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We founded the Arab American Institute in 1985 at a time when Arab Americans were excluded from the political process. Since then, we have watched our community move from the sidelines to the center of local and national politics. Arab Americans are serving in many of the highest elected offices and on innumerable commissions, school boards, city councils, court rooms, and more. But we still have work to do.

It is more important than ever for the Arab American community to increase our public service leadership at all levels of the American political system. And while running for office is not for everyone, there are more avenues to public service than that. The following Presidential Appointment Primer is a key resource for qualified Arab Americans to access over 7,000 positions within every Presidential administration that are infrequently publicized.

The Arab American Institute is committed to growing the presence of talented leaders from our community who possess expertise, skills, and perspectives that are great assets to our country. We work with each administration to get Arab Americans appointed to top government positions, from Cabinet-level agencies to support positions in the Office of the President.

It is my hope that our community can use this resource to apply for appointments, and it is my promise that you have our help with the process.

Regards,

Dr. James Zogby
President
Arab American Institute
BACKGROUND

The “United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions” provides a detailed list of all the positions that a President can appoint within the Federal Government and is often referred to as the Plum Book. The Plum Book is published after each U.S. Presidential election and alternates between the House of Representatives’ Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Senate's Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Filling the top positions in the executive, legislative and judicial branches is a shared responsibility stated in Article II Section 2 of the Constitution giving the President the authority to appoint officials “with the Advice and Consent of the Senate.” According to the 2012 Plum Book, there were between 1,200 to 1,400 positions in the executive branch that required advice and consent of the Senate, which was later reduced when the 112th Congress enacted the Presidential Appointment Efficiency and Streamlining Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-166). The act successfully eliminated the requirement of Senate advice and consent on Presidential nominations to 163 positions in the executive branch.

Many full-time government positions require Senate confirmation, such as: Military appointments, Secretaries and General Counsels of the 15 Cabinet agencies, Foreign Service officers, federal judges, officers in executive departments, regulatory boards and commissions, as well as independent, non-regulatory executive branch agencies like NASA. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), Senate uses the requirement of Senate confirmation for most Presidential appointments as leverage to influence policy by denying nominations, extracting the promises tied to appointments before granting consent and delay confirmation as a way to increase influence on unrelated issues. Despite Senate using the confirmation requirement to influence executive branch decisions, ultimately the approval of Presidential nominations has a high success rate. The CRS notes that during the 111th Congress, President Obama submitted 964 nominations to executive branch positions and 843 of the nominations were confirmed (87%).

There are around 500 Presidential appointment positions not subject to Senate approval. According to the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) the presidential appointment positions are divided into three categories: 67% of presidential appointment positions exist within commissions, committees, councils, boards or foundations; 29% of positions are within the Executive Office of the President; and the remaining 4% belong to other federal departments and agencies (figures do not include the additional positions from P.L. 112-166). Also, there are nearly 6,500 Senior Executive Service, Schedule C, and other limited-term positions listed in the 2012 Plum Book, which include most Civil Service positions.

TYPES OF POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS AND COMPENSATION

The amount and configuration of political appointments are susceptible to federal regulations, budgetary restraints, priority based on jurisdictional influence and political expediency. The types of federal appointments can be categorized into the following four main categories:
Presidential Appointments Requiring Senate Confirmation (PAS)

These positions belong to the highest level of political appointments, where the President nominates a candidate and the Senate must approve of the nomination before the President can appoint the person into office. The executive branch holds 1,200 to 1,400 positions that require Senate confirmation and advice. PAS positions include Cabinet secretaries, deputy secretaries, under-secretaries, assistant secretaries and deputy administrators. There is often a political agenda advanced behind Senate’s process of examining the presidential nominees and confirming or denying their appointment.

