



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE POLITICAL APPOINTMENT PROCESS

OVERVIEW

The Center for Presidential Transition has gathered answers to the most frequently asked questions about the political appointment process. For information about navigating this process, visit our [Ready to Serve website](#).

*These responses are **not** a substitute for the information provided by the official forms and materials. Please review the official application instructions and consult legal professionals, if necessary, when applying for a political appointment.*

1. What is the process of applying for a position in the Biden-Harris administration?

Before submitting an application, read all directions carefully and review the materials on our [Ready to Serve website](#). Then visit the Biden-Harris transition website [here](#) to submit an application for the incoming administration.

The Biden-Harris team will contact you about next steps if they would like to proceed with your application. The process will vary depending on the type of position you are seeking. All positions will require a **background investigation, with more extensive investigations required for national security positions**. Aspiring appointees can expect to fill out **financial disclosure forms** and participate in interviews.

2. What types of political appointments are available in the administration?

- **PAS positions:** Presidential appointments requiring Senate confirmation. These are the top-level senior positions: Cabinet secretaries, agency heads, deputy secretaries, undersecretaries and assistant secretaries. U.S. marshals and members of certain boards and commissions also require Senate confirmation. (1,242 positions)
- **NC-SES positions:** The Noncareer Senior Executive Service includes positions classified above the GS-15 level (761 positions). These positions are just below the top presidential appointees, linking the top officials to the rest of the workforce.
- **PA positions:** Presidential appointments that do not require Senate confirmation (459 positions). These are senior-level positions, including jobs within the Executive Office of the President such as senior White House aides and advisors.
- **Schedule C positions:** Schedule C positions comprise the largest number of political positions (1,538). Schedule C refers to the statutory authority for the appointment. Most of these positions are confidential or policy-determining roles at the GS-15 level and lower.

3. What kinds of forms will I have to fill out and where can I find the relevant security clearance and ethics forms?

The political appointment process involves many forms, which is why the Center recommends getting started early on this process. Every person hired for a federal job will be asked to complete a **background check**. Nominees will be asked to complete either a Questionnaire for National Security Positions (**SF 86**) or a Questionnaire for Public Trust Positions (**SF 85P**). A checklist for how to complete the SF 86 can be found [here](#). Review the Center's blog post about the form requirements of different positions [here](#).

There are several additional forms for **financial and ethics screening**. These screening processes will depend upon your proposed position. The White House Office of Presidential Personnel or the presidential transition team will ask you to complete their own questionnaires to determine if they would like to move forward with your application.

Most positions will also require that you to complete the **Public Financial Disclosure Report (OGE Form 278e)**. More junior and less sensitive positions will likely fill out the **Confidential Financial Disclosure Report (Form OGE 450)**, which does not require public disclosure. Those nominated for a Senate confirmed position will have to fill out separate committee questionnaires.

4. If I have not worked in government before, how do I know what type of job to seek and what type of job I am qualified for?

The current **Plum Book** lists all the political jobs that were available in 2016. **Keep an eye out for the 2020 edition scheduled to be released in December**. The Plum Book provides information on more than 9,000 federal government positions, including about 4,000 political appointments.

The **Plum Book provides the location, pay scale and name of the incumbent** for each position. Researching the background of an incumbent can be a useful way to predict your general qualifications for that position. While requirements for each position will change from administration to administration, this initial research is a good place to start. Since 1952, the Plum Book has been published every four years.

5. What should I do once I submit my application? What should I do if I have not heard back from the administration?

The new administration will likely receive anywhere from **150,000 to 300,000 applications**. Therefore, patience is a critical factor in the process.

If you are not quickly contacted by the transition team or administration, it does not mean you will not get a call at a later date. In the meantime, **do not inundate the transition team or the Office of Presidential Personnel with calls** or emails. That outreach can risk leaving a bad impression on the reviewer and can hurt your chances of being considered for a position. Read the Center's [blog](#) on behavior to avoid when applying for an appointment.

Melody Barnes, an assistant to the president and director of White House Domestic Policy from 2009 to 2012, emphasized the importance of networking when she was interviewed during a Transition Lab [podcast episode](#). Barnes highlighted that networking with individuals close to the campaign or transition can help get your application read.

6. What will my salary be as a political appointee?

The **Plum Book**, described in question four, is a great resource to assess the pay scale of different positions. Jeffrey Neal, former chief human capital officer for the Department of Homeland Security, wrote an article for the Center about what kind of pay to expect as a political appointee. Neal outlines the **six most common types of political jobs** and their pay scale. Review that blog post [here](#).

7. If I am a current government employee and have a security clearance, do I need to be re-cleared?

Specific security clearance guidelines may differ depending on a candidate's current position and a newly proposed job. Whether you have a clearance or not, **you will still need to submit a new SF 86**. The information must be current and up-to-date when seeking a new position. The SF 86 is 100 pages, so it is important to review the form early.

8. Which foreign contacts should I include on my forms?

The SF 86 asks candidates to disclose “**close and/or continuing contact**” with foreign contacts within the last seven years. The form specifies that the candidate should list any foreign contact that they, their spouse, or legally recognized civil union/domestic partner, or cohabitant is “**bound by affection, influence, common interests, and/or obligation**.” Candidates should also include associates as well as relatives not previously listed in Section 18 of the form.

It is not necessary to disclose the names of foreign individuals with whom you do not have continuing contact. **When in doubt, always choose to disclose more information than less information.**

9. When is it appropriate to get a private advisor for consultation? If I can self-file my taxes, is a private advisor still necessary?

In most cases, people have hired private lawyers when they have complex finances. If you are having difficulty completing the financial disclosure form, you may consider consulting with your accountant or possibly hiring a lawyer to assist you. If you have limited assets and are able to easily fill out the form, you may not require a lawyer. In fact, **most people will not need legal assistance** when completing financial disclosure forms.

10. How long is the average Senate confirmation process?

The length of the average Senate confirmation process was **112 days** during the Obama administration and **115 days** during the Trump administration. The process takes more than twice as long today as it did during the Reagan administration.

Looking for more resources? The Center for Presidential Transition has released webinars, articles and podcasts to help learn about and navigate through the appointment process.

Webinars:

- [Session 1; An overview of vetting forms: What aspiring political appointees should know.](#)
- [Session 2: Tips for aspiring political appointees: Security clearances and background investigations.](#)

- Session 3: Tips for aspiring political appointees: Financial disclosure, taxes and conflicts of interest.

Articles:

- How (not) to get a job in an administration: Five lessons from transition experts.
- Advice for prospective political appointees: Get an early start filling out security and financial disclosure forms.
- Demystifying the presidential appointee vetting process.
- Five tips for getting through the Senate confirmation process.
- Navigating the screening process for high-level political appointees.
- I was offered a political appointment—How much will I be paid?
- Improving the Plum Book: The need to modernize information about federal leadership.

Podcasts:

- Help wanted: The critical job of selecting 4,000 presidential appointees.
- Navigating the screening process for high level political appointees.
- Michael Froman on selecting a president-elect's Cabinet.
- Melody Barnes on the 2008 transition and what lies ahead for the Biden-Harris team.

Guides:

- Presidential appointments vetting guide: Precedents, authorities and case studies.