CONVERGENCE ROUNDTABLE ON
CIVIL SERVICE MODERNIZATION

Blueprint for Action

CONVERGENCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the population of the United States has more than doubled since the 1950s, the size of the federal civil service workforce is still roughly the same. Meanwhile, new demands and missions have added complexity (homeland security and cybersecurity, for instance) and global trends suggest that federal workforce needs are not going to get simpler.

From May 2022 – November 2023, the *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization* convened a diverse set of experts – representing current or past federal leadership roles and broader workforce constituencies – to identify areas of shared interest, opportunities for practical solutions, and areas for continued research and collaboration around how to create and retain a federal civil service workforce that meets the modern mission and skill demands of today and the future.

Participants discussed many aspects of how the federal workforce and the systems that recruit, staff, develop, and manage the workforce could be strengthened. The group ultimately centered its solution-seeking around **four working groups**:

Gen Z Recruitment and Retention

Retiree Hiring

Veterans' Recruitment and Retention

Cyber Training and Reskilling

Across these groups, **cross-cutting themes** aligned with phases of the employee lifecycle emerged as a foundation for continued deliberation and solutions:

➡ **1. On Ramps** (attraction and recruitment)

➡ **2. Mobility and Career Pathways** (onboarding, development, and deployment)

➡ **3. Retention** (retention, separation, and re-employment)

This **Blueprint for Action** – representing the **culmination** of the *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization's* **deliberations** – is designed for a wide audience of policymakers, practitioners, and those whose daily work is impacted by the federal workforce.

When thought leaders from different arenas came together through this Roundtable, they catalyzed connections, syntheses, and new solutions. In addition to the many solutions, the Roundtable also surfaced several questions that Congress, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and other leaders may be able to address, such as: How can agencies align human capital practices with the increasing pace of change? And what capacity do OPM and the broader human capital infrastructure require to execute the cross-agency solutions envisioned in this Blueprint?
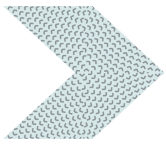
It is in this spirit of inquiry that we invite you to use this Blueprint for Action as a launching point for **further exploration** and **collaboration**.

About Convergence

Convergence is the leading organization bridging divides to solve critical challenges through collaborative problem solving across ideological, political, and cultural lines. For more than a decade, Convergence has brought together leaders, doers, and experts to build trusting relationships, identify breakthrough solutions, and form unlikely alliances for constructive change on seemingly intractable issues. Our process is improving the lives of Americans and strengthening democracy for a more resilient and collaborative future.

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A NOTE ON THE ROUNDTABLE AND FEDERAL WORKFORCE COMPOSITION

The very purpose of the federal workforce – to serve the entirety of the people of the United States – begs the question of how the policies and practices that shape the workforce also impact mission delivery and customer experience.

Prior to convening the *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization*, Convergence conducted **over 100 interviews** with current and past agency and Congressional leaders, scholars, and representatives from employee associations, labor unions, and the private sector. The team was intentional in seeking interviews with individuals representing a **diversity of skills**, **cross-sector experiences**, **demographics**, **constituencies**, and **policy perspectives** with respect to civil service reforms, including federal employees from outside the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

In assembling and convening the Roundtable and related working groups, Convergence continued to add voices as we learned of opportunities to deepen the conversation with additional perspectives. We also worked with Roundtable participants to develop the following **consensus principles**, which guided conversations and solutions:

CONSENSUS PRINCIPLES

→ **Prepare the federal workforce** for the challenges of the coming decades

→ **Build upon the talents and strengths** of the current federal workforce while **recruiting and retaining** new entrants

→ Ensure a workforce that **reflects the diversity, talent, and capacity** of the people of the United States

→ **Maintain the merit-based approach** to the U.S. civil service

The Convergence team, with counsel from a DEI consultant, was committed to reflecting and emphasizing these principles when facilitating the Roundtable participants in discussions about how past, current, and future civil service structures and policies impact, directly or indirectly, different populations of potential workers and recipients of federal programs and services.

The resulting set of conversations leveraged diversity of thought and experience and informed the solutions in this Blueprint for Action.

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Leaders and staff from the Partnership for Public Service and the Volcker Alliance served as advisors during the Discovery phase and continued as participants during the Roundtable phase, providing insights into federal operations and workforce challenges and opportunities in both the full group and the four working groups.

In addition, the stakeholders listed below joined over the course of the 18-month Roundtable to engage in shared learning and consider and advise on strategies they individually believe can contribute to a civil service workforce equipped to meet the needs of today and the future. Organizational affiliations are listed for informational purposes only and to demonstrate the breadth of perspectives represented in our discussions. **Participation in this process is neither an endorsement of other participants' organizational policies or public positions, nor of specific solutions developed and included in this Blueprint for Action.**

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*Indicates National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Fellow

ROUNDTABLE ADVISORS

The Convergence Roundtable and the resulting Blueprint also benefitted from the insights of many additional thought leaders throughout the project, including but not limited to these individuals:

Angela Bailey*
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Jane Datta
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Rebecca Hunter
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Former Controller, Office of Management and Budget (OMB); Assistant Deputy Commissioner, The Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

Indicates National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Fellow

IN its January 2001 report to Congress on high-risk government operations, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted, "This year, we have designated human capital as a new governmentwide high-risk area. Federal programs involving billions of dollars rely for their success on the performance of the federal government's people – its human capital. However, after a decade of government downsizing and curtailed investments in human capital it is becoming increasingly clear that today's federal human capital strategies are not appropriately constituted to adequately meet current and emerging needs of government and its citizens in the most effective, efficient and economical manner possible."

More than 20 years later, human capital is still on GAO's governmentwide high-risk list, and the acceleration of major events – 9/11, the Great Recession, the global COVID-19 pandemic –underscores the urgency of a federal workforce ready to deliver. Those inside of government are familiar with debates and ideas that have simmered around civil service reform, but a broader set of thinkers and a broader audience to generate pilot efforts, momentum, and political will is necessary to catalyze the level of change that the moment requires. Without careful, diverse, and deliberate engagement, the current polarized political environment could lead to insufficiently measured, impulsive action.

To be sure, examples of innovation and excellence when it comes to keeping our federal workforce primed, some of which are spotlighted in this report, can be found throughout federal agencies. Yet these good practices receive neither the public attention nor the resources to sufficiently scale given larger systemic problems that agencies face in attracting, hiring, onboarding, developing, and retaining the staff they need to fulfill a growing set of missions.

Following a **discovery process and report on Civil Service Modernization** that synthesized 125 interviews and small group conversations, in May 2022, Convergence launched the *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization*, **an incubator of diverse stakeholders to delve deeper into the tensions and shared interests that must be addressed to achieve meaningful consensus-driven reform and modernization of the federal workforce**.

Initially envisioned by our sponsors as an ongoing community of practice, Convergence determined after a few convenings that the mixed group of scholars, practitioners, researchers, labor leaders, and agency stakeholders were motivated by the potential of reaching consensus solutions and creating concrete

change. The Roundtable continued to meet on a bimonthly basis and gave rise to **four working groups** that drove deeper conversations, concrete problem framing, and solutions on:

Gen Z Recruitment and Retention

Retiree Hiring

Veterans' Recruitment and Retention

Cyber Training and Reskilling

This resulting Blueprint for Action analyzes cross-cutting themes and proposes concrete solutions. It offers a starting point for the significant task of ensuring our federal civil service workforce has the talent needed for the **future we envision**. We know that federal talent needs will continue to change even more rapidly than they have in recent decades, reflecting changing business and mission needs as well as labor force trends.

The experience and the outputs generated by this Roundtable's participants offer a strong foundation for **continued collaboration** around ongoing and future work on civil service workforce modernization. We challenge those within and outside of government to channel the spirit and outputs of this Roundtable in elevating the importance of having an agile and high-performing workforce that reflects the society it serves.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CIVIL SERVICE MODERNIZATION?

We are living in unprecedented times of economic challenges and social polarization, geopolitical conflicts, cyberattacks and digital misinformation, and climate and public health threats. Whether it is facilitating access to medical care or creating the infrastructure to prevent and quickly respond to bad actors or natural disasters, civil service workers occupy an increasingly complex and diverse set of roles in ensuring that the American public, and our allies around the world, are in the best position to thrive and navigate our changing landscape.

The policies and common practices related to the civil service workforce are also complex, with the last major revisit of the underlying laws codified in the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. There have been several reports and studies on how to "reform" and "modernize" the civil service since then – on facets ranging from pay and performance, to security clearances and time to hire to human resources information technology. Recent conversations have included contentious debates about employee accountability and whether decision-making and implementation related to subject matter expertise is consistent with a nonpartisan career civil service and who ought to hold the ultimate say – as embodied by Schedule F and similar proposals and the U.S. Supreme Court's re-examination of the Chevron Deference precedent. **As a bipartisan and cross-sector group, the Convergence Roundtable participants focused on pragmatic rather than political discussions.**

Convergence Roundtable participants explored many ways to think about and frame civil service modernization as guided by consensus principles and criteria (see appendices). The scope of the Roundtable problem statements and solutions ultimately centered around **current and projected talent and skills gaps** – specifically, how should government think about prospective and current workers through a planning lens? As the global economy grows, the demographics of the U.S. labor force evolve, and the way that work is done in other sectors changes, the federal government must lead and not lag in using a variety of levers to access talent pools in a fair and contemporary fashion that matches today's labor trends and anticipates future needs.*

In August 2023, the Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs, which included large private sector employers such as Walmart and McDonald's alongside worker advocacy voices and labor market scholars, published solutions for addressing the needs of low to moderate-income earners and employers.

