

**Publications**

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# Careers at NIH: Navigating USAJobs as an Academic Scientist

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# Careers at NIH: Navigating USAJobs as an Academic Scientist

## Introduction

**Careers at NIH: Navigating USAJobs as an Academic Scientist** is designed as a web-based toolkit addressing the need to acquire and retain top talent for the federal workforce. It is intended to assist applicants translate academic achievements into outcomes measured by USAJobs and provide working knowledge of key words and phrases within federal job announcements. The goal of this toolkit is to help candidates develop more competitive USAJobs application packages, which in turn will improve the ability of qualified applicants to be selected for Ph.D.-level, STEM positions that match their qualifications, competencies, and experiences.

The toolkit is comprised of three components:

- [Common Questions & Answers](#)
- [Real World Examples](#)
- [Glossary](#)

The [Common Questions & Answers](#) portion provides common scientific questions found within USAJobs applications and examples of potential answers to help guide applicants in showcasing their current experiences and talents

when applying to federal jobs. It also provides examples at the Grad Student, Postdoctoral Fellow, and Faculty level responses and translates those qualifications and experiences related to the job's federal grade level (GS12-15). They are grouped into similar topic areas for ease of use: *Scientific Expertise, Scientific Merit, Scientific Trends, Forward Thinking*



, and *Identifying Gaps in Scientific Literature*.

The [Glossary](#) is designed to assist in provide academic-friendly definitions to common key terms found within federal job applications. These terms are commonly found when applying to Ph.D. jobs within NIH. These definitions will assist applicants in understanding the types of jobs, requirements of the job, and pertinent details they are applying for. The intent is to increase the understanding of available jobs PhDs are eligible to apply to. There is also additional glossary resources provided on USAJOBS, NIH, and NARA.

## Common Questions and Answers for USAJobs

This section shows how different types of expertise can be used as evidence of meeting the expert level for different applicants (e.g. graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty members). The answers are also cross-referenced with the typical GSA payscale associated with a particular level of scientific expertise. Your experience may not be reflective of these levels.

How to use this section: Common USAJobs questions are grouped by themes. Under each theme, you will find one or more questions that are commonly asked on 601-series USAJobs announcements. We provided possible general answers that you can modify for your background and scientific expertise.

### Scientific Expertise Questions

- **Deliver presentations to senior medical/health practitioners, professional societies, and academia on pertinent matters relating to biomedical, behavioral health, or clinical health-related research.**
- **Write/Prepare major components of position papers or reviews on policy or critical scientific issues related to biomedical, behavioral health, or clinical health-related research.**
- **Present briefings on research to high level officials providing multiple alternatives and advice on the best course of action.**
- **Provide advice to government agencies, private firms, or other organizations regarding biomedical, behavioral health, clinical, or health-related research.**

### Grad Students (GS-12 level responses)

What you did: Conducted thesis project on topic X; authored primary literature; authored reviews; presented posters at national and international meetings, gave platform presentations at national and international meetings; gave seminars;

- Authored XX peer-reviewed manuscripts on X topic
- Briefed senior faculty and University officials while working on my graduate degree during seminars on myriad topics as well as specific and detailed analyses of my research. These briefings required recommendations for actions that included funding decisions, experimental direction, and laboratory procedures
- Presented my research on topic X at XXX conferences (spell out a few of these) and gave XX platform talks on my expertise at national and international conferences
- Organized and facilitated meetings where I presented research results to faculty and government officials

### Postdoctoral Fellows (GS-12 to 13 level responses)

What you did: Conducted research projects on topic X; authored primary literature; authored reviews; presented posters at national and international meetings, gave platform presentations at national and international meetings; gave seminars;

- Authored XX peer-reviewed manuscripts on X topic
- Briefed senior faculty and University officials while working on my graduate degree during seminars on myriad topics as well as specific and detailed analyses of my research. These briefings required recommendations for actions that included funding decisions, experimental direction, and laboratory procedures
- Presented my research on topic X at XXX conferences (spell out a few of these) and gave XX platform talks on my expertise at national and international conferences
- Organized and facilitated meetings where I presented research results to faculty and government officials

### Faculty (GS 14 to 15 level responses)

What you did: Conduct and supervise a research program on XXX; consulted for expertise on

XXX; authored XX papers and review articles on XXX; member of standing study section for NIH/USDA/NSF; chaired and organized sessions on XXX at scientific meetings; authored book chapters;

