



Public  
Service  
Commission

# Applying for a role in the NSW Public Service

A 'how to' guide for candidates

December 2014



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## 1. Introduction – Working for NSW Government

**Working for the NSW Government is not just a job; it is a good career choice**

The NSW Government is the biggest employer in Australia, with just under 400,000 employees, and provides some of the most flexible and varied career choices available. NSW Government employees contribute directly to the wellbeing and productivity of the NSW community in a variety of interesting and challenging areas, such as education, health, environment, justice, tourism, emergency services, transport and more.

There are exciting opportunities for people at all stages of their career – from entry level jobs, through generalist and specialist roles to managers and executives. We employ people from diverse backgrounds, experiences and qualifications, and provide access to a range of development opportunities.

Working for the NSW Government is not just a job; it is a good career choice.



**NOTE:** The Government Sector Employment Act 2013 (GSE Act) establishes two main employment groups: the government sector and the Public Service. This guide applies to the NSW Public Service.

## 2. Using the guide

This guide explains the application and selection processes for those seeking employment in the NSW Public Service.

While the process can vary depending on the role, it typically goes as follows:

1. Find a role on jobs.nsw.
2. Create or update your profile (personal details) in jobs.nsw.
3. Respond to the disqualification questions.
4. Create your cover letter (and responses to any targeted questions).
5. Create or update your resume/curriculum vitae (CV).
6. Submit your application.
7. Selection and assessment processes:
  - Standard panel assessment process; or
  - Assessment centre process.
8. Offer - successful candidate(s).
9. Feedback - unsuccessful candidate(s).

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**NOTE:** This application process can be followed for an individual specialist role, such as a research analyst, engineer or psychologist; or for the creation of a talent pool for common role types, ranging from executives and managers to administrative, policy and project officers. Talent pools can be accessed by agencies when they need to fill a vacancy for a common role type.

**Jobs.nsw is the primary career board for the NSW Public Service**

## 3. Merit – the basis of recruitment

The NSW Public Service recruits employees based on merit. This means that from a field of applicants the assessment panel selects the person best suited to the requirements of the role and the needs of the public service agency in which the person is to be employed.

To do this the assessment panel compares all candidates' skills, experience and abilities against the capabilities, knowledge and experience standards set for the role. The assessment panel uses different assessment methods, such as written applications, capability-based assessments, interviews and referee checks, to collect the evidence required to make a merit-based decision.

**The NSW Public Service Capability Framework** provides a common foundation for creating and recruiting to roles, which can be supplemented by occupation or profession-specific capability sets where applicable.

## 4. Finding NSW Public Service roles

**Jobs NSW** is the primary career board for the NSW Public Service. It lists current vacancies and is the portal for online application and tracking. While some jobs may be listed on other job search websites and/or in newspapers you need to apply for all roles on [jobs.nsw.gov.au](http://jobs.nsw.gov.au).

### Searching for roles

Vacant roles are displayed on [jobs.nsw](http://jobs.nsw) in descending order according to the date they were advertised. However, candidates can also choose to search by job title, location or work type (for example, full time or part time).

The '**quick search**' function allows you to search for a specific role using the role reference number, a keyword or through specific locations. The '**advanced search**' feature can be used to refine the types of roles displayed.

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Saving advertisements to the **'job cart'** will group roles you are interested in and separate them from the full list. It is an easy way of identifying advertised roles that interest you so you can quickly navigate to them on your return to the site.

You can also activate the **'new job alert'** function on your profile. This function triggers an email to your registered email address when a newly advertised role that matches your recorded preferences appears.

## 5. Understanding NSW Public Service roles

Depending on the nature of the work to be done and whether it is ongoing or for a defined term or project, employment as a Public Service employee may be:

- Ongoing
- Temporary
- Casual

Employees are assigned to a role within the Public Service and can be reassigned to other roles in the Public Service over time for organisational or development purposes. This approach promotes mobility across the sector, broadens employees' capabilities and provides new development opportunities. It also allows agencies to respond quickly to changing government priorities or community needs.

## 6. How to apply for NSW Public Service roles

### 6.1 Application

To apply, candidates must submit:

- A one-page cover letter.
- Where appropriate, a short statement (1-2 pages) in response to one or two targeted questions (to provide evidence of experience against required role capabilities).
- A resume/curriculum vitae (CV).

