



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

MID-CAREER HIRING IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:

A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

A Report by:
The Partnership for Public Service
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“As it enters the 21st century, the United States finds itself on the brink of an unprecedented crisis of competence in government. The maintenance of American power in the world depends on the quality of U.S. government personnel, civil and military, at all levels.”

From “Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change,” The Phase III Report of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, March 2001

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has become increasingly clear that the United States has a global responsibility to recruit, retain and develop the most talented and capable federal workforce possible. A key part of this workforce is comprised of experienced “mid-career” employees. These are the senior specialists, managers and supervisors who ensure that government accomplishes its critical missions on behalf of the nation. These professionals provide a myriad of services, some as essential to our wellbeing as protecting the air we breathe and the food we eat. Federal workers have also demonstrated the vital role they play in protecting our country against terrorism.

An impending wave of federal employee retirements in the coming years will have a disproportionately large impact on the mid-career ranks in government. After a decade of downsizing in the federal workforce, there will likely be an insufficient number of well-qualified internal candidates to replace them. In order to fill the anticipated skills gaps at the mid- to senior levels, therefore, the federal government must expand its mid-level hiring practices to include non-federal candidates more frequently. This report proposes a viable strategy for doing so, thereby ensuring we continue to have highly qualified and experienced federal employees making government work for us.

There are numerous benefits to launching an aggressive campaign to attract more external applicants for mid-to senior federal positions. Proactive outreach targeting the most talented and motivated individuals yields a strong candidate pool. Furthermore, a balanced recruitment and hiring program can improve diversity and increase access to critical skills and experience. However, achieving this balance will require significant changes in current practices in many federal agencies.

- In FY 2001, almost half (47 percent) of all federal job vacancies at this level were not open to outside competition. Of 48,000 vacancy announcements at the mid-career (GS12-15) level, only 53 percent of them were open to applicants who were not already federal employees.
- Of the more than 60,000 federal positions filled at the GS-12 to 15 grade levels in FY 2000, only 13 percent were filled by individuals hired from outside government.

Simply opening more mid-career vacancies to competition from external applicants, however, will not be enough. Research commissioned for the Partnership for Public Service by Hart-Teeter Research has shown that a lack of information about federal employment opportunities is the single greatest obstacle to recruitment. Non-federal workers may also harbor misperceptions about federal employment, including the nature of work, compensation and benefits.

Barriers to external hiring crop up at the agency level as well. In some cases, for example, the decision to restrict competition to internal candidates may be driven by a lack of resources or infrastructure needed to handle a larger applicant pool. Other barriers include legal and regulatory requirements that make the external hiring process more complex than internal processes. In some cases, organizational culture may constitute a major barrier to increased

hiring competition. It has been common practice at many agencies to “grow their own” by hiring only at the entry level and filling most higher level positions from among current employees. Considering today’s labor force and the federal government’s workforce needs, this practice may simply be outdated.

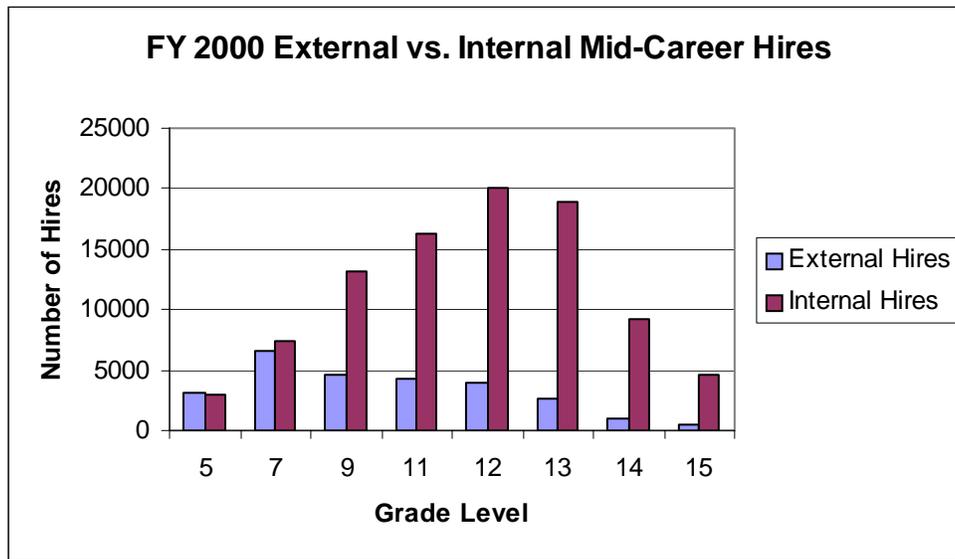
In this report, the Partnership for Public Service offers several recommendations for increasing the applicant pool for mid-career hires in the federal government.

