

[Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\) About Government Contracting Careers](#)

Q. What is a contracting Officer?

A. A Contracting Officer (CO) is a person who can bind the Federal Government of the United States to a contract. Contracting Officers hold a warrant that allows them to negotiate on behalf of the United States Government. As the Government's agent, only COs may execute, modify, or terminate a contract. There is a need for Contracting Officers both domestically and overseas depending on the agency.

Responsibilities - Contracting officers are responsible for ensuring that:

- The Government obtains value from contracts
- All requirements of law and regulation are met prior to executing an action
- Sufficient funds are available for obligation
- Contractors receive impartial, fair, and equitable treatment
- Both parties comply with terms of the contract
- The interests of the United States are safeguarded and taxpayer' money is spent wisely
- Contracting Officers work at every government agency and acquire everything from nuclear carriers to office supplies

Q. Are contracting internships positions available?

A. Internships positions are available. The details of the internship may vary from each agency. Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) provides a list of the various government agencies that offer their own internship programs at <https://www.fai.gov/drupal/careers/internships-acquisition> In many of these internship programs, interns will receive formal classroom and on-the job training designed to provide them with knowledge of the laws, regulations, policies and methods required to perform the full spectrum of purchasing and contracting functions.

Q. How do I apply for a contracting job in the Federal government?

A. Virtually all civilian jobs within the Federal government require the use of USAJOBS.GOV to apply.

Q. What type of experience and/or education is required to work in government contracting?

A. Various types of experience is welcomed as long as the education criteria is met. In general the entry level requirements for a Contracting Officer position include meeting the following criteria:

1. A four-year course of study leading to a bachelor's degree with a major in any field; **AND**

2. At least 24 semester hours in any combination of the following fields: accounting, business, finance, law, contracts, purchasing, economics, industrial management, marketing, quantitative methods, or organization and management.

Q. I have heard Contracting Officers referred to as an “Eleven O Two” 1102 . What does this mean?

A. Positions in the Federal Government are classified into occupational series. Contracting Officers are in the [Contracting Series, 1102](#).

Q. What is the difference between a contracting officer and contracting specialist?

A. Typically, new employees with no experience in contracting begin as a contract specialist. They normally work underneath the guidance of a contracting officer. Contract specialists are trained in acquisition and in related business skills such as market research, source selection, cost and price analysis, negotiation, and contract administration. Many contract specialists aspire to become contracting officers and this is a typical career progression. However, some contract specialists move into other positions within the acquisition community such as procurement analysts, contract administrators, and program/project officer just to name a few.

Q. What does the term “acquisition(s)” mean in the federal government?

A. The term acquisitions is used in the Federal government for the activity of buying and selling goods and/or services on behalf of the US government.

Q. Are government contracting professionals stuck behind a desk their whole career?

A. No, contracting government specialists can have a wide range of options dependent upon the program(s) they support. Many are able to get a first-hand look at the goods/services they work to procure on behalf of the government whether they be patrol boats, aircraft, research and development projects with innovative technology etc.

Q. What are the qualities needed to be successful in the contracting profession?

A. The contracting profession requires strong analytical and problem solving skills, innovative, good communications (both written and oral), ability to work in a team atmosphere, and flexibility. Much of the unique knowledge will be learned with formal and in-formal training and required continuous learning is part of the job. For an in depth explanation, see FAI’s Career Roadmap for contracting professionals and the various attributes required at:

https://www.fai.gov/drupal/sites/default/files/2017-06-05-Roadmap_v3.pdf

This roadmap provides a general idea of what to expect and the career progression of the profession.