NOVA | Northern Virginia Community College

Business Engagement and Career Services

Opportunities in Public Administration



Career Resources Guide

Introduction

As students navigate their academic journey, understanding career pathways is essential for making informed decisions about their future. Career planning involves recognizing industry trends, identifying potential employers, and equipping oneself with the necessary skills and qualifications to succeed in their selected field. This guide aims to provide an in-depth exploration of NOVA's six key career fields—Business and Finance, Construction & Skilled Trades, Healthcare, Information Technology, Public Administration, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)—highlighting top employers, in-demand job titles, resume, cover letter, and interview strategies, as well as programs of study (majors) at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) that lead to careers in each field. Beyond this guide, students can learn more information and opportunities in these key fields here.



Top Employers (by Number of Positions)

The following table lists the top employers in the public administration industry by number of positions. These organizations are known for contributing to their respective industries and offering competitive employment opportunities. The data reflects the organizations identified through the analysis of labor market information provided by the Department of Employment Services (DOES) and Indeed.com.

1. Colleges & Universities	6. Center for Disease Control & Prevention
2. Social Security Administration	7. U.S. Department of the Treasury
3. U.S. Secret Service	8. Virginia Department of Social Services
4. U.S. Department of Defense	9. Fairfax County Government
5. U.S. Department of Transportation	10. U.S. Department of Commerce

Note. This table is illustrative and not exhaustive. For comprehensive and up-to-date information, please refer to the respective organizations' publications.

Sources:

"Top 200 Employers Report 2023," District of Columbia Department of Employment Services

"Top 200 Employers Report 2024," District of Columbia Department of Employment Services

"Best Government & Public Administration Companies in Fairfax, VA," Indeed

Top Job Titles

Understanding the most sought-after job titles in the healthcare industry can help students tailor their career preparation. Below are some key job titles in the DC Metro area, based on the latest data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

1. Teachers
   (Elementary School Teachers, Teaching Assistants, Secondary School Teachers, Middle School Teachers, Substitute Teachers, Preschool Teachers, etc.)
2. Public Relations Specialists
3. Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers
4. Paralegals and Legal Assistants
5. Firefighters
6. Legal Support Workers
7. Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors
8. Education Administrators
   Kindergarten through Secondary
9. Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, Child, Family, and Mental Health Counselors
10. School Social Workers

Note. This list is illustrative and not exhaustive. For comprehensive and up-to-date information, please refer to the respective organizations' publications.

Source:
May 2023 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates for Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV, US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Resume and Cover Letter Tips

Resume and cover letter templates are widely available online, offering various options for different professional levels, including college students entering the workforce. Websites are available to provide resume and cover letter templates. When selecting a template, consider the following tips to ensure it highlights your strengths and aligns with your career goals:

Pick the Right Format:

- **Chronological:** Ideal for those with relevant work experience, as it highlights your job history. This format is popular among employers who value experience.
- **Functional:** Best for those with limited work experience or gaps in their employment history, as it focuses on skills rather than past positions.
- **Combination:** A balanced format that showcases both skills and experience. This is a good choice if you have some experience but also want to emphasize skills.

Know Your Audience: Different industries have different expectations. For example, a creative resume template may be suitable for graphic design roles, while a more professional template is better for industries like law or banking. When in doubt, choose a simple, clean design.

Play to Your Strengths: Choose a template that reflects your professional personality. The template should showcase your skills, interests, and experience in a way that feels authentic to you.

Ask for Feedback: Before finalizing your resume, seek input from the NOVA Career Services team. They can offer valuable perspectives on what works best.

Source:
Resume Templates, Hloom

Tailoring Your Resume and Cover Letter



Resume Tips

For each work experience, the start and end dates (including the month and year), the number of hours worked per week, and the level and amount of experience should be included. The resume should include volunteer work and roles in community organizations. Numbers should be used to highlight accomplishments.

Cover Letter Tips

A Public Administration cover letter should describe why you believe you are the perfect candidate for the job and why you are passionate about the work you will be doing for the company. The cover letter content needs to be completely written in your own words. In the letter, one should avoid repeating yourself or stating your weaknesses or shortcomings.

Sample Resume & Cover Letter

Your Full Name

Your Address | City, State, ZIP
Your Email Address | Your Phone Number | LinkedIn Profile

Professional Summary

Motivated and service-oriented professional with an Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Development and hands-on experience supporting community-focused programs and family outreach. Skilled in organizing events, maintaining accurate records, and engaging diverse populations. Brings a strong foundation in communication, problem-solving, and administrative support. Seeking an entry-level role in public administration to contribute to inclusive, people-centered initiatives in the Northern Virginia area.

