

How Millennials Are About to Change the Face of Public Service

As they move into leadership positions, we're going to hear less about "rowing" and "steering" and more about engaging the public.

BY [SAM TAYLOR](#) | AUGUST 3, 2015..... **GOVERNING MAGAZINE**

I was talking recently to Jack Madans, one of the founders of the "civic hacking" group Code for America, about community engagement, and we lamented the state of public participation in government.

It shouldn't be just about giving the public a chance to be heard, we agreed. It should be about taking the feedback from the public and then actually utilizing it to fashion policies that have an impact on their lives. That often isn't what happens when some municipalities get public feedback, Jack felt, adding that a lot of today's public engagement is like the Make-A-Wish Foundation without the wish actually being granted.

So how can we improve the way governments get and utilize public input? I believe a lot of this will change with time - that is, as more millennials come into positions of executive leadership in cities, we're going to see more focus on "the new public service," a term coined by Janet V. Denhardt and Robert B. Denhardt in their book *The New Public Service: Serving, Not Steering*.

The millennial generation that I'm part of has a strong dedication to public service. It's a generation that wants to make a difference in its communities and ensure that citizens control their own destiny. Public engagement is a cornerstone to making that happen.

Historic forms of government administration focused on either the "old public management" aims of simply "rowing" to achieve the ends of elected policy-makers or the "new public management" goal of "steering" agencies, with wide latitude toward market-focused management solutions. As the Denhardts might say, however, the public has been placed in the back of the boat. With the new-public-service approach, energized public administrators are intent on putting the community directly in the captain's chair.

It seems like a simple concept. But older forms of public administration did not readily embrace citizen input as a means of developing policy.

We're changing that now. Millennial executive leaders are already pushing on these fronts, seeking innovative public-engagement solutions using technology, such as the opportunities provided by Code for America. It's then about working to follow up with constituencies to ensure that they know how their input has been utilized.

That follow-up is critical to counteract the perception in some communities that public servants aren't listening to the input that citizens do provide -- one reason that it can be hard to engender the level of public participation that makes for a healthy, productive civil dialogue.

So let's begin to tell a different story. Start by building strategic public-engagement strategies for policy initiatives that work to both recruit participants and engage them. That means ensuring that residents are aware of how valuable their input is and understand clearly how it will be used. Personalize the communications to residents.

And go to where the community is. People are busy. They are tired. They are on fixed incomes. Attending meetings can be difficult. Bring the meetings to them, perhaps by creating a mobile or "pop-up" City Hall, with staff members from different departments meeting and talking to residents while providing them with information about what their community's government is doing and actively seeking their input. Put up booths at the local grocery store with information on the next major planning effort.

Millennials are thinking about these kinds of opportunities constantly, embracing a form of public administration that places the community directly in that captain's chair. It's about serving, not steering.



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VOICES OF THE GOVERNING INSTITUTE

Why Your Government Needs to Be a Hipster Organization

The millennials who will replace today's government workers are looking for a very different workplace culture.

BY JULIE THUY UNDERWOOD | MAY 11, 2015

A hot topic around public-sector organizations is the large wave of retirements that they expect over the next three to five years. Who will replace these retirees? Millennials, that's who -- those now roughly between the ages of 18 to 34.

But is your government or agency prepared for this wave of recruitments and new hires? Have you put updated policies and systems in place? Have you designed an inclusive, forward-thinking culture? Have you shifted your attitudes to maximize the talent this workforce brings?

The answers to questions like those will determine whether your government is well on the way becoming what might be called a "hipster organization" -- the kind that millennials are eager to join. Short of that, you may have a "trending organization," one that's at least heading in the right direction. But if your government's culture values status quo above all else, you may be looking at a "dated organization." You have a lot of work to do.

Here are some key questions (also available as [an online quiz](#)) that should help you figure out where your government or agency falls on this continuum:

1. Does your organization place a high value on communicating a vision, goals, challenges and the big picture?

Millennials are hungry to know the big picture. They have a curiosity and interest in all work-related matters -- even if those matters lie far outside of their defined area of responsibility. What value does your organization place on communicating? If it's not a priority, then you will lose this talent to other organizations that do make it a priority.

