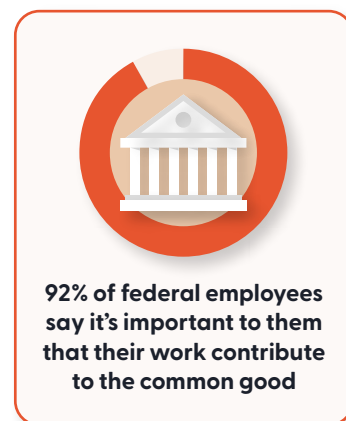


# How Skills Development Aids Recruitment & Retention

When it comes to recruiting and retaining employees, government agencies struggle to compete with the private sector. Companies typically offer higher pay, a faster hiring process and greater flexibility. **But there is one thing agencies can do to up the ante: invest in the training and development of their employees.**

“One of the things agencies do really well is take newer workers who may not necessarily have all the components of skills for a job and give them the expertise that they need to be effective,” said Erick Allen, Principal at Cornerstone OnDemand. “It’s the government that can take an 18-year-old and in two years teach them how to fly a fighter jet. That’s a training program that most corporations would envy.”

Many people seek out public-sector work because of the intrinsic value of providing services unavailable anywhere else. In fact, 92% of respondents to the Office of Personnel Management’s 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey said it’s important to them that their work contribute to the common good. The same study found that the Global Satisfaction Index, which measures job and pay satisfaction, rose to 64% from 62% in 2022.



Still, agencies need more workers, especially in highly sought-after fields. For instance, the Bureau of Labor Statistics expects the number of jobs for information security analysts to grow 32% between 2022 and 2032. Last October, the White House announced the establishment of the AI and Technology Talent Task Force “to accelerate and track the hiring of AI and AI-enabling talent across the Federal Government.”

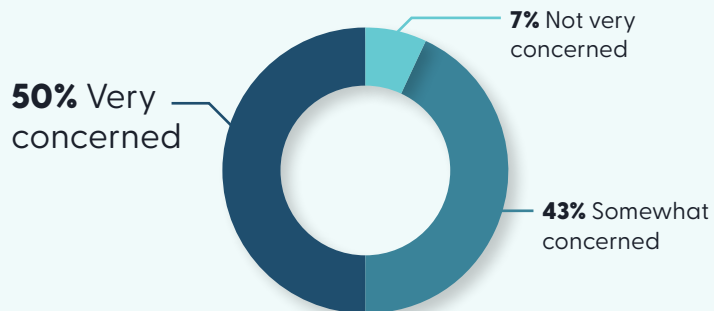
To better understand the government workforce landscape, we partnered with Cornerstone OnDemand, a leader in workforce agility, to survey 112 state, local and federal government employees directly about what works and what has room for improvement.



# A Complex Workforce Landscape

Allen describes the public-sector workforce's current status as "complicated." Several factors contribute to that: concern about a coming **flood of retirees**, struggles with **upskilling and reskilling** current employees, and a missed opportunity for using American Rescue Plan Act **funding for workforce development**.

How concerned are you about your agency's ability to recruit and retain employees with the right skill sets?



The survey reflects this. Almost all survey respondents – 93% – said they were somewhat or very concerned about their agency's ability to recruit and retain employees with the right skill sets.

"To me, what that points to is respondents are basically saying they don't believe that they have the right skills fully to do what needs to be done," Allen said. "I think it's an acknowledgement to a skills gap because they're part of that retention conversation."

How difficult is it for your agency to recruit employees?



Specifically, 78% said it is somewhat difficult for their agency to recruit employees, with only 13% saying it is somewhat or very easy. In fact, it takes the government an average of **98 days to bring new talent on board** – more than double the time it takes in the private sector, according to the Partnership for Public Service.



With 31% of all government employees eligible to retire by 2025, strong recruiting is a must, but it has its challenges. The biggest is pay, according to 74% of survey respondents. Commercial salaries were up 5% over the previous year in the fourth quarter of 2021, while state and local agency pay increased only 2.7%, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts. At the federal level, the gap is wider: “Wages were 10 percent lower, on average, for workers in the federal government than for benchmark private-sector workers with certain similar observable characteristics,” according to the Congressional Budget Office.

“The private sector is able to make quicker market-based decisions,” Allen said. “They go in a boardroom and decide, ‘We’re going to increase salaries by X percent. Let’s go get the talent we need.’ Governments can’t do that. They’re a little bit more restricted.”

