



AMERICA HAS TALENT

Breaking the Mold for Federal Recruiting

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PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to revitalize the federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works.

INTRODUCTION

You don't need to look far or wide to learn what's wrong with federal recruiting and hiring or to encounter the many challenges and barriers that impede agencies' progress. Recruitment efforts are passive, agency leaders fail to prioritize talent issues, hiring takes too long, candidate quality is spotty and key players don't cooperate. In addition to the raft of anecdotal evidence that supports these points, the problems and challenges have been well-documented in several recent research reports.¹

While there is much truth in these widely-acknowledged criticisms and a clear need to address them, it's worth remembering that they don't apply to agencies across-the-board. For every problem area in recruiting and hiring, there also are examples of agencies that are doing things well, making progress and serving as potential models—and in some cases inspirations—for others. Rather than posting openings on USAJOBS.gov and praying for qualified candidates to show up, these agencies are trying new strategies, securing needed commitments, breaking down silos and learning as they go.

Through this project, which was made possible by Monster Government Solutions, the Partnership for Public Service set out to find and highlight a group of agencies that are making headway on key challenges related to recruiting and hiring for hard-to-fill positions and to attracting special groups. This project focuses on recruiting in five areas: (1) recruiting veterans, (2) recruiting returned Peace Corps volunteers, (3) building talent pipelines for younger workers and diverse applicants, (4) recruiting people with disabilities, and (5) e-recruitment, web technologies and branding. For each area, we set the context and summarize the recruiting and hiring challenges before shining a spotlight on several agency approaches.

The examples we show are based on interviews with human resources specialists and recruitment officials at 14 federal agencies. They include snapshots of specific recruiting techniques and strategies being used, some well-tested and others in the early trial and error stages.

Through the interviews, some common themes became apparent. We found that:

- A slate of best practices is not enough to guarantee agency success or to add value.
- Effective agencies tend to draw on their strengths in recruiting and use what they have available; they stay in close touch with key stakeholders to build good relationships; they seek regular feedback on what works and what doesn't in order to keep improving; and they start small and build success incrementally.
- Tying all the strands together is the leadership in these agencies, which is committed to finding good talent, building on it and providing the necessary support.

A central goal of this project is to help broaden the dialogue around federal recruiting and hiring by highlighting positive approaches to the problems with which many agencies struggle. A related goal is to help agencies use existing tools and flexibilities in new ways to address their recruiting and hiring challenges—essentially to do more with the tools at hand. The agencies and recruiting practices that we spotlights are by no means exhaustive—there are many more in government. At the end of the day, we believe these kinds of stories, and the conversations they inspire, can help agencies connect with and learn from the good work of their peers.

¹ Reforming Federal Hiring, U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board; *Closing the Gap: Seven Obstacles to a First-Class Federal Workforce*, Partnership for Public Service, July 2010; *The Weakest Link How Strengthening Assessment Leads to Better Federal Hiring*, Partnership for Public Service, August 2010.

PART ONE

RECRUITING VETERANS FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT

BACKGROUND

In deference to their military service, American veterans have for many years received preference in federal hiring. This gives veterans an appropriate leg up when competing for certain federal jobs. Additionally, agencies have access to tools such as the Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA), which allows them to non-competitively hire qualified veterans who meet certain eligibility requirements.² The VRA lets agencies quickly bring veterans into positions that could otherwise take many months to fill.

In fiscal 2009, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) reported that 512,671 federal workers—just over one in four—were veterans.³ Partly due to the high unemployment rate of veterans returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, President Obama issued an executive order in November 2009 directing OPM to create a government-wide council on veterans hiring and to establish veterans' employment offices at 24 executive branch agencies.

In addition, OPM developed a government-wide marketing campaign on the value of veterans, and launched the FedsHireVets.gov website in January 2010, which established an information gateway on federal employment for veterans. In July of 2010, as part of the initiative, agency human resources (HR) staff and hiring managers received OPM training on recruiting and employing veterans. Agencies were encouraged to develop their own operational plans to identify qualified veterans and to assist them in navigating the federal hiring process.

THE CHALLENGE

“Our mission is simple: hire more veterans,” said OPM Director John Berry. “It benefits our government to utilize their skills and dedication to service.”⁴ Berry has noted that more than 32,800 veterans were hired in the first six months of fiscal 2010 by federal agencies, exceeding the total for the same period in the previous year by 2,600 hires.

But hiring of veterans is uneven, with roughly 80 percent of all such employees being accounted for by four agencies: the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs and Transportation. Agencies typically face at least three key challenges in attracting veterans. On the demand side, agency managers are not always aware of, or able to recognize, how the skills of veterans match up with positions that are available. And many remain passive, only looking at veterans that apply for jobs, rather than intentionally seeking out veteran talent. On the supply side, agencies must often educate veterans and their families about job opportunities that may be unfamiliar to them. Agencies may also need to offer assistance to help veterans more effectively target their resumes when applying for these jobs.

OPM recently reported significant progress in recruiting veterans by the Departments of the Treasury, Agriculture, Justice and Interior. Following are brief summaries of what Treasury, as well as Customs and Border Protection, are doing to recruit and hire veterans.

² *Special Hiring Authorities for Veterans*, OPM, <http://fedshirevets.gov/job/shav/index.aspx>

³ *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Executive Branch Fiscal 2009*, OPM, September 2010, <http://fedshirevets.gov/Blog/uploads/docs/FHVNews/2010/9/27/Employment-of-Veterans-in-the-Federal-Executive-Branch/EmploymentOfVets-FY09.pdf>

⁴ *Veterans Employment Initiative Shows Progress*, press release, OPM, Sept. 16, 2010, <http://opm.gov/news/veterans-employment-initiative-shows-progress,1593.aspx>

SPOTLIGHT ON THE DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

In line with the Obama administration's initiative for veterans, the Treasury Department established a Veterans Employment Program Office in January 2010 to create a Treasury-wide focus on professional opportunities for veterans.

Ernie Beltz Jr., a program manager for the office, has worked closely with the deputy assistant secretary for human resources and Chief Human Capital Office to develop and implement an aggressive operating plan. Beltz noted that Treasury traditionally has not been first on the list of employment options for veterans, with many unsure of how their military skills could fit the department's mission. "Most people didn't know what we had to offer," he said.

To change the prevailing attitude, Treasury created an outreach program to inform veterans about job opportunities that might match their military experience, including positions in information technology, human resources, program management, law enforcement-related fields and customer service.

The effort has included participation in numerous career fairs across the country and contacts with an array of veterans' organizations, veterans' hospitals and military installations. In each of these instances, Treasury provided updated lists of job announcements, information about internship opportunities and recruiting materials from its bureaus, such as the Bureau of Public Debt, the Internal Revenue Service, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, and the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. Treasury puts out a monthly newsletter featuring two stories in each issue about employees who are veterans and has held workshops for veterans on how to write a federal resume and find job openings. The agency even created a special logo to call attention to Treasury's active support of veterans and interest in hiring them.

In addition, Treasury has taken part in the Defense Department's Operation Warfighter, a temporary assignment/internship program for service members who are convalescing at military treatment facilities. This program is designed to provide internship opportunities to service members during recovery from an injury or illness. Service members are paid their military salaries and work about 20 hours a week for three to five months to gain experience and transition back to civilian life. The program can serve as a kind of "on-the-job-interview" that can lead to a permanent position.