2. Do employees have opportunities to learn new skills, gain valuable experience and possibly advance in their careers?

The days when employees stayed in one organization for their entire careers are a relic of the past. This generation does not see long-term value in pensions and other government benefits. "Organizations borrow talent, they don't own it," says Alex McIntyre, city manager of Menlo Park, Calif. We must emphasize the importance of harnessing as much of an employee's talent as long as he or she is in our organization, to cultivate and enhance that talent, and to realize that sometimes this means helping the person find a better opportunity elsewhere.

3. Do employees have a say in their work environment or workplace conditions that affect them?

I have witnessed a hesitation from some of my baby-boomer colleagues about having employees weigh in on this. They're concerned that employees will misunderstand their role in the organization. But this is a generation that will not "take their lumps" and continue to work in an environment that does not value their input.

4. Do you offer flexible work schedules?

Does your organization allow employees to work from home occasionally or on a regular basis? Would you consider job-sharing or allowing someone to go part-time? What about non-traditional approaches such as [the 9/80 work schedule](#)? This is a generation that will make career decisions based on life-work balance. They value having an enriched life outside of work and want their leaders to model this as well.

5. Are employees able to access workplace email, servers or key applications using their personal mobile devices?

Most millennials have never known a world without the Internet, mobile technology and social media. They find these tools easy to use and just part of life. And since they like having flexible work schedules, they value being able to access work from anywhere and at any time.

6. Does your organization have a diverse workforce?

Millennials are more racially diverse than any other generation; 43 percent of Americans in this age group are non-white. They want to see diversity in the most global sense, from race to gender to age, at all levels of government, and they want to see that diversity reflected in management positions.

7. Do your managers provide ongoing feedback and input to employees?

Millennials want a continual feedback and communication loop with their managers. Millennials were raised with lots of feedback, though most of it has been positive, so they're not used to negative feedback. Managers will need to shift how they provide feedback, being careful not to focus purely on what's wrong and what needs improving but to also spend time highlighting what has gone well.

So, now that you've answered these questions, how does your government or agency stack up? If you were able to answer most of these questions affirmatively, you have a hipster organization. You're cutting-edge and are open to continually improving.

If you answered positively to half of these questions, or you occasionally see your organization doing some of these things, you have a trending organization. With a little more effort, you'll be attracting and retaining those millennials.

If you could not answer most of these questions positively, you have a dated organization. It will be a challenge to shift the culture, but with leadership and commitment it can be done.

For insightful leaders who are willing to take this challenge on, it's worth the effort, and not just for millennials. Baby boomers and the generations that came along after them will still be working in government for many years to come. They too will see the benefits from these changes - even before the influx of millennials.



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The Challenge of Building the Workforce Government Needs

Competition from the private sector is stiff. Governments have much to offer, but they need do a better job of getting the message out.

BY ELIZABETH K. KELLAR | JULY 8, 2014.... **GOVERNING MAGAZINE**

State and local governments are hiring again, but they're having difficulty finding -- and retaining -- the right people. Do governments have a people problem?

In the Center for State and Local Government Excellence's [latest annual workforce survey](#), government human-resources managers cite staff development, succession planning, employee morale and retaining staff for core services as their top issues. Those issues were rated as greater concerns than compensation and health-care and retirement-plan costs. What's going on?

Some of the problem is the mismatch between the skills of people looking for work and the jobs that need filling. Whether governments are looking for finance experts, managers, engineers or public-health professionals, they face stiff competition from the private sector.

Add to that the fact that more local and state workers are heading for the exits as they become eligible for retirement. While many stayed in their jobs as the economy slowly recovered from the recession, they are now retiring in large numbers. The center's survey finds that 22 percent of retirement-eligible employees accelerated their retirement date in 2013.