Education

Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Development
Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria, VA
Graduated: May 2024

Key Skills

- Community engagement and family support
- Administrative and clerical assistance
- Event coordination and scheduling
- Recordkeeping and data entry
- Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
- Bilingual: English/Spanish (if applicable)

Experience

Mentions specific dates and hours per-week

Program Assistant (Internship)
Fairfax County Department of Family Services – Fairfax, VA
January 2024 – April 2024 | 20 hrs/week

- Supported early childhood and family resource programs by coordinating schedules, tracking attendance, and preparing outreach materials
- Engaged with families during public workshops, ensuring inclusive and respectful service
- Helped streamline reporting procedures, improving data tracking accuracy by 25%

Supports effectiveness by including metrics

Teacher Aide
Little Learners Childcare Center – Arlington, VA
June 2022 – December 2023 | 30 hrs/week

- Assisted in implementing daily routines and educational activities for children aged 3–5
- Communicated with parents and administrators to document child development milestones
- Contributed to classroom organization and safety procedures, aligning with licensing standards

Volunteer Experience

Highlights volunteer work

Community Outreach Volunteer
Alexandria Community Resource Center – Alexandria, VA
March 2023 – Present | 8 hrs/month

- Distributed resources such as food and childcare information to underserved families
- Supported event logistics and assisted local residents with registration for public services

Your Full Name
Your City, State, ZIP
Your Email Address | Your Phone Number

Date: [Insert Date]

[Recipient's Name]
[Recipient's Title]
[Agency/Organization Name]
[Address]
City, State, ZIP

Dear [Recipient's Name],

I am writing to express my interest in the [Job Title] position with [Organization Name]. As a recent graduate with an Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Development, I bring both hands-on experience working with families and a strong commitment to public service. My background supporting youth programs and coordinating outreach efforts has prepared me well for an entry-level position in public administration.

During my internship with the Fairfax County Department of Family Services, I assisted in community-based early childhood programs. I gained experience maintaining program records, preparing outreach materials, and engaging with diverse populations. I've also served as a teacher aide in a licensed childcare center, where I collaborated closely with administrators, families, and children. These roles strengthened my administrative skills and deepened my passion for supporting equitable access to public services.

I'm particularly drawn to your organization's commitment to community impact and inclusive service. I am eager to bring my organizational abilities, communication skills, and service mindset to a public administration role where I can continue helping people navigate resources and succeed.

Shares why applicant would be an ideal candidate

Thank you for considering my application. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experiences and goals align with your team's mission.

Sincerely,

Your Full Name

Interview Tips

When interviewing for public administration roles, it is important to research the role and its requirements thoroughly. You should understand the organization's mission and objectives and stay updated on current policies and issues in public administration. Highlighting your commitment to the values of public service, such as equity, effectiveness, and accountability, is essential. You should express your passion for public service and desire to contribute to society. Practicing common interview questions and preparing responses is recommended.

Sample questions for Public Administration Interviews:

1. Why do you want to work in government? What interested you in our agency?

2. How would you describe the role of our agency to a member of the general public?

3. This role involves a lot of interaction with concerned citizens. Is that something you can see yourself doing on a daily basis?

4. If there was one aspect of our government you could change, what would it be and why?

5. How would you reconcile a conflict between your personal beliefs and the case/project you are working on?

Source:
"33 Government Interview Questions," Indeed
"OPIA Job Search Tool Kit" - Harvard Law School

NOVA Programs of Study

Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) offers specialized programs that align with workforce needs. These programs prepare students for entry-level positions and further academic advancement. The following information highlights the NOVA's programs of study that lead to the six career fields (NOVA, n.d.):

Business and Finance:

- Accounting, A.A.S.
- Accounting, C.S.C.
- Accounting: Accounting Information Security with Data Analytics, C.S.C.
- Accounting: Bookkeeping, Certificate
- Business Administration, A.S.
- Business Management, A.A.S.
- Business Management: Business Information Technology, C.S.C.
- Business Management: Digital Marketing, C.S.C.
- Business Management: Entrepreneurship, C.S.C.
- Business Management: Leadership Development, C.S.C.
- Business Management: Promotion and Public Relations, C.S.C.
- Contract Management, A.A.S.

Construction & Skilled Trades:

- n/a

Healthcare:

- Health Information Management, A.A.S.
- Health Information Management: Clinical Data Coding, C.S.C.
- Health Information Technology, C.S.C. (Discontinued Fall 2024)
- Health Sciences, A.S.

Information Technology:

- Computer Science, A.S.
- Information Systems Technology: Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics, C.S.C.
- Information Systems Technology: Database Specialist, C.S.C.
- Information Technology, A.S.

Public Administration:

- Criminal Justice, A.A.S. (formerly Administration of Justice, A.A.S.)
- Criminal Justice, Certificate (formerly Administration of Justice, Certificate)
- Criminal Justice: Advanced Forensic Investigation, C.S.C.
- Criminal Justice: General Forensic Investigation, C.S.C.
- Criminal Justice: Homeland Security Specialization, A.A.S.
- Criminal Justice: National Security, C.S.C.
- Criminology and Criminal Justice, A.S.
- Early Childhood Development, A.A.S.
- Early Childhood Development, C.S.C.
- Early Childhood Development, Certificate
- Early Childhood Development: Infant and Toddler Care, C.S.C.
- Education, A.S.
- Education: Elementary Education Major, A.S.
- Education: Emerging Educator, C.S.C.
- Education: Grades 6-12 Social Studies Education Major, A.S.
- Education: K-12 Special Education Adapted and General Curriculum Major, A.S.
- Education: Teaching Professional, C.S.C.
- Paralegal Studies, A.A.S.
- Public History and Historic Preservation, C.S.C.
- Social Sciences, A.S.
- Social Sciences: Deaf Studies Specialization, A.S.
- Social Sciences: Geospatial Specialization, A.S.
- Social Sciences: Political Science Specialization, A.S.
- Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Counselor, Certificate

