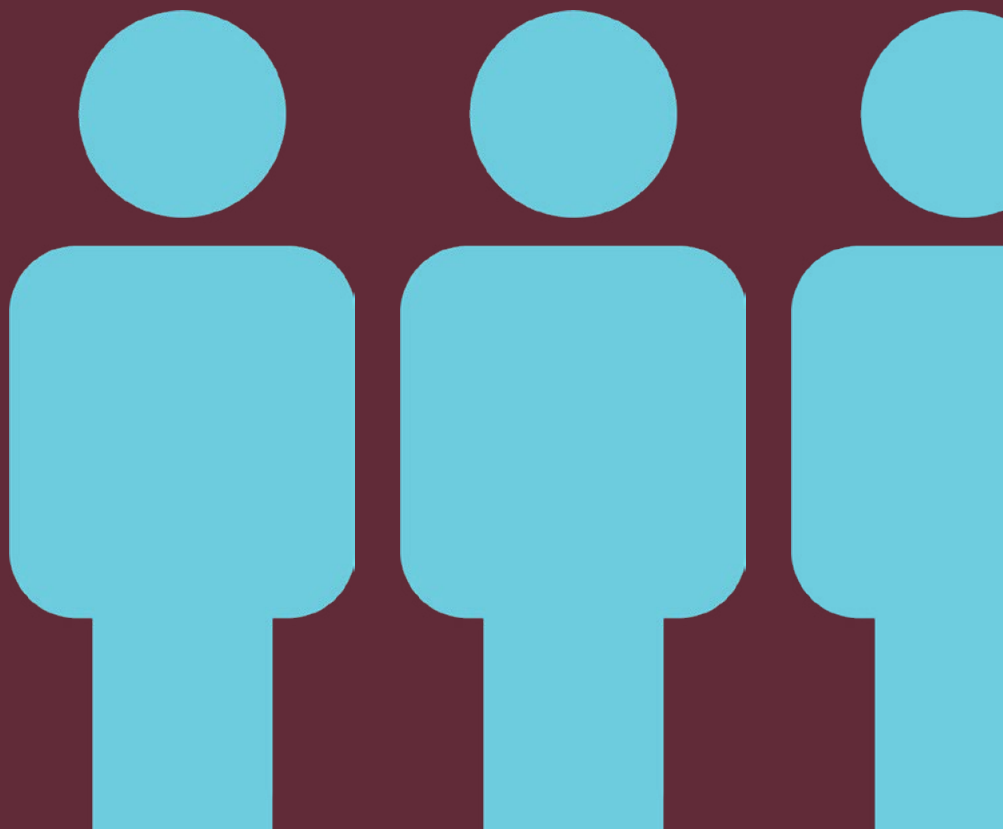


2020

Outlook:

Human Resources
Trends to Watch in
Government



Contents

3	Executive Summary
4	What's New in Government HR?
7	Does Your HR Tech Create Better Employee Experiences?
8	HR Trends at a Glance
10	Hiring Reforms
14	Diversity and Inclusion
18	Workforce Reskilling
23	Struggling with High Benefits Costs?
24	Employee Engagement and Performance
27	Training Delivery Methods
28	Conclusion



Executive Summary

If you've worked in government for any amount of time, chances are you've been exposed to the c-word: change.

Maybe your agency is in the midst of a reorganization and your team structure isn't the same. Or maybe mission priorities have evolved so you're being asked to take on new tasks. On top of all that, the very nature of how you work is likely changing, too. With the introduction of new technologies and processes, all these changes can feel overwhelming — to say the least.

But you don't have to endure them alone or without support. We wrote this guide to help you navigate the workforce changes that have happened and those that are ahead. **Whether or not you're a human resources (HR) professional, the trends we outline are sure to affect you.**

From employee reskilling efforts to hiring reforms and new ways of delivering training, we highlight these and other HR trends to help you adapt accordingly. You'll learn what's new, how these trends are playing out in government and why they are important. We also share practical tips from people in the trenches who are experiencing and leading change.

We've tailored the guide to include HR trends across federal, state and local governments. For example, you'll hear from Margaret Weichert, Deputy Director for Management at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), about the Trump administration's workforce reforms and what they mean for rank-and-file employees and hiring managers. You'll also hear from Marchelle Franklin, Director of Human Services for Phoenix, and get diverse perspectives from HR professionals, project management experts and chief information officers (CIOs) at all levels of government.

As your agency prepares for 2020 and beyond, use this guide to craft your HR efforts and help employees proactively prepare for change.

What's New in Government HR?

The role of HR professionals in any organization is critical, but the breadth of their reach depends heavily on their ability to evolve.

"The vision is for HR to be a stronger strategic partner, crucial to achieving high performance and...much more than agents of recruitment, compliance and employee benefits," said GovLoop featured contributor Lori Okami, an expert in state and local government HR. She shared the graphic below in one of her recent articles.



But are your leaders prepared to bestow such power on HR to prepare them for tomorrow's requirements? Is your HR team ready for this shift? To fulfill current and future expectations from employees, constituents and leaders, HR must acquire new skills demonstrating a broader understanding of business and expertise in quality and change management and process improvement, to name a few areas.

If your agency's HR department hasn't made this shift, the path forward may seem daunting. But the key is measured, incremental improvements. Throughout the guide we will highlight five key HR trends across government — **hiring reforms**, **diversity and inclusion**, **workforce reskilling**, **employee engagement and performance**, and **training delivery methods** — but here are additional priorities and focus areas we found during our research and heard in interviews for this guide.

Improve customer experience

There's a renewed focus on the customer and ensuring that individuals who interact with your agency have a streamlined and pleasant experience, whether on the phone, in person or online.

But from an HR perspective, the customer isn't just the public. The customer is your colleague, and

there must be a concerted effort to ensure that the people you share office space with have positive work experiences. The aim is not to be a people-pleaser at all costs, but to ensure you're addressing the things you can control, such as clear communication and empathy.

This is especially true for agencies such as the Agriculture Department (USDA) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM), where timelines for proposed reorganizations and relocations aren't quite clear. A White House proposal would shift OPM's workforce strategy functions to the Executive Office of the President. Background investigation responsibilities recently transitioned to the Defense Department (DoD). Under the proposal, all other remaining functions would move to the General Services Administration (GSA). But if and when those changes will happen is unclear, especially as some lawmakers continue to block the proposal from clearing legislative hurdles.

[USDA](#) is among the agencies looking to relocate offices and bureaus out of Washington, D.C. Their reasons include: placing resources geographically closer to stakeholders and saving on employment costs and rent, which it expects will help retain employees. But the department must also measure its intent against employees' perceptions and include a robust change management plan that doesn't leave the workforce in the dark.

