



2014 BEST PLACES TO WORK IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT® ANALYSIS

Improving the Employee Experience

What agencies and leaders can do to manage talent better

When asked in a federal survey about how well they are managed, employees routinely give their agencies failing marks. The evidence is clear: employees want and expect more from their leaders and agencies regarding recruitment, training, awards and recognition, leadership development and succession planning, factors that are often referred to as the talent lifecycle.

In this snapshot, the Partnership for Public Service and Deloitte¹ examine trends in the federal government for each phase in the lifecycle using the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*[®] data and the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results.²

Looking at issues throughout the entirety of the talent lifecycle helps identify the places that federal leaders can make changes and improve the total employee experience. In 2014, 60.2 percent of federal employees would be willing to recommend their agency as a good place to work. With improvements at each stage in the lifecycle, federal agencies can drive that number higher.

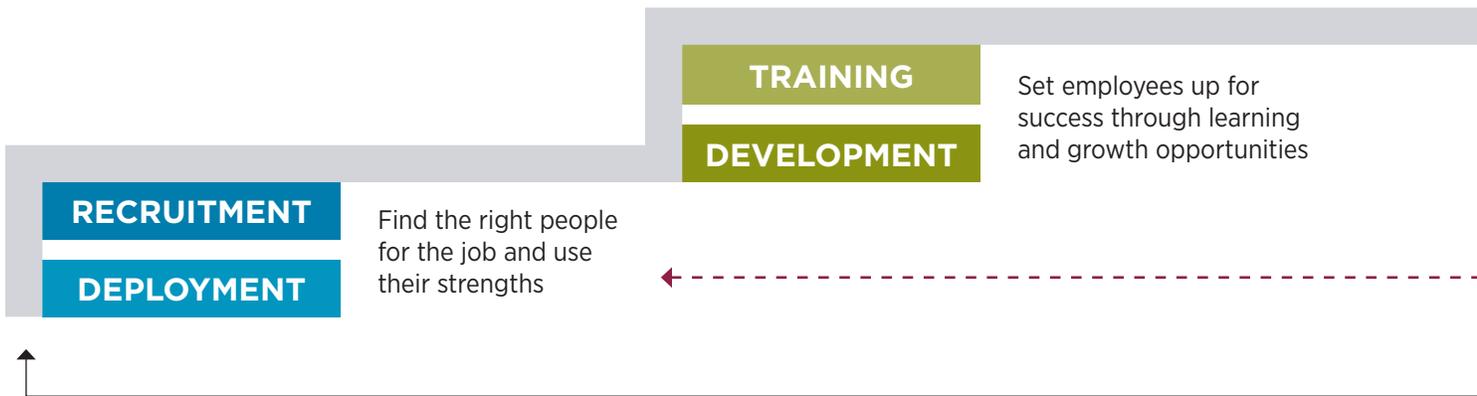
Once agencies hire employees, the data show that the honeymoon period does not last very long. The *Best Places to Work* government-wide employee satisfaction and commitment score, for example, drops from 72.3 to 62.5 on a scale of 100—a 10-point plunge—after the first year of federal employment, and the satisfaction rate never reaches the same level during an individual's time in government. This trend holds true at agencies with both high and low *Best Places to Work* employee satisfaction and commitment scores, as well as outside the federal government³ This suggests that both the public and private sectors need to do better.

1 As used in this document, "Deloitte" means Deloitte Consulting LLP, a subsidiary of Deloitte LLP. Please see www.deloitte.com/us/about for a detailed description of the legal structure of Deloitte LLP and its subsidiaries. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting.

2 The findings are based on the views of more than 392,000 respondents who participated in the 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey from April through June of 2014.

