

The Next-Generation Workforce

How state and local governments can attract and support the employees they need in the decades to come

U.S. Public Sector/State and Local

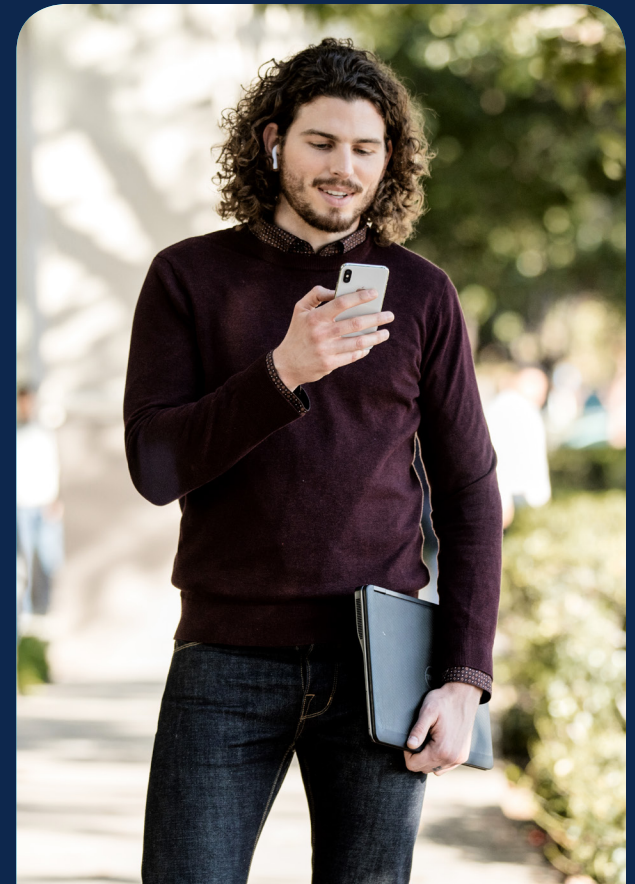
Introduction

As governments around the world face aging workforces approaching retirement, many of their leaders are trying to better understand the changing career preferences of the next generation of workers and young professionals.

Adults under the age of 38 now comprise the largest proportion of the U.S. workforce, representing 65 million working Americans, according to the Pew Research Center. And while much has been written about the impact of Millennials in the workplace, the oldest members of that demographic group are rapidly approaching the age of 40. However, less is understood about the next generation of workers who are under the age of 30 – many of whom are just now entering the workforce – and how governments can ensure they attract the best and brightest of them to serve the public in the decades to come.

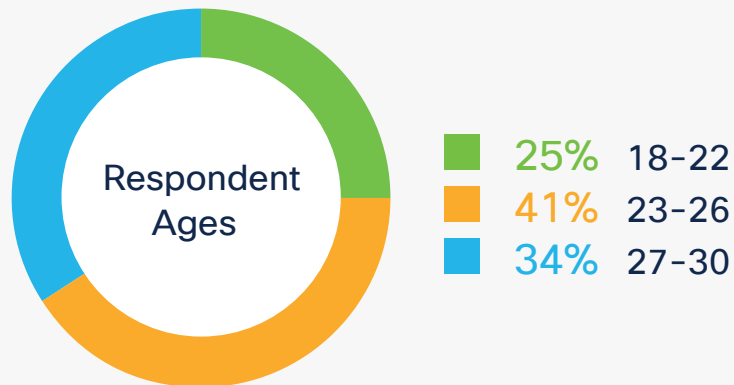
To better understand the dramatic shifts in the workforce, the Center for Digital Government (CDG) surveyed more than 2,000 early-career working Americans about their professional aspirations and expectations.

This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Government, with information and input from Cisco.



About the survey

This report is based on a nationwide CDG survey of 2,046 young professionals between the ages of 18 and 30, conducted in early 2020. All (100 percent) respondents were currently employed in either private or public sector roles. While respondents represent the full spectrum of employed workers under the age of 30, the plurality (41 percent) were between the ages of 23 and 26.



Key findings

Next-generation workers value the opportunity to make a difference in their communities – and understand government provides them an opportunity to do so.

When next-generation workers were asked what professional objectives are most important to them, serving and helping the public and making a difference ranked second and third, respectively, behind salary considerations by narrow margins.

