The *ABCs* of SCHEDULE A for Applicants with Disabilities Tips for Getting Federal Jobs

INTRODUCTION

There are many advantages to working for the federal government. Federal employees serve in a wide variety of exciting jobs, earn good wages, receive medical benefits, and make a difference through public service! The federal government hires people in many different fields, from accounting to public affairs, health care to law enforcement, and everything in between.

For so many, however, the steps to getting a federal job seem numerous and difficult. This does not have to be the case. There are many different paths to federal employment, and for individuals with disabilities, one of those paths is the Schedule A hiring authority.

So what is Schedule A?

Schedule A is an excepted service hiring authority available to federal agencies to hire and/or to promote individuals with disabilities without competing the job. Utilizing the Schedule A hiring authority to fill a vacancy allows federal agencies to avoid using the traditional, and sometimes lengthy, competitive hiring process. You are eligible for a Schedule A appointment if you are a person with an intellectual disability, severe physical disability, or psychiatric disability, and meet the qualifications of the job in question. There are no specific definitions as to what qualifies as an "intellectual disability," a "severe physical disability," or a "psychiatric disability," under Schedule A, **so federal agencies are free to interpret the requirements broadly.**

Want more information? Read on!

This guide provides answers to most of your questions about using Schedule A to get through the federal hiring process.

THE ABCs

A. **If you are interested in working for the federal government, your first task is to identify an open position you want to apply for, if you don't already have one in mind.**

Most federal vacancies are advertised on the USAJOBS Web site, found at www.usajobs.gov. This is the Federal government's official site for job information and includes over 16,000 job postings. Through this site, you can search for openings in a particular field, city, or agency, or all three (you also can sign-up for e-mail alerts about job openings by type of job, agency, and/or geographic area). If you cannot access the internet or need additional assistance, you can call 202-606-2525. There is also an automated telephone system that can be reached at 703-724-1850 (voice) or 978-461-8404 (TTY).

Not all agencies use USAJOBS to announce job vacancies. So it is important to check specific agency Web sites for additional information about employment opportunities. A listing of agency sites can be found at www.usa.gov.

B. **Once a job vacancy has been identified, the next step is to prepare your application.**

You will need to create a resume, if you do not already have one. If you need assistance with creating a resume, please use the Resources page at the end of this guide. Additionally, the USAJOBS Web site mentioned above has a resume builder.

Beyond creating a resume, you may need to prepare other documents as required by the job vacancy. Read the job announcement carefully. Make sure you have all the documents required (such as a writing sample or college transcript, for example), as your application will not be complete without them.

In addition to the typical application materials mentioned above, to be considered for a Schedule A appointment, you also will be required to submit proof of your disability. Disclosure of your disability in order to get a job is not typical, but will be required for a Schedule A appointment. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act both provide persons with disabilities protections against being compelled to disclose the existence of a disability, because Schedule A is only available to individuals with disabilities, individuals have to prove they have a disability to be eligible.

Proof of disability will typically come in the form of a letter. Such a letter simply needs to say that you have an intellectual disability, severe physical disability, or psychiatric disability.

You can get this letter from:

- your doctor,
- a licensed medical professional,

- a licensed rehabilitation professional, or
- any federal, state, District of Columbia, or US territory agency that issues or provides disability benefits.

The letter does NOT need to detail your medical history or your need for an accommodation. The simpler the letter is, the better.

Once you have submitted proof of a disability, an agency may make a permanent, temporary, or time-limited Schedule A appointment for a position if they determine that you are right for the position for which you are applying. An agency will make this determination in much the same way it evaluates other applicants: by reviewing your employment history, educational background, and other relevant experience, just as they would for any other applicant. So make sure you list all your applicable experience on your resume.

What if you don't have any previous related experience? Under the Schedule A regulations, agencies have the option of giving Schedule A applicants, who do not have work, educational, or other relevant experience, a temporary appointment, to allow you to prove your ability to perform the essential functions of the position, "on-the-job." After you've successfully demonstrated your ability to perform, the agency may then convert you, non-competitively, to a permanent position.