- **Implement a Presidential Management Fellows Program**, a highly competitive and prestigious program targeted at mid-career professionals and modeled on the Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program, to attract exceptional talent both within and outside of government.
- **Advertise federal jobs and their benefits more broadly to targeted audiences** in order to increase awareness of federal job opportunities and debunk negative myths about federal employment.
- **Devise competitive compensation systems** and add flexibilities to existing benefits systems.
- **Remove existing barriers** to external recruitment, including streamlining the application and hiring processes and reviewing staffing policies that unnecessarily limit vacancies to current federal employees.

The federal government’s workforce challenges have been called a crisis by many, but the crisis also presents a significant opportunity to attract talented people to government. A call to federal service may also have particular resonance at this moment in history when many Americans are looking for ways to give back to their country and communities. In this report, the Partnership for Public Service offers several recommendations for bringing experienced workers into federal service, thereby helping to ensure that the government has the workforce it needs to serve and protect Americans.

I. OVERVIEW OF MID-CAREER HIRING IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Federal agencies currently have the capability and authority to hire new employees from outside government in order to fill professional and administrative positions at any level. However, most new hires come into the federal government at the entry-level (GS-5 and 7). As shown in the following table¹, the proportion of new hires from outside government into competitive civil service positions declines noticeably at each grade level above GS-11.



Note: Hiring data is for competitive service positions.

This decline can partially be explained by the fact that fewer federal positions are open to external candidates at mid- to senior levels, and those that are open to external competition are most frequently filled with current federal employees. In filling vacant positions at GS-12 and higher levels, individual federal organizations determine what applicant sources will be used, i.e., internal applicants, external applicants or both. However, even a casual review of federal hiring patterns shows that the most frequent decision made for mid-career level positions is to recruit and select primarily from among current federal employees.

For instance, in FY2001, there were 48,000 vacancy announcements² at the mid-career (GS12-15) level, but only 53 percent of them were open to external applicants³. Moreover, of the more than 60,000 federal positions filled at the GS-12 - 15 grade levels in FY2000, only 13 percent of competitively selected new hires came from outside government.

¹ Central Personnel Data File, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001. The graph pertains to professional and administrative positions only.

² Each vacancy announcement can cover one or more vacant positions.

³ U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, based on a review of vacancy announcements posted on USAJOBS during FY2001.

ONLY 13 PERCENT OF MID-CAREER HIRES CAME FROM OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT IN FY2000.

| NEW HIRES AT THE MID-CAREER (GS12 – 15) LEVEL FY2000 | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------|
| New Hires | Number of New Hires | Percentage |
| External Hires | 8,000 | 13.2% |
| Internal Hires | 52,650 | 86.8% |
| Total Hires | 60,650 | 100% |

While there is no pre-determined “best mix” of external vs. internal placements or hires, the extent of the federal government’s reliance on internal hires merits close scrutiny. The decision regarding which applicants to target should be based on an assessment of which source(s) can provide the best candidates for the position, taking into account the organization’s short and long term needs. Nevertheless, other factors may enter into the decision-making process. In some cases, it may simply be administratively easier to restrict hiring to current agency employees or other federal employees. A strong organizational culture in many federal agencies may also encourage giving first – or often sole – consideration to current employees when filling higher level positions competitively.