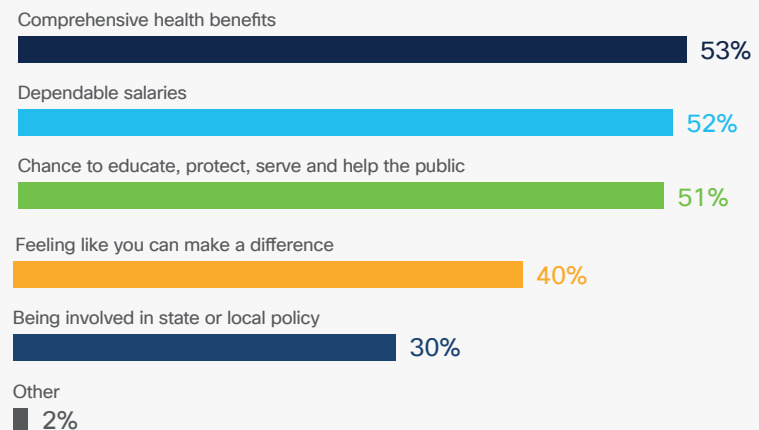
Importantly, young professionals recognize that careers in state and local government provide them an opportunity to make a difference. More than half (51 percent) of respondents said educating, protecting, serving and helping the public was one of the most attractive reasons to work for state and local government.

Other career objectives included solving difficult or complicated challenges, which ranked fourth, and working with reachable day-to-day goals, which ranked fifth.

Please rank the following work objectives in order of importance to you (with 1 being the most important).

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Higher salary | 5. Simple work with reachable day-to-day goals |
| 2. Serving and helping the public | 6. Helping a team meet sales goals to make bonuses |
| 3. Making a difference | 7. Using the most advanced technologies available |
| 4. Solving difficult or complicated challenges | |

Based on your current knowledge, what are the most attractive reasons to work for state or local government?

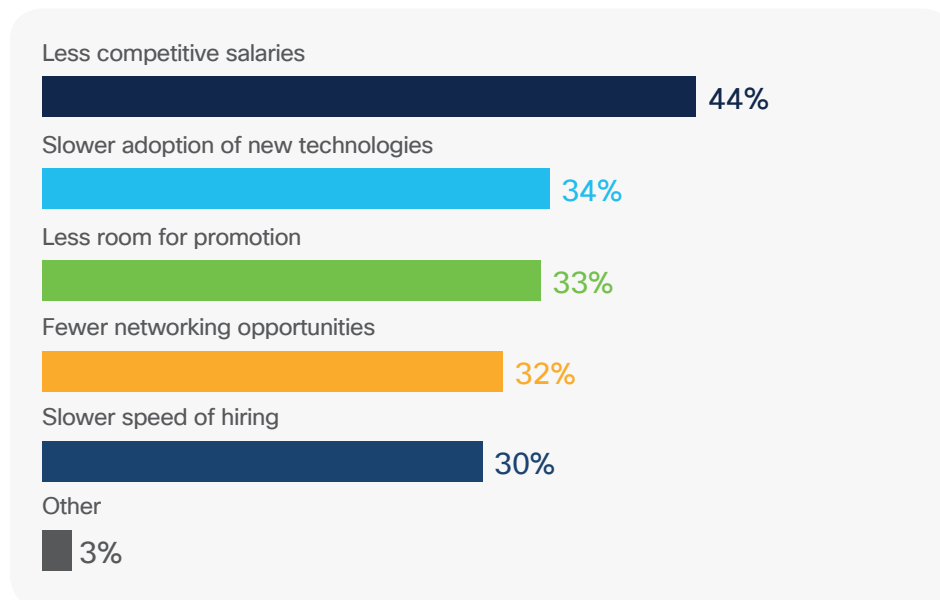


Lower salaries and opportunities for advancement within government are concerns for young professionals.

Despite their interest in public service, salary considerations remain the most important professional objective among survey respondents. And next-generation workers are aware of the salary differential between many private and public sector jobs. The greatest number of survey participants – 44 percent – said less competitive salaries is the least attractive part of working for state and local government.

Respondents also had strong perceptions of other often-cited public sector workplace challenges, including slower adoption of new technologies than in the private sector (34 percent), less opportunity for advancement (33 percent) and fewer networking opportunities (32 percent).

Based on your current knowledge, what are the least attractive reasons to work for state and local government?



Despite perceived salary differentials, young professionals value workplace conditions commonly found in government.

