

PMF Questions Asked to Alumni of the PMF Program

Shannon Rhoten, <shannon.rhoten@sba.gov>, MA in International Commerce and Policy, 2014.

1. How should students be preparing for the on-line assessment process?

Students should prepare for the online assessment by setting aside the allotted time and making certain they have a quiet space for testing. There is no formal “studying” for the online assessment process as there would be for any other exam. During the assessment, students should answer honestly and use their best judgment.

2. What was your strategy with writing the essay?

My strategy for writing the essay was to start early. I scoured the PMF site, read through the PMF Assessment Prep Guide, and spoke to current Fellows about the program. I made sure to incorporate core PMF competencies when appropriate; these competencies can be found in the PMF Assessment Prep Guide. I also had a friend read my essay before the final submission.

3. Should you submit a federal style resume or not?

I did not submit a federal style resume, but I think it is generally best to submit what the applicant thinks will best display his or her skills and experience.

4. Do you need federal experience to be seriously considered for PMF?

I believe that having federal experience is an advantage when applying to the program, but it is not a necessity. Of those I have met in the program, I would say slightly more than half had prior federal experience, including internships. With that being said, some of the brightest people in the program did not have federal experience. During my time at Schar, I was an intern at the Department of the Treasury. However, I did not focus on my prior federal experience throughout the application process. I believe that showcasing your skills is more important throughout the application and interview processes.

5. Did you have strategies to find positions?

I did. Prior to the career fair, I researched agencies that piqued my interest, given my background in business and economic policy. I was very proactive in the process, reaching out to PMF coordinators at these agencies. Half of my interviews came from just reaching out to these coordinators prior to the career fair. I also had offices reach out to me during the process. Overall, I believe I had 12 interviews over the course of the three month period. Early in the process, I had identified my first choice agency. However, believing that it was important to keep my options open, I continued interviewing. My first choice agency set up a preliminary interview with me prior to the career fair. The final interview occurred at the career fair, and I received my offer three days later. I declined all other offers and accepted the one from my top choice a day later.

6. How to prepare for the online career fair?

N/A. In-person career fair held that year.

7. How did you apply for your different rotations?

I set up my external rotation outside of TMC. Within SBA, we work with other agencies on various projects and initiatives. During the second month of my appointment, I was able to collaborate with the Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration on a project. A few months later, I was able to work with them again. Noticing the overlap in missions, I thought it would be interesting to rotate to EDA and see which best practices I could bring back to SBA. After interviewing with their Deputy Director, I wrote the MOU for my rotation. I will be rotating there in January 2017.

8. After two year fellowship did you know you had a permanent position?

My PMF position came with a floating FTE attached, so I have a permanent position contingent upon satisfactory performance. However, I know not every agency offers an FTE with the Fellowship.

Adam Salazar, <salazar.adam@gmail.com>, Master of Public Policy, 2014.

1. How should students be preparing for the on-line assessment process?

The online assessment is mainly situational and if I remember correctly, there are some questions that may have more than one acceptable response. A PMF should always be willing to help his colleagues, be polite, and stand up for his/her ideas without bulldozing over colleagues. Most of this portion of on-line portion felt like common sense to me.

2. What was your strategy with writing the essay?

Regardless of what the question was, I tried to always emphasize my commitment to public service. Emphasizing public service is very important in the essays. Additionally, I tried to demonstrate a personal side to my application. I was very interested in working in domestic poverty alleviation policy, so I emphasized experiences I saw or overcame related to domestic poverty.

3. Should you submit a federal style resume or not?

DO NOT submit a long, descriptive federal style resume. No one has the time to read it. 2 pages at most and I suggest using bullet points and streamlined formatting.

4. Do you need federal experience to be seriously considered for PMF?

Absolutely not, but if you do have the experience, it REALLY helps. If you interned or worked for an agency, play it up in your examples during the essay or the in-person interview. Basically, wherever you can play it up.

5. Did you have strategies to find positions?

YES. I already had my top 3 agencies before I was ever selected. The minute I was selected I reached out to the coordinators for those agencies. Unfortunately, 2 of them no longer participated in the PMF program (GAO and CBO) and one of them was REALLY late to begin posting positions (HHS). However, I kept an open mind and a posting came up that I really liked. Start early, apply to as many opportunities, and trust your instinct not just about the job, but the co-workers and salary.

6. How to prepare for the online career fair?

I did not attend. However, if you REALLY want to work for 1 particular agency that will be there, I highly suggest attending. Reach out to the agency coordinator beforehand. Also, some coordinators could call you the week before so even if you don't attend and they like you, stay in touch with them. This surprised me because many of them reached out to me by phone before a position was ever posted.

7. How did you apply for your different rotations?

My detail at CBO was purely from networking since they do not participate in PMF. My detail at OMB was through an application. My detail to a field office in New Mexico was a requirement of my home agency.

8. After two year fellowship did you know you had a permanent position?

I am not done with my program, but I was guaranteed an FTE position in my home component as long as I successfully complete the program. I am already designated an FTE and treated like any other employee from a budgeting perspective.