C. **Once you have your resume and references in order, have obtained your proof of disability, and have all the other required application materials ready to go, you are ready to apply.**

At this point you should try to contact the Disability Program Manager (DPM) or Selective Placement Coordinator (SPC) at the agency where you wish to work. You can find the appropriate person or office by either using the contact information included in the vacancy announcement itself (all announcements include a phone number and/or e-mail address to be used for questions), or by searching a directory of SPCs maintained by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

The directory can be found at http://apps.opm.gov/sppc_directory/, but please note that this list is not always accurate.

Not all agencies have a DPM or SPC, so you may need to speak with a human resources (HR) professional within the agency for help. If you are a veteran, you may want to contact a VA counselor. No matter what, be prepared to put in some time and effort to find the correct person or persons that can help you.

> *Note: There are several regulations that are generically referred to as "Schedule A." These regulations cover more than just persons with disabilities. When contacting a federal HR*

professional concerning possible employment opportunities, explain that you are referring to Schedule A for persons with disabilities.

Job seekers may think it appropriate to have a parent or vocational rehabilitation counselor contact federal agencies on their behalf. Managers are likely to be unimpressed. Thus, you should not do this unless it is necessary as an accommodation. If you do not need this as an accommodation, you should take control of your career search yourself.

Once you reach a person who can assist you, ask for guidance on the best way to proceed with applying for the identified vacancy using the Schedule A hiring authority. He or she can work with you to make sure your resume/application is considered. Please note that not all agencies utilize Schedule A specifically. Some may have other hiring flexibilities in place to increase the representation of persons with disabilities, so inquire with the agency if this becomes an issue.

You may also apply directly online through the USAJOBS Web site or the specific federal agency's Web site. If you do, make sure you follow the application instructions as given in the job posting. When you submit your application, indicate that you wish to apply under Schedule A. In fact, an agency may suggest that you first apply for a position through the regular vacancy announcement (on USAJOBS or the agency's Web site) AND THEN follow-up with the SPC/DPM or appropriate office. So, be diligent about following the process outlined by the agency.

Once you submit your application, there is nothing left to do but wait. If the agency is interested in you as a candidate for the open position(s), they will contact you to set up an interview. If the agency wants to hire you, you will be offered the position. If you have not already been asked for your proof of disability, you will be asked for it at the offer stage.

If you are offered a federal job, always ask for the offer of employment in writing. The person extending the offer – typically a HR specialist – should be able to clearly explain the offer and answer any questions you may have. After you accept an offer of employment, if you believe you will need an accommodation to perform the job duties, now is the time to ask. You want to give the agency plenty of time to get your accommodations in place, to ensure you will have what you need your first day.

That's it!

If you still have questions, check out the Frequently Asked Questions section for answers.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. **What is Schedule A?**

A. The federal government has special hiring authorities for people with disabilities. Schedule A is one of these. It helps individuals with disabilities to get, keep, and advance in federal jobs that are matched to their skills and abilities. By utilizing Schedule A to fill a vacancy, an agency can avoid using the traditional, and sometime lengthy, competitive hiring process. You are eligible for a Schedule A appointment if you are a person with an intellectual disability, severe physical disability, or psychiatric disability.

Q. **How does one prove eligibility for Schedule A?**

A. In order to receive a Schedule A appointment, a person must:

- demonstrate "proof of disability"; and
- be qualified for the job s/he is applying for – *i.e.*, have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the required duties.

Proof of disability can be satisfied with a simple letter stating that you have an intellectual disability, severe physical disability, or psychiatric disability. You can get this letter from your doctor, a licensed medical professional, a licensed rehabilitation professional, or any entity that issues or provides disability benefits.

The letter does NOT need to detail your medical history or your need for an accommodation. The simpler the letter is, the better.

An agency will rely on your work, educational, or other relevant experience to decide whether you are suited to a particular work environment and set of duties. Just as with any applicant, an agency will look at your specific background to determine whether you are right for the position for which you are applying.

Q. **How can I use Schedule A?**

A. Anyone can compete for a federal job by applying through a job posting, but people with disabilities can use Schedule A to secure a federal job without going through the typical process. Using Schedule A

means applying for a position just as other applicants would, but including additional information, i.e., proof of disability. Just follow the steps – A, B, and C – noted above.