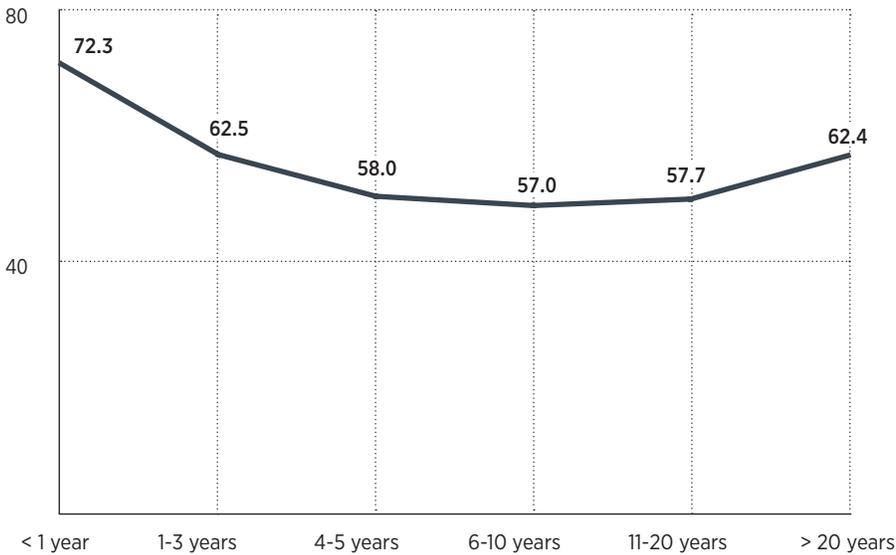
3 Harter, James. "Engage Your Long-Time Employees to Improve Performance." Harvard Business Review, March 2015. <http://bit.ly/1Lk6yUh>

TALENT MANAGEMENT LIFECYCLE



Methodology: We reviewed a variety of talent lifecycle models to identify common components and matched them with FEVS questions. Questions were selected based on content. We selected “I” or “You” questions when possible to focus on the individual’s personal experience. We looked at correlations, factor analyses, regressions, and availability of private sector comparisons to select the strongest question when there were a few possibilities.

2014 BEST PLACES TO WORK SATISFACTION AND COMMITMENT INDEX SCORES BY TENURE IN AGENCY



The *Best Places to Work* index score is calculated based on three different federal survey questions. We use the percentage of positive responses in a weighted, proprietary formula.

- I recommend my organization as a good place to work (Q. 40)
- Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job? (Q. 69)
- Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization? (Q.71)

RECOGNITION

PROMOTION

Honor employee accomplishments and advance them into new roles

RETENTION

TRANSITION

Keep the best for as long as possible and help employees move on when necessary

ENGAGEMENT

Motivate employees through effective talent management practices and great leaders and supervisors

Spotlight on Recruiting

Demographic trends also point to the importance of effective talent management strategies. The greatest challenge for federal agencies is recruiting and retaining younger employees, those who represent the foundation of the workforce in the years ahead. Contrary to what might be expected, data show that the percentage of the federal workforce under age 30 dropped from 9.1 to 6.6 percent, a steady reduction of more than 45,000 employees between 2010 and 2015. Those under 25 dropped from an already low 2 percent to an alarming 0.9 percent during the same period.⁴ In contrast, in the entire U.S. workforce, 23.5 percent are under age 30.⁵

Federal employees under the age of 30 are also slightly less satisfied overall than all other employees.

⁴ Office of Personnel Management, FedScope

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment status of the civilian non-institutional population by age, sex, and race," <http://1.usa.gov/1KOwc2P> (accessed Feb. 25, 2014).

FEDERAL WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS: PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES UNDER AGE 30 AND UNDER AGE 25

- Percentage of the federal workforce under 30
- Percentage of the federal workforce under 25



TALENT MANAGEMENT TRENDS

The federal government's challenge is daunting—hire the best people, often with highly specialized skills, and keep them engaged and committed. An effective talent management strategy enables employees to be high-performing and have high levels of job and workplace satisfaction and commitment. This analysis uses Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey questions to highlight key phases in the talent lifecycle: recruitment, deployment, training, development, recognition and promotion.