At the same time, Beltz said the veterans employment office has worked internally to educate hiring managers about the value of employing veterans and how best to take advantage of opportunities to hire qualified candidates. This has included an employment summit with the leaders of the department's bureaus, workshops for managers across the country on how to recognize skills on a military resume, and monthly meetings of an employment steering committee to discuss progress and new opportunities.

To help track progress of these initiatives, Beltz said his office is working with Treasury's chief information officer to create a "veterans dashboard" that will provide real-time data on veterans hiring, attrition rates and use of veterans preference. "This will be a powerful tool, and allow us to look across the entire organization. It will be a real-time snapshot of what is being done," said Beltz. In the meantime, Treasury must be doing something right. The agency was recently recognized by OPM for showing "notable improvement" in hiring veterans in fiscal 2010.⁵

SPOTLIGHT ON CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

In contrast to Treasury, job opportunities at Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are relatively well known to veterans. But that doesn't mean CBP recruiters can take the process of identifying and targeting good candidates for granted. Organization and coordination matter.

John Bronkema, CBP's director of national recruitment, uses the word "integrated" to describe his agency's approach to recruiting. Whether CBP is recruiting veterans, reaching out to people with disabilities or targeting other special groups, the core approach is similar. The agency relies on its Integrated Recruitment Team, under which the recruiting function has been centralized to plan and coordinate its campaigns. This central group then works with agency contacts nationwide to take full advantage of local assets, including CBP staff and managers in almost every major city who can serve as recruiters at local events.

The overall approach has at least three major benefits. It gives structure to CBP's recruiting process, while providing enough flexibility to adapt to a range of recruiting challenges, and it supports CBP's branding efforts

⁵ *Veterans Employment Initiative Shows Progress*, press release, OPM, Sept. 16, 2010, <http://opm.gov/news/veterans-employment-initiative-shows-progress,1593.aspx>

nationwide. The centralized approach also saves time and money by often allowing the recruitment team to collect similar recruiting requests from different offices, cut vendor fees at hiring events and reduce the need for recruiters to travel. Perhaps just as importantly, the approach has served to engage additional staff—public relations, information technology, human resources, diversity and civil rights, field staff and others—in the process. The result is that recruiting has improved as it has become more of a team effort across the agency.

One insight gained throughout this process is that the personal connection is critical, especially with veterans. “Recruiting is one-on-one,” said Bronkema. “It comes down to credibility.” He said this means drawing on CBP’s strong veteran base to help ensure that those making the contact with potential new employees can talk the talk. It also helps if recruiters are able to relate to the challenges that recent veterans, in particular, may be facing, such as culture shock and concerns about transitioning back to civilian life and work.

To recruit veterans, CBP leverages the full slate of available options, including print, Internet, radio and television advertising, and attending targeted events. While the agency’s recruiting team now has a budget to cover broad media outreach, this wasn’t always the case.

When the recruitment group was first starting out eight years ago, they had success on a much smaller budget. Many of the tactics they used then are still staples of their approach now. For example, CBP targets partnerships with organizations that are already helping many people transition out of military service, such as military and veterans groups, the Army Reserves, the National Guard and affiliated organizations. Regular CBP outreach to these organizations is important to build relationships, Bronkema said. These groups also reach back. They understand the value for their members and will often invite agency recruiters to events and provide other opportunities to connect with veterans, he said. In addition, agencies can tap into no-cost or low-cost media, such as public service announcements and news releases.

CBP’s targeted outreach helped ensure that, from fiscal 2006 to fiscal 2009, about one in four agency hires were veterans (2006 = 24%, 2007 = 27%, 2008 = 25%, 2009 = 24%). In 2010, veteran hiring increased to a full 30 percent of total CBP hires, said Bronkema. In talking with several CBP recruiters, a consensus emerges on what it takes to recruit veterans and other groups effectively. It comes down to understanding the mission, locating the

market and developing an appropriate marketing and outreach strategy that fits the agency’s needs.

PART TWO

RECRUITING RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

BACKGROUND

The Peace Corps was officially established in March 1961. Over the last half century, Peace Corps volunteers have served in 139 host countries and have worked on numerous issues ranging from AIDS/HIV education to environmental preservation⁶. The Peace Corps estimates that some 200,000 volunteers have gone through the program, with more than 8,000 currently on two-year assignments. The two-year term means that more than 4,000 volunteers return from service in any given year.

Along with their memories, volunteers return from service with special hiring eligibility. In fact, one of the best kept secrets in federal recruiting and hiring might just be presidential Executive Order 11103. The order allows for noncompetitive appointment of qualified Peace Corps volunteers to positions in the competitive civilian service for 12 months after they return from assignment. Eligibility can be extended for up to two more years if returned volunteers head to a full-time graduate program or take a military assignment.

The most startling fact: this little known and under-used executive order has been hiding in plain sight since 1963, when it was issued by President John F. Kennedy. AmeriCorps VISTA, a domestic volunteer program whose origins are similar to Peace Corps, also extends noncompetitive eligibility to volunteers who successfully complete their service assignments.

THE CHALLENGE

In plain terms, the noncompetitive appointing authority allows agencies to directly interview and hire returned Peace Corps volunteers without having these applicants go through what can be a lengthy competitive hiring process. Agencies can interview and select candidates eligible for such appointment without posting a position on USAJOBS.gov or a similar online application system. The savings in terms of agency time and resources can be substantial, with some new employees reporting to their new jobs within six weeks of their initial interviews.

⁶ Peace Corps website:
<http://peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=about>

Volunteers In Service to America (VISTA) was established in 1965 to help alleviate poverty in the United States (see AmeriCorps.gov/VISTA) and was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993. Approximately 6,500 AmeriCorps VISTAs are placed each year in low-income communities to work on projects ranging from financial literacy to healthcare access and food security. VISTA volunteers commit to a year of full-time service and are typically assigned to work in nonprofit organizations that have a presence in a given community. Through their service, the VISTA volunteers help to expand the capacity of these organizations to deliver needed services to those in poverty.

Under the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, VISTA volunteers are eligible for noncompetitive federal appointment in the same manner as Peace Corps volunteers. VISTA alumni maintain their noncompetitive status for one year after successful completion of their service. Noncompetitive hiring eligibility may be extended for up to two additional years for qualified volunteers who pursue military service, college studies or related activities.

Recently, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Social Security Administration and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have hired VISTA alumni, after working with the Corporation for National and Community Service, which provides administrative support for AmeriCorps.

You might expect that an executive order created decades ago and promising the benefits described above would have a more permanent place in the toolboxes of savvy federal recruiters. “Not so,” said Bonnie Robinson, who oversees and coordinates the career and transition support provided to returned volunteers.

Robinson, a program specialist in the Peace Corps’ Returned Volunteer Services office, can tick off the reasons. She admits that time and resources are limited, with the bulk of their funding going to running the program itself and little left for marketing to agencies. Robinson said the best advertisements tend to come from agencies that have used the hiring mechanism and had good experiences with their new employees.

But a thumbs-up may not be enough to trump agency risk aversion if human resources (HR) specialists are

not already familiar with the special appointing authority. Heavy workloads in HR may also lessen the chances that busy specialists will take time to seek the answers needed to address their concerns. Finally, some managers may carry old stereotypes about the Peace Corps—that volunteers come right from college, have no other work experience and care only about a narrow slice of employment opportunities. In fact, the average age of volunteers is now 28. Increasing numbers are entering Peace Corps with work experience and they tend to bring a broad range of skills, abilities and employment interests.

