



Tomorrow's Workforce: An Action Plan for State and Local Governments



A CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT REPORT | IBM AND NASPE



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National Association of State Personnel Executives

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Foreword

The public sector is struggling to build a future workforce, and IT departments are not immune to these challenges. In our July 2022 survey of state and local government IT leaders, an overwhelming 94% of respondents said they are experiencing challenges in recruiting qualified technologists to fill open positions, particularly in cybersecurity and data analytics roles.

The pandemic presented new challenges for employers as workers reassessed priorities and now expect increased flexibility in where and how they work — a benefit governments may or may not be able to offer. At the same time, inflation is driving demand for higher salaries, an area where government almost always loses out to the private sector. But the truth of it is that government has faced an impending talent shortage for some time, largely due to changing demographics. Younger workers are less likely to spend their career in one place, making the promise of a pension less valuable. Government is also not known for its use of cutting-edge tools — a big deterrent for skilled tech workers looking for their next gig.

But challenges always come with opportunities. State and local government IT departments can attract and retain talented employees and develop a skilled workforce, but they must transform their recruitment and hiring strategies to be successful. They must also rethink how they brand themselves to an incoming generation of workers.

Best practices are emerging. Through interviews with state and local CIOs as well as state HR executives across the country, we captured examples of innovative approaches. Optimizing and accelerating the hiring process was a highly recognized imperative, as was the need to embrace flexible work environments. Others noted their work in revisiting degree requirements for certain roles, reworking job descriptions, embracing non-traditional candidates and nurturing high-potential internal talent. Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion in talent strategies and going beyond race and gender when thinking about diversity is also a goal of leading agencies. Finally, many interviewees noted that governments must do a better job of telling a compelling story about their brand. “To me, it’s important to instill the why — the why behind what we do,” says Shawnzia Thomas, CIO for the state of Georgia. “We’re constantly talking to our staff about the value we bring to our constituents, how many lives we’re impacting and how we’re impacting those lives. When you have a heart to serve, the public sector is where you need to be.”

We encourage you to read more about these strategies and tactics in the pages that follow and connect with your peers on how they are finding success in overcoming challenges you all share.

Finally, on behalf of CDG, NASPE and IBM, we want to sincerely thank our survey respondents and the CIOs and HR executives who graciously gave their time to be interviewed for additional insights. We appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts and experiences to guide others on building the workforce of tomorrow.

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Introduction

State and local governments are embracing remote and hybrid work models and automated tools to create more agile and resilient enterprises. They must continue down this path if they hope to retain and recruit great talent.

They must also counter the view that government isn't a place where innovation happens, or where people looking for purpose-driven work can grow their careers and develop in-demand skills.

"There is a generation out there that's becoming more and more civic minded, and I think there's an attractiveness to public service. We can play well to that, but we need to develop a good, solid message about what they're going to be doing in government," says Fred Brittain, CIO for the state of Maine.¹

"There are a lot of wonderful things the public sector is working on that are very meaningful for the environment,

for our well-being, for our jobs, for our government and for our country that people want to be a part of. That's a brand image that agencies can leverage," adds Amy Wright, global managing partner for talent transformation at IBM.²

To help state and local governments chart a course to build their workforces, the Center for Digital Government (CDG), in collaboration with IBM, conducted a national survey of state and local CIOs in July 2022.³ Their responses highlight both the challenges and opportunities ahead for governments as they try to evolve into future-driven organizations and attract the talent they need to accelerate transformation.

The following report provides a roadmap for how state and local governments can address current talent gaps and cultivate their workforce of the future.

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Attraction and Retention Challenges

According to survey respondents, government organizations face a range of recruitment and retention challenges. Longstanding internal policies and processes play a role in many of these challenges, but so do shifting market dynamics, growing employee expectations and a highly competitive job market.

The talent gap: Recruiting and retaining qualified staff are the two top challenges for governments, according to state and local CIOs. Several factors account for this, according to human resources (HR) and government IT leaders throughout the country. First, there's the rising cost of talent due to inflation.