RECRUITMENT

Recruiting is a longstanding challenge for the federal government. Since 2003, less than half of employees agreed with the statement, “My work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills.” In 2014, only 39.2 percent of the federal employee survey respondents said their teams can attract the right people. This finding was corroborated by Vanderbilt University's Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, along with Princeton University, and the Volcker Alliance. In a survey of federal agency leaders, Vanderbilt found that 42 percent reported that they are unable to recruit the best employees. Senior federal leaders blame the slow hiring process, the outdated civil service system, and the hard-to-navigate USAJOBS.gov federal employment job site, among other factors.⁶

DEPLOYMENT

Many people who join public service are motivated by a desire to make a difference, which is why it is especially important to align federal employee's talents with the agency's mission. The trends are troubling. On the question, “My talents are used well in the workplace,” scores have fallen by 8.7 points to 54.2 percent from the peak in 2003. When employees do not feel like they are being effectively utilized, morale and productivity suffer.⁷ The data strongly suggests that more needs to be done to capitalize on the strengths of the workforce.

TRAINING

Less than half of all federal employees (46.8 percent) surveyed in 2014 reported being satisfied with the training they receive, and this number has dropped by 8.6 points from the highest level in 2005. Employees in the private sector are considerably more satisfied with training opportunities. According to Hay Group, 62 percent of private sector employees are satisfied with their training.

DEVELOPMENT

Supervisors play a critical role in managing talent and helping make employees more productive. Research suggests that regular performance check-ins and coaching by supervisors can positively influence performance.⁸ Federal employee survey results for the question, “Discussions with my supervisor about my performance are worthwhile,” have hovered around 58 percent for the past decade, which is somewhat encouraging compared to other aspects of the talent lifecycle, but it is still a failing grade.

⁶ Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Vanderbilt University, Princeton University, and the Volcker Alliance (2015). Survey on the Future of Government Service. <http://bit.ly/1IyLlnS>

⁷ Merit Systems Protection Board (2009). Managing for Engagement—Communication, Connection, and Courage. <http://1.usa.gov/1Hb8ztD>

⁸ Buckingham, Marcus & Goodall, Ashley (2015). Reinventing Performance Management. Harvard Business Review. <http://bit.ly/18AceYm>

RECOGNITION

Showing appreciation in the workplace matters, and it is important for federal civil servants given the critical nature of their work and the public attitude toward the federal government, which is at an all-time low. Many federal workers perform essential and difficult jobs, from defending the nation's security to protecting public health, and are highly successful in serving the nation. Despite the need to boost employee job and workplace satisfaction, which has been on the decline, federal leaders are doing poorly recognizing employees for their successes.

In 2014, only 41.8 percent of employees were satisfied with the recognition they received for doing a good job, which represents a decrease of 8.5 points from the highest level in 2009.

Compared with the private sector data provided by the Hay Group, government lags behind considerably. There was a gap of nearly 20 points between the federal and private sectors on this question in 2014.⁹

PROMOTION

From the perspective of employees, seeing a future path for themselves in the organization is important. Some employees, depending on their occupation and position, may be more inclined to stay on the job if they see opportunities to grow and advance their careers. Less than one-third (31.1 percent) of the federal survey respondents, however, were satisfied with opportunities to get a better job in their organizations in 2014. This figure has dropped 8.8 points since the peak score in 2010. The federal government trails the private sector by 13.9 points on this issue, but the relatively low score in the private sector (45 percent) also suggests that this may be a particularly challenging part of the talent lifecycle for any organization.