Understanding the role, what is required and whether you have the right skills and experience are important in deciding whether to apply.

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Your application will have a greater chance of success if you follow these principles:

**Read the advertisement and information package carefully**

- **Read the advertisement carefully** – All advertisements include a brief description of the role, information on how to apply and a closing date for applications. Keep a copy of the reference number for future enquiries.
- **Read the information package** – The advertisement gives you basic information, but it is important to read the information package from the link provided in the advertisement. Documents in the package may include a role description, organisational chart or other material to help you understand the role and the organisation.
- **Speak to the contact person** – After you read the information package, you will know more about the role and may have some questions. You can phone or email the contact person named in the advertisement to help find the answers. Talking to the contact person may also give you a better understanding of the role, whether it is right for you and what to emphasise in your application.
- **Other information** – Get as much extra information as you can to help you present a covering letter and resume with relevant information. You could look at the department or agency's website, annual report or other publications.
- **Online application process** – The online application process is presented as a series of 'pages' that require information to be completed prior to submitting your application. Each page has a number of fields. All compulsory fields are identified with a red asterisk (\*) and must be completed prior to the page being saved.
- **Submit your application prior to the closing date** – Keep your application short, succinct, and do not repeat information. Provide information for what is requested only. Give yourself enough time to complete and review your application in advance of the closing date.
- **Privacy Statement** – The privacy statement in jobs.nsw describes how privacy principles are applied, how and why data is collected and how it is stored. It also outlines circumstances when your information can be disclosed.



**TIP:** Remember to check spelling, punctuation and grammar, and be succinct. The application itself indicates how well you can communicate and, if written well, can make a positive impression.

## 6.2 Profile - personal details

You can create your general profile on jobs.nsw at any time. This includes personal and contact information, creating a username and recording a password.

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Your email address is your unique identifier in jobs.nsw, so you can only create one account per email address.

This general profile can also be created as part of your first NSW Public Service job application. Once this basic information is captured it will populate any future applications automatically, removing the need to retype the same information.

If your contact details change or you would like to include some additional information, you can amend your profile at any time and submit different information for each application if required.

Data is also gathered on subjects such as diversity to assist with workforce planning. Other information, including how you learned of the job vacancy, is also gathered to provide insight into the most effective ways of advertising. Some of this information is provided on a voluntary basis and some is mandatory.

**A cover letter should be short and specific and include short statements in response to the targeted questions\***

## 6.3 Essential requirements

One of the first steps in the online application process is to be screened for essential role requirements which may include qualifications and certifications (where necessary to practice), licensing and registration. In some cases knowledge and experience requirements may be included if they are critical to successful performance in the role, cannot be met by transferrable capabilities in other roles and cannot be developed **'on the job'** within a reasonable period of time. This is called **'disqualification questions'** in jobs.nsw and typically consists of a series of questions designed to provide information about your eligibility to apply, for example having a driver's licence. It will not be possible to progress with the application in the system if you do not meet all of the essential requirements.

## 6.4 Cover letter and a short statement addressing the targeted questions

Your cover letter should be short and specific; highlighting the main points of your claim for the role.

Your cover letter should be no more than one page in length and include:

- Details of the role you are applying for.
- A brief introduction about yourself.
- A summary of your relevant skills, qualifications and experience.

Your application may also include a short statement (1-2 pages) based on your actual experience in response to the targeted questions. These questions will usually start with phrases such as:

- "Give an example of a situation where..."
- "Describe a scenario..."

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Your responses could follow the STAR format (by detailing the Situation, Task, Action and Result).

**A resume needs to be clear, concise and neatly organised with content relevant to the role you are applying for**

## \* Targeted Questions

The advertisement may ask you to include a short statement in response to no more than two targeted questions. These are capability-based questions directly relevant to the role's duties and are designed to provide evidence of experience in a similar area. This is done by asking you to describe specific situations and to give actual examples of when you have used specific skills.

The jobs.nsw **'cover letter'** field can only accept simple formatting, so if you are creating your cover letter in a Microsoft Word document, stick to the basics.



**NOTE:** Depending on the role you are applying for, you may be asked to answer the targeted questions directly into the jobs.nsw "pre-screening questions" field. If you do this, you do not need to add these targeted questions to your cover letter.