Of course, there also are challenges on the supply side: convincing returning volunteers that government jobs are not defined by bureaucratic stereotypes, that their skills have broader applicability than they realize and that they can use their noncompetitive eligibility to market themselves to agency employers.

Fortunately, there is help available. Peace Corps makes it easy for agencies to connect with candidates who have noncompetitive eligibility. For example, career fairs hosted throughout the country provide opportunities for federal recruiters to collect the resumes of recently returned volunteers, if they wish. Agencies unable to attend can issue a special call for resumes through the Peace Corps. Targeted hiring events and employer information sessions, which Robinson also facilitates through her office, provide further opportunities for federal managers to connect with volunteers and discuss job opportunities. The candidates bring many positive qualities to the table: people who have already answered the call to serve, have overseas experience, diverse work histories, and strong cross-cultural, foreign language, and interpersonal skills.

The following are brief summaries of how the General Service Administration, Department of Housing and Urban Development and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are successfully and happily using this flexibility to hire returned Peace Corps volunteers.

SPOTLIGHT ON GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

When considering places in the federal government that a returned Peace Corps volunteer might land, the General Services Administration (GSA) and its Federal Acquisition Service (FAS), which procures goods and services for government, probably don't make many top 10 lists. Gail Sprinkle, a program analyst in the FAS human capital management division, is even more direct.

“Peace Corps folks have never heard of GSA,” she said. “We’re not one of those sexy agencies.” But that hasn’t stopped FAS from pursuing returned Peace Corps volunteers as part of its recruiting strategy for the past five years.

The fact that most Peace Corps volunteers don’t initially think of GSA makes Sprinkle’s story even more relevant to agencies that may not be top-of-mind in public awareness. As a former Peace Corps volunteer, Sprinkle recognized that many returned volunteers aren’t looking for jobs that would send them right back overseas. They have more immediate concerns about getting into the workforce and easing the transition back to life in the United States, while still looking to have a positive impact through their work.

Three times a year, GSA participates in Peace Corps career fairs that are offered as part of multi-day career development conferences for returned volunteers. The conferences draw upwards of two hundred returned volunteers to Washington, D.C., and the career fairs provide excellent opportunities for agencies and potential candidates to get to know each other. GSA also uses the Peace Corps listserv and a semi-monthly newsletter, the Hotline, to post jobs free of charge and keep GSA’s name in front of returned volunteers.

FAS recruits from the Peace Corps ranks for several hard-to-fill positions, including program analysts. The range of skills and experience needed includes communications, project management, strategic thinking and planning. Sprinkle said this list lines up nicely with the skills and experiences that many Peace Corps volunteers gain in the field. In addition, she said Peace Corps volunteers tend to have a wealth of experience solving problems in real time, thinking on their feet and being both resourceful and resilient under pressure.

When talking with returned volunteers, as with any candidate, Sprinkle advises recruiters and managers to be clear about the expectations and benefits of the job. But with the returned volunteers, it helps to emphasize the public service angle and any opportunities those hired will have to “make a difference.” Sprinkle also plays up the fact that GSA is ranked among the top 10 *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*.

Does it all pay off for FAS? The raw numbers for fiscal 2010 look modest—seven noncompetitive returned Peace Corps volunteers were hired out of 331 new employees, or roughly two percent of the total. The real significance, Sprinkle said, is that six of the seven were hired into journeyman grades of GS 12 and GS 13. “The

general assumption is that a returned volunteer is typically entry level, but that has not been our experience. And our team is meticulous at qualifying candidates.”

SPOTLIGHT ON DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Earlier this year, managers at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) were asked to participate in a special hiring event in Washington, D.C. for returned Peace Corps and former VISTA volunteers. Some HUD managers wondered what to make of the exclusive, no-cost event. It sounded too good to be true. They wondered “what’s wrong with these candidates,” said Phil Burrows of HUD’s office of policy, planning and training.

Two HUD program offices signed up to recruit community planning and housing support specialists. Burrows said he was optimistic about the event’s outcome because, as a group, the volunteers already had three key markers for job success: high skill sets, community involvement experience and a demonstrated willingness to serve.

Much like GSA, HUD also had to convince some initially hesitant returned volunteers to participate in the event. Common concerns centered on how well their skill sets would transfer and what kind of impact they could have as HUD employees. Other volunteers didn’t want to relocate to the nation’s capital, where they believed most HUD jobs were located. In fact, they learned that only about 30 percent of HUD jobs are in the Washington, D.C. area.

To prepare for the hiring event, HUD assembled a team comprised of representatives from its human resources and program offices, as well as representatives from the Peace Corps. During their weekly event planning meetings, the team built in useful options for both job seekers and managers. For example, candidates who submitted resumes early were pre-screened and, in some cases, prescheduled for interviews, while those signing up at the last minute were still accepted as walk-ins. Human resources and hiring managers also worked together to finalize paperwork that allowed managers with open positions to offer jobs to qualified applicants “on the spot.” Robinson of the Peace Corps coordinated the outreach and marketing of the event to the returned volunteer community, highlighting the event as a significant advantage in a competitive job-market for those with noncompetitive eligibility.

Was the event successful? The results speak for themselves, said Burrows. Out of about 50 returned Peace Corps volunteers and VISTA volunteers who attended, HUD hired 26. Not bad for a first time out! And while the event required up-front planning on the part of hiring managers and human resources, the risks were minimal: HUD gave itself the option to offer jobs to qualified candidates, but had no obligation to do so. Word of mouth was positive and the agency is hoping to do more events with the Peace Corps in the future. Burrows suspects that even those who were initially skeptical had good things to say. The question he got from a number of managers afterward: “Why wasn’t I invited?”

SPOTLIGHT ON CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

If GSA and HUD are relative unknowns among returned Peace Corps volunteers seeking federal jobs, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a rock star in the community. A key reason is that, in addition to its U.S.-based work, CDC hires for a number of international positions. These positions tend to offer the kinds of work experiences and environments that attract many volunteers to Peace Corps in the first place. In some cases, Peace Corps volunteers have even worked alongside CDC staff during their service.

Jan Hiland, workforce management officer at CDC’s Center for Global Health, has oversight for recruiting, hiring and training overseas staff. She said that, beyond CDC’s status as a premier public health organization, many Peace Corps volunteers are attracted to its “social justice orientation” and value system. “If a project is about clean water, there’s a sense that people have a right to it,” she said. “That translates into a kind of mission match for CDC and returned Peace Corps volunteers.”

While many returned volunteers have gravitated to CDC over the years, it was just three years ago the agency really got focused on the noncompetitive eligibility available to hire those recently back from their service. Hiland needed to fill a key position in her own office on short notice and remembered a stand-out returned volunteer she’d recently met at a Peace Corps event. Within six weeks, she was welcoming the new employee on her first day of work.

Recognizing the value of this hiring option, CDC now holds two exclusive events each year for returned vol-

unteers on its Atlanta campus to hire for international and domestic positions. In coordination with the Peace Corps, CDC puts the word out to potential applicants through Peace Corps' semi-monthly Hotline newsletter and other channels to reach large numbers of eligible returned volunteers. Applications are pre-screened and CDC invites about 30 to 40 of the most promising applicants to the event. According to Hiland, CDC hires about 20 percent of those who attend.

