

Lessons from the Annual Meeting Roundtables

Each year at The American Association of Immunologists (AAI) annual meeting, the Committee on the Status of Women, the Education Committee, and the Minority Affairs Committee offer roundtable sessions that give early career immunologists an opportunity to speak with experienced immunologists about a wide range of career topics—everything from what it is like to work in a particular job setting to how to address challenges in advancing one's career. The advice shared in these mini-mentoring sessions is invaluable. The AAI Newsletter has invited mentors from these sessions to share their knowledge with our readership.

Careers in Federal Agencies and Careers in Government



Augustine

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Disclaimer: The authors are writing in their personal capacity and not as representatives of the U.S. EPA or the U.S. federal government.



Robillard

Early in the spring of 2022, Michelle and I were invited to lead roundtable discussions on working as immunologists in the federal government and federal agencies at IMMUNOLOGY2022™ in Portland, OR, on May 8. This was the organization's first in-person annual meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and we were

delighted to see sold-out crowds of enthusiastic conference participants from across the globe showing very high levels of interest in working for the federal government.

Our sessions entailed sharing our experiences with the different types of scientific careers that one could engage in as either permanent or contract federal employees, including laboratory (bench), field, and administrative careers, among others. We also shared our experiences with the application process on USAJOBS (www.usajobs.gov), the official website for job postings throughout the federal government; onboarding; training; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA); and opportunities for growth. These topics, incidentally, were the “hot topics” that participants were clamoring to learn more about.

Our main advice was that if fame and fortune were the primary motivators for the audience, then the

federal government may not be the best place to work. Conversely, if people were driven by a burning desire to serve the American people, then government/public service would be an excellent fit. As major examples, we highlighted the superlative careers of Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D., who recently retired as director of the National Institutes of Health after 12 years of exemplary leadership, and Anthony Fauci, M.D. (AAI '73), who will be stepping down from his federal government posts at the end of 2022 after serving as director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases for 38 years and as chief medical advisor to President Joe Biden. Dr. Fauci is well known for guiding the nation through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Opportunities to serve in the federal government are vast and varied. For example, in addition to being a principal investigator in the U.S. EPA Center for Public Health and Environmental Assessment, where I (Dr. Augustine) am engaged in developing rapid, cost-effective, and noninvasive salivary antibody multiplex immunoassays to investigate immune responses to environmental pathogens and stressors, I am a volunteer member of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Surge Capacity Force. In that capacity, I was deployed twice in support of President Biden's COVID-19 National Vaccination Campaign, where I assisted federal, state, and local officials in crafting an effective message to combat vaccine disinformation and encourage vaccination, while also assisting with the actual drawing up of vaccines to be administered by medical staff. In fact, while on deployment to Tucson, AZ, I presented my research and led a roundtable on Careers in Government at Virtual IMMUNOLOGY2021™.

Our top five tips for participants include:

1. Set up a profile on USAJOBS and include your résumé, keywords, and desired locations. Follow the instructions on the site very carefully.
2. When a position of interest appears, first ensure that you meet the eligibility requirements to



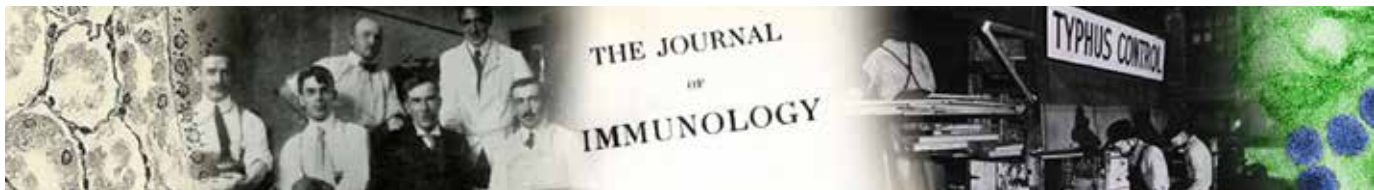
Augustine spoke passionately about his work in the federal government to a table full of interested attendees at IMMUNOLOGY2022™.

apply for the position (e.g., citizenship, internal or external applicants), then modify your résumé to fit the position and ensure that your educational background and skills match what the position requires. Be thorough!

3. When applying, complete the questionnaire honestly. Your responses will be matched to your résumé, so review step #1.
4. If you qualify and are scheduled for an interview, be confident in your responses and highlight your strengths. Engage the interviewers. Remember, you have already conquered the first hurdle and made the certification. The rest is up to you to convince them that you are the right person for the position.
5. Build your network. Conferences such as the AAI annual meetings are the perfect occasions to meet experts in your field who are federal government employees. Speak up, introduce yourself, ask questions, and exchange contact information.

Ultimately, the most-asked question was, why did you want to work for the government? Internal AAI polls taken after the sessions revealed that participants were satisfied with our responses and were motivated to seek federal government employment. Our hope is that we represented our employer well enough to encourage more young scientists to join the federal government and advance the cutting-edge research that we conduct.

In closing, it takes a very special person to dedicate their life to public service. It is especially fulfilling when that service includes using our knowledge, skills, and abilities to enhance the health and welfare of our fellow citizens. Of the two authors, Dr. Augustine has served the American people in varying capacities for more than 23 years, while Ms. Robillard is just beginning her career. Even given the differences in time served, we both feel honored to have been given the opportunity to serve our nation and our fellow citizens.



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