

# Application Tips

## GSA GeoCorps America and NPS Geoscientists-In-the-Parks (GIP)

### Resources

[GeoCorps Application Instructions](#)

### Relation Between GeoCorps and GIP Applications

The GeoCorps and GIP programs have nearly identical applications. However, the only information shared between the applications is the **Grade Record**. All of the other parts, such as the **Contact Info and Program Application Questions, Letters of Recommendation, and Cover Letters** are NOT shared. These unshared parts must be completed separately for each program. Many applicants end up with an incomplete application for one program because they completed parts for one program, but not the other. In the future, more, if not all, information will be shared between the applications. Other things to note:

- You may apply for up to **seven** GeoCorps positions per application period.
- You may apply for up to **three** GIP positions per application period.
- Your online profile page will show a checklist of required application materials.

#### Elements of a Complete GeoCorps Application

- 1. Contact Info and Program Application Questions**
  - a. Includes Contact Info, Program Specific Questions, Education, Work Experience
- 2. Letter(s) of Recommendation**
  - a. One letter is required, a second letter is optional; two letters are the maximum.
  - b. Separate letters of recommendation are not required for each position.
- 3. Cover Letter(s)**
  - a. One cover letter is required for each position.
- 4. Grade Record**
  - a. List of all courses and grades relevant to the positions to which you are applying.

#### Elements of a Complete GIP Application

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- 2. Letter(s) of Recommendation**
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  - b. Separate letters of recommendation are not required for each position.
- 3. Cover Letter(s)**
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- 4. Grade Record**
  - a. List of all courses and grades relevant to the positions to which you are applying.

## Contact Info and Program Application Questions

- You only need to fill out your profile once for each program (once for GeoCorps and once for GIP), even if you wish to apply to multiple positions in that program. Your profile is a work-in-progress until the application deadline date, at which time it will no longer be editable.
- **You must complete separate profiles for GeoCorps and GIP; this information is currently not shared between programs. You can use the same answers, but you have to enter it for each program separately.**
- Clicking the "Save " button will save your work - it is recommended that you do this often. The system will time out after 90 minutes and you will lose any unsaved data. It is also recommended that you create a separate document (in Word, etc.) containing your profile information, and copy and paste the information from that document into the online system. This will ensure that you do not lose any information.
- Be as thorough as possible in each field. You will have a chance to address topics specific to individual positions in your cover letters, but your profile is your opportunity to showcase ALL of your experience and qualifications.
- List all formal and informal outdoor experiences and activities in the "Relevant Experience" section on your online profile. Do not underestimate the importance of recreational outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, paddling, climbing, caving, off-road driving, etc.

## Letters of Recommendation

- You must have **one** letter of recommendation sent on your behalf for each program.
- **You must have at least one letter for GeoCorps and one for GIP; the letters are not currently shared between programs.**
- You may also include an optional second letter of recommendation.
- GSA used to require one letter of recommendation for each position. That is no longer the case, and only one letter is now required per program (one for GeoCorps and one for GIP), regardless how many positions you apply to in that program.
- On your online profile page, you will be asked to provide contact information (an e-mail address) for your reference. These should be people closely acquainted with your school and/or work accomplishments.
- It is your responsibility to notify your references in advance; we encourage that you do so and that you allow your references sufficient time to complete the requested letters. References like to have advance notice directly from you, the applicant, and they really appreciate having at least a week or two to write and submit the letters. Please do not wait until the last minute, when travel, etc., may prevent your reference from submitting the letter on time. Late letters will not be accepted.
- When you fill in and submit your reference's information, GSA will automatically and immediately email requests to your references, asking them to fill in an online form with their recommendation.
- In order to address your specific qualifications, your references will be able to see basic information about the program so that they are recommending you for. It is recommended that you let them know if there are specific things you want them to focus on, depending on what positions you apply to.
- You will be notified on your profile page when each letter has been received, but you will not have access to the content of the letter.
- It is recommended that you follow up with your references well in advance of the deadline to make sure they understand the process and submit your letter of recommendation on time. This is very important because the application period for spring/summer positions overlaps with winter break for many people, and the application period for fall/winter positions overlaps with summer break/field season, so it is important that you notify and follow up with your references in a timely manner. GSA and its agency partners will NOT send additional reminders or follow-ups to

references who have not yet submitted their letters of recommendation. Following-up is the responsibility of the applicant.

