Revolutionizing Federal HR: Insights from Recruits on the Hiring Process

From Application to Offer: Hiring in the Public Sector

As the federal government faces a landscape of increasingly complex public service challenges, it relies first and foremost on its biggest asset – its workforce. With almost three million employees, the United States federal government is the largest employer in the country. Yet in a world of increasing competition from the private sector, attracting and retaining top-tier talent has never been more critical.

The FY23 Federal Employees Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), the Office of Personnel Management's annual survey assessing the satisfaction of non-political federal employees with their work, found that employees are generally happy – over 80% of respondents feel they are treated with respect, that their supervisors support their work-life balance, and that they meet the needs of their customers. Applicants seeking to join the federal workforce are also choosing this path because it aligns with their values – 92% of FEVS respondents say they care that their work contributes to the common good.

This popularity, however, can put pressure on hiring managers, as more candidates seek federal jobs. The hiring process is both the backbone of federal employment, and the first impression potential hires receive about an agency. To help them move candidates through the process more swiftly, agencies need a strong HR system that supports consistent processes. Harnessing the power of technology, HR teams can design strategies to triage enormous volumes of applicants and speak to a variety of candidate types – those coming from the private sector, elsewhere in the government, or new workforce entrants – as well as rapidly evolving skillsets.

Reports from the Recruits

In partnership with Workday, CrossVue, and Groundswell, Market Connections conducted a survey focused on probing the experiences of 200 recent federal hires to better understand their overall hiring experience. While respondents still experienced frustration due to long wait times in the recruiting process, they are generally pleased with the overall process. The benefits selection process received particularly high marks from respondents about the ease and efficiency of sign-up. Technology has played a significant role in these experiences, increasing federal HR teams' abilities to scale their efforts and effectively manage this volume of applicants and new hires, as well as more effectively matching skills to needs, and building in employee self-service platforms.

What are the opportunities of this new, technology-driven federal hiring landscape? From a wealth of survey data, this paper identifies three opportunities for improvement based on the experiences and perceptions of those who know best – America's recently hired public servants.

#1 - The Waiting Game: Timing and the Hiring Process

The total length of time from application to offer remains one of the most challenging aspects of the federal hiring process. Survey respondents report experiencing wait times ranging from 3-5 months (47%) to a year (17%) before they received an offer of employment, more than three times the average in the private sector. **For 87% of respondents, this hiring process was longer than they've experienced in the past, and 49% of respondents report that the process took longer than they expected.**

The gap between application and onboarding can wear on an applicant. In fact, the timing can cause such frustration that it impacts whether potential hires choose to continue in the process at all. Two-thirds of

respondents (66%) report being so frustrated by the process that they doubted whether they wanted to continue, and 75% say they considered other positions because the hiring process was moving too slowly. These frustrations may be part of the reason why **85% of respondents think the length and complexity of the hiring process means the government doesn't have the best talent.**

Some timing challenges may be unavoidable for a process that is heavily reliant on outside timelines imposed by budget structures or security clearances, among other things. However, respondents indicate that there is one thing that might help alleviate this pain point – regular and transparent communication.

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#2: The Communication Connection

"Timely communication matters," commented one respondent. Establishing expectations about the process, regular updates about where an applicant is along the path, and clear and responsive directives about the onboarding process all foster confidence and engagement for federal hires from the day they submit their application to their first day of work.

Overall, respondents seemed happy with communication during the onboarding processes. Almost two thirds (65%) of respondents are satisfied with the transparency of communication during the onboarding process, and 64% are happy with the accuracy of that communication.

At the same time, there remains room for improvement, particularly around prompt responses during the hiring process. Over half (60%) of respondents experienced long periods without communication during their hiring process and 42% experienced a lack of information on application status. A third also report experiencing conflicting communications from their agency's HR office regarding the onboarding process, and 42% experienced slow responses. While overall metrics around both the hiring and onboarding processes are positive (over 50% satisfaction on all metrics), it's clear that communication must be more than transparent and accurate – it must also be timely.

Clear and regular communication tells an applicant that their interest in public sector work is appreciated and respected. It also serves as the first interaction with their potential future HR department, and positive interactions with the organization during the process builds confidence that their experience as full-time hires will be equally excellent.

#3: Onboarding:
The First Steps

Following a successful hiring process, the first experiences a new hire will have with their agency is engaging with onboarding protocols.

