



LOOKING INWARD FOR TALENT

RETRAINING EMPLOYEES FOR TOMORROW'S JOBS

SEPTEMBER 2019



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE



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- Providing assistance to federal agencies to improve their management and operations, and to strengthen their leadership capacity.
- Conducting outreach to college campuses and job seekers to promote public service.
- Identifying and celebrating government's successes so they can be replicated across government.
- Advocating for needed legislative and regulatory reforms to strengthen the civil service.
- Generating research on, and effective responses to, the workforce challenges facing our federal government.
- Enhancing public understanding of the valuable work civil servants perform.

General Assembly (GA) is advancing the future of work by equipping individuals and organizations with the most in-demand 21st-century skills. Offering training and assessments in software engineering, data science, digital marketing, and more, GA is building transparent career pathways for people, and sustainable, diverse talent pipelines for employers. With 20 locations, immersive online offerings, onsite trainings for the Fortune 500, and a global community of professionals nearly 1 million strong, GA is the leading source for training, staffing, and career transitions.

Executive Summary

The increasing adoption of automation and new technologies will change the face of government work. More than 80 different federal occupations are likely to be affected by automation.¹ While some jobs will go away, others will increasingly rely on technology to perform routine tasks. As occupations transform, federal employees will need the skills to adapt to new ways of work. Reskilling and upskilling, while still nascent in government, are important strategies that agencies can use to prepare employees for this transition.

The government has a long way to go to fully embrace reskilling and upskilling for long-term talent development. While private sector companies like AT&T have already turned to retraining to skill their workforce, the federal government has not devoted enough resources to keep up with the impending workforce changes. Federal employees are one of the government's most valuable assets. Improving the quality of the workforce by building new and relevant skills will also improve the quality of services that agencies can provide to the American people. The government will need to make a significant investment to retrain

current employees in order to continue delivering on its missions.

Retraining current employees provides several benefits to the federal government: It is a valuable way to retain federal employees with institutional knowledge who understand how government works and are dedicated to their agency's mission; it provides employees with the opportunity to focus on more meaningful work; and it helps agencies fill positions in highly competitive fields, such as IT and cybersecurity, with qualified candidates.

This white paper makes the case for why agencies should consider reskilling and upskilling and highlights promising practices across government and in the private sector. We also share recommendations for overcoming obstacles and making retraining an integral part of an agency's talent management strategy. Agencies will need to:

- **Predict how work will transform:** Develop a vision of what jobs will look like, what skills will be required and what future needs will be.
- **Assess employee skills:** Develop a skills inventory to understand workforce capabilities—the skills employees already have and which ones they lack—to identify whether the workforce has the

ability to do tomorrow's work.

- **Get workforce buy-in:** Recruit leaders, managers and front-line supervisors willing to commit to reskilling and upskilling by making the business case and showcasing employee successes. Encourage employee support by emphasizing the importance of learning new skills and bring them along by communicating upcoming changes.
- **Find the right candidates:** Find interested and capable employees to ensure successful training outcomes.
- **Be prepared:** Determine if your agency has the resources and infrastructure to start a new program. Target specific skills and positions for retraining and provide opportunities for employees to use their new skills.

As the federal workforce evolves, leaders should consider reskilling and upskilling employees to address workforce transformation and open their agencies to a wider pool of talent. Providing employees with new skills can help agencies build their future workforces and also meet the demands of today's interconnected, technology-driven world and prepare for the challenges of tomorrow.

¹ Partnership for Public Service and the IBM Center for The Business of Government, "More Than Meets AI," February 2019, 5. Available at <https://bit.ly/2INqbtm>

Introduction

The nature of work is changing. Rapid innovation and the accelerated adoption of advanced technology will continue to revolutionize how work is being done in the near future. The World Economic Forum projects that by 2022, new technologies will create a global net gain of 58 million new jobs in emerging areas such as artificial intelligence and machine learning.² This new reality will fundamentally shift how government does business and change the landscape of the federal workforce.

More than 80 different federal occupations are likely to be affected by automation.³ Technology is expected to replace routine tasks such as processing data and documenting information. Some agency jobs are unlikely to exist, while the need for high-level skills to use these technologies are predicted to increase. Under these expected changes, employees will find that the automation of day-to-day activities is likely to transform how their work is done and will have to adjust by

learning and using new skills for altered roles.