- After receiving funding for research in the area of (*health-related*) I was required to follow up with the *funding source* to provide advice regarding the direction they should take based on the results. This oftentimes included taking into account factors related to pecuniary decisions the government/company would have to make. *Provide examples of how your research benefited the government, private firms, or other agencies...*

## Scientific Merit Questions:

- **Analyze the scientific merit of current and projected research programs**
- **Evaluate the technical and scientific merit of grant applications and proposals requesting grant or contract funding**
- **Evaluate the technical and scientific merit of funding applications and proposals being submitted for approval. (Have you reviewed grants or project proposals?)**

### Grad Students (GS-12 level responses)

What you did: Participated in lab meeting, journal clubs, and writing qualifying exams; Selected your thesis project, including and evaluating possible projects and evaluating which projects had the most scientific merit

- Provided technical expertise and evaluated research projects of lab members and other investigators
- Made recommendations for project selection and new avenues of research
- Drafted a research proposal and modified based on feedback
- Evaluated ongoing research in the lab to prioritize research topics
- Edit faculty grant applications (name the grant and/or funding body)
- Wrote section of NIH Grant for Faculty Mentor (name the grant and/or funding body). If funded, cite grant Number

- Requesting grant funding was essential when conducting my thesis research at the graduate level. In order to be prepared to successfully solicit grant money I had to understand the process from the application to the disbursement of funding and all applicable laws and guidelines
- When undergraduate and junior graduate students were learning the process I was able to successfully mentor them to ensure they would be able to receive funding through the same process throughout their career

#### Postdoctoral Fellows (GS-12 to 13 level responses)

What you did: Reviewed research proposals; plan future research, as well as evaluate research programs from mentors; faculty search committee;

- Provided technical expertise and evaluated research projects of lab members and other investigators
- Made recommendations for project selection and new avenues of research
- Drafted a research proposal and modified based on feedback
- Evaluated ongoing research in the lab to prioritize research topics
- Planned future research for undergraduates and graduate students and evaluated their research proposals
- Reviewed grant applications (State study section, what agency/private funding body)
- Edit faculty grant applications (name the grant and/or funding body)
- Wrote section of NIH Grant for Faculty Mentor (name the grant and/or funding body). If funded, cite grant Number

#### Faculty (GS 14 to 15 level responses)

Faculty search committee; grant reviewer; thesis committee member, journal reviewer,

- Permanent member of NIH/USDA/NSF (etc.) Study Section (Name the Study Section)
- Ad hoc reviewer for NIH/USDA/NSF (etc.) Study Section (Name the Study Section)
- Served as reviewer for XYZ Private or Non-profit Granting Body
- Editor for XX journals (name journals)

- Reviewer for XX journals (name journals)
- Ad hoc reviewer for XX journals (name journals)
- Led team of scientists and evaluated research proposals from students
- Served on faculty search committees to review applications packets
- Analyzed merit of proposed research of grad students, postdocs and other faculty
- Served on XX thesis committees
- Chair of XX thesis committees

## Scientific Trends Questions

- **Analyze trends and new scientific fields to assess the adequacy of research being conducted and proposed in a given area**

### Grad Students (GS-12 level responses)

What you did: Write and publish a literature review on a specified topic; Attend and present at scientific conferences; Review manuscripts

- As an expert my field of research, and in order to obtain a graduate degree, I remained abreast of the latest trends in my field of research. Analysis of these trends contributed to my ability to both conduct and direct research in my field.
- I reviewed the scientific literature for manuscripts/review articles/thesis
- I looked through NIH Reporter to see current research in the field and to help me design fellowship applications
- I presented at scientific conferences to disseminate new research and to learn about new fields

### Postdoctoral Fellows (GS-12 to 13 level responses)

What you did: Write and publish a literature review on a specified topic; Attend and present at scientific conferences; Review manuscripts;

- As an expert my field of research, I remained abreast of the latest trends in my field of

research. Analysis of these trends contributed to my ability to both conduct and direct research in my field.