Two thirds (66%) of respondents are satisfied with the overall onboarding process. The majority of respondents (70%) feel that their onboarding process gave them a clear sense of their mission and the tools they needed to get started. Besides outlining the roles of their work, 63% also felt that onboarding fostered a sense of integration within their team, aligning them with not only the agency's culture and mission but with their coworkers. This all points to federal HR teams' excellent abilities to integrate new hires into their agency's shared mission.

Still, there remain challenges around timely and accurate information sharing. Three quarters (75%) report having trouble understanding where they were in the onboarding process, including any associated delays in the process. Over half of respondents report feeling challenged in understanding their job responsibilities and expectations during the onboarding process (63%), and 61% found it difficult to learn the organization's policies and procedures. Forty-six percent (46%) simply felt overwhelmed.

Previous government experience also matters – recent college graduates, for instance, can find it more difficult to find all the information they need than their counterparts with more experience (80% find this challenging compared to 60% of those with previous experience in the government), and are less likely to report that training provided them with the confidence they needed to perform well in their role. Given the amount of entry level job requisitions the government is trying to fill, as well as luring talent from the private sector, addressing these points of friction is an important step toward maintaining a positive experience for new hires.

On the other hand, of those who had previously held a role in the government, 73% percent report that there was a lack of information carryover from their previous role to their current position (including 84% of Department of Defense respondents). These respondents, who have more experience navigating governmental HR systems, may find it less stressful to find what they need, but may instead be frustrated by having to replicate or furnish information or processes that should already have been in the system.

No matter where an applicant comes from, onboarding should feel seamless, not stressful. Simplifying and streamlining communication can help provide a smooth onboarding experience is not only a way to welcome a new hire, but a way to attract and retain talent.

Harnessing Technology for the Future of HR

Taken together, these data points show us a complex hiring landscape – a wide range of motivated applicants who believe in the mission of government but can find it frustrating or stressful to navigate the hiring and onboarding process. Providing a seamless, self-service experience is crucial to making applicants feel valued. Technology can be a powerful partner in this mission.

When asked what they would recommend for a better hiring process at their agency, respondents are clear: improve timeliness and speed of the overall process, simplify the onboarding process, and improve the timeliness and accuracy of communication. These recommendations are not new or unique to the federal government's hiring process, but they do pose ongoing challenges for government HR teams looking to attract and retain the best talent – particularly as 30% of the federal workforce is eligible to retire within the next 5 years. Investing in technology that reaches applicants where they are, making it easy for them to help

themselves or receive organizational help throughout the process, empowers individuals and streamlines the process. It also helps the agency stand out.

"We need to acquire the most up-to-date tools in order to establish ourselves as an exemplary employer," commented a respondent. However, this is not just about choosing the shiniest new technology. A quarter of respondents have experienced an unintuitive online system as applicants, a problem that may add delays or frustrations and could turn away qualified applicants, and that may be costly for organizations. The right system should be able to meet the specific needs of the organization, grow at scale, and adapt to the rapid evolution of technical needs and capabilities. Most importantly, the tools need to support all participants in the process, from hiring managers to HR teams to applicants.

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>
> **Survey Respondent**

The Modern HCM for a Modern Workforce

Choosing the right tools can benefit new hires, the HR team, and ultimately their agency and the public they serve. Currently, 41% of respondents report interacting with their HR through email and 35% interact through a Human Capital Management (HCM) platform.

A modern HCM platform can address many of the challenges new hires are facing. These centralized systems can streamline business operations for employers, rapidly identify bottlenecks or pain points, and shorten or eliminate wait times throughout the entire recruitment, application, and hiring process so that agencies can employ the highest quality of talent.

STREAMLINED RECRUITMENT
HCM systems can automate job postings, screen resumes more effectively, and enhance applicant tracking throughout the hiring process.

EMPLOYEE SELF-SERVICE PORTALS
Applicants can receive or submit information through a platform without waiting to hear back from HR, streamlining the communication processes, providing insight for recruits about where they stand, and guiding new recruits through onboarding.

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION
Integrated communication tools and feedback mechanisms allow for rapid answers to questions and opportunities for HR departments to identify potential pain points.

EFFICIENT PAYROLL AND BENEFITS MANAGEMENT
Streamlined payroll processing and management of employee benefits reduces burden on HR and gives clarity to employees about their pay and benefits.