While negative perceptions about public sector salaries among survey respondents represent a hurdle for governments, the career aspirations of the next-generation workforce highlight places where the public sector can shine.

Survey respondents ranked the opportunity to have a long and steady career highest among a list of career attributes – even above salary considerations. Comprehensive benefits and dependable retirement funding immediately followed salary in participants' rankings, coming in third and fourth, respectively. Their other priorities – professional development opportunities, healthy relationships with managers and team members, being able to try different jobs over time and professional recognition – are all benefits governments can offer.

Please rank the following options in order of importance to you (1 being the most important).

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Having a long, steady career | 7. Being able to try different jobs over time |
| 2. Higher salary | 8. Professional recognition for your personal accomplishments |
| 3. Comprehensive benefits | 9. Knowing you are heard as a team member |
| 4. Dependable retirement funding | 10. Clear direction from leadership |
| 5. Professional development opportunities | |
| 6. Healthy relationships with your manager and team members | |

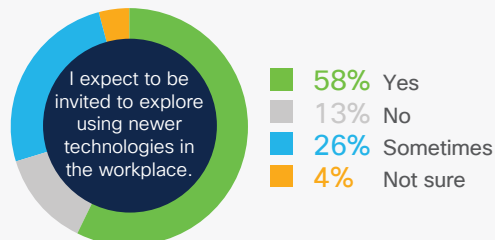
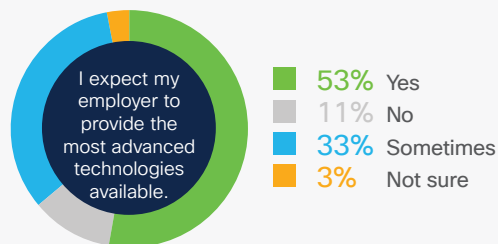
While next-generation workers believe governments lag in technology adoption, it's not their highest priority.

More than one-third (34 percent) of survey respondents said slow adoption of new technology in the public sector is a negative aspect of working in state and local government. However, they also ranked the ability to use the latest and greatest technologies last in their list of workplace priorities (see chart at the top of page 3).

Even so, governments must recognize that technology adoption – and playing a direct role in exploring new technologies – is an expectation of the next-generation workforce and those yet to come. Nearly nine in 10 respondents (86 percent) say they always or sometimes expect an employer to provide the most advanced technologies available. Nearly as many (83 percent) expect to at least sometimes be invited to explore using newer technologies in the workplace.*

* Due to rounding, not all percentages will add up to 100 percent.

Please tell us your opinions on the following questions:

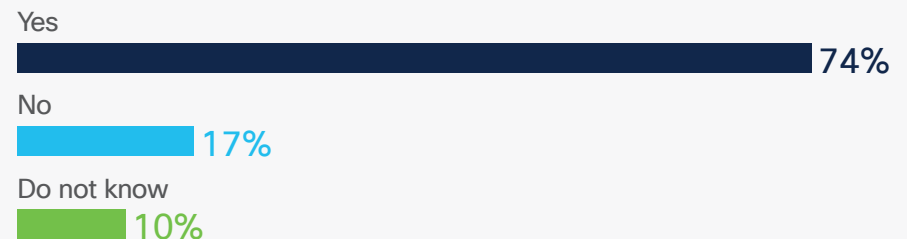


Next-generation workers value collaboration in their workplace – and the technology that enables it.

Survey respondents value open, collaborative office environments. When given the choice between these kinds of workplaces and the opportunity to work remotely, a majority (57 percent) chose the ability to collaborate in person.

In both cases, however, younger generations recognize the importance of technology to drive collaboration. Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents (74 percent) expect to use integrated platforms and other networked unified communications (UC) as part of getting work done.

Do you expect to use integrated platforms – sometimes referred to as networked unified communications – in the workplace to get your work done?



Next-generation workers want to be connected anywhere, learn online and have access to up-to-date technology.

Survey participants ranked tools that enable connectivity both inside and outside of the workplace as their top technology priorities. Laptops, remote access and robust Wi-Fi were the three top-ranked technology options among participants. Online training ranked fourth, reflecting the next generation's comfort with using technology to learn and grow professionally.

Other technology priorities reflect the importance of up-to-date technology, including updated security (fifth) and mobile apps (sixth), followed closely by updated systems and software, as well as video and telephone conferencing systems (ranked seventh and eighth, respectively).