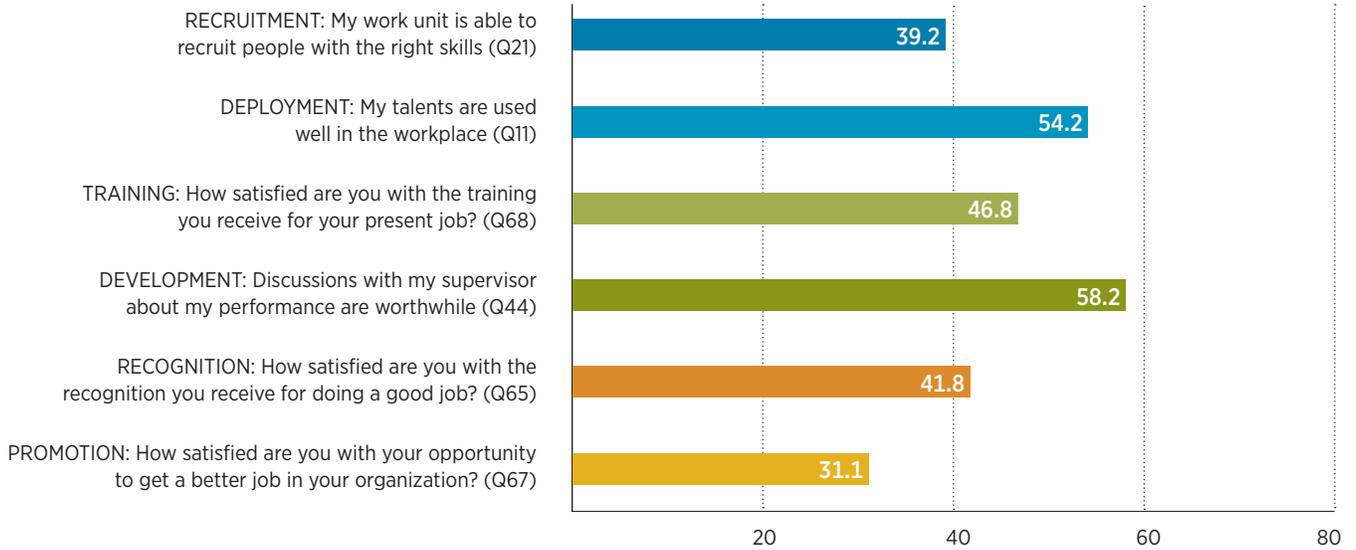
RETENTION + ENGAGEMENT

The ultimate goal for an organization's talent strategy is to keep good employees as long as possible. The majority of federal employees surveyed in 2014 (65.8 percent) said they planned to stay with their organization for at least the next year, 18.6 percent intended to take another job in the federal government, 6.3 percent planned to retire, 4.3 percent said they would leave for a job outside government, and 4.9 percent planned to leave for other reasons.

Those who plan to stay for the next year are much more likely to recommend the agency than those who plan to leave. Not surprisingly, those who plan to leave are less positive toward the agency. However, those who intend to go to another agency are more positive than those who plan to leave for the private sector or for other reasons. Additional analysis revealed that talent issues appear to be particularly important to this group's satisfaction and commitment. In other words, those who are dedicated to federal service want to be in an agency where the workforce has the right skills and abilities.

