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Law School

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*Office of Public Interest/
Public Service Law and Careers*

Introduction to Federal Government Honors Programs

**A Job Search Tool from the Office of Public Interest/Public Service
Law and Careers**

2024-2025 Edition

How to Use This Guide

This guide introduces graduating law students and recent graduates interested in government service to the numerous federal government honors programs. These programs are the primary means by which the federal government hires entry-level attorneys. The document offers a brief description of each program's application process, eligibility requirements and hiring practices.

This guide is only a starting point for your job search. For more information on the application process, required and preferred qualifications of applicants, and work of the agency and honors attorneys, please see the links provided in this document for each program as well as the [Arizona Government Honors and Internship Handbook](#), [PSJD.org](#), and additional [job search publications](#) from the Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers (the PI/PS Office).

Those interested in government employment should meet with the PI/PS Office's [director of government programs](#) for an individual counseling session.

Finally, it is important to note that you may find more than one government office that matches your interests, skills, and experience. This document—along with additional research—may help you to discover exciting opportunities in unexpected places.

Please note: You are responsible for verifying program due dates, eligibility requirements, and other details that may change from year to year. Always check agency websites.

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General Tips on Applying to Federal Government Honors Programs

When applying to federal government honors programs, keep in mind that many applications take a significant amount of time to complete and that the deadlines for the programs are often very early in the fall term. You should begin work on these applications over the summer. Many positions require a thorough background check and/or a security clearance. U.S. citizenship is required for all jobs except in extremely unusual circumstances.

To be successful in your government job search, you must demonstrate a commitment to public service in general as well as an understanding of the specific agency at which you seek to work. You must also explain how your experiences make you a good fit. Thus, it is important to determine the specific characteristics or qualifications that each agency requires or prefers, which can vary widely from program to program. Much of this information can be found on agency websites and in the [Arizona Government Honors and Internship Handbook](#).

Overview of Honors Programs at the Federal Agencies

ENVIRONMENT AND LAND USE

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

[EPA Office of General Counsel, Honors Fellowship Program](#)

- Application Process: Check the website in the fall for details. The application is typically due in early February, with offers made in the spring.
- Eligibility: Graduating J.D., J.S.D., and LL.M. students and judicial clerks.
- Office and Work Description: The EPA Office of General Counsel provides advice to scientists and policy makers to support development of regulations and legislation affecting the environment. It provides legal support for the issuance of permits, approves state environmental programs, and handles legal issues relating to contracting and organizing personnel. It also is involved in administrative litigation and works with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to defend the EPA in court and in appellate and amicus work.
- Program Details: The Fellowship is for two years. All positions are based in the Washington, DC area.

EPA Regional Honors Attorney Fellowship Programs

Positions vary by year. Check [regional office websites](#) as well as the [EPA careers website](#).

Nuclear Regulatory Commission

[Office of General Counsel, Honors Law Graduate Program](#)

- Application Process: Check the website in mid-August for details. The application will likely be due in early September. Finalists are typically invited to headquarters for interviews in the fall. Offers are generally extended by the end of the calendar year.
- Eligibility: Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students and judicial clerks. Technical or scientific experience is not required.
- Office and Work Description: The Commission ensures the protection of public health and safety, common defense and security, and the environment in the use of nuclear materials and facilities in the United States. Attorneys advise the Commission and technical staff in the development of regulations and represent the Commission in administrative licensing, enforcement proceedings, and reviews before the U.S. Court of Appeals. They also provide advice on labor relations, procurement, and other legal matters.
- Program Details: As part of the two-year program, honors attorneys are assigned six-month rotations in three of seven divisions. Their work includes administrative litigation involving nuclear power plants, review of environmental impact statements, drafting of proposed regulations, and preparation of briefs for the U.S. Courts of Appeals. After successful

completion of the program, participants are converted to permanent positions.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Chief Counsel's Civilian Honors Program

- **Application Process:** Hiring is done on a rolling basis, with applications typically due in the fall. Initial interviews are held at job fairs and over the phone. Follow-up interviews are conducted in Washington, DC and at Corps offices nationwide. Offers are extended in late fall.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students and judicial clerks.
- **Office and Work Description:** The Corps manages water resources and other civil works projects, responds to emergencies and natural disasters, administers the Army's permitting responsibilities, and manages the construction of military facilities. Attorneys handle a varied caseload. Practice areas include contract, environmental, tort, admiralty, international, intellectual property, employment, and real estate law, as well as litigation, legislation, water rights, and ethics.
- **Program Details:** Participants receive training and developmental assignments. Positions are based in Washington, DC and throughout the 50 Corps offices worldwide.

FINANCIAL REGULATION AND BANKING

Note: those interested in careers in this field should read our “Federal Government Careers in Financial Regulation and Banking Systems: An Introduction,” which is accessible on the [PIPS/Office job search tools page](#).