AUDIENCE AND AGENTS OF CHANGE

The intended audience for this Blueprint for Action includes the expected agents of change – the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the Office of Management and Budget, Congress, the President's Management Council, and the Chief Human Capital Officers representing each executive branch agency individually and collectively as the CHCO Council. The solutions and questions posed in this Blueprint for Action must be addressed by these policymakers and leaders.

This Blueprint for Action is also directed to the Federal Executive Boards in 28 cities across the country that represent the 85 percent of federal employees who live and work outside the National Capital Region, and managers and agency leaders who are not in human capital roles, to create conversations around the culture needed to prioritize and support workforce modernization, best practices sharing, and cross-government coordination. Culture plays a powerful role in changing expectations, engagement, and practices.

Convergence is also directing this Blueprint for Action for amplification and discussion with key nongovernmental partners, including workforce development researchers, private sector contractors, employee-serving groups, and good governance groups.* Convergence spoke with a broader set of stakeholders during the Discovery phase of this effort and encourages close consideration of this Blueprint for Action by all those who have a stake in a highly functioning federal workforce, including groups such as the Business Roundtable, the Professional Services Council, the national security industry, the Chamber of Commerce, and the news media.

All **these entities will be pivotal** to continuing to shine a light on promising governmental practices as well as models from other sectors and to offering connection to talent pools.

Several, such as the Volcker Alliance, the Partnership for Public Service, the Senior Executives Association, the African American Federal Executive Association, the Network of Schools of Public Policy Affairs and Administration, the National Academy of Public Administration, Jobs for the Future, the Markle Foundation, the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, and others provided valuable expertise and guidance throughout the Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization.

GEN Z RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Problem Statement

In 2021, Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) made up roughly 9% of the total U.S. labor force, but less than 2% of the federal workforce. With nearly 30% of the federal workforce reaching retirement age in the next five years and shifting needs in highly dynamic fields such as tech and cyber, agencies must intentionally include Gen Z in their workforce strategies.

The gap in representation of Gen Z in federal service may be traced to gaps in expectations of what constitutes a quality work experience, a federal hiring culture that favors individuals who already have federal experience, and a need to focus more on retention factors related to a quality work experience. Mitigating these gaps must start with federal leaders prioritizing **applicant-facing** and **agency-facing changes**.

Background

Creating stronger, sustainable early talent pipelines and pathways into federal service is an element of federal workforce practice and policy with near-unanimous support and energy across the *Convergence Roundtable* stakeholders. The federal workforce skews older than the overall U.S. labor force – with 6.8% of the federal workforce under the age of 30 compared to 19.7% of the overall labor force in December 2020 – underscoring the opportunity and relevance of focusing on Gen Z and early career talent pools as part of any sustainable reform. Beyond filling practical demographic holes for long-term continuity, **this focus also leverages the attributes and talents that this generation brings to the workforce**, including being digital natives and fluency with collaborative work.

In recent decades, most employers have mirrored changing labor market trends – integrating technology and even AI into everything from recruitment and hiring to how the work is done. Similarly, employers have adjusted workplace cultures to reflect the gig economy, demand for work-life benefits, longer life spans, and other evolving expectations

2%
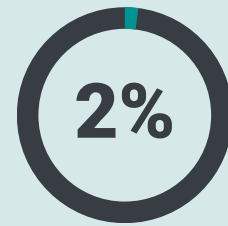
Percentage of Gen Z individuals in the federal workforce in 2021

Partnership for Public Service

30%
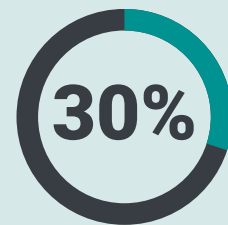
Percentage of federal workforce reaching retirement age in the next five years

The White House

of jobseekers. Federal government has not adapted as readily to shifts in the labor market – the established hiring process for most federal civilian roles begins with vacancy postings through the OPM-administered USAJobs portal, rather than active in-person recruitment or virtual outreach through career sites and networks frequented by Gen Z. Federal job descriptions often emphasize bureaucratic narratives about duties and qualifications based upon prior experience rather than descriptions of impact and growth that are highly valued by Gen Z.

OPM and other agencies have been making important progress with respect to reaching a wider range of candidates about career pathways, including tools that an be further leveraged, such as the Open Opportunities portal on USAJobs. However, the gap demands greater and **more intentional attention by all leadership**. This summer, OPM issued new proposed rules that would broaden eligibility criteria to include individuals who have completed more technical and educational programs such as Job Corps, AmeriCorps, and Registered Apprenticeships. Yet, more intentional attention is needed to keep pace with the labor market. While three quarters of agency Chief Human Capital Officers responding to a FY 2022 survey administered by the MSPB indicated that targeted hiring authorities were helpful for hiring recent graduates, they also indicated that they still have difficulty with educating and convincing hiring managers to use new authorities and programs.

The *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization* isn't the first collective to seek ways to improve federal recruitment and hiring of early career talent. However, given the timeliness of this need, we are emphasizing consideration of **targeted**, **cross-government**, and **cross-sectoral solutions** in hopes of focusing attention and allies on steps to advance Gen Z hiring and retention into the federal workforce. Alongside other talent pools examined by the Roundtable, **Gen Z** is a cohort that **can play a strategic role** for agencies seeking to address critical hiring and staffing needs.

> We are emphasizing consideration of **targeted, cross-government**, and **cross-sectoral solutions** in hopes of focusing attention and allies on steps to advance Gen Z hiring and retention into the federal workforce.

Solutions

The Roundtable Gen Z Working Group identified several solutions that federal agencies and leaders can implement to ameliorate the gap in Gen Z representation in federal government and address the immediate need for concerted and sustained investment in prioritizing Gen Z and other early career talent pools.

A necessary **first step is a cultural shift to intentional prioritization of early career talent**. This shift must come from the very top agency leadership – Secretary, Administrator, Commissioner – and be communicated agency-wide to empower HR and hiring managers to fully integrate early career talent into overall workforce planning. This approach would incorporate consideration for career ladder promotions, rotations, and other deliberate

investments that meaningfully develop staff over time. Leadership commitment to early career talent requires an integrated and broad strategy on everything from using outreach to students in target disciplines and institutions, to the use of internships as a complement to other more-seasoned hiring pools, to support for developmental programs, rotational structures, and other on-the-job elements that impact growth and retention of the early career talent cohort.

Building on top agency leadership buy-in and support, the Chief Human Capital Officers and other HR leadership may choose to create a standing task force that includes non-HR staff and members of Gen Z to assess agency-specific opportunities for applicant-facing solutions to improve and align the experience and expectations for Gen Z and early career talent pools, as well as for agency-facing solutions that provide more tools and support to hiring managers to onboard and retain Gen Z hires.

APPLICANT-FACING SOLUTIONS

Federal agencies must consider the **marketing and outreach** that they do to reach early career talent to increase awareness and reputation. Potential strategies include:

Going beyond passive recruitment

Agencies won't reach Gen Z merely by posting on USAJobs or relying on past hiring networks. Enhancing recruitment and outreach with tailored tools and language on their websites (see FBI spotlight) and organizing forums to pitch job opportunities or explain the application process are starting points.

Engaging external organizations

Work with partners such as Roundtable participants NASPAA, the Volcker Alliance, and the Partnership for Public Service – as well as other skills-based or geography-based talent pools – to reach a broader set of early career talent. Leveraging associations that work with multiple institutions to reach career counselors and faculty in particular disciplines is another avenue to target prospective talent.

Enlisting Gen Z employees as representatives

Use current Gen Z employees as early career "ambassadors" on social media and in more formal recruitment forums such as career fairs or panels. Video testimonials and Gen Z-to-Gen Z chat box opportunities are other ways to leverage this connection.

Creating a strategy to reach non-traditional populations

OPM's newly proposed Pathways rules will increase the pool of early talent career job seekers eligible for Pathways hiring, including those who have completed registered apprenticeships and training programs like Job Corps. OPM should help facilitate outreach once the rules are final.

To capture the attention of Gen Z applicants, agencies should emphasize, leverage, and promote the ways in which their offerings align with the **values and expectations of a good job** that current research demonstrates is of greatest value to this cohort:

Purpose-driven Work

Federal agencies should lean into their true competitive advantage to package the work in terms of the mission, impact, and services it provides to the American people and the world.

Collaboration and Teamwork

Gen Z should be considered for project teams and cross-functional working groups in order to appeal to the value they place on collaborative work environments.

Balance and Flexibility

Federal agencies should provide examples of how employees can achieve positive impact for society while also having time to use hybrid work or flexible work schedules, highly valued by Gen Z.

Diversity and Inclusion

Federal agencies should highlight the broad reach and impact of the work across the public sector and demonstrate a generationally and demographically diverse and inclusive federal workplace.

Transparency and Communication

Federal agencies can begin the recruitment phase by developing messaging that incorporates what matters most (the values in this list) to this cohort. Once members of Gen Z are on board, regular communication channels are especially important for engagement.

Advancement Opportunities

Underscoring developmental growth equips prospective and current federal employees with vocabulary and examples to talk about advancement with hiring managers and supervisors. Federal agencies that can point to meaningful career pathways, training, and growth in responsibility and impact should do so. Agencies that lack such structures may want to work with OPM or other agencies (see agency-facing solutions) to develop them. Skills-based talent management across a career path, aligned with skills-based hiring –advancement that is based on skills rather than time or vacancies – needs further development across agencies.