Other barriers to outside mid-career hiring crop up on the applicant side of the equation. Surveys show that non-federal applicants lack information about federal jobs and frequently have misperceptions about government employment. A slow application screening process in many agencies and lengthy time-to-hire may discourage others from even applying. These and other mid-career hiring barriers take on a sense of urgency when viewed in the context of the federal government’s current workforce challenges and the increasing demands on government to protect Americans from the threat of terrorism.

The President’s budget calls for an additional 63,000 federal civilian workers, a 60 percent increase over the next two years, in order to meet homeland security demands. This figure is in addition to replacing the more than 200,000 federal employees who are expected to leave during that time. Waning interest in federal service poses a major challenge to the government’s ability to attract such a large number of qualified applicants. According to a 2001 Hart-Teeter national opinion survey conducted on behalf of the Partnership for Public Service, only 1 in 6 college-educated workers see the government as an employer of choice. Furthermore, even those who choose to study government show less and less desire to work in government: 76 percent of graduate students in public policy and public administration programs chose to enter government in 1974. By 1993, the percentage had declined to 49 percent⁴.

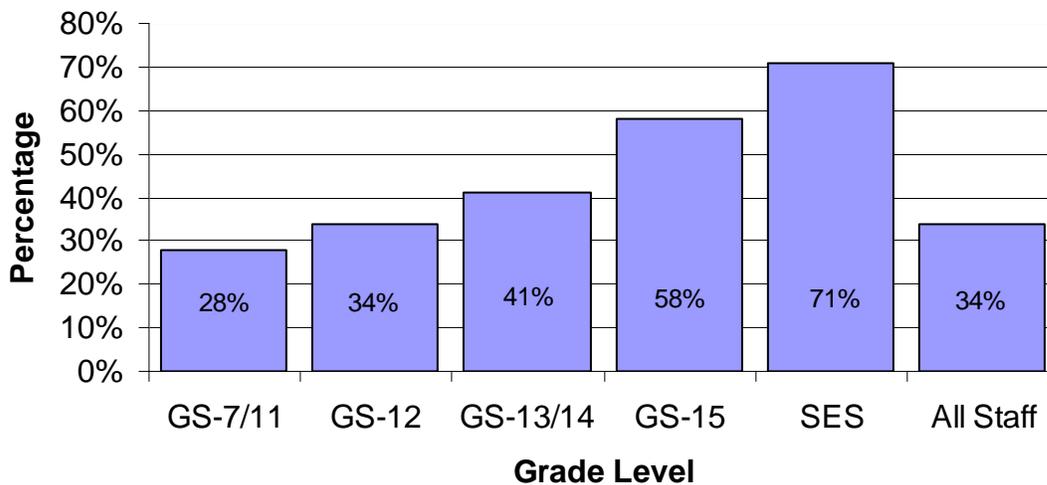
Finally, it appears unlikely that the post-September 11th resurgence in patriotism will be enough to fill the federal workforce gaps. A survey conducted on behalf of the Brookings Institution's Center for Public Service in February 2002, just five months after the World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorist attacks, points to declining public confidence in government. The survey reveals decreasing favorability toward Congress, presidential appointees, and federal government workers.

⁴ The New Public Service, Paul C. Light, 1999.

Although there are many well-qualified candidates for vacant GS-12 and higher positions within the federal workforce, dramatic shifts in U.S. labor force demographics highlight the need for external mid-career hiring in the federal government.

First, America’s baby boomers are graying, and a large percentage of some of the most experienced federal employees will become eligible to retire within the next five years. The chart below shows this concentration of retirement eligible employees at the senior levels. According to General Accounting Office estimates, 34 percent of federal employees and 71 percent of the Senior Executive Service (SES) will be eligible for retirement by FY2005⁵. Entry level hiring alone cannot sufficiently replace the intellectual capital that the government will be losing over the next several years.

