

The Federal Bureaucracy

“Bureaucracy” usually isn’t a word people use very nicely. The word brings to mind long DMV lines, backlogged immigration requests, and the generally slow rate at which the U.S. government sometimes works. However, to manage a country as big as the U.S, there has to be a structured government.

There are three main features that distinguish a bureaucracy: hierarchy, specialization, and rules. Bureaucracies are based on a pyramid structure with a chain of command running from top to bottom. Much like a business, bureaucracies have a position of authority high on the pyramid, while low-skill jobs make-up the bottom. Each person who works for the bureaucracy has certain defined duties and responsibilities. This is called job specialization. All employees of a bureaucracy follow a set of established regulations and procedures, adding an extra layer of order to the structure.

The federal bureaucracy is all of the agencies, people, and procedures through which the federal government operates. The President is the chief administrator of the federal government, placing him at the top of the pyramid. In order to enact and enforce policy, Congress and the President have created an administration, which is all the agencies the government controls. The federal bureaucracy organizes all of these agencies into one cohesive unit, greasing the wheels of action.

The term department is reserved for agencies of Cabinet rank, which are near the top of the bureaucratic structure. Besides department, there is little standardization of names throughout the agencies. Common titles for agencies include agency, administration, commission, corporation, and authority. Lower down the totem pole are Staff Agencies, which are aids to chief executives and other administrators that help with management and organization. All of these agencies represent pieces to one big government pyramid. The federal government works as a well-oiled machine capable of solving big problems, dealing with everything from licensing, to health insurance, and practically everything in between. Without a bureaucracy, every state would be left to fend for itself, and nobody wants that large of a task. It takes a lot of time and effort to build a strong pyramid.