Mobility

Collaboration on messaging around the mobility opportunities across federal government – the potential to work in different jobs and continue to grow and advance within a federal career – could be a powerful way to create positive associations with the federal government as an employer. Federal employment has a reputation for rewarding tenure over mobility, but the two are not mutually exclusive; highlighting rotational opportunities and mobility within an agency can offer skill development and networking that is mutually beneficial. As with advancement opportunities, agencies may benefit from deeper collaboration with OPM or other agencies to consider "joint duty" arrangements.

Agencies should also take into consideration **where they post** their positions and the **information and language** they use in their job descriptions. According to a recent survey, 54% of Gen Z said they wouldn't complete an application if the recruitment methods were outdated.

54%

Percentage of Gen Z who said they wouldn't complete an application if the recruitment methods were outdated

Yello

→ **Use the platforms that are familiar to Gen Z**

Go beyond USAJobs to Handshake, Indeed, and LinkedIn, and consider enlisting Gen Z employees to explore creative use of social media to provide "real life examples" and increase awareness.

→ **Align federal hiring process expectations**

Up-front, plain language communication about aspects unique to federal hiring, such as the security clearance process and anticipated timeline, is more effective than burying such details.

AGENCY-FACING SOLUTIONS

Agencies will also need to provide tools and support to their hiring managers and staff to successfully onboard and retain Gen Z and other early career talent. In many cases, agencies can choose to pilot solutions on their own, but **several of these would be stronger and more sustainable with coordination across a group of agencies** – by the President's Management Council, Chief Human Capital Officers Council, OPM, or Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

→ **Expand the use of shared certificates and pooled hiring**

OPM should continue their efforts to work with agencies to evaluate data and best practices from recent and past pooled hiring and shared certificate pilots for entry level positions, using data and best practices derived from OPM-run pilots. The 2200 Information Technology occupational series would be a candidate given that it is one of the occupations with the lowest proportion of employees under 30 (3.7% according to a recent MSPB report).

→ **Implement recurring early career leadership cohort models**

OPM should work with agencies to create early-career occupational leadership cohorts for networking, collaboration, career development, and peer support opportunities. Using Federal HR Institute materials, OPM could pilot an Emerging Human Capital Leadership Cohort to create an HR community across agencies. Starting as GS-7 employees together, the cohort could include rotational elements and built-in training with promotion potential (also known as full

performance level or FPL) to GS-12 or GS-13. Such cohorts would naturally drive information sharing and innovation across agencies and could eventually be allies for executing new innovations to strengthen the workforce.

Address cultural factors and workforce planning

There needs to be a comprehensive and ongoing commitment at all levels to address cultural factors that lead to limited consideration of early career talent in workforce planning, starting with the highest levels of leadership, then each component and division, and then each hiring manager.

Leverage Open Opportunities at USAJobs as an internal talent marketplace

An internal marketplace for project-based work and rotational opportunities will foster a growth-minded and sharing culture, important to the Gen Z cohort.

Set a norm of training managers

OPM should provide structured guidance to agencies, including manager training modules and requirements, to ensure that the responsibility for workforce planning, recruiting, and retaining employees is shared across HR and all managers. This training should include how to help tailor a Gen Z training plan to an individual's current state of learning and development.

Invest and partner on skills-based hiring

Early career and career transition hiring will need to include familiarity with the shifting skills-based hiring landscape. Competency assessments, including for potential, cut across career level; with the new proposed rules that expand Pathways Recent Graduates hiring eligibility to include registered apprenticeships and other non-degree educational programs, OPM and the CHCO Council should continue to work with industry and state leaders on appropriate skills-based assessments.

Innovate on security clearance efficiencies

Agencies should collaborate to find ways to increase efficiency, including initiating recruitment efforts for Gen Z individuals early, offering tentative job offers, and conducting background investigations to align start dates with graduation. Exploring lower-level internship clearances for a streamlined pathway to full-time employment or starting with suitability may be other options, though they will require advance planning and budgeting.

Spotlights

As agencies engage more deeply on Gen Z recruitment, hiring, and retention, there are systemic pieces that OPM can continue to lead, such as the revised Pathways rules and the enhanced student and recent graduate-focused information and opportunity hub on USAJobs. There are also many good examples from agencies, states, and other employers, of which we have captured just a few:

DISH Network's University Relations team offers a helpful example through their "recruit once, hire twice" philosophy – their internal data shows that 60% of the DISH University Relations hires were rated as top talent, compared with 29% of general hires. Leadership and hiring manager buy- in is critical to DISH's investment in a robust internship program, with top leadership setting aside time to meet with the intern cohort. Their approach goes beyond passive attendance at career fairs and combines intentional focus on increasing applications as well as quality, conversion, and matching. DISH Network tracks a number of metrics, and their overall success earned them the 2023 National Association of Colleges and Employers Award for Recruiting Excellence.

The **Federal Bureau of Investigation's jobs site** features a four-question quiz, "to find out which of the 1,000s of unique careers at the FBI is right for you" – one of many elements that makes the FBIJobs page approachable and engaging. Plain language introductions on hiring process, culture and commitment, and benefits also make the site easy to navigate. For Gen Z, the dedicated students and graduates page highlights "impact" and "intern voices," and the overview blurb asserts that, at the FBI, students and recent graduates "will be given challenging and rewarding assignments to enhance your resume and grow your professional network."

The **Department of Labor** and **Jobs for the Future** provide two examples of efforts to create "quality jobs" conversations, including specific elements of what should be included in a quality job framework to meet employer needs and satisfy what prospective employees are looking for.

State-level leaders from both parties are emphasizing skills-based hiring, which is a fundamental on-ramp for Gen Z. Governors in at least ten states (CO, MD, UT, PA, AK, NC, NJ, SD, OH, VA) have committed to greater use of skills-based hiring in place of degree requirements for many public sector jobs. In April 2023, then-National Governors Association Chair Phil Murphy (NJ) and then-Vice Chair Spencer Cox (UT) issued a letter to their peers to urge implementation of skills-based hiring in more states.

The **U.S. Digital Corps** includes five tracks (software engineering, data science and analytics, product management, design, cybersecurity) for early career technologists, bringing them in at a GS-9 and pathing them to a GS-12 by the end of the two-year fellowship. Using the Pathways Recent Graduates authority as a framework, the program offers info sessions and clearly outlines timelines and eligibility requirements in plain language on their web site. The first cohort was launched in June 2022. Run by the General Services Administration (GSA), the program gives Fellows the opportunity to work at a range of federal agencies and incorporates key elements that are important to Gen Z – high-impact mission, learning and development, career growth and a career pathway, and mentorship.

The **Department of Energy, Office of Environmental Management** offers another example of robust use of the Pathways Recent Graduates authority in a range of engineering, science, business, technology, and management roles at the DOE headquarters and at 15 active Environmental Management cleanup sites around the country. After participants complete a one-year developmental program, they are eligible for conversion to a full-time, permanent role.

VETERANS' RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Problem Statement

When veterans transition out of the military, the transition and pursuit of a position within the federal government can be jarring. Veterans new to the federal work force can struggle with lack of inclusivity, isolation, and stark differences in work culture and management.

An OPM report found that, in FY 2020, 30% of federal employees were veterans. 87% of these veterans were permanent, full-time employees with veterans' preference (or 26% of the federal workforce).

If the federal government is supporting civil servants well and fairly, civil servants should have similar attrition rates regardless of where they are coming from. A 2020 GAO report found that, compared to similar non-veterans, veterans:

> Veterans in civil service **resign 1.6x more often** than their counterparts
>
> GAO

>> Resigned 1.6 times more often

>> Left in their first five years at higher rates (18.7% vs. 11.1%)

>> Were less satisfied with their relationship with supervisors and the meaningfulness of work

Background

The Veterans' Preference Act of 1944 gave eligible veterans preference in appointments into competitive and excepted civil service roles. In discussions about this historically significant segment of the federal workforce, *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization* participants were generally supportive of a continued emphasis on leveraging the skills of those separating from military service.

Veterans' Preference has been an important policy to help veterans transition out of military service into meaningful employment in the federal civil service. The Roundtable considered focusing on the many suggested reforms and changes to veterans' preference and formed a working group to better understand the current landscape.

Ultimately, the Roundtable Veterans' Working Group concluded that a productive and practical approach to address the challenges and barriers to **recruiting** and **retaining veterans** is to treat them as a **naturally strategic talent pool** in line with other persona-focused working groups. The Working Group, which included Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), veterans serving in civil service leadership roles, and those with direct experience establishing and advising programs to support veterans moving into civilian roles, found that solutions that **strengthen existing veteran pipelines** improve **onboarding** and **increase retention** to meet critical talent shortages.

> A productive and practical approach to address the challenges and barriers to **recruiting** and **retaining veterans** is to treat them as a **naturally strategic talent pool** in line with other persona-focused working groups.

Solutions

The Roundtable Veterans' Working Group identified **three core areas** for how to improve veterans' retention:

1. Improve how the military and supporting agencies handle the **preparation process for transitioning out of the military**

2. Effectively translate the **hard** and **soft skills** of military positions to civilian ones in a host of different federal agencies

3. Strengthen efforts within hiring agencies to **help acclimate** and **support veterans** as they make their career move into civilian federal services.

Additionally, the working group identified the following as a **fourth area** to greatly enhance pilots and efforts in transition, translation, and acclimation:

4. Intentional and focused **management support** and **cross-agency coordination** with OPM

Solutions supporting these areas are described below.