Recruitment challenges have been a shock to communities that see themselves as highly desirable places to live and work. As one North Carolina local-government manager told me, "It takes a lot of time to fill senior positions -- sometimes we have to go through the recruitment process three times." She speculated that the housing market and two-career family dynamics were making it more difficult for people to move.

A legacy of the recession is that more governments are hiring contract or temporary employees to fill positions (one third reported doing so in 2013, according to the center's report). The rise of this independent workforce is significant for both the private and public sectors. Will these workers be able to accumulate adequate retirement savings? If not, they may have to turn to government for social services when they do retire.

One reason that governments may be relying more on temporary or contract workers is to manage their overall compensation costs. Although employees in many state and local governments saw no pay increases for three or more years in the wake of the recession, the costs of health insurance and defined-benefit pensions have continued to grow. In 2004, those benefits made up 16 percent of employer costs for public workers' compensation; by 2013, they made up 20 percent of employer costs.

These trends create new management challenges. In many places, new government hires have less-generous benefits than the longer-term employees with whom they work. Generational

differences may create workplace tensions or lead newer workers to press for more significant wage increases in the future.

But while workforce challenges are a hot topic in human-resources and other management circles, they are not on the radar screen for most elected officials. Cost containment for health insurance and pension benefits continues to dominate the agenda for many elected leaders.

Yet demographics are destiny, and the local and state government workforce should be getting more attention. The average age of a state or local worker is 44, compared with 39 for a private-sector worker. Many governments have reduced or eliminated internships and entry-level positions in the last five years, so the pipeline of younger workers is small.

On top of all that, there is evidence that government has become a less-attractive career option for college students. In its [State of the Internship Report](#) last month, InternMatch found that most college students would rather work for the private sector than for government.

Government has many advantages over the private sector, but must sell itself effectively and adapt to current worker preferences. Many young people want to work for an organization where they can make a difference in the world. If governments can make a better case for the rewards of a public-service career -- and write better job ads -- they should be able to attract more of these millennials.

Where to begin? A good place to start is by assessing who is working for the organization today. A workforce assessment not only should examine the age of workers and their retirement eligibility but also document skill sets and talent gaps.

Investing in employees by helping them develop new skills not only benefits governments but also shows workers that they are valued. Offering cross-cutting assignments appeals to younger workers who are eager to gain experience and a bigger picture of organizational challenges. Providing flexible work practices appeals to workers at all ages and is another excellent retention strategy.

Governments often undertake huge, important projects and are in a position to offer major growth opportunities. They should use these as selling points for hard-to-fill jobs, whether in information technology, engineering, health care or management. The message to the workers that government needs should be: "Wanted: Smart people with a passion to fix things so our society is a great place to live."



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MANAGEMENT & LABOR

Millennials Face Hurdles Breaking into Public Sector

To compete with the private sector and nonprofits these days, states and localities have to rethink their recruiting and hiring processes.

BY MIKE MACIAG | OCTOBER 2013



As agencies at all levels continue to expand their use of contracting with private firms and nonprofits, young graduates entering the workforce are discovering that they don't need to work in government to serve the public. *David Kidd*

Chris Howell was dead set on working in local government. He had been a graduate student in business school and decided that wasn't the career for him. So he began doing just about everything conceivable to

prepare for a change in direction. He earned a master's degree in public administration. Through volunteering and internships, he worked with a dozen municipalities—from a small town's fire department to a regional chamber of commerce. Howell then hit the job market in late 2008.

It wasn't the best time to be looking for public employment. By networking, though, Howell eventually succeeded in finding a job with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. "It was hard, but I knew it was what I wanted to do, so I kept at it," he says. "If you really want to make local government your career, it's a matter of persistence." Now he works as a budget and management officer for the town of Dedham, Mass.

Breaking into the public sector isn't a whole lot easier now than it was when Howell started out. Young people wanting to pursue government careers face a series of barriers. States and localities hard hit by budget pressures often lack the resources to offer them entry-level positions.