"Before the pandemic, there were a lot of two-income households," says Shawnzia Thomas, CIO for the state of Georgia. "Due to daycares closing and the need for parents to homeschool their children, one of those parents may have had to quit their job to stay home. Right now, the one-income parent must make up for the shortage of that second parent not earning income."⁴

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics notes nearly 25% of private sector organizations have increased wages and salaries and paid bonuses over the past two and a half years.⁵ This adds pressure to state and local governments that traditionally haven't had the budget to offer higher compensation. In fact, nearly nine out of 10 CDG survey respondents say offering competitive compensation is their top workforce challenge.

Falling birthrates are also shrinking the talent pool. One recent report by Emsi, a research firm that analyzes labor market and economics data, indicates a "demographic drought" is on the horizon. Organizations already face a labor shortage of six million workers, but the U.S. birth rate is at its lowest point in history, which will further exacerbate

"Remote work has become the new soup du jour, if you will. Many job candidates now ask whether remote work is available."

— Tony Riddick, CIO, State of New York

the shortfall. Because of this, it's likely the country will experience lower labor participation rates in future generations.⁶

Shifting employee expectations: State and local agencies must also contend with changing employee expectations. The gig economy makes freelance work more attractive for its flexibility and unlimited earning potential, and remote work creates more competition for talent because candidates can look anywhere in the country for jobs.

"Remote work has become the new soup du jour, if you will," says Tony Riddick, CIO for the state of New York. "Many job candidates now ask whether remote work is available."⁷

Ted Ross, CIO for the city of Los Angeles, says there's a larger cultural shift happening that's reshaping the nature of work.

"The pandemic has made job candidates rethink how work fits in their life," Ross says. "At the city of Los Angeles, this

has required us to recreate our employee value proposition. If a candidate is dissatisfied with the value they perceive their employer is providing, they're going to look at other employers and try to identify what the value proposition is for them."⁸

Governments' brand image and bureaucratic structure:

Along with these larger market forces, government faces a branding problem. The image of government traditionally hasn't been one of innovation, especially when it comes to IT.

"The idea that inspired public service can really make a difference to your fellow citizens is important to share," says John MacMillan, former CIO and deputy secretary for IT at the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. "That's something the public sector offers that the private sector really can't. You can get involved in large projects much earlier in your career. That's a distinguishing factor between the private sector and public sector."⁹

Governments must also accept that new employees are less likely to spend their entire career in the public sector. Instead, they'll work in government two to three years, learn what they need to learn and move on.

"We're probably looking at a three-to-five-year employment window," says James Weaver, CIO for the state of North Carolina. "We'll probably see people changing jobs more frequently and maybe even bouncing between the public sector and private sector."¹⁰

Curtis Wood, CIO for the commonwealth of Massachusetts, echoes this point. He says his state's IT projects have benefited from workers who want to do mission-oriented work and quickly build competitive skills early in their careers.

"My commitment to them is, 'Give me a couple years and you can get some great experience and a decent salary. You've contributed; you've learned; and you can move on from there,'" Wood says. "If you like government, you can stay. It's worked. We have younger folks that do stay."¹¹

The skills gap: Agencies also face a significant IT skills gap, according to the CDG survey. Ninety-four percent of survey respondents said their organizations have trouble recruiting qualified technologists, and 86% said they have trouble retaining them. Respondents report their biggest needs are for specialists in cybersecurity

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and data and analytics. Additionally, more than three-quarters of respondents agree that the volume of IT deployments is increasing, and their organizations are missing or extending project timelines due to staff shortages or skills gaps.

To address these gaps, more than half of respondents said their organizations have retrained or reskilled employees, offered professional development, contracted with third parties, and used vendors for implementation staff or expertise.

Thomas, Georgia's CIO, says part of the challenge is there simply aren't enough employees with specialized skills in cybersecurity and cloud technologies to meet the demand.

"Those skill sets have not been established like they should. There's also competition from the private sector," Thomas says. "With our cyber team, we'll train them, get them certified and then someone from the private sector will snatch them up. So we have to start over again, and that's just the nature of the beast in the public sector."