1. TRANSITIONING FROM THE MILITARY REQUIRES MORE THAN JUST INFORMATION

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP), operated by the Department of Defense (DOD) in partnership with the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Education (ED), Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), is the primary tool

for supporting veterans as they transition out of military to civilian life. TAP is a mandatory program that provides career readiness services and information on veterans' benefits. It focuses on numerous potential transition pathways, from choosing a career to finding employment to starting a business or returning to school. The DOD and DOL are increasing the use of post-TAP navigator programs to support veterans.

> **The Working Group recommends expanding and enhancing post-TAP class navigator programs prior to separation.**

DOL's Employment Navigator (EN) and Partnership Pilot (ENPP) provides one-on-one career assistance to interested transitioning service members and their spouses at select military installations worldwide. Transitioning service members and their spouses work with Employment Navigators to complete self-assessments, undertake skills testing, explore career options, and identify high-demand occupations and their necessary credentials. They also review detailed labor market information and connect with government and non-government partners to identify other services. Tailored counseling aids transitioning service members in effectively using and operationalizing the vast amount of information shared in TAP.

> **For further improvement, the existing EN program should include strong support for navigating USAJobs and the transition to federal employment as a meaningful choice. In addition, the EN program should be expanded annually at a steady rate to be available at most installations by 2026, subject to funding.**

Public Law 116-315, title IV, Section 4303, directs the Secretary of Labor to carry out an Off-Base Transition Training (OBTT) pilot in no fewer than 50 locations, in at least 20 states with high rates of unemployment among veterans. DOL launched this initiative in five states (CA, MA, NC, PA, and TX) in FY 2022 and is expanding to five additional states (CO, IL, NV, NY, and OR) in FY 2023. This program offers veterans and military spouses the chance to participate in DOL-employment-related workshops typically only available for service members and spouses on military installations. The OBTT curriculum consists of 10, two-hour workshops, which can be attended in-person, virtually, or a combination of both; it can be tailored to fit individual schedules and pace. The program is conducted in partnership with the American Job Center, with the provision of referrals for one-on-one follow-up services as needed.

> **This program may be advantageous for veterans who move first into education and then seek employment off-base. It is also helpful to veterans who need assistance after separation from the military, including veterans who transitioned out before the current, robust TAP program was implemented.**

The DOD SkillBridge program is an opportunity for service members to gain valuable civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of active-duty service, while still on the DOD payroll. DOD SkillBridge connects transitioning service members with industry partners for real-world job

experiences. Service members participating in DOD SkillBridge programs continue receiving their military compensation and benefits, while employer partners provide the civilian training and work experience. SkillBridge was launched in 2014 and federal agency participation was authorized more recently. Please refer to the "Spotlights" section for examples of SkillBridge programs that have been established in different occupational areas.

Another solution for tapping into the talent pool transitioning from military to civilian life would be to use the SkillBridge model to build tailored programs in partnership between federal agencies and DOD to transition skilled military personnel to related civilian fields of work.

→ **Federal agencies can effectively enhance veterans' retention by providing specific programs to transition military personnel with related or similar skills to relevant jobs in the federal civilian workforce.**

Such programs benefit the agency by ensuring new employees are ready and trained on day one to assume jobs and roles. Such programs benefit veterans by providing them with the necessary on-the-job training to be ready to work effectively on day one.

To further **build out additional SkillBridge** and **related programs, OPM should require all federal agencies to submit a SkillBridge plan by July 2024** that:

Assesses the applicability and relevance of the SkillBridge program to their mission and work, identifies the skills and expertise offered by transitioning military personnel that could benefit the agency, and considers areas such as cyber-security, logistics, healthcare, leadership, and specialized talents to address specific gaps in their current workforce.

Identifies at least one new SkillBridge program that the agency will invest in and create.

Establishes a work plan, including milestones and deadlines to "stand up" such a new program no later than July 2025.

Identifies specific job classifications and employment that are pertinent to the features of SkillBridge (e.g., sufficient numbers of a position to warrant an apprenticeship program or positions that are typically entry-level GS grades).

Establishes a working group across all participating federal agencies of "SkillBridge Now" that provides a shared learning platform for designing, launching, and implementing such programs and might utilize similarities in mission and skill gaps to identify cross-agency partnership opportunities with the DOD and other federal agencies.

Building off the Presidential Management Fellows, the U.S. Digital Corps Fellowship, and the Presidential Innovation Fellows,

> **OPM and DOD should create a cohort model for a cross-agency SkillBridge program to mirror the current structure and cadence of these programs to allow larger scale piloting to address large-scale talent gaps.**

2. TRANSLATING MILITARY SKILLS FOR THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE IS NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

A starting point for successful translation of skills is to utilize existing tools and enhance data translation. Sophisticated, online skills translators help military personnel translate their current or past military job classifications and commensurate skills with possible good fits with civilian jobs, including, but not limited to, the federal government. One example is the Military Skills Translator. Google launched the feature in 2018 as a tweak of its Google for Jobs job search technology, based on occupational skills mapping and machine learning.

> **Skills translation tools must also be accessible across a range of platforms. This accessibility should include but not be limited to USAJobs to help facilitate the connection between military service and federal employment. If required, develop functionality within USAJobs to import skills translator results from other platforms.**

OPM should build into USAJobs a sub-portal that allows veterans to opt into uploading their resumes so that potential federal agency employers could search across key fields for information such as veterans' last pay grade, years of service, and most recent educational attainment.

While skills translators are useful, they are not sufficient. Many military personnel are assigned jobs based on military needs, not based on what the service member wants to do. While the translator is useful to translate military job classifications into skills applicable to similar civilian jobs, it does not help the many service members who wish to do something different. Many veterans may express interest in federal service after they have left the military and pursued further education under the GI Bill. Furthermore, many employers, including federal agencies, struggle to translate how military skills may be highly relevant to jobs they offer.

> **To connect veterans who have used the GI bill to pursue further education, the DOL and VA along with OPM, in their roles as members of the TAP interagency partnership, should ensure connection across databases in tracking and reaching out to veterans after military service.**

3. FOCUSING ON ACCLIMATING VETERANS IS A WIN FOR BOTH AGENCIES AND VETERANS

The Working Group also identified the need to improve transition and acclimation support for junior enlisted veterans in particular. Of enlisted military personnel, some 80% have at most some college, a high school diploma, or GED. Veterans who are leaving the military with lower pay grades can face greater barriers to employment. Overall, the lowest pay grade groups (E5 and below) have the most negative results post-transition. Though this outcome is likely due to many factors,

→ **intentional focus on acclimation – including managed assignments, advanced training, and rotations that mirror structures in the military – could yield mutually beneficial results.**

Federal service provides numerous entry-level positions that could provide employment, benefits, and stability for these veterans.

For federal civilian service to take advantage of the military's trained, disciplined workforce,

→ **OPM, in its role as a member of the TAP interagency partnership, should ensure provision of tailored support and meaningful connection to similar entry-level grade positions within the federal workforce.**

In turn, federal agencies as employers must review their degree requirements to ensure that excessive educational requirements are not a barrier to this trained and entry-level pay workforce. They should review military occupational specialties that translate well into agency positions, and ensure that job descriptions are skills-based, allowing a better 'match' of military to civilian skills, including softer skills such as leadership and teamwork.

4. RETAINING VETERANS REQUIRES STRUCTURED AND SUSTAINED SUPPORT BY TRAINED, COMMITTED, AND INTENTIONAL MANAGEMENT, AS WELL AS CROSS-AGENCY COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION WITH OPM.

Agencies should place a strong focus on intentional management practices when hiring and assigning veterans to positions. The Senior Executive Service training program and agencies should ensure that managers are equipped to support and mentor veterans, creating a supportive work environment that fosters retention. **Agencies should implement the following strategies to improve the retention of veterans in the federal government**, including providing better mentoring, peer support, and other tools to help veterans feel connected and supported in their employment:

Utilize data-sharing

OPM and the CHCO Council should utilize data shared across agencies to identify specific barriers to entry and retention.

Data call and inventory

OPM and the CHCO Council should conduct a data call to develop a broader inventory of best practices, cases, and examples of how management in specific agencies are bringing intentional management to recruiting and retaining veterans.

Advisory Committee

OPM, the President's Management Council, and the CHCO Council should establish an advisory committee of private sector, federal agency, and Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) that can share best practices and lessons learned across entities to improve onboarding and support programs for veteran employees. Many private sector entities have dedicated veterans' employment programs; examples include defense industry firms and other large companies.

Regular meetings

Currently, OPM does not meet regularly with VSOs to focus on the topic of veteran hiring and retention, identifying shared goals, and supporting one another in advancing those goals. In the past, these regular meetings have provided a forum for advancing mutual interests on this topic. Reinvigorating these meetings and relationships with VSOs and all federal agencies would also help build community and understanding of nuances across longer standing and newer, post-9/11 VSOs.

Spotlights

Warrior Training Advancement Course (WARTAC): The first federal SkillBridge program was Warrior Training Advancement Course (WARTAC), which allows transitioning military personnel to complete a national-level Veterans Benefit Administration training program while still on active duty. WARTAC began SkillBridge-like activities prior to federal agency SkillBridge authorization, but did so as a pilot, the success of which supported statutory authorization for federal agency participation in SkillBridge. Successful completion of this training program leads to an employment opportunity at one of the 55 Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Offices around the country. This program allows both virtual training as well as installation-based training at select military installations. Since its inception in 2014, 1,694 transitioning service members have completed the WARTAC program, and 1,582 have accepted positions with the VBA.