So what does great internal customer service actually look like? It has a [few hallmarks](#):

Be excellent. Treat colleagues' needs with the same great care and courtesy that you would a request from a constituent.

Communicate promptly and consistently. Don't go MIA when others are waiting for information or while a solution is in progress. Provide regular updates, even when the news isn't positive.

Empower customers to meet their own needs. Make information available on the agency intranet, provide internal customer training, create an app or take other steps to make it easier for the customer.

Listen to feedback and rethink your workflow based on what you hear and the shared experiences of others.

Apologize when things don't go well. A sincere apology goes a long way toward mending fences when a mistake happens.

Shifting from low-level to high-value work

OMB has made clear that agencies should adopt technologies such as [robotic process automation](#) (RPA) to shift employees from doing mundane and manual processes to more high-value, mission-centric work.

But the challenge for many agencies is wrapping their heads around what RPA entails and how to get started. What process is a good candidate for RPA and how do you practically redirect employees who have spent years doing a certain task to now do something else?

RPA uses software bots to automate repetitive, rule-based tasks, such as copying and pasting information from one system to another or reconciling financial accounts. The implications for HR are huge when it comes to providing clarity around the use of this technology. Managers must also clearly communicate how employees' jobs might change and how they should respond. For example, do they need training? What tasks will be automated, and how are employees expected to work alongside their new [digital coworkers](#)?

RPA is a big focus area for the federal government, but state and local governments are also taking advantage of the technology. For example, the state of Arizona launched a pilot in May 2018 that used software bots to streamline finance, accounting and reporting processes within the state's General Accounting Office (GAO) and Department of Economic Security (DES). The pilot's success has prompted the state to evaluate its strategy for expanding automation capabilities to other agencies.

Employee experience is the key to attracting and retaining the future workforce.

Cornerstone's talent management software helps government agencies provide an engaging employee experience and achieve their mission by attracting, developing, and retaining their best people.

Learn more at
csod.com/state-local or
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Does Your HR Tech Create Better Employee Experiences?

An interview with Steve Dobberowsky, Senior Principal for Thought Leadership and Advisory Service, Cornerstone OnDemand

Digitally native employees are entering the workforce with their own expectations for learning, training and interacting with online platforms. The onus is now on government agencies to provide a work experience that caters to employees' needs rather than compliance requirements alone.

In a recent interview with GovLoop, Steve Dobberowsky, Senior Principal for Thought Leadership and Advisory Service at Cornerstone OnDemand, explained the main drivers that are prompting agencies to view HR technology as an enabler. Cornerstone OnDemand is a cloud-based learning, talent management and talent experience software provider that empowers agencies to tap into the innovative capabilities of modern HR tech.

Dobberowsky explained that too often, investments in HR technology are made with the intent to meet mandatory requirements and communicate policies — not to enhance the employee experience.

But agencies must rethink this approach to properly develop a 21st century workforce. Today, employees expect consistent development. They want to understand their career path for growth and feel included and heard. Lastly, they want a work-life with systems and experiences that are intuitive.

The more agencies understand and incorporate employees' needs into their training and development initiatives, the better prepared the workforce will be to embrace new ways of doing business.

"The way people learn and develop has changed. How agencies adapt to different learning styles and employees' needs must also evolve."

"We eventually won't need to train our workforce on doing the tasks that will transition to artificial intelligence and automated processing," Dobberowsky said. "We will need to ensure they have stronger soft skills, such as problem solving and collaborating."

This doesn't mean technical training falls by the wayside. Instead, agencies must be more strategic about how and when they provide learning opportunities.

Consider that more than 45% of chief human resource officers say that people coming out of college have the digital skills they need, but what they're missing are skills in complex problem solving, teamwork, business understanding and leadership, according to Josh Bersin, an industry analyst and founder of Bersin by Deloitte.

To help bridge this gap, Cornerstone works with agencies to address HR and employee needs in a holistic manner. For example, the company is collaborating with agencies to create online learning and recruitment experiences that prioritize authentic offline interactions. This entails blurring the lines between the physical and digital worlds — a practice Dobberowsky referred to as phigital.

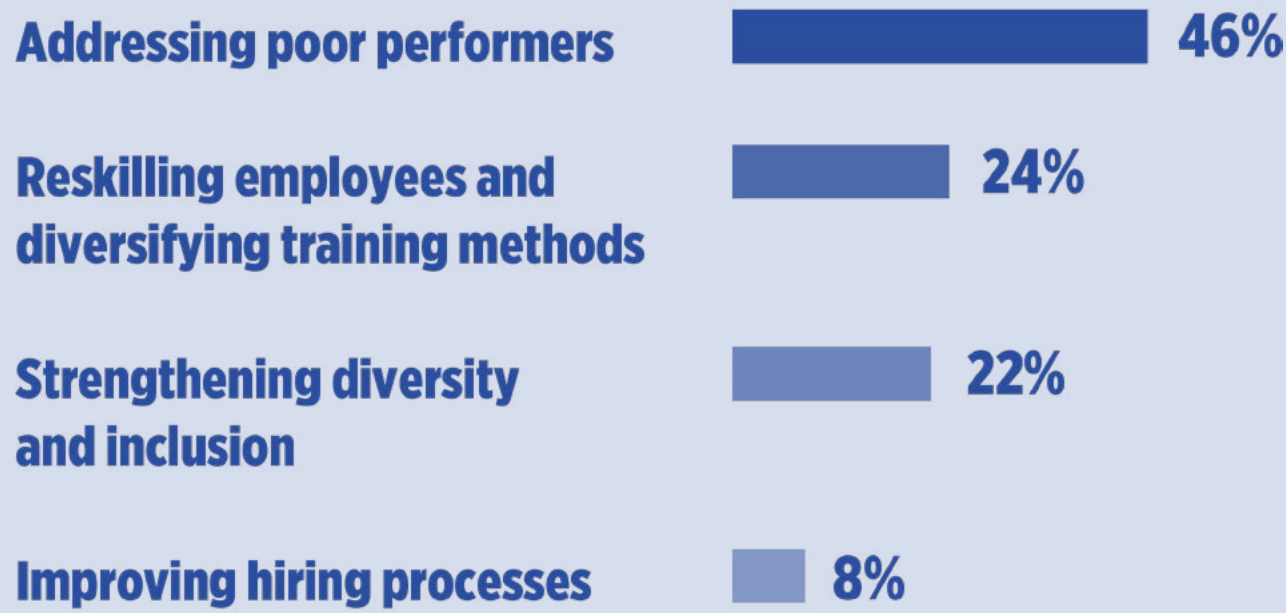
One of Cornerstone's biggest government clients has a number of employees who don't own computers or personal devices or have emails. This can make online recruitment efforts challenging. With a phigital approach, the organization uses digital tools to identify who and where these individuals are, and also uses in-person efforts to recruit potential employees and develop them based on their specific regional needs.

