# Government employment: tips and tricks to navigating USAJOBS applications

By Jenn DeHaan   May 17, 2021

FORT KNOX, Ky. – Looking for a new job can oftentimes be a stressful experience – even more overwhelming when you add the federal employment USAJOBS system [https://www.usajobs.gov/] into the application process.

Civilian Personnel Advisory Center staffing branch chief Toni Kvalheim is one of the faces behind the scenes who reviews applications for positions at Fort Knox. She said the process has undergone many improvements in recent years, and there are key ways hopefuls can set themselves up for success.

"The burden really shifted to the applicant," said Kvalheim.
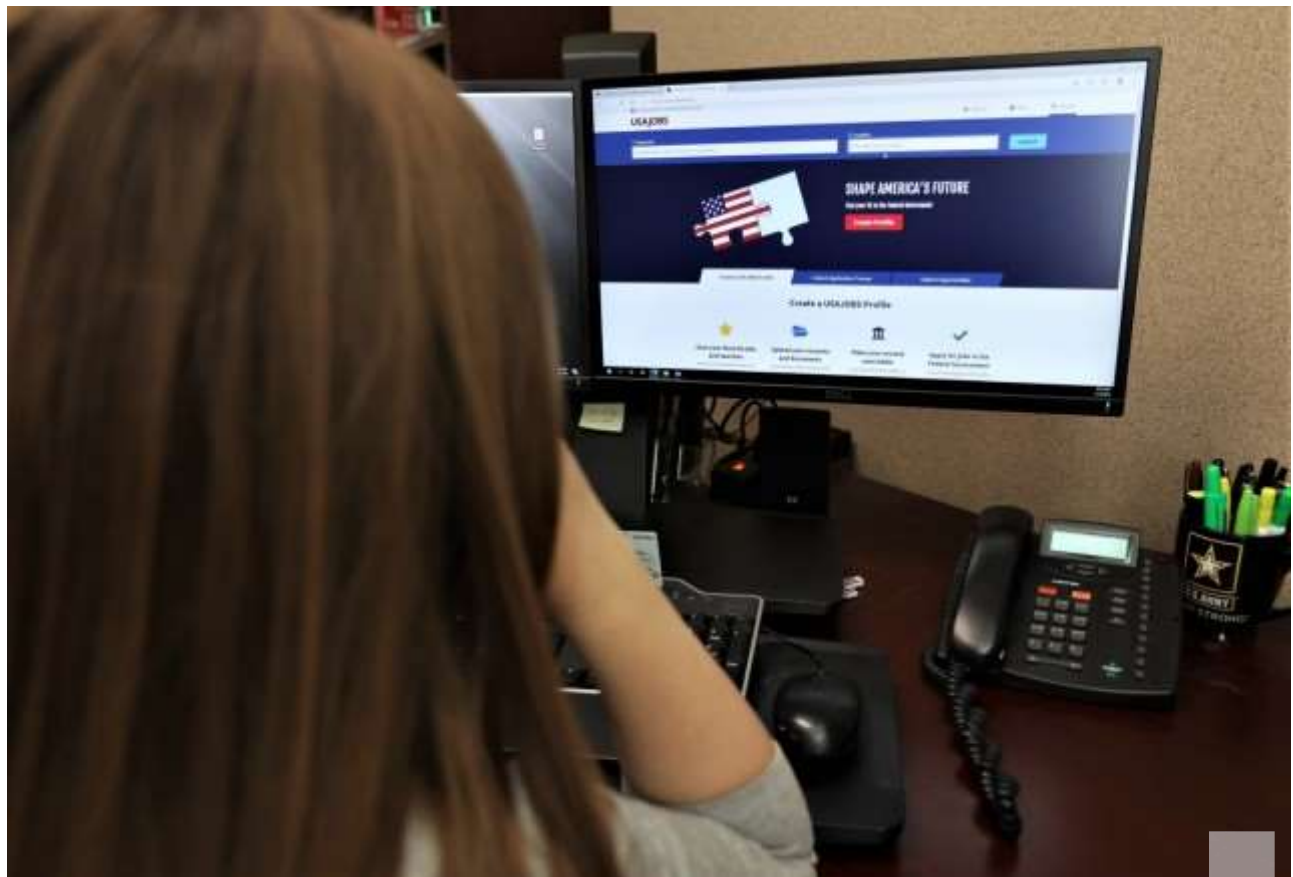
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She explained that while the system is now set up so candidate qualifications must be demonstrated, many believe resumes are still vetted the old way.

"Years ago there was a system that would look for keywords," said Kvalheim. "Now it's a self-assessment, so when you apply, you have to self-evaluate your skillset based on the competencies of that position."

The assessment is in the form of a questionnaire. The score attained, combined with the applicant's resume, will help determine whether a referral is made.

Kvalheim said many concerns about resumes can be alleviated by keeping a few points in mind.

> **"There's a misnomer that you have to have [your resume] in a certain format, which is not true," said Kvalheim. "You can have any type of resume minus a picture, or any classified or personally identifiable information. Other than that, the format is what you want to use."**

Additionally, there is no resume length requirement. Kvalheim said the most important thing is making sure it aligns with the position for which the person is applying.

"It should be detailed enough to give people an understanding of the job you're wanting to get," said Kvalheim. "I would recommend your resume be in a format that makes sense to you; it should be clear and concise, and it does not have to be only one or two pages. There is no hard, fast rule."

The main thing to keep in mind, according to Kvalheim:

"You want to answer questions before they're asked."

Having someone read through a resume to see if they have a thorough understanding of previous job experience is another step Kvalheim recommends to applicants. She warned, however, that there are cases when a hopeful candidate follows all this advice and still misses one cardinal requirement.

"Check the eligibility and make sure you meet it," said Kvalheim. "Then make sure to upload the required documentation for that eligibility. You have up to the point that the position closes to upload any documents needed.

> **"We cannot ask for any additional documentation once it's closed."**

Once a job opening closes, Kvalheim noted that's when the waiting begins.

"Everything takes time," said Kvalheim. "Rarely is there a quick turnaround, so know that it is going to take a while to get a response."

Kvalheim explained it's good to know what to expect when applying for a government position, and she said it starts by logging into the USAJOBS site.

"Set up your account, and then set up a search," said Kvalheim. "You can set it up [to receive] daily or weekly emails or alerts [for]jobs that meet your criteria so that you're always getting told when something opens up."

If an applicant doesn't get referred for a position, Kvalheim said she'd still like to help. Most, however, don't take advantage of the opportunity.

"At the bottom of that announcement you can submit an inquiry," said Kvalheim. "That's one of those things I wish more people would do because I can't help you get better if you don't ask the question. You have nothing to lose, but we can't answer a question if you don't ask it."

Overall, Kvalheim said the process is designed to fill open positions with the most qualified applicants. She said the best way a candidate can ensure they're referred is to have a complete understanding of the job description.

"Do your research," said Kvalheim. "Make sure that you read it thoroughly, and make sure you have all the required documentation."