

# Are You Experienced?

## How Boomers Can Help Our Government Meet Its Talent Needs

CIVIC VENTURES POLICY SERIES

Max Stier



**The Civic Ventures Policy Series, focusing on older adults and civic engagement, is made possible through generous support from The UPS Foundation.**

*Civic Ventures is a think tank and program incubator helping society achieve the greatest return on experience.*

# Introduction

The paper you are about to read strikes a personal chord with me.

My father worked in business for 40 years. Like so many of his generation, Dad was deeply moved by John F. Kennedy's call to service, but he had a young family and the right opportunity for public service never presented itself. So Dad stayed in business and threw himself into a wide array of civic and political activities. By age 59, Dad was done with the business world; no more to accomplish, no desire to do more of the same.

But traditional retirement didn't suit him—he had too much energy, too much curiosity, and no interest in golf. He wanted additional income to assure financial security and, besides, he had some unfinished business relating to that call to public service some years before. So Dad went looking for a job in the public sector.

The deck was stacked against Dad in a million ways, but he got lucky. The Virginia Department of Agriculture was looking for a marketing director with Dad's exact skills and, amazingly, he got the job. Someone in the Virginia state government was creative and bold enough to hire a 60-year-old guy from California with no public sector experience!

It was a great match. While Dad was successful in the private sector and found the work gratifying in many ways, he'd tell you today that working in the Virginia state government for five years was the most interesting, most challenging, and most satisfying part of his professional career.

Dad's story is hardly unique, but it is all too rare. Today the Partnership for Public Service is working to make it commonplace. The Partnership, founded by Samuel Heyman and headed by Max Stier, wants "to make the government an employer of choice for talented, dedicated Americans."

A brilliant and persistent leader, Max sees the urgent workforce needs of the federal government and the potential to meet them with older adults who would be thrilled to have the chance to use their skills and passions to serve their country in government jobs. People like my Dad.



John S. Gomperts  
*President, Civic Ventures and  
CEO, Experience Corps*

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## ABOUT THE SERIES

*The Civic Ventures Policy Series seeks to provoke discussion and prompt new policy initiatives that will help America transform the aging of the baby boom generation from a crisis into an opportunity. The series is funded by The UPS Foundation.*

# Are You Experienced?

## How Boomers Can Help Our Government Meet Its Talent Needs

Max Stier

*President and CEO, Partnership for Public Service*

**R**obert Danbeck was one of the brightest stars in Human Resources at IBM, selected to run the business giant's HR offices in Hong Kong, then Beijing and, finally, Bangalore. In 2003, after 35 years at IBM, Danbeck decided it was time to retire, but he didn't want to hang it up. He knew he had more gas in the tank and began searching for a new challenge. He found it working for his country. Danbeck now plays a leading role in the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's efforts to recruit more talented Americans to federal service.

Ann Vande Vanter, a CPA with almost 30 years of experience in the private sector, was appalled at the Enron and WorldCom accounting scandals and how they had shaken her industry. She wanted to make a positive difference and took her skills to the Internal Revenue Service.

John Emens retired from Allfirst Bank after 26 years at Allfirst and 32 years in commercial banking. He now runs the U.S. Export-Import Bank's outreach efforts to American small businesses.

Danbeck, Vande Vanter and Emens certainly aren't celebrities, and their movement into second careers with the government may not even seem that exceptional. But the truth is that their transitions and our government's ability to replicate them are directly tied to our ability to tackle key national challenges in the years ahead.

The first baby boomers have already begun entering their sixties, and millions of Americans will soon be retiring from the workplace. Not only will this wave of retirees be the largest in U.S. history, it will also be the healthiest, best educated and most affluent—which means that retiring boomers can be a tremendous asset for our country. Now is the time to start a debate about how to tap their potential.

Some people are looking to government to come up with new ways to utilize this growing talent pool to promote national goals. That's a good idea, but in addition to looking for solutions *from* government, it's time people realized one of the solutions is to get more older Americans working *in* government.

Our federal government—the nation's largest employer—will be especially hard hit by the boomer retirement wave. The average age of the federal workforce is over 46 and climbing.<sup>1</sup> And over the next five years, nearly half of federal workers will be eligible to retire, including nearly 70 percent of senior managers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *The Fact Book*, February 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *Issue Brief PPS-05-08: Federal Brain Drain*, November 2005.