"Our entire existence is based on our passion for empowering people through learning and development," Dobberowsky said. "We believe that your people are your greatest assets, so agencies must ensure they adapt accordingly to recruit and develop employees in the manner that best suits them."

Takeaway: The extent to which HR departments can align with the learning styles of next-generation workers has a direct impact on efforts to attract, retain and reskill employees.

HR Trends at a Glance

In a recent GovLoop poll, we asked our community **where their agency faces the most challenges**. We mapped the responses back to the key trends we see across the HR landscape. Here’s a snapshot of what respondents said:



Addressing poor performers was the top challenge for 46% of respondents, followed by reskilling and training employees at 24%. Neither is a completely new issue, but we are seeing new dynamics taking shape. As agencies prepare their workforces for the future, they must have the right people with the right skills in the right roles. They have operated under a “do more with less” mantra for some time, and they can no longer afford to shoulder the burden of underperformers who are unwilling or unable to improve.

We will touch more on these topics throughout the guide. But before we dive in, let’s review a quick snapshot of each trend, what it is, why it’s important, how it’s taking shape and what outcomes are expected.

What's the trend?	Why is it a big deal?	How is it playing out in government?
Hiring Reforms	Government hiring practices must align with the innovative and agile work agencies are trying to establish and expand.	Agencies are testing new ways to streamline hiring and include subject-matter experts earlier in the hiring process.
Diversity and Inclusion	Diverse teams are better equipped to serve a diverse public and meet customers' needs.	Forward-thinking agencies realize that you can't talk diversity without also addressing inclusion and equity. This goes for the workforce, but also the community being served.
Workforce Reskilling	The talent gap is growing in critical areas, such as cyber, and agencies must start looking within to fill these roles.	Reskilling programs are becoming more formalized as agencies automate manual jobs and seek out employees who have a knack for hard-to-fill positions.
Employee Engagement and Performance	An engaged workforce is a productive and mission-focused workforce. Where there is no accountability, performances suffer.	Agencies are using data to track engagement and performance and make workforce decisions.
Training Delivery Methods	Evolving technologies are driving and supporting new training delivery methods to develop the 21st-century workforce.	Virtual reality, gamification and online options are expanding the scope and reach of training across government.

Hiring Reforms

Hiring in the government can be more of an art than a science. Although there are rules and laws that govern how it's done, the execution varies by office and individuals. Hiring managers and HR professionals can interpret requirements differently, which makes it easier to lean on what you've always done rather than explore new possibilities.

Although there are many innovative approaches to hiring across government, we've highlighted a new federal pilot that is expected to have far-reaching impacts for shaping how agencies hire in the future. It highlights a new approach for government agencies that requires HR and subject matter experts (SMEs) to work more closely earlier.

Case Study:

New hiring pilot could help federal agencies find qualified candidates faster

A recent hiring pilot that the U.S. Digital Services (USDS) and OPM spearheaded could serve as a new model for how federal agencies involve subject matter experts earlier in the hiring process. Because of its reliance on subjective self-assessments, the federal government often has trouble weeding out unqualified candidates and quickly finding those who are qualified.

This approach could be particularly useful for technical roles that receive large numbers of applicants but also have a clear set of qualifications.

"What we were essentially testing was the notion that we could get better outcomes by applying existing law and existing (regulations) in a way that is different than what...common practice uses to determine qualification," OMB's Weichert told GovLoop in an exclusive interview. "Ever since we eliminated civil service exams, what has been happening is a migration towards this sort of self-assessment process."

Therein lies a big part of the problem for federal agencies. When HR relies on job applicants to self-assess themselves, large pools of people rate themselves as qualified for a job when they aren't.

One example Weichert shared was someone saying they were qualified for a job managing the strategic petroleum reserve because they had worked as a gas station attendant.

"That's a problem because we actually want the competitive service to provide the best candidate," Weichert said. "People who are not qualified are essentially blocking people who are qualified from getting visibility."

In most competitive hiring processes, HR compiles the list of people who respond to a job opening, and because of self-assessments, the list is usually lengthy. HR uses this process to produce a shortlist of candidates who meet the job qualifications.

How the pilot works

As part of the President’s Management Agenda, the administration launched a hiring pilot, known as the Subject Matter Expert Qualifications Assessment, in which USDS worked with the Interior and Health and Human Services (HHS) departments on hiring in the competitive service.

The agencies wanted to hire IT professionals, so subject-matter experts partnered with HR specialists to conduct resume reviews and structured interview assessments before determining if an applicant was qualified and applying veterans’ preference. They did not rely on the self-assessment to make that determination.