Private sector companies in similar circumstances have felt compelled to act. AT&T, for example, is experiencing fast-moving technological upheaval as the 140-year-old business transforms from a telephone company to a mobile, broadband and video service provider. Internal assessments showed that its workforce would be woefully unprepared to operate in this new technological environment. In response, AT&T has dedicated \$1 billion to provide half of its workforce with the software and engineering skills needed to keep up with new industry trends.⁴

Government has yet to fully embrace large-scale retraining efforts. Many agencies are aware of what the future holds but have not devoted enough resources to keep up with the impending workforce changes. The government will need to make a significant investment to retrain employees in order to continue delivering on its missions. But first, it must recognize all that is involved in retraining endeavors,

including planning for future talent needs, providing skills and matching people with new roles.

As technology becomes more intertwined with mission-critical operations, the government requires a workforce that understands new technologies and can use them in their daily work. The current federal workforce is highly tenured—at the end of fiscal 2018, more than half of its full-time, nonseasonal permanent employees had 10 or more years of government service and many agencies struggle to attract tech talent.⁵ With other sectors competing for similar skills, hiring alone is not the answer—there may not be enough people with the expertise to become part of a highly skilled, tech-savvy government workforce. The government will need to look towards its experienced roster of civil servants to provide the critical skills needed for new work.

The Office of Personnel Management has this future scenario on its radar. “The technology and workforce needs in the federal workplace are changing rapidly, which means we have to change our thinking around talent management,”

2 World Economic Forum, “The Future of Jobs Report,” 2018, 8. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2xeWN7e>

3 Partnership for Public Service and the IBM Center for The Business of Government, “More Than Meets AI,” February 2019, 5. Available at <https://bit.ly/2INqbtm>

4 Susan Caminiti, “AT&T’s \$1 billion gambit: Retraining nearly half its workforce for jobs of the future,” CNBC, March 13, 2018. Retrieved from <https://cnb.cx/2FBr9ah>

5 Office of Personnel Management, “FedScope September 2018 employment data.” Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2kAbmiz>

Office of Personnel Management Acting Director Margaret Weichert stated in a May press release. One solution is to retrain current employees, as AT&T and other companies are doing, using methods increasingly being referred to as “reskilling” and “upskilling,”—both terms for training employees in new skills.

This training could be a valuable way to shift employees whose jobs are changing or disappearing to positions that agencies need filled, especially in cases where agencies face hiring difficulties. “Federal agencies will have greater capacity to redeploy workers through reskilling efforts to meet their most pressing, mission-critical needs,” Weichert added.

Reskilling federal workers is a critical part of the federal government’s strategy to create a workforce for the 21st century. The president’s management agenda includes a directive for a “reskill and redeploy” strategy, and some agencies have already acted. The CIO Council launched the Federal Cyber Reskilling Academy to develop cybersecurity skills in the current federal workforce. The National Science Foundation is leading the Career Compass Challenge, a competition seeking innovative ideas for addressing the rapidly

changing nature of work—which could potentially offer technological approaches for matching federal employees’ skills with current and future work opportunities. Finally, the Office of Information and Technology at the Department of Veterans Affairs is piloting a reskilling program as part of an ongoing IT modernization effort.

Despite these advances, government needs to do more to see a much-needed payoff. Although many pilots have been started and more are on the horizon, agencies are only beginning to explore the potential for cultivating new skills in their employees, either to address current technology needs or meet the workforce changes of the future. Many current efforts are in early stages and only involve small groups of people.

There are many steps involved in any retraining effort, from leading the transition to matching people with jobs that use those skills. At this early stage, the jury is still out on whether agencies are looking comprehensively at reskilling, if they’re taking the right steps to begin and how successful their efforts will be.

In this white paper, the Partnership for Public Service and General Assembly highlight promising reskilling and upskilling initiatives and examine how agencies can look inward to build a modern workforce

equipped to do the work of today and tomorrow. We also explore how organizations can address common barriers to reskilling and upskilling and present a blueprint to help agencies get started. This paper is based on our research and interviews with human resources and talent experts in the federal government and private sector, who shared how they hope to fill critical skills gaps through reskilling and upskilling and why it is worth considering.

