



GEN NEXT

THE BEST PLACES TO LAUNCH A CAREER IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

How do professionals starting their federal careers feel about the agencies they serve, and how well are those agencies managing their new class of public servants? In an era of career flexibility and job fluidity, what does it take to build a federal government workforce of the future?

These are the questions the Partnership for Public Service and Deloitte set out to understand in this *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*[®] snapshot analysis—based on the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) 2010 employee survey.

The good news for government is that a majority of new employees under the age of 30 report high levels of overall satisfaction when it comes to their specific jobs and agencies (table 1). The three agencies that top the overall satisfaction rankings are the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The government-wide overall satisfaction index score¹ for this cohort of new employees is 75 percent (out

of 100), 10 points above the score for employees of all ages employed for any length of time.² Out of 26 agencies, only four scored below 70 percent.

In a time of budget cuts and hiring freezes, the need to attract young professionals and subsequently retain them is paramount to a high-performing federal government. OMB estimates that 60,000 federal workers are set to retire by year's end. To prevent a brain drain of highly skilled and educated employees, the government must work to attract young talent into its ranks and be seen as a great place to launch and build a career. These emerging professionals potentially offer a diversity of skill sets and innovative ideas that could expand agencies' overall expertise, and better represent the population they serve. Ideally, they are future federal leaders helping agencies to fulfill their missions.

¹ The *Best Places to Work* index score is based on the percentage of positive responses to questions: I recommend my organization as a good place to work (Q40); Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job? (Q69); Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization? (Q71).

² The scores and rankings for all employees, originally published in September 2010, includes the under 30 respondents. Excluding new under 30 employees from all employees does not substantially affect the results.

TABLE 1
**New government employees under 30 years old—
 overall Satisfaction**

GOVERNMENT AGENCY	RANK	INDEX SCORE
Department of Veterans Affairs	1	90.3
Nuclear Regulatory Commission	2	88.8
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	3	87.5
General Services Administration	4	84.1
Social Security Administration	5	83.6
Environmental Protection Agency	6	82.3
Department of the Treasury	7	82.1
Securities and Exchange Commission	8	79.4
Department of State	9	78.8
Department of Commerce	10	77.7
Department of the Interior	11	76.3
Department of the Air Force	12	76.1
Government-wide	—	75.3
Department of Health and Human Services	13	74.5
Department of Labor	14	74.4
Department of the Navy	15	74.3
Department of Justice	16	73.1
National Archives and Records Administration	17	72.7
Department of Energy	18	72.4
Department of Defense	19	72.1
Office of Personnel Management	20	71.0
Department of Homeland Security	21	70.7
Department of Transportation	22	69.9
Department of Agriculture	23	69.1
Department of the Army	24	68.9
Department of Education	25	64.3
Department of Housing and Urban Development	26	47.6
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*	—	—
Small Business Administration*	—	—
Government Accountability Office†	—	—
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation†	—	—
Smithsonian Institution†	—	—
Intelligence Community†	—	—

* Small sample sizes may increase the likelihood of measurement error. EEOC and SBA did not meet the requirement for at least 30 respondents in the new and under 30 cohort. A few agencies had more than 30 but less than 100 respondents: VA; GSA; SEC; State; NARA; Education; and HUD.

† GAO, FDIC, Smithsonian, and the Intelligence Community do not participate in OPM's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, but conduct their own employee surveys. Comparable survey data for age group and tenure was unavailable.

The Three-Year Plunge: Honeymoon Ends at Many Agencies

There is a large gap in overall satisfaction levels at many agencies between new, young employees and those with longer tenure, suggesting a need for agency leaders to understand the gap and address it with targeted strategies. Federal workers who have been on the job for three years or more report far less satisfaction than those who have held their positions for a shorter period of time, and at some agencies, the chasm looms large. The widest disparity appears at the VA, where there is a 27-point drop-off between young, new employees (90 percent) and the workforce as a whole (64 percent). Only one agency ranked defies the trend: Housing and Urban Development. Emerging professionals there give HUD a score of 48 percent, 10 points *below* the average for all employees (table 2).