## Grade Record

- Transcripts are not required nor accepted. Please do not send transcripts, as they will not be kept on file, nor will they be considered part of your application.
- **The Grade Record is shared between GeoCorps and GIP. You only need to enter the grades one time.**
- Instead of transcripts, applicants will create an online listing of their courses and grades.
- If you are still attending school (undergraduate or graduate level), or if you have graduated less than five years before the upcoming application deadline, you must submit a listing of your courses and grades.
- If you have graduated five years or more before the application deadline, you do not need to submit a grade listing. (You can if you want to, but it is not required.)
- The listing should include all courses that are relevant to the GSA programs/positions to which you are applying. This includes all geoscience courses, courses in subjects closely related to geoscience, and courses related to any special skills that are important to the position(s), such courses in education, outdoor recreation/skills, computer courses, scientific writing/research, etc.
- Remember to include field camps, as well as courses taken at other institutions (such as “study abroad” programs, etc.). If you are in doubt about whether you should include a course or not, please include it.
- If your school is not on a regular U.S. semester and credit system, please do your best to convert your grades to regular semesters and credits.
- You only need to create one complete list of your courses and grades. This list will be seen by the hiring supervisors for all positions to which you apply.
- The listing of courses and grades can be updated any time before the posted application deadline.
- GSA will indicate when your listing of courses and grades has been created; you will be able to see the status on your My Profile page. (It is up to you to decide when the record is complete.)
- This listing will be saved indefinitely for use in GSA Education & Outreach programs. You can add new courses at any time, even in a different season or year.
- Grades are accepted on an “honor system”. GSA trusts that grades are stated honestly, accurately, and thoroughly.
- In submitting this information, you are attesting that this list of courses and grades is accurate and thorough; that no grades are misrepresented; that no relevant grades are omitted; and that you understand that any offer of a GSA position or award is contingent upon verifying these grades.
- If you are selected for a position, GSA will require that you provide transcripts to verify your grades. Failure to verify your grades will result in the offer being rescinded.

## Cover Letters

- You must write one tailored cover letter *for each* position to which you apply.
  - **It is not one letter per program, but one per position.**
- Pay careful attention to the qualifications sought for each position, and the responsibilities of that particular position. Specifically address as many qualifications and responsibilities as you can. Be specific about why you are a qualified candidate for this position.
- Do not be humble—this is your chance to highlight all of your great qualifications!
- Address this letter to the primary contact listed on the position description.

## Cover Letter Outline (Example)

Introduction:

- First sentence: Who are you as a professional? Example: “I am a geologist with enthusiasm for public outreach.”

- What position are you applying for? ALWAYS mention what position you are applying for in the cover letter.

First two sentences might look like:

"I am a geologist with enthusiasm for public outreach and education. I am writing to you with regards to the Park Interpreter project at Denali National Park, advertised on the GeoCorps America website."

- Why are you interested in this position?

Do you have a career object that relates to the project? This is the place to share it.

- Why are you interested in working with this place/agency, even this person?

This is a great opportunity to show that you have done some research on where/who you will be working with, and you aren't just applying to apply. Do you think work they did on a project in the past is amazing, and you want to be part of similar work? Say so.

Body:

This is where you show that you have the qualifications the hiring manager(s) are looking for.

- Pick key words out of the job description, and use those key words.
- Don't just say that you have the experience/skill. Show by giving an example of where you gained or used it.
- Don't be afraid to have more than one body paragraph, where appropriate.
- Make sure that your ideas flow in a way that makes sense. Each paragraph addresses related ideas.

Conclusion:

- What makes you uniquely qualified for this job? What will you bring to the table that other applicants might not?

Do you have life experiences that will add to your career experience? Example: Not only do you have experience working with school children, but you spent 3 months in a different country building a school, and your confident dealing with linguistic and cultural barriers. Really think about not only your career experience, but also your life experience, and how it can apply to your work. Almost every experience has a "transferable skill" buried in it somewhere.

- Make sure that you can support these statements, preferably with the content of your cover letter

Sign off:

- Suggest places where examples of your work can be found.

Does a program you have worked on in the past have a website? Invite the hiring manager(s) to go look at it. Is one of your publications available for free online? Provide a link. Only provide one or two of these, maximum.

- End with a confidence.

Such as "I look forward to an opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you further in person."

- Using a Call to Action

A call to action would be "I look forward to an opportunity to discuss my qualifications with you further. I will follow up my application with a phone call two weeks after the closing date if I have not heard from you."

