

## NETWORK



**Susan Anthony**  
*B.A. Communications*  
*U.S. Agency for International Development*

This picture is of me eating a traditional Indian meal with my friends. In high school, my church raised \$250,000 for developing countries. I got to represent the kids at my church on a trip to India. Ever since then, I knew I wanted to do something to contribute.

I found out about the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through the person who organized my church's trip to India. The job was listed on [usajobs.opm.gov](http://usajobs.opm.gov). Even though travel isn't a part of my job, I still feel connected to what's happening in other countries. It feels good to know I am part of such an awesome organization.

*Read Susan's federal resume on the CD-ROM.*



## Why network?

For many students, finding a summer job or internship means canvassing door-to-door or contacting many managers of businesses or organizations to gain information about jobs and internships. Networking is just a sophisticated form of the door-to-door research. This step is more important than you may realize. The federal government is huge and the hiring process is both complex and decentralized. Visualize the federal government as an iceberg (generally huge and imposing!), which you can see only a small part of at one time.

Networking will help in several ways as you navigate the federal hiring process. You may 1) become familiar with the hiring process; 2) gain information about current and upcoming jobs; and 3) learn about specific agency missions and cultures.

### 1. Become familiar with the hiring process

When you talk to people who work in government, you will soon realize that each individual has taken a different path to get that particular job. While this may look confusing at first, this is also true of private industry. For example, applying for a job at Microsoft would require a different hiring process than applying for a job at Dell.

Hiring practices reflect distinctive corporate needs and cultures. Agencies and departments use specific vocabulary and sometimes require unique online applications systems. You can learn a lot about what to expect by talking to people on the inside.

### 2. Gain information about current and upcoming jobs

To begin your search for federal job listings or announcements, you can go to [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov). However, [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov) does not list most federal internship programs, and finding the right announcement for you can be challenging. If you build a network, or support system if you will, you may hear about jobs before they are posted and know where to look for them. You will also learn about how jobs are described on usajobs. One of the

most common job titles in the federal government is Program Analyst. The terms used to describe duties of a Program Analyst may include “help agency fulfill its mission” and “conduct programmatic research.” But what do those terms mean? The meanings vary by agency. Your government network can help you interpret job announcements and determine if a job is right for you before you spend a lot of time applying.

### 3. Learn about specific agency missions and cultures

Students and recent graduates often make the mistake of conducting a very narrow job search. For example, students of international relations often think that the State Department is the only place for people with this type of experience. People who are already in government positions can give you great tips on how to expand your job search.

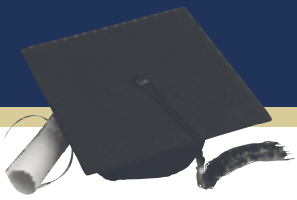
They may work with a little-known agency that would be perfect for you. For instance, have you ever heard of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency or the Southern European Task Force? Agency names also change from time to time and new departments, like the Department of Homeland Security, are especially challenging to navigate.

## How to Network

Due to security concerns, it is virtually impossible to walk off the street and into a federal building. Therefore, you must find alternate ways to connect with people on the inside. Compared to local and state governments, the federal government has relatively few street-level employees.

The most visible federal government employees are often the least accessible, such as those featured on television’s *West Wing*. The people in such jobs are also politically appointed, not hired. Political appointees make up only 0.001% of all federal jobs! As a recent graduate, you probably want to set your sights on more behind-the-scenes positions. Here are some basic strategies to make the task less daunting:

**Start with people you know.** Don’t be embarrassed to cash in favors from family and friends. Now is the time to call up your long lost Uncle Fritz and let him know you are in the market for a federal job.



**Do your research.** Federal employees and managers are often more than happy to speak with students about their jobs. But you will get more insightful advice from people if you know a little about what they do and how they fit into the system. Take time to look at organizational charts and agency missions. These can be found online.

**Don't expect a miracle.** He may be your uncle or your best friend from college, but unlike some private industry companies, individuals truly cannot do anything to advance or influence your application. Try to remember that a network is an opportunity to learn, but in the end the federal government cares about what you know, not who you know.

**Master the informational interview.** Informational interviews are a great, non-threatening way to approach people. Simply call or e-mail the person and ask for 20 minutes of their time to inquire about their job and career. If you express a genuine interest in your interviewer, you let them know that you are not simply looking to make “connections” or get a job. Stick to the time limit you mentioned, and be sure to send a thank-you note and periodic updates on your search.

## Where to Network

### *Your Career Services Office*

The career services office of your school can provide you with many different services. Many career services offices now manage comprehensive placement websites – a good place to start when looking for a job opportunity. Additionally, they typically offer the following services to assist you:

- Resume development/feedback
- Career workshops
- Interview coaching
- Assessment tools
- Job search tools/strategies
- Dress-for-success tips
- Orientation to their services
- One-on-one career counseling
- Employer information

- Benefits information and assessment
- Career days/fairs
- Mentoring
- Externships

The majority of these services are offered at no cost to students or alumni. Career services offices are especially useful at large schools or schools with an established government relationship. But even at small schools, the career services office often coordinates formal internship programs like the Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMFP, formerly PMI Program), the Emerging Leaders program (a career internship program at the Department of Health and Human Services), and other internship and development opportunities. See Step 2 for more information on internships.