Key Opportunities for Government Employers

It's clear public sector IT organizations face multiple hurdles as they strive to future-proof their organizations and build a modern IT workforce. However, CDG interviews with IT and HR leaders throughout the country indicate state and local governments also have opportunities to turn the tide and attract and retain highly skilled talent. Jurisdictions are taking practical and proactive steps to combat their current workforce challenges — whether it's offering greater flexibility or upskilling their workforce.

Offering more flexibility: Nearly 73% of CDG survey respondents said their organizations are improving or implementing flexible work policies to invest in employee growth and well-being. About one-third said at least 50% of their agency's workforce works remotely.

Tamara Mosley, HR director at the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA), the state's IT organization, says the agency has given employees flexibility in several ways. Depending on their role, most employees come into the office only once or twice a month.

"There's also flexibility in work schedules. We've noticed that technologists especially want that flexibility in their schedule, not just in where they work but when they work," she says.¹²

Improving job descriptions: While offering remote or hybrid work is the starting point for workforce transformation in many organizations, 66% of CDG survey respondents said their agencies are focused on improving job descriptions to match current market needs and realities. In interviews conducted by CDG, most — if not all — government IT and HR leaders said their organizations were in the process of enacting these changes or had already done so.

"We have old-fashioned job titles, like computer operator and entry data processing systems or analyst-type of positions," Wood of Massachusetts says. "We're in the process of finalizing a reclassification of all our titles to a much less complicated grid using today's titles that people can associate with, like web architect, cloud architect and web enterprise developer."

66% of survey respondents said their agencies are focused on improving job descriptions to match current market needs and realities.

Training and upskilling: In a competitive job market, the public sector's best strategy may be to nurture talent from within, which is why many agencies are focused on upskilling current employees. Fifty-seven percent of CDG survey respondents said their organizations are improving employees' soft skills and hard skills through training.

Tennessee has adopted this approach. Trena Maynard, the director of employee engagement, says Tennessee has what it calls an "IT Academy," a program that offers free IT training to employees.


"It's a good mix of on-demand, virtual and in-classroom training that's available to our employees," she says. "It's provided at no cost to them. They can take it during work hours or after work hours. I think it benefits our employees as well as the organization."¹³

Maine has launched a program that requires 40 hours of annual training. Employees who complete the requirement receive a stipend equivalent to 5% of their salary. Brittain says the program "actively shows employees we want to continue to invest in them."

Integrating diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI):

Nearly 42% of CDG survey respondents said their organizations are implementing or expanding DEI efforts to invest in employees' growth and well-being. DEI is a central part of New York state's workforce strategy, according to Riddick, the state's CIO. The state has started recruiting at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and community colleges and has partnered with tech training schools to attract more diverse and non-traditional job candidates. Riddick says the state is also expanding job opportunities for people with disabilities.

"We want to make sure we have people at the table [at recruiting events and job fairs] who look like other people that may be interested in getting hired so we don't seem like we're excluding a population of people," Riddick says. "I've also emphasized to my team that we can't get caught in the paradigm of only thinking of diversity as gender, race or ethnicity, or even perhaps religion."



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Driving Workforce Transformation:

Examples from the Field

As the public sector looks to build its workforce, several states, cities and counties are implementing holistic workforce transformation strategies that could serve as models for their peers.

Texas DIR nurtures talent internally and externally:

The Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR) is composed of 200 IT professionals who serve nearly 30 million residents. With such a large customer base, having skilled resources is vital for the agency and the state overall.

Amanda Crawford, state CIO and executive director of DIR, says her agency has a multifaceted and evolving recruitment and retention strategy. Whereas most organizations conduct exit interviews, DIR conducts “stay interviews” to get feedback from employees and learn how to improve the agency’s culture.

“I want to know their opinions on what we do well, what we can do better, where they see themselves in five years and where they see the agency in five years,” Crawford says. “I find those connection points incredibly meaningful. I get great input and feedback from folks on the front lines about what’s really going on in my agency.”¹⁴

DIR complements this internal engagement effort with expansive external outreach. DIR representatives regularly attend veterans’ events to recruit more veterans. The department has also developed partnerships with local universities, community colleges and HBCUs, and it regularly collaborates

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—Amanda Crawford, CIO, State of Texas

with professional organizations, such as Austin Women in Technology and the Texas Diversity Council.

