

Shifting the Paradigm of Public Service to Secure our Nation's Future

THREE BOLD CHANGES TO BRIDGE
THE GOVERNMENT TALENT GAP

December 2022



LMD
a change agency

14409 Greenview Drive, Suite 200
Laurel, Maryland 20708
301.498.6656 / [LMDagency.com](https://www.LMDagency.com)

The federal government has a talent problem that includes attracting individuals early in their careers. Perhaps most concerning, without a talent pipeline of skilled talent to fill the workforce gap, the Nation and the people it serves would have limited access to critical resources and services that protect our borders, data, and freedoms.

Bold changes are required to shift attitudes and perceptions about public service and ultimately elevate the government's appeal among the next generation of workers. More must be done to address the talent gap and change perspectives on the government if we are to attract and hire America's best and brightest talent into federal service.

The Context for Change

Our nation faces **four** key challenges that contribute to the perfect talent storm putting the future of public service jobs in jeopardy.

1. HIGH-RISK SKILLS GAP

According to the Government Accounting Office, strategic human capital management—the driving component for talent acquisition—remains a high-risk threat, indicating there's a dire need of transformation. "Skills gaps have been identified in government-wide occupations in fields such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, cybersecurity, and acquisitions."¹

Our country is facing critical national security challenges and issues as a result of a lack of top technology talent working in the federal government. Recent initiatives, like the Biden administration's Cybersecurity Apprenticeship Sprint, offer an innovative way to build a pipeline of skilled workers; however, it will take more than registered apprenticeships (a proven "earn-while-you-learn" model) to fill nearly 770,000 open cybersecurity positions at all career levels.²

The deficit of mission critical skills puts our nation's national security at stake.

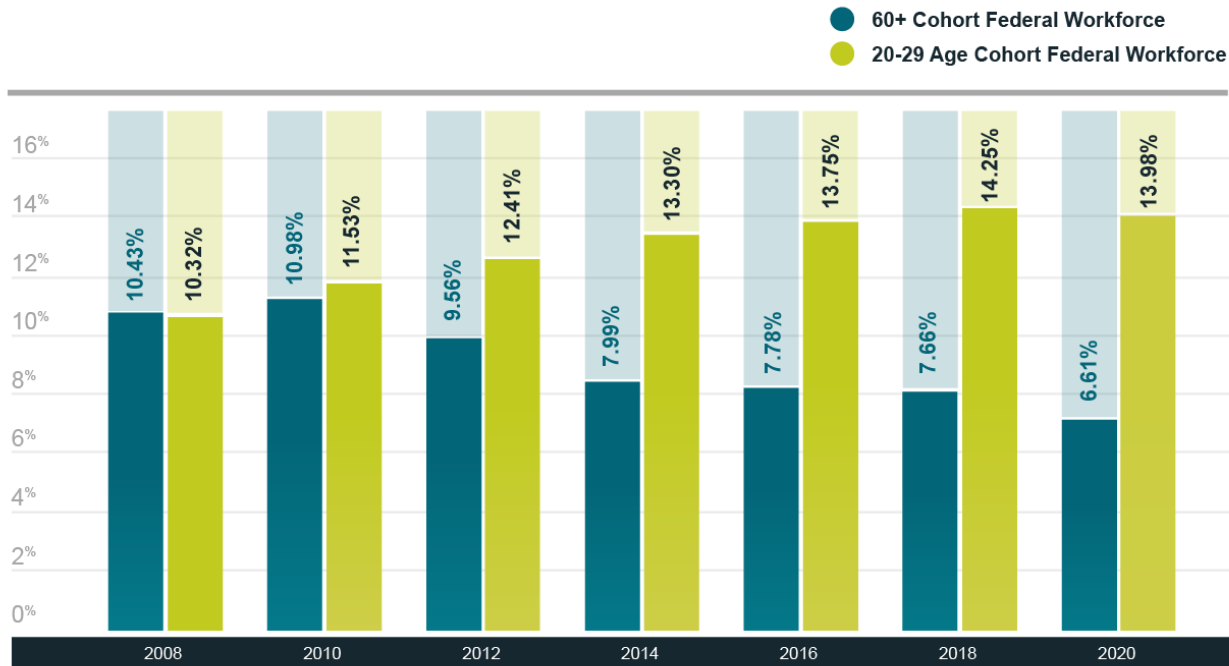
2. GROWING AGE GAP

With four million employees, the federal government is our nation's largest employer. However, currently less than 7% of the federal workforce is under the age of 30, and nearly 28% of federal employees are eligible to retire in the next 5 years. This demographic age imbalance is one of the reasons that the top priority for the President's Management Agenda is to "strengthen and empower the federal workforce." As shown below, data tracked by the Office of Personnel Management shows this age gap is increasing.³

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/highrisk/strategic-human-capital-management>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/11/15/fact-sheet-biden-%E2%81%A0harris-administration-accomplishes-cybersecurity-apprenticeship-sprint/>

³ <https://www.performance.gov/pma/vision/#section-7>



3. BARRIERS FOR EARLY CAREER TALENT

Research⁴ indicates there are several barriers impacting this trend, to include:



Diversity and inclusion. Young people do not see themselves working in the government, and Gen Z is particularly more diverse than previous generations.