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)

Office of General Counsel, Enforcement Division, Joseph Story Honors Attorney Program

- **Application Process:** Applications are typically due in early fall. Successful applicants may be asked to complete further screening processes.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students and attorneys who graduated from law school within the past two years and who at the time of appointment have spent no more than one year in activities other than judicial clerkships, public interest fellowships, or other comparable activities.
- **Office and Work Description:** The bureau is primarily responsible for regulating consumer protection with regards to financial products and services in the United States. Bureau attorneys work on a broad range of projects, including representing the bureau in litigation, providing advice for fair-lending compliance examinations, participating in complex rule-making, developing policy, and advising bureau officials on legal matters.
- **Program Details:** Honors attorneys are placed in the Office of General Counsel, Enforcement, or Fair Lending, or other offices as needed. They have opportunities to rotate to other bureau offices or other federal agencies. The program is two years, after which positions are usually made permanent.

Department of the Treasury

Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Office of Chief Counsel, Honors Attorney Program

- **Application Process:** Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, primarily in the fall. The number of attorneys hired varies each year.
- **Eligibility:** Open to graduating J.D. students and to graduating Tax LL.M students who have less than one year of post-J.D. legal work experience.
- **Office and Work Description:** Attorneys draft regulations and rulings relating to the Internal Revenue Code, represent the IRS before the U.S. Tax Court, and provide legal guidance to taxpayers and IRS agents.
- **Program Details:** Honors attorneys develop strong litigation experience and acquire significant training in tax, contract, personnel, and labor law. Positions are permanent and a three- year commitment is required. Placements may be in Washington, DC or in one of 48 field offices.

Office of the Comptroller of the Currency

Law Department Chief Counsel's Employment Program

- **Application Process:** Applications have previously been due in September. Interviews are conducted by phone. Selected applicants are then invited to Washington, DC for an in-person interview. Offers are extended in late fall or early winter.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students, judicial clerks, and recipients of the above degrees who graduated within the past two years.
- **Office and Work Description:** The department assures the health of national banks and offers a federal corporate law practice. The office is separated into seven legal practice groups, including administrative and internal law, bank activities and structures, community and consumer law, enforcement and compliance, legislative and regulatory activities, litigation, and securities and corporate practices.
- **Program Details:** This is a one-year program that is followed by full-time employment. Honors attorneys are assigned to a practice area and work in team settings with senior attorneys. Rotation is possible between DC practice groups, as well as the New York, Chicago, Dallas, and Denver district offices.

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)

Legal Division Honors Program

- **Application Process:** Applications are typically due in early fall, after which finalists are contacted arrange in-person interviews in Washington, DC. Offers may be extended from October through early January.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D. students, graduating LL.M. students who began their studies immediately upon completing law school, and judicial clerks.
- **Office and Work Description:** The FDIC promotes sound banking practices and insures bank deposits. Attorneys work in a corporate practice setting that includes litigation, transactional, regulatory, and administrative activities.
- **Program Details:** During the first year of the program, Honors Attorneys participate in three-month rotations in various legal divisions in Washington, DC. During the second year, Honors Attorneys receive long-term assignments in areas such as bank regulation, litigation and bank receivership matters, and corporate practice. The program is two years, but Honors Attorneys may apply for existing vacancies.

Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

Bureau of Competition, Entry-Level Attorney Program

- **Application Process:** Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, typically until early fall. Offers are extended in late fall or early winter.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D. and LL.M. students and judicial clerks.

- **Office and Work Description:** Attorneys investigate and prosecute unfair methods of competition, including illegal boycotts, price-fixing, and collusion. Attorneys also investigate compliance with prior FTC orders. Attorneys engage in litigation in federal district court and before administrative law judges.
- **Program Details:** Before beginning, attorneys undergo training in legal writing skills, deposition skills, trial advocacy, negotiations, and litigation. They are then assigned to one of four practice areas: Mergers and Acquisitions, Anticompetitive Practices, Healthcare Services, or Products and Compliance. The positions are permanent and are generally located in Washington, DC. Regional placements are occasionally available.

Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)

Chair's Attorney Honors Program: Law Clerk Program

- **Application Process:** Applications are typically accepted through mid-September, although due to the large number of applications the program receives, the portal may close early. Applicants may also apply through the Presidential Management Fellows Program, which typically has a mid-fall deadline.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D. or LL.M. students who have yet to take/pass the bar and judicial clerks.
- **Office and Work Description:** The SEC's mission is to protect investors, maintain fair, orderly, and efficient markets, and facilitate capital formation.
- **Program Details:** This highly selective two-year program initially hires new graduates as law clerks, but upon being admitted to a state bar association, law clerks are eligible to be converted to attorney positions.

LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT

Department of Labor (DOL)

Office of the Solicitor, Honors Program

- **Application Process:** The Honors Program typically accepts up to ten new attorneys each year. Applications are usually due in the fall.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D. and J.S.D. students, graduating LL.M. students with no significant post-J.D. work experience, judicial clerks, or graduates serving a fellowship.
- **Office and Work Description:** Attorneys in the Office of the Solicitor represent the Secretary of Labor in proceedings before federal courts and administrative law judges, as well as in alternative dispute resolution activities. Attorneys also assist in developing regulations, standards, and legislation. Focus areas include safety and health laws, civil rights laws, pension and health benefit laws, minimum wage and overtime requirements, whistleblower protections, and international labor standards.
- **Program Details:** Honors attorneys complete 90-day rotations in divisions in the Office of the Solicitor and may choose to do a regional rotation. Their work includes arguing cases in federal courts, drafting regulations, participating in negotiations, and arbitrating disputes. After two years, attorneys are converted to a permanent position and assigned to either the national office in Washington, DC or one of 14 regional offices.

National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)

Honors Program

- **Application Process:** Applications are usually accepted in mid-to-late fall. Students may apply to any number of three separate programs. All three use the same application process, but the deadlines may vary slightly.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students, judicial clerks, and recent graduates completing a full-time labor law fellowship.
- **Office and Work Description:** The NLRB is an independent agency that administers the law governing relations between employers and unions in the private sector and processes charges of unfair labor practices.
- **Program Details:** The NLRB's three honors programs include one for divisions within the General Counsel's Office, one for offices on the Board, and one for regional offices. Each program is two years and leads to permanent positions upon successful completion.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Note: All federal government jobs in national security and international law require intensive background checks and, in most cases, security clearances. Please see the [director of government programs](#) at the Office of Public Interest/Public Service Careers if you have any questions about these processes. We also recommend reading our “Brief Guide to Federal Government Careers in National Security Law and Policy,” which is accessible on our [job search tools page](#).

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

Office of General Counsel, Honors Program

- Application Process: Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Applicants are encouraged to apply as early as possible. Selected applicants are invited to interview in Washington, DC one to two months after applying, with offers extended one to two months after the interview. The program often selects former participants in its Summer Law Clerk Program.
- Eligibility: Visit the Honors Program website for up-to-date information.
- Office and Work Description: Attorneys provide legal advice and guidance related to foreign intelligence and counterintelligence, international terrorism, international narcotics trafficking, nonproliferation, and related issues.
- Program Details: Honors attorneys are assigned to two to three divisions within the Office of General Counsel. All positions are located in the Washington, DC area. The program is three years, with the potential for conversion to a permanent position.

Department of Homeland Security

Secretary’s Honors Program for Attorneys

- Application Process: The Honors Program accepts a variable number of new attorneys each year. In the past, it has accepted up to 15 new attorneys, with the application due in early fall, followed by initial telephone interviews and in-person interviews in Washington, DC. Offers are extended in early winter.
- Eligibility: Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students and judicial clerks.
- Office and Work Description: Attorneys provide legal advice, participate in crafting policy, review proposed legislation, and assist in operational initiative planning on various issues, including transportation and border security, cyber security, immigration law, environmental law, international law, and national security law. In addition to the Office of General Counsel at headquarters, each of the department’s components has legal offices. They include the Coast Guard, Customs and Border Control, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Secret Service, and Citizenship and Immigration Enforcement.
- Program Details: The Honors Program is a two-year program consisting of six-month rotations. All assignments are in the Washington, DC area. After 18 months, honors attorneys may apply for full-time positions.

Department of State

Office of the Legal Adviser

- **Application Process:** Applications are generally due at the beginning of September. Selected applicants interview in Washington, DC. Offers are extended in early winter.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D. students and judicial clerks.
- **Office and Work Description:** The office is divided into 23 regional and functional bureaus. Attorneys furnish advice on domestic and international legal issues and assist in the formulation and implementation of U.S. foreign policy. Permanent attorneys rotate bureau assignments every two or three years.
- **Program Details:** Honors attorneys rotate assignments throughout the 23 bureaus. All positions are located in the Washington, DC area. After successful completion of the three-year program, conversion to a permanent position is available.