- I reviewed the scientific literature for manuscripts/review articles/thesis
- I looked through NIH Reporter to see current research in the field and to help me design fellowship applications
- I presented at scientific conferences to disseminate new research and to learn about new fields

#### Faculty (GS 14 to 15 level responses)

What you did: Write grants to explore new topics; Develop courses on new techniques; Serve on grant review; Review manuscripts; Present at scientific conferences; Write primary literature, reviews and opinion pieces

- Obtained R21 exploratory funding (or other exploratory awards, e.g. DP1, DP2, etc.)
- Permanent member of NIH/USDA/NSF (etc.) Study Section (Name the Study Section)
- Ad hoc reviewer for NIH/USDA/NSF (etc.) Study Section (Name the Study Section)
- Served as reviewer for XYZ Private or Non-profit Granting Body
- Editor for XX journals (name journals)
- Reviewer for XX journals (name journals)
- Ad hoc reviewer for XX journals (name journals)
- Gave XX platform presentations at My Favorite Conferences
- Wrote primary literature, reviews and opinion pieces

#### Forward Thinking Questions: Where should the science go?

- **Identify and recommend the program direction of new research**
- **Propose comprehensive and cohesive research plans outlining the direction and long term goals to be accomplished**
- **Obtain independent grant funding for research from either the private or public sector (GS-13-15)**



- **Write or co-write research grants (GS-13-15)**

Grad Students (GS-12 level responses)

What you did: Developed a research project; Changed research direction based on new studies and review of the literature; Wrote research proposals for my qualifying exam and for fellowship proposals

- Led thesis research program – developed hypothesis based on review of the literature
- Informed senior faculty and lab members regarding state of the literature
- Entrusted to inform and evaluate senior faculty of new research in the field
- Discuss new research through journal clubs and coursework

Postdoctoral Fellows (GS-12 to 13 level responses)

What you did: Developed a research project; Changed research direction based on new studies and review of the literature; Wrote research proposals for fellowship proposals and grants; Wrote research statement for tenure track applications

- Developed multiple research projects
- Determined new areas of research for research projects
- Informed senior faculty of new research avenues and strategies

Faculty (GS 14 to 15 level responses)

What you did: Developed a complete research program, write grant applications; recommend research program of new tenure track hires; evaluate new tenure track research programs; establish collaborations with faculty outside of expertise; establish research consortia; chair sessions at meetings

## Identifying Gaps in the Scientific Literature Questions:

- **Identify gaps in scientific research**

Grad Students (GS-12 level responses)

What you did: Write a literature review and state the gaps; Write a research proposal; Write a

grant; Propose new areas of research

- Wrote and published review on XYZ topic and identified research gaps to address during my thesis project
- Wrote a research proposal for my thesis
- Wrote fellowship applications to address gaps in the literature

Postdoctoral Fellows (GS-12 to 13 level responses)

What you did: Developed a research project based on careful review of the literature to identify important gaps; Changed research direction based on review of the literature; Wrote research proposals for fellowship proposals and grants; Wrote research statement for tenure track applications;

- Wrote and published review on XYZ topic and identified research gaps to address for research projects
- Wrote fellowship applications to address gaps in the literature

Faculty (GS 14 to 15 level responses)

What you did: Developed a complete research program, write grant applications; recommend research program of new tenure track hires; evaluate new tenure track research programs; establish collaborations with faculty outside of expertise; establish research consortia; chair sessions at meetings;

## Real Examples of Postdoctoral Experience and How They Translate to USAJobs Questions at the Expert Level

This section shows real examples of a USAJobs resume that indicates the applicant is an expert in several common questions (See Wenzel USAJobs CV). These are types of accomplishments in the USAJobs resume that can be listed to show your expertise. The academic CV does not indicate that the applicant has expertise in these areas (See Wenzel Academic CV).

How to use this section: Each example correlates with a bullet point from the USAJobs CV. These bullet points are cross-referenced with common questions in USAJobs applications (See section XX).

**Example 1: Initiated, developed and conducted neuroscience research projects using methods in behavioral pharmacology and rodent models of reward, reinforcement, and drug abuse/addiction**

■ **Scientific Merit:**

- Analyzing the scientific merit of current and projected research programs

■ **Scientific Trends**

- Analyzing trends and new scientific fields to assess the adequacy of research being conducted and proposed in a given area

■ **Forward Thinking**

- Identify and recommend the program direction of new research
- Propose comprehensive and cohesive research plans outlining the direction and long term goals to be accomplished

**Example 2: Learned sophisticated techniques to implement in my research, including; optogenetics, chemogenetics, immunohistochemistry, confocal microscopy, fast scan cyclic voltammetry, and fiber photometry**

■ **Scientific Trends Questions**

- Analyze trends and new scientific fields to assess the adequacy of research being conducted and proposed in a given area

■ **Forward Thinking Questions: Where should the science go?**

- Identify and recommend the program direction of new research
- Propose comprehensive and cohesive research plans outlining the direction and long term goals to be accomplished

### Example 3: Presented research findings at nine national and international academic meetings and nine invited talks

#### ■ **Scientific Expertise Questions**

- Deliver presentations to senior medical/health practitioners, professional societies, and academia on pertinent matters relating to biomedical, behavioral health, or clinical health-related research.
- Present briefings on research to high level officials providing multiple alternatives and advice on the best course of action.