Crawford also wants to create a registered apprentice program, similar to Indiana’s State Earn and Learn Program (SEAL).¹⁵ The SEAL program takes people from their respective fields and puts them in a totally different career path within state government or with other local employers, where they receive on-the-job training and certifications. For example, a bus driver or custodian could train for a job as an IT help desk technician.



“They are having tremendous success, and they’ve already got their first round of folks who’ve gone through this program that now are full-time state employees,” Crawford says. “They’ve completely transitioned in about a year from one career path to where they’re doing IT or cybersecurity for state agencies. It’s a great program. I’d like to build a similar model here in Texas.”

The state of Tennessee ushers in next-gen IT:

The CDG survey indicates nearly seven out of 10 public sector organizations are improving their job descriptions to match current market needs. The state of Tennessee is one of them.

State CIO Stephanie Dedmon says Tennessee previously updated all its job classifications “based on the speed of technological change.”

“They hadn’t been touched in over 20 years. So, we created all new job classifications to better reflect the current state of technology. We went through a process and we called it ‘Next-Gen IT.’”¹⁶

The state formed a panel of subject matter experts who identified the knowledge, skills and abilities required for various roles. Dedmon says the process was daunting, but it allowed the state to reduce the number of job classifications, increase its salary ranges and upgrade its workforce. All employees were then able to apply for new jobs that interested them. Dedmon says the intensive process ultimately served as an effective retention tool.

“It was not a one-year endeavor,” she says. “It took us some time, but I do think it’s helped us retain some of our employees.”

Given the rapid pace of change, the state may revisit the issue in the coming years, Dedmon adds.

The city and county of Los Angeles embrace non-traditional job candidates and redefine the employee value proposition:

The city and county of Los Angeles are separate entities that have taken their own unique approach to recruitment and retention.

L.A. County has a proactive workforce development strategy that encompasses everything from offering paid internships and reclassifying jobs to partnering with universities and upskilling current employees. Peter Loo, L.A. County’s acting CIO, says the county has also embarked on an ambitious justice reform initiative where it matches previously incarcerated individuals with entry-level positions in county government to help them transition back into society. In 2021, 93% of candidates with conviction histories passed the background screening and were approved for hire.¹⁷

The county also has a retiree return program in which it hires retirees on a part-time basis, typically 120 days a year. “This allows us to continue to leverage some of their skills as we begin to address and mitigate attrition and the loss of talent,” Loo says.¹⁸

The city of Los Angeles is rethinking its approach to hiring, with an emphasis on how it can engage a new generation of potential employees, says Ross, the city CIO.

“At the city of Los Angeles, we’ve been focusing on key methods to improve how IT candidates and current IT employees view the employee value proposition. We do

“Even in the recruitment process, we need to do something that traditionally we have not been great at – and that is sales. We need to sell people on the value proposition of working for government, why it’s a great thing and why they could be excellent at it.”

— Ted Ross, CIO, City of Los Angeles

it through recruitment, through development, through retention, as well as release,” Ross says.

This requires a “multi-level and multi-modal” approach, he says, that integrates the city’s employee value proposition in job descriptions and throughout the entire recruiting and interview process. The city has tried to demystify its civil service process by providing clear information on its website about what the process entails and what candidates can expect. Hiring managers constantly follow up with candidates and try to keep them engaged throughout the hiring process, which can be lengthy.

“Your branding and your employee value proposition shows up probably in a dozen different ways all throughout the process,” Ross says. “Honestly, I think any government could be quite good at this. It just takes effort and really thinking through what the user experience is for a candidate.”

He adds that in today’s highly competitive job market, agencies can’t rest their hopes on traditional hiring strategies alone.

“Even in the recruitment process, we need to do something that traditionally we have not been great at — and that is sales,” Ross says. “We need to sell people on the value proposition of working for government, why it’s a great thing and why they could be excellent at doing it.”

