

Tips for Navigating Your Federal Career



The General Schedule (GS) classification and pay system covers the majority of civilian federal employees in professional, technical, administrative, and clerical positions. That's a simple fact. What's not so simple? Navigating the winding path from GS level to GS level.

If you want to be successful in your federal career, you need to understand the government's unique and complex application process – and how to navigate from an entry-level GS job all the way through to the Senior Executive Service.

That's why we here at GovLoop created this checklist of tips. Use it for step-by-step advice on everything from starting your government career to cracking the SES – and make sure to download the resources we link to along the way for even more advice.

Step 1

Getting into and Starting in Government





It's simple: **getting a job in government is often a numbers game.** Put in the work and apply to 40-50 jobs, not just four or five – increasing the number of quality applications you send in will increase your chances of landing of those jobs.



Tailor your search to jobs with your very specific skill set. Try to apply for more targeted positions like auditor, statistician, economist, or HR if you have the skills as there are fewer applications there.



One of the best opportunities are the **entry-level leadership development programs created by federal agencies.** The Presidential Management Fellows program is for recent graduates with advanced degrees to work at a range of federal agencies. Many agencies have also started their own programs under the OPM Pathways program.

Resources:

The GovLoop Unofficial Guide to Getting a Federal Job

Getting into Government:
A Guide for High Achievers

Step 2

Moving into GS 7 – 10





It sounds basic, but the best advice we can give? **Be amazing at your job.** Do the things you need to do and more – don't always be networking without actually crushing the job duties assigned to you.



Develop your soft skills -- they matter. Join Toastmasters and get great at public speaking, while also working on your emotional intelligence.



Find out what a critical need is in your department and fill it, even if it's not in your job description. This could be stepping up to lead a team or learning a new skill like agile development.

Resource:

Happiness is a Balance: A Framework to Success

Step 3

Moving into GS 11 – 13





Begin to develop your internal and personal brand. It represents your promise of value to your next employer and sets you apart from the rest. **You want your future employers to associate your personal brand with something they need on their team.**



At this stage, **the right certifications begin to matter**. Figure out if you need a PMP, CISA, CGFM or other gov certification.



Even if you don't manage people, start learning to. **There are lots of sideways and peer management opportunities in any office**; take advantage of them.

Resources:

[8 Essential Books on Government Leadership](#)

[How to Develop Your Personal Brand](#)

Step 4

Moving into GS 14 – 15





Job seekers who are cross-functional take the time to get their feet wet in a variety of skills. **Go where the action is in your agency.** Take on a critical project of your SES, whether it's on fire and needs immediate help, or just launched and needs help getting started.



Start joining outside groups to **prove your commitment to your future career development.** [ACT-IAC](#) is a good one to start with if you are in the IT field.



Meet peers beyond your agency and **develop leadership skills by attending outside conferences.** Here's a [list](#) for inspiration.

Resource:

[Want to Lead? 18 Leadership Training Options for Feds](#)

Step 5

Moving into the Senior Executive Service





Decide if being in the SES is even for you – there are distinct advantages and some disadvantages. Read more about those [here](#).



OPM lays out a great roadmap to become an SES in their [Executive Core Qualifications](#). **Every year you should map yourself against these five executive core qualifications.** Where you see deficiencies, take additional responsibilities and assignments to fill in the gap.



Rotate jobs. It's hard to become an SES without changing your position. Most SESers have had at least five different jobs before making it to the top. This could be taking a detail to OMB or detail within your agency, or officially taking on a new title and role within your agency or at another agency.

Resource:

[6 Ways to Become SES](#)

Want more tips
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career? Make
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About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 250,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.



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govloop.com



info@govloop.com



1152 15th St. NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005

P: (202) 407-7421 | F: (202) 407-7501

www.govloop.com | [@govloop](https://twitter.com/govloop)