These invitation-only events have special value for CDC, because finding the right people for overseas positions is challenging and the costs for poor candidate matches are substantial. Peace Corps volunteers' similar experiences working in developing countries and their realistic expectations going in give them an important advantage. "If we're going to invest in sending someone overseas, it cuts the risk and gamble on their ability to succeed in low-resourced settings," said Hiland.

Hiland, echoing the comments of others, said the key to success in working with returned volunteers is having someone in human resources who understands non-competitive eligibility and can explain it to managers, and put the word out well in advance of events.

CDC also participates in the Peace Corps' week-long transition events for returned volunteers, which are held in Washington, D.C. But since CDC mainly hires returned volunteers with graduate degrees for its positions, they tend to use these events to educate undergraduates about CDC's opportunities for the future. Still, positive word-of-mouth makes a difference, particularly in the tight-knit Peace Corps community.

Is Hiland worried about competition from other agencies after trumpeting the benefits of returned volunteers and sharing her recruiting secrets? Not so much. "I'm also a taxpayer," she said. "I want to see good quality people in government who have already proved themselves in public service."

PART THREE

CREATING TALENT PIPELINES FOR YOUNGER WORKERS AND DIVERSE APPLICANTS

BACKGROUND

For many in today's younger generation, employment is not just about having a job. It's about making a real difference for society. If the federal government is going to tap into the idealism of this new generation, agencies must actively recruit younger workers on college campuses by promoting the importance of their missions, highlighting the skills that are needed and reinforcing how the work can be meaningful.

Recruiting talented and motivated younger workers is a necessity both because of the increasingly complex and technical demands being placed on our government and because of demographics. By any measure, the federal workforce skews older than most. The average age among civilian federal employees is 47. In addition, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) estimated two years ago that 57 percent of full-time, permanent federal employees on board as of Oct. 1, 2006 would be eligible to retire by 2015.⁷ This will place some departments at risk of a "brain drain" if too many experienced workers and managers leave at once, but it also presents an opportunity to bring new talent into the workforce and build a solid foundation for the future.

In addition to the need for skilled young talent, the federal government holds itself accountable as a model employer that seeks to recruit a workforce that reflects the rich diversity of the nation. Unfortunately, individual agencies often fall short in ensuring adequate representation of different racial and ethnic groups in the rank and file, as well as in leadership positions.

THE CHALLENGE

Our government faces ongoing challenges in attracting top-notch young people to public service, especially students with technical and scientific majors and those with advanced degrees—groups that are needed most to fill mission-critical positions. Many college and graduate students are unaware of the varied and challenging employment opportunities in the federal government, and they often do not know how to find out what is

available or how to wade through the often difficult federal hiring process.

The government also has not been aggressive in creating the kind of diverse and inclusive workforce that it says it wants, and it lacks a strategy to create the kind of talent pipelines needed to change the status quo. Recently, OPM created an office to develop a government-wide diversity plan to support federal agencies in improving outreach to, and hiring of, diverse groups of candidates. At the moment, however, agencies have to go it alone.

The bottom line is that too many government agencies remain passive when it comes to marketing, recruiting and hiring young employees and pursuing a more diverse workforce. Agencies are often content to post job announcements and wait to see who applies. Change will require building relationships with key universities and with professional and community organizations; making greater use of fellowship and internship programs; and even undertaking modest branding and marketing activities. We spotlight three federal agencies working to break the mold on one or more of these fronts.

SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

The Social Security Administration (SSA), an agency with about 65,000 employees, launched a national recruitment strategy in 2002 to ensure that it would have a skilled, multi-generational and multi-cultural workforce to provide high quality service to the public.

The now well-tested strategy includes a number of different elements, such as an integrated marketing campaign with branded materials; use of the Internet for public outreach; a resource-rich intranet for internal use by SSA managers and human resource specialists; and wide adoption of available hiring and compensation flexibilities.

Central to Social Security's efforts has been a commitment to create talent pipelines designed to bring the younger generation into the workforce and to ensure employees' cultural diversity. Fred Glueckstein, the na-

⁷ *An Analysis of Federal Employee Retirement Data*, OPM, March 2008. http://www.opm.gov/feddata/RetirementPaperFinal_v4.pdf

tional director of recruitment for Social Security, said two primary goals of the plan include building a foundation for the future as the baby boom generation retires and “having a workforce that reflects the public we serve.”

Like many other federal agencies, Social Security has an aging workforce. By 2013, more than one-third of the agency’s staff will be eligible for retirement. Therefore, recruiting the new generation of workers is a business necessity.

Glueckstein said the same is true when it comes to diversity. While it is a worthy social goal, he said that attracting candidates from under-represented groups such as Hispanics, Asian-Americans and American Indians is also essential to properly serving the needs of the 58 million Americans who receive retiree and disability benefits.

To carry out these objectives, Social Security recruiters have developed ties to more than 100 colleges and universities, including institutions with diverse student bodies. Social Security uses employee recruitment teams from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, prepares specialized recruitment materials and undertakes a year-round program to educate college staff and students about potential opportunities and how to apply.

In addition, the agency sends recruiters to minority-sponsored career fairs, and partners with organizations such as the National Association of Colleges and Employers and the Hispanic College Fund.

Like other agencies we have featured, SSA has taken advantage of its unique strengths to better serve its recruiting and hiring needs. Glueckstein said the agency works extensively at the grassroots level by making use of the contacts developed at its 1,300 field offices spread across the 10 different Social Security regions. Individuals from these offices often have relationships with civic, ethnic and religious organizations and have used these local ties to find talent that reflects the community and the needs of each office.

These activities pay off in unheralded, but nonetheless important, ways. For example, many SSA beneficiaries need translators to help them through the application process, but the specific foreign language needs often vary by location. Glueckstein said having employees on staff that are fluent in the languages prevalent in the community is more efficient for the agency and extremely helpful for the beneficiaries. “Recruiting for language abilities also means recruiting for diversity,”

said Glueckstein. Today, Social Security has employees who speak about 100 different languages, including Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Chinese and Russian.

Glueckstein said Social Security also maintains employee advisory groups representing African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Alaskan Natives. He said that the views of the advisory groups are regularly solicited and that they have provided valuable information and insights on improving recruitment.

The result of all this work: over the past eight years, SSA’s diversity numbers have been on the rise. The increases have been modest in some cases, more substantive in others, but moving forward overall. In 2010, employees of Hispanic origin represented nearly 14 percent of the workforce, up from just over 11 percent in 2002. Asian and Pacific Islanders now make up over five percent of the workforce, compared with about three percent in 2002. The percentage of African-American staff rose one percent over the same period (28 percent in 2010 versus 27 percent in 2002), while representation among American Indian and Alaska Natives remained steady over the same period, at just over one percent of the workforce.

SPOTLIGHT ON NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION AND FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is an agency of some 4,000 employees which licenses and regulates the civilian use of nuclear materials, including nuclear power plants and disposal of radioactive materials and waste. The NRC hires engineers, scientists, information technology specialists, investigators and attorneys, along with a range of other skilled occupations. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which regulates the interstate transmission of natural gas, oil and electricity, has a staff of about 1,500 employees.⁸ Like the NRC, FERC must recruit for very specialized talent such as electrical engineers with power system experience.