Intermediate Care Technician (ICT) Program: The Intermediate Care Technician (ICT) Program at the VA also uses the SkillBridge model. The ICT Program takes

military medics and employs their medical skills in a healthcare role, commensurate with their military education, training, and experience, without the need for a license or additional credential. This aspect of the ICT allows these service members the employment opportunity now rather than after going back to school for additional education and training. Like hospital-based paramedics, ICTs work under the direction of a licensed provider. ICTs' specific scope of care allows them to perform skilled tasks, such as ultrasound-guided IV placement, laceration repair, splinting, and geriatric screening. As of 2021, there were 325 ICTs working in 72 VA medical centers in 17 different clinical areas, funded locally as healthcare.

CyberVets: The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has a SkillBridge program called CyberVets. This program provides an opportunity for transitioning military members who are interested in starting a career in the federal cybersecurity field with little or no prior cybersecurity experience. The program involves a six-month rotation at CMS where service members engage in both problem-based and "on the job" cybersecurity training, learning the skills required to protect data and networks.

Solar Ready Vets Network: In 2014, the DOE launched a SkillBridge pilot program, Solar Ready Vets, that connected veterans to the solar energy industry by preparing them for careers as solar photovoltaic (PV) system installers, sales representatives, system inspectors, and other solar-related occupations. Altogether, the pilot program graduated 526 students from 35 cohorts in 10 different states across the country. In 2017, the pilot ended, and Solar Ready Vets became an independent program administered by participating military bases. Now known as the Solar Ready Vets Network, this network is a group of solar workforce development programs funded by the DOE Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO). The Network builds upon the Solar Ready Vets program and includes three new initiatives: 1) Solar Ready Vets Fellowship Program: This program places active-duty military service members in 12-week work-based learning programs with solar employers to help them transition to civilian careers. 2) Solar Opportunities and Readiness (SOAR) Initiative: The SOAR Initiative connects veterans with solar training, credentialing, professional development, and employment opportunities. 3) Cyberguardians and STEM Warriors: This project, led by the SunSpec Alliance, provides training for veterans in cybersecurity and information technology.
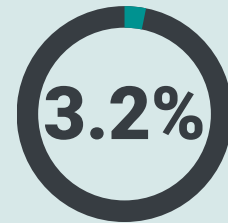
RETIREE HIRING

Problem Statement

Expertise and technical skills are not age-restricted, yet most federal hiring does not account for today's longer average life expectancy. Current Population Survey data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that, after a dip during the pandemic, the percentage of retirees returning to the workforce is on the upswing: 3.2% of individuals who were retired in March 2021 were back in the workforce in March 2022. Assuming federal retirees behave similarly to the overall retiree pool, that translates to 3.2% of 2 million non-disability annuitants, or 64,000 retired feds returning to the workforce in that timeframe.

Agencies can hire retired federal employees, however, the salary offset poses a significant disincentive for the retirees. A more systematic use of dual compensation waivers would provide agencies with access to an additional talent pool to fill prolonged vacancies in hard to fill occupations. Dual compensation waivers do not require new legislation and are already authorized categorically in certain scenarios (e.g., law enforcement trainers or intelligence reserve corps) and on an individual basis for unusual circumstances.

3.2%

Percentage of individuals retired in March 2021 who were back in the workforce in March 2022

Hiring Lab

Background

When *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization* participants identified skills gaps as a guiding criteria for modernization solutions, a conversation emerged around the fact that talent gaps across agencies arise at all levels of experience, and sometimes occur with positions that require a level of technical expertise that may be difficult to measure through typical self-assessment questionnaires and may be difficult to fill with entry-level hires or mid-career transfers from other sectors. Thus, a working group formed to explore the **persona** of **retired federal workers** who are already eligible to be hired as re-employed annuitants, but who face a financial disincentive (their compensation being reduced by the amount of their annuity) unless they receive a dual compensation waiver.

Some Roundtable participants expressed concerns about re-employed annuitants displacing new entrants to the federal workforce or slowing the advancement of other federal workers.

There was agreement that **no hiring tool**, including hiring re-employed annuitants into temporary roles, **should be used as a substitute for long-term workforce planning**, and that retirees represent a unique opportunity to leverage the size and longevity of the **"Baby Boomer" cohort** to **facilitate workforce training** and **knowledge transfer** beyond what is occurring through limited use of phased retirement. There was also agreement that agencies should **not be required** to **hire re-employed annuitants** but rather be given **guidance** on how to use it as an option as they assess their needs.

Roundtable participants discussed concerns about perceptions of possible abuse of the dual compensation waiver and overall cost based on the assumption that they retired at higher GS levels than an agency might otherwise hire. The **comparative costs**, which should include insurance and leave benefits, should be examined as agencies review their staffing options. There are also **multiple safeguards** against retirees leaving and returning immediately to earn their same salary alongside their annuity, including required time in between separation and reemployment and limitations on hours and duration of the employment; nonetheless, **detailed data analysis on usage** – one of the group's recommendations – would offer greater clarity. Anecdotally, in instances where agencies are retaining private sector consulting firms to execute contracts that are often expansive in scope, those firms are often leveraging retired federal employees who wish to continue applying their subject matter expertise and experience. Data on this type of engagement would also help **clarify whether** it may be that **re-employed annuitants offer a cost-effective alternative** in certain scenarios.

Dual compensation waivers have historically allowed agencies to bring back specific retired annuitants without a reduction in compensation equivalent to their annuity, and there is some limited precedent for OPM delegating broader authority to grant dual compensation waivers without review of each individual case, including during the COVID-19 pandemic and also to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (before the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act codified greater flexibility).

One specific proposal of the Roundtable Retiree Working Group is for agencies to work with OPM to **institute pilots** that **add dual compensation waivers** to their broader toolkit to fill mission-critical skills gaps.

The Working Group drafted an example of such a request to OPM based upon templates that OPM has available on their website (see appendices).

Solutions

CREATE AGENCY UNDERSTANDING AND DEMAND

Given the relatively low numbers of re-employed annuitants in the overall federal workforce, hiring managers and HR specialists are unlikely to think about this cohort as a potential

talent pool without directed education and training. Working Group members hypothesized that CHCOs are so busy with competing priorities that most haven't investigated how to leverage re-employed annuitants. Based on historical use cases of dual compensation waivers, it seems unlikely to ever become a major source of hiring for most occupations, yet it could offer strategic relief for hiring surges and specific scenarios. Proposed solutions for creating **agency understanding** and **demand**:

➡ Make template and a roadmap widely available

OPM has templates for emergency dual compensation waivers available for download on their website and could build out a roadmap using a series of questions to help agencies learn about past use cases and determine whether their mass hiring needs may be eligible for a delegation of authority.

➡ Promote existing authorities through training

OPM should offer training to agencies on the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) additional dual compensation waiver authority for temporary, part-time appointments to mission critical functions. This authority includes guardrails to prevent it from supplanting regular hiring, including that the appointments are one year or less and equivalent to half-time in terms of total hours.

➡ Conduct a new and comprehensive study on demand and use of re-employed annuitants

GAO briefed the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in May of 2012 and the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in June of 2012 with a finding that the NDAA authority had been used in very limited numbers, with the exception of the IRS. In January of 2015, GAO issued a study, "OPM Needs to Better Analyze and Manage Dual Compensation Waiver Data," which included the recommendation: "To improve OPM's assistance to agencies and management of its dual compensation waiver program, the Director of OPM should analyze dual compensation waivers to identify trends that can inform OPM's human capital management tools." GAO closed this recommendation as incomplete in September 2020 because OPM indicated that it had no plans to analyze use of dual compensation waivers. Interviewing CHCOs and managers at all agencies that have made use of dual compensation waivers could spur both deeper interest in and analysis of dual compensation waivers.

➡ Identify one or more agencies to pilot dual compensation waivers for mass hiring

The Roundtable Retiree Working Group used the OPM waiver request template as a starting point to mock up a sample request to OPM requesting categorical dual compensation waiver authority (in contrast to for specific individuals). Members of the Working Group have begun socializing the idea with a small number of agencies that are currently facing hiring challenges in one or more mission critical occupations.

Explore potential of job-series blanket waivers

If there is sufficient interest among CHCOs, OPM could work with agency leaders on a cross-agency dual compensation waiver pilot for a specific high-need job series, for example, a job series for which OPM has already approved direct hire authority. Pairing the blanket waiver with a cap on the number or percentage of hires that are re-employed annuitants would help address potential concerns about impacts on other applicants, ensuring that re-employed annuitants are augmenting rather than supplanting the talent pool.

Consider a civilian "reservist" program

Depending on projected needs and interest, additional research into the value of a civil service reserve corps of recent retirees could create a pool of skilled workers available to fill short-term, surge, and other needs. The Intelligence Community and the FBI have Reserve Corps models that are authorized through separate legislation, and research into how these programs have worked and been used, including any logistics related to being "called up" as a reservist if someone is employed in a private sector role, could be a starting point. A job posting on USAJobs that closed on 9/30/2023 read, "the National Security Agency (NSA) may occasionally need skilled civilian retirees to augment the existing work force on high priority projects or programs. In order to fill these temporary positions quickly, we need to know who may be interested and available to return to work with us on a short-notice basis as well as their skills. Retired federal government employees at the National Security Agency (NSA) provide expertise and corporate knowledge to temporarily support mission requirements, manpower shortfalls, and/or mentor the next generation of Agency employees." Learning more about how NSA has used this approach could be informative for other agencies.

