

Pathway Models Companion: Civilian Opportunities at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio offers in-demand civilian career opportunities aligned to the [pathway models](#) designed by Montgomery County Educational Service Center. These civilian opportunities—available in a range of career fields—are within five units of the U.S. Department of the Air Force (DAF): the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, Air Force Research Laboratory, National Air and Space Intelligence Center, Air Force Institute of Technology, and 88th Air Base Wing. Work-based learning programs that serve as a stepping stone into civilian opportunities, as well as unique processes for accessing those opportunities, can help students, families, and educators in their pathways planning.

Career Preparation Opportunities

Several programs are offered at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base to support entry into civilian occupations with DAF. These work-based learning opportunities allow current students and recent graduates to explore careers, receive training, and apply learning in a real-world setting. Between 300 and 600 students are placed across these programs annually.

	Program	Description	Benefits	Requirements
Current high school and college students	Pathways Program	Paid part- or full-time internship up to one year in duration with an opportunity to explore federal careers in a range of fields.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuition assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 16 years old and currently enrolled in school (high school and above) 2.0 GPA or above
Current college students	Premier College Intern Program (PCIP)	Paid 10- to 12-week summer internship in a range of career fields.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eligible to be non-competitively converted to PAQ following college graduation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full-time college junior or graduate student 2.95 GPA or above
Recent college graduates	Palace Acquire (PAQ)/ Copper Cap (COP)	Paid, full-time two- to three-year training program in a range of career fields. Provides training and development, mentoring, and on-the-job training. For STEM disciplines, one year of required graduate studies is built into the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuition assistance Student loan repayment of up to \$30,000 Permanent position upon successful completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduated with a bachelor's or a master's degree within the past two years 2.95 GPA or above



Selected Civilian Occupations, Wages, and Occupational Outlook

The table below includes labor market information about DAF civilian occupations at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base that are aligned to growth industries in the Dayton, Ohio, region and the existing pathway models. The occupations shown currently have a significant number of vacancies or percentage of employees nearing retirement in the next five years. Most occupations pay above a living wage for one adult and one child in Montgomery County in 2024, as defined by the MIT Living Wage Calculator.

Occupation title	Current positions (excluding vacancies)	Current vacancies (as of August 2024)	% within five years of minimum retirement age (57)	Typical education required	Average salary	Pays a living wage (\$72,198 annually)
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Advanced Manufacturing

Civil engineer	17	3	41%	Bachelor's or master's	\$113,929	Yes
General engineer	1,377	662	33%	Bachelor's or master's	\$143,210	Yes
Mechanical engineer	258	89	15%	Bachelor's or master's	\$121,081	Yes

Aerospace and Aviation

Aerospace engineer	725	339	20%	Bachelor's or master's	\$129,497	Yes
Aircraft mechanic/ aircraft electrician	73	11	6%	High school	\$75,732	Yes
Airplane pilot/light test pilot	21	4	24%	High school	\$152,640	Yes

Business and Management

Accountant	71	37	37%	Bachelor's	\$119,712	Yes
Acquisition program management	1,517	577	33%	Bachelor's	\$119,742	Yes
Auditor	92	39	36%	Bachelor's	\$128,057	Yes
Contract specialist	1,364	688	17%	Bachelor's	\$108,525	Yes
Data management specialist	162	43	40%	High school or bachelor's	\$97,742	Yes
Financial management specialist	915	368	30%	Bachelor's	\$112,704	Yes
Logistics management specialist	929	280	40%	Associate's or bachelor's	\$112,707	Yes
Management/ program analyst	696	313	47%	High school, associate's, or bachelor's	\$113,656	Yes
Operations research analyst	286	172	25%	Bachelor's or master's	\$124,812	Yes

Health Science*

Medical technician	10	10	50%	High school	\$64,865	No
Health systems and records administration	25	15	48%	High school or bachelor's	\$103,112	Yes
Medical technologist	12	3	25%	Bachelor's	\$113,949	Yes

*Data for medical professions is substantially limited and underrepresented. The Wright-Patterson Medical Center is largely operated by a different federal agency, the Defense Health Agency, and was not available for this publication.

Information Technology and Computer Science

Computer scientist	140	98	27%	Bachelor's	\$128,743	Yes
Computer engineer	115	62	29%	Bachelor's	\$128,090	Yes
IT specialist (all variants/specialties)**	762	246	41%	High school	\$118,444	Yes

**IT specialist can be further categorized by specialty: Policy and Planning, Enterprise Architecture, Information Security, Systems Analysis, Applications Software, Operating Systems, Network Services, etc.

Special Hiring Considerations

The hiring process for federal jobs consists of an application, questionnaire, interview, suitability investigation, and security clearance investigation. Each of these steps is geared toward assessing both the skill and the character of an individual to determine their ability to efficiently perform in a role. The application, questionnaire, and interview help agencies identify an individual's relevant skills and qualifications and assess whether the applicant can perform a job. Suitability and security clearance investigations help identify an individual's character traits, including, but not limited to, trustworthiness, loyalty, and conduct, providing an additional lens to their ability to efficiently perform in a job and manage sensitive information.

Interviews, an important part of the hiring process, tend to follow a standard model that consists of a phone screening and multiple rounds of structured, one-on-one or panel interviews, resulting in the selection of a candidate.

The following steps represent a typical hiring process, though each process will vary depending on the hiring body and type of position.