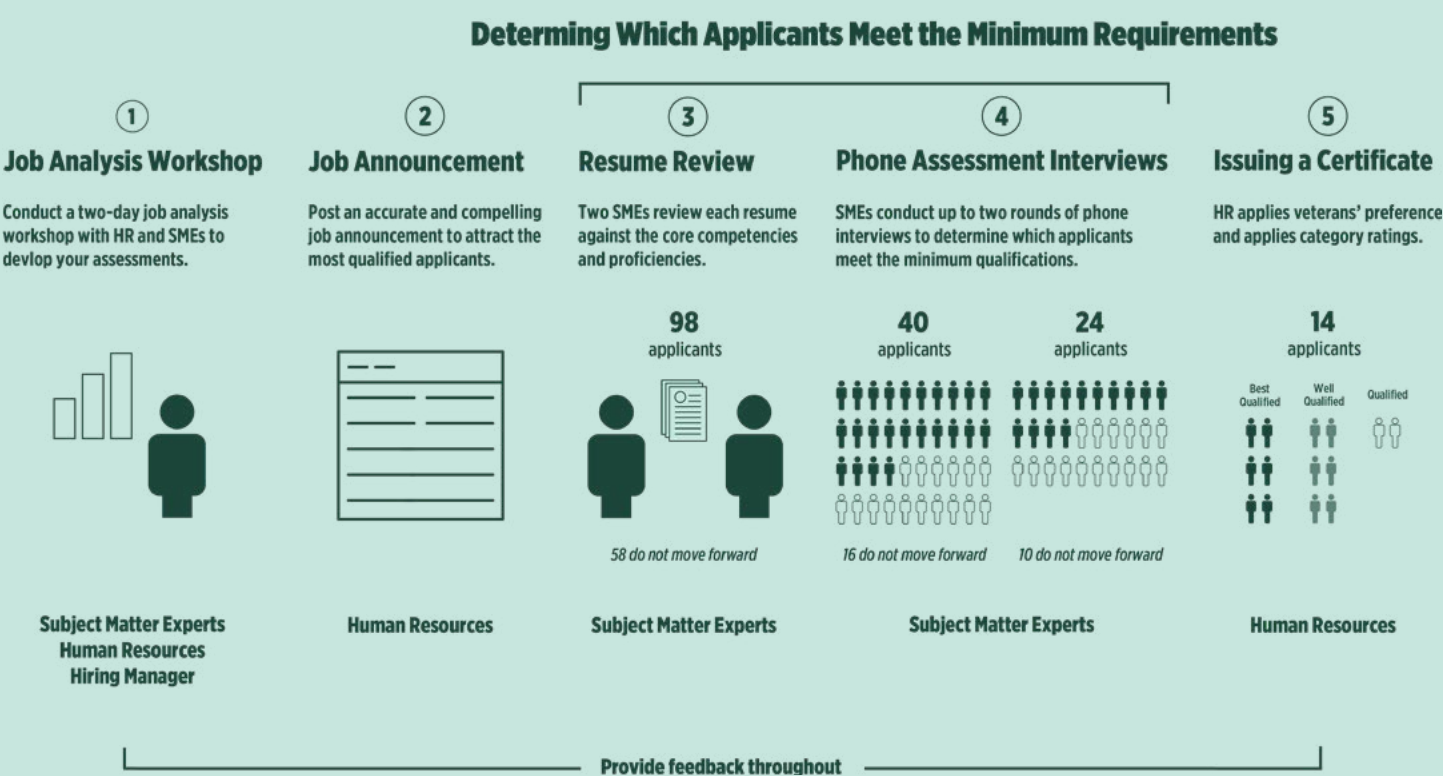
The pilot process was recommended for technical positions, such as IT, that are classified on the federal government’s General Schedule pay scale as GS-12 and higher. Under the pilot, there was

also a preference for testing roles that had at least five vacancies for the same position and where applicant volume may be limited to 100 to 200 applicants.

“We were able to screen a lot of potential applicants and arrive at a list of truly qualified applicants,” Weichert said. “In fact, even those that did not receive offers, the list is being used to fill future vacancies. And so it’s dramatically improving the quality, the speed and the efficiency of the overall process.”

Agencies are already showing interest. The Justice Department, for example, is looking at potentially using this process for hiring paralegals.

Below is a graphic of what federal hiring looks like under the new pilot.



Pilot outcomes

Weichert couldn't provide specific numbers about how the test sped the hiring process, but she said the new process cut months off the usual hiring times. The main benefit is that using experts up front to weed out unqualified candidates reduced the number of people who have to be considered who are really not qualified — a big part of the time reduction.

"More importantly, a huge number of the overall competitive job openings result in no hiring at all," she said. "And then you basically go back to the drawing board." In some cases, nonqualified candidates so overwhelm hiring managers that they use hiring exceptions to fill positions as opposed to going through the traditional process.

The larger issue that the administration expects this pilot will address is how the traditional process locks out truly qualified candidates and clogs the pipeline with fundamentally unqualified people.

What's next?

Many in the hiring community have argued that the self-assessments do not provide value. But when asked if they'd be going away, Weichert said the administration would not stop agencies from using them.

Although applicants who were assessed during the pilot filled out self-assessments, the agencies did not use them to determine if candidates were qualified, she said. "It might be something that would be useful in preparing for an interview, but it is not a determining factor in the pilot. So, we're not yet prepared to say, 'You know, eliminate the self-assessment,' but I think it is well understood that there are many serious problems with the self-assessment."

The administration will issue formal guidance around the pilot that prescribes how agencies can take a similar approach, without requiring them to follow suit.

The chart to the right shows how many candidates considered themselves qualified based on the self-assessment, or the baseline qualification rating. Self-assessment rates of qualification are substantially higher than the pilot qualification rate, in which experts made the determinations.

Inevitably, that leads to a smaller pool of applicants but a larger overall number of qualified professionals. Hiring managers can spend more time interviewing truly qualified candidates.

Weichert admits the ratio of hired candidates to qualified candidates is low, but the expectation is that a pool of qualified applicants can be shared broadly with other hiring managers looking to fill similar positions.

HHS Selection Case

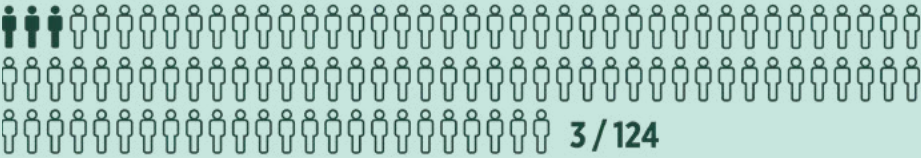
Baseline qualification rate



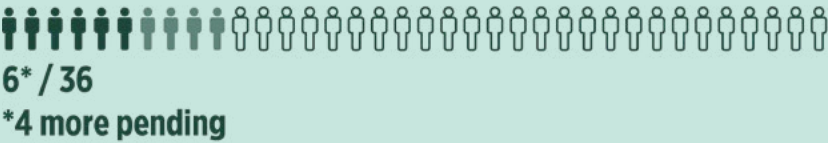
Pilot qualification rate



Baseline selection



Pilot selection



DOI Selection Case

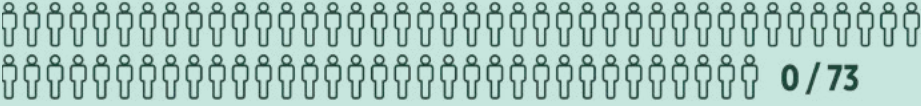
Baseline qualification rate



Pilot qualification rate



Baseline selection



Pilot selection



Diversity and Inclusion

Workforce diversity and inclusion (D&I) isn't a new concept in government, but forward-thinking agencies are breathing new life into their D&I programs by moving beyond the letter of the law or what's required. They are embedding and prioritizing D&I in their hiring practices, programs and daily work assignments.

What is it?

Diversity is a collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively. These include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age and experience.

Inclusion is a culture that connects each employee to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential.

Source: [Government-Wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan 2011](#)

Why it's relevant now

There is a concerted effort across government to build a 21st-century workforce that can adapt to new demands, use technology in innovative ways and provide better user experiences for their customers.

"(Diversity) is important to me because it helps us understand the customer," said Kanika Tolver, a Senior Project Manager at the Treasury Department. "It helps with understanding the public that we're serving." This is especially critical because her team develops digital products and services for a diverse public.