Do not make follow up phone calls before the closing date.

ONLY use a call to action if:

- 1) It does not say "No unsolicited phone calls," "Those selected for an interview will receive a phone call," or something along those lines in the job advertisement. (Look for these statements. They are usually in small print at the bottom of the application.) If they have made it clear they don't want follow up phone calls, don't call.
- 2) You actually plan to call. Saying you will call, and NOT calling makes a worse impression than if you never put the call to action in your application.

### **Additional Application Tips**

- Make sure the application is complete

This seems obvious, but many people do not answer all of the questions, or give very brief answers to the questions that lack detail. Even if a question does not directly apply to the positions that you have applied for, answer it! Sometimes there are positions that have not received a lot of applications. In these circumstances we might go through the applications of people who have applied for similar or related positions, to see if someone in those lists fit the criteria for the position with few applicants. If you do not give us enough information, then we can't tell if you fit, and your application doesn't get passed on.

- Apply for more than one position

Successfully securing a position (and job hunting in general!) is partially a numbers game. Every application is practice, and every application increases your odds of successfully finding a position. Think about the skills you want to learn, the knowledge you want to apply, and how GeoCorps can help you get to where you would like to go in your career – and then use that knowledge to select multiple positions that would suite you. There may be one position that seems like it is a better fit than all the others – and you should definitely apply for it – but apply for others as well. That said, don't apply to positions just for the sake of applying. That will do you, and the people making selections, no favors. We suggest applying for the maximum number of positions each season.

This also applies over multiple years. If you really want to be part of the program, and don't get selected for a position the first year you apply, try again next season or next year. Matt Dawson, Education Programs Manager at the Geological Society of America, applied to GeoCorps multiple times before he was selected for a position.

- Include the details

For most job applications you are trained to keep things brief. A short application is not always the best one when it comes to the GIP program. (This also holds true when applying for government jobs in general.) In your application you want to tell whoever is reading it that you have the skills/knowledge/experience or potential to meet the criteria listed in the qualifications. But then you have to prove it. So instead of just telling the reader that you have good communication skills, you should follow that statement up by giving an example of how you built those communication skills, or used those communications skills in the past.

- Provide Detail/Use Your Space (But don't be long winded!):

We've all been told at one point in time that a cover letter should be no more than one page. Especially when it pertains to online application forms, you can throw that rule out the window. Use all the space you have (within reason!) to make sure that you have addressed as many of the required qualifications as possible. However, more space is not an excuse for sloppy writing! You still need to keep your writing clear, concise and exciting.

If you know your cover letter is going to a person first, and not through a computer system, then you need to keep your cover letter and your answers detailed, but as brief as possible. In this circumstance keep your cover letter as close to one page as possible, two pages maximum.

- Refer back to the Position Description and Qualifications

As mentioned above, you want to make sure that your application is demonstrating to the reader that you meet the criteria that they need. Go through the posting for the position and pick out some key words that highlight the characteristics that are being sought, and make sure that where you meet that criteria you have clearly stated so in your application.

- Proofread

Spelling and grammatical errors look unprofessional, and make your application harder to read. You do not have to worry about formatting when you submit a GIP application, so take that extra time and use it to make sure your application is spotless.

- Review: Spelling, PUNCTUATION and GRAMMAR

Make sure to review your entire application for not just spelling/typos but also for punctuation, grammar and sentence structure. You want to make sure that your writing is easy to read and that it flows well. There is nothing more off-putting than a sentence that doesn't make sense because of a misplaced word or misplaced punctuation. If you review for punctuation and grammar, as well as spelling, it will make your application seem polished and professional. (Better yet, get a peer or mentor to look over your application. They will tell you if something doesn't make sense.)

- Use Active Words:

The more active your sentences are, the more exciting, and confident, they sound. The more exciting they sound, the more attention your application will hold.

- Avoid Passive Voice (as much as reasonable):

If you follow the suggestion about using active words, you will usually avoid falling into this habit. When you use the passive voice in a sentence the focus is on the recipient of an action instead of on who/what has completed the action. Passive sentences are very common and popular in academic and scientific writing because in these contexts you want the focus to be on the subject of the paper, not on the writer of the paper. (Passive voice is an easy way to avoid using personal pronouns.) If you have been writing a lot of academic papers writing in the passive voice is an easy habit to fall into.

When you are writing a job application you want the focus to be on you and your work, and the passive voice takes the focus away from you.

