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Résumé and CV Guide

Public Service Transition Program · November 2026

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide shows veterans and public employees how to turn the record of their service into a résumé or curriculum vitae (CV) that a private employer, nonprofit organization, or client can read quickly. It is written for people working on their own.

It pairs with three other program materials: the Skills Translation Worksheet, which you should complete first, and the Résumé Template and Cover Letter Template. All of them are available at library.agardresearchassociates.org/public-service-transition.

1. Choose the right document

Employers expect different documents in different settings. Decide which one your target field expects before you begin writing.

DOCUMENT	WHERE IT IS EXPECTED	TYPICAL LENGTH	WHAT IT EMPHASIZES
Private-sector résumé	Most private companies and nonprofit organizations	One page early in a career; two pages for most people with substantial experience	Results and skills that match one specific job
Curriculum vitae (CV)	Academic, research, scientific, and medical positions, many international employers, and some policy organizations	As long as your record requires	A complete record of education, research, publications, presentations, teaching, grants, and service
Federal résumé	Federal jobs posted on USAJOBS	No more than two pages for most announcements, under a limit that took effect on September 27, 2025	Evidence that you meet each qualification in the announcement

State and local governments set their own application rules, so follow the instructions in each posting. If you apply for federal jobs as well as private ones, keep a separate federal version. The rest of this guide focuses on the private-sector résumé and the CV.

2. Start with the job, not the résumé

A résumé is an argument that you can do a particular job. Before you write, collect three to five postings for the kind of role you want, and read them closely.

- Save the full text of each posting, because postings are often removed once a position is filled.
- Highlight the duties, skills, tools, and credentials that appear in more than one posting. These are the employer's keywords.
- Note the job titles the postings use. You will use the same vocabulary in your summary and skills section.

- Match each highlighted item to an entry on your Skills Translation Worksheet. Where you have no match, decide whether you have relevant experience you have not yet written down or whether the role is a stretch for now.
- If you plan to work for yourself, replace the postings with a short written description of your first client: who they are, what problem they need solved, and what they would pay for.

If you are unsure which civilian occupations fit your experience, My Next Move for Veterans and the O*NET Military Crosswalk link military occupations to related civilian occupations, and O*NET OnLine lists the tasks, skills, and common job titles for each occupation. The Department of Labor sponsors all three.

3. Translate your vocabulary

Words that carry weight inside government often carry none outside it. Use these rules as you write.

Spell out or replace acronyms. Assume the reader knows none of them. Write “performance reviews” instead of “NCOERs” or “FITREPs,” and “budget execution” instead of “obligations.” Keep an acronym only when the posting uses it, as with a widely known certification.

Describe the function as well as the title. Use your official title, because employers may verify it, and make the function clear in the same line or in the first bullet. For example, write “Platoon Sergeant (operations supervisor), U.S. Army” or “Program Analyst (risk and internal controls), [agency name].”

Show scope instead of rank or grade. Private employers rarely know what an E-7 or a GS-13 means. Show your level through the size of what you led or managed: people, budget, equipment, customers, cases, or territory. If you include a rank or grade at all, place it after the scope rather than in place of it.

Convert units of work into business terms. Missions become projects or operations, readiness becomes availability, taskers become requests, and constituents become customers or stakeholders.

Keep classified and sensitive information out. Never include classified information, controlled unclassified information, or details of sensitive programs. Describe scale and results in general terms, and ask your security office if you are unsure what you may say.

State a clearance accurately. If you hold a security clearance, you may list its level and status, for example “Active Secret clearance,” without describing the programs it gave you access to. Access usually ends when you leave a position that requires a clearance, so record your eligibility level and the date of your last investigation, and ask your security office how to describe your status.

4. Write bullets that show results

Each bullet should answer three questions: what you did, how large it was, and what changed because of it. A reliable formula is an action verb, followed by what you did, its scale, and its result.

AS OFTEN WRITTEN	REWRITTEN FOR A PRIVATE EMPLOYER
Platoon sergeant responsible for 38 Soldiers and $4.2M in equipment; maintained 98% readiness.	Supervised a team of 38 and managed $4.2 million in equipment while sustaining 98 percent operational availability.
Leading Chief Petty Officer, supply division. Supervised 14 Sailors; inventory accuracy 99.6%.	Led a 14-person logistics team that managed $4 million in inventory at 99.6 percent accuracy.
GS-0343-13 Program Analyst. Duties include conducting A-123 internal control reviews for the grants portfolio.	Led internal control reviews for a $310 million grant portfolio and directed corrective actions with program managers.
Township clerk. Responsible for OPRA requests, licensing, and records retention.	Managed public records, licensing, and records retention for a municipality, and answered [number] public records requests a year within legal deadlines.

Habits that make bullets stronger

- Begin each bullet with a strong verb: led, supervised, trained, managed, coordinated, planned, analyzed, audited, budgeted, negotiated, procured, improved, reduced, launched, wrote, presented, or resolved. Use the past tense for past roles and the present tense for your current role.
- Use numbers wherever you can: people, dollars, items, cases, customers, time saved, or errors reduced. If a figure is sensitive, describe scale honestly, for example “a portfolio of more than 200 grants,” or use a percentage.
- Put the most relevant bullets first. Use three to six bullets for recent roles and fewer for older ones.
- Avoid “responsible for” and “duties included.” Those phrases describe the position, not what you accomplished in it.
- Do not copy your position description or evaluation language word for word. Use it as raw material for your own sentences.