Application

Job openings can be accessed through USAjobs.gov, where applicants can find information about vacancies, as well as relevant qualifications and requirements, and apply for available positions. HR staff receive and review applications and determine which meet the minimum requirements. These applicants are then narrowed down to the most qualified.

Questionnaire

After a pool of applicants is selected, the applicants move on to the next step of the process where they are given a questionnaire that requires them to rate themselves on skills and qualifications. These ratings are assigned a point value. The questionnaires then move to the selector for the position, to choose the best qualified applicant package.

Security Clearance

Many federal jobs are contingent upon receiving a security clearance because they are tied to a position. The clearance and suitability process takes place after the applicant accepts a job offer and fills out the required forms and questionnaires, known as a security package. Many of the positions available to high school and college students are either non-sensitive or Public Trust positions requiring no clearance or low-level clearance.

Classification

Prior to the hiring process, positions receive a designation that assesses their risk and sensitivity levels. This measures the level of risk (low, moderate, or high) to the agency, government, or country if the individual performing the job were to cause damage. Sensitivity is whether a position requires access to classified national security information. The security clearance helps determine an individual's eligibility to access national security information. Jobs within the federal government have three classifications:

- Non-sensitive
- Public Trust
- National Security

Non-sensitive positions have low to no risk of posing damage or harm to national security. Public Trust positions are similar but require increased trustworthiness for roles that require more responsibility and sensitivity, including managing finances, protecting people and assets, and compliance.

Clearance Level

The National Security classification is divided into distinct clearance levels. Clearance levels help specify the level of security required to access sensitive information, specifically that which could harm national security if disclosed without proper authorization.

Investigation Requirements

Each subsequent level has additional investigation requirements for obtaining and maintaining that security clearance level. Requirements range from automated background checks and fingerprinting to investigations into former coworkers, residences, and foreign contacts, typically from the past seven or more years.

Time to Receive Security Clearance

Timing to receive a security clearance can vary depending on many factors, including the number of security clearance requests, the need for additional information, the depth of the investigation, and priority. While waiting for a full check to be completed, interim clearances can be granted within a few weeks of a security package being completed.

Reinvestigation

An initial security clearance may also take longer to receive and must be reinvestigated to maintain the clearance level. The higher the clearance level, the more often it will need to be reinvestigated—e.g., every five years for a top secret security clearance.

Summary of Security Clearance Types

Risk	Sensitivity	Classification	Clearance level	Initial clearance	Investigation requirements	Time to receive	Reinvestigation period
Low	Non-sensitive	Non-sensitive	-	-	National Agency Check With Inquiries (NACI) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Automated background checkFingerprints	60 to 90 days	-
Moderate	Non-sensitive	Public Trust	-	-	Minimum Background Investigation, Limited Background Investigation, or Background Investigation <ul style="list-style-type: none">Automated background checkFingerprints	60 to 90 days	-
High							
Low	Non-critical sensitive	National Security	Confidential	NACI	Access National Agency Check with Inquiries (ANACI) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Background checkAgency interview of people who have lived or worked with applicant in the past seven (or sometimes more) yearsPast 10 years of residencyForeign contactsCredit checksPolygraph (some)	90 days to one year	15 years
Moderate	Non-critical sensitive		Secret				10 years
High	Critical sensitive		Top Secret	Single-Scope Background Investigation			5 years
High	Special sensitive		Top Secret, Compartmented Information				5 years

Suitability Investigation

Once the security package is submitted, the applicant must undergo a suitability check. Suitability investigations inquire about a person’s character traits and conduct to assess whether an individual’s selection or continued employment would protect and maintain the integrity and efficiency of federal service. These investigations typically involve checking the applicant’s background for prior substance use or substance use disorders as well as criminal, negligent, or dishonest conduct, especially as it relates to employment and an individual’s integrity in performing a job. The Office of Personnel Management or the specific hiring agency can also make determinations about additional considerations for suitability, including but not limited to:

- The nature and seriousness of the conduct
- The circumstances surrounding the conduct
- The recency of the conduct and age of the individual at the time

The higher the security clearance requirement, the more in depth the suitability check will be.

Note on recreational marijuana use: Though marijuana is legal in Ohio, using marijuana is still against federal law. This allows recreational marijuana use to be considered along with other criminal conduct in an applicant’s suitability for a job. For non-sensitive positions, employers cannot base suitability on past marijuana use alone.

Onboarding and Training

All new hires to DAF, and the wider U.S. Department of Defense, are required to complete the Total Force Awareness training requirements within the first 90 days of hire. This consists of several hours of computer-based training modules on various topics. Required training specific to the Defense Department includes Operations Security, Controlled Unclassified Information, and Cyber Awareness. These courses cover the safeguarding of sensitive information and use of encrypted IT systems.

Federal employees also have training covering the unique ethics rules they must follow regarding gift giving, fundraising, political activism, misuse of position, and financial investment.

Pay and Advancement

Many federal jobs use a salary grade system known as the General Schedule. The system has 15 grades (GS 1 through GS 15), each with 10 steps. The pay of each level depends on the level of difficulty, responsibility, and qualifications required. The specifics of the salary are determined by a base salary and locality adjustment, meaning positions at the same level may not pay the same in every location.

Most employees will begin at step one of the GS levels they are hired at and can move to the next step based on satisfactory performance and predetermined waiting periods that increase every three steps. Initial waiting periods between each step begin at Year 1 and end at Year 3. It takes approximately 18 years to advance through all 10 steps within one GS grade level. Under special circumstances or for outstanding performance, employees can also qualify for entrance at a higher step rate, quality step increases, or promotion to higher grades.

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