**PRIORITY 1**

# Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce

## Recruiting the Next Generation of Federal Workers

On May 16th, 2023, the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Personnel Management and the General Services Administration co-hosted the President's Management Agenda (PMA) Learning Agenda Workforce Symposium. The Workforce Symposium sought to support the implementation of the PMA by providing Federal practitioners with various examples of evidence-informed approaches related to Federal Workforce topics. To achieve this, staff from the Federal evaluation community and Federal practitioners, as well as external researchers and academics were brought in to share their experiences and research. The event included four sessions, including one on Recruiting the Next Generation of Federal Employees. The following document highlights research and emerging evidence shared during the recruitment session.

### PMA LEARNING AGENDA QUESTION

"What approaches to recruitment and hiring result in high-performing, diverse teams in Federal agencies?"

### CHALLENGE

Early career programs are a critical pathway into Federal service and an important part of the talent pipeline. While major progress has been made to improve the Federal hiring process, there are still opportunities to do more, especially in early-career hiring and programs.

### DESIRED OUTCOME(S)

Build a sustainable, long-term talent pipeline to ensure that agencies have sufficient and appropriate staff to effectively deliver their missions, including entry-level employees.

**WHAT WE KNOW**

*The following is a summary of key evidence shared during the PMA Learning Agenda Workforce Symposium for agencies to consider. Please note this summary is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive.*

## Survey of Potential Federal Employees Shows Opportunities to Improve Recruitment Strategies and Practices

*"Federal Recruitment and Hiring Studies", Qualtrics, 2023 ([Original Market Research Reports & Studies - Qualtrics](#)) – Dr. Sydney Heimbrock, [sheimbrock@qualtrics.com](mailto:sheimbrock@qualtrics.com)*

Qualtrics, a private-sector company specializing in experience management, discussed their survey of students and recent graduates, as well as a study of recent Federal government new hires and hiring managers, to better understand what potential candidates are looking for, what their expectations are, and what their experiences are in trying to get a Federal job. Highlights from this study (available on their website here: [2022 employee experience trends - Qualtrics](#)) include:

**Perceptions of Federal jobs vary by level of education, which result in those with high-demand skills having the least awareness of Federal job opportunities.** Education level is strongly correlated with the degree to which people would consider a job in the Federal government (see graphic, below). Per the survey findings, those with the least awareness of Federal job opportunities includes those with certifications, including in mission critical occupations like cyber. With some Federal government hiring moving more towards more skills-based hiring, it may be critical to work with certification institutions to reach students and recent graduates to educate them on the opportunities to work for the Federal government. The biggest opportunity is the thirty-five percent of people with certifications who state they may be interested in Federal jobs.
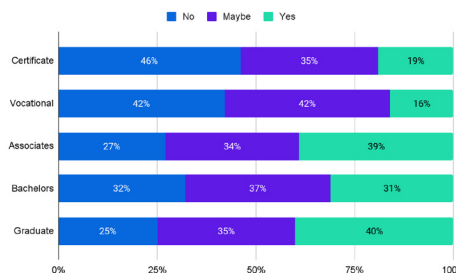


*A slide from the Qualtrics presentation, showing the results of their survey, which asked whether or not students and recent graduates who had completed different educational programs were considering Federal employment.*

**Students and recent graduates report the biggest barrier to applying for Federal jobs is their perception that they are not qualified.** The presentation recommended ensuring job postings are clear about any degree or certification requirements, as well as any requirements related to previous work experience.

**Understanding what students and recent graduates are looking for in jobs can inform recruitment strategies.** Both students and recent graduates express interest in work-life balance, but students also emphasize meaningful work, while recent graduates focus more on job security.

**Improving the hiring experience – for both successful and unsuccessful applicants, as well as for hiring managers – may help to ensure that top candidates are not being lost, and that strong, but unsuccessful candidates are not turned off from Federal service.** The interview stage was listed as the most positive step in the process, with the offer stage as the most negative. Agencies should work to better understand the drop off between the interview and offer stages, and work to address the drop-off, in order to avoid losing strong candidates. It is also critical to focus on the experience of the hiring manager, as they are the key ambassadors to Federal hiring. Enhancing their confidence in the hiring process will improve their engagement with potential candidates.

<span style="background-color:red">**RELATED PUBLICATION**</span>

[2022 employee experience trends - Qualtrics](#)

## Behavioral Science Insights can Inform Federal Recruitment and Retention Strategies

*"Recruiting new and diverse talent for government," Harvard Kennedy School People Lab, 2023 [(The People Lab (harvard.edu)](#) - Dr. Elizabeth Linos, Harvard Kennedy School, [elizabeth_linos@ hks.harvard.edu](#)*

The People Lab at Harvard University looks across the entire span of the Federal worker's experience, from application through retention and career advancement, to understand the pain points along the way, and to help agencies improve their efforts to build and maintain a diverse workforce. Their research is based in behavioral science, and done in collaboration with Federal agencies.