Because many FERC and NRC entry-level positions require specific, hard-to-find skills, recruiting can sometimes be difficult. Other factors may add to the challenge. For example, only nine percent of engineers

⁸ *FY 2010 Congressional Performance Budget Request*, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, <http://www.ferc.gov/about/strat-docs/FY10-budg.pdf>.

rank the federal government as an ideal employer.⁹ As a result, both of these agencies try to maintain a delicate balance between attracting younger talent while targeting their recruiting for hard-to-fill jobs to universities with curricula that fit their agency’s hiring needs.

At NRC, a key goal is to increase the agency’s visibility on college campuses and to position itself as a top competitor in recruiting. Susan Salter, chief of the NRC’s outreach and recruitment branch in the Office of Human Resources, refers to this as “teaching” rather than “selling” the agency. This approach gives students exposure to agency personnel and establishes a connection with faculty, which helps the NRC better understand the university’s curricula. The NRC typically receives more job applications from schools at which the agency has “university champions”—NRC managers who work directly with selected universities to strengthen and develop relationships with faculty, deans, placement officers and diverse student populations.

To develop outreach plans and build relationships with colleges and universities, Amanda Perry, a corporate recruiter at FERC, literally started with the basics. Using simple Internet searches, she found schools that offered specialized courses and curricula relevant to the agency’s mission-critical needs. Then, using the annual U.S. News and World Report college rankings as a guide, Perry created a system to evaluate and rank schools based on select criteria—academics, course offerings, diversity and others—which aligned with FERC’s hiring needs. This effort has helped FERC separate schools into three tiers of interest to more efficiently target its recruiting efforts.

Perry also encourages managers at FERC to create and share “ideal candidate profiles” for their hard-to-fill positions. The profiles help recruiters recognize a good resume when they see one by flagging key information, such as colleges with strong programs, relevant membership organizations and the like. “It gives recruiters more insight on how to spot top talent,” said Perry. Asked how she gets busy hiring managers to actually complete these profiles, Perry said it comes down to seeing value in the effort. “If it saves managers time and helps them get the right people, they are usually willing to do it.”

Similarly, NRC finds it valuable for recruiters to know “what best qualified looks like.” Although NRC uses an automated system with set criteria to rate and rank job

applicants for competitive positions, knowledgeable recruiters can readily identify outstanding candidates who they meet at various events—those likely to rise to the top of most-qualified lists. Recruiters can then encourage these candidates to apply for jobs and can also flag their resumes for hiring managers’ attention if they make it onto a certificate list.

When FERC and NRC recruit on college campuses, another best practice is to pair a representative from human resources with a hiring manager—one who can relate easily to students. “Face-time with hiring managers is a key,” said Salter. “It’s what gets you the interview.” She said having someone from human resources on campus to answer logistical questions frees up the hiring manager’s time to talk meaningfully with job candidates.

At the end of the day, Salter and Perry see no substitute for maintaining good relationships with schools to increase agency visibility, name recognition and branding among qualified young applicants. It’s also an intentional win-win strategy. Targeting student groups and schools with diverse student bodies allows these agencies to simultaneously address recruiting for diversity, veterans and people with disabilities.

SPOTLIGHT ON DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Agency recruiters can reach job seekers through job fairs, e-mail blasts and job announcements, among other methods. They face a challenge, however, when seeking to personally inspire and attract young talent. The Federal Student Service Ambassadors, a program initiated by the Partnership for Public Service and already adapted by several federal agencies, offers a solution to this challenge. The program is based on the research suggesting that the most effective recruiters of college students are their peers.¹⁰

Agencies use ambassador programs to tap college students who have successfully completed internships and to send these former interns back to their campuses as public service emissaries. The ambassadors host educational visits from agency representatives, promote job and internship opportunities to classmates, share their intern experience and meet with key staff and faculty to bolster the government’s effort in recruiting and hiring young people. Currently, two federal agencies, the Departments of Energy and Housing and Urban Develop-

⁹ *Great Expectations: What Students Want in an Employer and How Federal Agencies Can Deliver It*, Partnership for Public Service, January 2009.

¹⁰ *Back to School: Rethinking Federal Recruiting on College Campuses*, Partnership for Public Service, May 2006.

ment, are using ambassador programs. These programs support a total of 12 student ambassadors, who are promoting agency jobs and internships on their campuses to peers, faculty and administrations.¹¹

The Energy student ambassadors program stemmed from collaborations with the Oak Ridge Institute for Science Education and the Partnership for Public Service. DOE sees the program as central to its recruiting strategy and uses it to enhance the agency's brand recognition, stimulate student interest in agency jobs and internships, and ultimately to increase applications from talented college recruits. The ambassadors focus their efforts on disciplines related to specific DOE hiring needs, including engineering, science, technology, business and social sciences.

Melanie Wong served as a DOE ambassador last year while studying at the University of Maryland. A typical initiative involved hosting a student panel discussion for undergraduates at the School of Environmental Science and Policy (ENSP). She shared information about the hiring process with 17 students and talked about how her internship at DOE intersected with her career goals. She received contact information from many interested students and connected with the associate director of the ENSP.

"It's not just another medium. It's the most effective medium for finding the right entry-level talent you need," said Edwin Luevanos, a DOE human capital specialist and manager of the program. "In recruitment, a peer-to-peer strategy works best because you're able to engage the best and most committed individuals on the ground."

Over the course of the last academic year, Luevanos said that DOE ambassadors promoted 75 jobs and internships, engaged about six-dozen faculty, staff and student leaders, and collected contact information from more than 400 students. DOE has hired more than 10 students for full-time jobs or internships through the ambassador network. The program's annual operating costs run \$50,000-90,000, which includes a \$3,000 stipend for each ambassador, he said.

DOE currently has eight student ambassadors on its team and hopes to increase that number going forward. To improve online collaboration, operational workflows, and the ability to measure program impact, DOE this year is utilizing Salesforce.com, a software services provider with expertise in enterprise IT and customer

relationship management. A key benefit: the company's software allows DOE to track how an ambassador's campus event or promotion affects hits for particular job announcements on USAJOBS.gov. Going forward, DOE will also be assessing the quality of the applicants it attracts through ambassador events and referrals.

Luevanos acknowledges that building an ambassador program is a learning process. He noted that one of the challenges has been a tendency among student ambassadors to focus mainly on numbers, such as total e-mails they have sent or events they have hosted. Much more important is the quality of ambassadors' interactions and the unique things they do to engage the talent that DOE requires to effectively execute its mission, he said. It's one reason that DOE also offers incentives—above the base stipend—to ambassadors who consistently perform beyond program standards.

¹¹ The Partnership for Public Service separately supports an additional 34 ambassadors through its own program.

PART FOUR

RECRUITING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES INTO FEDERAL SERVICE

BACKGROUND

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in federal employment and requires the federal government to engage in affirmative action for people with disabilities. It's one of several laws designed to help government boost employment of workers with targeted disabilities—deafness, blindness, missing extremities, partial or complete paralysis, convulsive disorders, mental retardation, mental illness and distortion of the limbs and/or spine.

Yet, in fiscal 2009, employees with disabilities made up less than one percent of the federal workforce,¹² a decline since fiscal 2000 and far short of the two percent goal set by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC),¹³ a mark reached by only 11 federal agencies.

