

# Guide for veterans applying for roles in the Victorian public sector

## Before you apply

Carefully read the job description and the requirements of the application and follow application instructions.

- Adhere to the page limit restrictions.
- An incomplete or incorrectly submitted application will likely be immediately discarded.

### What is a job description?

The job description will include important information including:

- if the position is fixed or ongoing
- if the position is full time or part time
- the name and contact details of the relevant manager
- the VPS level and the proposed salary
- an outline of responsibilities of the department, branch and section that the advertised role works in
- the likely responsibilities of the role
- the key selection criteria (see further information below).

It is important to familiarise yourself with this information. Being able to sell yourself for the role requires understanding what the nature of the role is. Do further research about the role including on the Department's website.

Call the contact listed for the role - this will make them aware of your interest in applying. Ask some specific and relevant questions which will help you get a better understanding of the key requirements of the role and what they are looking for.

Try to find someone you know who is working in the Organisation to get a better sense of the workplace priorities. Try LinkedIn or connect to other veterans working in the public sector through the Victorian Government's Veteran Mentor Program.

Public sector bodies place emphasis on resumes, cover letters and applications differently during the application process. Contacting the job poster to understand where they place their emphasis may assist in your application.

We encourage applicants to write their resume and cover letter themselves to better reflect their experience and achievements. However, if you are having trouble, seek professional advice.

## Preparing your cover letter

The format of your cover letter should follow the standard business letter format.

Write to the point of contact (e.g. Dear Mr Bourke), identify the job you are applying for by name and number (e.g. “I am applying for the Program Manager position in the Community Security Branch (VG/1487)”).

The letter should explain your motivation for applying for this role:

- What attracted you to the role?
- What key skills and experience make you suitable for the role?
- Where does the role sit in your career journey?

If you are transitioning out of the ADF, explain that in your Cover Letter and what attracted you to a career in the VPS.

Highlight transferable skills that you have obtained in the ADF such as teamwork, resilience, adaptability, leadership, critical thinking, strong judgment and initiative. This will help you stand out from the crowd.

The letter should indicate an enthusiasm for, and an openness, to learning new skills or building knowledge relevant to the job.

*Be succinct and targeted – longer does not necessarily mean stronger!*

*The focus of your cover letter should be on how you meet the key selection criteria – don’t water that down with other less relevant information.*

## Responding to the key selection criteria

Selection criteria describe the qualities, skills, abilities, knowledge and sometimes qualifications a person needs to perform the role.

This is the most important aspect of the job application. In the Victorian Public Service, written applications are assessed on your ability to show how you have the capabilities described in the selection criteria.

Your response should indicate that you understand the requirements of the role and how your own skills and experience are relevant to it.

Applications may ask for key selection criteria to be addressed:

- in the cover letter;
- in a separate document; or
- in responses to questions in the online application form.

If not otherwise specified, each selection criteria should be addressed in your cover letter in a short statement.

*This is your opportunity to sell yourself and communicate the value you will bring to the role and organisation.*

If the application requires you to respond to each key selection criteria you may wish to use sub-headings.

- Step 1:** Carefully read each key selection criteria and make sure you understand what is required.
- Step 2:** Write down examples under each criterion of your relevant skills and experience.
- Step 3:** Choose one example that best highlights your skills and experience for that key selection criteria.
- Step 4:** Begin with an opening sentence that clearly states your claim. Try to reflect the same language used in the job description.
- Step 5:** Provide a description of a relevant example that demonstrates your knowledge and experience. You may wish to use the STAR method:

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**Situation** – set the scene and give the necessary background detail of your example (approx. 10%).

**Task** – describe what your responsibility was in the example given (approx. 10%).

**Action** – explain exactly what steps you took to achieve the task (approx. 65%).

**Result** – share what outcomes your actions achieved (approx. 15%).

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Try to be specific about your role in the example, exactly what you did and how this contributed to the outcome. Don't expect people to read into things – make it clear on the page.

For example – instead of saying “I coordinated this” – breakdown the tasks: “I reviewed the task, I briefed the team, I consulted project matter experts, I considered my options, I sought feedback, I drafted the strategic plan....etc”. This supports readers without military experience to understand what processes you went through.

#### **What to avoid when responding to key selection criteria:**

- Simply affirming the usefulness of the skill highlighted in the key selection criteria (i.e. avoid “I agree that XXX is important”).
- Outlining a theory of practice (i.e. explaining how to do something in the abstract).
- Speculating about how you might or could use the capability.
- Using military terminology.
- Being ambiguous about the role (e.g. I assisted, I was involved in, etc.). Instead, use strong language such as “I led,” “I initiated” or “I coordinated.”

If you are not able to address a specific key selection criterion because you don't have the relevant skills/knowledge or because you have not had the opportunity to demonstrate the skills/knowledge in a work context, then you might:

- Omit the particular criterion in the statement.
- Provide a statement that describes the application of a similar capability to the one identified.

- Make a statement that the relevant criteria is not something you have had the opportunity to demonstrate, but that you are confident that you can develop and use the relevant capability (this could be a good opportunity to highlight your transferable skills from the ADF and show that you are adaptable and able to learn new skills quickly).