**Focusing on recruitment is important, but should be viewed as the first step in building and maintaining a diverse Federal workforce.** Diverse recruiting efforts also need to be connected to efforts during onboarding, and in the workspace and culture of the organization. Otherwise, agencies risk recruiting top talent, but losing them within the first two years.

**Agency recruitment efforts should consider not just increasing the number of applicants, but also streamlining the process to facilitate strong applications.** This includes looking at the application requirements, to make sure that top candidates aren't being lost in a process that is too long or too complicated, and refreshing announcements to determine whether the skills stated as required are truly necessary. Finally, it is also important to understand how a job is framed, and the impact that has on different population segments.

**Testing varying recruitment messages can illuminate different strategies that resonate with diverse populations.** Agencies can test not only which recruitment messages attract different candidates, but also which messages motivate candidates with the desired skills for the position to apply.

### RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Summary: How do we attract diverse talent to government jobs? – The People Lab (harvard.edu)

Policy Brief: Recruiting Young Talent to Government Policy Brief (harvard.edu)

Full Report: Recruitment White paper- final version 3.3.22 (harvard.edu)

### WHAT WE ARE TRYING

*Includes information from selected efforts to apply research featured during the PMA Learning Agenda Workforce Symposium.*

## EPA Responds to Hiring Surge through Creative Engagements that Meet Potential Candidates Where They Are

*"Outreach Strategies for Recruiting the Next Generation of Talent," EPA, 2023 (Careers | US EPA) - Arron Helm, Helm.arron@epa.gov; Kate Fox, Fox.Kate@epa.gov*

Recent legislation and appropriations authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to hire thousands of new positions – on top of the roughly 900-1,000 jobs the agency needs to fill each year due to attrition. EPA sought to meet this demand by reaching out to passive job seekers who may not have been considering Federal employment. The following are highlights from their strategies to use creative engagements to try to reach a new and diverse candidate pool.

**Conducting active outreach to potential candidates who may not be aware of or seeking Federal jobs opens up a huge pool of talent.** EPA's recruitment strategy focused, in part, on a pool of potential candidates by developing fun and creative content to post on social media.
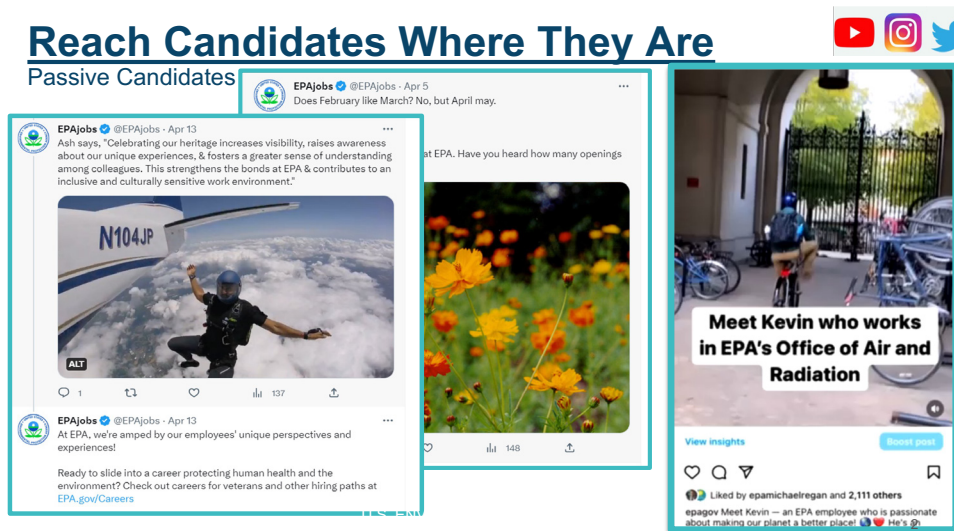


*Illustrative examples from EPA's social media*

**EPA sought to address barriers in applying to Federal positions by demystifying the Federal
hiring process.** They created simple and fun online content, including YouTube tutorials and
application walk throughs; hosted webinars for students and recent graduates that walked through
the Federal application process; and partnered with career services staff at colleges and universities
to educate them on the Federal hiring process using a "train the trainers" model. Reaching out to
career services staff during the summer, when they typically have less day-to-day demands from
students seems particularly promising, with one recent webinar having over 400 attendees.

**Special events and outreach efforts were developed to reach historically underrepresented
candidate pools.** EPA worked with new partners from minority-serving colleges and institutions,
as well as conducted outreach focusing on LGBTQI populations, first-generation college
students, persons with disabilities, and veterans. As part of this approach, EPA changed the
way they represented themselves by focusing more on sharing the stories of recent hires who are
demographically similar to the potential applicants the agency is trying to reach, particularly the
opportunities they have received throughout their Federal careers.