The Case for Reskilling and Upskilling

OPM's Reskilling Toolkit,⁶ which helps agencies design reskilling and upskilling opportunities based on employee strengths and mission needs, defines **reskilling** as training for employees who have shown they have the aptitude to learn a completely new occupation. For example, an office clerk whose job has become obsolete might be reskilled to learn web development. **Upskilling** involves training employees in a particular occupation with new skills to improve how they perform their jobs. For instance, employees who use the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program in the grant administration process might be upskilled to use robotic process automation instead.

6 Office of Personnel Management, "Reskilling Toolkit," 2019. Available at <https://bit.ly/2WgGNPS>

Agencies have several options when it comes to filling critical positions but typically find talent by recruiting and hiring new employees. With competition for new talent steep in several occupations, meeting future hiring needs and closing the technology skills gap requires a more forward-looking approach.

Retraining initiatives can offer several benefits for the federal government. Providing people with new skills is a valuable way to retain mission-driven federal employees with institutional knowledge who would otherwise be lost through attrition as roles are displaced. "Reskilling is essential because the current workforce knows the business of government and knows how to execute their mission," said Dorothy Aronson, chief information officer at the National Science Foundation and co-lead for the PMA subgoal on reskilling. "We don't just need cyber experts or data analysts or data scientists. We need people [who] understand the way the agencies work, and so we need to continuously upskill or reskill the people that are working here," she added.

Reskilling and upskilling could also give employees the opportunity to do more meaningful work beyond the routine tasks automation can handle, potentially leading to more engaged employees, according to OPM Deputy

Director Michael Rigas. "A lot of the work that employees are doing is repetitive or rules-based. It's required and necessary work, but it's not the kind of work that they get excited to do every day," Rigas said. "It's not what they're thinking about when they talk about why they're passionate about their work."

Finally, it has become more difficult for agencies to hire and retain top talent in certain fields. The government competes for tech talent with the private sector, which can typically offer more attractive pay and benefits. Providing new skills to agency employees could enable organizations to fill positions in highly competitive fields, such as IT and cybersecurity, with qualified candidates. As just one example, demand for cybersecurity roles in the U.S. has increased 94% since 2013, according to labor analytics company Burning Glass Technologies.⁷ However, projections suggest a cybersecurity workforce shortage of 1.8 million unfilled positions globally by 2022.⁸

7 Burning Glass Technologies, "Recruiting Watchers for the Virtual Walls: The State of Cybersecurity Hiring," June 2019, 9. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2KQQT20>

8 (ISC)², "2017 Global Information Security Workforce Study" Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2IHsRh4>

Reskilling in Practice

Some organizations have used pilot programs to explore the potential to reskill and upskill employees for their data and technology needs. For some agencies, retraining will provide much needed talent in areas that lack employees with expertise. Others are exploring reskilling and upskilling to strategically respond to evolving business needs. In this section, we highlight federal and private sector perspectives that can help inform the efforts of other organizations.



Department of Veterans Affairs

At the Department of Veterans Affairs, IT modernization efforts have led the Office of Information and Technology to begin reskilling many of its approximately 8,000 employees. An agency priority is to reduce costs and increase the quality of services to veterans. These goals are driving IT modernization and transformation to DevOps, a collaboration practice used by software developers and other IT professionals. The goals are also leading to more agile methodologies to manage ongoing delivery of highly technical projects and contracts.

In 2018, the agency began the effort by evaluating the existing IT landscape and assessing how prepared the organization was to provide employees with the skills for moving into new roles. The agency examined critical IT trends and lessons learned from other large-scale federal IT modernization efforts. An outside team conducted interviews and focus groups with more than 40 IT subject matter experts to critically examine technical and digital shifts in the

field. Team members also reviewed strategic planning materials and data on demographics and positions.

