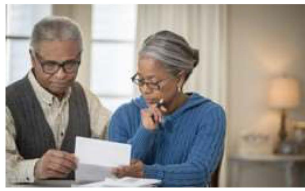
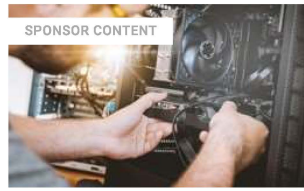




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## Why Young Workers Don't Want Government Jobs—and What To Do About It



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By Jenny Kosek | MAY 11, 2022

**COMMENTARY | A recent survey of millennials and Generation Z adults paints a grim picture for the future of the government workforce. Here's how states and localities can change the "disheartening" situation.**

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While many state and local governments hope to attract young adults to fill open positions, they may be facing an uphill battle. [A recent survey](#) by [Next100](#) and [GenForward](#) of young adults ages 18 to 36 (with an over sample of Black, Asian and Latinx respondents) aimed to gain a better understanding of how this age group perceives government and their attitudes towards working in government.

“The results are disheartening,” the report states.

Although 48% of survey respondents considered themselves politically engaged or active, many of them reported that they didn't feel represented or well served by their

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“largely **white, male and wealthy**” local, state or federal government representatives.

Accordingly, young adults have little interest in working for governments that they view as out of touch and exclusionary. The survey report notes, “few are excited to join the government themselves; and they are skeptical of the government’s desire to employ them or its ability to have a meaningful impact—signing a petition was more likely to be viewed as impactful than working in government.”

The negative sentiments revealed by this research could not come at a worse time. The “Great Resignation” continues, with **half of all state and local government workers** considering leaving their jobs, and a quarter of those considering leaving government altogether. Waves of retirements, pandemic-induced burnout, benefit reductions and a host of other factors have fanned the flames of the public sector employment fire. With so many opportunities available in the job market, the contrast between a modernized private sector and a public sector that has failed to pivot, change and respond to rapidly evolving worker expectations is stark.

With “(a) labor force (that) is expected to become even more diverse than it is now ... and minorities ... projected to expand their share of the workforce considerably in the future,” governments appear to be making little effort to become an employer of choice for the emerging population of workers. Survey respondents reported feeling excluded and unwanted by government employers, with just 24% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: “I believe that local government wants to hire people like me.” Equally troubling is that just 18% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “I want to work in local government at some point in my career.”

Whether intentional or not, governments are turning young people away from the industry. Immediate action is needed to alter the prevailing distaste young people have for this work.

State and local governments can start by implementing civic engagement programs geared towards young and multicultural audiences. These efforts should include voter education, policy engagement and campaigns that educate constituents about how to run for office—and empower them to do so. Engagement must begin while young people are still in school and continue to meet them where they are post graduation to build lifetimes of connection. That means getting out of city hall and hosting opportunities directly within communities, both in person and online.

Meanwhile, conscious efforts need to be made to diversify representation on committees, boards and ballots; and staff, candidates and elected officials need more support from government organizations to better



connect with and include constituents in collaborative governance.

Focusing inward, government organizations need to abandon the tired message of “making a difference” by working in the public sector, a dusty adage that is obviously not resonating with a weary and wary younger generation. As partisan bickering and [vocal minorities continue to stall meaningful change](#) in communities, young job seekers from historically underrepresented backgrounds will not respond to messaging they perceive as rose colored and empty.

Instead, governments need to do the work within their organizations to provide meaningful, attractive opportunities to young workers. And public employers of all sizes need to start by prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion practices that build welcoming and functioning workplaces for all employees. These efforts cannot be part of aspirational five- or 10-year plans, but need to be top of mind, budgeted and measurably executed *now*.

According to Next100/GenForward’s survey, only 38% of respondents “know how to get a job in local government.” Governments must reframe passive recruitment strategies and include targeted outreach to underrepresented candidates to guide them towards government opportunities and assist them, if needed, in applying.

Next, governments must radically overhaul their operations and cultures to create work environments that are attractive to young, diverse workers. This may include:

- Offering remote or hybrid work and flex schedules.
- Floating holidays or unlimited PTO.
- Prioritizing the dismantling of bureaucracies to operate more agilely and responsively.
- Updating job descriptions to include flexible educational or experience requirements.
- Providing on-the-job training.
- Modernizing benefit offerings to include child care and mental health services.
- Designing accelerated career paths and educational opportunities.
- Allowing autonomy for younger workers.
- Involving new or younger workers in key decision making.

Implementing and promoting these organizational accomplishments as employer branding rather than relying on trite messages about “making a difference” will help public sector employers attract and retain the young professionals their organizations need to thrive.

In short, actions, not words, are needed now to engage and attract the next generation of government workers.

As the survey report states, “Government leaders must ... work to build inclusive institutions in which young adults from the communities most impacted by harmful policies—and who are most likely to benefit from transformative and impactful policies—are able and eager to work, thrive



and have influence and impact in government.” It’s past time for the industry to embrace sweeping change and build cultures and communities that reflect the realities of the present and are prepared for the future. 🌐

Jenny Kosek is a writer and researcher based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A former government official, she now works in private sector marketing. Connect with her on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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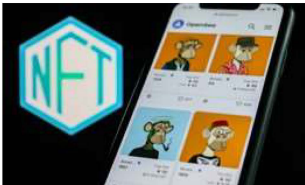
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