Pay isn’t the only influencer, though. Bureaucratic processes, opportunity for advancement and flexibility in work hours and location rounded out the top four challenges, according to the survey.

## Where are the biggest challenges with recruitment?

### Pay

75%

### Bureaucratic processes

59%

### Opportunity for advancement

47%

### Flexibility in work hours/location

46%

### Job satisfaction

40%

### Outdated technology

30%

### Opportunity for training

20%

### Job security

13%



# Recruitment, Retention Getting Tougher

## Where are the biggest challenges with retention?

### Pay

66%

### Opportunity for advancement

65%

### Flexibility in work hours/location

53%

### Bureaucratic processes

48%

### Job satisfaction

48%

### Outdated technology

27%

### Opportunity for training

27%

### Job security

6%

New workers are the hardest to recruit, according to the survey responses. But they're a crucial demographic. Per OPM, only 8% of federal employees are younger than 30, while 30% are older than 55. In an effort to increase the number of young workers, recruitment, succession planning and knowledge transfer was OPM's No. 2 priority in the 2022 Federal Workforce Priorities Report.

"You're competing for the same talent," Allen said of the private and public sectors. "If you're competing with someone in a sport, you don't win by playing a totally different sport. You don't compete with your basketball team by playing soccer. You're not going to win. So, it's really understanding that the employee is the employee. The environment in which they're going to work may be different, but the essence of the individual that you're recruiting is typically the same."

Once employees are hired, agencies often struggle to keep them, with new hires the toughest to retain. Almost three-quarters of respondents said that retaining workers is somewhat difficult.

Again, pay emerged as the top reason with 66% citing it, but opportunity for advancement was not far behind at 65%. Work flexibility rounded out the top three reasons.

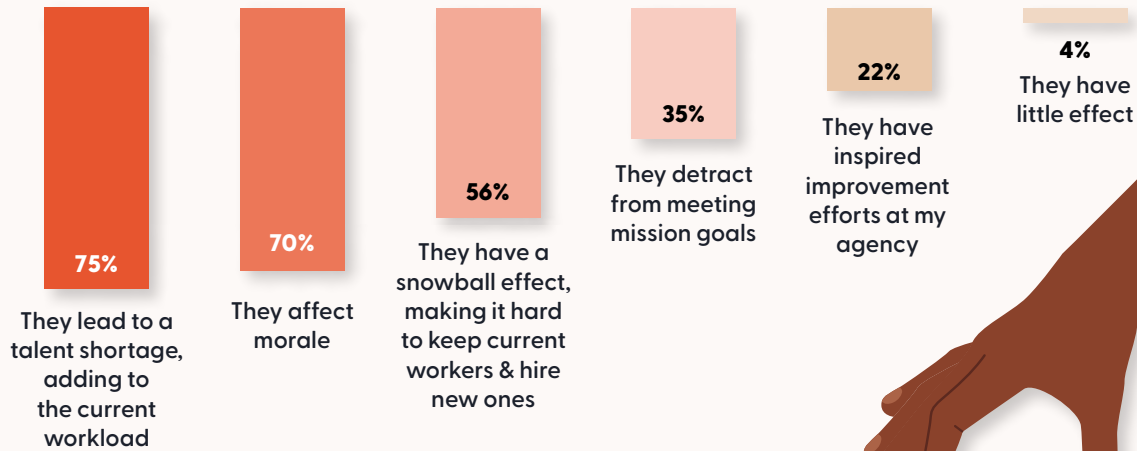
**"Public-sector workers want to have internal mobility, and they expect their employer to play a part in that mobility, preparing them for what's next or what's possible,"** Allen said.

"They want opportunities to enhance their skills so they can be more vertical, or they want to expand into new skills that allow them to move horizontally."



# Skills Development Takes on Greater Importance

## How do recruitment and retention struggles affect the existing public sector workforce?

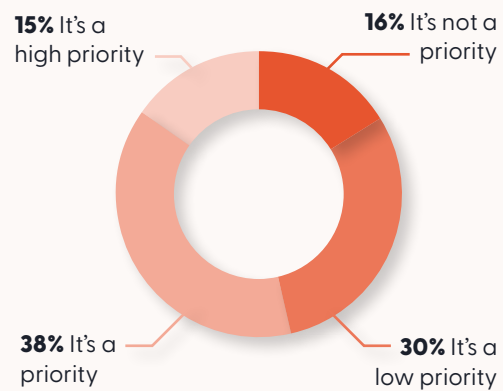


Recruitment and retention are each their own problems, but they impact the workforce overall too. Seventy-five percent of respondents said that recruitment and retention lead to a talent shortage, which affects their workloads, and about 71% said it hurts morale. What's more, the challenges snowball, making it difficult to keep workers and hire new ones, 56% of respondents said.