Next, they conducted a workforce study to forecast and assess the supply and demand for particular skills and roles. “It’s difficult to achieve success when you don’t have a competent understanding of the workforce and what the goal is,” said Angela DeSarro, director of IT workforce development at the VA. The team identified which roles would change based on shifting agency priorities, which skills would increase in demand and which workforce strategies would most effectively staff each role. For example, team members found an increasing demand for systems analysts, a difficult position to hire for externally because the role requires knowledge of internal agency systems and existing business relationships. They used this information to target the role as a potential career destination for staff members who held engineering and testing roles that might be decreasing in demand in the near future, and who

would benefit from learning new skills.

Looking to the future, IT workforce development personnel, in collaboration with leadership from the Office of Information and Technology, and the OIT DevOps Implementation Team led by Patty Craighill, will continue to evaluate the workforce to inform future training and workforce development tools. One such initiative includes the creation of workforce development programs, called “mastery teams,” specifically focused on upskilling or reskilling the workforce in priority areas, including cloud and product-line management. These workforce development program frameworks are designed to meet the specific needs of each target population and include training methods ranging from virtual instructor-led training to job shadowing and mentoring.



Federal Cyber Reskilling Academy

In November 2018, as part of the president's management agenda, the CIO Council announced the government-wide Federal Cyber Reskilling Academy to address the shortage of cybersecurity talent in the federal government. The program, run by the council's workforce committee and the Department of Education, aims to develop new IT and cyber talent to fill open cybersecurity positions in government. "This is a great step in our upskilling and reskilling of the federal workforce by taking folks who want to

execute on their agency's mission in a different way than they are today, but never really had an opportunity or an on-ramp to get into the cybersecurity field. This opens the door to keep employees engaged within federal service and leverage their skills and talent in a new way," Rigas said.

Interest in the program soared from federal employees who wanted an opportunity to expand how they might work for the government. The academy attracted more than 1,500 applicants from across government to

fill 30 spots in its inaugural class. The finalists who completed the three-month training program in July 2019 received two Global Information Assurance Certification credentials in cybersecurity and are hoping to either transition into new cybersecurity roles or apply their new skills to fill existing gaps at their current agencies. While the first cohort was restricted to current employees who did not work in the IT field, the second cohort was expanded to admit federal employees with IT backgrounds.



Private Sector

The private sector is already going down the path to reskill and upskill employees to build internal capacity. In July 2019, Amazon.com, Inc., announced plans to spend \$700 million over the next six years to train about a third of its U.S. workforce—about 100,000 workers—as part of its Upskilling 2025 pledge.⁹ The initiative will present opportunities for employees to develop skills for company jobs in fast-growing areas. For example, the Amazon Technical Academy will help employees in non-technical roles transition to careers

in software engineering. Amazon will also invest in existing internal training programs with proven outcomes, including the Amazon Apprenticeship, which provides on-the-job training to veterans and military spouses for roles such as cloud support associate and software development engineer. The program, started in January 2017 with a cohort of 15 employees, is certified by the Department of Labor and will have produced approximately 600 apprentices by the end of 2019.

Booz Allen Hamilton also recognized a growing need for data science skills within its analyst workforce. In 2017, the company

invested in creating and launching the Data Science 5K, a program which focuses on developing foundational data science skills—including programming fundamentals, data analysis and machine learning—to better gather insights from data. The Data Science 5K, available to any firm employee, is one program under Booz Allen's internal Analytics University portfolio, which relies on a variety of internal and external training providers. In the past fiscal year, more than 1,400 employees were trained through Analytics University programs.

⁹ Amazon.com, Inc., "Upskilling 2025." Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2KJrqrh>

Recommendations

Agencies need to consider retraining existing employees as a workforce strategy but also must think through the challenges. From planning future changes to placing successful candidates in new roles, agencies must be ready to build up their existing workforce to better deliver their missions.

In May 2019, OPM released tools to help agencies prepare for workforce changes and provide guidance for starting reskilling programs that can build on the recommendations of the president's management agenda. The Reskilling Toolkit helps agencies plan, implement and evaluate new programs that get employees much needed skills. Many strategies in the toolkit support recommendations our private and public sector experts suggested for how to overcome obstacles and make retraining an integral part of a talent management strategy.

Reskilling Framework



Predict how work will transform

- How is your agency's mission likely to change in the future?
- How will new technologies change jobs?
- What skills and capabilities are likely to be needed?