**EPA's recruitment team is tracking the process from outreach through applications.** Social media
engagements are higher, and participation in recruitment webinars has substantially increased.
Engagement on EPA's Virtual Hiring Platform from Potential Candidates from Historically Black
Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions has also increased. Thirty-six percent
of all applications from students and recent graduates list finding out about the job from one of the
team's recruitment initiatives. This progress has been achieved through a strategic use of limited
resources and staff.

**RELATED RESOURCES**

Careers | US EPA

# Strategic Recruiting for DEIA to Boost Innovative Research at NIH

*"NIH Corporate Recruitment: Sharing Sample Practices," National Institutes of Health, 2023 (NIH: Office of Human Resources) - Kyle Hartwig, kyle.hartwig@nih.gov; Joy Reding, joy.reding@nih.gov*

The National Institues of Health (NIH) employs over 20,000 people in a wide range of positions that support the agency's research mission. Their Office of Human Resources focuses on understanding how becoming an employee at NIH can be a personal experience for diverse poputlations, not just for entry-level jobs, but for jobs at all levels, including executive level positions. Their strategies aim to create a more diverse workforce that brings in new perspectives to spur more innovation in their research.

**NIH recruitment efforts are supported by a team and branding that reflects the diversity of the talent they are trying to reach.** The diversity of NIH's Corporate Recruitment Team brings a range of perspectives about what strategies can reach underrepresented populations. Their recent brand refresh showcases diversity in a range of positions in NIH.

**NIH supports hiring managers to create positive experiences for potential candidates through an easy-to-use, on-demand menu of resources that supports the hirign process, from beginning to end.**

**NIH uses a private sector model for talent sourcing that leverages corporate recruiting approaches, but with knowledge of Federal hiring processes.** The team uses this approach to hire approximately 100 executive-level candidates per year, using social science interventions to obtain a diverse set of candidates.

**NIH's "New Frontiers" strategy recruits hard-to-fill positions with remote-eligible postings that appeal to veterans and indigenous populations.** Social media and events reach out to populations that may have the skills, but prefer to live in their communities, to inform them of remote-eligible positions at NIH.

## Topics for Future Research

Researchers interested in exploring ways to contribute to the PMA Learning Agenda may consider reviewing some of the questions listed below. These are a selection of questions relevant to the recruitment session at the workforce symposium that were either raised during the symposium, or are from the PMA Learning Agenda or agency learning agendas that are of interest to Federal practitioners.

- Questions that emerged from the PMA Learning Agenda Workforce Symposium
  - » What is driving the perception by students and recent graduates that they are "not qualified" for Federal jobs? Is it the job announcements themselves, or are there truly fewer early career opportunities than there could be – in other words, are hiring managers less willing to open up certain positions to early career applicants?
    - If the latter is true, what might be driving hiring managers' decisions? Could concerns over a lack of resources to develop early career hires be a barrier?
  - » What can user experience research tell us to help us understand those who report accessibility or website challenges in submitting their application?
  - » How do recruitment messages change the composition of the applicant pool along important dimensions, such as underrepresented status and beliefs about working in government?
- Question from PMA Learning Agenda (PMA Learning Agenda | Performance.gov)
  - » What approaches to recruitment and hiring result in high performing, diverse teams in Federal agencies?
  - » What hiring assessments and practices effectively identify qualified talent, especially in high-need career series?
  - » What barriers to entry into Federal service currently exist for potential Federal employees? How do these barriers vary across demographic populations?
  - » How can the Federal Government organize work, workplaces, and workforces to create a competitive advantage for recruitment and retention?

- Questions from the Evaluation.gov Learning Agenda Dashboard (Evaluation.gov | Learning Agenda Questions Dashboard)
  - » Office of Personnel Management (OPM): What aspects of the classification and pay systems facilitate or hinder recruitment, retention, and promotion of diversity and equity? (Learning Agenda (opm.gov)
  - » Department of the Interior (DOI): To what extent are the Department's recruitment and hiring practices adequate to attract and retain a diverse and highly skilled workforce? (FY 2022-2026 Learning Agenda (doi.gov)

**FOR MORE RESOURCES ON FEDERAL RECRUITMENT,**

**CONTACT THE FEDERAL RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

The Federal Recruitment and Outreach Community of Practice is a government-wide interest group that provides opportunities for Federal employees working in recruitment and outreach to share experiences and resources with one another. For more information, or to join the conversation, please email chococouncilcops@opm.gov.

**THE PRESIDENT'S MANAGEMENT AGENDA (PMA) LEARNING AGENDA**

This summary document is part of the broader effort to build and use evidence in support of the President's Management Agenda. The PMA Learning Agenda, a management-focused learning agenda, identifies key questions to support and further an equitable, effective, and accountable Government that delivers results for all Americans.

**GET IN TOUCH**

The PMA Learning Agenda is a collaboration between Government and the public – if you have research you would like to share, questions, comments, or feedback, send us an email at PMALearningAgenda@omb.eop.gov.