IDENTIFY AND PREPARE INTERESTED EMPLOYEES

Recent labor force data suggests that retired workers are returning to the workplace at slightly higher rates than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Agencies that determine that re-employed annuitants would be a strategic talent pool should consider ways to **target information** about such opportunities to **recently retired** or **retirement-eligible employees**. Proposed solutions for **identifying** and **preparing** interested employees:

Include information and case studies about dual compensation waivers in retirement information sessions

Not all federal workers who have retired or are getting ready to retire will want to return, but concrete examples of those who have done so could be useful to add to general information about dual compensation waivers. As agencies face increasingly difficult-to-fill roles, annuitants could offer one robust pool alongside entry- and mid-level hires.

Enhance information on the OPM site

OPM could create a dedicated page with relevant information and specific opportunities for retirees like the page for Pathways hiring. This page would be a good place to emphasize the unique contributions of a re-employed annuitant, such as knowledge management and transfer of technical skills, and developing and training early career talent.

Partner with nongovernmental groups to share information

Agencies choosing to pilot use of a blanket dual compensation waiver should partner with groups like National Active and Retired Federal Employees (NARFE) to publicize opportunities.

Spotlights

Tennessee State Government: Like some other states, the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System (TCRS) has several return-to-work programs that allow retirees to receive their retirement benefits while drawing a salary. All the programs, which include a program that allows retirees to work up to 120 days in a year at a salary ceiling of 60% of the pre-retirement salary, have at least a 60-day period and some require as much as a one-year period before return to ensure bona fide termination of employment. As of 2022, roughly 2.5% of the TCRS members were participating in return-to-work programs. (State of Tennessee Return-to-Work Requirements Explainer.)

Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers: FLETC occupies a unique, cross-governmental role in training law enforcement professionals, working with over 120 federal partners. FLETC determined that one crucial talent pool to provide the training would be retired law enforcement officers. The FLETC leadership had been working with OPM on solutions for building out their training staff and were in a pilot phase when the events of 9/11 took place. Based on initial success and the use of dual compensation waivers to bring back those with law enforcement backgrounds into training roles, FLETC was able to scale their training force quickly to meet the increased training demand and run training programs six days a week. Because of the specialized needs of the 120+ partner organizations, the ability to hire re-employed annuitants offers agility for technical expertise (for instance, financial crimes) and law enforcement experience credibility with the students being trained. (Example of FLETC Reemployed Annuitant Cover Sheet.)

Centers for Disease Control: The CDC HR Director was delegated the authority to waive the salary offset for mission-critical positions needed to support the President's proclamation on March 13, 2020 declaring the COVID-19 national emergency. The delegated authority was in effect from July 19, 2022 to June 30, 2023 for temporary appointments in specific positions and grades.

Additional Tools and Information

Sample Dual Compensation Waiver Delegation of Authority Request to OPM (mocked up with the Social Security Administration as the sample submitting agency)

Joint NARFE / Ron Sanders article in Government Executive, "**Federal Retirees Could Be a Great Talent Source, if Only it Were Easier to Bring Them Back**," May 10, 2023

CYBER TRAINING AND RESKILLING

Problem Statement

Lack of sufficient cyber talent within and entering the federal workforce is attributable to many things, including:

- ➤ the need to **modernize skill-based hiring** to match demand in rapidly changing professions across the government;

- ➤ lack of **comprehensive updates** to computer science classifications to accommodate rapidly changing needs;

- ➤ competition for **limited talent**;

- ➤ and a lack of focus on **reskilling**, **mobility**, and **pay parity** to create flexibility for skilled/re-skilled professionals in a workforce for whom changing a job is a way to keep their skills fresh.

Each recent Administration has drawn on the technical knowledge and forecasting of cyber experts from across the private and public sectors to develop a federal cyber workforce strategy, but a disconnect remains at the **workforce implementation** phase. Fixing this disconnect will require **coordination** across government, dealing with **antiquated classifications** and requirements, and flexibilities that **encourage upskilling**, **lateral movement**, and **retention**.

Background

Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization participants identified skills-based hiring as an area of shared interest and opportunity for modernization from the start. This interest was spurred by several factors in the landscape, including trends in the broader labor force and the move by Governors and policymakers in a growing number of states to remove degree requirements from hiring for certain state government opportunities. Additionally, there has been nearly **unanimous bipartisan support** in Congress for **skills-based hiring**, and some initial steps at the federal level to adapt to changing workforce needs and qualifications have been taken. As the Roundtable formed working groups, the cybersecurity arena offered a lens through which to examine models and solutions related to skilling and retraining.

In an era dominated by rapidly evolving technology and an increasing reliance on digital infrastructure, the demand for cybersecurity expertise across public sectors has never been greater. The federal government, responsible for safeguarding critical national interests, is no exception to this growing need. However, a persistent issue that hinders the federal workforce's ability to effectively combat cyber threats is a **lack of sufficient cyber talent**.

New threats and attack vectors are continuously emerging, necessitating a workforce capable of staying ahead of cyber adversaries. The federal government's need for cybersecurity talent is further compounded by its expanding **digital footprint** and the increasing **sophistication of cyberattacks** targeting sensitive government data and critical infrastructure. This dynamic environment calls for a workforce that is agile, well-trained, and adaptable.

While the Biden Administration's National Cyber Workforce and Education Strategy (NCWES) listed an "unmet demand for 411,000 cybersecurity workers in 2022", Congress has called out the much larger gap of 700,000 open cyber/IT positions nationally.

Solutions

The **Cyber Training and Reskilling Working Group** began convening in February 2023. Their goal was to address the problem statement above by identifying opportunities to accelerate the **recruitment** and **retention** of **cyber/IT talent**.

After review of the current landscape, and to build on shared areas of interest, the working group focused its proposed solutions on streamlining education and training pipelines for emerging and mid-career candidates, specifically:

 1. Modernizing **skill-based hiring** to **match demand** in rapidly changing professions across the government

 2. Addressing the lack of focus on reskilling and mobility to **create flexibility** for skilled/re-skilled professionals

By expanding on the full Roundtable's focus on persona-based employee cycles, participants were able to identify means by which the Administration can start implementing proposed changes to simultaneously **address talent gaps** for populations ranging from students to mid-level civil servants.

 ## 1. MODERNIZING SKILL-BASED HIRING TO MATCH DEMAND IN RAPIDLY CHANGING PROFESSIONS ACROSS THE GOVERNMENT

To **modernize skill-based hiring** by identifying and matching talent with relevant vacancies, simplifying the hiring process, and eliminating barriers that impede the government's ability

to meet cyber talent needs across agencies, the Cyber Training and Reskilling Working Group considered several solutions:

→ **The Administration** should evaluate the outcomes of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) use of the Cybersecurity Talent Management System (CTMS) to meet challenges recruiting and retaining cybersecurity talent. CTMS was designed to draw on best practices from the public and private sectors, including use of competency-based assessments, reducing the time to hire, a modified compensation structure, and career development plans. Based on analysis of what has been working well, one option might be to have additional agencies collaborate with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to leverage DHS's authority and funding to allow for cyber placement across the federal workforce, with CISA serving as a recruiting and hiring hub.

→ **The CHCO Council and OPM** should expand strategic use of the Department of Defense's SkillBridge program to improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of highly trained military personnel in high value roles, such as cybersecurity, within the federal workforce. SkillBridge, targeting the last 180 days of military service to provide training or apprenticeships, could be leveraged for transition into federal civil service roles, with advance consideration for grade and pay. For instance, DOD should work with agencies to assess the fit of SkillBridge program to their mission and work and could help by identifying the skills and expertise offered by transitioning military personnel that could benefit cybersecurity roles. A multi-agency collaboration could include all agencies with an interest in piloting SkillBridge for cybersecurity roles, with participation predicated on an agreement to work with DOD and OPM to develop standardized policies and guidelines for broader expansion across federal government, perhaps mirroring the cohort and developmental structure of successful programs like the Presidential Management Fellowship and the U.S. Digital Corps Fellowship. If successful, this collaboration could be expanded to other high-need talent areas such as healthcare and procurement.

→ **The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** should evaluate and share data on the outcomes of implementing an August 2023 special pay rate for cyber and information technology roles. The VA implemented a 17% salary increase for a range of IT management, computer engineering, and computer science roles. Longitudinal data on employees hired under the special pay rate may offer critical information to help justify budget adjustments at other agencies.

→ **OPM** should actively work with additional agencies on implementation of the special salary rate for cyber/IT professionals based on evaluation of the VA special pay rate. As with VA, all agencies implementing a special salary rate should be required to participate in regular meetings to share data on hiring and retention trends, manager feedback, and other relevant evaluations to inform any modifications or continued use of the special pay rate. Collective data that demonstrates return on investment will also be important in getting Congress to prioritize new appropriations or other innovative ways to fund and support recruitment and retention of strategic skills such as cybersecurity.

→ **Congress** should explore designating appropriations or funding mechanisms for cybersecurity and technology positions.

→ The **Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)**, **National Institute for Standards and Technology's NICE Program Office**, **National Security Agency (NSA)**, **Department of Defense (DOD)**, **National Science Foundation (NSF)**, and other agencies should collaborate to monitor and evaluate bootcamp, certificate, and other offerings that would be valuable in preparing talent for federal roles. One such partnership, launched Summer 2023, is funded by the Charles Koch Foundation and is led by edX and Jobs for the Future in concert with universities and tech companies providing training. There are many other universities, online course providers, and private companies regularly developing new courses.

→ **Congress** should continue to explore bipartisan legislation to encourage the use of skill or competency-based assessments when evaluating candidates for certain cybersecurity positions, including for future potential. The undoubtedly fierce competition for graduates across computer science-related professions in all sectors points to the vital need to readjust how agencies look at the qualifications and required experience needed when considering cyber candidates. CISA is positioned to collaborate with OPM to define acceptable credentials for classification standards and to create cyber skills assessments (including for potential) for use by all federal agencies.