With so many positions being vacated in the federal government, as well as state and local governments, it only makes sense to look to other retiring boomers as possible replacements. Some of these retirees could come from the government itself, including the military, but many more could come from the private and nonprofit sectors.

**In addition to looking for solutions from government, it's time people realized one of the solutions is to get more older Americans working in government.**

Getting experienced workers from outside of the federal space to enter government service won't be easy. Over time, government has grown isolated from external talent pools. Today, the flow of talent from the private and nonprofit sectors into the highest levels of our civil service is barely a trickle.

But logic and necessity dictate that an effort to get more retirees to enter government service should be explored. And a number of signs—in particular, a match of numbers, interests, jobs and skills—suggest that such an effort could work. If it does, it would be a win-win—for older Americans, who would find meaningful opportunities to use their talents and experience, and for the federal government, which would gain highly skilled talent to help solve our nation's most pressing problems.

This paper will explore the nature of government's challenges as the boomer generation begins to retire and explain why government should look to recent and potential retirees to meet its workforce challenges. It will also lay out a number of recommendations for how to facilitate the entry of talented older Americans into government service.<sup>3</sup>

## **THE CHALLENGE: BRAIN DRAIN + THIN BENCH + ISOLATION = TROUBLE**

Every day, we rely on the federal government to deliver vital services—from protecting our homeland to promoting a competitive economy to preserving natural resources. New challenges, including the threat of terrorism, increasing globalization and rising energy costs, intensify the need for the government to act.

Unfortunately, at this critical time, the federal government faces an unprecedented exodus of talent as the boomer generation nears retirement. Complicating matters, the federal government has become increasingly isolated from other sectors of the U.S. labor market, making it difficult for the government to attract the experienced talent it needs.

### **Brain drain**

The loss of experienced personnel, many analysts say, can be one of the surest ways to undercut an organization's effectiveness. When this loss occurs rapidly and is concentrated in critical positions, the results can be devastating. For example, the departure of some of the most experienced employees at the Federal Emergency Management Agency is often cited as a key reason the agency failed to respond effectively to Hurricane Katrina.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, most major organizations will lose significant amounts of talent as the boomers begin to retire, but the federal government is particularly vulnerable. While the average age of the American worker has increased over the past decade, the federal civil service has 1.5 times as many workers over age 45 (58 percent) as the U.S. workforce (40 percent).<sup>5</sup> According to U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) estimates, among all full-time permanent employees in the federal workforce as of October 2004, 58 percent of supervisory and 42 percent of non-

<sup>3</sup> While this paper will focus on our federal government, most of the ideas and lessons contained would be applicable to state and local governments as well.

<sup>4</sup> Hsu, Spencer, "Leaders Lacking Disaster Experience; 'Brain Drain' at Agency Cited," *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation: September 2005, October 2005 and U.S. Office of Personnel Management," *FedScope*, September 2005.

supervisory workers will be eligible to retire by the end of FY 2010.<sup>6</sup> In addition to these potential retirements, about 250,000 federal employees are expected to resign or leave for other reasons over the next five years. This combination of retirements and other departures will result in a loss of about 550,000 employees, more than one-third of the full-time permanent workforce.

The impact on government effectiveness will be compounded by the concentration of turnover in high-level and hard-to-staff positions with specialized skills:

- 40 percent of Department of Homeland Security managers and program analysts will reach retirement eligibility by 2009.<sup>7</sup>
- 42 percent of the Senior Executive Service—government’s top-ranking civil servants—is projected to retire by 2010.<sup>8</sup>
- 87 percent of claims assistants and examiners in the Social Security Administration and 94 percent of their administrative law judges will reach retirement eligibility by 2010.<sup>9</sup>

The federal government needs to work to encourage top workers who are retirement-eligible to stay by allowing flexible and part-time work schedules and other incentives. But that alone will not be enough to make sure that our government’s talent needs are being met.