### Example 4: Organized a panel of talks for a national academic conference

#### ■ **Scientific Expertise Questions**

- Provide advice to government agencies, private firms, or other organizations regarding biomedical, behavioral health, clinical, or health-related research.

#### ■ **Scientific Merit Questions:**

- Analyze the scientific merit of current and projected research programs

#### ■ **Scientific Trends Questions**

- Analyze trends and new scientific fields to assess the adequacy of research being conducted and proposed in a given area

#### ■ **Identifying Gaps in the Scientific Literature Questions:**

- Identify gaps in scientific research

### Example 5: Established effective collaborative projects with principal investigators both within and outside my institution

#### ■ **Forward Thinking Questions: Where should the science go?**

- Identify and recommend the program direction of new research
- Propose comprehensive and cohesive research plans outlining the direction and long term goals to be accomplished

Example 6: Published four first author peer-reviewed journal articles – three additional manuscripts are currently in preparation

■ **Scientific Expertise Questions**

- Deliver presentations to senior medical/health practitioners, professional societies, and academia on pertinent matters relating to biomedical, behavioral health, or clinical health-related research.
- Write/Prepare major components of position papers or reviews on policy or critical scientific issues related to biomedical, behavioral health, or clinical health-related research.
- Present briefings on research to high level officials providing multiple alternatives and advice on the best course of action.

■ **Forward Thinking Questions: Where should the science go?**

- Identify and recommend the program direction of new research
- Propose comprehensive and cohesive research plans outlining the direction and long term goals to be accomplished

■ **Identifying Gaps in the Scientific Literature Questions:**

- Identify gaps in scientific research

Example 7: Developed a research training plan and independent line of research which resulted in the award of a Postdoctoral National Service and Research Award from NIDA

■ **Forward Thinking Questions: Where should the science go?**

- Obtain independent grant funding for research from either the private or public sector (GS-13-15)
- Write or co-write research grants (GS-13-15)

Example 8: Reviewed and provided advice on the scientific integrity of grant submissions to NIH

■ **Scientific Merit Questions:**

- Analyze the scientific merit of current and projected research programs
- Evaluate the technical and scientific merit of grant applications and proposals requesting grant or contract funding
- Evaluate the technical and scientific merit of funding applications and proposals being submitted for approval. (Have you reviewed grants or project proposals?)

## Glossary for Key Job Application Terms

This glossary is designed to assist you by explaining common key terms in the federal job application process for a Ph.D. position at NIH/NIDA. There are many additional resources available to learn more key terms and jargon within federal job announcements on USA Jobs, NIH, and NARA.

- USA Jobs Glossary: <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/Glossary>
- NIH Glossary: <https://hr.nih.gov/jobs/terminology-glossary>
- NARA Job Announcement Terminology: <https://www.archives.gov/careers/jobs/fields.html>

*Please click any term below to view the definition.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Applicant</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Appointment</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Area Of Consideration</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Career Or Career-Conditional</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Certificate Of Eligibles</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Competitive Position</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Competitive Service</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Competitive Status</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Duty Station</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Eligibles</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Executive Order</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Excepted Position</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Excepted Service</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Expert</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Expert Position</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Extramural</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">General Experience</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">General Schedule</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Grade</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Indefinite Appointment</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Intramural</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">KSA</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Locality Pay</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Noncompetitive Action</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Minimum Qualifications</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Occupational Code</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Open Period</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Pay Plan</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Permanent Appointment</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Probationary Period</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Promotion Potential</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Provisional Appointment</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Qualification Standards</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Quality Ranking Factors</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Recruitment Bonus</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Register</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Selective Placement Factors</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Scientific And Professional Series</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Schedule A</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Series</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Specialized Experience</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Special Salary Rates</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Status Employee</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Superior Qualifications Appointment</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Temporary Appointment</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Term Appointment</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Tour Of Duty</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Work Schedule</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Work Site</a></li> </ul>
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## Definitions

**Applicant** - A person who is applying or has applied to be considered for a federal job. An applicant may be a current employee of the agency, an employee of another agency, or a person who is not currently employed by any agency.