In fact, nearly half of respondents – 45% – said they are either somewhat or very likely to leave their government jobs. One thing that might influence that decision is the availability of training and development. Seventy-three percent of respondents said that's very important to their job satisfaction and 22% said it's somewhat important.

Despite that sentiment, almost half of respondents – 46% – said that investing in skills development is a low or nonexistent priority at their agency.

## Do you feel your agency is investing in skills development?



## What types of professional/ career development options does your agency provide?

Regularly scheduled performance check-ins

58%

Training opportunities beyond my current role

54%

Clear pay increase schedule

45%

Mentorships

38%

Job rotation opportunities at the agency

25%

Succession planning goals

20%

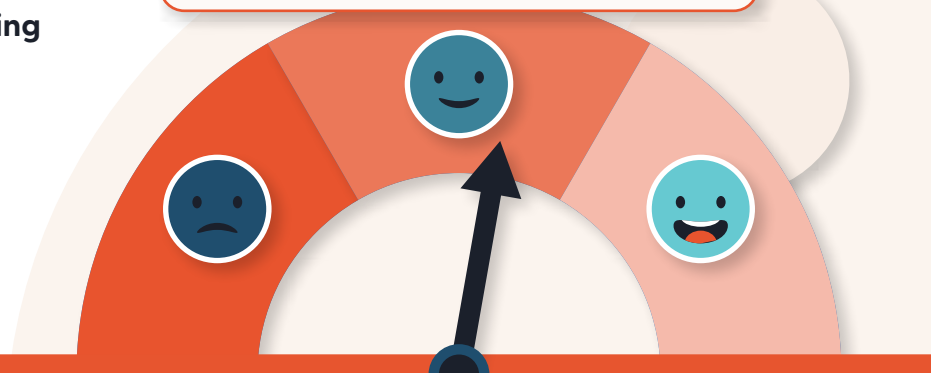
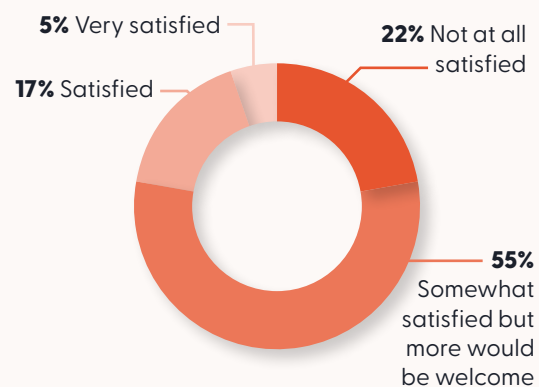
Overall, more than half of respondents said they are somewhat satisfied with the professional development options they have, but they'd welcome more. Only 22% said they were satisfied or very satisfied. The same number said they were not at all satisfied.

One way agencies can provide more training is through technology, Allen said. **"Governments are going to have to address and grapple with their policies around devices because one of the biggest barriers to unleashing a lot of these development tools is not empowering them to use their mobile device to take part in that development,"** he said.

"That's a disconnect that happens everywhere." Allen said, but it will change with the shredding of the paper ceiling, that is, eliminating the requirement for college degrees to get jobs. **When "you're not hiring for things that have been acquired or perceived to be acquired through a degree, you really are backing into that skills conversation. ... Skills become the economy of the workplace and government."**

The most offered professional and career development option is regular performance check-ins, but about 54% said their agency offers training opportunities beyond their current area of expertise, which is promising. A clear pay increase schedule is also common, but succession planning goals are the least available.

## How satisfied do you believe your agency's employees are with the professional development options they have?



## Conclusion

The need for effective recruitment and retention is imperative to building a strong, satisfied workforce. Although the government has challenges competing with private-sector entities for talent, agencies offer unique benefits, such as meaningful work and training unavailable in other industries. Providing more workforce development is key to attracting – and keeping – talent today and for years to come.

**To learn more about best practices and solutions for improving your agency's workforce agility, click here.**