Tolver stressed that D&I extends far beyond race to include different backgrounds, walks of life, education and tenure. "Some people have institutional knowledge about what the public needs because they've been in the government for a long time, and I think we discredit them sometimes, because we think that it's all about certifications and education," she said. "But a lot of times, the subject matter experts are those people that have been there for a great amount of time, who have seen the evolution of what the public needs, and what worked and what didn't work."

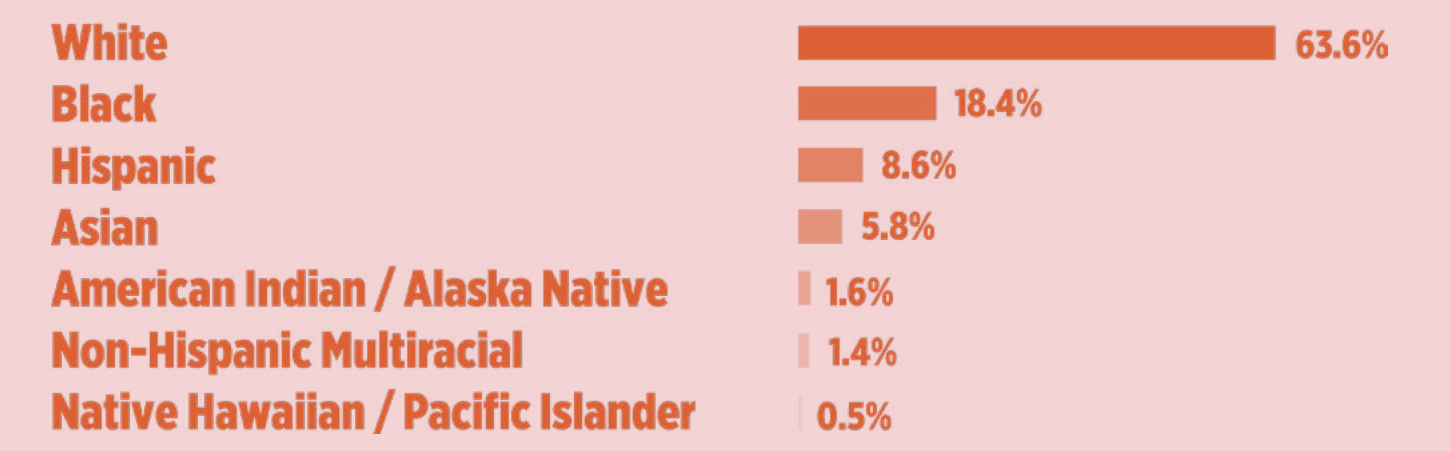
In Phoenix, for example, the city is preparing for its first LGBTQ community fair focused on the senior population. "There's still this stigma," said Marchelle Franklin, Director of the city's Human Services Department. Through education and outreach, the city wants to change that. She explained that Phoenix is focusing on diverse subcategories within the community to address their needs and enhance the quality of life for all individuals.

Organizations that fail to prioritize D&I risk being tone-deaf about the diverse needs of their workers and the constituents they serve. This amounts to wasted energy and futile efforts that may have been well-intentioned but improperly guided.

Metrics show that there are pockets in the federal space, such as USDS, where progress has happened, but diversity has remained relatively flat overall.

By the numbers: diversity in the federal workforce

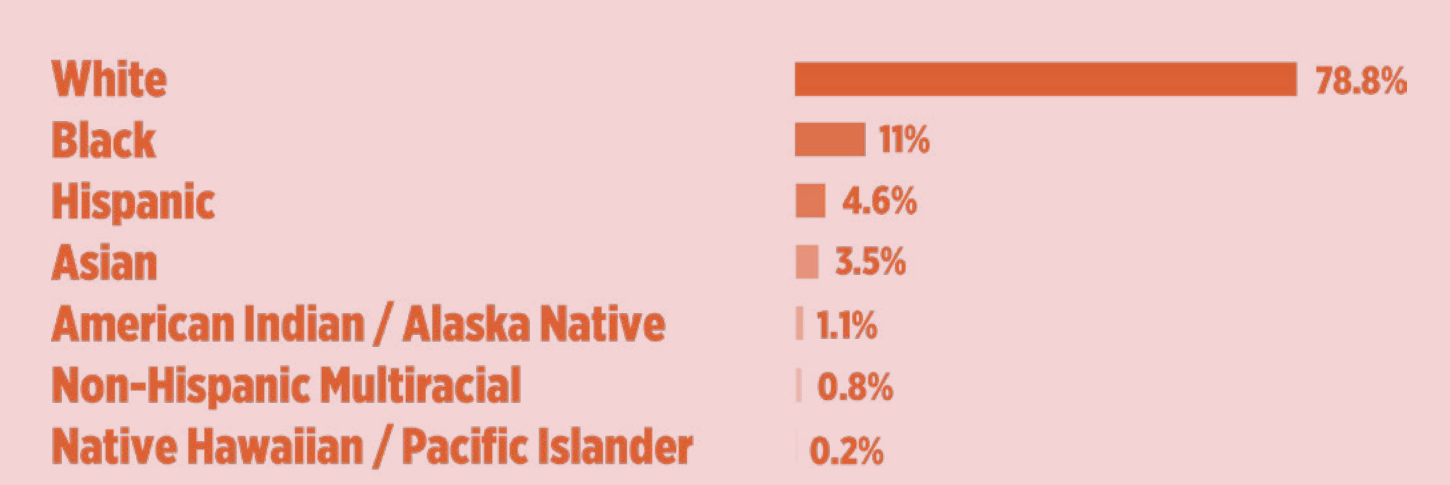
In fiscal 2016, the percentage of minorities in the permanent [Federal workforce](#) increased by .06% –from 35.8% in fiscal 2015 to 36.4% in fiscal 2016. According to the most recent data released in 2018, the Federal workforce is represented as follows:



The overall distribution of Federal employees is as follows:.



Minority representation in the Senior Executive Service (SES) remained the same in fiscal 2016 as it was in fiscal 2015 at 21.2%. SES representation is as follows:



Source: [United States Office of Personnel Management](#)

Best places to work in federal government

According to the latest [Best Places to Work in the Federal Government](#) (2018) report, here's how employees at the largest agencies rated their departments in terms of diversity. Employees were asked the extent to which they believe that actions and policies of leaders and managers promote and respect diversity.