**Federal Retirement Eligibility Rates
FY1999 - FY2005**



Secondly, attracting experienced non-federal employees to federal service is particularly important because the existing pool of internal candidates is arguably not as robust as it once was. Between 1993 and 2000, the federal government civilian workforce was reduced by nearly 400,000 employees⁶. At the same time, federal hiring slowed drastically: the number of permanent new hires was reduced from 118,000 in FY1990 to about 74,000 in FY1999⁷. Furthermore, an increasingly knowledge-based economy places higher demands on federal government services and the skills, knowledges and abilities of its workforce. In short, the

⁵ “Maximizing Human Capital in the Government Workplace,” U.S. General Accounting Office, November 2001.

⁶ “Federal Human Resources Management for the 21st Century,” U.S. Office of Personnel Management, September 2000.

⁷ “Major Management Challenges and Program Risks: A Governmentwide Perspective,” United States General Accounting Office, Performance and Accountability Series, January 2001.

number of highly qualified internal candidates has shrunk, and some federal agencies are finding they have a rather thin “bench.”

Lastly, the practice of some organizations to “grow their own” by hiring only at the entry level and filling almost all higher level positions from within may be outdated. There is growing evidence that new entrants to the labor market, and particularly new college graduates, expect to change employers, and even career fields, multiple times throughout their working life. Therefore, a workforce management approach that assumes most new employees will remain with the same organization from “cradle to grave” is likely to fail.

This report outlines the advantages of mid-career hiring from outside the government, analyzes potential barriers, and proposes reasonable, multi-faceted strategies for increasing external hiring of experienced workers. A key component of this strategy is the creation of a “Presidential Management Fellows” program for mid-level intake, which is modeled on the successful Presidential Management Intern (PMI) program.

II. ADVANTAGES OF MID-CAREER HIRING FROM OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT

- **A more robust applicant pool**

Within reasonable limits, the larger the applicant pool for a given job vacancy, the greater the likelihood that highly-qualified and diverse applicants will be represented in that pool.

- **Greater range of skills and experience**

Opening more mid-career hiring to applicants outside of government can help the government achieve a more balanced recruitment mix to fill in the skill gaps created by non-strategic downsizing and the lack of workforce planning. Competition that is open to external candidates can complement the internal pool of highly qualified candidates for mid-level vacancies.

- **Fresh ideas and new perspective**

Considering applicants who possess significant work experience outside the government not only enlarges the applicant pool, but also opens the door to applicants who possess a fresh perspective and ideas new to the organization.

- **Improved diversity**

Going outside the existing federal workforce may, in some cases, be a valuable strategy for improving diversity. Hispanics, for example, are significantly underrepresented at mid-career and senior level positions. Mid-career hiring that is open to external candidates has the potential, particularly if done in connection with targeted recruitment of highly qualified Hispanic applicants, to improve representation in a much shorter period of time than would otherwise be possible.

- **Responsiveness to changes in the labor pool**

Expanded mid-career hiring opportunities for non-federal candidates better reflects the realities of the current labor market. More individuals expect to work for a number of

different organizations during the course of their careers, as opposed to “cradle-to-grave” employment in a single organization beginning at the entry level.

- **Improved merit-based competition**

Opening federal positions to external and internal competition is the best way to ensure fair competition and fill jobs with the best qualified candidates. Open competition also helps to address current employees’ perceptions of unfair internal promotion practices.

- **Appropriate change strategy**

Introducing new employees into an organization can have positive reactions on workforce chemistry. Organizations seeking to implement change, particularly those attempting to transform the organizational culture, could benefit from integrating new elements into their employee mix.

III. BARRIERS TO EXTERNAL MID-CAREER HIRING

Agency Barriers:

- **Lack of effective workforce planning**

As noted earlier, the decision to open more jobs to non-government employees should be driven by a thorough workforce planning effort that takes into account the agency’s mission and the corresponding short and long range workforce needs. Ill informed decision-making may leave in place outdated practices that have traditionally focused on recruitment from among current federal employees.