### Thin bench

All good organizations develop talent from within. The federal government has done a good job on this front in the past and should continue to make this a priority. However, during the 1990s there was a concerted and successful effort to reduce the size of the federal workforce by almost 400,000 employees.<sup>10</sup> During that time, hiring was very limited and the average age of the federal workforce continued to climb.

The size of the federal workforce has grown slightly post-9/11 with the establishment of the Transportation

Security Administration and increases in other select agencies, but most federal organizations have been relatively stagnant in terms of growth. Consequently, the number of high-level employees who will retire in the coming years will likely exceed the number of promotion-ready candidates who are already in the federal government.

**Over the next five years, nearly half of federal workers will be eligible to retire, including nearly 70 percent of senior managers.**

This lack of “bench strength” will force the government to look externally to find highly qualified candidates to fill these mid-level and high-level positions. It will also increase the demand for talent at the lower levels of government, as a growing number of the people currently serving at those levels will be promoted.

It should also be noted that the government is not just facing a pending numbers shortage, but also a skills shortage, as it will need individuals with proven management skills and the sophisticated understanding of programs to help train and provide on-the-job development opportunities for new workers.

### Isolation

The lack of enough highly qualified internal candidates to fill the government’s looming vacancies is exacerbated by the fact that the federal government is, in many ways, isolated from the other sectors.

This increasing separation of government from the labor force is part of a continuing trend that began a generation ago. In his book, *The Warping of Government Work*, Harvard professor John Donahue describes the federal government as “an island apart.”

<sup>6</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *Issue Brief PPS-05-08*, November 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *Where the Jobs Are: The Continuing Growth of Federal Job Opportunities*, 2005, A-20.

<sup>8</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *Issue Brief PPS-05-08*, November 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *Where the Jobs Are*, A-40.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *Managing Federal Recruitment: Issues, Insights and Illustrations*, 2004, 5.

Donahue says a gap between government and the rest of the economy began opening up in the 1970s as the economy became “more global, more diverse, more sophisticated, technologically complex and flooded with information.”<sup>11</sup>

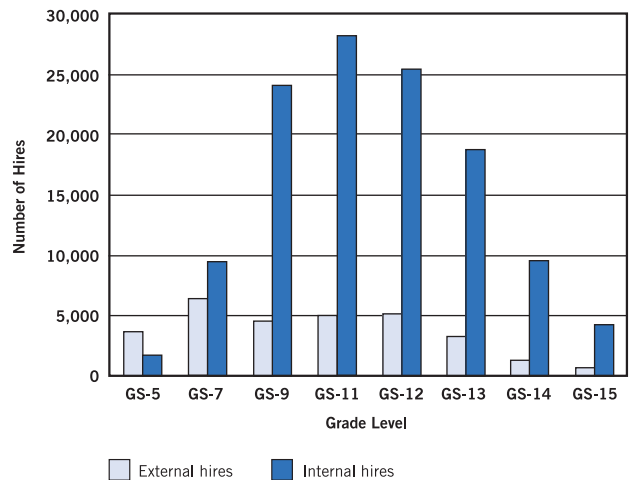
The private economy has evolved, Donahue writes, to include more opportunity, more reward and more risk. In contrast, the public sector is still a place where both risk and opportunity are dampened. Donahue does not assert that either the private or public work environment is better. He simply states that they are now unmistakably *different*.<sup>12</sup> The consequence is that government is increasingly shut off from the outside, and hence shut off from many new individuals, new ideas and new solutions that could be valuable assets.

This isolation is reflected by government’s poor track record when it comes to tapping into external talent pools. Perhaps the best illustration of this isolation can be found by looking at the federal civil service’s mid-career level. Mid-career employees are the managers, supervisors and senior specialists who drive the work of federal agencies from the trenches. These professionals, at the top four grades (GS-12 to 15) of the General Schedule pay system, make up 35 percent of the federal workforce.

The federal government continues to draw the vast majority of its mid-career hires from within its workforce via competitive promotion. As the following graph demonstrates, the proportion of competitive service new hires from outside government is much lower for mid-career positions than for entry-level jobs.