Rank	Agency	2018 Rating	Change from 2017
1	National Aeronautics and Space Administration	78.3	↑ 1.1
2	Intelligence Community	70.1	↑ 3.0
3	Department of Health and Human Services	64.2	↑ 0.2
4	Department of Commerce	63.4	↓ -0.8
5	Department of Agriculture	62.3	↓ -4.8
6	Department of Transportation	61.9	↑ 0.6
6	Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Defense Agencies, and Department of Defense Field Activities	61.9	↑ 1.3
8	Department of the Navy	61.4	↓ -0.6
9	Department of the Treasury	60.2	= 0.0
10	Department of State	60.0	↓ -3.2

How do you make D&I a part of your agency's culture?

We posed that question to Dr. Kendra L. Smith, Director of Community Engagement at the University of Houston's College of Medicine and author of a [research report](#) the International City/County Management Association released in January 2019. The report highlights local governments that excel at increasing diversity and fostering inclusiveness, and offers new findings and recommendations for moving beyond compliance exercises. Although the focus is local government, these points can support any level of government.

1. Reconfigure recruitment and hiring processes to be inclusive

Obstacles that prevent the success of job seekers from underrepresented populations include testing processes, unpaid internships that are unfeasible for lower-income families, and even the language used in the job posting. "If we want true equity and inclusion, this means discarding practices meant to keep people out," Diane Powers, Director of the Tacoma, Washington Office of Human Rights, said in the report.

Case Study:

Breaking down cultural barriers to improve access to health care

Stella G. Uzogara, Nutritional Epidemiologist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, was recognized by GovLoop for being an advocate for others. Her story shows the level of impact that D&I can have on a community.

As part of her role as Nutritional Epidemiologist, Uzogara conducted training for the department's Women, Infants and Children Program staff on cultural competence and sensitivity to the health and food practices of new immigrants from Africa. The trainings led to increased awareness and cultural understanding of African health and nutrition practices that improved staff/client relationships, said Leonard Lee, Director of the Division of Violence and Injury Prevention, who nominated Uzogara for the GovLoop award.

2. Drive culture change

All participants in the report noted a culture change in which members of the community feel that they have "a seat at the table," which affects diversity efforts. In Tacoma, for example, a resolution was passed in December 2017 to support the formation of the Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs to allow for better engagement of immigrant and refugee populations.

3. Promote metrics and accountability

Participants noted that metrics are used to observe the outcome and impact of their work, but substantive metrics are lacking.

4. Foster collaboration among offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion and HR

Newly created offices of diversity and the longstanding HR department of a local government need to collaborate to drive forward diversity initiatives. One participant said, "It is a collaborative effort. HR has to be on board. If not, our work suffers and hurts (the organization) because we're not doing as much as we can."

"It led to elimination of barriers to health access for these new immigrants and increased the new immigrant use of state health services and improved their nutrition," Lee said.

As a Nigerian American, Uzogara said she could relate to her patients and health consumers and took it upon herself to work with them — educating her clients, patients and colleagues. "Because I came from that part of the world, I know their health practices, I know their food practices, I know the taboos they have about food and health, which sometimes clash with life in the modern society like the United States."

Workforce Reskilling

The nature of government work is changing, and agencies such as OPM want to ensure that federal agencies can adequately equip employees to adapt. New work requirements created by emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), are forcing agencies at all levels of government to rethink how they keep employees current.

What is it?

Reskilling involves learning a completely new skillset based on a demonstrated aptitude. Upskilling is often discussed in the same breath as reskilling, but they are slightly different. Upskilling allows individuals to train in the same field, but in a new way that adapts to the reality of automated tasks and other new capabilities that technologies such as AI provide.

Why it's relevant now

There was a time when people signed up to work for the government with a plan to be public servants for 30 years and then retire. "All of that's still possible, but what that doesn't take into consideration is the notion that work itself changes," said Dorothy Aronson, CIO and Chief Data Officer at the National Science Foundation (NSF). "If you sign up to be an accountant when you're 21, the job of accounting has changed so dramatically in 20 or 30 years that your original job no longer exists in its original state."

In partnership with a small group of NSF colleagues, Aronson launched a competition on the government's Challenge.gov platform in late 2018. The challenge called on innovators in government, industry and academia to put forth their brightest ideas for helping NSF employees adapt to the agency's changing workforce needs, develop their skills and prepare for new opportunities. The winning prototype, called PathwayU, enables individuals to "both identify optimal career paths and focus their reskilling efforts," according to [NSF](#). Specifically, the platform:



Measures interests, values, personality and workplace preferences with scientific assessments



Uses an algorithmic approach to recommend careers



Provides up-to-date information about required knowledge and skills for matched jobs



Guides employees to relevant learning opportunities, and identifies well-fitting job opportunities available both within and outside the federal government

Through continuous reskilling, Aronson's goal is to help employees take charge of their career and develop the skills they need to grow professionally and meet the needs of the government.

"I feel that if we wait to be innovative, or if we wait until the future is upon us, we won't have a chance to shape that future," Aronson said. "Getting involved now is absolutely essential for the federal government."

How do you make reskilling a part of your agency's culture?

In May 2019, OPM [released](#) a [Reskilling Toolkit](#) that addresses reskilling and upskilling from the perspective of all the key stakeholders involved: agency leaders, managers and employees. The toolkit explains how these efforts can affect employees emotionally and offers helpful guidance on communicating change and dealing with the varied responses that it elicits.

For example, the toolkit urges agency leaders to anticipate and allow for strong emotions from employees, and recognize that "emotions are not only natural, but also a necessary part of the change and transition process."

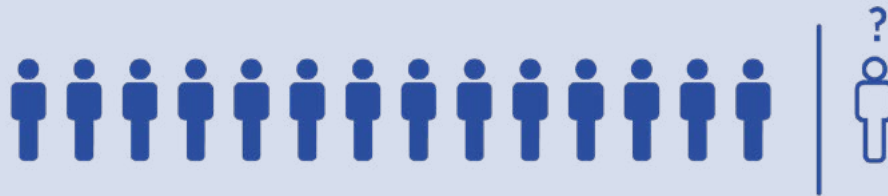
Change can lead naturally to fear. The way to counter this, according to the toolkit, is to increase information flow and make sure employees know where they will end up. Keeping familiar aspects of

the workday and organization in place should help create a semblance of stability that employees can lean on as they adjust.

HR professionals, managers and employees can use the toolkit as they shape reskilling and upskilling opportunities rooted in the unique strengths each employee has to offer. The toolkit specifically emphasizes planning as key to an effective program. HR professionals should evaluate the current workforce's skills, create specifications for what the future workforce should look like, and identify gaps in staffing and skills that limit the agency from reaching the workforce they need.

Learn more [here](#).

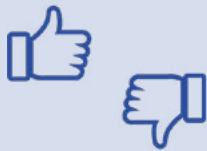
Reskilling shouldn't be a one-way street, with agencies dictating what skills employees must learn. Spend time understanding your team, what interests them and how that fits into your agency's mission.



