

This is Eastern Michigan University, Career Corner. Welcome to season three, "Major Choices and Career Decisions."

Welcome back to the Career Corner podcast. It has been a great series thus far and getting to highlight so many of the amazing majors and career paths that students here at Eastern can really get excited about pursuing in the future. Continuing on today, we have a fantastic topic that's a little bit different.

And instead of calling in an expert, we actually have our own expert in our office to talk about what it's like to work for the government and how can you find these types of positions? So some of you may or may not know our own April Calkovsky is a career coach. But she's also a certified federal advisor. So there's no need to call in any additional help today. We have our own expert guest on this one. So welcome back, April.

Thanks, Brad. I'm happy to be here to chat with you about working for the government. It's definitely one of my great passions to talk about the importance of public service.

Absolutely. So I'm hoping to learn a little bit on this episode, as well as our listeners. So first, can you tell us or help us understand first, what are maybe some of the common misconceptions that students might have about working in government?

Sure. So some common misconceptions about working in the government are that you won't make a good salary, that you have to live in Washington, DC for a federal job, that government work is all about pushing papers, and red tape, that the work is boring, and that the work just doesn't require a lot of effort. And we'll talk more about all of those things, because none of them are true.

And another misconception that I just thought about is that some people think you need a certain major to get into any type of government work. And really, it's the opposite. There's so much variety to the types of work that needs to be done in all levels of government that really all majors are essential in the work that the government is doing.

That's such a great point. And I think it's really good for all of our students to hear that maybe regardless of what they're already pursuing, there could be some really great fantastic opportunities to use their skills. So that's an excellent point. So talking about maybe some of the benefits here, what do you think are some of the benefits to taking on a government position?

Well, one of the biggest benefits of working for the government at any level-- city, county, state, federal-- is job security. It is rare for government entities to fire people simply due to budget constraints. Instead, you'll hear about layoffs or furloughs, where the employees are brought back to work fairly quickly.

Competitive salary is another benefit. There are times when positions may start a little lower than the market rate for a job. However, the consistent raises and strict salary structure of pay grades and levels of pay brackets ensures that your base salary will continue to increase over time, which is not at all guaranteed in the private sector.

Health insurance and retirement plans are two additional benefits when working for the government. Without a doubt, the health insurance surpasses that available in most private sector companies. And the retirement plans, in particular at the state and federal level, are very generous.

Another benefit to working for the government is the ability to change career paths within the system. I think this is an extremely important benefit because we all know that we are not likely to stay in the same career for our entire lives. In the government, it is very much a "once you're in, you're in" type of situation.

This means you can enter the government with one position in one agency. And six months later, if it's not going well, you can change jobs, or departments, relatively easily if you have the right qualifications. You can also amass an enormous professional network from every position you occupy, which as long as you're doing a great job, will only benefit you.

The final benefit I want to mention is the sense of satisfaction one can gain from being part of something bigger than themselves. One of the most important reasons I returned to college for a master of public administration was my commitment to the greater good of society. If you're a person who believes in working toward a common goal, and that a government should support its citizens, then I encourage you to consider working for a local, state, or federal government agency.

Wow. Wow. That is a lot, in terms of benefits. So I mean, I heard having work that aligns with your values, lots of job security, great health benefits, opportunities for advancement, salary increases. You got me sold. So I have to imagine, though, on the flip side there are some challenges. So what kind of challenges do come from working in the government?

For sure, Brad. The toughest thing for me while I was working for the state of Ohio in a couple of different agencies was the slow pace of change. I think the government is much more complicated

than people realize. And the bureaucracy of red tape is a very real thing. While every entity will be different, some government agencies are very slow to implement updated technology, improve processes, and common sense efficiencies.

If you have been trying to get into the secretary of state during the pandemic or receive unemployment benefits, then exactly what I'm talking about. The slow pace of change is definitely a challenge. But that is why we need more innovative and creative thinkers in the government at all levels.

Another challenge that comes with working for the government is politics. At all levels of government, even at the city and county level, politics can influence processes and people. For instance, we are witnessing an exodus of government employees who were appointed to their positions during the last administration.

