2010 Government Jobs Forecast

Between now and September 2012, the outlook for federal government careers will be sunny and government jobs will be plentiful, experts say. However at the state and local levels, the layoffs and furloughs that characterized 2009 are likely to continue or accelerate as those governments respond to lower tax revenues.

"As is typical when the country is in economic or military stress, the [federal] government has been looked to as part of the answer," says John Palguta, vice president of policy for the Partnership for Public Service (PPS), a Washington, DC, advocacy group working to promote public-sector careers. "To respond to what it's being asked to do, it's hiring."

The federal workforce is set to expand to 2.1 million civilian employees between now and September 2012, including 384,000 new government jobs that will open as existing federal employees leave their jobs, according to PPS.

"That 384,000 is a projection for retirements, voluntary separations [and] reductions in force," Palguta says. Add 200,000 workers needed to fill new positions, and Uncle Sam is faced with hiring 584,000 people looking for a career in government.

Residency in the nation's capital isn't required either. About 85 percent of jobs in government are located outside Washington, DC, he adds.

The bad news for applicants is that competition for jobs in the government sector is increasing. "Government agencies are seeing a doubling of applications for many of the jobs compared to a year ago," Palguta reports.

Despite the rising competition, there are still some jobs the government is scrambling to fill. Your best bet for finding federal employment in 2010 is to focus on the portion of all current and upcoming federal job openings agencies have labeled "mission-critical," Palguta says. Agencies are likely to focus their hiring efforts on these positions, which include:

**Medical and Public Health: 54,114 Job Openings**

Among the 54,114 mission-critical medical and public-health roles are 19,000 openings for nurses at Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals. Other federal entities hiring civilian health professionals: the Army, Navy, Air Force, Centers for Disease Control, US Public Health Service and Indian Health Service.

While demand for nurses is especially high, the government is also hiring physicians, dietitians, radiologic technologists, pharmacists, industrial hygienists, medical technologists and rehabilitation therapists.

**Security and Protection: 52,077 Job Openings**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the big employer in this category, which includes correctional officers and federal marshals, as well as budget, program and intelligence analysts.

College grads might consider the Federal Bureau of Investigation, while those with a high school diploma can work as security officers for the Transportation Security Administration.
A youthful indiscretion won't keep you from getting the security clearance you need to work in this niche, but repeated and recent offenses could. You'll also have to pass a background investigation and credit check.

**Compliance and Enforcement: 31,276 Job Openings**
Jobs in this area involve inspections, investigations and protection working for agencies that regulate the border, mines, food, agriculture and exports. The DHS alone anticipates hiring 9,800 border patrol agents.

**Legal: 23,596 Job Openings**
The government currently employs 75,000 legal professionals and will need to hire nearly 24,000 in coming years to work as attorneys, claims examiners and contact representatives.

**Administration and Program Management: 17,287 Job Openings**
The Social Security Administration (SSA) anticipates hiring 7,000 employees between now and 2014, says SSA Deputy Commissioner of Human Resources Reginald Wells.

Most of the openings are customer-facing positions, such as telephone representatives or field office employees. These jobs require empathy, knowledge of the rules governing assistance and, most of all, the desire to help people, Wells says.

Given the large number of hires it must make, it's not surprising that the SSA and other federal agencies are putting human resources professionals on the mission-critical list. Federal HR workers are older on average than those in the private sector, so look for lots of job openings created by retirements.

However, the toughest jobs to fill at federal agencies are related to acquisitions, according to Wells. Demand for experienced acquisitions and contract professionals is outstripping the supply of college-educated candidates interested in managing government purchases of goods and services.

Monitoring contractors is a big part of that job. By some estimates, for every one federal employee, four to five contractors provide goods and services, Palguta says. Those contractors are monitored by 50,000 federal contract and procurement officers.

**Start Your Government Job Search**
When you’re ready to find a specific job, head over to the USAJOBS Web site, where you can search by agency or job title to see which jobs are currently open. If the job you’re seeking isn't currently open at any agency, set up a search agent to alert you to new postings.

**State, Local Outlook Still Cloudy**
While federal agencies are staffing up, 60 percent of state governments and nearly 42 percent of local governments laid off employees in 2009, according to a survey by the National Association of State Personnel Executives (NASPE).

With tax and other revenues down, states are also likely to continue hiring freezes and salary cuts put in place in 2009, says NASPE director Leslie Scott. However, states will continue hiring for positions involving public safety and welfare, such as police officers, as well as those tied to revenue, such as tax auditors, she says.