**Appointment** – The federal personnel action to hire an individual. There are different types of federal appointments.

**Area of Consideration** - (who may apply or who may be considered for a position) - The group of people from which an agency will accept applications for the job (vacancy). A vacancy can be advertised for all sources, all U.S. Citizens, status candidates, and other categories of applicants. It may be a broad or a limited group of individuals. Applying for a category you do not belong to can result in your application being rejected.

- *General Public* - To apply for a job that is open to the General Public, the only basic requirement is that you must be a United States citizen. There is no requirement for previous government service also known as government "status."
- *Current and Former Federal Employees* - To apply for a job that is open to Current and Former Federal Employees, you must have status or be eligible under a special appointment authority. Examples include:
  - You are currently working for NIH/NIDA on a career or career-conditional appointment (defined below).
  - You are currently working for a different federal agency on a career or career-conditional appointment.
  - You previously attained career status in the federal government on another appointment, left federal service, and now wish to work for the federal government again; or you served in the federal service on a career-conditional appointment within the last three years, left the federal service, and now wish to obtain a new appointment.
- *NIH/NIDA Employees Only* - To apply for a job that is open to NIDA Employees Only, you must be currently working for NIDA on a career or career-conditional appointment, or working for NIDA under a special appointing authority (e.g., Veterans Recruitment Appointment, Disabilities Program).
  - If you are working for NIDA on a temporary or term appointment, you are not eligible unless you previously attained career or career conditional status (see definition below) in the Federal Government on another appointment.

**Career or Career-Conditional Appointment** - The Federal Government employs permanent and



temporary employees. Permanent employees are generally hired under a career-conditional appointment (Permanent - Career-Conditional Appointment). Normally this is the first career-type of appointment and the appointee must complete a 1-year probationary period and a total of 3 years continuous creditable service to attain a career appointment (Permanent - Career Appointment).=

**Certificate of Eligibles** (also called Referral List) - A list of the highest-ranked eligibles (defined below) in score and veterans' preference order, submitted to a hiring manager or appointing officer for employment consideration.

**Competitive Position** - A position in the competitive service (defined below).

**Competitive Service** – Hiring and other personnel actions in the Federal Government are based on employment rules and regulations. These rules group employees in different categories and appointments. The Federal Government consists of three types of services, the Competitive Service, the Excepted Service, and the Senior Executive Service. The competitive service consists of all civil service positions in the executive branch of the Federal Government with some exceptions. As defined by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the term means: All civilian positions in the Federal Government that are not specifically excepted from the civil service laws by or pursuant to statute, by the President, or by OPM under Rule VI, and that are not in the Senior Executive Service. In the competitive service, the individual must go through a competitive process (i.e. competitive examining). This process may consist of a written test, an evaluation of the individual's education and experience, and/or an evaluation of other attributes necessary for successful performance in the position to be filled.

**Competitive Status** – “**Status candidates**” are current or former federal employees who have worked in the competitive service, in a permanent appointment for a total of three years of qualifying service.

**Duty Station** - The city/town, county, and State in which the employee will work. For most employees, this will be the location of the employee's work site.

**Eligibles (see also certificate of eligibles above)** – The list of applicants deemed qualified to be considered for the advertised position.

**Executive Order** - A directive issued by the President.

**Excepted Position** - A position in the excepted service, defined below.

**Excepted Service** - Federal or civil service positions not in the competitive service or the Senior Executive Service. Excepted service positions have been excepted from the requirements of the competitive service by law, Executive Order, or OPM regulation. Excepted service agencies set their own qualification requirements and are not subject to the appointment, pay, and classification rules in the Federal Government employment rules (title 5, United States Code). Appointments to the Excepted Service are civil service appointments within the Federal Government that do not confer competitive status. There are a number of ways to be appointed to the excepted service such as appointed under an authority defined by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as excepted (e.g. Veterans Recruitment Appointment) or being appointed to a position defined by OPM as excepted (e.g. Attorneys).

**Expert** - A person with excellent qualifications and a high degree of attainment in professional, scientific, technical, or other field. An expert is usually defined as a person, through education and experience who has a comprehensive and authoritative knowledge of or skill in a particular area. An expert's attainment is such that he or she usually is regarded as an authority or as a practitioner of unusual competence and skill by other persons in the profession, occupation, or activity in unskilled, semiskilled or skilled manual labor.