**TIP:** When completing targeted questions in the "pre-screening questions" field in jobs.nsw, you should draft your responses to targeted questions externally (for example - Word document) before entering the responses into the defined field. This allows you time to review and amend your responses prior to entering them into the system.

## 6.5 Resume/curriculum vitae (CV)

Your resume - also known as curriculum vitae or CV - is a snapshot summarising your qualifications, experience, skills and qualities. A resume needs to be clear, concise and neatly organised with content relevant to the role you are applying for.

Your resume should include your:

- Education, qualifications and details of any courses or areas of focus that might be relevant to the role.
- Experience, paid and volunteer in reverse chronological order. For each job, include the role title, name and location of employer, and dates of employment. Briefly describe your role responsibilities for each job.
- Special skills, computer skills, achievements, and membership in organisations.

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- References (refer to [6.6 Referees](#)). In jobs.nsw, the **'work experience'** and **'education'** fields capture traditional resume information electronically.

## 6.6 Referees

Capabilities for a role are assessed at different stages of the assessment process and panels will treat referee information as an equally important aspect of fact finding about your application.

When the assessment panel is making its final decision, information obtained from your referees will be considered together with your application, resume, interview and other selection tools used.

The assessment panel may conduct a 360-degree reference check, which means talking to people who reported to you, who you have worked with and who you reported to.

The panel may also ask you for additional referees if they need more information than is available from those you have nominated.

Like the **'work experience'** and **'education'** fields in jobs.nsw, referee information can be captured online. Names, contact details and information about your working relationship(s) can all be entered. You can add and remove referee contacts for each application and rearrange the referee order at any time.

## 6.7 Attachments

You may be asked to attach some form of documentation with your application, for example, a consent form to do background checks, and this can be added in the **'attachment field'**.

Please do not use this function to attach lengthier versions of your application letter. The one page cover letter described in [Section 6.4](#) is all that is needed.



**NOTE:** It is important to note that your attachment library in jobs.nsw contains the attachments for all your applications; however, only those marked as 'relevant' will be submitted for viewing with your application.

If you delete a document you will be removing the ability for the assessment panel to view that document and therefore it will not be considered as part of your application.

Do not delete any document until you have information on the outcome of the recruitment action. If you have any concerns, please contact [support@jobs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:support@jobs.nsw.gov.au) for advice before you delete any documents.

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## 6.8 Submitting your application

Once all information has been entered into the system, you will be given an opportunity to review your application prior to submitting it. Take this opportunity to ensure all details are correct.

When you have successfully submitted your application, you will receive an email from jobs.nsw acknowledging your submission.

More information please visit [the Job NSW site](#).

## 7. Understanding NSW Public Service selection processes

Review your application prior to submitting it

Once the closing date has passed, the assessment panel sets to work to determine the most suitable candidate(s) for the role(s).

The assessment process can be conducted in one of two ways:

### 7.1 As a standard panel assessment process.

### 7.2 As an assessment centre process.

The assessment process selected by the panel may depend on whether they are assessing for an individual specialist role, such as a research analyst, engineer or psychologist, or for the creation of a talent pool for common role types, such as administration, policy and project officers.

## 7.1 Standard panel assessment process

This process includes:

- Review of your application, i.e. your cover letter, your short statement (1-2 pages and responses to targeted questions) and your Resume/CV.
- At least three capability-based assessments\*, one of which is an interview.
- Rigorous '**fit-for-purpose**' reference and background checking (which may include 360-degree reference checks to verify your employment and performance claims (refer [Section 6.6](#))).

This approach allows the full spectrum of capabilities for the role to be assessed using different tools or methods, and at different stages of the assessment process.

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## \* **Capability-based assessments**

The assessment panel will use a range of appropriate assessments to determine the person who has the capabilities, experience and knowledge best suited to the requirements of the role and the needs of the agency. Capability-based assessments are a good predictor of your future performance.

The capabilities for the role you are applying for are described in the role description (part of the information package). The NSW Public Service Capability Framework provides a common foundation for creating and recruiting to roles and can be supplemented by complementary occupation specific capability sets, where appropriate. Refer to [The NSW Public Sector Capability Framework](#).

Assessment methods can vary depending on the capabilities being assessed and may include personality profiling, cognitive ability testing, behavioural interviews, work samples, group exercises, and role plays.