Senior Executive Service (SES)

The Civil Service Act of 1978 established SES positions that compose “a personnel system covering top level policy, supervisory, and managerial positions in most Federal agencies,” according to the 2012 Plum Book. The two types of SES positions are Career Reserved and General. Career Reserved is designed to ensure impartiality of the Government by limiting appointees to only career employees. General appointees can be filled by career employees, non-career appointee, or limited-term appointees. Career appointees are chosen through a competitive, non-political, merit-based process. Non-career appointees make up less than 10% of all SES positions because they are filled by appointment with no competitive process, but the agency must prove the appointee meets the credentials for the position. Meanwhile, limited term appointees fill positions that aren’t continuing or are established for an unanticipated, urgent need and cannot exceed three years. SES positions include a majority of Civil Service positions above grade 15 of the General Schedule like deputy assistant secretaries, associate deputy secretaries and deputy directors.

Schedule C

Schedule C positions include a majority of Civil Service positions at grade 15 of the General Schedule or below, and are composed of close aides to the heads of agencies and programs. According to the 2012 Plum Book, Schedule C positions can be filled non-competitively due to their “confidential or policy-determining character”. The position is created through agency request by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director or by either an Executive Order of the President or legislation. The position requires the direct supervisor be a Presidential appointee, a SES appointee occupying a General position or another Schedule C appointee. The Schedule C appointees are not subjected to conduct or performances based removal procedures and “serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority and can be removed at any time”.

Presidential Appointments not Requiring Senate Confirmation (PA)

In addition to PAS, SES, and Schedule C appointments, there are Presidential political appointments that do not require Senate confirmation. There are almost 500 PA positions after the enactment of the Presidential Appointment Efficiency and Streamlining Act of 2011, which opened another 163 positions to Presidential appointment without the requirement of Senate approval. PA positions range from the President needing an individual for a specific task, positions within the
Executive Office of the President, to long-term positions on boards and committees. The President might use this kind of appointment if he suspects the PAS nomination would be rejected by Senate due to political reasons and leverage.

The majority of Presidential Appointment positions have salaries based on the level it ranks on the Executive Schedule pay scale. The levels on the Executive Schedule pay scale are ranked I through V. According to the Executive Schedule index in the 2012 Plum Book: level I consists of Secretaries which are paid a salary of $199,700, level II consists of Deputy Secretaries which are paid a salary of $179,700, level III consists of Under-Secretaries which are paid a salary of $165,300, level IV consists of Assistant Secretaries which are paid a salary of $155,500, and level V consists of Administrators, Directors and Commissioners which are paid a salary of $145,700. The maximum salary for SES positions are between level II and III, depending on whether the individual works in an agency with a Certified SES Performance Appraisal System or not. Most Schedule C appointees’ salary ranges from $67,114 to $155,500, which is in accordance to the GS pay grade system.

**Desired Credentials and Characteristics**

The Presidential Personnel Staff searches for potential appointees from both political parties and are legally required to appoint members of certain committees, boards and commissions through bi-partisan measures. There will inevitably be Presidential Appointees from both major political parties, but applicants who share a political affiliation with the President or are in non-partisan appointed positions are more likely to be appointed.

Top-level government officials come from a wide range of careers in both the public and private sector. When the Brookings Institution surveyed 435 former and current senior-level appointees in 2000, it found that 35% came from positions in the federal government; 18% had worked in a business or corporation; 17% came from law firms; 14% had worked in educational or research institutions; and 8% had served in state or local government. Additionally, Professor David E. Lewis published a study in 2010 which found that a selected group of political appointees who served between fiscal years 2004 and 2006 were more likely than career employees to have private sector management experience, and to have previously worked in Congress or the White House. Candidates should be aware that by Executive order, President Obama has prohibited individuals who have served as registered lobbyists within the most recent two years from accepting any employment with executive agencies that they have lobbied. If you have been a registered lobbyist, you must wait two years after deregistration before obtaining a political appointment. (Information on Executive Order 13490 redirects here.)

In addition to the abilities highlighted in this guide – aptitude at leading people, envisioning and achieving change, and getting results – political appointees need to be able to work constructively with different personalities, and be sensitive to the many competing demands and considerations weighing on policymakers. Previous experience in elected or other political office may be particularly helpful in this regard.
**APPLICATION PROCESS**

Before starting the application process, it is important to research and dedicate some time to identifying which particular areas of policy, agencies and boards you are most interested in and qualified for. The Plum Book is a great resource to begin researching the range of positions that are filled through Presidential appointment, as well as reviewing pages eight through nine of the Presidential Appointment Application form that provides a listing of the agencies, boards and commissions available to fill.