**Expert Position** - A position that cannot be satisfactorily performed by someone who is not an expert in that field.

**Extramural or Extramural Research** - Organizational component of research in support of biomedical and behavioral research and research training by scientists located at universities, research institutions, and medical centers across the United States and abroad. Extramural research is research supported by NIH through a grant, contract, or cooperative agreement. (See Intramural)

**General Experience** - A type of work experience that is not necessarily directly related to the

position, but demonstrates the ability to acquire the particular competencies/knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the work of the position.

**General Schedule** - Federal pay system that covers more than 1.2 million employees. Click here to view the [2021 general schedule](#).

**Grade** - Rate of basic pay associated with a specific level of work or range of difficulty, responsibility and qualification requirements.

**Indefinite Appointment** - An appointment given to a non-permanent employee who is hired for an unlimited period of time.

**Intramural or Intramural Research Program (IRP)** - Organizational component of research which is conducted by federally employed scientists within its laboratories on or near the NIH campus and in the NIH research hospital. The intramural program is the sum of all the research projects carried out by NIH investigators and trainees in NIH facilities to develop scientific and professional skills that will enable them to become leaders in the biomedical research community. (See Extramural)

**KSAs** - KSAs refers to the “knowledge, skills, and abilities,” required to perform the duties of a position. Sometimes called “competencies,” these are the factors on which applicants are rated to determine their qualifications for the position relative to other applicants.

**Locality Pay** - Location-based pay, in addition to an employee’s rate of basic pay. There are currently 32 locality pay areas. Employees outside the continental United States in non-foreign areas (i.e., Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands) do not receive locality pay, but rather receive cost-of-living allowances.

**Minimum Qualifications** - Minimum standards set by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to help ensure that federal employees are, indeed, qualified for employment. You must meet these minimum qualifications to be considered for employment. The job announcement describes the minimum qualifications required for the position. Minimum qualifications are stated in terms of general or specialized experience.

- **General experience** is progressively responsible clerical, office, or other type of experience that shows you have the ability to perform the duties of the job being filled.
- **Specialized experience** is usually obtained from having worked in a position similar to the job being filled.
- **Education** – Applicants can qualify for some jobs based solely on their education instead of experience. For other jobs, both education and experience are required to qualify; and for other jobs, applicants can qualify based on a combination of both experience and education.

These requirements will be described in the job announcement. If you are relying on your education to qualify for a job, you *must* submit a copy of your official transcript with your application. If you are selected for the position, you will be required to submit an *official* transcript before a final job offer will be made.

**Noncompetitive Action** - A promotion, demotion, reassignment, transfer, reinstatement, or an appointment based on prior federal service.

**Occupational Code** - See definition of [Series](#).

**Open Period** - The time period during which applications will be accepted.

- Applications must be received or postmarked by the closing date; late applications will not be considered.
- Applications must be submitted following the instructions on the job announcement.
- NIDA does not accept applications submitted by fax or e-mail.

**Pay Plan** - The pay system or pay schedule under which the employee's rate of basic pay is determined, e.g., General Schedule (GS), Executive Schedule (EX), and Leader under the Federal Wage System (WL).

**Permanent Appointment** - A permanent appointment is an appointment to a position that is not a temporary or time-limited appointment.

**Probationary Period** – In the Federal Government, the first year of service of an employee who is

given a career or career-conditional appointment. During this period, the agency validates the competencies of the employee and his/her fit for the position. Also, the first year of service in a supervisory or management position during which the agency decides whether the employee has the unique skills necessary to succeed in a supervisory or managerial position.

**Promotion Potential** - Identifies the highest salary (grade) to which the applicant could be promoted without having to apply for a position (further competition). Some jobs have the potential for noncompetitive promotion and others do not; it depends on how the agency structured the position.

In a job with promotion potential, promotions may occur after the employee has:

- worked at the lower salary (grade) level for at least one year;
- performed at an acceptable level of competence;
- and demonstrated the ability to perform work at the next higher salary (grade) level.

For example, a position advertised at the GS-11 level with promotion potential to the GS-13 level means the employee would be eligible for promotion to the GS-12 level at the end of his or her first year of employment. Once promoted to the GS-12 level, the employee would be eligible for promotion to the GS-13 level at the end of a year.

