# Preparing for the Federal Workforce of the Future

The federal government's reorganization offers leaders an opportunity to transform how agencies do business. To drive this change, leaders need to attract, retain and retrain a workforce that can effectively align with the needs of citizens now and into the future. Currently, many agencies are struggling to recruit younger employees, while the proportion of federal employees who are retirement eligible grows. Additionally, agencies are responding to various workforce trends, including the increased pace of automation and the growing emergence of critical areas like cybersecurity. Federal managers must develop innovative ways to fill these workforce gaps and find mission-critical expertise by retraining federal workers with outdated skill sets, sharing existing expertise across agency silos, attracting entrepreneurial talent, and bringing diverse talent from across the country into federal service. Below, we provide a snapshot of what the government workforce looks like now, some major trends affecting it, and recommendations about how federal managers can prepare for their workforces of the future.

HIRING FUTURE LEADERS

There were nearly eight times more full-time federal employees older than 50 than under 30 in fiscal 2017. In some agencies, more than half of senior leaders are eligible to retire.

Recommendation: Agencies must work to recruit talented young employees to ensure that there is a pipeline of individuals and future leaders with the skills and experience necessary to meet ongoing challenges and drive federal agency innovation. Leaders can engage younger employees by reaching beyond the USAJOBS website, and using social media and virtual recruiting methods, like hosting online open houses where candidates can talk to current employees about agency mission and culture. The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, for example, maintains an active social media presence, including a "Job of the Week" post that highlights diverse career opportunities.

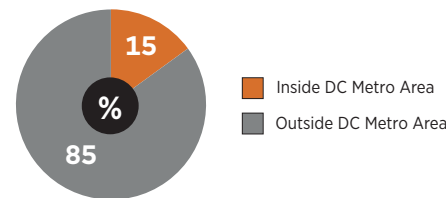|	Government	Private Sector
55+	29%	20%
30–54	65%	53%
Under 30	6%	24%
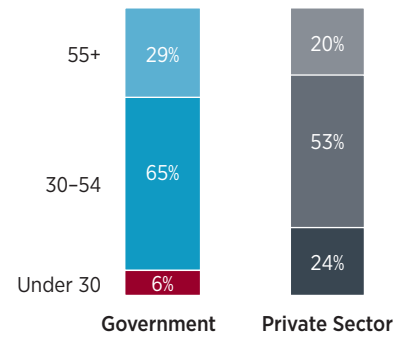
ATTRACTING AND MANAGING DIVERSE TALENT

The nation and the government are served best when we draw on the talents of all parts of our society and bring together diverse perspectives, backgrounds and skills to tackle our greatest challenges. The gender and racial diversity that is a characteristic of the overall government workforce today diminishes as individuals move up the career ladder. Racial and gender diversity decrease in senior positions, with a continual downward trend from the GS-8 level to the Senior Executive Service.
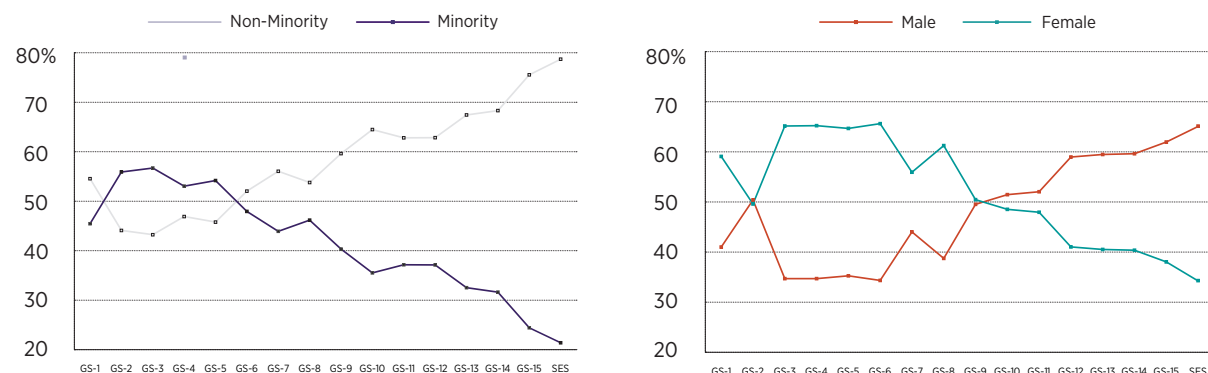
Geographic diversity is another characteristic of the federal workforce. With almost 85 percent of federal employees based outside of the Washington, D.C.-Virginia-Maryland region, government leaders need to be responsive to an increasingly dispersed and virtual workforce.

Recommendation: Agencies should strive to recruit, retain and grow diverse workforces to increase organizational performance and foster innovation in the workplace. Agency leaders can connect with associations and organizations that help fund and foster diverse talent, and they can learn from women and minorities in the workforce about what attracts them to federal service and what they need to stay and advance. In addition, federal managers must engage workers across the country in conversation about agency reforms and use technology, among other means, to connect and build a sense of community among these employees. Using this information, agency leaders can build innovative plans to more effectively target and manage the talent needed to meet their mission.