- **Administrative inconvenience**

It may be technically easier to fill mid-career jobs through the merit promotion process rather than open competition to include non-federal candidates. The “rule of three” and veterans’ preference, for example, do not apply to the internal merit promotion process.

- **Overemphasis on the need for specialized knowledge**

In some cases, there is a legitimate need for specialized knowledge that is rarely found outside the organization, e.g., knowledge of the air traffic control system or knowledge of the relatively complex laws and regulations governing Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Where specialized knowledge, however, is not critical to effective job performance, it simply serves as a barrier to external recruitment efforts.

- **Organizational culture**

The organizational culture in some agencies discourages external mid-career hires for less than valid reasons. For example, the agency has always “grown its own;” current employees find benefit in more limited competition for promotional opportunities and discourage expanding the applicant pool; or there is a non-supportable belief that one cannot be effective in a mid-career position unless one has extensive experience within the organization at lower grade levels.

Applicant Barriers:

- **Difficulty obtaining information on federal jobs**

Mid-career external applicants may find it difficult to obtain information on federal jobs. For example, while some agencies are reaching out to colleges and universities as logical sources for highly qualified entry-level hires into professional and administrative occupations, few agencies are targeting mid-career applicants. Furthermore, a 2001 Hart–Teeter national public opinion survey conducted on behalf of the Partnership for Public Service revealed that lack of information about federal employment opportunities is the single greatest obstacle to recruitment.

- **Misperceptions about federal employment**

The Hart-Teeter survey indicates that non-federal workers view federal employment as less attractive than work in other sectors, based on their assumptions about the nature of federal work and potential rewards. However, many non-federal sector employees harbor misperceptions about the federal government as an employer. For example, while many believe that federal salaries are always below private sector salaries for comparable positions, at the mid-level the government is very competitive for many occupations in various geographical areas.

- **Federal benefits linked to tenure**

Federal employment may be less attractive to mid-career hires, as federal annual leave and other benefits are structured around 30 year career employees. For example, it takes 15 years of federal service to become eligible for maximum annual leave accrual (one day for each full biweekly pay period). A mid-career applicant entering government even after 15 or more years of very relevant private sector experience starts at the bottom in terms of leave accrual (one-half day for each full biweekly pay period).

- **Restrictive federal ethics regulations**

Some highly qualified, ethical mid-career candidates may be discouraged by federal ethics regulations. For example, the requirements for some candidates to divest themselves of stock holdings, complete lengthy financial disclosure forms, undergo extensive background checks, and agree to post-employment restrictions that place limits on their ability to return to private sector employment in their area of expertise all serve as disincentives. While some of these requirements are necessary to protect the public interest in ethical and competent government, others may currently be applied more broadly than necessary.

- **Compensation**

Both real and perceived salary gaps between the federal and non-federal sectors may affect a mid-careerist's decision to apply for a federal government job. Applicants may not be fully aware of the total compensation package the government offers, e.g., the Thrift Savings Plan (with matched contributions), health and retirement benefits, flexible work schedules and generous annual and sick leave. However, we also need to recognize that, in some cases, the federal compensation package is not sufficiently market-sensitive.

- **Organizational culture**

Since a number of federal agencies have traditionally followed a “grow your own” approach to workforce management, mid-career employment opportunities for external candidates are often lacking. Furthermore, information on those that exist is often hard to come by. For example, a recent survey of new federal hires discovered that more than one third of them learned about their jobs from a friend or relative, and only 4 percent learned about opportunities from a federal recruiter.