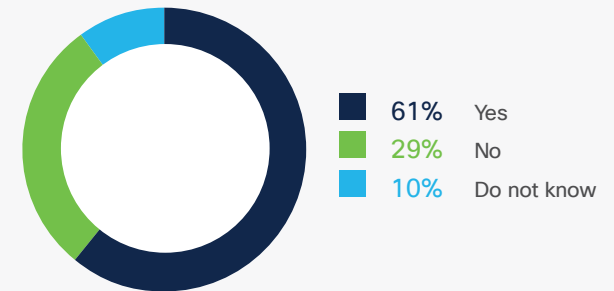
Please rank the following technology options in order of importance to you when it comes to choosing a workplace (1 being the most important).

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Remote work options such as updated laptops | 8. Reliable video/telephone conferencing systems |
| 2. Remote access to workplace resources/systems | 9. Software applications to handle things like payroll and benefits |
| 3. Robust Wi-Fi and connectivity | 10. Combination of personal and collaborative workspaces |
| 4. Online training | 11. Environmental controls (cooling, heating, noise cancellation, lighting, etc.) |
| 5. Updated security measures on work computers | |
| 6. Mobile apps | |
| 7. Updated operating systems and software on work computers | |

The next-generation workforce expects to use their own devices in the workplace.

Nearly two-thirds of survey participants (61 percent) expect to use their own smartphones, tablets or laptops in the workplace, reinforcing both the prevalence and importance of bring your own device, or BYOD, policies among younger workers.

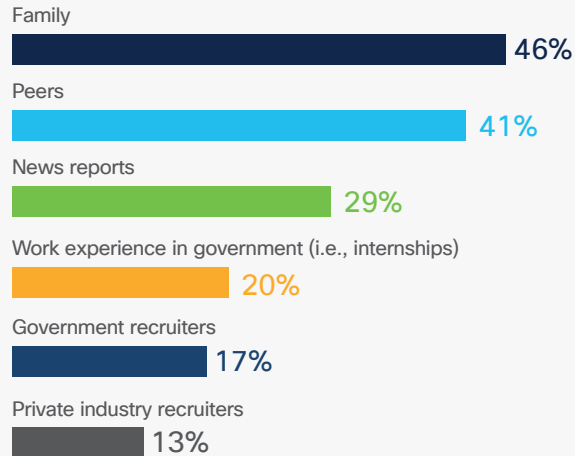
Do you expect to bring your own technology to the workplace, or use your own personal technology (mobile phone, computer, tablet) to complete work?



Word of mouth – in person and online – remains the most powerful tool to recruit next-generation workers.

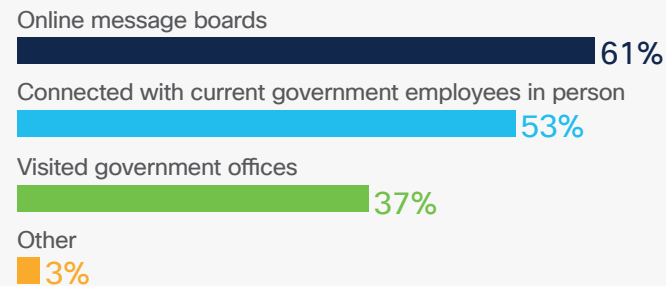
By wide margins, survey participants said they learned about what it's like to work for state and local governments from peers and family. Fewer than two in 10 cited experience with government or private sector recruiters or internships (17, 13 and 20 percent, respectively).

How have you learned about what it's like to work for state and/or local government?



However, survey respondents suggested several avenues that governments could leverage to inform and potentially attract new employees from younger demographics. More than half of respondents who explored employment in state and local governments used online message boards or connected with current government employees in person.

What kinds of research have you done to figure out what it's like to work for state and/or local government?



Conclusion

Understanding the changing aspirations and priorities of the next generation of workers is critical for state and local governments to continue to recruit the people needed to serve their missions – and to protect, educate and otherwise improve the lives of their citizens. The findings outlined in this paper suggest several ways government leaders can attract young workers:

- Continue to stress how public service can help you improve lives and make a difference, which are among the top priorities for the next generation of workers.
- Recognize that salary matters but emphasize areas in which the public sector often has advantages – including the ability to have a long and changing career, as well as comprehensive benefits and retirement.
- Create workplaces that value collaboration and enable workers to do their jobs whether they're in the office or not. Doing so involves both culture – open, collaborative environments and opportunities for training and advancement – and the technology that empowers rather than constrains workers in serving the public good.