2. ADDRESSING THE LACK OF FOCUS ON RESKILLING AND MOBILITY TO CREATE FLEXIBILITY FOR SKILLED/RE-SKILLED PROFESSIONALS

Focusing on **reskilling and mobility for federal employees seeking flexibility or career growth** into an area of high need now and into the future is another solution that could leverage workers who have already demonstrated a commitment to serving through public service and who may want to upskill or retrain out of roles that are in lower demand in order to stay in federal service.

Specifically, the working group proposes revisiting a Federal Chief Information Officer (CIO) Council reskilling pilot, incorporating modifications based on lessons learned. Then-CIO and Convergence Roundtable participant Suzette Kent led the Federal Cybersecurity Reskilling Academy in response to Executive Order 13870 issued by President Trump to address gaps in cyber talent. The Federal Cybersecurity Reskilling Academy offered a small, competitively selected class of federal employees a series of intensive professional development opportunities that included direct instruction and hands-on learning in labs. Key lessons from the two cohorts of this Reskilling Academy include:

→ **The innovative use of an aptitude screening tool**, provided by SANS Institute, that identified those with aptitudes most aligned with cyber professionals (for instance, pattern identification and logical analysis).

→ **A six-month curriculum** condensed for completion within three months, which takes a candidate out of their primary role only two days/week with a commitment to focus personal time on completing their individual coursework.

→ **Self-selection and inclusion of candidates' current supervisors into the interview process** was a key component of a candidate's success. This inclusion ensured candidates had internal support for integration of the program into their existing work schedule and streamlined the approval process for candidates to spend two days per week out of the office for training.

→ **Recruiting employees at similar pay grades** and/or provisioning for a save pay/save grade can solve the biggest challenge of the Reskilling Academy pilot, as several graduates would have needed to take pay cuts to work in cyber.

For a revamp of such a certified reskilling pilot to be successful, the CIO Council would need to approach this effort as a **talent placement program** from the beginning, with a clear pathway from training to credentialing to job placement. Federal employee unions could also collaborate in identifying opportunities to **coordinate training for members** in fields that are downsizing.

Spotlights

While cyber-related hiring and talent development has unique challenges associated with its rapidly changing needs, there are specific hiring authorities and programs that can assist human capital officers and hiring managers when filling these workforce gaps.

National Cyber Workforce and Education Strategy

OPM has established Direct Hiring Authorities for the following IT/cyber roles. Find more information here.

Position Title	Occupational Series	Grade Levels
Computer Engineers (Cybersecurity)	GS-0854	12-15
Computer Scientists (Cybersecurity)	GS-1550	12-15
Electronic Engineers (Cybersecurity)	GS-0855	12-15
IT Cybersecurity Specialist	GS-2210	12-15

OPM's Guidance on Skill-Based Hiring

Grouped Hiring: OPM also provides guidance on a number of recruitment incentives, saying, "An agency may target groups of similar positions (e.g., same occupational

series, interdisciplinary positions, titles, or duties) that have been difficult to fill in the past or that are likely to be difficult to fill in the future and may make the required determination to offer a recruitment incentive on a group basis. Agencies must review each decision to authorize a recruitment incentive for a group of similar positions at least annually to determine whether the positions are still likely to be difficult to fill." Agencies can use this template to request a Recruitment Incentive Waver.

CISA's Career Development Tools:
- Cyber Career Pathways Tool - New interactive micro-challenges allow users to complete several core cybersecurity workforce tasks. Students and those exploring reskilling can use the micro-challenges to explore the knowledge and skills necessary to complete tasks in roles ranging from cyber defense incident responder to law enforcement/counterintelligence forensics analyst.
- Career Pathway Roadmap (Interactive)

While the DOD operates under a different suite of recruitment and hiring parameters than most agencies, agencies wishing to explore successful models or practices may be able to find examples from the **DOD Cyber Excepted Service (CES)** to help build their case.

Federally Focused Hackathons
- 2022 Congressional Hackathon
- 2023 Congressional Hackathon

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES ON CIVIL SERVICE MODERNIZATION

The *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization* used a **persona-based lens** to develop problem statements and solutions through **four focused working groups**–

Gen Z Recruitment and Retention

Retiree Hiring

Veterans' Recruitment and Retention

Cyber Training and Reskilling

– while simultaneously deriving themes that cut across these cohorts.

Analyses of solutions put forward by these distinct but complementary groups surfaced **three broad areas** that line up with the phases of the employee lifecycle:

1. **On Ramps** (attraction and recruitment)

2. **Mobility and Career Pathways** (onboarding, development, and deployment)

3. **Retention** (retention, separation, and re-employment)

1 ON RAMPS

Build and strengthen interest, awareness, and avenues for those with needed skills to enter into federal jobs.

This includes entry-level hiring, but also encompasses other talent pools, including veterans and others with work experience in high-need skill areas, all the way up to recently retired federal employees. Continuity and effective function of the federal government, including service delivery to the American people, requires greater attention on **strategic pipelines** into federal government.

Considering a **persona-based pipeline** and **on-ramp approach** can also support the goal of ensuring that the federal workforce reflects the composition of the American people that it serves. This translates first to a deeper understanding of **key employment motivators** and **detractors** for different populations, and then taking the step of **marketing the elements** of federal opportunities that match these factors.

Skills-based hiring offers a whole of government opportunity to examine and leverage the diversity of experience in the American workforce. The Roundtable focused on the cyber workforce to better understand what other employers are doing and what federal agencies have been doing in this rapidly changing area. An increasing number of states have removed positive educational requirements, and Congress continues to discuss this via the "Chance to Compete Act." Particularly for newer fields, continued exploration and piloting are required to assess skills using tools besides self-reported evaluations, legacy forms of credentialing skills such as college degrees, and prior federal experience. The government may be able to leverage industry-vetted standards and assessments for these areas.

Skills-based Hiring

Internships, either during or shortly after an educational program, offer an important avenue to create targeted outreach to skills-based or demographic cohorts to reach a diverse and representative swath of the American public. This applies to short-term internships typically completed during a course of study, as well as one- to two-year programs that follow completion of a degree or other credential. Internship outreach can target minority-serving institutions and programs focused on specific skills or disciplines. Internships also offer a way to start examination and evaluation for eventual full-time hiring, including in roles that typically require a security clearance. OPM recently proposed rules designed to clarify and enhance early career on ramps, including internships, offers a natural opening to deepen innovation and sharing across government.

Internships

More commonly used in the private sector and the military, **apprenticeships** offer a more expansive way to think about career pathways with on-the-job training, which may be particularly useful in fast-changing fields like AI and cybersecurity. Given the breadth of wage grade and general schedule roles that have equivalent training programs outside of government, this may be a cross-sector learning opportunity for adoption by agencies that have geographically distributed and recurring mass hiring, potentially paired with retiree hiring.

Apprentice-ships

The Roundtable Veterans' Working Group focused on how to maximize the experience and contributions of **veterans** that transition to civil service roles – including managing and matching their expectations through the attraction and recruitment stages of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and SkillBridge programs. Veterans have historically been a vital pipeline into civil service roles, leveraging specialized military training in high-need areas like cybersecurity to address agency skills gaps and to provide separating service members opportunities to expand the ways they serve the country.

Veterans

Retirees

As lifespans increase and more jobs can be done in a remote or hybrid modality, recently **retired federal employees** offer a specialized potential talent pipeline. In addition to offering agencies budget flexibility, much as agencies contract with consultants, retired annuitants can fill time-bound skill gap needs and aid in knowledge retention and transfer within highly specialized positions so that new pipeline candidates can be trained without overwhelming understaffed teams. Considering adding detailed modules to the retirement preparation courses and creating a sub-page on USAJobs targeting this demographic could address the supply-side gaps in information for this talent pipeline.

Leveraging this demographic's potential to bring diverse perspectives, technological fluency, and innovative thinking to federal agencies will ensure continuity of the workforce. Proposals that emphasize early career exploration, improved job application experiences, and engagement with organizations that work with **Gen Z** resonate with the themes of career development, innovation, and strategic investment in talent. Gen Z also offers a uniquely rich profile of backgrounds and experiences. By providing new and innovative platforms and marketing materials for Gen Z to learn about federal careers and by showcasing diverse opportunities through persona-based approaches deployed through Gen Z testimonials about working in the federal government, the government can attract and retain young and diverse talent that can grow with the evolving needs of the digital age.

Gen Z
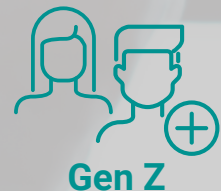
2 MOBILITY AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Strengthen capacity and cross-governmental information sharing and deployment/assignments to foster greater skills exchange between agencies, and, as appropriate, across sectors, for individuals at different stages of their careers.

Mobility was a concept that surfaced early and often in conversations about ways to align federal work experiences better with contemporary worker and applicant expectations. Beyond what it offers to the individual, conversations around mobility within a federal career – to different roles and across agencies – is an enterprise-wide strategy for continuity, gap-filling, and capacity.

Mobility is built into certain cohort programs such as the Presidential Management Fellows and Senior Executive Service Career Development Programs (CDP), and it is an expectation of the permanent Senior Executive Service cadre. However, even within these cohorts, mobility can create tensions due to short-term talent gaps when people are on detail, and it is up to the discretion of each office, so greater long-range and cross-agency coordination needs to be ingrained in the leadership vision and culture. Anecdotally, the administrative complexities sometimes associated with moving across agencies function as a deterrent.

