

Engaging and retaining public sector employees in a digital workplace



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Government agencies face many workforce challenges, including attracting new talent, retaining skilled workers and hiring to replace retiring senior employees. A highly skilled, engaged and efficient workforce is key to delivering crucial public services.

The favorable job market (3.5% unemployment in August) and a large inventory of job openings have empowered job-seekers to accept roles selectively. Public sector positions' benefits packages remain important, but compensation, telework, upskilling and current technology also are vital. Agencies that are modernizing, looking to enhance customer experiences and increasing digital offerings rely on attracting and retaining talent. Consider:



Agencies are launching complex projects, such as those funded by the bipartisan infrastructure law, needing skilled workers.



Customers expect more service, forcing agencies to rethink their public engagement and increasing demand for exceptional employees who know agencies and their audiences.

Fortunately, the public sector realizes technology can help solve these challenges. State chief information officers prioritize cloud service, legacy modernization and workforce development, the National Association of State Chief Information Officers reports.

2022 priorities for state CIOs

include:

- Cybersecurity and risk management
- Digital government and digital services
- Broadband and wireless connectivity
- Cloud services
- Legacy modernization
- Identity and access management
- Data and information management

An additional three priorities listed were workforce development, services consolidation and enterprise architecture including governance.

Attracting and retaining top talent requires a multi-pronged strategy. What follows are areas where agencies can provide focus.

Hybrid workplace

Maintaining hybrid models is key to retaining staff. Since 2020, Americans have enjoyed cutting time-consuming commutes, working more efficiently and setting their own work schedules. As coronavirus health restrictions lift, 90% of Generation Z and Millennials say they have no interest in returning to the office full-time. Another survey found 87% of respondents wanting more workplace flexibility. Further, 83% of Gen Z and Millennials prioritize autonomy or high-trust work when choosing an employer.

Hybrid work models benefit government agencies in several ways. With fewer people in the office, organizations can consolidate and retool real estate. In the office, that may mean replacing assigned desks with collaborative spaces and huddle rooms. Likewise, moving more data to the cloud means downsizing or eliminating on-site data centers, which can help improve cybersecurity, system flexibility and efficiency.

The buildout of a hybrid workspace doesn't necessarily mean workers have to learn new technologies. Remote communication platforms embraced early in the pandemic can provide a smooth transition. Agencies that turned to BlueJeans, MS Teams, WebEx and similar systems are in good standing to further use the cloud and run efficient, technologically advanced hybrid workplaces.



Upskilling opportunities

Large, public corporations often attract and retain talent by touting the ways workers can increase their skill sets. Government agencies must follow suit. Investments in best-in-class communication technology allows public agency staff to:

- Maintain technical skills.
- Reduce time on manual and redundant tasks.
- Provide efficient service.
- Focus on strategy and innovation that can improve the organization.

It is an investment in people as much as tech. Helping employees feel valued is just one way technology can better engage workers. When employees are engaged, their commitment to the organization grows, as does their productivity and, often, creativity.

Purpose and equity

This should appeal to most employees, though the newest generation of workers may value it more, despite having less work experience.



The most racially and ethnically diverse US generation, Gen Z folks were born roughly between 1996 and 2012. Generally, they prioritize equity, social good and employment with a **sense of purpose**. As such, they may be strong public sector candidates. Gen Z folks aren't interested in merely clocking in and out. They want to feel like they're making a difference.

To capitalize, agencies must meet Gen Z's expectations of a well-equipped, technologically advanced workplace. They were raised with devices and technology, and expect nothing less from their employer. Members of Gen Z value:

- Opportunities to learn and grow through experience and training.
- Easy access to superiors and mentors.
- Challenges via problem-solving complex issues.
- Automating mundane and trivial tasks.

More than **90%** of surveyed Gen Z members say technology affects their job preference, and **80%** say technology and automation will create a more equitable work environment.

Behavioral changes

Still, technology isn't an engagement failsafe. The digital workplace transformation requires associated human behavior changes. Training and support should be offered to improve new system adoption and help agencies maximize return on technology investments.

To encourage adoption:

- Use digital training assets based on leading practices, provided by the asset vendor.
- Establish "champions" who coach team members and drive behavioral changes.
 - For example, a champion might use OneDrive/Google Drive for content co-creation and collaboration, moving email attachments and sharing document links.
- Take a persona-based approach to understand employee roles better and consider tasks that could be automated.
- Encourage leaders to demonstrate adoption of new technology so employees will emulate them.

In a hybrid work setting, enabling employees to communicate seamlessly is essential to engagement. Having multiple communication platforms helps workers discuss projects, education and personal plans. But introducing too many platforms can mean messages get lost.

To engage, retain and recruit, employers can benefit from demonstrating a clear sense of purpose. Public agencies have a natural advantage here, but only an up-to-date, digitized workplace can use it properly.



Audience-targeted technology

Creating cloud-based, flexible, hybrid workplaces requires modern collaboration and communication tools, for which there are three internal audiences:

Individuals: Tools that enable individual work include:

- A unified communications client with voice, text, meeting and presence (e.g. MS Teams, Slack).
- An integrated mobile wireless device supporting the UC solution.

Teams: Tools that enable team collaboration include:

- OneDrive and MS Teams, for example, for content co-creation.
- BlueJeans meeting, WebEx, Zoom and MS Teams, for example, for meetings and video chats.
- Smart boards and tech-equipped huddle rooms for in-office meetings.
- Integration of older meeting room technology with the meeting solution.

Enterprises: Tools that enable enterprise-wide work include:

- Security across data centers, workstations and mobile devices.
 - Cloud-based systems can best support staff members.
- Connectivity at home, on the road or in the office.
 - Integrated mobile wireless for nomadic mobility and user connectivity redundancy.
 - Secure voice networks, for example, are needed for critical services and business continuity.
- Wayfinding and space reservation tools to enable hoteling, for example.

Employees empowered to help constituents

Constituents are a fourth audience. They are expecting more government services and a better experience. Attentive public agency employees with the right tools are needed to assist them.

Having the technology to support each audience can help ensure high-quality services, which may help keep employees on the payroll.

To engage, retain and recruit, employers can benefit from demonstrating a clear sense of purpose. Public agencies have a natural advantage here, but only an up-to-date, digitized workplace can use it properly. Cloud-based technologies can further help attract employees and give them the tools to better serve citizens digitally.

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