Of the more than 68,000 employees hired at the GS-12 to 15 levels in FY 2003, *only 15 percent* were from outside government.<sup>13</sup> The fact that only 15 percent of mid-career positions are being filled with external candidates is hardly a surprise when you consider how

FY 2003 External vs. Internal Hiring



few jobs are even made available to non-government candidates. In FY 2003, more than 36,000 mid-career level vacancies were posted at USAJobs, the government’s online home for job information. Of those, only 43 percent were open to applicants from outside the federal government.<sup>14</sup> It’s hard to say what the right percentage of external hires would be, but it is safe to conclude that when less than half of all federal vacancies are even being opened to non-government candidates, government could be doing more to explore external pools of talents.

### Trouble

Taken independently, each of these matters—the looming brain drain, the thin bench and government’s isolation—is cause for concern. Added together, these factors constitute a gathering crisis that threatens to undermine our national strength. Good government requires good people, and if our government hopes to have the talent it needs to effectively serve the needs of the American people, federal leaders and key stakeholders need to pursue creative strategies to revitalize the federal workforce.

<sup>11</sup> Donahue, John D., *The Warping of Government Work*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Monster House Data Source, Office of Personnel Management and USAJobs, FY2003.

## MATCH GAME

The pending retirement of the baby boomers will create new human capital challenges for our federal government, but there's hope on the flip-side of the very same coin. As baby boomers retire from current jobs in the private and nonprofit sectors, they will create a new reservoir of experienced talent from which our government can draw. That could be a good fit for all parties.

### Numbers match

The latest government estimates show that from FY 2006 through 2010, more than 550,000 federal employees will leave government. This represents more than one-third of all full-time permanent employees. About 300,000 of these departures will be retirees, many of whom are the government's most experienced employees. During those same five years, the number of Americans age 55 and older is projected to increase by more than 9 million.<sup>15</sup> Many of these millions of new retirees will take some time off, then head back into the job market. According to a survey by AARP, 70 percent of boomers say they expect to continue working in their "retirement" years.<sup>16</sup> It makes sense for large numbers of them to at least consider our nation's largest employer—the federal government—as a viable option.

### Interest match

Not only are a growing number of older Americans interested in working after retirement, but they are also increasingly interested in jobs with meaning and purpose. According to the MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures *New Face of Work* survey, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, half of all Americans age 50 to 70 want work that helps others. Baby boomers are ahead of the curve: 58 percent of those in their 50s are interested in work that will help improve the quality of life in their communities, now and in retirement.<sup>17</sup>

Government service offers unique opportunities to work on challenges on a large and consequential scale.

For example, Wayne D. Hettenbach left private practice to be a trial attorney in the Department of Justice's Environmental and Natural Resources Division. He prosecutes cases involving violations of endangered species law. "Public service was always something I wanted to do. I was always interested in being a federal prosecutor," Hettenbach said. "Today I prosecute people who are involved in violating the endangered species law. It's a great job, and it's a job that is unique to federal government."<sup>18</sup>

**Not only are a growing number of older Americans interested in working after retirement, but they are also increasingly interested in jobs with meaning and purpose.**

### Job match

Many retirees from the private sector don't have the same financial needs as they did earlier in their careers and are more concerned with good health care benefits than a large salary. Federal employment is a great option for these individuals. Those who have recently retired from the private sector, who then work for at least five years in the federal government, become vested for life in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP).

Government also offers a good match for many boomers because it can offer one of the most important things that retirees seek—flexibility. The Office of Personnel Management recently launched a major push across government to offer more flexible work arrangements. This new effort, called *Career Patterns*, calls on federal agencies to develop alternative work arrangements that will help attract and retain top talent from all age groups.

As for geographic desirability, federal jobs can't be beat. Today 84 percent of all federal civil service employees are based outside Washington, D.C.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> AARP, *Staying Ahead of the Curve: The AARP Work and Career Study*, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures, *New Face of Work* survey, 2005, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Wayne D. Hettenbach, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *FedScope*, September 2003.



## Skills match

Government jobs are available for almost every occupation. Many people who are looking to change jobs in their 50s and 60s are not necessarily looking to change professions. For those people, the federal government offers myriad jobs that won't require retraining. The same point applies to federal retirees, whose skills might be in demand and easily transferable to another government agency.

