



PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Post-Hearing Responses from
Margot Conrad,
Director for Federal Recruiting and Hiring Programs
Partnership for Public Service

to Questions from Chairman Gerald E. Connolly,
The House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Government Operations

September 25, 2019 Hearing,
“NextGen Feds: Recruiting the Next Generation of Public Servants”

1. How can agencies incorporate recent graduates and millennials into their workforce planning to meet the future needs of the organization?

The Chief Human Capital Officers Act charges CHCOs with setting the workforce development strategy of the agency and assessing workforce characteristics and future needs based on the agency’s mission and strategic plan. Every agency should be doing thorough workforce planning, and the subcommittee’s oversight can be very helpful in ensuring this happens. Creating a pipeline of talent through students and recent graduates should be an important part of this strategic, long-term planning. Then, to implement the strategy, agencies should make effective use not only of the Pathways programs, but also third-party internships and fellowships (e.g., the National Internship Program of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, which aims to help the government attract diverse talent), as well as other innovative initiatives to bring young people into government, such as the Partnership’s Cybersecurity Talent Initiative and Coding it Forward’s Civic Digital Fellows program.

2. Do you see a link between employees’ opportunities to telework and their engagement?

The Partnership had the opportunity to review 2010 Federal Employee Viewpoint surveys related to telework and found that employees who had the opportunity to telework – whether or not they actually did so – were more satisfied than those who did not have that choice. Some agencies have used telework as a key part of workforce strategy. For example, the United States Patent and Trademark Office has relied heavily on telework to create a nationwide workforce. USPTO has found that its telework program significantly and positively impacts the need for additional office space,

enhancing recruitment and retention, and fostering greater efficiency in production and management. USPTO's Federal Employment Viewpoint Survey results indicate that the agency's teleworkers have higher positive scores on broad engagement indicators. (See, for example, USPTO's 2018 Telework Annual Report.¹) Elsewhere, in profiling the Department of Agriculture's significant drop in 2018 Best Places to Work rankings,² the Partnership found USDA's biggest losses were in employee ratings of senior leaders. This drop took place with the backdrop of both USDA's reorganization and relocation of some agency subcomponents, as well as restrictions on employee ability to telework, suggesting a potential connection between ability to telework and engagement.

- 3. Recently, the Partnership for Public Service published a report titled *Shutdown Letdown: How the Longest Shutdown in U.S. History Did Lasting Damage to Our Government and the People It Serves*. The report noted that the “shutdown further discouraged under-30 generation from federal service.” Can you expand on the impact shutdowns have on agency recruitment and retention, especially regarding potential and current employees in their 20s and 30s?**

Our research for our *Shutdown Letdown* report showed that the shutdown cast doubts on the government's ability to provide a stable income, while also contributing to a perception that federal employees are not valued. The shutdown, therefore, was a self-inflicted wound on the government's reputation and undermined employee morale, making agency recruitment and retention efforts more difficult. With 2019 data not yet available on FedScope, we are limited in conducting analysis of data trends that may be related to the shutdown. It's our understanding that the 2019 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey included a series of questions on the impact of the shutdown, which could help shed further light on the shutdown's impact on recruitment and retention.

- 4. According to your testimony, “many federal agencies are missing the opportunity to use internships as a pipeline for talent.” What barriers are preventing federal agencies from using internships more frequently and more effectively?**

Barriers to use of internships include hiring freezes and budget constraints, which limit the ability of agencies to set aside salaries for interns and provide the resources that agency human resource officers need to recruit at colleges and universities. Meanwhile, low unemployment can make it hard for the government to compete for young talent. The Partnership also often hears that FTE limits create an incentive for agencies to fill vacant FTE slots with permanent employees instead of interns. This is one dynamic we found when conducting research on federal field offices in our recent report, *California's Talent Gap: Recruiting and Hiring a New Generation of Federal Employees*. Agencies need to view intern programs as a primary way to build a talent pipeline. As touched on in the question below, agencies are sometimes restricted in being able to convert interns into permanent positions. Also, the labor-intensive process of evaluating the large number of applications that agencies often receive for intern positions may discourage

¹https://www.uspto.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Telework_Annual_Report_2018%20508%20Compliant.pdf

² <https://bestplacestowork.org/analysis/agency-profiles/#usda>

agencies from using interns. Potential solutions include expanding conversion flexibility, allowing public notice that is more targeted than full notice on USAJOBS, and creating a database of interns eligible for conversion. Congress should also ensure that the Office of Personnel Management has the authority and clarification it needs to implement the provision passed as part of last year's National Defense Authorization Act which would provide for expedited hiring authority for students and recent graduates. This authority would provide a streamlined, highly effective way for agencies to pull in young talent.

