



Summer job slog

Seeking summer work? Ask Uncle Sam

By Andrea Coombes, CBS.MarketWatch.com

Last Update: 10:54 PM ET April 27, 2004

SAN FRANCISCO (CBS.MW) -- Teens and college students on the job hunt might instinctively head to the familiarity of the mall, but they shouldn't neglect federal and local government agencies in their search.

While government-run Web sites such as StudentJobs.gov and USA Jobs don't make the search particularly easy, there are some gems hidden among the governmentese.

"Government jobs have a reputation for low pay, not being very exciting and even impractical in terms of career development or advancement," said John Challenger, chief executive of outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas.

"Nothing could be further from the truth. There are some great jobs here," he said. "These are great places to start a career."

The FDA is hiring high-school and college students for its summer intern program, paying \$9.65 to \$11.82 per hour for clerical jobs in Washington, D.C., according to the listing on the federal government's site, USA Jobs.

And, according to the same site, the U.S. Coast Guard is seeking "recreation assistants," at various locations along the New Jersey coastline to provide "support for preventative maintenance, service work or minor construction projects."

Students can apply for a summer job as a clerk at the Energy Department's Idaho offices, with pay starting at \$8.30 per hour, while a Navy "clothing facility" in Natick, Mass., is hiring office clerks for \$11.32 an hour, according to another federal site, StudentJobs.

Generally, the minimum age to work at federal agencies is 16.

Slightly cheerier employment outlook?

Teens might find it easier to find work this year compared with last year, said Renee Ward, principal of The Forward Group, publishers of Teens4Hire and Seniors4Hire, which list private-sector job ads.

"Our job openings are up 20 percent over last year," Ward said, with much of the growth driven by small-business owners and hospitals.

"A lot of hospitals are taking an interest in young people, to just introduce them to a health-services environment," she said, adding that resort-related companies are also busier as more Americans are traveling this year.

Still, "we're not in a situation where we're in a tremendous job-growth mode. Things are not like they were back in 1999, 2000," Ward said.

Back then retailers would hire 16-year-olds, but now "most retail stores won't even consider anyone under the age of 18. They have enough older workers they can pick from."

Many teens are already gearing up for the job search: "We had 70,000 teenagers log on in March. April is already over 100,000," she said. "Teens should be getting ready now."

No easy pickings

Expect to work to find government work. In creating the StudentJobs site, the government "meant well," Ward said, "but it's really a challenge for a young person to get through."

For instance, on the front page of StudentJobs, job seekers are asked, among other things, whether they are "in an excepted service position covered by an interchange agreement" or "a person with noncompetitive appointment eligibility."

Plus, there are just 443 job opportunities currently listed on StudentJobs.gov. "There are some openings. They're extremely competitive," Ward said. Still, "it's another group of jobs for teens to take a look at."

Also, the site is not "geared toward high-school students," Ward said. "Typically, it's geared toward college graduates and graduate students. It's really not geared to the younger teen group," she said.

One agency spokeswoman advertising a job on the StudentJobs site did confirm that the agency regularly hires high-school students.

Tips for the hunt

For teens dismayed by the complexity of the government job sites, keep an eye out for jobs labeled GS1 or GS2, which are federal-level jobs requiring the least amount of experience, said Claire Gibbons, program manager at USA Jobs.

Jobs that are advertised at higher levels might be more "appropriate for college students," she said.

At job sites that aren't aimed at students, such as USA Jobs, consider entering "summer job" in the keyword search to narrow down the job listings.

And don't limit yourself to online searches, Gibbons said. "USA Jobs and StudentJobs are certainly powerful ways for agencies to advertise their summer jobs, but federal agencies aren't obligated to use these tools, so if teens are knowledgeable about federal agencies in their area, I would simply call the agency directly," she said.

"Speak to someone in charge of hiring or personnel and inquire as to whether or not there are any summer opportunities available," she said.

Local and state government agencies are also good potential job sources. "For instance, Washington, D.C. has an active summer jobs program where city youth apply through city government for summer employment programs," Gibbons said.

But call your local employment agency fast: Application deadlines tend to hit by the end of April, Ward said.

Can't get a job? Try these alternatives

For those struggling to find paid employment, consider following three alternatives, Ward said.

Go to summer school or take a class, particularly in word-processing and other office applications, as preparation for work in the future.

Consider volunteering. For instance, the nonprofit Student Conservation Association offers volunteer positions in national parks such as Yosemite and in the Adirondacks, Ward said. Volunteers build trails and restore habitats, among other duties. Room and board is paid, and some positions come with a stipend. Volunteer positions are also listed on the Teens4Hire site.

Start your own business. Ward suggested the following as possible ideas for the budding entrepreneur: House-sitting or cleaning; pet sitting, walking, or washing; gardening; personal assistant; tutoring; car washing/detailing; garage sale coordinator; and party/event planner.

For more tips, see Teens4Hire. QuintCareers also offers a variety of articles, information and listings for teen jobs. Other teen job sites include SnagAJob and CoolWorks.

Andrea Coombes is a reporter for CBS.MarketWatch.com in San Francisco.

© 1997-2004 MarketWatch.com, Inc. All rights reserved. Disclaimer. See our Privacy Policy - updated 4/3/03.
CBS and the CBS "eye device" are registered trademarks of CBS Broadcasting, Inc.