Trust. Data tracked by the Pew Research Center shows trust in the government has been low for a decade. Forty six percent of adults aged 18-29 were categorized in the low trust group by the Pew Research Center. Individuals who experience an epidemic outbreak in their ‘impressionable years’ (between the ages of 18-25) are less likely to have confidence in political institutions and leaders.⁵



Private sector competition. It is often difficult for the government to compete with the private sector on pay and perks (such as remote and hybrid work).



Brand/image. The government often suffers from a “bureaucratic” persona. This image was tarnished further during the pandemic and “great resignation” as private sector companies increased the incentives to leave government jobs.

⁴ <https://strixus.com/entry/why-young-people-dont-want-to-work-for-government-16733>

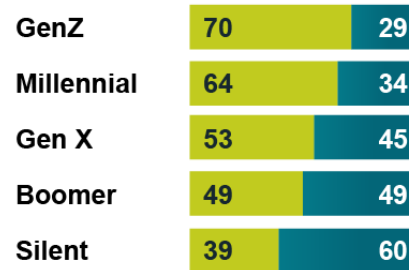
⁵ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/06/young-americans-are-less-trusting-of-other-people-and-key-institutions-than-their-elders/>

4. GENERATIONAL PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT

Attracting early career talent will require a clear understanding of the psychographics and motivators for Gen Z. The Pew Research Center defines Gen Z as individuals who were born after 1996. We know that this generation is more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations and that they are also the most well-educated generation to date. They also have little to no memory of a world before smartphones and are true digital natives.

Gen Z also is more likely to look to the government to solve problems, rather than businesses and individuals. This sentiment was tracked before the pandemic, as noted in the graphic.⁶ In the post-pandemic era, we have not given this generation much hope for the future. They have seen gridlock in the federal government and are directly impacted by the current inflation rate.

Gen Z more likely than other generations to want an activist government



- Is doing too many things left to businesses and individuals
- Should do more to solve problems

Note: Share of respondents who didn’t offer an answer not shown. Source: Surveys of U.S. adults ages 18 and older conducted Sept. 24-Oct 7, 2018, and U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 conducted Sept. 17-Nov.25,2018. “On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Generation Z So Far”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Today’s young adults “are the first generation in American history to be worse off than their parents,” according to Cristina Tzintzún Ramirez, the executive director of NextGen America, a youth voting-rights organization.

Gen Z is also more likely to support “completely replacing” or significantly reforming our government itself. Young people may be at greater risk of disengaging with the government. However, this sentiment could be leveraged to get them more directly involved in public service work.

“It takes government an average of 98 days to bring new talent on board—more than double the time in the private sector.”

-Partnership for Public Service

⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/>

Big Challenges Require Bold, Sustainable Changes

Convincing the next-generation workforce of the value of government service is not an easy task, and it needs a holistic, integrated approach. Stakeholders to the government can play a role in creating new perceptions about federal work. Individuals must also see how their personal and professional development is tied directly to their overall success—and the success of a broader societal cause. And early-career talent must view government service as an opportunity to change how the government works and improve its value to those it serves.

Three bold transformation strategies need to be implemented to shift public opinions, perceptions, and attitudes; and, in turn, shift the paradigm of public service to attract today's top talent:

1 Change the way academia, government, and industry work together. Strategically align and connect academia, government, and industry around a common purpose, such as building a world-class national security system, engineered by America's top tech talent, that endures for future generations.

Why? This strategy is important because it takes a "systems thinking" approach to change. For the federal government to change it needs to address all of the factors and interdependencies impacting the problem including all of the stakeholders within their ecosystem and sphere of influence. The other advantage to this strategy is that partners often have more credibility and can help carry the messages needed to increase awareness and affect change.

2 Position the federal government as a desirable and rewarding employer for the next-generation workforce by demonstrating the profound impact on people's lives.

Why? Understanding generational differences is the starting point for engaging with early career talent. Empathy is an effective tool for reaching new audiences, and outreach programs can address the barriers for Gen Z and highlight benefits that will appeal to their preferences.

3 Activate a social movement that appeals to an emotional cause (e.g., personal and national security) that people can believe in and trust, knowing they're contributing to a brighter, safer future.

Why? Creating a social movement elevates the problem to benefit the common good. A social movement will create a unified cause that the public can support. Positioning public service as an important tour of duty for all careers would challenge the current perceptions and create a new reason for top talent to tackle our nations' most pressing challenges.

A cohesive, coordinated effort amplifies efforts, creates efficiencies, and delivers benefits.

An integrated approach that incorporates the strategies mentioned above generates:

- Coordinated national efforts to attract and hire early career talent to the federal government through a unified platform of leading institutions and businesses.
- Accelerated knowledge sharing on the importance of addressing the talent gap in the federal government through an authentic, trusted peer-to-peer network.
- Maximum flexibility of creative development efforts to sustain the movement over time in collaboration with non-federal, like-minded partners.



LMD

a change agency