Some questions to consider:



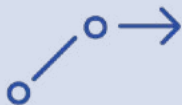
1. When was the last time I talked to my staff about their goals?



2. When was the last time I gave constructive feedback about their work?



3. Am I aware of my staff's ambitions?



4. Does everyone on my team have a development plan?

Learn more [here](#).

Case Study:

Federal cyber reskilling program touts early wins

When the Trump administration launched a new [program](#) in November 2018 to quickly retrain non-IT employees to become cyber defenders, much of the focus was on preparing those individuals to fill critical job openings in government.

Although the Federal Cybersecurity Reskilling Academy website explicitly states that jobs are not guaranteed for participants, it also states that “participants receive career mentorship and soft skills guidance to help them prepare for re-deploying into the cybersecurity workforce.”

More than 1,500 federal employees applied to the program’s first cohort — with about 66% of applicants coming from the upper levels of the federal pay scale at GS-12 to GS-15. The Academy accepted 30 applicants (24 in-person and six virtual), who were tasked with completing an intense three-month schedule of self-study and classroom and hands-on training on topics such as handling cyber incidents and thinking like hackers to become better defenders.

During an August 2019 roundtable with reporters, Federal CIO Suzette Kent gave an update on the program and explained what the administration hoped to prove by launching the academy. “It wasn’t like we were out shopping to match this open role, this open role, this open role,” Kent said about participants converting to new cybersecurity positions. “We (government workers)

struggle in many cases to say, ‘These are the cybersecurity things about which you need to be knowledgeable.’”

The tradition of promoting cybersecurity awareness training in October each year won’t cut it, she said, and the academy appears to be the proof of concept for how government can elevate cyber skills across its workforce.

The big takeaway for the administration after finishing its first cohort of program participants in July 2019 wasn’t how quickly the inaugural class could fill open cybersecurity roles. Rather the experience showed that there is an appetite among the federal workforce for a cyber reskilling program, that a screening mechanism could be used to find those people and that this type of training delivery approach could be successful.

The short answer to these questions is “yes.” Some program participants told GovLoop that their newfound skills help them in their current roles and also bring valuable knowledge to their agencies.

Another pilot is underway aimed at data science reskilling. The administration is also eyeing other areas that are ripe for reskilling in the future.

Learn [more](#) about the program and hear from recent graduates



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Struggling with High Benefits Costs? The Right Solutions Deliver Better Data Insights

An interview with Ty Arlint, Vice President, State, Local & Education, Businessolver; and Marilyn Bartlett, former state Business Leader and Chief Financial Officer

Annual enrollment can be arduous and confusing for employees trying to navigate the ever-changing complexities of benefits. For the agencies administering the plans, communicating what's new and how those changes impact employees is equally challenging.

"There is too much at stake for the process to not run smoothly," said Ty Arlint, Vice President of State, Local & Education at Businessolver, a leader in SaaS-based benefits administration technology and services. "The urgency and importance of getting this right is heightened by the fact that benefits spending is often the second or third largest budget item in an agency's financial report."

In a recent interview with GovLoop, Arlint explained how the [right benefits administration technology](#) and meaningful data can transform annual enrollment from a once-a-year event into a year-round personalized journey that engages employees. Ultimately, this helps employees become better consumers of benefits, thereby lowering an agency's spend.

But how can agencies move from an organization that administers benefits to one that focuses on benefits strategies to create better member outcomes? Organizations face headwinds that include tracking benefits data effectively, helping members select the appropriate plans and automating tasks such as dependent verification.

For example, knowing who is not eligible for benefits coverage is important, Arlint said. Many organizations provide benefits to those who are ineligible—from 7 to 10% of those enrolled, on average. With an average annual health benefits cost of \$15,000 per employee, that amounts to a significant financial burden to the agency. Without full and transparent access to data, agencies can't make informed decisions that drive better outcomes.

Marilyn Bartlett, former state business leader and chief financial officer, stressed that many organizations see close to double-digit increases in their benefits spend from healthcare costs. "Tackling these costs requires agencies to have an understanding of employees' claims and utilization data to determine their biggest expenses," she said. Using that data, agencies can tailor plans to fit employees' needs.

According to Arlint, the state of Colorado took this approach but realized that creating an optimal plan for employees is only part of the solution. How that plan is communicated is also critical. When the state implemented a high-deductible health plan (HDHP) a few years ago, less than 2% of employees enrolled. An HDHP essentially has lower premiums and higher deductibles than a traditional health plan and is meant to encourage consumer-driven healthcare.

"What they found was people didn't understand how an HDHP works," Arlint said.

Partnering with Businessolver, the state used the company's decision guidance tool, MyChoice™ Recommendation Engine, to help employees choose the plan that best fit their needs. The following year, the state saw HDHP participation increase to more than 15%.

"By leveraging technology to learn about your population, you can significantly impact your organization's bottom line," Arlint said. **"To create a sustainable benefits program and reduce the average annual increase in total spend for your organization, you must have access to the right data and transparency."**

Takeaway: The real value for agencies is using the right technology and data analysis to understand employee needs and craft benefits plans that meet those needs.

Employee Engagement and Performance

Employee engagement and performance are intrinsically intertwined. Both data and likely your own personal experiences have proven that employees who are most engaged and find value in their work tend to perform better than those who are disengaged.

What is it?

OPM defines engagement as “an employee’s sense of purpose that is evident in their display of dedication, persistence and effort in their work or overall attachment to their organization and its mission.”

Why it’s relevant now

As we discussed earlier in this guide, the nature of government work is changing. We also know that change is a very personal and potentially emotional experience that can directly impact engagement positively or negatively.

Along the lines of employee engagement and performance, OPM issued [proposed guidance](#) in September 2019 to streamline and standardize the way agencies demote or fire poor performers. One proposed change, for example, would set a standard of 30 days for employee performance improvement plans.

OPM is collecting data from agencies to show how many exceed the 30-day limit for employees to improve or address performance issues. In its guidance, OPM noted that interpretations of current laws make it difficult for agencies to take actions against unacceptable performers.

But what measured steps can you take now to help improve or address performance, particularly for employees who want to be more engaged?



How do you make employee engagement a part of your agency's culture?

GovLoop featured contributor Andrew Rahaman [interviewed](#) about 50 government supervisors from a variety of departments and agencies. He asked them how they motivate staff members. Here's what they said:

1. Create a value chain.

A senior executive at a large government financial institution said it simply: "Smile and talk to people about the impact of their work." We spend 40-plus hours a week at work – people want to feel significant and that their work is valued.

