Application Tips

National Park Service (NPS) Scientists in Parks (SIP) Interns

Resources

[GSA SIP Intern home page](#)

General Tips

- The NPS SIP Intern program and GSA GeoCorps America have a very similar application process. However, you need to complete a separate application for each program. The only information that is shared between the programs will be the Grade Information, and Letters of Recommendation if you actively select that requested recommendations can be used by both SIP and GeoCorps. GSA strongly encourages you to apply to both programs.
- You may apply for up to *five* SIP projects per application period. However, we suggest that you be selective about which positions you apply for, and only apply for projects that align with your interests, experience, education, and skills.
- The home screen of your application profile will show the completion status of required application components.
- When logged into your application profile, you can select to apply for the SIP Intern projects, which will add them to the home screen. You can also add cover letters to each selected project from the home screen.
- Once all the components of your application are complete for applying to the NPS SIP Intern program, you do not need to do anything else to formally submit your application; after the application deadline, all completed applications are automatically forwarded to the NPS staff that mentor the projects. There is no final "SUBMIT" button.
- You may edit all components of the application right up to the application deadline. All components of the application will be considered final once the deadline arrives.
- Due to the high number of applicants, contacting the project mentors is not recommended, unless there is an important and specific question you need to ask about a project that is not already addressed in the project description.
- For assistance with the application process, you are encouraged to contact GSA staff at sip@geosociety.org.

Filling Out Your Online Application Profile

- You only need to fill out one set of application questions under the NPS SIP Intern heading of your application profile, even if you wish to apply to multiple projects in the SIP Intern program. Your responses to the application questions are considered a work-in-progress until the application deadline, at which time it will no longer be editable.
- **If you are applying for SIP and for GeoCorps, you need to fill out a separate set of application questions for each program. Responses to application questions are not shared between programs. You can use the same answers where appropriate, but you must provide responses to each program separately.** The link to complete each program's application questions can be found under the program's heading in your application profile. The set of application questions for each program will be similar.
- Clicking the button on the third and final page of SIP Intern application questions will save your work - it is recommended that you do this often. It is also recommended that you create a separate document (in Word, etc.) containing your 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 projects in your cover letters, but answering the application questions is your opportunity to showcase ALL of your experience and qualifications.
- There is a question regarding diversity: "Please explain how you can enrich GSA's goal to support a diverse and inclusive geoscience community." One of SIP's core goals is to broaden diversity within the

professional levels of the NPS workforce in natural resource fields, so GSA recommends that you pay special attention to this question and provide a thorough response.

- List all formal and informal outdoor experiences and activities in the "Other Relevant Skills" section of the application questions. Do not underestimate the importance of recreational outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, paddling, climbing, caving, off-road driving, etc.
- All information must be submitted through GSA's online system; GSA cannot accept résumés or CVs as a separate document (PDF, etc.) via email nor upload.

Letters of Recommendation

- You must have a ***minimum of one recommendation*** sent on your behalf.
  - For each recommendation you receive, you can choose which program(s) review that recommendation as part of your program application. These choices are: SIP (SIP Intern), GeoCorps, and other GSA-related programs, such as On To the Future (OTF), GSA/ExxonMobil Bighorn Basin Field Award, and the J. David Lowell Field Camp Scholarships.
- You may include up to three recommendations.
  - It is a good idea to request at least two recommendations so you have a backup in case one provider is unable to submit their recommendation on time.
- On your online application profile page, you will be asked to provide contact information (the email address) for each recommendation provider. These should be people closely acquainted with your school and/or work accomplishments.
- It is your responsibility to notify your recommendation providers in advance; we encourage that you do so and that you allow your recommendation providers sufficient time to complete the recommendation request by the application deadline. Recommendation providers like to have advanced 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, because time out of office, etc., may prevent your recommendation provider from submitting the recommendation on time. Recommendations received after the deadline will not be guaranteed consideration.
- When you add and submit your recommendation provider's information, GSA will automatically and immediately email requests to your recommendation provider, asking them to fill out an online form to complete their recommendation.
- You may submit your recommendation requests before completing the other components of the application; in fact, this is recommended, but please ***be sure you have at least completed/updated your name and contact information first in the application profile before sending recommendation requests***, because that contact information will be used to notify your recommendation provider about who is requesting the recommendation. (If you have left your name blank prior to submitting the recommendation request, the recommendation provider will not know for whom to write the recommendation.)
- In order to address your specific qualifications, your recommendation provider will be able to see basic information about the program requesting the recommendation. It is recommended that you let them know if there are specific things you want them to focus on, depending on what projects you would like to add to your application.
- You will see on your application profile page when each recommendation has been received, but you will not have access to the content of the recommendation. If you wish to see the content of the recommendation, you will need to request a copy directly from your recommendation provider.
- It is advisable to follow up with your recommendation providers well in advance of the application deadline to make sure they understand the process and plan to submit the recommendation by the deadline. This is very important because the application period for spring/summer projects 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 recommendation providers in a timely manner. GSA will not send additional reminders or follow-ups to recommendation providers who have not yet submitted their requested recommendations. Following up is the responsibility of the applicant.
- All information must be submitted through GSA's online system; GSA cannot accept recommendations as a separate document (PDF, etc.), via email nor upload.