However, we don't change out everyone who works in an agency every time there's a change in leadership. Usually, only the appointed positions, and maybe the top two or three executives or director positions, will be in jeopardy. However, if you are a strongly partisan person, you may be challenged to work under someone from another party.

In government, partisan politics should not interfere with the daily operations of the agency. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. And so the strength of your professional network is really important in case you need to move into another position with a different department or agency.

Wow. Wow. Extremely good things to know. And definitely those could be some considerations for students before going in, and really great reminders. So I've heard a little bit about the application process or what it takes to apply. So what are the things that our students and graduates, in particular, really need to know before they apply to those government jobs?

So when you're applying to federal and state government positions, you'll need to plan ahead. One reason is that depending on the agency and the position, it could take several months to hear about any progress on your application. In particular, federal agencies requiring a significant security clearance need a lot of time to process that security clearance. This means the entire application process from start to finish could take as much as a year.

There are also some agencies such as the FBI, CIA, State Department, Secret Service, and more that have rules around how soon you may reapply if you've been rejected at some point during the process. Another reason to plan ahead when applying for state and federal jobs is the application

process is tedious and takes a lot of time if you want to do it well.

Both levels of government require you to create a profile and complete boxes for your information. These boxes should be seen as an opportunity rather than a hassle. The boxes allow you to provide a massive amount of detail regarding your work, volunteer, and classroom experience, which will help you meet the requirements of the applicant tracking systems in use.

The agencies use a software program to scan your application for keywords. If you do not meet a certain threshold, your application will not make it to human eyes. So these burdensome boxes are actually your gateway to opportunity.

It is essential that you read job descriptions carefully and incorporate language from them around knowledge, skills, and abilities into your application and cover letter. You'll need to plan to spend several hours creating your profile for either the state or federal government. Now, don't do it all at once, because it's quite a lot. But if you spend an hour working on your profile, three or four different times, that should be enough.

One final important thing to know about government application processes is that for some positions, you must take and pass a civil service exam. These exams are not generally difficult per se. But you do need to prepare yourself and schedule your seat for the exam ahead of applying for an opportunity.

So the big takeaway for state and federal applications is that you must investigate options and plan time to input a lot of information for the application. If we're talking about municipal, township, county, or city government, these application processes are usually a little more straightforward. Oftentimes, there's a brief online application, or you simply need to email a cover letter and resume to an HR representative. Always follow whatever directions you are given. Check the website of the entity you are applying to in order to learn their process.

Absolutely. So I think the really big takeaway here is that you want to be very strategic. You want to take your time. And you want to make sure that you're really doing it right and that you're customizing this application for the position that you're applying for. So, excellent tips, thank you.

So I guess the last thing that I really want to touch on today is the value of resources. I think it's always good for students to really know where they can turn to find really great information about applying to government jobs and the opportunities that are available. And you've always led me to some really great ones. So what are those resources that you'd recommend?

Honestly, first and foremost, please schedule an appointment with me at emich.joinhandshake.com. It is really important to think through what level of government you're interested in, what type of application process there is. And if you're going with state or federal government, the application process is so tricky that it will save you a lot of time and frustration if you just have an appointment with me. And then you'll learn everything you need to know.

Outside of my support, a great website for the federal government is gogovernment.org. This site is operated by the Partnership for Public Service, a nonprofit nonpartisan organization that works to make the federal government operate more effectively, especially in their hiring practices. So again, that was gogovernment.org.

For the state of Michigan, you'll want to check out the Michigan Civil Service Commission's website at michigan.gov/mdcs, and click on Applicants. For more information about municipal, township, city, and county government opportunities, always go straight to that entity's website and find their human resource department. It's really important that you go straight to the source when you are looking at federal, state, and local government opportunities to make sure you're getting the best information.

Amazing. And just to reiterate, obviously, your first step is go see April. She will definitely get you all the information that you need to take that next step. So I want to thank April for taking the time with us today.

I know I learned a lot. And hopefully, our listeners learned a lot. And if you are interested in pursuing some of the incredible and challenging career paths in local, state, and federal government, then reach out to April. Set up an appointment through Handshake. And she can take you through the steps. So until next time-- stay safe, stay healthy, and remember, we support your goals.

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