IMPROVED EMPLOYEE DATA MANAGEMENT
A centralized repository for all employee data, including performance and training records creates easy access and management.

AUTOMATION
Artificial intelligence and machine learning tools, now more powerful than ever, can be drivers of automation and self-service, accelerating time to hire, keeping recruits informed throughout the process, and reducing administrative burdens on HR staff.

Best Practices

Rethinking how an agency's HR team engages with its employees, from new recruits to career employees, can be a daunting task – but it doesn't have to be. What should HR leaders do to take the first step toward a swifter, more efficient hiring process?

REIMAGINE THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER IN THE CANDIDATE'S EXPERIENCE.
How can you support faster throughput with candidates? How can you harness the power of data at your fingertips for workforce planning? How can you use the power of analytics to help identify trends in people retention, performance, or other metrics? Thinking about your goals and your pain points can help you decide what you need and where.

ASK FOR, LISTEN TO, AND RESPOND TO EVOLVING CANDIDATE NEEDS AT SCALE.
Not all agencies are built alike, and hiring processes look differently across the federal government. Robust feedback mechanisms can give HR teams real-time data about the friction or pain points that their applicants are experiencing within the process, helping them to adjust accordingly. Consider providing automated push notifications as candidates pass through specific checkpoints in the application and onboarding process or provide visibility through self-service interfaces so candidates can check their own status.

GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE INVOLVED, IN THE RIGHT PLACES, AT THE RIGHT TIMES.
Spend the time to get a good governance structure in place with stakeholders who want to own outcomes, transforming how employees receive and engage with information needs alignment across the organization.

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS.
Robust data collection and visualization will inform target areas for improvement, track progress toward those goals, and improve decision making capabilities.

ASK FOR HELP.
Whether from fellow federal agencies, many of whom have already begun transforming their HR organizations through both operational and technology changes, or from experts in the private sector, there are resources available to support this journey.

Conclusion

The government's best asset is its people, and in order to continue making progress across all the various agency missions, it must be able to continue to attract and retain the best. Candidates applying for federal government jobs are not just looking to pay the bills. We know from both data and respondent qualitative feedback that candidates want to be a part of something meaningful. The process of becoming a federal employee should not deter them along the way. Investing in tools that streamline communication, shorten wait times, and ensure a smooth integration process is an investment in a workforce that is not only qualified but passionate for the work.

ABOUT MARKET CONNECTIONS

Market Connections, a portfolio platform of GovExec, delivers actionable intelligence and insights that enable improved business performance and positioning for leading businesses, trade associations, and the public sector. The custom market research firm is a sought-after authority on preferences, perceptions, and trends among the public sector and the contractors who serve them, offering deep domain expertise in information technology and telecommunications; healthcare; and education. For more information visit: www.marketconnectionsinc.com.

ABOUT WORKDAY

Workday is a leading enterprise platform that helps organizations manage their most important assets – their people and money. Workday provides enterprise cloud applications for HR and finance to help federal agencies transform the workforce in support of agency mission; ensure safe, secure, trustworthy AI; meet zero trust mandates; and make critical decisions with clarity. Workday is used by more than 10,500 organizations around the world and across industries – from medium-sized businesses to more than 60% of the Fortune 500. Learn more at workday.com/federal.

ABOUT CROSSVUE

CrossVue is a leader in the boutique consulting space specialized in the Workday platform for over 10 years. With one of the most experienced US-based workforces in the market, our human capital professionals bring deep technical and industry expertise to solve complex business challenges. Leveraging our mastery of the end-to-end Workday platform, we go beyond providing insights – we transform how enterprises view their operations. From human capital to financials to data analytics, we deliver unparalleled transparency and innovation, empowering leaders with a clear, comprehensive view of their organization. Discover how we're reshaping the future of business intelligence and how you can see clear across your enterprise at crossvue.com.

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Groundswell is a premier technology integrator resolutely committed to solving the most complex challenges facing federal agencies today. By integrating modern ERP, low-code solutions, and leading platforms like Workday, Groundswell leverages its world-class talent and SaaS intellectual property to enhance service delivery and achieve strategic objectives for government entities. Our specialized approach is redefining what citizens can expect from digital government services, embodying our commitment to be an unstoppable, seismic change in government. Discover more at www.gswell.co.