The comprehensive list provides all of the Presidential appointment positions throughout all of the Agencies, Boards and Commissions. If applying for a position during a two-term presidency, several appointees confirmed during the first term of the presidency will continue to occupy the position.

After deciding which positions interest you, submit your Presidential Appointment Application by following the instructions provided by the Presidential Personnel Office (PPO), which gives you the option of submitting it online or as a hardcopy.

Since the materials initially under consideration are just the complete application and current resume, it is important to distinguish yourself from the thousands of other job applications the Administrations receive. This can be done by utilizing any connections and relationships you have with Administrative officials or members of Congress to gain support behind your application. Although the recommendations from current employees are valuable, the White House has no obligations to pursue these recommendations.

The appointment process begins at the PPO, located in the interior of the White House. For prominent political positions, the President is directly engaged in choosing candidates for positions in the Cabinet, diplomatic corps, and agency leadership. Those who seek these positions should make their interest and superior qualifications known in the White House as soon as possible while also connecting with the White House and Presidential advisors.

Because of the amount of positions being filled by appointment, the President and his closest advisors are not intimately involved in selecting candidates for all openings. The PPO plays a central role in recruiting and screening candidates.

After a nominee is selected, he or she will undergo a vetting process that requires submission of additional information and forms that cover the topics of personal finances, policy positions, and private and professional relationships that may have political significance. Applicants should be prepared to submit their public and private lives to scrutiny. If and when cleared by the counsel to the President, nominees are either appointed by the President or forwarded to the Senate for its confirmation. Nominees who are subject to Senate confirmations should be aware that information gathered by the White House is not necessarily provided to the Senate. Thus, nominees should be prepared once again to provide their personal, profession, and financial information to Senate staff.
Those nominees subject to Senate confirmation must be approved first by a standing committee, then by the full Senate. It is possible, as well as highly recommended, for nominees to seek meetings with each of the Senators who sit on the committee that will consider the nomination, and to form and use relationships with Senate officer during their confirmation process. It is important to note that Senators agreed to a 2011 resolution to exempt 272 positions from committee consideration unless any Senator objects to a particular nominee going through an expedited process. Therefore, certain nominations to Boards, Commissions, Chief Financial Officer Appointments and other positions will now normally proceed directly to consideration by the full Senate.

While a nomination is in consideration, it is important for the candidate to cultivate contacts with members of the House of Representatives who hold key positions on the authorizing and appropriations committee for the department that the candidate desires. While they do not have a vote on nominations, the House members have a large sway in convincing those who do. House committee staff work closely with the Senate and may know ways to advance the candidate’s nomination.

Lastly, nominees should keep a low profile and avoid giving interviews or making speeches prior to confirmation. Nominees often fail to enhance their chances of being appointed and confirmed by courting press coverage.

**COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT**

Obtaining and keeping a political job can be a draining process and applicants should consider carefully if the benefits outweigh the potential costs. The hours are typically long for a political appointee in a full-time position, and the pace of work is intense. Appointees are also subject to public and press scrutiny, which does not cease during the nomination and confirmation process but carries through to the remainder of the candidate’s time as an appointee. Additionally, appointee’s dealings with the federal government will also be restricted for a period of time even after they leave their political positions, in order to prevent possible conflicts of interest. It is important to keep in mind political appointments come with no job security.

The potential rewards of political appointments are great, however. Appointees gain significant opportunities to add to their areas of expertise and develop contacts and relationships. Most importantly, they provide important services to the nation and shape public policy in a real, concrete way.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Application

The National Academy of Public Administration has published in its most recent 2013 edition *The Survivor's Guide for Presidential Nominees*. Included in this resource is information all prospective nominees need to know about appointments and confirmations, and advice on how to succeed in these processes.

Presidential Appointments, Senate Confirmation Process, Proposals for Change in the 112th Congress

Information on Political Appointees, Appointment Process, Full Profiles of Current Appointees

The Plum Book

Candidate Development Programs