Seeking to reverse the downward slide, President Obama issued an executive order in July 2010 on recruiting and hiring people with disabilities. It directed the head of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), in consultation with the secretary of labor, the chair of the EEOC and the director of the Office of Management and Budget, to develop mandatory training programs for agency human resources personnel and hiring managers. It also tasked agencies to develop their own plans and to increase the use of Schedule A, the hiring authority that allows agencies to appoint people with disabilities to federal positions noncompetitively.¹⁴

¹² *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Annual Report on the Federal Work Force*, Fiscal 2009. <http://eeoc.gov/federal/reports/fsp2009/index.cfm#exec>

¹³ *The EEOC's LEAD (Leadership for the Employment of Americans with Disabilities) Initiative*, <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/initiatives/lead/index.cfm>

¹⁴ *Presidential Executive Order, Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities*, July 26, 2010, <http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-increasing-federal-employment-individuals-with-disabilities>

THE CHALLENGE

Agencies have their work cut out for them. The July 2010 executive order is not the first time a president has weighed in on this topic. President Clinton did so in 2000, setting aggressive targets for hiring workers with disabilities, but to little effect.

A recent survey found that only half the federal managers interviewed had the knowledge and tools to bring on employees with disabilities, while more than one in three (36 percent) said they were not familiar with Schedule A.¹⁵ Part of the challenge is educating managers, many of whom may be reluctant to hire people with disabilities for fear they cannot do the job or will create a burden and extra financial costs for the agency.

Nonetheless, some federal agencies are actively seeking to recruit workers with disabilities, and their good efforts offer guidance and insights to hiring managers and recruiters across the board.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT PROGRAM FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP) is a recruitment and referral program that connects federal employers with qualified postsecondary students and recent graduates with disabilities who are interested in summer internships or permanent jobs. The program was created in the 1980s as an internal Department of the Navy effort and was expanded in the mid-1990s to serve the entire federal government under the sponsorship of the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and the Department of Defense (DOD).

The WRP annually dispatches recruiters from different federal agencies to interview students with disabilities on campus and in person. In 2010, 76 recruiters from 40 federal agencies visited 230 campuses nationwide.

¹⁵ Rosenberg, Alyssa. "Managers might need a refresher course on hiring the disabled". *Government Executive*, March 29, 2010, <http://govexec.com/dailyfed/0310/032910ar1.htm?oref=relink>

More than 3,000 students identified by the colleges were interviewed, and about 2,100 made it through the screening process and had their information entered into the WRP national database accessible through the Internet.

Students in the database are categorized by job interest, degree program, geographic location and other factors. The comments of the recruiters are included in each student's database profile. The database also holds resumes and college transcripts that can be downloaded, but details in the resumes are not searchable separately online. Applicants can self-identify as Schedule A eligible or as a veteran. Federal employers can use the WRP database to locate talented job candidates and are free to conduct independent interviews.¹⁶

The WRP has posted some impressive numbers. Since 1995, the program has provided permanent jobs and internship opportunities to more than 6,500 students. In the 2010 recruiting cycle, through mid-November, 41 applicants with disabilities had been hired into permanent positions and 565 others received temporary jobs or internships at 40 agencies and sub-agencies.

But these numbers don't tell the full story. Sara Mahoney, a business development specialist with ODEP, said DOD supplies about one-third of the campus recruiters and is responsible for about three-quarters of the internship and permanent hires. In short, DOD is by far the WRP's biggest user. The agency has a central fund to pay for the summer internships, which incentivizes the use of the program.

What about other agencies? Unfortunately, too often the WRP is simply not on their radar. "Everything that an agency needs in order to find a candidate with disabilities is available online in the database. But agencies don't use our system because they don't know about it," Mahoney said. The database is also open to private-sector employers, but gets very little traffic from the business community, in large part due to lack of awareness.

Like many niche program offices, WRP has a small staff and limited resources for agency outreach. Another challenge of the current system, Mahoney said, is that the students must rely on a federal agency to contact them, with no way for the applicant to use the campus interview process and the ODEP system to pro-actively reach out to federal employers looking to hire someone with disabilities. Despite these challenges, she noted that her office continues to refine the program and is

engaged in continuous outreach to promote its availability and its benefits.

SPOTLIGHT ON NASA'S GODDARD SPACE FLIGHT CENTER

Goddard Space Flight Center, a NASA facility located in Greenbelt, Md. that employs about 3,400 civil servants, is a leading project management center that develops and analyzes scientific data from unmanned spacecraft. As a global leader in earth science, astrophysics and planetary science, Goddard hires for positions in its core scientific fields, as well as for a variety of other occupations.

Since March of 2009, Goddard has increased the representation of employees with disabilities in its workforce from 1.3 percent to almost 1.9 percent, which translates to an additional 14 hires over this period. While these numbers may seem small, they have made Goddard one of only a few organizations to approach or exceed the EEOC's goal of 2.0 percent. The agency has done this by taking a proactive recruitment approach and by making use of the noncompetitive Schedule A hiring authority to put applicants with disabilities on the fast track to employment. In the process, Goddard has learned how to take fuller advantage of related, but often overlooked, tools and resources to bring in new talent and fill job openings more effectively.

Goddard started building its talent pipeline by locating qualified individuals with disabilities through the disability support service offices at universities, including the University of Maryland, the University of Virginia and Columbia University. This initial outreach has been followed up by campus visits, one-on-one interviews and the development of a list of candidates who have skills and backgrounds needed by Goddard. Goddard also is in regular contact with the rehabilitation service departments in the states of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia to tap into their lists of qualified candidates for available job openings.

Recruits with disabilities who pass the initial screening process are routinely brought in to see the Goddard facilities, to learn about what takes place at the center and to meet with individuals in their fields of interest. Some are interviewed ahead of time to fully gauge their abilities, and human resources staff at the space center keeps in close touch through e-mails and telephone calls.

Jon Pak of the Office of Human Capital Management said he keeps track of jobs that will become available

¹⁶ Workforce Recruitment Program website: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/programs/workforc.htm>

at Goddard, and tries to bring in qualified Schedule A applicants on his recruitment list for interviews with hiring managers before job openings are publicly advertised.

Pak said an equally important part of this process is to interact regularly with the hiring managers about job openings, to inform them about the noncompetitive Schedule A hiring flexibility and, when necessary, to have “heart to heart” conversations to allay potential fears and concerns about employing someone who has a disability. The biggest hurdle is often just convincing hiring managers to consider interviewing the candidates, Pak said. “The applicants usually can prove they can do the work if they get interviewed.” Pak also makes it clear to hiring managers that he is available to provide support and to “clear the air so that so we can create the most positive hiring process for everyone.”

Richard Gudnitz, Goddard’s recruitment program manager, said the space center has a separate fund to cover reasonable accommodation costs for employees with disabilities, pointing out that this helps overcome some of the logistical and cost concerns held by managers. He noted this fund supplements assistance from the federal Computer Electronic Accommodation Program (CAP), which provides services to employees with disabilities in more than 65 federal government agencies.

Pak said that bringing on those with disabilities who are capable of doing the job helps to break down preconceived notions and paves the way for others. For example, after one division at Goddard hired a person with a hearing impairment, the entire office was so impressed with the individual and his work that they took a sign language class to better communicate with him.

Pak credits part of his progress to the strong buy-in and commitment from top management at Goddard, who made it clear throughout the organization that increasing workforce diversity is a priority. It also helps that he is devoted full time to the task. “It’s the main focus of what I do,” he said.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Lori Thompson runs a year-old, five-person corporate recruitment office at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Office of Human Resources, Client Services Division, that allows her to work with individual institutes and centers to market job openings to high-caliber candidates.

