

Civil Service of Steuben County

An introduction to the administration of public employment

I. **What is Civil Service?**

Except for elected officials and public school teachers, practically every job in local government falls under the Civil Service System. The Civil Service System is required by the New York State Constitution and is intended to ensure that all public service positions (jobs that are paid for by tax dollars) are filled by “merit and fitness.” In other words, people get their jobs because they have proper qualifications; they are not hired just because they “know” someone. It’s all about **fairness, accountability and transparency**.

A “Civil Service” employee might be a deputy sheriff, secretary, registered nurse, mechanic, IT Help Desk technical assistant, mail clerk, attorney, accountant, laborer, IT programmer, food service worker, carpenter, cook, GIS technician, paralegal, code enforcement officer, etc. Many jobs found in government are also found in the private sector; some are unique to government.

2. **Who employs Civil Service workers?**

All departments in Steuben County, cities, towns, villages, school districts, and special districts (other public employers such as colleges, water districts, and municipality-owned utilities) hire civil service employees.

NOTE: Each county’s administration of Civil Service is separate from other counties. The state and federal governments administer their own civil service systems, including tests.

3. **Why would I want to work for government?**

Job stability is probably the primary factor for most people. While layoffs can and do occur, traditionally they have occurred much less often and in fewer numbers than in private business. Opportunity for advancement is another reason; the civil service system is designed to be a career system that encourages promotion from within. Benefits packages and retirement plans are usually other important considerations.

4. **What does it take to get a job in public service?**

Each job has a specific set of requirements, such as education, experience, or a combination of both. Whenever a vacancy or exam is advertised, its associated requirements, called Minimum Qualifications,

are announced with it. This tells you what qualifications you must have. Some require an examination, while others do not.

Jobs are categorized by general type of entry process/requirement...

Open Competitive _____	Examination, open to anyone who meets the minimum qualifications
Promotional Competitive _____	Examination, open only to certain current employees
Non-competitive _____	No exam, but there are specific, well-defined requirements
Non-competitive "55-a" _____	Position originally competitive, but reclassified to NC for a disabled applicant
Exempt _____	No exam, but the hiring authority determines the qualifications
Labor _____	Usually no exam and usually no or minimal requirements
Unclassified _____	Not classified in the civil service; usually elected officials or teaching staff

If you are interested in an untested job in a local government agency other than in Steuben County departments, apply directly to that town, village, school district, etc.

5. What score do I need if I have to take a test?

This varies, but obviously, you must pass; the higher your score the more likely you will get an interview. You may have heard something about having to have one of the top three scores. That is (part of) what is known as the "Rule of Three." Counting down from the top score, numbers 1, 2, 3, and anyone who is *tied* with the third person may be considered. Someone from that list of top scores has to be selected.

Some examinations also have additional portions called "Qualifying Tests" that are pass/fail. Common examples are typing tests and physical agility/fitness tests (for positions as police officer and deputy sheriff).

6. How do I know what jobs are available or what exams are offered?

All current openings not requiring an exam and all exams that will be used to fill known or anticipated openings are posted in the Personnel Office, on the County's website www.steubencony.org, and in various public places. Job postings and examination announcements are usually posted for public viewing for approximately one month. This means that if you are looking for a job, it pays to check regularly and often.

7. How do I apply?

Applications can be printed from the Internet at www.steubencony.org or obtained from the **Steuben County Department of Personnel and Civil Service**. If you apply for more than one exam or opening, you must complete one application for each exam or opening.

8. How much does a Civil Service exam cost?

Most Civil Service exams for Steuben County have a \$15 application fee; uniformed services exams have a \$25 application fee. It is a non-refundable application processing fee, not an exam fee. This means that you are charged the fee even if you are later determined to be ineligible to take the exam. Before spending your money, carefully review the Minimum Qualifications required for each exam you intend to take to ensure your experience and education meet them. There is no fee to apply for an exempt,

non-competitive, or labor position. Note: Since each county administers its own civil service system, exam fees and minimum qualifications vary.

9. How specific do I need to be on the application?

Be as specific as you can and be sure you clearly show how you meet the advertised minimum qualifications. Answer every question and do so completely. You may include a resume, but writing "See Resume" is NOT an acceptable substitute for completing the application. *Vagueness will not be resolved in your favor.*

10. Can an exception be made for an application deadline?

No. When applying for an exam, take note of the Last Filing Date. Applications must be postmarked or in the possession of Civil Service by the Last Filing Date for the exam. No exceptions can be made. Don't procrastinate.

11. What happens after I apply for the test(s)?

Applications for examinations are reviewed after the application deadline. Individuals who meet the minimum qualifications are notified by mail at least one week prior to the test date of the test location and other details.

Applicants who do not meet the qualifications are notified by mail; the letter will specify why it appears that you do not meet the minimum qualifications for entry to the examination. Perhaps you did not provide enough information on the application. Read the rejection letter closely. If you still think you should qualify, submit a letter providing additional information *within the timeframe indicated*. The Civil Service office will then make a final determination.

12. What will be on the test?

Each Examination Announcement has a category called "Subjects of Examination" that lists and describes the test subject areas. Read the Examination Announcement thoroughly and carefully.

13. How can I prepare for the test?

New York State Civil Service publishes "*How to Take a Written Test*" and several other free study guides for entry-level exams; these are available from the State's website, www.cs.state.ny.us/testing/localtestguides.cfm, or from the Personnel Office. Libraries and Workforce Information Centers can be of assistance in exam preparation.

14. When will I know my exam score and my rank/position on the Eligible List?

New York State Civil Service scores most exams and notifies us approximately two - three months after an exam is held. You will be notified of your score and placement on the eligible list by mail. An eligible

list is a ranked listing of all passing candidates from a civil service exam. Rank refers to your score compared to all scores and position refers to your individual numbered position on the list relative to all. Eligible lists are established for a minimum of one year and may be extended to a maximum life of four years.

15. What if I moved since taking the test?

Be sure to inform the Department of Personnel and Civil Service in writing and as soon as possible to avoid missing an opportunity! Unfortunately, we see people miss their chance because they do not notify us in a timely manner.

**16. But I need a job now; I can't wait months or longer to start work.
Or... But I have an okay job now. Why bother?**

The same months will fly by whether you have another job or not. Ending up with a satisfying career is not usually something that just happens; it takes investigation, planning, and preparation. To attain a job in the civil service, you must **look and plan ahead**. The familiar saying for New York Lotto is apropos - "You have to be in it to win it." Likewise, if you don't take the exam, you can't be considered for the job.

17. How can I find out more about employment with New York State, the federal government, and Steuben County?

NYS Civil Service: www.cs.state.ny.us/; the federal government: www.opm.gov/; Steuben County: www.steubencony.org.

STEUBEN COUNTY DEPARTMENTS

911 Emergency	Elections	Purchasing
Auditor	Emergency Management	Real Property Tax
Buildings & Grounds	Historian	Records Management
Clerk of the Legislature	Information Technology	Risk Manager
Community Services	Law Department	Sheriff
County Administrator	Office for the Aging	Social Services
County Clerk Office	Planning	Special Children's Services
County Personnel	Probation	Telephonic Communications
County Treasurer	Public Defender	Veterans' Services
District Attorney	Public Health Nursing	Weights and Measures
Economic Planning & Dev.	Public Works	Youth Bureau