5. Why are some federal interns not eligible for conversion to full-time status at the end of their programs?

We sometimes hear a concern that conversion of interns “circumvents” the competitive hiring process. The Partnership respectfully disagrees with this proposition. First, the competition to get an internship – through Pathways or through a third party – can be very stiff. Second, internships are a form of intense competition because they allow agencies to assess a potential employee in a way better than any test or interview would provide. Internships also broaden the talent pool available to government by reaching a pool of candidates who are willing to use the internship to test out public service. For these reasons, we urge the subcommittee to consider providing agencies with the authority to convert third-party interns.

6. Does the Office of Personnel Management publish the data needed for your organization to assess the effectiveness and use of the Pathways program in serving as a talent pipeline across the federal government? If not, what types of data would be helpful to you?

It would be helpful for OPM to clarify where Pathways data is captured in excepted service data on FedScope. Additional data points that would be helpful include: conversion rates government-wide by Pathways participants, conversion rates by agency for Pathways programs, Pathways conversions as a percentage of new hires, and total Pathways program participants by agency per year (as well as historical data for the last five fiscal years). Also, in general, FedScope data should be updated more frequently.

7. How can agencies make current and graduating students more aware of internship programs in the federal government?

Agencies not only need to drive out better information on-line about internship opportunities, but also need to establish close relationships with colleges and universities. Showing up with a booth at a career fair is not enough. Agencies need to develop close relationships with career services officers, faculty, advisers, and student organizations, get them energized about public service, and help them understand what curricula would be helpful to educate students who can fill skills gaps in the government. Agencies should also use their alumni connections to recruit and should make greater use of student loan repayment authorities. Agencies should also use plain language in their recruiting efforts and develop strategies to use social media to help students

understand their culture and mission (for example, by profiling young employees or featuring the work of interns).

- 8. According to your testimony, former federal employees can only non-competitively reenter the federal workforce at or below the last grade level they held when they separated from the government. This requirement does not give workers credit for experience they may have gained in the private sector. What can be done to accommodate a new generation of employees who may not want to spend their whole career in the federal government?**

A “passport” concept allowing a former federal employee to come back into government at any level for which the former employee is qualified, not just their previous grade level, would help the government bring back former employees who have valuable non-governmental experience. Other ways to promote inter-sector mobility include use of temporary and term appointments to fill skills gaps and help agencies take a project-specific approach to workforce planning. Public-private talent exchanges are another way of sharing knowledge and experience across sectors. Federal agencies also need to promote mobility within the federal government through rotational opportunities.

- 9. Do young people think about benefits like paid leave and compare benefits across sectors of the workforce when they’re making decisions about which jobs to take?**

Our review of literature on this issue found that most millennials consider benefits packages when deciding to take a new job or stay in their current role. According to OPM, 56% of millennials report that a quality benefits package influences their choice of employers, while 63% say it is an important reason for staying at their current job. 56% prefer benefits they can choose. OPM also found that 35% of millennials were attracted to employers that offered excellent training and development programs.³ One report that OPM relied on also found 62% are willing to bear most of a cost than lose a benefit.⁴ According to another report, over 80% of millennials prefer benefits or perks to pay raises, more than older generations, and the top three benefits and perks they seek out are health insurance, vacation/paid time off, and performance bonuses.⁵ A recurring theme is that millennials fear “flexibility stigma,” the likelihood they’ll be labeled less than fully committed to work if they seek arrangements like flex time and paternity leave, and seek workplaces that value flexibility, with one report finding 38% of U.S. millennials saying they would move to another country for better parental leave benefits.⁶ According

³ Office of Personnel Management, 2018 Federal Workforce Priorities Report. <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/human-capital-management/federal-workforce-priorities-report/2018-federal-workforce-priorities-report.pdf>

⁴ National Chamber Foundation, Millennial Generation: Research Review (Nov. 12 2012)

<https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/article/foundation/MillennialGeneration.pdf>

⁵ Glassdoor, 4 in 5 Employees Want Benefits or Perks More Than a Pay Raise; Glassdoor Employment Confidence Survey (Q3 2015). October 2, 2015. <https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/ecs-q3-2015/>

⁶ Fondas, N. (2015, May 7). Millennials Say They’ll Relocate for Work-Life Flexibility. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2015/05/millennials-say-theyll-relocate-for-work-life-flexibility>; Sarah Landrum (Jan 23, 2017). The Work Benefits That Are Making Millennials Happy. Forbes. Retrieved from

to a recent GAO report, CHCOs and other experts in the federal government say that millennials value non-financial benefits as well, such as life and wellness programs.⁷ Another report found that the three most important non-financial benefits cited are good work/life balance, opportunities to progress/become leaders, and flexibility (remote working and flexible hours).⁸

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahlandrum/2017/01/23/the-work-benefits-that-are-making-millennials-happy/#1910b53e6ad3>

⁷ Government Accountability Office, Key Talent Management Strategies for Agencies to Better Meet Their Missions. (March, 2019) <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/698084.pdf>

⁸ Deloitte. (2016). The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey: Winning over the next generation of leaders. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-millennial-survey-2016-exec-summary.pdf>