- **Problematic application process**

A non-transparent, time-consuming and cumbersome application process can deter candidates at many stages of the application process. Multiple application formats for similar occupations across agencies, requests for more information than is needed for an initial screening, and lack of information about application status are among the most frequently cited complaints.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

1. Tailor New Programs:

The Presidential Management Fellows Program: A Fellows program, modeled on the successful Presidential Management Intern (PMI) program, can be developed to serve as a vehicle for mid-level intake. The purpose of the program – which would also be open to current federal employees – would be to attract experienced workers to the Federal civil service and to identify and retain high-performing federal workers. By opening the process to both federal and non-federal applicants, the government preserves the value of truly fair and open competition, and avoids the appearance of denying its employees advancement opportunities. Fellows would enjoy a series of unique training and development opportunities over a two-year period. The program would be centrally administered by OPM on a reimbursable basis and could begin with an initial ceiling of 600 Fellows.

Fellows program candidates would possess a proven track record of success in their chosen field (5+ years of professional experience) and possess a completed graduate degree. A formal assessment process would assign Fellows to a functional track based on their educational and professional experience. An appointment would function as a “federal passport” which allows the appointee to be appointed in any agency at the mid-career level in their respective functional areas. Fellows would be appointed at the GS 12 -13 levels, depending on individual qualifications and agency vacancies (approximately \$55,000 - \$86,000 range per year).

The Fellows Program would include a brief government orientation course, modeled on OPM’s two-week orientation course for new political appointees; rotational assignments; functional-area cohort meetings; cutting-edge training with industry leaders; and an executive mentoring program. In addition, Presidential Management Fellows, like White House Fellows, would be required to produce a high caliber “deliverable,” such as a memo or report for their respective agency heads, by the end of their two-year appointment. These deliverables could be tailored by agencies to meet specific needs.

Being selected as a Presidential Management Fellow would be prestigious for a number of reasons:

- The program would be highly competitive and involve a formal assessment process.
- The program could be associated with the success and prestige of the PMI program.
- Only professionals with a proven track record of success would be eligible to apply.
- Fellows would participate in training with leading private sector companies.
- A limited number would be chosen each year.

Interagency Job Sharing: If a full exchange or detail, as in the IPA Mobility Program, is not appropriate or desirable for some positions, agencies could allow job sharing among counterparts at different agencies, whereby participants continue to perform a portion of their permanent jobs and have the opportunity to perform a similar job in another agency for a predetermined period of time. This program offers the same advantages as the full exchange program, but allows for greater continuity in the participants' home offices. While this does not increase the proportion of new hires at the mid-career levels, it does have some of the same advantages in terms of bringing individuals with new ideas and fresh perspectives into federal organizations.

Digital TechCorps Exchange Program: U.S. Representative Tom Davis (R-VA) introduced a bill, H.R. 2678, in July 2001 to establish a "Digital TechCorps" that would allow government and the private sector to "exchange" workers for up to two years. The program is expected to involve hundreds of workers, generally in their 30s. Agencies would negotiate exchange agreements with companies under which workers would retain their salaries and benefits while participating in the program. The bill also attempts to safeguard against potential conflicts of interest and ethical problems. For example, government workers would have to return to government duty for a period equal to the length of assignment and private-sector workers would not be able to take on procurement-related assignments in areas where their companies seek government contracts. The bill is currently being considered in committee.

2. Expand Existing Programs:

Student Career Experience Program (formerly the "Co-op Program"): The Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) allows students to alternate periods of education and federal employment under terms of an agreement between the student's school and a government agency. Agreements may provide for the student's permanent employment in the agency upon satisfactory completion of the education and work assignments required by the agreement. According to the 2001 OPM Fact Book, undergraduate students comprise about 55 percent of SCEP participants, while graduate/professional degree candidates account for approximately 15 percent, or about 1,600 participants in FY2000. Federal agencies could expand their use of the SCEP to target mid-careerists pursuing advanced degrees. These experienced workers would likely appreciate the flexibility such a program could afford them.

Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Mobility Program: The IPA mobility program was enacted in 1970 to allow cooperation between the federal government and non-federal entities (state and local governments, institutions of higher education, Indian tribal governments, and non-profits) through the temporary assignments of skilled employees. There are about 1400 mobility assignments each fiscal year. These assignments allow federal civilian employees to

work in eligible non-federal organizations for a limited period without losing their employee rights and benefits. Employees of eligible non-federal organizations may work in federal agencies for similar periods.

