

THE FEDERAL HR WORKFORCE



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FED·ER·AL HR WORK·FORCE
(fed(-ə)-rəl āch är
wərċ·fōrs)
noun

Individuals within the government who are employed in the field of personnel recruitment, management and advice.

FURTHER READING

“A Call to Action: A Coalition on the Future of the Federal Human Resource Management Profession,” International Public Management Association, Federal Section, September 2000.

Office of Personnel Management, “Federal Human Resources Employment Trends, An Occupation in Transition, Part 1,” September 1999.

Office of Personnel Management, “The HR Workforce: Meeting the Challenges of Change, An Occupation in Transition, Part 3,” January 2000.

Office of Personnel Management, “Strategic and Operational Plan, 2006-2010,” March 2006.

Federal human resources (HR) professionals today face a critical challenge with enormous implications for the rest of the government. At a time when many of the government’s most experienced workers are retiring from government, the HR community must become even more effective at helping attract, engage, and retain a highly capable and motivated 21st century workforce while also managing transitions to new models of pay and performance. Unfortunately, and for a variety of reasons, much of the HR workforce is ill-prepared to meet this challenge.

THE AILING HR WORKFORCE

According to a 1999 Office of Personnel Management (OPM) report, the federal HR workforce (except for equal employment opportunity employees and civilian HR personnel for the military) declined by 20 percent from 1991-1998, from 22,917 to 18,305 workers. Significant expertise and institutional knowledge was lost and many of the anticipated advances in technology, streamlined operations and regulations never coalesced, leaving HR offices understaffed.

The number of HR professionals has risen slightly since 1998 to approximately 20,000 (out of a civilian workforce of 1.9 million), but according to the federal section of the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR), many of those positions were filled through promotions of administrative and clerical workers who did not receive the needed training. In a 2000 OPM survey of federal HR executives, 94 percent indicated there was a gap between requirements and actual competencies for HR professionals. Only 33 percent said they had formal plans to resolve the problem.

The problems facing the HR workforce are exacerbated by high turnover. Due primarily

to retirements (73 percent of the 1,420 HR professionals that left government in 2005 retired), the number of HR professionals leaving the federal workforce has increased 140 percent from 2001- 2005. Retirement rates will continue to rise; the percentage of HR professionals over 45 years old (65%) is five points higher than the government overall, according to OPM.

PRESCRIPTION FOR CHANGE

In 2002, Congress mandated the establishment of Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs) in each major government agency to ensure that strategic plans address human capital issues at the highest levels. Despite this, insufficient attention has been paid to the talent needs of the HR community. OPM has included goals for improving the federal HR workforce in its 2006-2010 strategic plan, including the development of shared service centers, which is a positive step. However, if agencies are to advance, the government must be as dedicated to improving the HR workforce as it has been to the financial, procurement and information technology workforces. With the leadership of the CHCOs, identified competency gaps among the current HR workforce must be closed, clear and high standards for internal promotions and external hiring must be met, new staff with superior HR skills must be recruited and professional development must be a priority.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Federal HR professionals have a disproportionately large impact on the rest of the federal workforce, and an investment in attracting and developing highly skilled HR employees will pay enormous dividends in improved organizational effectiveness. We must invest in the federal HR workforce today in order to have a first class federal government tomorrow.



To learn more about the Federal HR Workforce, please visit
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