**Provisional Appointment** - A temporary appointment to a continuing position when the agency intends later to convert the employee to a non-temporary appointment and has current authority for such conversion at the time of the temporary appointment.

**Qualification Standards** – Describes the minimum qualification requirements to qualify for a particular job. (A description of the minimum requirements necessary to perform the work of a particular occupation.) These minimum requirements may include specific job-related work experience, education, medical or physical standards, training, security, and/or licensure. They are not designed to rank candidates, identify the best qualified for a particular position, or substitute for an analysis of an applicant's knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies.

**Quality Ranking Factors** are job-related KSAs (defined above), and competencies that could be expected to *significantly enhance performance* in the position but are not essential for satisfactory

performance. Qualified candidates are not rated ineligible solely for failure to possess a quality ranking factor.

**Recruitment Bonus** - A one-time payment of up to 25 percent of basic pay to an employee who is newly appointed to a hard-to-fill position.

**Register** (also known as CIVIL SERVICE REGISTER) - A list of qualified applicants compiled in order of relative standing for certification. Applies to Federal jobs and is generally administered by the Office of OPM or delegated to agencies by OPM.

**Selective Placement Factors** are job-related KSAs that are *essential* for satisfactory performance on the job. Only applicants that meet these requirements as of the closing date of the job announcement receive further consideration for the job.

**Scientific and Professional (ST) Series** - Unique category of federal jobs, which covers non-executive positions classified above the GS-15 salary level, and involves performance of high-level research and development in the physical, biological, medical, or engineering sciences, or a closely-related field. In some cases, qualified applicants for ST positions can often be hired more quickly than applicants for other federal positions.

**Schedule A** – This is the term used for a special hiring category. For special jobs and situations for which it is impractical to use standard qualification requirements and to rate applicants using traditional competitive procedures. Examples of Schedule A hiring includes, applicants with an intellectual disability or a severe physical or psychiatric disability (with or without reasonable accommodation).

Examples of other Schedule A exceptions include:

- A critical hiring need to fill a short-term job or to fill a continuing job pending completion of the regular hiring process (examining, clearances), or other procedures.
- A temporary or part-time job in a remote or isolated location.
- A noncitizen must be hired because no qualified citizen is available.
- A temporary board or commission established by law or Executive Order that must be quickly

staffed.

**Series & Grade** - The job series is the occupational family or category to which the advertised position belongs. For example, the federal series code for the Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences Group is 0400. The job grade represents the pay-level of the position, which is based on the level of difficulty and responsibility. For example, a Microbiologist position at the GS-11 level of difficulty would be expressed in a job announcement as GS-0403-11.

**Specialized Experience** - A type of work experience directly related to the work to be performed in a position.

**Special Salary Rates** - Salary rates higher than the regular statutory schedule. The President establishes these higher pay rates for occupations in which private enterprise is paying substantially more than the regular government schedule and this salary gap significantly impairs the Government's recruitment or retention of well-qualified persons.

**Status Employee** - One who has completed the career-conditional period of employment and has served a career appointment in the competitive service. Also known as an employee with competitive status. Status employees are eligible for noncompetitive movement within the competitive service.

**Superior Qualifications Appointment** - Placement of a person in a hard-to-recruit-for position at a pay rate above the minimum rate based on the applicant's unique or unusually high qualifications, a special government need for applicant's services, and the applicant's current salary or salary offerings being higher than the minimum rate of the grade level to which the applicant can be appointed.

**Temporary Appointment** - An appointment lasting one year or less, with a specific expiration date. Typically used to fill a short-term position due to reorganization, abolishment, or the completion of a specific project or peak workload; or to fill positions that involve intermittent (irregular) or seasonal (recurring annually) work schedules.

**Term Appointment** - An appointment lasting more than one year but less than four years, with a specific expiration date. Term appointments may be used for project work; extraordinary workload; scheduled abolishment of a position; reorganization; uncertainty of future funding; or contracting out of the function.

**Tour of Duty** - The hours of a day (daily tour of duty) and the days of an administrative workweek (weekly tour of duty) that are scheduled in advance and during which an employee is required to perform work on a regularly recurring basis.

**Work Schedule** (see Tour of Duty) - Several work schedules exist: alternative, flexible, fixed and compressed.

**Work Site** (often called Duty Station) - The place where the employee works, or at which the employee's activities are based, as determined by the employing agency.