The profile of mid-careerists suggests that a temporary external detail would be beneficial for both the employee and the deploying federal agency. Mid-careerists may feel burnt out and desire new and different challenges. Expanded use of this program could help agencies retain their mid- to senior level employees by offering them a change of pace at a pivotal point in their working lives. Employees' experiences in different work environments and the knowledge they garner on their assignments could bring a more objective outlook and sharpened skill set to participating agencies.

Federal employees on IPA assignments also serve as ambassadors for the federal government within the organizations to which they are assigned, and can generate interest in federal mid-career opportunities among highly qualified and motivated individuals outside of government.

Exchange Programs: Exchange programs between government and the private sector can be reinstated to increase understanding between the federal and non-federal sectors and to provide developmental opportunities for participants. These programs could be built on the concepts underlying the IPA Mobility Program. A number of exchange programs, such as a senior executive exchange program involving senior executives from the federal government and the private sector, have had limited success. Conflicts of interest and one-sided participation led to waning participation and eventually the abandonment of the program. However, a carefully structured exchange program could effectively serve as a tool for both recruitment and retention purposes. A mid-career exchange program could increase the satisfaction as well as the experience-base of current federal employees, and reduce turnover. It could also increase interest in future federal employment opportunities for the non-federal participants. Furthermore, such a program could foster private sector understanding and support of federal programs and services.

Unfortunately, the attitudes that led to the earlier failure of exchange programs still persist today. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that federal supervisors feel their operations are understaffed and are unwilling to allow staff members to participate in protracted training programs. They would, however, welcome the addition of a non-federal exchange program participant to help out with their workloads. This reality helps explain the one-sided nature of previous exchange programs.

In order to overcome the reluctance of federal agencies to "give up" their employees for the period of the exchange program for fear of losing productivity, this program could be structured to operate primarily as a one-to-one exchange of employees. In addition, a phased approach to the program, allowing a part-time orientation and part-time departure from the program, would allow participants to prepare each other and their work colleagues for the exchange. Participants could also be encouraged to stay in close contact with their counterparts, to ensure a smooth transition and successful exchange.

3. Remove Agency Barriers:

- **Create top-level buy-in**

In order to succeed, a mid-career hiring approach must receive buy-in at top levels of the White House, Congress, OPM, OMB and federal agencies. One way to build support is to create forums that bring policy makers and other stakeholders together to better understand and develop solutions that address identified needs and barriers. For example, this year, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government is hosting a series of Executive Sessions on the Future of Public Service. The most recent session, held in February 2002, included a discussion on mid-career hiring needs.

- **Remove legal and regulatory barriers**

Legislation could revise statutory limitations that discourage the hiring of experienced workers from the non-federal sector. For example, a current proposal contained in S. 1603, the "Federal Human Capital Act of 2001," introduced by U.S. Senators Voinovich (R-OH) and Thompson (R-TN), would allow greater use of a category ranking approach for applicants in place of the outdated "Rule of Three" and that would make it administratively easier for agencies to select well-qualified candidates. Other sections of the bill that would enhance the federal government's ability to attract and hire highly qualified mid-career applicants are provisions to streamline critical pay authority; expedite approval for appointments to positions above the GS-15 level; and accelerate leave accrual for newly hired federal employees from outside government.

- **Link staffing strategies to programmatic outcomes**

OMB has begun to require agencies to submit workforce plans; the next step is working with agencies to develop staffing plans that are linked to programmatic outcomes and which specifically consider workforce needs at the mid-career level.

- **Review staffing policies**

The criteria for deciding when a vacancy announcement should be open to non-government candidates should not be a matter of one group's personal preference, but rather made within the context of long range workforce needs and the statutory merit system principle calling for fair and open competition and selection and advancement based on merit. Furthermore, announced qualification requirements for a mid-level position should not require an unnecessary level of familiarity with current federal programs and operations.

