



10 Steps to Fix Our Broken Government

OVERVIEW

As Americans, we have only one institution with the resources and the public mandate to address our nation's most important and difficult challenges: the federal government. Its responsibilities include strengthening our national security, supporting the economy, maintaining the rule of law, protecting public health, responding to natural disasters and helping those in need.

The performance of our government depends on the tens of thousands of civil servants who have dedicated themselves to the public good and who carry out the nation's policies and deliver vital services. Federal employees are mission-driven, with a 2018 survey showing 89% believe their work is important while 95% say they are willing to put in extra effort to get the job done. And many are responsible for significant accomplishments, including this year's Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal honorees who have advanced our country's global leadership in space, medicine, security, innovation and much more.

However, our government is at a tipping point. Decades of persistent neglect and antiquated systems have left federal agencies and their employees unable to meet many of the demands of today's fast-paced, interconnected world or prepare for the challenges of tomorrow. In short, we have a legacy government that is not keeping up with the world around it.

We need thoughtful action by Congress and the administration to fix broken workforce and management policies and operations that are crucial to the government's ability to serve the public effectively. The solutions below, taken together, offer an achievable strategy to make government work better and to attract a new generation to public service.

PROBLEMS AND FIXES



1. Overhaul the hiring process

The government faces complex demands requiring a specialized workforce, but its ability to attract top talent is impeded by a slow, arcane hiring process. It takes the government an average of 106 days to hire an employee, more than double the time in the private sector. The government must simplify the obstacle-laden hiring system so agencies can hire better and faster.



2. Address the generation gap

Only 6% of federal employees are under the age of 30 compared with about 24% in the private sector. About 45% are over 50, and 32% on the payroll at the start of fiscal 2018 will be eligible to retire in 2022. The government must bring young talent into government through better use of internships and proactive recruiting on college campuses, and by using an expedited hiring process.



3. Reform the pay system

The compensation system was last overhauled in 1949 and does not reflect the realities of the modern labor market. The government must move to an occupation-specific, market-sensitive compensation system to attract skilled professionals.



4. Provide better customer service

The public expects and deserves fast and efficient services from the government, whether it's helping students obtain college financial aid, linking veterans to critical health care or tracking the status of a request or application. Federal agencies need vision, resources and incentives to deliver high-quality services online, on the phone or in the office, and upgrade the customer experience.



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5. Make better use of data and technology

Top-performing organizations use data to improve results. Congress and federal agencies need to expand use of data to inform policy decisions, measure program effectiveness and improve outcomes, and should make long-term investments in the technology necessary to do so. The government also is saddled with legacy technology, spending 70 to 80% of about \$80 billion a year of its IT budget on computer system operations and maintenance. Better, newer and smarter use of technology is essential.



6. Improve government leadership

The government's career and political leaders need to be strategic thinkers, skilled problem-solvers and good managers. This requires leaders to work collaboratively, engage career civil servants and emphasize long-term stewardship over short-term policy success. Federal leaders, whether career or political, should be prepared or trained for their roles and held accountable through performance plans. And some political appointments that require Senate confirmation should be converted to career positions to allow more stable leadership for tackling long-term challenges.



7. End government shutdowns and fix the budget process

The 35-day partial government shutdown from Dec. 22, 2018, until Jan. 28, 2019, the most recent disruption of critical services caused by a budgetary and political stalemate, harmed our national security and our economy, and violated the public trust. Legislation should be approved to automatically continue federal funding at existing levels when Congress and the president do not meet the deadline to enact yearly appropriations bills. Congress also should consider reforming the budget process, including adopting multiyear instead of one-year funding cycles.



8. Focus on employee engagement and recognize good work

Federal employees' satisfaction with their jobs and workplaces falls well below their counterparts in the private sector. Less than half of all federal employees believe good work is recognized while only 59% believe their talents are used well in the workplace. Leaders should make use of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® data to pinpoint areas for workforce improvements, and leaders should create a culture of recognition that acknowledges employees who excel.



9. Harness the power of innovation

Innovative organizations are comfortable taking risks, capitalizing on success and learning from failure. Our government is risk averse, a point driven home by a federal employee survey showing that fewer than four in 10 civil servants feel creativity and innovation are rewarded in the workplace. Congress and administration leaders must create a culture of innovation and develop incentives for employees to share and try new ideas for improving operations and service to the public.



10. Make the presidential transition a priority

Presidential candidates tend to focus on campaigning, not what it will take to manage and lead the federal government. Incumbent presidents also have tended to miss the chance to learn from their first four years in office and make adjustments in personnel, policy and the performance of government. Preparing to govern the world's most important and complex enterprise is an absolute necessity. Presidential candidates and incumbents must understand how to create opportunities and mitigate risks through deliberate and comprehensive transition planning well in advance of Election Day.