5. Build the résumé section by section

SECTION	WHAT TO INCLUDE	TIPS
Header	Your name, city and state, phone number, email address, and a LinkedIn address if you have one.	Leave off your street address, photograph, date of birth, and any identification number.
Professional summary	Two or three sentences naming the role you want, your years of relevant experience, and two or three strengths that match the posting.	Write it last, after the bullets, and revise it for each application.
Skills	Eight to twelve skills and tools drawn from the posting, such as project management, budgeting, data analysis, or a named software system.	Use the employer’s words, and list only skills you can discuss in an interview.
Experience	Each role in reverse chronological order, with title, organization, location, and month and year.	Group short military assignments under one heading with overall dates when that is clearer.
Education and training	Degrees and relevant military and civilian training, with dates.	Explain course names when needed, for example “Senior Leader Course, a leadership and management program.”
Certifications and clearance	Licenses, certifications, and an active clearance if it is relevant.	Include expiration dates where they apply.
Optional sections	Volunteer work, languages, publications, or awards that an employer would understand.	Describe an award by what it recognized rather than by its name alone.

The Résumé Template uses this order in a clean, single-column layout that reads well on screen and in applicant tracking systems.

6. Format for people and software

Many employers screen applications with an applicant tracking system before a person reads them. Systems differ, so always follow the posting’s instructions, and keep these general habits.

- Use one column, standard section headings such as “Experience,” “Education,” and “Skills,” and a common font at 10 to 12 points.
- Keep important text out of tables, text boxes, headers, footers, and images, which some systems cannot read.
- Submit the file type the employer asks for. When there is no instruction, a Word file or a text-based PDF is usually accepted.
- Name the file clearly, for example “Firstname-Lastname-Resume.pdf.”

- Use the posting's keywords where they truthfully describe your experience. Never hide keywords in the file or copy the posting's text.

7. Write a curriculum vitae

A CV is a complete record rather than a summary, so its length follows your record. Most CVs use the following sections, in an order that puts the most relevant material first.

- Contact information.
- Education, with degree, field, institution, and year, and the title of any thesis or dissertation.
- Research and professional experience.
- Publications, in one consistent citation style.
- Presentations and briefings that were public and unclassified.
- Teaching and training.
- Grants, fellowships, and awards.
- Service and professional memberships.
- Languages, clearances, and technical skills.

Reports you wrote in government count as publications only if they were publicly released. List internal documents under experience instead. Put publications early for research positions and teaching early for teaching positions.

8. Convert a federal résumé

Federal résumés are written to show human resources specialists that you meet each qualification, so they include details that private employers do not need. When you convert one, take the following steps.

- Remove grade, series, hours per week, salary, and supervisor contact details unless the posting asks for them.
- Replace duty descriptions with results, and cut any language copied from a position description.
- Rename internal programs, offices, and systems in plain terms.
- Shorten older roles to one or two lines each, or combine them under an "Earlier experience" heading.
- Keep the federal version on file. If you apply for federal jobs, remember that it must also fit within two pages for most announcements.

9. Cover letters

Send a cover letter when the posting asks for one, when you are changing fields, or when a short explanation will help, for example to explain a move from military service or a planned relocation. Keep it to one page and four short paragraphs.

Opening. Name the position and where you found it, and give one sentence on why you are a strong match.

Evidence. Describe two or three results that match the posting's most important requirements.

Fit. Explain what draws you to this organization and how your public service prepared you for its work.

Close. Thank the reader and say how you can be reached.

The Cover Letter Template follows this structure.

10. Your LinkedIn profile

- Write a headline that names the role you want and your strongest qualification, rather than your rank, grade, or current title alone.
- Write the About section in the first person, using your résumé summary as a starting point.
- Translate each experience entry the same way you translated your résumé.

- If you are still serving or still employed, check your service's or employer's guidance on outside activities and on how you describe your official position, and consider limiting who can see any "open to work" setting.
- Ask former supervisors and colleagues for recommendations that describe your results in plain language.

11. Protect your privacy

- Never put your Social Security number, Department of Defense identification number, date of birth, or medical information on a résumé, CV, or online profile.
- Do not list your discharge characterization, a disability rating, or your reason for leaving.
- Share a DD Form 214 or other personnel records only when an employer has a clear and secure process for receiving them, such as verifying a veterans' preference, usually after an offer.
- If an employer invites you to self-identify as a protected veteran, answering is voluntary. Federal contractors are required to make that invitation, and the information is kept separate from your application.
- Be cautious of any "employer" that asks for payment, bank details, or identification numbers before a formal interview.

12. Before you send it

☐ The résumé is tailored to this posting, and the summary names this role.

☐ Every acronym is spelled out or replaced.

☐ Each recent role shows results, with numbers where possible.

☐ Dates, titles, and names are accurate and consistent.

☐ Nothing classified, sensitive, or personal appears anywhere in the document.

☐ The file is named clearly and saved in the format the employer asked for.

☐ Someone you trust has read it for errors.

Where to get help

Other program materials. The Résumé and CV Guide, the interview guides, the worksheets and checklists, the Referral Guide, and the résumé and cover letter templates are available to download at library.agardresearchassociates.org/public-service-transition.

One-on-one help. If you would like one of the program's directors to read your materials and help you tailor them to the jobs you are applying for, request one-on-one help through the program page at agardresearchassociates.org/public-service-transition. Requests are reviewed on a rolling basis as volunteer time allows, and veterans are served first.

If you are in crisis or worried about someone, help is available at any hour. Veterans, service members, and their families can reach the Veterans Crisis Line by dialing 988 and pressing 1, or by texting 838255. Anyone can call or text 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

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