Adherence to that principle and "transparency" in the processes implementing fair and open competition – can go a long way towards ensuring that not only will the federal government have access to the best qualified candidates possible, but that no category of candidates, including current federal employees, will be placed at an unfair disadvantage. An increased emphasis on mid-career intake from outside government – if not properly based on a sound workforce planning effort – could have a negative impact on federal employee morale. Care must be taken, therefore, to ensure that current federal employees are not just given the opportunity to compete on a level playing field for any mid-career opportunities, but that they are also provided with the training and development opportunities that will enhance their competitiveness.

It is also important to note that a recent study by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board finds that employees, supervisors, and union representatives all have reservations about how well the internal merit promotion process is currently working in the federal government⁸. Only 45 percent of federal employees responding to the MSPB survey reported that their supervisors promote the best qualified person, and 75 percent of employees said they were not promoted because the supervisor had someone else in mind before announcing the job was open to competition. Likewise, a significant portion of federal supervisors did not think that their organization's merit promotion process allowed them to select the best qualified applicant. Clearly, additional attention to the government's merit promotion process is warranted.

4. Remove Applicant Barriers:

- **Broadly advertise federal jobs and their benefits**

A more thorough approach to advertising federal opportunities is necessary to correct a primary obstacle to federal recruitment: lack of information. Moreover, educating the public about the tangible and intangible benefits of federal employment could also help to correct the negative stereotypes of the government as an employer.

- **Debunk negative myths around federal employment**

An advertising campaign focusing on debunking negative myths about federal employment could generate interest in the applicant pool. Such a public outreach campaign should target non-entry level groups looking to transition to work that makes "more of a difference" to the country or society, begin a second career in public service, or undertake a temporary or career-building assignment in the public sector.

- **Optimize recruitment for targeted labor pools**

Agencies should determine the most effective recruitment methods to attract the applicant groups needed to fill gaps identified by their workforce planning efforts. This strategy should include the Internet and the optimization of OPM's employment Web site USAJOBS. OPM may benefit from a public/private partnership with one or more online job sites for content, design and marketing expertise.

- **Devise competitive compensation systems**

A goal for the federal government should be the development of a truly market-sensitive compensation system. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management is planning to issue a white paper on federal compensation in the near future, and this could serve as the start of a useful dialogue in this regard.

- **Streamline the application and hiring processes**

Applicants may be discouraged by a complex and time-consuming application process, and may abandon their pursuit of a federal job. Furthermore, by the time an applicant is contacted by a hiring government agency, he/she may have already accepted a job in a

⁸ The Federal Merit Promotion Program – Process v. Outcome, U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, December 2001.

company with a faster, better, more interactive hiring process. Streamlining and automating these procedures will help the government attract the best and brightest, and bring them on board in a timely fashion.

- **Examine legal and regulatory barriers**

In addition to statutory changes to the federal compensation system, other potential barriers to mid-career hiring, such as the seniority-based leave accrual system, should be examined and eliminated whenever possible.

5. Expand the Body of Knowledge:

More information is needed in order to fully understand and proactively address barriers to external mid-career hiring. The following studies could help inform the discussion:

- A survey of existing federal mid-career hires to understand “what went right?”
- A survey of non-federal mid-careerists to determine possible aversions or attractions to federal employment
- Case studies of agencies’ successes in mid-career hiring
- A study of the role of compensation incentives e.g., critical pay authority, and disincentives
- Synthesis and dissemination of the results of existing research to inform policy and decision-making
- A survey of federal employees who choose to leave government mid-career

6. Possible Next Steps:

The Partnership suggests the following actions to move toward the opening up of mid-level positions to external applicants:

- An Executive Order and or legislation to create a Presidential Management Fellows Program
- A Workshop Series for agencies to teach effective mid-career hiring practices
- A tool-kit of flexibilities and effective strategies for mid-career hiring in government
- Support for needed legislative and regulatory changes
- An action plan to expand the number of mid-level positions open to external candidates