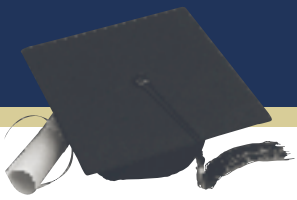
### *Your Academic Program*

Federal employers often develop relationships directly with college professors or departments (School of Business, Engineering, etc.). These relationships are encouraged by the college or university and offer opportunities to enhance placement for the best and the brightest—since the candidates are clearly visible to professors and instructors. Many employers will work with the individual college to provide career information, student briefings, and provide coaches and mentors.

Identify your professors' connection with the school's career program. Introduce yourself and become known to your professors. Though it's sometimes hard to believe, they went to college once too. They have access to another valuable network of friends and colleagues who may be able to help you. Don't be afraid to ask, “Can you recommend a friend or co-worker who could help me navigate the federal system or tell me about their career in government?”

### *Alumni and Alumni Associations*

Every college or university has an alumni association. Most colleges rely heavily on alumni groups to act as coaches and mentors, provide fund-raising for scholarships, and offer job opportunities to current students. College alumni may have a better understanding of your curriculum and can give you insightful, directed career advice. The easiest way to find alumni groups is the career services office or your college or university's website.



### *Professional Associations*

There are hundreds of professional associations and groups in the United States, representing every single occupation and particular facets of an occupation. Internet searches are a good way to start, though for a comprehensive list of associations in your field, you should consult your school or local reference librarian. Libraries usually own one or more directories of professional associations, which list every possible group and give information about how to join.

Most associations offer low-cost student memberships with great benefits like workshops, newsletters, job bulletin boards, and member lists. Member phone and e-mail lists can be a great way to make contact with people and conduct informational interviews.

### *Conclusion*

It may seem time consuming, but networking works! Many federal employees found out about their jobs by staying connected. Just remember, unless you are a political appointee, do not expect your connections alone to help you land a job. Former President Theodore Roosevelt created the original structure of the federal hiring process so that it would be fair and impartial. So join professional organizations, send polite e-mails, but leave the fruit baskets and crisp \$100 bills at home.

### Top Questions to Ask in an Informational Interview

- How did you find your position?
- What education or experience is necessary for a job like yours?
- What kind of a job would people in your position look for next?
- How do you spend an average day at work?
- What skills or attributes do you consider crucial to your job?
- What aspects of your job do you love/hate?
- What other agencies do you work with?
- Which professional associations would someone in your field belong to?
- Can you recommend someone else that I might interview?



## Q&A with John Shaw, General Services Administration, Student Human Resources Recruiter

*Q: Can you briefly explain what your agency does and your role there?*

**A:** GSA helps federal agencies better serve the public by offering, at best value, superior workplaces, expert solutions, acquisition services, and management policies. Simply put, GSA is the business arm of the Federal Government. We help other Agencies accomplish their missions by providing office space, supplies, telecommunications, IT, and vehicle support. For further information our website is [www.gsa.gov](http://www.gsa.gov). I serve as the Regional Employment Officer for the Great Lakes Region and as the GSA National College Recruitment Coordinator.

*Q: Where can students and new grads find information about your internship programs?*

**A:** Students should contact the Human Resources office in the geographic area where they wish to work. We have 11 regional offices.

*Q: Which students/new grads do you target? Is there a particular profile?*

**A:** For a few of our jobs we require specific degrees, such as engineering, architecture, information technology, industrial technology, and automotive technology, but for many of our jobs, most majors are acceptable. However, we like to see students who have some coursework in business, economics, management, etc. We are looking for students and new grads who have a sincere interest in public service and are enthusiastic, motivated, and able to work as part of a team.

*Q: How long does it take to get your application reviewed, and how can young people best prepare to be competitive?*

**A:** It depends on the agency, the appointment authority, the number of positions being filled, etc. With GSA it may typically take from four to six weeks. Most government agencies afford applicants the opportunity to complete an online resume either through the Office of Personnel Management's USAJOBS website or on their own automated systems. My recommendation is that applicants should look at their current resume, see how closely it conforms to what the agency is asking for, and make the necessary changes before applying for a specific job. Recent grads should be prepared to submit copies of their transcripts.

*Q: What are the top three most common mistakes that recent grads or students make in their applications or during interviews?*

**A:**

1. Incorrect spelling and poor grammar [in their applications].
2. Not becoming informed about the employer prior to the interview. This is inexcusable with all the information available on the web.
3. Not following up with the agency after an interview.

*Q: If you could give a student or new grad two strong tips for how to successfully enter the federal government, what would they be?*

**A:** Probe to find out what hiring authorities a particular Agency uses, that is, Student Career Employment Program (SCEP), Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP), Presidential Fellows, etc., because Federal agencies have different preferences for hiring. Then find out the qualification requirements for those programs and, assuming that you meet the requirements, make a contact via e-mail, phone, or letter or all three indicating your interest in their positions and your eligibility for those programs.