Assess employee skills

- How can your agency assess the skills of its current workforce?
- What methods will you use to keep inventories up to date?
- How do the current skills of the workforce compare to the projected needs of the future?



Get workforce buy-in

- What strategies can your agency use to encourage employees to take advantage of reskilling and upskilling opportunities?
- How can agencies communicate the career benefits of acquiring new skills?



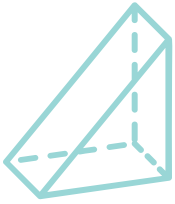
Find the right candidates

- How will the employees who are interested and capable of mastering new skills be identified as candidates for reskilling and upskilling?



Be prepared

- What infrastructure and resources does the agency need so that employees who acquire new skills can put them in to practice quickly?



Predict How Work Will Transform

At least 30% of job tasks in 60% of occupations could be automated using today's technology, according to the McKinsey Global Institute, a business and economics research organization.¹⁰ As organizations adopt new technologies, the workday will start to look very different from what it does today. Leaders must forecast future needs and articulate a clear vision of what jobs will look like and what skills will be required for future work.

However, most agency strategic plans focus on the roles needed now instead of anticipating the evolution of today's positions in the future. "Reskill and redeploy is more than just looking at roles that are going to exist in the

strategic workforce planning level three years from now, five years from now and 10 years from now," said Robyn Rees, senior advisor for human capital transformation at the Department of the Interior.

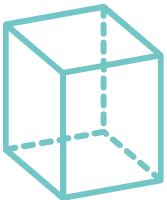
Agency leaders need to understand how work will transform so they can communicate to employees how their skills align with future opportunities, according to Rees. It is a challenge, she added. "How can we really help employees understand their future opportunities and how their skills might align with these opportunities, if leadership doesn't understand it ourselves?" Rees asked.

Scott Cameron, principal deputy assistant secretary for policy, management, and budget at the Department of Interior and co-lead for the PMA subgoal on reskilling, said, "The best way to approach this

may be to bring together functional experts from agencies with similar roles, so they can collectively envision the mechanisms and skill sets organizations need to deliver on their missions in the future."

To plan effectively, mission and support staff teams must work together closely. For example, HR professionals depend on high-quality forecasting information from mission staff for their strategic planning. Without input from mission staff, HR professionals risk making decisions in a vacuum. "There's no way HR could have identified something like the cryptocurrency issue," said Trevor Norris, chief human capital officer at the Department of the Treasury. Effective collaboration positions leaders to do a better job of evaluating their current workforce and future needs.

¹⁰ McKinsey Global Institute, "A Future That Works: Automation, Employment, and Productivity," 2017, 5. Retrieved from <https://mck.co/2tGoTj>



Assess Employee Skills

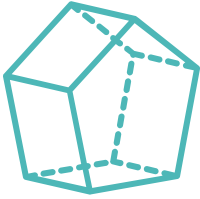
Agencies should develop a skills inventory to understand the capabilities of their workforces—what skills employees have and what skills they lack—and to identify whether the workforce has the skills to do tomorrow's work. This analysis will also help agencies pinpoint which employees have skills that put them in a better position to take on retraining. "We have a body of employees who are currently ready, able [and] capable of performing higher-value work," Norris said, "We need to look within to determine how we might better optimize the people we have onboard now and assess their performance."

Agencies should regularly assess their workforces to determine which employees are potential

candidates for training—a strategy the IT organization of the Internal Revenue Service is using now by incorporating employee assessments into its workforce planning. For the past six years, the IRS has maintained an automated skills database for its IT technical skills, in which nearly 7,000 IT employees have rated their proficiency in targeted skills such as computer and software languages, IT certifications and project and program management skills. Employees are required to complete a first-time skill assessment within 120 days of being hired, then update their skill proficiencies and technical certifications every two years. The agency maps these self-assessments with data based on job grades and

series, so leadership can assign high priority work to employees with the specific expertise or competency levels that the agency needs. They can also use the data as a tool for talent management efforts, such as hiring, training or succession planning.

The IRS also develops and offers its own IT courses, customized for its work based on the critical skills identified through the assessment process. In addition, the agency looks at the overall skill level of employees in specific job series and the projected retirement dates of employees in those series. The agency can then project the IT skills it is likely to lose in the near future, which helps inform how it should recruit for and train employees in those skills.