Q. **I found a job vacancy that I am interested in applying for, and I want to use Schedule A. What's next?**

A. Once you have your resume and references in order, and have obtained your proof of disability, you are ready to apply. Reach out to the appropriate person within the agency you are applying to for assistance in applying. Be prepared to put some time and effort into finding the correct person that can help you. You may apply online through the USAJOBS Web site or the specific federal agency's Web site. Make sure you follow the application instructions as given in the job posting. When you fill out the application, indicate you wish to apply under Schedule A.

Q. **Who can help?**

A. If you want to apply for a job under Schedule A, contact the DPM or SPC at the agency where you want to work. You can also contact your career counselor or vocational rehabilitation counselor for information. If you are a veteran, you may want to contact a VA counselor.

Q. **Is there a probationary period?**

A. Yes, two years. During probation, Schedule A employees are held to the same performance standards as all other employees.

Q. **Are agencies required to use Schedule A?**

A. No. An agency can choose to use the traditional competitive process to fill its job vacancies; or they can choose to use the non-competitive Schedule A hiring authority.

Q. **If I am eligible for a Schedule A appointment, am I guaranteed a job?**

A. No.

RESOURCES

RECRUITMENT / HIRING

ABILITYJobs and JobAccess – This organization enables people with disabilities to post their resumes for potential employers to view and to browse job opportunities posted by employers. The Web site also includes information about the ADA and reasonable accommodations. For more information, see www.jobaccess.org.

CareerOneStop – The CareerOneStop Web site, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides a variety of services to employers and job seekers. The site also offers information about other service provider locations relevant to employment, training, and economic development. Visit www.careeronestop.org for more information.

GettingHired.com – This free national network provides a jobs database and other services to people with disabilities and the employers who hire them. Further information is available at www.gettinghired.com.

WRP – The Workforce Recruitment Program is a recruitment and referral program that connects federal sector employers nationwide with highly motivated postsecondary students and recent graduates with disabilities who are eager to prove their abilities in the workplace through summer or permanent jobs. Students represent all majors and range from college freshmen to graduate students and law students. A searchable database is available through the WRP Web site. Colleges and universities, if you are not signed up to be a stop on the WRP recruiting tour, you should be! Further information can be found at www.wrp.gov.

For Veterans with Disabilities – There are numerous organizations and agencies that exist to assist veterans with disabilities find and maintain employment. The following is a sample of useful resources to keep handy:

- The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Veterans Employment & Training Service www.dol.gov/vets/welcome.html
- Hire Heroes www.hireheroesusa.org
- Wounded Warriors Project www.woundedwarriorproject.org

Advocacy Groups – There are several different advocacy groups that also serve as excellent resources for recruiting and hiring individuals with disabilities. The following is a sampling of those resources:

- American Association of People with Disabilities www.aapd.com
- American Council of the Blind www.acb.org
- Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation www.rehabnetwork.org
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Government www.dhhig.org
- National Council on Independent Living www.ncil.org

Federal Resources – There are numerous federal programs designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities in finding employment. The following is a non-exhaustive list of programs/resources:

- The Office of Personnel Management's "Disability Site" www.opm.gov/disability
- The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy www.dol.gov/odep
- The federal government's one-stop Web site for people with disabilities, their families, employers, veterans and service members, workforce professionals, and many others. www.disability.gov

ACCOMMODATIONS

CAP – There is a wonderful federal program housed within the Department of Defense. The Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) provides assistive technology and services to people with disabilities throughout the federal government FREE OF CHARGE! That means you can tap this resource for help in accommodating an employee with a disability. CAP will do the needs assessment, buy the needed technology, train the employee on how to use it, and follow up with updates. All you have to do is ask! (Note: Before contacting CAP directly, check with the DPM or SPC, as they may already have a relationship with CAP.) Additional information can be found at www.cap.mil.

JAN – The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) represents the most comprehensive resource for job accommodations available and is a terrific and easy-to-use resource. This free consulting service is designed to increase the employability of people with disabilities. JAN provides individualized worksite accommodation solutions, as well as information on job accommodations and related subjects for employers and people with disabilities. Further information can be found at www.askjan.org.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

1-800-669-4000 / TTY 1-800-669-6820

www.eeoc.gov