Creating a whole-of-government commitment to mobility and development managed and supported by the organization (as is done in the military service), and not left to individuals to figure out, would be an important step. Starting with a targeted job series or career paths would go a long way towards fostering an inclusive culture and emphasis on professional development.
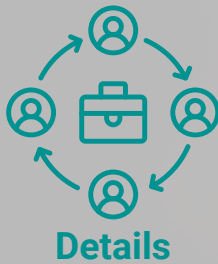
Details

Ad hoc rotations or **details** to fill short-term talent gaps can be a boon for both the individual employee and the receiving office and suggest that more structured and intentional use of rotations could be a planning-intensive but cost-effective way to encourage mobility, cross-pollination of ideas and innovation, and increased employee resilience and engagement. Beyond packaging immediate skills gaps as engagement. Beyond packaging immediate skills gaps as growth opportunities for employees, a more collaborative use of rotations can deepen the cross-government leadership bench. The Open Opportunities page on USAJobs offers a solid platform to organize and publicize rotations.

Reductions in force trigger attention to **reskilling** as a reactive tool, yet a more strategic use of reskilling can offer mobility and growth to motivated individuals. The Cyber Skilling pilot during the Trump administration was an effort to screen and select existing federal employees seeking a job change. Continuous training in fast-changing fields is a related and important need to ensure that federal employees are staying current and competitive in their abilities; certain fields like accounting and law have continuing education requirements, but the same principle applies to technology, AI, and other dynamic skill areas.

Reskilling

3 **RETENTION**

Prioritize a culture of growth, leadership, and empowerment that will nurture and retain top talent.

While it has become increasingly difficult for federal agencies to match top-paying private sector companies, federal employee engagement surveys and other workplace trends point to other attributes that are important to various job seeker and employee personas. Federal agencies should lean into their competitive advantages when it comes to mission-oriented work to leverage these tools to avoid stagnation and to develop and retain high performing workers.

A healthy agency culture and example setting from the top leadership is a starting point to empower managers to use tools to recognize high performing workers.

Cohort-based programs

Many agencies offer leadership development programs that target mid-level civil service workers, and there are also models of mid- to senior-level cross-agency **cohort-based developmental opportunities** such as the Presidential Innovation Fellows and White House Leadership Development Program. In addition to skills-based training and mentoring, these cohort programs offer many network-enhancing programs and opportunities that build a sense of belonging, inclusion, and purpose.

Similar to rotations, but less formal than standing interagency working groups, part-time intra-agency or **inter-agency special projects** can strengthen long-term employee engagement and connection across agencies at a macro level. At an individual level, positioning these opportunities (for instance, as one day a week) takes a persona-based management approach to valuing and recognizing high performing employees, which in turn boosts their commitment and growth. The Open Opportunities sub-page of USAJobs offers a way to post and recruit for time-bound special projects.

Interagency Projects
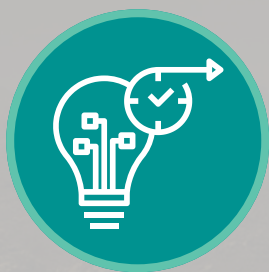
FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The *Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization* demonstrated that consensus is possible on civil service issues.

There were many topics that the Roundtable participants surfaced but that were outside the scope and capacity of this series of convenings. We **encourage participants and other stakeholders to build on the consensus principles and foundation laid by the Convergence Roundtable to continue seeking solutions** on timely topics such as skills-based hiring, hybrid work, and telework as tools for geographic and demographic diversity recruitment and retention; mobility between government and nongovernmental jobs; and, co-creating job standards and assessments with industry in emerging fields.

> We encourage participants and other stakeholders to **build on the consensus principles** and **foundation** laid by the Convergence Roundtable to continue seeking solutions.

The Convergence Roundtable conversations brought to light that civil service modernization is not immune from the politicization we see in other realms—e.g., Schedule F, Due Process, legal challenges to the Civil Service Reform Act. We urge those who are most knowledgeable about the federal workforce to **work across the aisle** and **across sectors** to take on these issues rather than leave it to chance.

Separately, during the Roundtable process, the group did not have the time to do a deep dive into every question that emerged for further discussion. We have **compiled some of these below for the consideration of policymakers, researchers, and future conveners**:

- How can federal agencies **align human capital practices with the pace of change**, including the need for job family updates and updated talent confirmation practices, to get the required skills for critical roles?

- What data are being collected on applicants and new hires and re-hires that can be shared to **clarify trends in who is applying to and being hired** for different kinds of competitive, direct, excepted and term or temporary roles?

- What data are available about use of **dual compensation waivers** and other hiring efforts instituted in response to the **COVID-19 pandemic**?

- What are the pros- and cons of mobility into and out of federal roles using the **intergovernmental personnel act (IPA)** and **structured industry exchange secondments**, and what data are available on these practices?

- What data are available related to hiring during times of **sustained use of Continuing Resolutions** to fund government operations?

- What do we know about **support for special pay rates for targeted positions**, and what lessons do we know from past use of special pay rates?

- Can OPM or an intergovernmental task force create **greater coordination around maximizing information and navigation** to federal civil service opportunities **for separating military members** through the TAP program, since hiring can often take more time in the federal government than with other employers?

- What **additional capacity** does **OPM** need to execute on the kinds of **cross-agency solutions** envisioned in this Blueprint?

- What can Congress do to support **greater executive branch coordination** on workforce strategy and solutions?

> We urge those who are most knowledgeable about the federal workforce to work **across the aisle** and **across sectors** to take on these issues rather than leave it to chance.

Acknowledgements

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THEORY OF CHANGE

Civil service reform has been an ongoing topic for "good government" experts and practitioners since the Pendleton Act and the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. Outside this expert group, however, it cannot compete with policy priorities such as health care, immigration, and national security when it comes to the attention of the American public and Congress. The ironic result is that issues surrounding the federal workforce are increasing politicization and reactivity, impeding planful discourse.

Rather than weighing in on these ongoing debates, the Convergence methodology instead sought to offer a neutral convener approach to:

- Assess and explore the range of opportunities in the civil service modernization landscape;
- Select areas appropriate for administrative and agency-level change as ways to have conversations across interests;
- Develop the relationships for continued work on future topics;
- Take a persona-centered lens for concrete jobseeker and employee audiences (e.g., demographic, skillset);
- Develop problem statements that allow for targeted and longer-term attention;
- Generate a range of solutions and begin to identify owners who can execute the change;
- Offer proof of concept that collaboration across stakeholders can create new ideas on less controversial areas of modernization, to build the trust and relationships to tackle more complex issues requiring reform; and,
- Analyze cross-cutting themes that can be elevated and revisited.

APPENDIX B: PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA

As the Roundtable participants identified areas of shared interest in the early meetings, Convergence was intentional in guiding the participants through an iterative process to develop a set of consensus principles and criteria. These principles and criteria provided a framework to ensure that conversations and preliminary solutions, even in the smaller working groups, would not extend far beyond the boundaries of the participants' interests. The four principles and six criteria are listed below.

Consensus Principles:

- Prepare the federal workforce for the challenges of the coming decades.
- Build upon the talents and strengths of the current federal workforce while recruiting and retaining new entrants.

- Ensure a workforce that reflects the diversity, talent, and capacity of the people of the United States.
- Maintain the merit-based approach to the U.S. civil service.

Consensus Criteria:
- Focus on mission needs, and the skills necessary to fulfill those needs.
- Focus on the recruitment, retention, and retooling of high performing workers at all stages of their career.
- Draw from best practices and innovative programs in the private and public sectors for learning, piloting, and broader adoption.
- For the shorter term, prioritize solutions with high feasibility, such as pilots and administrative changes.
- For the longer term, identify actions with broad impact, such as influencing expert opinion and advancing needed legislation.
- Balance mission delivery, performance, and accountability.

APPENDIX C: REFLECTIONS ON THE CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS FOR CIVIL SERVICE MODERNIZATION

While many of the participating stakeholders knew of each other at least by organizational association prior to the Roundtable, most had not worked together previously. The Convergence Roundtable on Civil Service Modernization offered a novel forum to meet and ideate on topics of common concern related to the federal workforce. Participation in smaller working group settings created more opportunities to build and strengthen relationships. Overall, participants shared that they saw value and meaningful progress with respect to surfacing issues with people they do not typically interact with in their day-to-day.

Though this list is not exhaustive of process outputs and results, examples of specific feedback and observations gathered from meetings, one-on-one conversations, and surveys include:
- The Roundtable cultivated new contacts and relationships and expanded how participants will contemplate reform efforts in their work even after the Roundtable ends, such as establishing coalitions to address reforms.
- Survey feedback from participants about the Roundtable process and experience suggests the methodology and connections felt productive and meaningful; a launching pad for new follow up conversations and partnership.
- A participant-driven methodology has pros and cons. For instance, it sometimes departs from the intended direction or focus, which is a con. However, the slower pace fosters relationship building, trust, and deeper discussion across different perspectives, which is a pro.
- Participants realized that, while not every priority or interest could make it through a consensus process, everyone had equal opportunity to provide input and comments on the direction and outputs of the Roundtable and the working groups.
- Anchoring the process on the larger goals of serving the American people and a well-functioning federal workforce helped to re-orient the conversation towards ideation.
- Convergence observed that conversations amongst participants qualitatively improved over time – a better conversation with less friction, more productive ideation, and interaction.

CONVERGENCE ROUNDTABLE ON CIVIL SERVICE MODERNIZATION BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

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