### **Translating your military experience**

Responding to key selection criteria will require you to translate your experience to readers without defence experience. Avoid ADF jargon.

Try to civilianise military terms into terms relevant for the role – for example, instead of soldier and platoon, you could use team and team members.

Assume reader knows nothing about the military. It is useful to have someone from outside of the ADF read over your application to make sure they understand it.

Examples of translating military experience

- Responsible for operations management, including the provision of information, recommendations and advice to Defence senior leadership and government.
- Program manager for a comprehensive employment review, including employment and remuneration policy and training programs.
- Briefed superiors on the threat environment.

## **Preparing your resume**

### **General tips**

- Hiring managers often have a very short time to consider your resume – being able to sell yourself quickly and succinctly is very important.
- Keep the resume short – no longer than two or three pages.
- Be selective about what you include and only include things that are most relevant to this position.
- Start the resume with a short (two to three sentence) summary of who you are and what you are good at.
- Clear presentation is important. Try to avoid clutter and large chunks of text. You may like to use bullet points rather than prose - this helps readers identify your key achievements quickly.
- There are templates available for resumes on Microsoft Word and on the internet.
- Use a font size that is easy to read.
- Keep the key selection criteria in mind while developing your resume for that role. Try to include only things that help demonstrate your experience against these criteria.
- Avoid including claims that everyone can make – for example, familiarity with Microsoft Office and email.
- Use headings to highlight essential information, for example:
  - contact information
  - key areas of expertise / or relevant skills and attributes

- professional experience (list most recent first) – in one or two sentences describe what you did in the role and then list some key achievements. Be selective and avoid listing every task you were responsible for
- studies (most recent first) - it may be worthwhile highlighting particular study units within a course or degree that are particularly relevant to the position
- training courses and/or professional development history – only include recent, relevant and credible development activities.
- Use strong verbs to describe your professional experience such as: managed, led, coordinated, contributed to, planned, produced, created, developed, transformed, enabled, inspired, motivated or consulted.
- Your resume is an opportunity for you to refer to procedures and processes that you have experience with that are relevant to the role.
- Numbers may also be useful in helping to demonstrate your role and achievements.

#### **When writing your resume, try to avoid:**

- using decorative fonts and pictures – these can be distracting
- including information that is not relevant to the job, such as hobbies and personal interests
- including information about personal characteristics (for example age or marital status) as it is not relevant to an assessment of suitability for a job. Information about cultural identity, disability, sexuality or gender identification should not be included in the resume – unless it is relevant to a selection criterion for the role
- including information about jobs held a very long time ago that illustrate skills and experience that have no connection with the job being sought
- choosing a very small font to fit your resume into 2 pages, but rendering it unreadable.

#### **Before you submit an application**

- reread the application and make sure you have complied with all the requirements
- ensure the application is within the page and word limits
- check the documents for any spelling or grammar areas
- read the application aloud to see if it flows easily and does not have any ADF jargon.

## **Preparing for an interview**

#### **What to expect**

- Public service interviews can be quite formal. Dress in appropriate business attire.
- Interviews can take place in person, via video conference or over the phone.
- In-person interviews take place in a meeting room.
- There are usually three Departmental representatives at the interview.
- One of the interviewees will provide an overview of the role and the structure of the area where the role is situated.
- All candidates for the job vacancy are asked the same behavioural questions based on the key selection criteria.

- The interview panel provides a score for the candidate's response to each question.
- Some questions may have several parts. You may wish to take notes during the interview to write down all the elements. You can also ask the interviewer to repeat the question at any time.
- There will be opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview.

### **Tips on how to prepare**

- Prepare a response about what attracted you to the role – this is critical to making a good first impression.
- Reread the job application and selection criteria.
- Prepare some examples of achievements linked to each of the key selection criteria that you can draw on in the interview.
- It is good to use the STAR technique when responding to questions (an example is provided below).
- Hold a mock interview to help prepare or practice your response in the mirror.

### **Sample interview question**

Describe a project or piece of work that best illustrates your organisational skills. What time management principles did you apply while undertaking that work?

### **Sample response using the STAR method**

<b>Situation</b>	In my previous sales role, I was put in charge of the transfer to an entirely new customer relationship management system (CRM) – on top of handling my daily sales calls and responsibilities.
<b>Task</b>	The goal was to have the migration to the new CRM database completed by Q3, without letting any of my own sales numbers slip below my targets.
<b>Action</b>	In order to do that, I had to be careful about how I managed my time. So I blocked off an hour each day in my Outlook calendar to dedicate solely to the CRM migration. During that time, I worked on transferring the data, as well as cleaning out old contacts and updating outdated information. Doing this gave me enough time to chip away at the project, while still having time to handle my normal tasks.
<b>Result</b>	As a result, the transfer was completed two weeks ahead of deadline and I finished the quarter 10% ahead of my sales goal.

### **If you are unsuccessful**

- Call or email the point of contact for feedback.
- Understand Victorian Government roles receive high numbers of applications.
- Contact the hiring manager or contact point for the job and seek feedback on your application.
- Take your feedback and experience from the process to improve your future applications.
- Feel free to get in touch with the Veterans Branch ([veterans@dpc.vic.gov.au](mailto:veterans@dpc.vic.gov.au)) to discuss further opportunities in the public sector.