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The Career Navigator Playbook

Strategies and Tools to Navigate
Each Step of the Career Transition





THE CAREER NAVIGATOR PLAYBOOK

Welcome to the FedsForward Career Navigator Playbook—your trusted companion for navigating your career from the Federal government to a non-Federal sector role. After dedicating your talents to government work, stepping into the private job market might feel like entering unfamiliar territory. The rules are different, the pace is different, and even the language can sometimes feel foreign.

This playbook breaks down that intimidating process into manageable steps, giving you both the strategy and the tactical tools needed for a successful transition. Each section contains practical worksheets and templates designed to help you translate your government experience into terms that private employers will value. From crafting a resume that highlights transferable skills to negotiating compensation packages that reflect your true worth, this guide walks beside you through every stage of your journey.

Think of this playbook as your personal career transition command center. We recommend starting with the Career Exploration Phase to clarify your priorities, then methodically working through each subsequent phase. Each phase has a set of tasks to do, and includes both a description of the task and some resources, tools, and templates to help you complete that task. The templates are meant to be living documents—revisit and refine them as you progress through your search. Don't feel pressured to complete everything at once; this is a process, not a race.

Remember that your government experience has equipped you with valuable skills—project management, navigating complex systems, working with diverse stakeholders—that are highly marketable. This playbook will help you showcase those strengths in ways that resonate with for-profit, non-profit and academic sector employers, turning your public service background into your competitive advantage.



1. Career Exploration Phase

This foundational phase is about understanding yourself as a professional and setting clear targets before diving into applications. For federal employees, this is your opportunity to reflect on the skills you've developed in government and identify how they translate to value into non-Federal government sectors and roles.

| Task | Description | Resources, Tools & Templates |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Assess my competencies | Figure out what you're good at, what you need to work on. This will guide you as you think about what you'd like to do next. Would you be more comfortable doing what you're already good at? Would you like to move towards improving an area in which you're not as competent as you'd like to be? | How to Assess your Competencies using the Four Quadrant Framework Navigating your Career Transition: The Four Quadrant Strategy Four Quadrant Framework (Template) |
| Identify my interests | At this moment in your career, reassess what you want | Finding Your Career - Identifying your Interests and Preferences |
| Research industries/sectors | Research different sectors to get a sense of which might feel like better fits based on what you want | What to Know about Private Sector v Public Sector Guide for Moving from Government to Private Sector |
| Translate my skills | Take your federal government experience and frame your competencies and skills in a way that is applicable to non-federal government sectors | Playbook: Successfully Translate Your Federal Experience to the Non-Federal Sector Worksheet: Successfully Translate Your Federal Experience to the Non-Federal Sector |
| Identify target job roles/titles | Based on what you are looking for and your experience, competencies and skills, identify roles and job titles that might be good fits | Playbook: Successfully Translate Your Federal Experience to the Non-Federal Sector |



| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| | | Worksheet: Successfully Translate Your Federal Experience to the Non-Federal Sector |
| Set up & do informational interviews | Identify people in your network who are in the jobs or the organizations of interest to you & set up informational interviews | What are informational Interviews How to Get the Most Out of Informational Interviews |



2. Document Preparation

This phase focuses on crafting your professional narrative for roles outside of the Federal government. Federal government resumes and non-Federal government resumes differ significantly in format, length, and focus—here you'll create the foundation to reframe your public service accomplishments in ways that resonate with hiring managers in for-profit, non-profit and academic sector employers. In this phase, you'll also establish (or re-establish) your online presence on LinkedIn so prospective employers can find you.

| Task | Description | Resources, Tools & Templates |
|---|--|--|
| Develop a “base resume” that you can tailor for different sectors/industries and/or specific job applications | A base resume is one that has all of your professional experiences, certifications/licensures, educational background, and other information. You will use this as the “base layer” resume for specific job applications | How to Make a Base Resume |
| Develop cover letter template | Create a cover letter template that you can modify and tailor for job applications | Cover Letter Sample Templates |
| Create or update LinkedIn profile to align with your career goals | Create or update your profile so that it communicates your strengths and your value to prospective employers | 20 steps to a better LinkedIn profile 14 LinkedIn Profile Summaries That We Love (And How to Boost Your Own) Setting up your LinkedIn Checklist Tool |



3. Research and Application Phase

This phase helps you develop a systematic approach to finding suitable opportunities in the private sector. Unlike the structured USAJobs process, job hunting outside of the Federal government requires a multi-channel approach and strategic networking—skills that may feel new after time in government service.