Here is an example of a passive vs. active sentence:

Passive voice: Fifty millimeters of the solution were added to the serum.

Active voice: I added fifty millimeters of the solution to the serum.

Think very carefully while you are writing and reviewing your application about where you want the focus to be, and use active and passive voices accordingly.

- Vary Sentence Structure

Reading the same sentence structure over and over again in the same document gets boring. Vary your sentence structure and sentence length throughout your application answers and cover letter. Variety adds interest.

- Don't Get Repetitive

Pay attention to how many times you use the same word in one paragraph. Words such as also, therefor, and however are the usual suspects when it comes to being repeated too often. In job applications I, opportunity, and responsible/responsibility also tend to get repeated too frequently. Make sure your writing isn't starting to sound redundant because you use the same word too many times.

The same applies to ideas. Make sure that you do not repeat the same idea too often. Most writing for job applications is short. There is little need to repeat an idea more than twice, and never in the same paragraph.

- Avoid Negative Words

An application is meant convey your positive characteristics as an employee so that an employer will want to meet you, and then hopefully hire you. You are introducing yourself on paper. Using negative words gives the impression of lack of confidence, just like a weak hand shake. Don't lie or overemphasize a skill, but express your skills and experience in the most confident, positive and truthful way possible. Avoid using descriptive words such as basic, simple, or small. Likewise, avoid other adjectives or adverbs that belittle your work.

- Use Key Words:

Many online application systems use a computer program to weed out the first round of unqualified applicants. The computer is looking for specific words to judge whether you are qualified. Before you start writing your application take a good look through the job description, and pick out key words that they have used for the required and desired qualifications. Use those exact words in your answers and cover letter. If someone hasn't programmed synonyms into the computer your application will not make it past the first round if you don't use those words, despite the fact that you have the qualifications.

This method also makes it easier for you to keep track of whether you have addressed all of the qualifications in the job description, and it makes it easier for a person reading your application. If you have used the words that the hiring manager used to describe the job, then they don't have to think about whether the experience and skills you are describing apply to the position.

- Show and Tell (Actually, tell and show):

Tell the reader that you have an experience/skill, using the words that were used in the job description. Then prove that you have that experience/skill by providing a brief example of where you have used it in your career. Just as in writing an academic paper you need to illustrate your points. Don't write anything you cannot back up.

- Never Say "I am the best!":

You might be the best, but that's not the point. Writing "I am the best qualified candidate for this position." is a statement you cannot back up. You do not know who else has applied for the position. You want to sound confident, but not arrogant. There are more subtle, tactful ways to get the same idea across. For example "I am uniquely qualified for this position because of the combination of my skills and experience." Then you can elaborate on what those skills and experiences are, and back up your statement.

## **Additional Tips**

Be specific with your skills and experience, and pick recommendation letter writers who can be specific as well.

Read the position descriptions carefully and look for ones that list qualifications that match your skill set well.

If you're applying to multiple positions, apply to one that just look awesome, another one or two that look like a really good fit for your skills, and then maybe one that has few other applicants; in other words, spread your chances around as best as possible.

During the school year, seek out as many research opportunities as you can. That helps you get good recommendation letters, and more importantly, helps you broaden your skills. If you don't see such opportunities available, just ask some professors what they might be able to come up. Many would be happy to work with you on creating a project. Sometimes it's just a matter of taking initiative and asking.

Another good thing to do is volunteer (or work) at a local state or National Park, National Forest, BLM area, etc. Having experience with an agency already can really help give you an edge too.

## **Problems/Questions**

- If you have problems with the application process, please review the instructions in this document and elsewhere on the GeoCorps website.
- If you receive an error message when entering text into your online application, it may be due to the fact that you have exceeded the character limits for a particular field. Please try to reduce the amount of text you enter to see if that helps. You may be able to find a different field to enter some of your information into in order to shorten your response in one area.
- If you are unable to apply for a position, make sure you have not reached your application limit. You may need to unapply from other positions first. In some cases, return applicants may find that they need to unapply from positions from a previous season/year to make room for new positions.
- If you cannot find the answer to your problem online, please contact the Education and Outreach Assistant, Allison Kerns, at [akerns@geosociety.org](mailto:akerns@geosociety.org), 303-357-1097, or the Education Programs Manager, Matthew Dawson, at [mdawson@geosociety.org](mailto:mdawson@geosociety.org), [geocorps@geosociety.org](mailto:geocorps@geosociety.org), 303-357-1025.