**Assessment methods can vary depending on the capabilities being assessed**

## **Common forms of assessments include:**

### **Online assessments**

Online assessments are a common way of gathering important information about candidates' capabilities, personal values and attributes, with minimal inconvenience to candidates. Candidates do not have to take time away from current employment as the assessments can be completed out of hours or at home.

By testing aptitudes using cognitive ability tests, such as abstract thinking and verbal and numerical reasoning, potential employers can get measures of various abilities such as problem solving, critical thinking and aptitude to learn certain tasks.

Cognitive ability tests are commonly used because of their reliability in identifying role performance. Because these assessments are completed online in an unsupervised setting, a further validation test is completed by the candidate at interview under supervision.

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## Work samples

Work sample assessments may be set as a means of gathering information on candidates' experience and capabilities. Work samples can be designed to test a number of skills. For example, a work sample that involves applicants analysing a document and providing a summary of key issues can assess conceptual and analytical ability and communication skills. Verbal presentations simulate other role requirements and will give an indication of other capabilities.

**Work sample assessments can be designed to test a number of skills**



**NOTE:** Work sample assessments may be conducted just prior to the interview or undertaken as part of an assessment centre (further information relating to assessment centres is detailed in [Section 7.2](#)).

## Behavioural interviews

The interview is one of the most common forms of assessment. A structured behavioural interview allows interviewers to rate candidates in a consistent, standardised manner.

Behavioural questions invite candidates to give examples of like roles or similar situations from their own experience and how they approached them, what they did and what were the results; as well as any lessons learned.

The following are examples of behavioural questions:



Question: Tell me about a time when you had to analyse information and make a recommendation? What kind of thought process did you go through? Was the recommendation accepted? If not, why?



Question: Describe a project or idea (not necessarily your own) that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was your role? What was the outcome?

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## Multi-mini interviews

Another interview format is the multi-mini interview (MMI). The MMI uses many short independent assessments (behavioural questions), typically in a timed circuit, to assess candidates' skills, experience and abilities against the capabilities, knowledge and experience standards for the role.

The MMI usually consists of approximately six interview stations, each being a timed (six-minute) interview scenario. Candidates rotate through the stations, each with its own interviewer and scenario. The reviewers then meet as a panel to agree on an overall assessment.

**Assessment centres are specifically designed for either a particular role or for a common role type**

## 7.2 Assessment centre process

### How they work

Assessment centres usually follow after the initial short-listing stages of the assessment process, i.e. cover letter and resume review and any online assessments. Each assessment centre is specifically designed for either a particular role or for a common role type with generic transferable capabilities in order to assess candidates' skills, experience and abilities against the capabilities, knowledge and experience standards for the role.

A typical assessment centre incorporates a range of assessments in which your performance is observed and rated by a team of qualified assessors.

This approach also allows the full spectrum of capabilities for the role to be assessed using different tools or methods, but typically conducted in one session.

### What to expect

At the beginning of the assessment centre, candidates will receive an initial briefing about the organisation and the structure of the day.

### Common forms of assessments include:

#### Group exercises

The group exercise - sometimes called the '**group discussion**' - is a common assessment centre activity. A group of candidates are invited to work together to perform an activity while being watched by assessors. The assessors will make notes and score the candidates based on their respective contribution to the exercise.

#### Job knowledge tests

Job knowledge tests evaluate technical or professional expertise and knowledge required for specific roles or professions. Examples of job knowledge tests include tests of basic accounting principles.

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## Role plays

A role-play exercise is an assessment activity where candidates are allocated a scenario that closely mirrors a situation that could occur in the role they have applied for.

## Work samples

As described in section 7.1 .

**Feedback is a useful way to understand areas that could be strengthened in future applications**

## Filling roles from talent pools

If the assessment centre is for the purpose of creating a talent pool, then there may also be a subsequent suitability interview to ensure the candidate fits with the requirements of the organisation, team and role (and/or additional assessment for agency or role specific requirements).



**NOTE:** Assessments are generally valid for a 12 month period.

## 7.3 Offer – successful candidate(s)

Once the assessment panel has received approval to employ the successful candidate(s), an initial verbal offer will be made. This offer will then be confirmed in writing.

## 7.4 Feedback – unsuccessful candidate(s)

Unsuccessful candidates will be advised in writing and offered an opportunity to receive feedback. This feedback is a useful way to understand the areas that could be strengthened in future applications.



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