But it isn't just the tight job market for new applicants that is changing the nature of state and local employment. Governments need to make adjustments of their own. It's hard for agencies to compete with the private sector for top talent when they have to freeze pay or trim benefits. Millennials who do end up in the public sector bring their own perspectives and a different set of job expectations they want employers to accommodate. At the same time, the workforce continues to experience shifting roles as nonprofits and contractors take over more tasks traditionally performed by public employees.

Taken together, these realities are sending a signal that the next generation of public servants will be fundamentally different from those who make up much of the workforce today.

The Great Recession hit young people particularly hard in all sectors of the economy. The unemployment rate among people ages 20 to 24 hovered between 15 and 16 percent for much of 2009 and 2010. Some aiming at careers in government still haven't caught up.

Tim McManus from the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service says he has seen a dramatic reduction in paid summer internships, with federal agencies either providing only unpaid positions or eliminating slots altogether. "Young people looking at jobs face one of the more challenging times that we've seen in quite some time," he says. Depending on how well they weathered the economic downturn, state and local governments may or may not have managed to preserve internships and other entry-level programs.

Recent signs do point to a slowly improving outlook in the public job market. A survey of mostly state and local government members of the International Public Management Association for Human Resources conducted this spring reported that 26.5 percent incurred hiring freezes, down from 41.6 percent the year before.

But there's a catch. Hiring managers are so focused on immediate concerns that they're ignoring workforce needs for the long term, McManus says. When governments are allowed to fill a

single position after eliminating multiple jobs through layoffs or attrition, they tend to hire veterans who can hit the ground running.

When opportunities do exist, job applicants are in for a long wait. While the federal government expedited its hiring process in recent years, it still takes agencies around 100 days on average to hire. State and local governments typically fill vacancies faster, but lag far behind the private sector. “The private sector over the last 20 years has developed clear and better pathways to employment,” says Laurel McFarland of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). One of the more common complaints levied against governments is that they often don’t update applicants on where they stand in the process, leaving job seekers in the dark as they hunt for other opportunities.

The lengthy hiring process and lower entry-level pay are obstacles that governments have long fought to overcome as they’ve recruited against the private sector. Offering generous benefits and pension plans helped agencies compete. However, many can no longer afford these incentives in an era of cutbacks. “Now that they’re not there, the public sector has to really work harder to be more attractive,” says Rex Facer, a Brigham Young professor who studies workforce issues.

An increasing number of new graduates hoping to work in government aren’t finding immediate openings or none that offer much job security, so they are taking their talents elsewhere. Young graduates entering the workforce are discovering that they don’t need to work in government to serve the public. As agencies at all levels continue to expand their use of contracting with private firms and nonprofits, students are adjusting their job searches accordingly.

At the University of Kentucky, about 20 percent of public administration and public policy graduates took jobs with businesses or private associations over the past two years. It’s a figure that has increased as students broaden their wish lists.

“We’re experiencing a much greater diversity of placements, and part of it is due to the reduction of opportunities in state and local government,” says Merl Hackbart, director of the university’s Martin School of Public Policy and Administration. With an understanding of the public sector, Hackbart says, the school’s graduates serve as valued additions to a government relations staff or other corporate offices.

Similarly, when J. Edward Kellough started teaching at the University of Georgia 25 years ago, it was unusual for public administration graduates to end up at nonprofits. Now, he estimates that about a third of students go to work in that sector, typically in management, performance measurement or related roles.

It’s clear that the lines dividing the roles of government, private firms and nonprofits have blurred. So rather than confine themselves to a single job sector, students tend to focus on an issue or policy goal regardless of where they’ll end up. “The sector distinction coming in is becoming less and less of a driver,” says Mary Beaulieu, Harvard Kennedy School of Government’s assistant dean and director of career advancement.

