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Transition Checklist for Public Employees

Public Service Transition Program · November 2026

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

This checklist is for current and former federal, state, and local government employees who are moving into private-sector work or self-employment, whether by choice, by retirement, or because of a reduction in force. Work through the sections that match your timeline, and check items off as you finish them. In the Word version, click a box to check it.

Rules differ by employer, retirement system, and state. The items are general reminders, not legal or benefits advice, so confirm every date and election with your human resources office, benefits office, or ethics official.

As soon as you are considering a move or receive notice

- ☐ Download or request copies of your personnel records while you still have access, including personnel actions (for federal employees, SF-50s from your electronic Official Personnel Folder), position descriptions, performance appraisals, awards, and training records.
- ☐ If you received a reduction-in-force notice, read it closely. Note the effective date, any offer of another position, and your appeal rights, and ask about career transition services and selection priority. Federal employees may be eligible for priority under the Career Transition Assistance Plan, the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan, or a Reemployment Priority List.
- ☐ Ask your benefits office for a retirement estimate if you may be eligible to retire, including under any early retirement offer.
- ☐ Ask whether you are eligible for severance pay or a separation incentive, and how each would interact with your other benefits.
- ☐ Request written advice from your ethics official about the rules that apply while you look for work and about post-employment restrictions, before you seek or accept a private role that touches your current duties.
- ☐ Build a monthly budget for the transition, including any gap in pay and the cost of health coverage.

Once you have a separation date

- ☐ Confirm your health coverage. Federal employees who will not carry their coverage into retirement can elect Temporary Continuation of Coverage for up to 18 months, and must elect it within 60 days after separation or after receiving notice, whichever is later. State and local employees should ask about COBRA or their plan’s continuation rules.
- ☐ Decide what to do with your retirement savings, such as the Thrift Savings Plan for federal employees, and confirm any pension election deadlines. Ask before withdrawing money early, because taxes and penalties may apply.
- ☐ Confirm your life insurance options. Federal employees whose group life insurance ends can convert it to an individual policy, generally by applying within 31 days.
- ☐ Ask how unused annual leave will be paid and how any sick leave will be treated.

- ☐ If you file public financial disclosure reports, file your termination report on time. For federal filers, it is due within 30 days after you leave the covered position.
- ☐ If you hold a security clearance, record its level and the date of your last investigation.
- ☐ Gather work samples you are permitted to share, with all sensitive and nonpublic information removed.
- ☐ Return government property, leave government records in government systems, and keep only personal files you are allowed to keep.

After you leave

- ☐ If you are out of work, apply for unemployment compensation through your state workforce agency. States also administer the program for former federal employees.
- ☐ Put the deadlines for health coverage, life insurance, and retirement elections on your calendar.
- ☐ Keep copies of your final personnel action and your last pay statements.
- ☐ Follow the written advice from your ethics official, and ask again if a new opportunity raises questions.
- ☐ If you may want to return to public service, ask your former human resources office whether you have reinstatement eligibility, and keep a federal version of your résumé within the two-page limit.

Your job search and your first months

- ☐ Complete the Skills Translation Worksheet, a tailored résumé, and an updated LinkedIn profile.
- ☐ Collect three to five postings for the role you want, or describe your first client if you plan to work for yourself.
- ☐ Compare offers by total compensation, not salary alone. Private employers differ from government in pay, leave, retirement contributions, and health benefits.
- ☐ Learn how decisions are made and how performance is measured in your new organization, and ask for feedback early.
- ☐ Keep in touch with your network, and update your résumé every six months.

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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