Get Workforce Buy-In

Agency leaders will need buy-in from managers, front-line supervisors and employees for a reskilling or upskilling program to be successful. At agencies in early stages of workforce modernization, leaders may not want to commit to reskilling or upskilling programs until they show proven returns. Advocates should be prepared to make the business case for retraining to make it an appealing choice for talent management.

Funding is one aspect agencies consider when they explore new ways of doing business. Reskilling supporters can make a case that managers need to weigh the costs of hiring for a vacant role against the resources needed to train existing staff, according to Ardine Williams, vice president of people operations and workforce development at Amazon.com, Inc. “You’ve got two pieces: the opportunity cost of that job being open and the cost to hire [a new employee],” she said. Retraining existing employees can be a cost-effective way to fill the labor gap. “If I can bring somebody in and train them, I can reduce those two numbers. That’s very hard to argue with,” she added. Agencies can also consider creative ways to enhance funding for retraining programs, such as using tuition reimbursement funds.

Our experts also advocated for celebrating employee accomplishments, which can promote the retraining programs and attract additional buy-in from more risk-averse leaders. The General Services Administration, for example, used town halls to promote success stories for a rotational program aimed at providing agency reskilling and upskilling opportunities. As a result, Erika Dinnie, director of IT organizational development and management services, said the agency grew the number of participants from less than 1% of staff to 12%. There

are always some managers who are resistant to change, she added. “But once that train starts moving, they see they’re behind the curve and get on board,” she said.

Securing employee buy-in can be another challenge. Employees may lack the confidence to learn new skills or believe they do not have time to commit to a program for doing so. A common theme we heard was that employees often did not sense any urgency—they did not believe a workforce change would occur. “People hear from their employers that they need to get these skills because that’s what their job is going to require in six months or a year and some people still don’t take classes or engage in training because they somehow believe it won’t happen,” said Wendi Copeland, chief mission and partnership officer at Goodwill Industries International. “If you believe you can kick the can down the road, you might kick the can down the road,” she added.

Leaders should help employees recognize impending workforce changes and their likely impact. This can include sharing with employees throughout the decision-making process the expected outcomes of reskilling programs, such as how individuals’ roles will change. Employees then get a stronger sense of their personal stake in the outcome and could feel empowered to make decisions about the future. “People need to know what’s in it for them and why they should do it,” said Chaletta McCoy, staff director of human capital program development at the Defense Logistics Agency. “How can [retraining] make them more efficient and help the organization and others around them?”

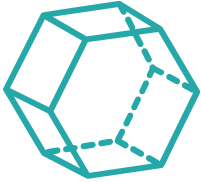
Senior leaders should also share with employees how new skills can benefit their career development. Envisioning a clear career path can

help motivate employees to improve their skills. “If they feel the connection with their job and the organization and have the aspiration, then they’ll want to do it,” McCoy said.

Selecting a group of employees to act as “change agents” could also encourage employee buy-in, according to our interviews. These employees would go through a reskilling or upskilling program and, by example, help promote the experience to their colleagues. This strategy could help generate broader support among employees wavering over whether to participate in retraining initiatives. They could be motivated by witnessing colleagues using new skills in the workplace.

Leaders must also communicate with their workforces about upcoming changes, according to DeSarro. “How many people, because of plans not being clearly communicated by leadership, are resistant to change?” she asked. “Communicate to the workforce why this is happening, and no, it’s not personal. It’s not you. It’s good for the organization. It’s good for the veterans. You have to tell them why. If you ask me a thousand times what I think is most important, it’s communication.”

Throughout the retraining process, employees should be kept informed about where they fit into the future and how their roles might change. Messaging makes a difference, Copeland said. “Help people have specificity about the skills needed, the time frame and the advantage of reskilling. The gain must be more than the pain. Many people thought they were done with their education. It’s a mind shift to believe, ‘Oh, I’ve got to keep learning.’”