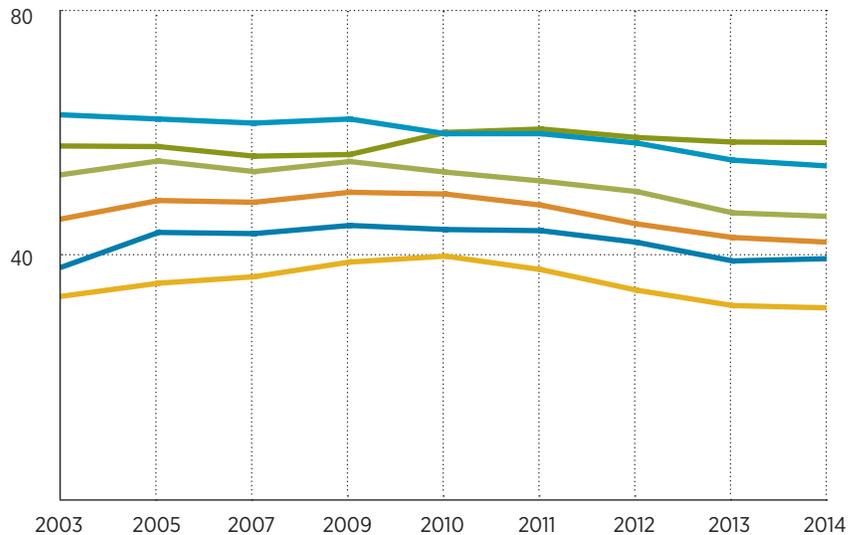
⁹ Hay Group Private-Sector Global Norm

2014 GOVERNMENT-WIDE PERCENT OF POSITIVE RESPONSES ON TALENT MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS



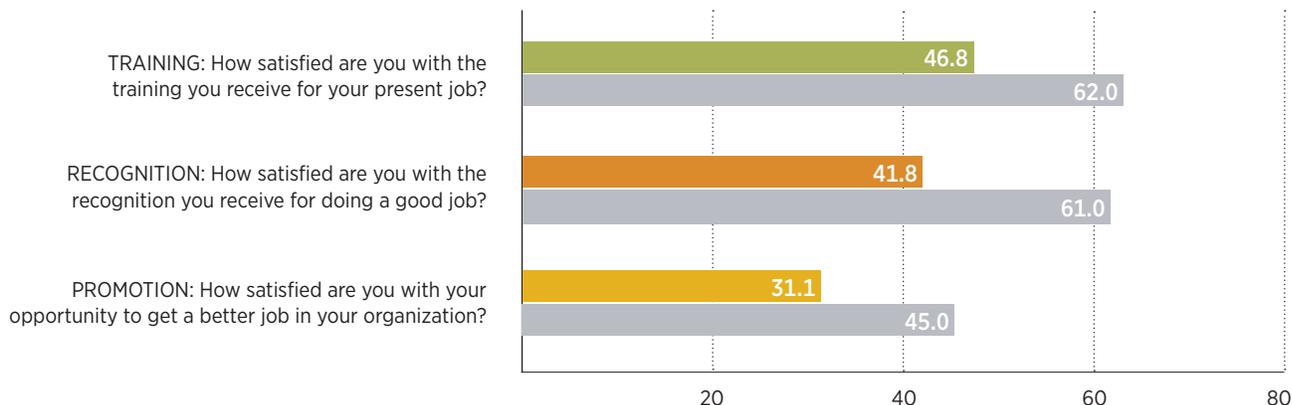
GOVERNMENT-WIDE PERCENT OF POSITIVE RESPONSES ON TALENT MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS OVER TIME

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
RECRUITMENT: My work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills (Q21)	37.8	43.7	43.5	44.9	44.2	44.0	42.0	38.8	39.2
DEPLOYMENT: My talents are used well in the workplace (Q11)	62.9	62.2	61.5	62.2	59.7	59.7	58.1	55.2	54.2
TRAINING: How satisfied are you with the training you receive for your present job? (Q68)	53.1	55.4	53.6	55.3	53.5	52.0	50.2	46.6	46.8
DEVELOPMENT: Discussions with my supervisor about my performance are worthwhile (Q44)	57.6	57.5	55.8	56.1	60.0	60.6	59.1	58.3	58.2
RECOGNITION: How satisfied are you with the recognition you receive for doing a good job? (Q65)	45.8	48.9	48.6	50.3	50.0	48.1	44.9	42.6	41.8
PROMOTION: How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in your organization? (Q67)	33.1	35.3	36.4	38.9	39.9	37.6	34.1	31.5	31.1