Eleven other agencies have double-digit satisfaction index score gaps between emerging professionals and seasoned workers. While some drop-off in satisfaction is to be expected, the extent of this falloff is dramatic enough to warrant attention (figures 1 and 2). Satisfaction levels drop off among those who have served three or more years and need to be addressed. Senior leaders can strengthen agencies' performance by finding ways to maintain high satisfaction levels among young staff members and keeping talented workers who can make valuable contributions.

TABLE 2
Overall satisfaction index gaps

BIGGEST GAPS	NEW EMPLOYEES UNDER 30 YEARS OLD	ALL EMPLOYEES	GAP
VA	90.3	63.6	26.7
SEC	79.4	62.0	17.5
NARA	72.7	57.1	15.6
SMALLEST GAPS			
OPM	71.0	65.8	5.1
DOJ	73.1	69.3	3.8
Army	68.9	65.6	3.3
NEGATIVE GAP			
HUD	47.6	57.1	-9.5

FIGURE 1
Overall satisfaction index by length of service

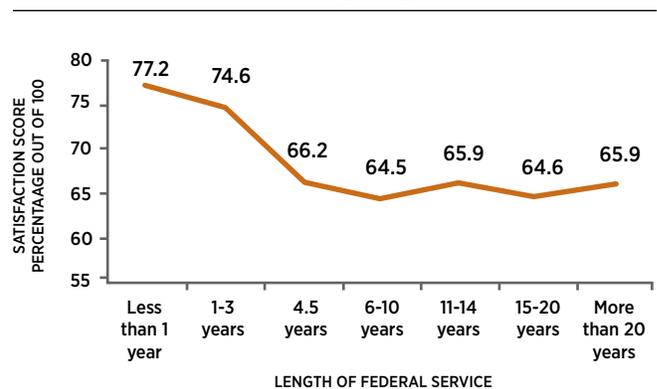
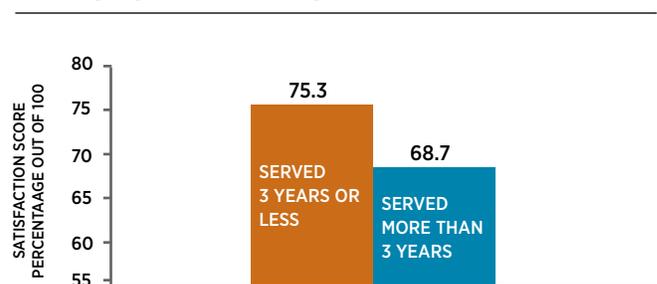


FIGURE 2
Overall satisfaction score by length of service for employees under 30 years old



Leadership Key to Satisfaction

What, exactly, is contributing to these gaps? The data show that government-wide, the most notable satisfaction gaps are related to effective leadership and the subcategories on employee views of supervisors and leaders (table 3). Emerging professionals are far more satisfied with their agencies' senior leaders than longer-term employees. At the Social Security Administration (SSA), for example, young employees rate leaders 21 points higher than all employees. At VA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the gap is 20 points (table 4). This indicates a positive impact, or greater connection, is being made by leaders of these agencies on new twenty-something employees.

Moreover, individual supervisors play a critical role in the satisfaction levels of these employees. At ten agencies, young staff members rated their supervisors above 75 percent. At NASA, for instance, where supervisor satisfaction among all employees is already high at 75 percent, young employees new to the agency gave supervisors a substantially higher score, 86 percent. Supervisors can be a significant and positive force in the development of these emerging professionals, thus the challenge becomes how to maintain that positive relationship over time.