In addition, just as the federal workforce is becoming more highly-skilled and white collar, so is the 55-plus population. While less than one-third of today's adults aged 70 to 74 have at least some college education, more than half of people aged 55 to 59 have some college experience.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, three out of five federal workers are in managerial, business, financial or professional positions—double the proportion in the workforce as a whole.<sup>21</sup> Most federal workers engage in work involving the use of analytical and technical skills, as opposed to production-related activities. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, the distribution of federal jobs will continue to shift toward more professional and related occupations.<sup>22</sup>

## OBSTACLE COURSE

If it's such a good idea for retirees and potential retirees to be pursuing second careers in the federal government, then why isn't it already happening in larger numbers?

### Internal obstacles

The greatest obstacles are within government. They are largely cultural, and many of them stem from the government's isolation.

Again, the federal government generally fills vacancies above the entry level with internal candidates, and it does so almost exclusively when filling senior positions. Consequently, one of the biggest reasons federal managers miss out on talented candidates outside of government is that they aren't even looking.

Even for those positions that are open to non-federal employees, the very nature of the federal hiring process is a major deterrent to potential federal workers. Candidates for federal jobs are often discouraged by a complicated and lengthy application process, in addition to wait times that can run up to a year or more in some cases. This slow process is particularly off-putting for people with extensive work experience who have other options.

Federal retirees who might be interested in a second career in federal service face a big financial disincentive—most typically have their new salary reduced by the amount of their retirement annuity. There are provisions to waive this offset in some circumstances, but that waiver is rarely used. As a result, federal retirees who want to return to work in government generally come back to work as private contractors at a much higher cost to the taxpayers.

**One of the biggest reasons federal managers miss out on talented candidates outside of government is that they aren't even looking.**

In the end, the biggest internal obstacle is probably the culture barrier at federal agencies. Considering the government's increasing isolation from other sectors, many current federal employees are likely to be skeptical about whether an "outsider" coming in will know the "right" way to do things.

### External obstacles

The biggest external obstacle is public attitudes toward and knowledge about government.

First, there is a major knowledge gap in the U.S. population regarding federal jobs. Polling suggests that most Americans do not even see federal service as being public service, undercutting one of government's biggest recruiting tools.<sup>23</sup> Additional Partnership research shows that among populations where interest in government service may be high, a lack of

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Educational Attainment in the U.S.*, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Career Guide to Industries: Federal Government, Excluding the Postal Service*, 2004-2005 edition, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *The Class of 9/11: Bringing a New Generation of Practical Patriots into Public Service*, May 2005, 6.



knowledge about opportunities in government precludes individuals from acting on this interest.<sup>24</sup>

A Partnership survey also found that while a solid majority of Americans think there are good jobs available in the federal government, the percentage of mid-career professionals who believe “there are great jobs for people like me” is a significantly lower percentage than the percentage among the general population.<sup>25</sup> This finding reinforces the notion that many Americans see government as an island apart.

In addition, according to the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research, trust in government is down from 76 percent in 1964 to 30 percent today.<sup>26</sup> Research by University of Akron’s Dr. Dennis Doverspike has shown that there is a strong link between trust in government and interest in government service.<sup>27</sup>

**Most Americans do not even see federal service as being ‘public service,’ undercutting one of government’s biggest recruiting tools.**

Another problem is a lack of inspirational leadership to draw talent into government service. Many of the federal employees who will soon retire from government chose to work in government because they were answering President Kennedy’s call to serve more than 40 years ago. In recent years, not only have a growing number of elected officials from both parties chosen not to promote government service the way Kennedy once did, but they have run campaigns “against government.”

## HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

To help federal agencies—and the federal government overall—tap the potential of recent and future retirees,

the Partnership for Public Service offers the following recommendations. This preliminary list of recommendations will expand as we learn more about this issue.