2. Build trust.

A supervisor at the Homeland Security Department (DHS) said he builds trust through three primary mechanisms: 1. Set a clear and compelling vision for where the team is expected to go and clear expectations for getting there; 2. Empower others and let them know they can act without always asking for permission, though keeping supervisors informed; and 3. Be a role model of office behavior.

3. Leverage strengths and develop future organizational needs.

Developing all staff members is important to building the team's trust and capability. This also gives them something to work toward. Ideally, agencies would train staff members for current and future needs, but it's not always possible to promote someone from inside your office. That said, it shouldn't stop their development and potential use of skills elsewhere in the organization. As a DoD supervisor said, "Developing people doesn't necessarily mean they will stay with me; it does mean they will learn, grow and give more while they are here."

4. Create a vision and align it to agency goals.

People want to know what they're working for and how they fit in. Each person needs to know the unifying core vision and to believe their work is connected in achieving something that matters. Equally important and critical is alignment. One supervisor at the Commerce Department said, "I'm more engaged when I understand how my work fits into the overall goals of the organization and how my decisions impact these goals. Why shouldn't employees feel the same way?" To that point, supervisors must be able to create and align work to the organization's visions and to the unit goals and objectives.

5. Share leadership.

Not everybody gets to make decisions, but leaders can involve employees and then empower them to act. One manager said, "Empowerment means more than just turning someone loose; it's also about giving the supervisory support that helps them make the right decisions and to act with confidence."

Case Study:

How NIH implemented a culture change using data and feedback

To get a pulse of employee sentiments across the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), supervisors rely on the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). But it took managers weeks or even months to comb through the FEVS data. It was labor-intensive, time-consuming and costly. So Camille Hoover, Executive Officer and Associate Director for Management, turned to colleagues at NIDDK to help create a framework for using FEVS data effectively.

Her approach involves partnering analytics with the voice of the employee to inform leaders' strategies and resource allocation, and to show where engagement activities are paying off. Her advice to agencies: Create a vision and identify core values. These can't just be lofty goals that you hang on the wall. They must translate to the frontlines where employees do day-to-day work.

"The result was a masterpiece that brings to life the voice of the people," Hoover said. The tool is called EVS ART, derived from EVS at the "heART" of a healthy organization. It was created for and by federal employees to enable leaders to drill down and compare data, increase awareness of engagement levels, and view FEVS scores in an actionable and targeted way.

The tool offers heat maps and color-coded indexes measurements of sub-offices to better understand employee sentiments, target areas for improvement and use OPM guidance for interpreting results. Managers can see suggested opportunities for improvement in areas where scores fall below a certain threshold.

Focus groups, town halls and ideation tools are some of the ways to have a two-way dialogue with employees about values and expectations. Hoover considers employees who directly report to her to be ambassadors on the frontline because she cannot possibly connect with every person.

Hoover shared an example of how EVS ART helped transform an underperforming agency that had a vote of no confidence across NIDDK. The organization is forward-facing and interfaces with all 1,300 employees at NIDDK. The corrective course of action included:

- **Instituting new standards and accountability measures for productivity.**
- **Working with leaders to create a new vision and changing out leaders who did not embrace that vision.**
- **Creating opportunities for new performers and ensuring mediocrity wasn't acceptable, meaning there were consequences for poor performers in rank-and-file and management positions.**
- **Ensuring that employees knew what changes were happening and why, and giving them opportunities to voice any concerns.**

These changes transformed the organization, Hoover said. Complaints fell and partnerships with scientists began forming. EVS ART validated that the intervention was working.

Training Delivery Methods

Government training can be hard to come by in an environment where budgets are tight and the barrage of work projects overshadows the need for continuous training. But as workforce demands evolve and the need for workers to stay current on new topics and refresh their skills grows, agencies are tapping into creative ways of delivering training. We've highlighted some examples below that focus not only on how agencies deliver the training, but how they make niche or technical topics relevant to employees those issues will affect. There is also a greater focus on developmental programs to train from within to prepare employees for higher ranks.

DHS Cloud Stand Down Day

"We've been spending a lot of time on cloud computing. One of the key components of anything is training. We have recently done a Cloud Stand Down Day, where we provided training to all of our employees. It was introductory level to make sure that all my employees across CIO understand what cloud is, understand what it could bring to us and understand how it works. The next session will be more focused on the intermediate level, and we're going to start moving into the area of security."

– [DHS CIO John Zangardi](#)

CIO/CISO Multi-Agency Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program

The career paths of CIOs and chief information security officers are far from linear, which makes it challenging for aspiring leaders in those fields to find their way. This USDA program is designed to develop individuals with proven leadership potential who want to serve at the executive levels of government and lead the IT community. The four-month program includes formal training, assessments and seminars. At the end, candidates must submit a portfolio for review by an executive board. There is also a structured interview phase, signaling that participants may have a shot at being hired for full-time roles.

VA Innovative Technology Advancement Lab (VITAL)

The Veterans Affairs Department (VA) recently launched an innovative new training program to support its electronic health record (EHR) modernization. The [VA Innovative Technology Advancement Lab](#) (VITAL) teaches users how to optimize EHR modernization by collaboratively solving real-world problems that VA participants identify. VITAL was designed to increase adoption of EHRs, promote standardization and optimize the use of advanced analytics. The program consists of four three-day, in-person sessions over 12 to 18 months, monthly virtual checkpoints and a core capstone project that participants select. Capstone projects are designed to tackle real-world problems that participants encounter at their facilities. These projects allow them to gain confidence and competence in optimizing solutions and tools while solving today's problems and proactively attacking future ones.

GovLoop offers free [training and resources](#) for government professionals, including [webinars about a variety of technology and management topics that are relevant to all government employees](#). We also offer [self-paced courses through our GovLoop Academy](#) and [multiday training sessions at our NextGen Government Training Summit](#).

Conclusion

The HR landscape is constantly evolving. Employee expectations are changing, their skillsets are progressing, technology is advancing and government customers are demanding more. Keeping pace with these nuances can seem daunting, especially if you're reacting to change, rather than proactively preparing for it.

From this guide, we hope you've gathered helpful tips and insights to help you respond to some of government's most pressing workforce trends. Whether it's streamlining the hiring process or being more inclusive across the workforce, the ability of HR professionals to adapt and respond is critical.

But this responsibility does not fall squarely on HR. Working collectively across departments and alongside employees on the frontlines will ensure that there is greater communication and collaboration to prepare for today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities.

About GovLoop

GovLoop's mission is to inspire public sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to the public sector.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.

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Thank You

Thank you to Businessolver and Cornerstone OnDemand for their support of this valuable resource for public sector professionals.

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