The state of Ohio makes employees ambassadors: Some states are making employees an active part of their recruitment strategy. A few years ago,

Ohio started using current IT employees as ambassadors to share their experience with job candidates.

“They are by far our best sales folks,” says Kitty Hollingshead Mancil, director of Ohio’s Office of Talent Management. “People who are here, they’re here because they love it and they feel they’re doing meaningful work, so we try to leverage their abilities.”¹⁹

Katrina Flory, Ohio’s CIO, adds that deploying current employees in this manner helps clarify what kind of work job candidates can expect with the state.

“Sometimes when you see our job postings, we have very specific classifications — you’re an infrastructure specialist three. Does that necessarily jump out at you? Do you understand what you’d be doing in that job?” Flory says. “That’s where we have people talk about the network they are building and what the impact of that is. Or, we have a software developer talk about some of the applications you’re going to be working on or some of the technologies you’ll be using. I think that makes a big difference.”²⁰

The state has used employee ambassadors for in-person and virtual career fairs, separating candidates into virtual breakout rooms where they can direct questions to employees in specific roles. Ambassadors also have recorded short videos describing their work and what they’ve found meaningful about it, Hollingshead Mancil says.

These efforts have helped Ohio’s IT organization find qualified candidates and, in some cases, direct candidates to other roles within state government that were a better fit — a win for the entire enterprise.



Recruitment and Retention Best Practices

State and local agencies must implement multifaceted strategies to recruit and retain talent more effectively. As they assess how to build their workforce for the future, they should keep the following best practices in mind.

Optimize and accelerate the hiring process:

CDG survey respondents said they want to remove HR roadblocks to hiring and shorten the hiring process so they can onboard good candidates sooner. Some state and local CIOs said their organizations had lost qualified candidates because the hiring process was too lengthy.

In many jurisdictions, accelerating hiring will require civil service reforms. Pennsylvania, for example, has centralized its hiring function to standardize the process, says Shelly Forte, the commonwealth's director of enterprise recruitment. Pennsylvania is also assessing its pay, job responsibilities and specifications, as well as creating a career path site that lets job seekers chart their potential career trajectory with state government. It also uses a simple online application to assess and score candidate's skills and experience instead of making them go to an in-person testing center.

"We've really tried to make it a better experience for applicants," Forte says. "That civil service reform piece has brought us a lot more candidates."²¹

Embrace flexible work and compensation structures: Survey respondents would also like their organizations to offer more flexible work environments

States like North Carolina offer sign-on and retention bonuses, as well as the opportunity for employees to accumulate and take leave earlier in their tenure.

and salary options. Fortunately, most state and local CIOs that CDG surveyed and interviewed are already offering remote and hybrid work schedules.

States like North Carolina also offer sign-on and retention bonuses, as well as the opportunity for employees to accumulate and take leave earlier in their tenure, says Weaver, the state's CIO.

In terms of salary, most state and local governments have little wiggle room to bump up pay for skilled technologists, so they need to do a better job of highlighting their competitiveness in terms of total compensation and job security, says Jennifer Ricker, Illinois' CIO and secretary of the Department of Innovation and Technology.

“While we might not be able to compete from a compensation perspective directly, the healthcare, the paid time off and the strong benefits packages are all attractive. There is a great deal of stability in government as well,” she says.²²

Wright of IBM adds that retirement security is another huge advantage for government.

“A real benefit is that most private sector companies have gotten rid of pensions,” she says. “The pay might be higher, but the longer-term stability is much lower in the private sector than it is in the public sector.”

Implement enabling tools and technologies: Less than half of CDG survey respondents said their organizations are equipped with modern tools and technology.

Younger employees, in particular, use cloud and AI-driven technologies in their everyday lives, so agencies must accelerate the integration of similar technologies to automate employees’ work, increase their productivity and deliver a better experience. This could mean implementing a new learning management system to improve employee training, or workforce automation tools and business intelligence dashboards that save employees time and help them make more informed decisions. Weaver says these steps are critical as government embraces a diverse, multi-generational workforce.

