Survey on the Future of Government Service

What is the 2020 Survey on the Future of Government Service?

The 2020 Survey on the Future of Government Service includes questions about federal employee hiring, performance, management and government reform. Data from the survey will supplement existing government-wide data sources such as the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® rankings that is produced by the Partnership for Public Service and Boston Consulting Group. It is hoped that this survey will contribute to evidence-based decision making on the future of public service.

The survey is a collaborative effort sponsored by the nonpartisan, nonprofit Partnership for Public Service, the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Vanderbilt University, and Georgetown University. The survey was previously administered in 2014.

Who had the opportunity to take the survey?

The survey was sent to executives including Senate-confirmed appointees, Presidential appointees without Senate confirmation, noncareer and career members of the Senior Executive Service, Schedule C appointees, members of the Senior Foreign Service, senior career professionals running agencies and programs, and other comparable managers. The survey team used the Federal Yellow Book to determine who should receive the survey.

How many people completed the survey?

The survey was completed by 992 people between June 22 and Sept. 30, 2020. The survey data is weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the federal executive workforce. The margin of error is between +/- 3.33 and 5.07.

Survey findings

The 2020 Survey on the Future of Government Service remains open, with federal executives permitted to complete the survey for several more weeks. Therefore, the results represent an early look at the findings. While the numbers will change slightly as additional federal executives complete the survey, substantial changes are not anticipated.

The survey paints a picture of a mission-driven cadre of federal executives.

Respondents who said the following are "important" or "very important" attributes of their job:

- Supporting their agency's mission – **97%**
- Influencing public policies that are important to me – **72%**
- Salary and benefits – **67%**
- Job security – **67%**
- Developing professional skills to move to a job in the private sector – **19%**

Federal executives report that government struggles to bring top talent onboard, failing to recruit as effectively as it could, underutilizing internships and taking too long to hire.

Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that their agency:

- Is able to recruit the best employees – **55%**

- Often loses good candidates because of the time it takes to hire – **73%**

- Leadership is held accountable for recruiting top talent – **36%**

- Has a strategic recruitment plan that's aligned to its workforce needs – **32%**

- Effectively uses internships to build a talent pipeline – **44%**

Federal executives believe agencies often lack the talent they need to deliver on their missions.

Respondents agreed or strongly agreed that:

- Their agency has enough employees to do a quality job – **45%**

- Their agency can retain its best employees – **57%**

- They are satisfied with the performance of their agency's contract workforce – **61%**

- Their agency effectively integrates contractors and agency employees – **54%**

- An inadequately skilled workforce is a significant obstacle to fulfilling their agency's mission – **60%**

  - When respondents who reported that an inadequately skilled workforce inhibits mission fulfillment were asked about factors that contribute "a good bit" or "a great deal" to the problem, they selected:

    - A hiring process that takes too long – **82%**

    - Inadequate career growth opportunities for staff – **56%**

    - Cannot compete with salaries offered by other employers – **55%**

    - Lack of resources – **54%**

    - Civil service rules that prevent hiring the best candidates – **54%**

    - Lack of a proactive recruiting strategy – **51%**

    - An aging workforce with a high employee retirement rate – **45%**

    - Political pressure to keep growth of the workforce low – **44%**

    - Lack of a qualified applicant pool – **42%**