### Learn the facts—conduct comprehensive research

These are largely uncharted waters. Little is known about what works and what doesn’t when it comes to hiring Americans aged 55 and older into government jobs. Comprehensive research should be conducted to examine the following questions:

- To what extent is the federal government hiring new employees from outside government, and what proportion of these new hires are older Americans?
- Which federal agencies have successfully attracted experienced, older talent? What approaches have been most effective?
- Which agencies have not hired from “outside,” and why not?
- What are the perceptions about, and what is the interest in, core federal careers among retirees and soon-to-be-retirees?
- What should the federal government do to attract larger numbers of boomers, and what can be done to encourage agencies to hire more experienced talent from outside?
- What are the barriers that older workers face as they seek to enter federal service, and how can these barriers be eliminated or minimized?
- How can federal agencies ensure that newly-hired older workers successfully transition to government careers?
- What factors discourage government agencies from giving serious consideration to experienced workers from outside government?
- What incentives will encourage government agencies and managers to make greater use of older, experienced talent when filling vacancies?

### Make more flexible work arrangements available

Many retiring boomers considering second careers are looking to take short-term jobs that offer flexible schedules, which is also true of the U.S. labor force as a whole. In order to help federal agencies compete

<sup>24</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *Back to School: Rethinking Federal Recruiting on College Campuses*, May 2006, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Partnership for Public Service, *A New Call to Service for an Age of Savvy Altruism*, August 2004, 8.

<sup>26</sup> University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Dr. Dennis Doverspike, University of Akron, 2006.

for talent that seeks flexibility and mobility, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management has launched a new initiative called *Career Patterns*. This effort calls on federal agencies to develop alternative work arrangements that will help attract and retain top talent from all age groups, including boomers. *Career Patterns* is a valuable effort and it should be enhanced to place more emphasis on ways to attract retiring boomers.

#### **Promote a change in the culture within government**

It is important to maintain a drumbeat within government that constantly repeats the message: When it comes to federal human capital issues, the status quo is not acceptable. Perhaps the biggest value of *Career Patterns* is that it sends a clear message to federal agencies that a new way of thinking is required. Beyond the messaging, the creation of a federal leadership training institute could help promote the successful integration of senior “outsiders” into the government.

#### **Undertake creative initiatives to “prime the pump”**

Someday federal agencies will fill more vacancies with retirees as part of the normal course of business, but today it makes sense to explore ways to prime the pump. One idea: Create an elite fellowship program for older Americans, modeled after the White House Fellows program. This effort would not only allow older Americans each year to get exciting opportunities working at high levels of government, but it would be a valuable public relations tool to let retirees know that there are opportunities for them in government. Another idea: Establish pilot programs at a few agencies to see if they can successfully attract and use boomer talent.

#### **Fix the federal hiring process**

To attract the talent it needs, the federal government must continue to work on changing its hiring practices to be faster and smarter. With applicants waiting up to a year for an employment offer, government misses too many opportunities to hire in-demand talent. The problem is even more acute for jobs that require a security clearance, which can add months to an already lengthy process.

To combat the problem, the Partnership for Public Service enlisted the services of a dream team of the nation’s premier recruiting experts to give the federal hiring process an “Extreme Hiring Makeover.” Working on a pro-bono basis with three pilot agencies, the teams helped diagnose problems in each agency’s recruitment and hiring processes and then piloted new solutions, which have streamlined their hiring processes. Government-wide interest and action since the completion of the project have been substantial. To enable agencies across government to apply the tools, techniques and lessons of the Extreme Hiring Makeover, the Partnership also worked collaboratively with the Office of Personnel Management to develop and release an online “Hiring Toolkit,” which can be found at <http://www.opm.gov/HiringToolkit>.

**To attract the talent it needs, the federal government must continue to work on changing its hiring practices to be faster and smarter.**

#### **Use available hiring flexibility**

During the past few years, there has been a great deal of legislative and regulatory action to increase hiring flexibility. But this new flexibility will only show results if it is employed throughout the government. OPM should continue to help agencies educate their human resource professionals and management about existing hiring flexibility, and agency leaders should encourage the use of this flexibility and allocate adequate funding. Programs that are already in place—recruitment bonuses, relocation bonuses, and direct hire authority for specialized and high-need occupations—could be major tools in helping agencies attract and retain the experienced talent necessary to meet agency objectives.

#### **Create networks to generate an active pipeline of experienced talent interested in government work**

Employees at some private companies and nonprofits are especially well-suited to make the transition into government. Federal human resource professionals

and managers should identify and tap into the appropriate networking channels to target desired experienced employees. Workshops should also be held with network partners to improve understanding of the federal government, the various federal agencies, work opportunities available in the agencies, and the differences and similarities between work in the public and private sectors.