Listing of Courses & Grades

- Transcripts are not required for the SIP Intern application. Please do not send transcripts unless you are specifically asked to do so. (That is a relatively rare occurrence).
- Instead of transcripts, applicants will create an online listing of their courses and grades.
- **The listing of courses and grades is shared between the SIP Intern application and the GeoCorps application. You only need to enter the grades one time.**
- If you are still attending school (undergraduate or graduate level), or if you have completed coursework less than five years before the upcoming application deadline, you must submit a list of your courses and grades.
- If you have graduated five years or more before the application deadline, you do not need to submit a list of courses and grades. It can be helpful to do so, but it is not required.
- The listing should include all courses that are relevant to the SIP Intern projects to which you are applying. This includes all STEM courses and courses related to any special skills that are important to the position(s), such as 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.
- You only need to create one complete list of your courses and grades. This list will be seen by the NPS mentors for all projects to which you apply.
- The listing of courses and grades can be updated any time before the posted application deadline.
- GSA can see when the listing of course and grades has been created, and you will be able see the status of this component on your application profile home page. It is up to you to decide when the record is complete.
- This listing will be saved indefinitely for use with future SIP Intern applications, and applications to other GSA-related programs. You can edit or 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 an SIP Intern project is contingent upon verifying these grades.
- If you are selected for an SIP Intern project, GSA may 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* project to which you apply.
    - **It is not one letter per program (not one letter for applying to be an SIP Intern, and one for GeoCorps, etc.), but one per project.**
- Pay careful attention to the qualifications sought for each project, and the responsibilities of that particular project. Specifically address as many qualifications and responsibilities as you can. Be specific about why you are a qualified candidate for this project.
- Do not be humble—this is your chance to highlight all of your great qualifications!
- If you wish to address the letter to somebody specific, please use the primary NPS contact listed on the project description. (This can be omitted to save space.)
- Each cover letter is limited to a maximum of 2,500 characters, including spaces and formatting characters.
- Keep in mind that applications like Word will not count formatting characters in drafted text—Word will just count spaces. The web-based application where you enter cover letter text does count all types of characters.
- Cover letter text cannot be formatted. Please avoid using special characters unless necessary; they can affect the behavior of the character counting function.
- Cover letters may only be submitted by pasting text into the online system; GSA cannot accept separate documents (PDFs, etc.) via email nor upload.

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? Briefly 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."

- Why are you interested in this position?

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

- Why are you interested in working with NPS (or with this park, or this staff person, etc.)?

  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 project mentor(s) are looking for.

- Pick key words out of the project 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.
- 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 project? 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 three months in a different country building a school, and you're 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 with in the past have a website? Invite the project mentor(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 confidence and with a call to action:

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

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 that lack detail. Even if a question does not directly apply to the projects that you have applied for, answer it! Sometimes there are projects 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 projects, to see if someone in those lists fit the criteria for the project 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 project

Successfully securing a project (and job hunting in general!) is partially a numbers game. Every application is practice, and every application increases your odds of successfully finding a project. Think about the skills you want to learn, the knowledge you want to apply, and how SIP can help you get to where you would like to go in your career – and then use that knowledge to select multiple projects that would suit you. There may be one project 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 projects 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 projects 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 project the first year you apply, try again next season or next year. (For example, Matt Dawson, Education Programs Manager at the Geological Society of America, applied to the GeoCorps America multiple times before he was selected for a position.)

- Include the details

For most job and internship applications you are trained to keep things brief. A short application is not always the best one when it comes to a program like this one. (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!):

In the cover letter, use all the space you have (2,500 characters, including spaces and formatting characters) 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.

- Refer back to the Project 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 project 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 an application to this program, 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 then 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 or internship 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, therefore, 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 or intern 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. (Currently, GSA's systems do not operate in this fashion, so this is just general advice.) 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.

And More Tips...

- Be specific with your skills and experience, and pick recommendation providers 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 or two 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.

- Within and outside of school, 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 or supervisors what they might be able to come up with. 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 a government 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 GSA SIP Intern 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. Sometimes, certain special characters are counted as more than one character, so that may artificially inflate the character count.

- If you are unable to apply for a project, make sure you have not reached the limit for the number of projects that you are allowed to add to the application. You may need to unapply from other projects first. In some cases, returning applicants may find that they need to unapply from projects from a previous season/year to make room for new projects.

- If you cannot find the answer to your problem online, please contact GSA staff at sip@geosociety.org.