PRIVATE-SECTOR COMPARISONS

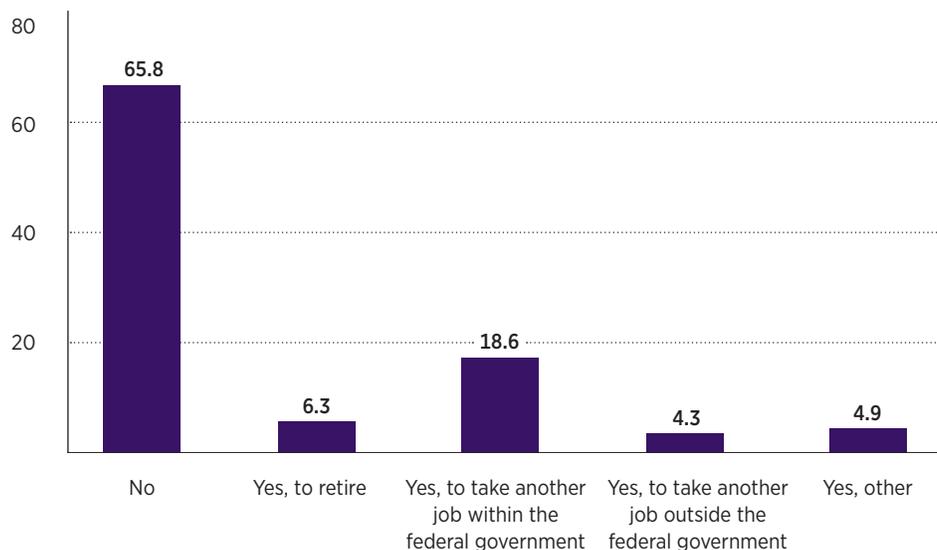
Private sector



GOVERNMENT-WIDE RETENTION AND ENGAGEMENT

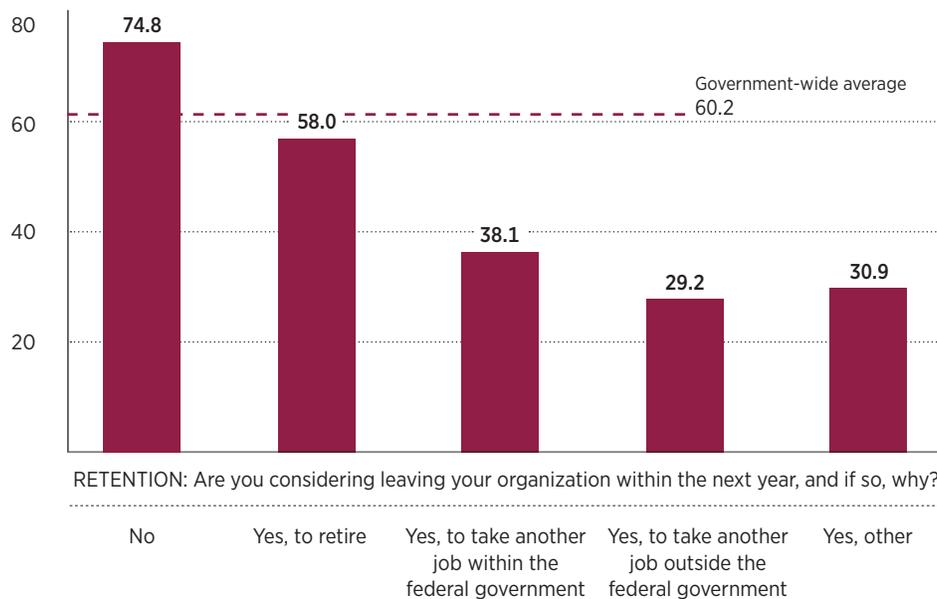
RETENTION: Are you considering leaving your organization within the next year, and if so, why?

The ultimate goal for an organization's talent strategy is to keep good employees as long as possible. The majority of federal employees surveyed in 2014 (65.8 percent) said they planned to stay with their organization for at least the next year.



ENGAGEMENT: I recommend my organization as a good place to work.

Out of those who plan to stay for the next year, 74.8 percent would recommend their agency as a good place to work, which is much higher than those who plan to leave. Not surprisingly, those who plan to leave are less positive toward the agency.



Data sources: Hay Group and OPM, 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

Profile of Pathways

The good news is that the government has taken steps to improve talent management for younger employees with the development of the Pathways Programs. This effort is designed to help agencies recruit and develop future leaders, and is tailored to those at the beginning of their careers. While these programs provide important opportunities, the downside is that these initiatives have not yet realized their potential. Agencies still have some work to do to capitalize on Pathways as a means of strengthening the federal workforce.

So what does Pathways involve?