After deciding to focus on a hiring event in August 2010 for persons with disabilities and veterans, Thompson and her staff reached out to hiring managers throughout NIH to alert them to the opportunity and to identify job openings that would be available at the time of the event. Her team then engaged in extensive outreach to veterans’ organizations and to placement services for persons with disabilities to inform them of the positions that needed to be filled and the skills required. They also placed advertisements in the Washington Post.

Some 300 applications were received. A team of human resources specialists then called those who appeared to be qualified and talked to them about the job possibilities. Candidates were invited to sign up for interviews with hiring managers.

Prior to the event at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Bethesda, Md., the recruitment office conducted a special session for participating hiring managers to learn from experts about interviewing and hiring veterans and disabled individuals. “It was important to make sure the managers understood what to expect, how to deal with people with disabilities, what to do and what not to do,” said Thompson. If there was a sign language interpreter, for example, Thompson said the managers were informed that they should speak to the candidate, not the interpreter.

On the day of the hiring event, there were 105 applicants in attendance and 115 interviews conducted for approximately 100 jobs, with some candidates vying for more than one opening. The job openings included a variety of professional, technical, scientific and administrative positions. Each interview lasted about one hour. Accommodations were available for those needing interpreters or who relied on assist animals, such as seeing-eye dogs. Thompson said that by mid-November 2010, 14 job offers had been accepted, with “still more in the works.”

Key challenges included working with the different institutes and centers on their individual hiring needs, educating the managers, and coordinating 50 volunteers from human resources and the institutes and centers who worked at the event.

PART FIVE

E-RECRUITMENT, WEB TECHNOLOGIES AND BRANDING

BACKGROUND

As part their strategies to compete for top talent, federal agencies are turning increasingly to web technologies and various electronic recruitment tools. Some agencies are also developing branded websites, which centralize and promote the entire agency's recruiting and hiring initiatives, as a way to supplement the patchwork of smaller subcomponent websites that they have now.

These new web-based tools allow government agencies to reach broader audiences than traditional recruitment techniques to describe and illustrate their missions in new ways and to market themselves directly to job applicants in all corners of the country and beyond. In short, online approaches allow agencies to rethink the potential for communicating with job applicants. This also includes sharing information in real time, making outreach a continuous process and enabling more two-way interactions with applicants.

In particular, the deployment and creative use of online tools is becoming increasingly important to reach and speak to the aspirations of the younger generation—a group that has grown up using the computer and is comfortable interacting in the virtual world. The private sector is now routinely connecting in this way, and government is trying to catch up.

A review in 2009 by the Partnership for Public Service found that government use of social media for recruitment was limited, but was attracting heightened interest among agencies. The 2009 survey found agencies, to varying degrees, using blogs, podcasts, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace and Second Life for recruitment purposes.

THE CHALLENGE

The use of such online tools for recruitment poses many challenges for government agencies, including building successful models and ensuring their effectiveness in attracting high quality applicants. This requires buy-in from leadership and managers, earned by demonstrating the business value and return on investment. It requires adequate resources and staff to build and operate the systems and, in some cases, outside help to develop

an agency's recruiting message and marketing campaign. It also requires assistance from agency information technology experts to run the online systems and help keep them up to date and a need by the operators to pay close attention to network security and issues of individual privacy.

SPOTLIGHT ON DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

The Department of Energy (DOE) has a great need for engineers, scientists and individuals with a host of technical skills, but its past approach to recruiting employees has often been passive and reactive. The department is now seeking to change the way it attracts new employees.

One aspect of the new marketing and recruitment plan has been the creation of a department-wide website that consolidates job and internship openings that are now housed on more than 50 different DOE web locations. The aim, said human capital specialist Edwin Luevanos, is to better compete for high quality talent with private-sector companies and other top talent organizations by making it easier for potential applicants to find and learn about opportunities throughout the agency.

Luevanos said many DOE subcomponents have been enthusiastic about creating a smartly branded, one-stop recruitment and employment site, although he anticipates some resistance once the agency reaches the deployment phase of the new website. DOE plans to gather and share evidence of resulting benefits to help shrink resistance and gain additional buy-in.

DOE has taken a big step into social media and other web technologies. Perhaps the most innovative is the virtual recruitment initiative. DOE has used immersive 3-D virtual world platforms, like Second Life, to create a much more engaging experience for the public in its search for more information about the agency, its mission and job opportunities.

Potential job applicants also can interact with DOE recruiters and managers at virtual recruitment events. The experience is much like playing an elaborate video game. Participants in Second Life create personal

avatars—animated characters to represent themselves—and can then spend time exploring jobs, getting information on energy policy, even viewing a giant particle accelerator. What makes it all possible is that DOE has carefully built these and many other interactive locations within the Second Life virtual space.

Luevanos said this approach provides a number of benefits for DOE and for potential applicants who participate in virtual recruitment activities. Chief among these is the ability for DOE to maintain both interactive and passive communication channels. These sites allow job seekers to attend real-time events with DOE recruiters, as well as ensure that takeaway information about DOE’s jobs and mission is readily available at any time. The kicker is the time savings and low-cost of virtual events compared with those held at physical locations. In the former, there are no expenses for travel or facilities rental, and outlays for collateral materials are generally small. DOE is still in the process of comprehensively benchmarking cost savings and expects to have the data available in the coming year.

A standout example of DOE’s virtual recruiting can be seen in the virtual career fairs and presentations that the agency hosts, including one that drew about 170 college students. Communication between recruiters and applicants at these special events tends to feel real and personal because the recruiter and job seekers are online at the same time, utilizing text, instant messaging and voice chat. Small touches, such as “3-D perception and awareness” and being able to raise one’s virtual hand during a PowerPoint presentation, help to reinforce the sense of being there. “It’s very flexible in what you can do,” said Luevanos.

Finally, there is the wow factor. In Second Life, for example, DOE uses 3-D modeling, animation and scripting to better simulate aspects of its mission that can be hard to describe in writing or appreciate when applicants just read about them. Some things just don’t jump off the printed page or screen. But in Second Life, for example, DOE can actually show job seekers how a giant particle accelerator might be used. Luevanos said it is not just interactive, but it’s also “cool” and much more engaging for applicants, which often matters to an agency’s branding.

Making the business case for any new approach to recruiting can be difficult. As suggested above, strengthening agency competitiveness and brand, along with the potential for cost and time savings are important. But getting an agency to adopt new technologies may bring its own challenges. In the latter area, Luevanos of-

fered several tips from DOE’s experience, including the need to find people who understand the technology and can teach others. He said there also must be an initial focus on people who want to innovate and are open to adopting new technology, rather than those who show reluctance. In addition, he said there is a need to choose test cases that allow for quick, demonstrable wins to help others in the organization recognize the potential value of the technology.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE AIR FORCE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

With a civilian workforce of more than 180,000, the Air Force hires thousands of new employees every year. The jobs vary from blue collar to professional and from intelligence and cybersecurity to engineering and human resources positions.

Unlike their military brethren who have a centralized and well-branded recruitment program, the civilian side of the Air Force traditionally has recruited at the command and base levels without a consistent or integrated message.

Mike Brosnan, Chief of Workforce Planning and Enterprise Recruiting, said the Air Force in 2009 undertook a project with the help of a private communications and marketing firm to create a national branding campaign for the civilian workforce.