Find the Right Candidates

One way to ensure limited reskilling and upskilling resources are spent wisely is to be clear about expectations from the outset. “You want to make sure that the employees going into the program are very clear on the expectations, requirements, demands, and responsibilities upfront,” said Crane Division University Technical Advisor Scott K. Karcher, who manages the Tech-to-Engineer reskilling program at the Naval Surface Warfare Center. “You don’t want any surprises. You don’t want any employees coming back after they’ve been in the program for some period of time saying, ‘Hey, you didn’t tell me I was going to have to do this or you didn’t tell me that it was going to require that,’ because then you

start losing people and you get people that are unhappy.”

Agencies can find the right candidates by taking account of applicants’ interest upfront to see if they are likely to commit to completing their training. At GSA, officials found that when they initially offered software licenses for employees’ online training without restrictions, many of those licenses went unused. In response, they instituted a process requiring interested employees to write a commitment statement indicating how many hours they would devote to the program and what they were going to learn. They found that by asking employees to consider how they would use the training,

and holding them accountable, the employees who enrolled were more likely to complete the program.

“We are trying to hit that sweet spot of allowing people who want unlimited access to continuing learning, while ensuring taxpayer dollars are well used,” Dinnie said. “We invest in ongoing learning licenses and require participants to make a commitment to the topic areas of study and number of hours they will commit, and our folks are doing that.”



Be Prepared

Once agencies find the right candidates, they need to determine whether it is the right time to implement a new program, according to our interviews. That includes learning if they are ready to provide training and have the infrastructure and support to do so.

Agencies should be prepared to target critical skill sets and positions for reskilling and upskilling programs to ensure the added skills will

best serve the agency’s mission. If employees are poised to fill existing talent gaps, agencies should also make sure they have opportunities to apply what they have learned to their work, even if new roles are not immediately available.

Resources for new training can also be limited. One way that agencies can navigate this challenge is to devise programs with other agencies who share similar missions. Agencies

can also maximize their resources by considering a broad range of training methods and taking advantage of internal assets, such as using subject matter experts to share knowledge. Without the proper preparation and resources, a training program is more at risk of failing, and failure could lead to low morale and slimmer chances for success in the future.

Conclusion

As the nature of federal work evolves, federal leaders should consider using reskilling and upskilling to address workforce transformation and to open their agencies to a wider pool of talent. The world is changing fast and government cannot be left behind. “Modernization is always happening, and it’s always been happening,” Aronson said. “People aren’t using the same tools today that they used five or 10 years ago. Even if they’re using the same business system, they’re using different kinds of phones and networking and underlying technology,” she added.

Training employees with new skills is not only a promising method for filling technology positions, but it can be highly useful for agencies to build future workforces. The experts who shared their methods for reskilling and upskilling employees offer a view of what other leaders may want to consider when starting their own programs. Federal leaders can use these lessons to decide how reskilling and upskilling employees fits their agencies’ needs.

Organizations need to forecast what the workforce will look like in the future, get buy-in from key

stakeholders and plan and implement programs to teach employees valuable skills to help manage workforce changes. Despite the potential challenges, agencies need to put reskilling and upskilling in the mix as they seek the talent and skills that will help them achieve their goals.

Appendix A

Acknowledgments

The individuals listed below generously offered their input on the potential of reskilling and upskilling the federal workforce. We greatly appreciate their time and counsel. However, the contents of this white paper do not necessarily reflect the views of those we interviewed. Additionally, the views of participating federal officials do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the federal government or its agencies.

Interviewees

Sherri Abdel-Majid
Branch Chief
HR Customer Services Division
Internal Revenue Service

Dorothy Aronson
Chief Information Officer
National Science Foundation

David Aten
Senior Advisor to the Chief Human
Capital Officer
Department of the Treasury

Scott Cameron
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Policy, Management and Budget
Department of the Interior

Wendi Copeland
Chief Mission and Partnership
Officer
Goodwill Industries, International

Janice Corley
Management & Program Analyst
HR Customer Services Division
Internal Revenue Service

Angela DeSarro
Director of IT Workforce Development
Office of Information and Technology
Department of Veterans Affairs

Erika Dinnie
Director of IT Organizational
Development and Management
Services
General Services Administration

Kathleen Featheringham
Director, AI Strategy and Training
Booz Allen Hamilton

Sonya Francis
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