“As we look at the continuation of so many generations in the workforce, we also have to look at the technologies and how we design things to account for the vast differences in ages,” Weaver says.

Nurture high-potential internal talent: Leslie Scott, executive director of the National Association of State

Personnel Executives (NASPE), says conducting a skills inventory can benefit agencies and their workforces because these activities let employees clearly see where their skills and certifications align with other internal roles.

“The state as an employer can take a broader approach to share opportunities within its agencies,” she says. “Just because you work in the Department of Transportation right now doesn’t mean you can’t go over and work in the Department of Natural Resources. There are so many opportunities to develop skills and get more experience.”²³

Along with conducting a skills inventory, it’s also important for agencies to engage new hires. Chris Rein, chief technology officer for the state of New Jersey, says his organization conducts a six-month survey with all new hires to find out how they’re doing in their new roles and how the organization can help them succeed.

In addition, Rein says agencies should take the time to understand what truly matters to employees.

“No two people have exactly the same aspirations,” he says. “Try to recognize which team members value stability and which place a high priority on change, such as new environments, assignments and opportunities.”²⁴

Collaborate with external partners: Workforce development organizations can help agencies reskill or upskill candidates for new roles, such as entry-level IT positions. Several states, including New York, are also collaborating with local technical training schools to build their talent pipelines.

As agencies struggle with recruiting and retaining technical talent, they may want to look to the federal

“We developed the training for our hiring managers where they don’t just say, ‘Tell me how many years of experience you have in this.’ Instead, they say, ‘Tell me about a time you confronted this particular situation.’”

— James Canavan, HR Director, Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Service and Security

Many CIOs and HR leaders interviewed by CDG say they allow candidates to use certifications, training and experience in place of degree requirements for certain roles.

government for effective strategies. For example, the federal government's CyberCorps®: Scholarship for Service Program gives students scholarships to pay for their undergraduate or graduate degree, and in return students serve in a government cybersecurity role for a period of time equal to the length of their scholarship.²⁵ State and local agencies could offer similar cyber scholarships in exchange for public service afterward.

Revisit degree requirements for certain roles:

Agencies shouldn't only focus on credentials or degrees in the hiring process; they should also screen applicants based on their practical and transferable skills and capabilities.

Many CIOs and HR leaders interviewed by CDG said they allow candidates to use certifications, training and experience in place of degree requirements for certain roles.

Massachusetts even created special interview training for hiring managers to dig deeper into candidates' soft skills, like problem solving and customer service, says James Canavan, HR director for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Service and Security.

"We developed the training for our hiring managers where they don't just say, 'Tell me how many years of

experience you have in this,'" Canavan says. "Instead, they say, 'Tell me about a time you confronted this particular situation. How did you handle it? How did you fix it? How did you solve that problem?'"²⁶

Taking a similar approach could help other agencies better assess candidates' aptitude and attitude for certain roles.

Embed DEI into your talent management strategy and culture:

To be effective, DEI must be ingrained in agencies' processes and be visible in recruitment and retention, career paths, and internal training and development opportunities.

Minnesota, for example, has both a chief equity officer and chief inclusion officer. Tarek Tomes, the state's CIO and commissioner of Minnesota IT Services (MNIT), says the roles are separated because "the work is enormous."

"Our chief equity officer sits inside the governor's office and is geared toward making sure government services are available and delivered in an equitable manner," Tomes says. "The chief inclusion officer focuses heavily on workforce education and bringing a DEI lens to the state's workforce and doing things like intercultural competencies and strategic planning efforts to meet those overall goals and objectives."²⁷

Minnesota also maintains an intercultural development inventory, says Chad Thuet, HR director for MNIT. The inventory is an assessment of leaders' "intercultural competence" — or their ability to shift cultural perspectives and adapt their behavior to cultural differences.²⁸ Thuet says all MNIT's senior leaders have taken the assessment.