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics):

- n/a

Source:
Programs of Study, Northern Virginia Community College

NOVA Programs of Study Leading to Specific Careers in Public Administration

Opportunities	Non-Transfer Tracks	Transfer Tracks
Programs of study to support entry into these employment opportunities are currently offered at NOVA	*These career paths allow you to enter the workforce immediately after graduation from NOVA.*	*These career paths require transfer for additional education beyond NOVA.*
Teachers	Early Childhood Development, A.A.S. | Education: Teaching Professional, C.S.C.	Education, A.S. | Education: Elementary Education Major, A.S. | Education: Grades 6-12 Social Studies Education Major, A.S. | Education: K-12 Special Education Adapted and General Curriculum Major, A.S.
Education Administrators, Kindergarten through Secondary	Education: Teaching Professional, C.S.C.	Education, A.S. | Social Sciences, A.S.
Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors	Education: Teaching Professional, C.S.C. | Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Counselor, Certificate	Education, A.S.
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	N/A	Social Sciences, A.S. | Social Sciences: Deaf Studies Specialization, A.S. | Social Sciences: Geospatial Specialization, A.S.
Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Counselor, Certificate	Social Sciences, A.S.
Firefighters	Criminal Justice, A.A.S. | Criminal Justice: Advanced Forensic Investigation, C.S.C.	N/A
Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	Criminal Justice, A.A.S. | Criminal Justice: Homeland Security Specialization, A.A.S. | Criminal Justice, Certificate | Criminal Justice: National Security, C.S.C.	N/A
Paralegals and Legal Assistants	Paralegal Studies, A.A.S. | Criminal Justice, A.A.S. | Criminal Justice: General Forensic Investigation, C.S.C.	N/A
Legal Support Workers	Paralegal Studies, A.A.S. | Criminal Justice, A.A.S. | Criminal Justice: General Forensic Investigation, C.S.C.	N/A
Public Relations Specialists	Public History and Historic Preservation, C.S.C.	Social Sciences, A.S. | Social Sciences: Political Science Specialization, A.S.
Campaign Management, Public Service, & Political Advocacy	N/A	Social Sciences, A.S. | Social Sciences: Political Science Specialization, A.S.
Public Historian and Historic Preservationist	Public History and Historic Preservation, C.S.C.	Education, A.S. | Social Sciences: Political Science Specialization, A.S.

Conclusion

Navigating career pathways requires careful planning, industry awareness, and continuous skill development. As community college students explore potential careers, leveraging available resources—such as NOVA's career services and industry connections—can significantly enhance employability. By understanding industry trends, aligning academic pursuits with workforce demands, and crafting effective job application materials, students can position themselves for long-term career success.



NOVA Career Resources



Career Development:

https://www.nvcc.edu/student-resources/career-services/career-development.html

Understand four key stages: understanding self, exploring careers & majors, decide & plan, and employment preparation. Students can use tools such as free career aptitude and assessment tests, Career Coach, Occupational Outlook Handbook, and Workforce - Labor Market Research to explore career options, set goals, and prepare for employment.

Career Planning System- Focus 2:

https://www.nvcc.edu/student-resources/career-services/focus2.html

FOCUS 2 is an online, interactive, self-guided career and education planning system that can help you select a program/major based on your interests and aspirations, discover occupations matching your personal preferences and attributes, map out your career plans, and make informed career decisions.

Handshake:

https://nvcc.joinhandshake.com/login

Sign in to Career Connection to search and apply to jobs and Internship, view and participate in career development workshops, career fairs, employer information sessions, and access resources such as the Resume Builder and Mock Interview practice tool.

Career Counseling:

https://www.nvcc.edu/student-resources/career-services/contact.html

Students can request an appointment with a Career Counselor by logging into Handshake, navigating to the Career Center page, and selecting “Appointments.”

NOVA Career Resources

Career Opportunities:

https://www.nvcc.edu/student-resources/career-services/career-opportunities.html

The Employer and Career Services Team is pleased to offer Career Opportunities for NOVA students and alumni! Review these opportunities and don't forget to log into Handshake to view more.

Coordinated Internships & Cooperative Education (Co-op):

https://www.nvcc.edu/student-resources/career-services/co-op/index.html

Coordinated Internships are an extension of Academic Services that provides work-based experiential learning opportunities through collaboration between academic departments and community employers. Students may enroll in Coordinated Internship course.

Career Events:

https://www.nvcc.edu/student-resources/career-services/career-events.html

View the Handshake Events Calendar for career development workshops, career fairs, employer information sessions, community hiring events (external) and more!

Additional Career Resources:

https://www.nvcc.edu/student-resources/career-services/career-resources.html

Contact Information

Questions? Feel free to contact novacareerservices@nvcc.edu.