| Task | Description | Resources, Tools & Templates |
|---|--|--|
| Research target organizations/ companies (culture, reviews, news) | Learn the background of the organization, who's on the leadership team, its strategic plan, special initiatives, and reviews of the organization | |
| Reach out to your network to learn more about potential job opportunities | Meet up (in-person or virtual) with people in your network (or referred from your network) to learn about specific job opportunities, gain insights, and secure a job through referrals | How to Network for a Job Practical Tips on How to Identify and Engage your Network Networking Worksheet Tool |
| Set up job alerts | Based on your target roles, your skills, and targeted industries / organizations, create specific criteria for your job search. Set up job alerts on platforms like LinkedIn, Indeed, etc. | How to Set up Job Alerts on LinkedIn How to Set up Job Alerts on Indeed |
| Tailor your resume and cover letter to specific job opportunities | Tailoring your resume and cover letter is important to ensure that your application will stand out through the initial screening phase through to hiring managers. | How to Tailor your Resume to a Job Description How to Use Job Descriptions to Tailor your Resume |
| Apply for jobs and track all applications in your spreadsheet or app | Keep yourself on task. Track applications, deadlines, follow-ups, and status updates so you know what you've done, what's upcoming, what's worked & what didn't | Jessica Schillinger's job application tracking tool |



4. Interview Preparation

This phase prepares you for interviews, which often differ from government interviews in style and substance. You'll need to translate your government accomplishments into business impact stories and be ready for questions about adaptability, innovation, and commercial awareness that may not have been emphasized in your Federal agency interviews.

| Task | Description | Resources, Tools & Templates |
|--|---|--|
| Research common interview questions for your industry | Prepare for the interview for anticipating the questions you'll get and how you'll respond | How to Prepare for an Interview in 11 Steps |
| Research to find recent news/events related to the organization you'll be interviewing | Research to find any current events or issues that may affect the organization. Research the organization's leadership to see if they are making any headlines. | |
| Prepare STAR method responses (Situation, Task, Action, Result) | This will help you communicate what you've done and the value you can bring to a prospective job. The STAR method is a structured approach to answering behavioral interview questions, using the acronym Situation, Task, Action, and Result, to provide clear and concise examples of your skills and experiences | Using the STAR method for your next behavioral interview STAR Method Worksheet for Interview Prep |
| Document for yourself how the interview went | Identify what you learned, what you liked and didn't like about organization, what you didn't like | Jessica Schillinger's job application tracking tool |



5. Follow-up

This is a simple but important step - follow up with interviewers after you meet with them.

| Task | Description | Resources, Tools & Templates |
|--|---|--|
| Send thank-you emails within 24 hours after interviews | A thank you note email is a low-effort way to keep you on the recruiter or hiring manager's radar! | Guide on how to write thank you notes 4 Sample Thank you Note Templates |
| Connect with interviewers on LinkedIn | Go onto LinkedIn and search for your interviewer. If you're not already connected with them, click "connect" to make them part of your LinkedIn network | |

One Last Thing Before You Go

Transitioning from federal service is an opportunity for you to carry forward your public service to other sectors in the economy using the unique skills and experience you've gained. Your Federal government experience has equipped you with qualities many for-profit, non-profit and academic sector employers desperately need: accountability, integrity, navigating complexity, and delivering results under constraints. These are strengths, not limitations. Your challenge now is translating this experience into language that resonates in your new target environment.

This job search will have moments of frustration and uncertainty—that's normal. Be patient with yourself and with potential employers who may not immediately recognize the full value of your public service background.

Remember that this playbook isn't just about landing any job; it's about finding the right opportunity where your unique combination of government experience and personal strengths will be valued. Take the time to reflect on what success means to you beyond just titles and compensation.

As you move forward, maintain connections with both your government colleagues (Hello to your agency's alumni organization!) and your network of people outside of that. These relationships often provide unexpected opportunities and insights that no playbook can anticipate.



Your public service background has given you a perspective on how systems work, how policies impact people, and how to navigate complex organizations—all valuable assets in your next chapter. Carry that forward with confidence.

The skills that made you successful in government will serve you well in this journey too: persistence, attention to detail, and commitment to excellence. The right opportunity is out there.

FedsForward: Helping public servants extend their mission-focused impact to all sectors of the economy. Visit us at www.fedsforward.org