"We're having regular conversations with an IDI [Intercultural Development Inventory] administrator to follow up on where we are in our intercultural journey and how we can get to the next level," Thuet says. "I think that says a lot about the type of organization we are and how we value diversity."²⁹

Agencies also need to think about diversity beyond race and gender. For example, agencies can engage the neurodivergent community, which typically has a higher unemployment rate, to help address the IT skills shortage. To engage neurodivergent job candidates, agencies must have ADA-compliant job applications and adjust their interview approach, says Jennifer Kirkwood, a partner for Talent Transformation at IBM who focuses on human capital management and data strategy. IBM's "New Collar" initiative has built one of the largest IT communities of neurodivergent people.³⁰ Several of IBM's government partners are also leaning into this idea and considering launching similar programs.

"The neurodivergent population offers an abundance of wonderful skills. With the right supports in place, the government sector can leverage the neurodivergent community to address the shortage in IT skills," Kirkwood says.³¹

To increase hiring diversity, jurisdictions can consider establishing a dedicated disability recruiter, as Pennsylvania has done, or conduct blind recruitment and candidate evaluation, like Georgia has. The latter

approach involves removing names and other cultural identifiers from candidates' applications to ensure more fairness in the hiring process.

Additionally, organizations should measure and track hiring outcomes and potentially tie them to leadership evaluations. HR technology can help agencies advance equity by performing activities such as candidate identification, bias audits, compensation analysis across demographics and DEI progress tracking, Wright of IBM says.

"We need to be bold and go bigger than what we believe the outcome needs to be," she says. "If the outcome isn't right, then it needs to be measured, and leaders need to be measured and compensated on it. DEI also needs to be part of the marketing of jobs. How are we interviewing? It must be part of the promotion process and part of the deciding on jobs. It must be integrated into every single solitary process."

Embrace non-traditional candidates: Similar to how Los Angeles County has integrated retirees and formerly incarcerated individuals into its workforce, agencies should think outside the box when recruiting.

The state of Georgia, for example, actively recruits mothers who are military vets to join its cybersecurity team, since they may have direct experience or transferable skills in this area. Utah has created a "returnship" program for parents returning to the workforce and other professionals who have on-ramped and off-ramped throughout their career. The back-to-work program offers two tracks — one for professionals who want to work in state government and another for individuals who want to participate in short-term training at local colleges and universities. The state government track is a paid experience, so those who join the cohort can refresh and enhance their skills while still earning an income.³²

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Focus on upskilling and training: According to McKinsey research, 56% of all employees want to increase their skills. To fulfill this need, IBM's Kirkwood says government organizations can use a career lattice approach, which offers multiple ways for employees to advance their careers compared to the traditional hierarchical career ladder.

“Candidates want to know that an employer is going to grow their skills, and if they can't, they'll grow them elsewhere,” Kirkwood says.

Agencies have taken multiple approaches to upskill employees. Some have organized collaborative sessions focused on design thinking or Agile methodologies. Minnesota recently held a cloud learning challenge, where 1,000 employees chose to participate. Other government IT organizations have made knowledge transfer a part of their IT vendor contracts. Texas DIR, for example, offers cloud training and certification programs with its technology partners.

Market government's unique value proposition: Many of the state and local CIOs interviewed by CDG said governments need to do a better job of telling a clear and compelling story about their brand values.

Arguably, few employers give professionals the chance to do mission-driven work, impact and change lives, and give back to their communities in the way government does. In the private sector, companies are competing for employees based on their commitment to ESG (environmental, social and corporate governance) and their ability to provide a positive environment for their workforce. The public sector also must engage younger and diverse workers around these issues.

Scott of NASPE says agencies can start by performing outreach to middle and high school students to introduce them to government and build interest in public service. They can also offer paid internships to local high school and college students and have agency leaders speak at schools about government as a viable career path.

In addition, state and local governments need a branding and communications strategy that encompasses their job descriptions, websites and social media channels. They can use each of these mechanisms to amplify their purpose and mission and showcase how potential candidates can contribute to these objectives.



Conclusion

Government agencies perform mission-critical work every day that impacts residents and communities.

But to continue doing this vital work and transform government for the better, public agencies need skilled talent — and traditional recruitment and retention approaches no longer will suffice. By streamlining civil service hiring processes, collaborating with external partners, and modernizing recruitment and retention strategies, state and local governments have an opportunity to remake their workforces for the future.

