

FAQs from Landscape Architects as Federal Leaders Webinar

ASLA and the Landscape Architecture Foundation teamed up to host [Landscape Architects as Federal Leaders](#), a live webinar exploring positions for landscape architects in the federal government and pathways to employment throughout the federal agencies. The webinar featured representatives from federal agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service and the Smithsonian Institution, who discussed federal leadership opportunities available to landscape architects, the range of project types, and national policies that affect landscape architects as well as the pathways to careers in federal service. More than 270 enthusiastic participants logged into the webinar for an interactive discussion about federal opportunities for the profession. Below are some of the frequently asked questions (FAQs) resulting from the webinar.

- What resources are available to locate an internship/employment in the federal government?
 - The best resource for finding internships and employment in the federal government is [USAJOBS.gov](#). Internships and full- and part-time employment opportunities are all listed on this site, as is the general application for the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program.
 - For positions at the Smithsonian Institution, applicants may use [USAJOBS.gov](#) as mentioned above. However, for internships at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute, there is a [separate website](#), and for Smithsonian Gardens internships, use [this link](#).
- Is licensure a requirement for all who apply? If not, can I attain licensure through employment in the federal government? What about through the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program?
 - Landscape architects practicing on federal lands are not required to be licensed. That said, having a landscape architecture license is a great way to demonstrate your qualifications.
 - Also, when hired by the federal government in a landscape architecture position, you will gain valuable experience that will help you qualify to sit for your Landscape Architecture Licensure Exam (LARE). You will also have an opportunity to develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP) each year with your supervisor. If your supervisor is supportive, your IDP may include review courses for your licensure exams. However, the federal government does not cover expenses associated with the cost of your actual exams.
 - In the PMF program, you are required to get 80 hours per year of training. This training can include review for the LARE if it helps you to achieve your professional goals, too.
- Are jobs for landscape architects in the federal service limited to those with advanced degrees?
 - There are certainly federal jobs for landscape architects with a BLA, MLA, or PhD. The federal government uses a [General Schedule](#) (GS) to

determine position responsibilities, salaries, and wages. A combination of an applicant's education and experience will determine what position grade an applicant will qualify for. Generally speaking, with a BLA and no experience, an applicant may qualify for GS-5 positions. An MLA degree and no experience generally qualifies one for GS-9 positions. Please note that the professional series (like [landscape architect, series 0807](#)) excludes some even numbers.

- When reviewing a job announcement, it is important to determine if it is a ladder position (meaning the position has multiple grade levels, e.g., GS-5/7/9), or if it has only one grade level. The career ladder starts with a GS-5, then the next highest grade is a GS-7, then GS-9, then GS-11, then GS-12, GS-13, GS-14, and GS-15. The highest grade level listed in the ladder is the highest grade level you could be promoted to without having to compete again for the promotion through USAJOBS.
- What certifications/qualifications can make me a more competitive applicant? Is it necessary to be Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) certified in order to gain employment in federal service?
 - No particular certification or qualification is required or will make you universally more competitive for employment in federal service. As with any job application, certifications or qualifications that relate to your particular job can help to strengthen your résumé. For example, if you are applying for a position that involves developing sustainable recreation sites, LEED or SITES certification may be helpful. If you are applying for a position in urban forestry, being an International Society of Arboriculture certified arborist may be helpful.
- Is private sector experience necessary/preferred/helpful?
 - Private sector experience is not necessary or preferred over other types of experience, but of course any type of previous experience can be helpful in preparing you for federal service. Previous experience in the private, public, or nonprofit sectors can help you gain skills and competencies that will qualify you for higher grade levels.
- Do qualified veterans receive hiring preference?
 - Yes. You can learn more about the Veterans Employment Initiative [here](#).
- Where, geographically, do most opportunities exist for landscape architects interested in federal service employment?
 - Opportunities for landscape architects exist all over the country. Some land management agencies like the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or U.S. Forest Service may have more opportunities in the western states where there is a large concentration of federal lands.
- How do federal landscape architects perform work that addresses the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or the National Historic Preservation Act

(NHPA) (Section 106)? Is experience in these areas preferred by federal employers?

- How landscape architects work under NEPA and NHPA will vary depending upon the federal agency. In the land management agencies, like the Forest Service, BLM, and National Park Service, landscape architects may serve as scenery management and design subject matter experts on interdisciplinary teams preparing packages to assess the impacts of proposed projects and alternatives under NEPA.
- How much design work are federal landscape architects able to perform? Is most of the design work done in-house or contracted out?
 - This will vary from position to position. In some positions, you will have the chance to do hands-on design work, while in others you may work with contractors to complete design work, or you may be helping to design programs or set guidelines and standards that will affect design. It is important you read the position description for a particular position to understand the type of work you will be doing.
- How can private sector firms collaborate with the federal government on projects?
 - Any opportunities for federal work go through the federal bid and contracting process. Learn more [here](#).
 - For contracting with the Smithsonian Institution, please use this separate [link](#).
- For Jennifer Daniels—Are the *Olmsted Walk Design Guidelines* published and available?
 - The *Olmsted Walk Design Guidelines* are not available for sale but can be used as a learning tool if individuals contact Jennifer Daniels directly at danielsje@si.edu.