

Nov 04, 2016 by [Cari E. Guittard](#)

For MPD's Considering Public Service—Take a Second Look at the Presidential Management Fellowship ^[1]

By: Cari E. Guittard, MPA & Renee Lee, MPD 2011

Background

I met Renee Lee in the Spring of 2010 when she was an MPD student in my Corporate Diplomacy class. The next year Renee graduated with her MPD and I encouraged her to apply to the Presidential Management Fellowship as I was one and it truly was a defining moment in my career. Renee applied, was selected, and began the two-year program that following fall. I've stayed in touch with Renee and am eager for her to share her experiences as a PMF so current MPDs can have a fresh perspective on the unique opportunities the PMF brings. This is Renee's journey...

A theme that is the backbone of my PMF experience is *tenacity*.

I thought I had thick skin. After all, I was a U.S. Air Force (public affairs) officer prior to attending graduate school. Often the only female in meetings and sometimes one of just a handful of women on an entire installation, I was tough. However, I underestimated the notion of having thick skin as I chugged through the rigmarole of landing a PMF position.

After becoming a PMF finalist and finishing grad school, I moved to Washington, hoping to work for the Department of Defense and/or the Department of State. The advertised demand for PMF positions in public affairs was low. I applied to most, if not all, PMF public affairs positions listed. Unfortunately, I did not hear back from many; this puzzled me since I had a robust public affairs resume. Eventually, after applying to more than 50 positions, I received an offer doing public affairs for the U.S. Forest Service. I didn't have experience in public lands, but who was I to be picky at this point? Later, I realized that although I enjoyed working for the Forest Service, my heart wasn't in working for a domestic agency.

One Wild Ride -- PMF Rotations & Diverse Experiences

An advantage of being a PMF is doing temporary rotations outside of your regular assignment; i.e., you're on loan to another office to expand your government experience. It was during my search for opportunities that I understood the meaning of networking. While I was good at it, I realize that I wasn't as *aggressive*. Years ago, Cari once asked us in class to rethink how we approach networking. She shared the notion of social capital: it's not how many friends you have on Facebook or the number of connections on LinkedIn. Rather, social

capital is the ability to develop trusted relationships that one can leverage throughout their career.

From the initial stages of the PMF application, I stayed in touch with Cari, updating her on my progress and seeking her mentorship. I eventually found rotation interview opportunities in several government agencies, which led me back to the previous summer's square one: interviewing, waiting, facing possible discouragement, and repeat.

I repeated that cycle for about three months until I accepted a six-month opportunity at State. I was thrilled, even though it was one of the most challenging professional experiences of my life. I didn't know much about Afghanistan and Pakistan, but I was up for a challenge and the opportunity to work with brilliant people. While there, I knew that State was the right fit, but since I wasn't a State employee, the next challenge was finding a permanent reassignment to State; i.e., find a job -- again!

Fortunately, since I was already working for the State Department, finding a position wasn't as terribly difficult. Roughly one year after accepting my position with the Forest Service, I accepted a permanent assignment at the State Department where I am currently posted at the Bureau of Public Affairs' Office of Strategic Planning. I can describe my current position as one similar to a public relations account holder. I work with "client" bureaus in helping plan their communication strategies and efforts. I'm part of a fantastic team and this job is a terrific opportunity to learn about the department and its wide range of regional and functional missions.

Final PMF Reflections & Takeaways

From the time I was a PMF finalist, bright-eyed and eager to find a position, to when I was a full-fledged State employee where I am happy -- took 15 months, countless interviews and tenacity. My biggest takeaway is that it may not be a completely smooth experience to get placed in your 'dream' job. And if it's not, persevere and you will reach your goal if you are hungry enough.

When I reflect on that time in my career and what I came away with, four things come to mind again and again: **Tenacity, Sense of Purpose, Determination, and Git 'Er Done!**