One key element of the new recruitment strategy has been creation of a centralized dot.com website, www.afciviliancareers.com. Brosnan said that the dot.com site has been instrumental in distinguishing Air Force from other military agencies and has freed them from many of the limitations of a dot.mil site. In particular, the dot.com site allows for greater freedom to control the site’s look and feel.

“You’re competing not just with other federal agencies, but against the private sector for top talent,” said Brosnan. A mundane website is not the way to attract applicants, particularly those in the younger generation, he said.

When the user clicks to the entry page for the new website, he is greeted with the Air Force recruitment pitch: “You can earn far more than just a paycheck. It’s time you knew.”

The lead-in and related content has special significance for the Air Force brand, Brosnan said. That’s because it

comes from employees. To help build the brand, the Air Force conducted focus groups with a range of current employees—from new employees with no military experience to former servicemen and women with many years of experience. Among the top findings: Air Force employees value the diverse range of careers and options available to them without ever having to leave the agency. As a result, the Air Force opted to shape the value proposition around a set of personalized themes that closely resonated with its employees, not just present a laundry list of benefits and reasons to work there.

Brosnan added that the new website lets people—especially those specifically interested in the Air Force—explore their options in greater depth, without getting lost on USAJOBS.gov. Job seekers can see what openings the Air Force has on the site and then click a link that will take them directly to the job posting on USAJOBS.gov.

Was it hard to get the website up and running? Brosnan said it took a long time to get the commitment of dollars and to secure the marketing contract. But he also said that senior managers understood the need for the website and were able to articulate the need to the leadership. With a promise of return on investment, they were eventually able to get leadership buy-in.

Since the website was launched in July of 2010, it has logged more than 300,000 visits, which includes about 215,000 unique visitors (30 percent of the traffic is from returning users). The website lists civilian Air Force job openings around the country, provides information about career fairs and hiring events, details on how to apply, descriptions of career opportunities and much more. And it's all in one central spot. "Currently we can track how many job applications result from website visits and, in the near future, will be able to track how many of these applicants wind up getting hired," Brosnan said.

The Air Force also is expanding its arsenal of techniques for recruitment, including resume mining on privately operated career sites to find qualified employees for open positions and outreach on Facebook and Twitter. Some agencies use e-recruiting primarily as a way to reach a wider audience, but the game-changing opportunity is not simply in the "gee-wiz" response to new technology. It is in something much more basic: expanding the opportunities for two-way interactions between potential applicants and agencies to help build closer relationships.

As the Air Force continues expanding its online presence, the priority it places on close interaction can already be seen off-line, in a highly effective approach it has been taking to fill some very challenging positions.

Until recently, the Air Force could not find child care specialists for its day care centers at overseas military bases. Some positions were staying open for upwards of 300 days, Brosnan said. At first blush, the problem may seem trivial, but without a child care specialist, regulations dictate that military bases must close their child care centers. And when the centers close, Air Force employees with small children stay home to provide care, instead of coming to work. This can adversely affect mission impact.

In response, Air Force started what amounts to a "keep in touch" program to fill these positions. For each opening, the agency now designates a point-person from its mission-critical recruitment group to find suitable applicants, help them apply and then trouble-shoot problems that arise at any stage in the hiring process. The point person provides both outreach and in-reach by staying in regular contact with applicants and hiring managers until a position is successfully closed.

Using this approach, Brosnan said, Air Force has been able to bring down hiring times for child care specialists from 300 days to 60 days. The success is leading to other applications, such as filling priority civilian security forces positions and cybersecurity positions within the agency.

APPENDIX POINTS OF CONTACT AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following people were interviewed as part of this project and are the points of contact at their agencies for additional information about the programs and initiatives described herein:

RECRUITING VETERANS

Ernie A. Beltz Jr.
Veterans Employment Program Manager
Department of the Treasury
202-927-VETS (Main) or 202-630-8387 (Direct)
ernie.beltz@do.treas.gov
Website: treasury.gov/veterans

Stephanie Malin
Public Affairs Specialist
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
stephanie.malin@dhs.gov
Website: cbp.gov

RECRUITING AND HIRING RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

Phil Burrows
Office of Policy, Planning, & Training
Department of Housing & Urban Development
202-402-5915
phillip.d.burrows@hud.gov

Gail Sprinkle
Program Analyst
Human Capital Management Division
FAS Office of Administration
General Services Administration
gail.sprinkle@gsa.gov

Bonnie K. Robinson
Program Specialist, Returned Volunteer Services
Peace Corps
brobinson@peacecorps.gov
rvs@peacecorps.gov
Website: peacecorps.gov/rpcv
Website: peacecorps.gov/nce

Janice P. Hiland
Workforce Management Officer
Center for Global Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
joh2@cdc.gov
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/employment/rpcv.htm>

Elizabeth Matthews
VISTA Alumni Outreach and Support Specialist
Corporation for National & Community Service
202-606-6774
ematthews@cns.gov

CREATING TALENT PIPELINES FOR YOUNGER WORKERS AND DIVERSE APPLICANTS

Susan Salter
Chief, Outreach and Recruitment Branch
Office of Human Resources
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
301-492-2206
susan.salter@nrc.gov

Fred Glueckstein
Senior Advisor, Office of Human Resources
Social Security Administration
fred.glueckstein@ssa.gov
Website: www.socialsecurity.gov

Amanda Perry
Corporate Recruiter
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
Amanda.perry@ferc.gov
Website: www.ferc.gov

Caroline Pettit
Program Manager, Education & Outreach
Partnership for Public Service
cpettit@ourpublicservice.org
(202) 775-6956

Amanda Davis
Program Associate, Education & Outreach
Partnership for Public Service
adavis@ourpublicservice.org
(202) 292-1019

RECRUITING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Sara Mahoney
Business Development Specialist, Office of Disability
Employment Policy
Department of Labor
202-693-7901
mahoney.sara@dol.gov

Lori Thompson
Team Lead, NIH Corporate Recruitment
National Institutes of Health
301-594-2157
thompsonl2@mail.nih.gov

John S. Pak
Program Specialist, Organizational Capability Office
Office of Human Capital Management
Goddard Space Flight Center
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
john.s.pak@nasa.gov
recruitment@gsfc.nasa.gov

E-RECRUITMENT, WEB TECHNOLOGIES AND BRANDING

Edwin Luevanos
Office of the CHCO, Strategic Planning & Policy
Department of Energy
202-586-4107
edwin.luevanos@hq.doe.gov

Michael F. Brosnan
Chief, Workforce Planning and Enterprise Recruiting
Air Force Personnel Center
United States Air Force
michael.brosnan@randolph.af.mil
afciviliancareers.com

For more information about this project,
please contact:

Joshua Joseph, Ph.D.
Senior Program Manager, Research
Partnership for Public Service
202-775-9111
jjoseph@ourpublicservice.org

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Deputy Director, National Recruitment
National Institutes of Health

Patrick Miller
Director, Workforce Management Resource Center,
National Cancer Institute

Bob Michon
Training Administrator, National Institutes of Health
Office (formerly at Peace Corps)

United States Air Force

Edward Vargas
Enterprise Recruiter, Air Force Personnel Center

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Mike Mrozowski
Chief of Recruitment and Development

Department of the Treasury

Nicole Johnson
Associate CHCO for Human Capital Strategic
Management

Shanda Adams
Hamilton Fellows Program Manager

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Richard Gudnitz
Recruitment Program Manager, Goddard Space
Flight Center

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