The Internship Program

This paid program provides current high school, college and graduate students with opportunities to work in federal agencies. Each agency decides how many interns it will hire. We know that internships remain the best way to assess top talent. When agencies use the Pathways Programs, they can noncompetitively convert interns to full-time employees.

The Recent Graduates Program

This paid opportunity is a full-time, one-year developmental program designed for individuals who have received an undergraduate or graduate degree from a qualifying educational institution. Candidates must apply within two years of graduation, with the exception of veterans, who have up to six years to apply due to their military obligations. Participants in the Recent Graduates Program receive training and professional development throughout the year, customized to their own needs. These individuals also are assigned a mentor. Each agency determines how many recent graduates it will hire, and they may also be eligible for conversion to full-time federal employment after completion of the program.

The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program

The PMF Program is the federal government's premier leadership development program for advanced degree candidates. Individuals who have received a qualifying advanced degree are eligible to apply for a federal position within two years of graduation. Fellows are offered paid jobs in federal agencies, participate in an orientation program, receive training and professional development, complete an individual development plan, are assigned a mentor, have at least one rotational or developmental assignment and often have the opportunity to get full-time positions in government.

Benefits

If an agency uses the Pathways Programs, it can noncompetitively convert an intern into a full-time employee, a speedier and easier process than the more cumbersome way individuals are normally hired. Internships also allow for a thorough assessment of the person and fit with the agency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a lot of room for improvement for talent management in the federal government. As evidenced by the low scores from employees, agencies and leaders at all levels have room to improve. Here are some recommendations for how to optimize talent engagement at key points, but perhaps the most fundamental shift is that leaders need to see themselves responsible for this lifecycle, and not view it as the responsibility of the HR office alone.

WHAT AGENCIES CAN DO

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO

RECRUITMENT

Use internships and other strategies to assess potential employees.

One of the best means of assessing and identifying top talent is through internships, where potential applicants can demonstrate their skills for a job and learn if the agency is a good fit. The agency, in turn, can have a chance to fully evaluate the strengths of the individuals. Likewise, other strategies, such as realistic job previews, can help to determine if there is a good match between the person and position.

Communicate a compelling vision.

Offer a strategic direction for the agency or team. Share stories about why the work matters and inspire the best to join. Connect personally with the new or potential employees and express to them why their role is meaningful to the mission.

DEPLOYMENT

Promote a culture where each person's unique talents are understood and valued.

Have a clear understanding of the organization's needs, employees' skill, and the support systems to allow for agile matching and job movement, such as rotational opportunities.

Pay attention to your employees' strengths and interests.

Ask employees how they feel about their work and how their skills are being used. If the response is negative, try to understand the problem and what you might be able to do about it. Consider making changes or offering a new assignment or responsibility.

TRAINING

Be a learning organization.

Provide the workforce with the knowledge and skills they need to do their jobs well through a variety of training options—virtual, on-demand, classroom instructor-led training, or communities of practice.

Be a teacher and a mentor.

Maximize the potential of employees by giving your time and advice, whether it is speaking at a training session, or identifying a unique training opportunity for an individual.

DEVELOPMENT

Make development a priority.

Equip leaders at all levels with the skills and time to coach employees.

Be a coach. Provide feedback through regular check-ins.

Advise employees on challenges and help them navigate the organization.

RECOGNITION

Recognize accomplishments frequently and formally through various channels.

Find ways to surface and honor achievements affecting the mission, strategic goals, or operations. Use non-monetary rewards, such as nominating employees for awards, to recognize good work. Consider creating awards for exemplifying the agency's culture and values.

Say thank you and express appreciation in ways that are authentic.

Share a personal story about the employee's accomplishments, or send a handwritten note with a simple and sincere thank you. This can go a long way. Acknowledge the work of employees when they put in extra effort and time to get the job done.

PROMOTION

Define career paths clearly and fairly.

Give employees a sense of what unique opportunities might be available to them if they stay with the agency. If promotion is not feasible, provide coaching or career counseling.

Be tough yet tender.

Provide realistic feedback to employees. Demand high performance and advance those who excel. Be understanding and helpful to those who need to transition to a new job or organization.