While recent graduates navigate a difficult job market, employers are adjusting to the new mindset that millennials are bringing to the workplace. For one thing, they don't stay put for long. A national survey conducted by the research firm Millennial Branding found that 45 percent of companies experienced a turnover rate among their younger ranks double that of older employees. Along with job hopping, academics say younger workers expect to move between sectors as well.

"More than ever, I think students are coming back and are very interested in having an organizational culture that meets their needs," says Bryan Kempton, career services director for the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy. Research also indicates that millennials desire work they consider meaningful right away. Employees decide how long they'll stick around early on in new jobs, so it's crucial for managers to give them at least a taste of something challenging soon after they sign on.

Jamie Gwynn, a 26-year-old University of Pennsylvania graduate, focused his job search on local government, where he best felt he could directly implement programs without waiting long. Northampton Township in Pennsylvania was prepared to give him what he wanted. After a few months, he has worked on a budget, an employee handbook and employee pay classification. Seeing firsthand results as simple as a newly paved road are a source of great motivation for him. "We get to do a lot of the day-to-day things that really make people's lives move," Gwynn says. Like others of his generation, Gwynn wants to be in a position where he can grow and quickly learn. "We don't set ourselves for 30 years," Gwynn says. "We want to make a difference, otherwise, we'll want to move on."

North Carolina is one of the places where the turnover rate for state government workers ages 18-30 is approximately double that of older employees. Sondra Chavis, an HR consultant, says the state recognized a need to retain these workers and transfer to them vital knowledge from their peers. "Not only do we need young people to come in and take on these positions, but we need their brain and innovative ideas on the table," she says.

The state responded by launching its Young Employees Initiative, not only to better understand the needs of millennials, but to actually address them. Employees mostly in their 20s from various state agencies serve on an advisory committee, conducting studies and making recommendations on issues important to their peers.

Chavis, who leads the initiative, says the committee has pushed long-neglected workforce concerns to the forefront. Online job applications, for example, were finally implemented by all state agencies last year. The group also made strides in encouraging agencies to allow for more flexible work schedules. "The energy level from the initiative and the fact that they can bring in a new perspective is really the kicker," Chavis says.

What's more, governments are realizing they'll need to find new ways to connect with prospective employees. Chief among these are social media websites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

To further reach candidates, more state and local governments are posting openings on GovernmentJobs.com, a national recruiting website with an integrated applicant tracking system. Nearly 700 agencies in 44 states were advertising positions in August, the website reports. Before the North Carolina Department of Transportation began advertising positions on the site, the agency received about 125 applicants for an entry-level training program. Now, it's getting about 400. "It has really made our recruitment pool become nationwide," says Barry Bridges, the department's career services manager, "where before it was very much a localized effort."

Of particular concern for HR managers is the brain drain set to occur as a large segment of baby boomers exits the workforce. "Potentially, we have a talent crisis just as much as was talked about for the financial crisis," says Elizabeth Kellar, president of the Center for State and Local Government Excellence. Partnerships with academic institutions are gaining prevalence, she says, along with peer mentoring. "The governments ahead of the curve have been doing pretty serious workforce development work."

In Wyoming, state health director Tom Forslund is employing a twofold approach to developing talent. A fellowship program places some recent public administration graduates in the department's policy unit before they're brought on as full-time employees. For others, the department recently kicked off a leadership development program in partnership with a local community college, providing talks by college instructors and other state employees over the course of nine months. "Governments need to respond to this changing world and be in a better position to compete and retain talent," Forslund says. He is counting on this new crop of leaders to stay on and move up in the agency, a critical need since a quarter of the workforce will retire or be eligible to do so within the next five years.

The good news about all this change is that despite the drawbacks, millennials don't seem to be discouraged from seeking careers in the public sector. Young up-and-comers continue to sign up for schooling in public administration and policy. The latest NASPAA figures indicate no dip in graduate school enrollment.

Will Miller, dean of the University of Illinois' public administration program, says his students continue to want to pursue public service, despite all the negativity surrounding that state's political environment and insolvent pension system. "In spite of it, we still have all these kids coming into the program," he says. "That's impressive."

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