#### **Expand mentoring and orientation programs**

While external boomer hires can bring a wealth of skills and abilities as well as a fresh perspective to federal agencies, it is important that hires from outside of government are given assistance in learning the culture and work process of their new agencies. Agencies should implement orientation programs that recognize the unique culture of the federal workforce and help external mid-career hires assimilate. On the individual level, agencies could implement mentoring and professional development programs to promote both short-term assimilation and long term retention of external hires.

#### **Make sure that efforts to look for external talent complement the existing workforce**

Hiring retired boomers should be done in a way that is sensitive to the legitimate expectations of current employees. If efforts to bring in experienced professionals from external sources are seen by existing employees as threats to their own career prospects, employee satisfaction levels can decline, with serious implications for organizational success. Agency leaders should be careful to communicate to employees that there remain significant opportunities for progress in their careers.

#### **Make it easier for federal retirees to re-enter the government workforce**

The federal government should better utilize waivers of the salary offset requirement for re-employed federal retirees. Currently, when most federal retirees are re-hired, their salaries are reduced by the amount of their pension. The existing authority to waive this salary offset when it is in the interest of the government (e.g., to fill a critical need) should be expanded and delegated to each agency.

## **SUMMARY**

Getting federal agencies to actively recruit and hire from the pool of talented retirees who will soon be on the job market will not be easy. It will require significant changes in the way agencies behave and older Americans think about government. But while there is cause for skepticism, there is even more cause for hope. The need for an effort to bring older Americans into government service is compelling, and so is the evidence that it can work.

*Robert Danbeck* is putting 35 years of experience at IBM to work, to make a difference for his country at OPM.

*Ann Vande Vanter* is putting 30 years of private-sector experience as a CPA to use at the Internal Revenue Service.

*John Emens* is drawing on 32 years of experience in the banking industry to run the U.S. Export-Import Bank's outreach efforts to American small businesses.

And there are many others already on the job.

Older workers can be a tremendous asset to our federal government. Now is the time to launch a concerted effort to get more retirees to serve our country through government service. Doing so will be good for America's retirees and good for America.

### About the Author

Max Stier is the President and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service. He has worked previously in all three branches of the federal government.

In 1982, he served on the personal staff of Congressman Jim Leach. Stier clerked for Chief Judge James Oakes of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in 1992 and clerked for Justice David Souter of the United States Supreme Court in 1994. Between these two positions, Stier served as Special Litigation Counsel to Assistant Attorney General Anne Bingaman at the Department of Justice.

In 1995, Stier joined the law firm of Williams & Connolly where he practiced primarily in the area of white collar defense. Stier comes most recently from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, having served as the Deputy General Counsel for Litigation.

Stier is also an adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University, serves on the Board of Directors of Public Agenda and is a National Academy of Public Administration Fellow. He is a graduate of Yale College and Stanford Law School.

### About Civic Ventures

Civic Ventures ([www.civicventures.org](http://www.civicventures.org)) is a think tank and incubator, generating ideas and inventing programs to help society achieve the greatest return on experience. Founded in the late 1990s by social entrepreneurs John Gardner and Marc Freedman, Civic Ventures is defining a new stage of life and work between the end of midlife careers and the beginning of true old age—and finding new ways to apply the experience of baby boomers to society's greatest challenges. Civic Ventures runs two major programs, Experience Corps and The Purpose Prize.

### About The UPS Foundation

Founded in 1951 and based in Atlanta, Ga., The UPS Foundation ([www.community.ups.com](http://www.community.ups.com)) identifies specific areas where its support will clearly impact social issues. The UPS Foundation's major initiatives currently include programs that support increased global volunteerism, literacy, and hunger relief. In 2005, The UPS Foundation donated more than \$43.8 million to charitable organizations worldwide.

### About the Partnership for Public Service

The Partnership for Public Service ([www.ourpublicservice.org](http://www.ourpublicservice.org)) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to revitalize our federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and transforming the way government works.



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*by Max Stier*