“We're never going to compete with the private sector. I think we can get better, but we're not going to compete and I don't think we should,” says Texas CIO Crawford. “I think our biggest draw is actually our mission. Part of that is understanding your brand, understanding your mission and then being able to communicate it. Investing in branding and having a clear branding message to communicate your mission is really important.”

About



The National Association of State Personnel Executives (NASPE) was established in 1977 to enhance communication and exchange of information among state government personnel executives across the country — providing a collaborative forum for state HR leaders to share effective leading practices.



The Center for Digital Government, a division of e.Republic, is a national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government. Through its diverse and dynamic programs and services, the Center provides public and private sector leaders with decision support, knowledge and opportunities to help them effectively incorporate new technologies in the 21st century.

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IBM brings innovative thinking, software and services to clients, helping them transform talent across their enterprise and reinvent Human Resources (HR). Providing insights and strategies, leveraging HR engagements from around the world, IBM collaborates with clients to inspire their workforce with today's technologies across data, AI, hybrid cloud and security while creating a people-centric approach to talent management.

Leaders today must focus on what matters most — their employees and helping them to succeed. IBM helps organizations meet their HR needs and deliver data-driven insights while fostering a culture of continuous learning. Working together, we can transform talent management and build a workforce for the future.

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Endnotes

1. CDG interview with Fred Brittain, conducted on September 1, 2022
2. CDG interview with Amy Wright, conducted on August 30, 2022
3. CDG survey of 62 state and local government CIOs conducted in July 2022. Breakdown of CIOs included 48% state, 30% county and 21% city
4. CDG interview with Shawnzia Thomas, conducted on September 22, 2022
5. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/24-percent-of-establishments-increased-pay-or-paid-bonuses-because-of-covid-19-pandemic.htm>
6. <https://lightcast.io/research/demographic-drought> & <https://www.forbes.com/sites/edwardsegal/2021/06/03/new-report-says-demographic-drought-will-worsen-labor-shortage-crisis/?sh=455fd8214686>
7. CDG interview with Tony Riddick, conducted on September 12, 2022
8. CDG interview with Ted Ross, conducted on September 20, 2022
9. CDG interview with John MacMillan, conducted on September 21, 2022
10. CDG interview with James Weaver, conducted on August 24, 2022
11. CDG interview with Curtis Wood, conducted on August 23, 2022
12. CDG interview with Tamara Mosley, conducted on September 22, 2022
13. CDG interview with Trena Maynard, conducted on September 12, 2022
14. CDG interview with Amanda Crawford, conducted on August 24, 2022
15. <https://www.in.gov/dwd/owbla/>
16. CDG interview with Stephanie Dedmon, conducted on August 24, 2022
17. <https://hr.lacounty.gov/fairchanceemployer/>
18. CDG interview with Peter Loo, conducted on September 6, 2022
19. CDG interview with Kitty Hollingshead Mancil, conducted on September 12, 2022
20. CDG interview with Katrina Flory, conducted on September 13, 2022
21. CDG interview with Shelly Forte, conducted on September 21, 2022
22. CDG interview with Jennifer Ricker, conducted August 29, 2022
23. CDG interview with Leslie Scott, conducted on August 25, 2022
24. CDG interview with Chris Rein, completed via email
25. <https://niccs.cisa.gov/education-training/cybersecurity-scholarships>
26. CDG interview with James Canavan, conducted on August 29, 2022
27. CDG interview with Tarek Tomes, conducted on September 21, 2022
28. <https://idiinventory.com/generalinformation/the-intercultural-development-inventory-idi/>
29. CDG interview with Chad Thuet, conducted on September 21, 2022
30. <https://newsroom.ibm.com/2022-05-10-IBM-Tackles-Talent-Shortage-and-Cybersecurity-Crisis-with-New-and-Expanded-Partnerships>
31. CDG interview with Jennifer Kirkwood, conducted on August 18, 2022
32. <https://inutah.org/return/>