What, if any, impact does satisfaction have on retention rates? Perhaps unsurprisingly, those emerging professionals with higher levels of satisfaction say more often than their less satisfied counterparts that they plan to stay in their current positions (86 percent versus 48 percent who plan to leave). Nor is it surprising that agencies with high satisfaction scores among *all* employees have lower percentages of new employees planning to leave. For example, slightly less than 20 percent of new emerging professionals at VA and NASA indicate they plan to leave. On the other hand, more than a third of these young newbies are contemplating departing agencies that have low overall satisfaction index scores, such as HUD and the Department of Education.

Empowerment, allowing for the ability to take one's own initiative on the job and have a sense of personal responsibility, is the factor that separates the new, under 30 employees from those planning to stay or leave (table 5). On the leaders subcategory, a 26-point gap exists between the emerging professionals who plan to stay and those who plan to leave. Other large gaps include: pay; training/development; rewards/advancement; and skills/mission match. The first three, to some extent, seem to be linked to feelings of future growth and accomplishment on the job. Skills/mission match shows very high scores for those who plan to stay and high scores for employees in general, acting as the cement that binds employees to a long-term career.

TABLE 3
Gaps on effective leadership category scores

	NEW EMPLOYEES UNDER 30 YEARS OLD	ALL EMPLOYEES	GAP
Effective Leadership	64.1	54.5	9.6
Leaders	61.8	49.0	12.8
Supervisors	72.6	63.3	9.3
Empowerment	57.0	49.1	7.9
Fairness	58.7	53.3	5.4

TABLE 4
Biggest positive gaps on leaders and supervisors

	NEW EMPLOYEES UNDER 30 YEARS OLD	ALL EMPLOYEES	GAP
LEADERS			
SSA	76.8	55.8	21.0
VA	65.6	45.5	20.1
EPA	67.6	47.6	20.0
SUPERVISORS			
VA	78.8	56.5	22.3
SSA	80.4	61.8	18.6
SEC	74.1	59.0	15.1

TABLE 5
Plan to stay or leave gaps for new employees under 30 years old

	PLAN TO STAY	PLAN TO LEAVE	GAP
Overall Satisfaction Index	86.1	48.0	38.1
Effective Leadership	70.7	47.7	23.0
Empowerment	65.5	35.3	30.2
Leaders	69.4	43.5	25.9
Fairness	64.3	44.8	19.5
Supervisors	77.7	59.6	18.1
Pay	75.3	47.7	27.6
Training /Development	77.1	50.4	26.6
Rewards/Advancement	59.4	33.2	26.2
Skills/Mission Match	84.1	60.7	23.4
Strategic Management	72.4	53.0	19.4
Teamwork	78.7	59.7	19.0
Work/Life Balance	74.7	58.4	16.3
Support for Diversity	69.8	54.0	15.8
Family-Friendly	27.4	31.7	-4.3

Opportunity and Challenge

With the potential departure of large waves of retirement-eligible federal workers, the future of effective government lies in agencies' ability to attract and retain the next generation of workers. From 2006 to 2009, more than 100,000 people under 30 started a federal career.³ Currently, nearly 10 percent of the federal workforce is twenty-something and at some agencies, such as the Patent and Trademark Office and Customs and Border Protection, that percentage doubles to 20 and 18 percent, respectively. These numbers signify a need for federal agencies to assess how to take advantage of the young, energetic talent they have brought on board. Whether new, emerging professionals remain at their federal jobs depends on their satisfaction level, particularly with their leaders and supervisors. However, the substantial drop in satisfaction as employees gain tenure is worrisome, especially at a time when keeping talent is critical for government.

Given the state of today's economic climate, along with likely government budget cuts and hiring freezes, it becomes even more crucial to engage this emerging group of government professionals, particularly as they begin a federal career. Agencies now are challenged with developing and retaining these workers to ensure that they will rise through the ranks to become leaders themselves. Agency leadership—from senior leaders to those supervisors closest to the employee level—plays a critical role in earning positive views of federal employment from emerging professionals, a reality that agencies should focus on to improve mission success in the long term.

This Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® snapshot was made possible by the generous support of Deloitte.

³ OPM, FedScope, fiscal 2007, 2008 and 2009.