

## AKCESS PRESENTS: A GUIDE TO APPLYING TO POLITICAL INTERNSHIPS AND OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The House of Commons will sit again on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2020 and the Senate of Canada will sit again on February 4<sup>th</sup> 2020. If you are reading this document, you might be interested in volunteering for an MP or Senator this semester. This guide will go through step by step on the suggested process a would-be volunteer might take when applying to a position in Ottawa's political community.

### 1. Where to look

There are a couple places that may offer available positions. First, consider Carleton central's volunteer position list on the *mySuccess* job portal (<https://cufed.carleton.ca/adfs/ls/?wa=wsignin1.0&wtrealm=urn:cas:cas5prod>). Under the Dashboard, you'll find *Volunteer Jobs*, then click *View all available postings*.

The other place you may consider checking for available volunteer positions is each individual MP or Senator's webpages. If they haven't listed an available position but you are particularly interested in volunteering for this specific politician, consider emailing them directly. Their contact information should be listed on the website. When applying, discussed later, you'll need this information.

### 2. Your cover letter

When writing a cover letter, remember that this is your moment to stand out. All your skills, competencies and job experience will be listed on your resume, so your cover letter allows you to be a bit less formal and little more personal.

Your cover letter should begin with your name, contact information and the date listed at the top. Following that you should write "Re: *Position you are applying for*". If the position is not listed and you are simply trying to volunteer, just write whatever you feel appropriate, something like "Volunteering". Following this you may begin to write your letter, which should be about one page in length.

If you are simply emailing the MP or Senator's office rather than replying to an ad, you can title the email however you wish, just ensure that you explain why you are applying for the position at the beginning of the email. You could talk about your interest in politics, your interest in the MP/Senator. You are trying to explain why you would want to volunteer for this politician and also why you would be a good choice for them. You might also include your availability.

The first paragraph should highlight why you are interested in the position and explain how you heard about the position. Consider ending the paragraph with a sentence that contains your three main skills and how they apply to the position. Think of this sort of like your thesis statement.

Your second paragraph should include some of your past job and volunteer experience and how you came to obtain the skills included in your resume (see section 3). Include real examples of skills and instances where they were used. For example, "During my

time at Dairy Queen, I learned to take initiative and tried to solve a problem *before* asking for help from my manager”.

The final paragraph you write should be the most personal aspect of the letter. Use relevant anecdotes that shows your interest in the politician and the work that they do. Let them know why you want to work with them and what drew you to contact them - be it their riding, their policies, or even their personality. Your last sentence should thank the person for taking the time to read through your cover letter and enclosed resume (this doubles as an invitation for them to keep reading rather than casting your resume aside).

### 3. Resume

When considering your resume and its composition, its important to remember that if you don't have extensive job experience, it may be better to use a skills-based resume rather than a chronological resume. Skills-based resumes focuses on the skills/competencies that you have acquired through past job/volunteer experiences, even if that job doesn't seem related to the position you are applying for. Typically, you ought to choose three types of skill sets to include, such as *communication skills*, *analytical skills*, and *leadership skills*.

Under these headings you should come up with at least three statements that exemplify a time when you demonstrated the skill in question. For example, under *communication skills*, you could write “Successful completion of the DELF Bilingual French exam, level C,” if you are bilingual. These are called SAR statements, which stands for *Situation, Action, Result*. In this example, the situation was the DELF exam, the action was taking the exam, and the result was becoming certified as bilingual. You should use SAR statements throughout your resume.

The first section of your resume should be on your education, indicating your year of study, your program, the university you attend, and any minors you may be pursuing. Following this, include the skills-based section previously discussed.

Following that, you should then list your past job experiences, using brief SAR statements to exemplify some of the tasks you were responsible for at the jobs. Always consider how these skills will relate to the job you're applying for when phrasing these SAR statements. However, you should not replicate the SAR statements used for your skills section at the beginning. These SAR statements can be more job specific, referencing actual tasks and not just skills that you learned.

After job experience, you should list volunteer experience, still using SAR statements when describing the duties and responsibilities you were tasked with when volunteering in each instance. For example, “Organized other volunteers into teams to effectively carry out \_\_\_\_\_ task”. After this, you will have completed your skills-based resume. Congratulations!

### 4. Other Helpful Tips

Last, we will discuss some helpful tips for applying to volunteer positions with MPs and Senators.

One important thing to remember is to cast your net wide. Don't be afraid to apply for multiple positions, but also be sure to personalize your resume and especially your cover letter in each different application. If you don't really care about working with the politician in question, your application will likely reflect that. On the other hand, if you demonstrate why you genuinely want to work with this politician and are interested in the position, they will be far more likely to try to give you an opportunity. Apply even if you don't think you are all that qualified.

The politician will almost certainly ask you why you chose to apply. Be honest with them - if you share some political views with him or her, they would probably be happy to discuss that with you. If it is something else that drew you to them - they represent your riding, or you are interested in their work on a committee, or whatever else - bring that up too.

When you arrive for an interview, it is best to be at least 10 minutes early. You should dress as professionally as you deem fit, but always remember that it is better to be overdressed than underdressed.

Most importantly, be yourself and have confidence in your ability - confidence is everything.

Good luck!

Disclaimer: the following is only meant to serve as a guide to navigating the common challenges faced when applying to volunteer opportunities in Ottawa's public sector. These suggestions ought not be considered exhaustive and will not *guarantee* you a volunteer position but may assist in the effective construction of your resume and cover letter, and finally in interviewing in a professional manner. It is also necessary to note that not all views expressed in this guide are shared by Arthur Kroeger College or Carleton University.