OTHER

Department of Health and Human Services

[Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\), Office of Chief Counsel, New Attorney Hiring](#)

- Application Process: Deadlines and annual numbers of hires vary; check website.
- Eligibility: Graduating J.D. students and judicial clerks.
- Office and Work Description: The FDA, Office of Chief Counsel is a component of the Health and Human Services Office of General Counsel. Its attorneys advise the FDA on legal matters and represent the agency in court proceedings and administrative hearings. They participate in civil and criminal cases and in rulemaking proceedings, legislative matters, policy deliberations and international negotiations. Attorneys serve as counselors to the agency's major programs, including drugs, foods, biologics, devices, veterinary products, tobacco products, and enforcement.
- Program Details: These positions are permanent and are located in Silver Spring, MD.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

[Office of General Counsel, Legal Honors Program](#)

- Application Process: Applications are typically due in early fall. Finalists are interviewed in Washington, DC, at field offices, or by telephone. Offers are extended in early winter.
- Eligibility: Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students who have not been admitted to the bar, as well as judicial clerks who have not been admitted to the bar.
- Office and Work Description: The Office of General Counsel provides advice to the department on its programs and policies. It is comprised of the Offices of Assisted Housing and Community Development, Finance and Regulatory Compliance, Human Resources Law, Insured Housing, Legislation and Regulations, Litigation, Fair Housing, and Program Enforcement.
- Program Details: The term of employment is 14 months. Positions are located in Washington, DC and in some of the department's 35 field offices. Honors attorneys are assigned mentors. Attorneys at the DC headquarters can rotate among the General Counsel offices, while those in field offices can rotate among the field office divisions. Participation in the program may lead to permanent employment.

Department of Justice

[Attorney General's Honors Program](#)

Please see our "Introduction to the Department of Justice Attorney General's Honors Program," which is accessible on our [job search tools page](#).

Department of Transportation (DOT)

Honors Attorney Program

- **Application Process:** The program begins in the fall of even-numbered years; applicants apply in the summer/fall of odd-numbered years. Students graduating in odd-numbered years must seek a one-year judicial clerkship or public interest fellowship to remain eligible. Interviews are conducted at law schools and job fairs. Applicants unable to attend such an interview may apply directly to the department. Successful applicants are invited to Washington, DC to interview. Offers are extended by late fall.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students, public interest fellows, and judicial clerks.
- **Office and Work Description:** The Office of General Counsel is responsible for supervision, coordination, and review of the DOT's legislative efforts, regulatory program, and involvement in legal proceedings before other agencies, as well as various operational and international legal matters. The office is also responsible for the Office of Aviation Consumer Protection and Enforcement and provides legal support to the ten Chief Counsel's Offices of the Operating Administrations.
- **Program Details:** Honors Attorneys participate in six rotations, including at least one in the Office of General Counsel and up to five in Chief Counsel's Offices of the DOT's operating administration. The program is two years in duration, and all positions are in the Washington, DC area. Participants are eligible for permanent positions after completing one year in the program.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

Office of General Counsel, Attorney Honors Program

- **Application Process:** Applications are typically due in early fall. Finalists are invited for an in-person interview. Offers are extended between mid-November and the end of December.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D., LL.M., and J.S.D. students and judicial clerks.
- **Office and Work Description:** Attorneys advise the commission on its oversight of television, radio, cable, wireless, satellite, and other communications services and facilities. Attorneys draft decisions in adjudication and rulemaking, participate in international negotiations, represent the commission in dealings with government agencies, Congress, the private sector, and federal courts, and formulate decisions authorizing new technologies and services.
- **Program Details:** The program is two years, and all positions are located in Washington, DC. Participants may rotate to a new assignment after the first year, depending on availability. Conversion to permanent employment depends on performance, availability of funds, and need.

U. S. Postal Service (USPS)

Office of General Counsel, Honors Attorney Program

- **Application Process:** The number of annual hires varies. Applications are usually accepted in the fall. Interviews are conducted in person and by phone. Hiring decisions are made one to three months after interviews.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating J.D. students and attorneys who graduated no more than 30 months prior to the date of employment. Please check the program website for up-to-date information.
- **Office and Work Description:** Attorneys provide representation and advice to Postal Service officials involving the interpretation of statutes, regulations, and contracts and present cases before administrative bodies. Practice areas include employment, torts, economic regulation, finance, contracts, intellectual property, legislation, administrative, international, and consumer protection law.
- **Program Details:** The program duration is three years. Positions are located in Washington, DC and occasionally other U.S. locations. Participants are usually converted to permanent staff.

U.S. Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF)

Administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management

- **Application Process:** Applications are typically due in the fall; the application window is narrow. Finalists are named a short time later. Finalists then have twelve months to secure an appointment to a participating federal agency.
- **Eligibility:** Graduating/graduated advanced-degree students who graduate no more than two years prior to the opening date of the application announcement.
- **Office and Work Description:** PMF is a flagship leadership development program at the entry level for advanced degree candidates. Fellows work at a range of federal agencies. They do not hold practicing attorney positions, but jobs that draw on legal education are available.
- **Program Details:** PMF appointments are two years in duration. During the appointment, fellows must take part in training and career development programs. Appointments can lead to permanent employment.