Geographic Diversity of Federal Employees

- 15% Inside DC Metro Area
- 85% Outside DC Metro Area

Diversity Decreases as GS Level Increases

Non-Minority — Minority

Male — Female

"Government faces many challenges—budget cuts, shrinking workforces, pay freezes, increasing workloads and negative rhetoric about federal employees. Without proper attention to our employees, we will be hard-pressed to weather the turbulence successfully."

—Reginald F. Wells, former deputy commissioner and chief human capital officer at the Social Security Administration

BUILDING A FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE

Federal agencies often do not take advantage of the hiring flexibilities provided to them to build a more dynamic workforce.

Recommendation: The Intergovernmental Personnel Act and other talent-exchange programs and hiring flexibilities make it possible to incorporate the expertise of employees from state and local governments, academia, nonprofits and the private sector on a temporary basis. Managers can approve short-term transfers of federal employees to another agency or position, allowing them to share expertise and gain new experiences and knowledge. Managers can recruit former federal employees without going through the full competitive hiring process, and may have special flexibilities to hire and pay for mission-critical skills. To create the workforce of the future, federal leaders should take advantage of available hiring flexibilities to fill skills gaps, diversify talent sources and promote knowledge-sharing across government and between sectors.

To Build a More Flexible Workforce:

- TAP EXPERTISE FROM OUTSIDE
- RECRUIT FROM MULTIPLE TALENT POOLS
- USE EXISTING TALENT IN NEW WAYS

ADJUSTING TO AUTOMATION

According to the Office of Personnel Management, 5 percent of current federal occupations could be fully automated and 60 percent could be partially automated. The capabilities of technology to automate repetitive tasks and allow federal employees to focus on high-level, strategic work will continue to grow.

Recommendation: Federal leaders need to assess their agencies to determine which tasks can be automated and how employees will be affected as a result. Leaders also will need to invest in retraining employees for jobs that require greater expertise. Agencies can start small, finding places to pilot automation projects and allow their employees to get comfortable with new technologies. The Department of the Air Force, for example, is working to automate its acquisition process, creating a system that allows its workforce to more effectively tailor contracts to the needs of the agency.

Based on Technology Available in 2016:

- **5%** Percentage of occupations that could be automated entirely
- **60%** Percentage of occupations that could have 30%+ of their activities automated
- **45%** Percentage of total work activities that could be automated

Source: Office of Personnel Management, "2018 Federal Workforce Priorities Report," p. 23, at https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/human-capital-management/federal-workforce-priorities-report/2018-federal-workforce-priorities-report.pdf

RECRUITING AND RETAINING TOP TALENT

The Office of Personnel Management and the Chief Human Capital Officers Council have identified four government-wide skill gaps:

- STEM
- ACQUISITION
- CYBERSECURITY
- HUMAN RESOURCES

Federal agencies are competing against the private sector and each other for the employees who can fill these critical gaps in the government.

Recommendation: To help fill these skills gaps, federal leaders should consider retraining workers displaced by reorganization efforts. Federal agencies also should use existing recruitment, relocation, retention and other pay flexibilities to attract talent to these occupations. The departments of Agriculture and Treasury, for example, reported that offering special pay incentives allowed them to effectively compete with the private sector for a limited pool of highly competitive STEM candidates. Some other agencies are using gamified approaches to test the skills and capabilities of high-demand technical talent such as cybersecurity professionals as part of their recruitment and selection strategies. In addition, agencies can create partnerships with colleges, universities and private sector companies, and step up recruitment efforts by offering college scholarships in return for federal service, or by taking advantage of flexible hiring authorities for positions that have critical shortages.

What is Powering Government Innovation?

With the administration pushing for change across the federal government, agencies have been asked to rethink how they deliver programs and meet their missions. The Partnership for Public Service and Booz Allen Hamilton are working together to help agency leaders embark on efforts that will lead to leaner, more accountable and more efficient government; a workforce more aligned to future needs; and the elimination of barriers that hamper frontline employees from serving the public effectively.
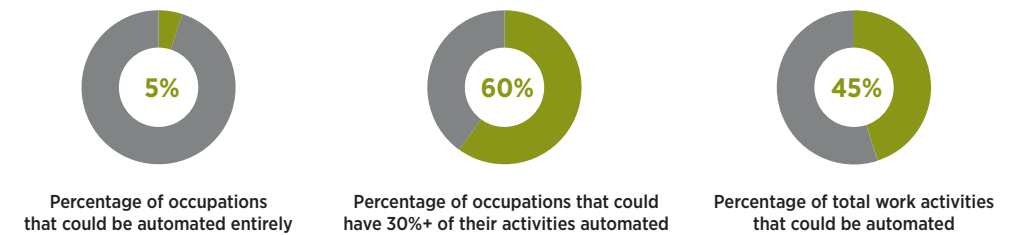
To learn more, visit: ourpublicservice.org/government-reorganization

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Data Sources: Unless otherwise noted, all data are from FedScope (https://fedscope.opm.gov) from the Office of Personnel Management, for all full-time, nonseasonal, permanent employees (September 2017).