

A Briefing
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Federal Recruitment and Retention on a Budget: What Workplace Mobility Can Offer

Despite recent efforts to promote telecommuting and other workplace mobility policies, the federal government must do more to encourage such practices, as they may be the key to attracting new hires and retaining current employees.

The federal workforce is aging and agencies will need to recruit the next generation of federal workers in spite of tightened budgets. Sixty percent of the federal workforce is 45 years or older, while just ten percent is under the age of 30.¹ In a recent survey of graduating college students, just 2.3 percent planned to work for the federal government.² Workplace mobility options such as telepresence and telecommuting accompanied by alternative work schedules can revitalize federal recruitment and slim agency travel costs.

Increased flexibility and support for workplace mobility offers an opportunity to attract new hires while also helping to retain current workers. At present, just eight percent of the federal workforce telecommutes more than once a week,³ while less than half of the federal workforce is limited by the nature of their position or opt not to telecommute.⁴ Federal agencies have room to expand telework and mobile work.⁵

Workplace Mobility Gains

Both agencies and individual federal employees have saved funds through mobile work, either by cutting travel costs or through fewer commutes. In November 2011, President Obama ordered a reduction of spending in travel costs. In response some agencies have made significant headway, such as the Internal Revenue Service, which is on track to cut travel costs by 27 percent in fiscal year 2012, and the Department of Energy, which expects to cut \$15.7 million from its travel budget.⁶

Teleworking can also save individual employees money by allowing them to avoid costly commutes. An American Psychology Association report found that, "autonomy is a major factor in worker satisfaction.... We found that telecommuters reported more job satisfaction, less motivation to leave the company, less stress, improved work-family balance, and higher performance ratings by supervisors."⁷

The Office of Personnel Management quantified these effects and in 2010 found that "33 agencies reported cost savings/benefits as a result of telework; of these, the greatest benefit was in the area of productivity (39%), then human capital, such as recruitment and retention (37%). Furthermore, compared with federal employees not able to telework, federal teleworkers report greater levels of job satisfaction (76% versus 68%) would recommend their organization as a good place to work (75% versus 66%), and are less likely to express intention to leave their current organizations (74% versus 68%)."⁸

Benefits to mobile work are already apparent in the private sector. Of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" as ranked by Fortune Magazine in 2011, 82 offer telecommuting options that allow employees to telecommute at least 20 percent of the time.⁹ The private sector has seen considerable

success in employee retention after implementation of workplace mobility options, as well. Firms with flexible work policies, including teleworking options, have seen up to a 70 percent drop in voluntary turnover.¹⁰ The figures suggest that employees enjoy their jobs more when they have flexibility in when and where they work.

The Council of Economic Advisers estimated 15 percent of all workers telecommuted at least once a week in 2010. Still only eight percent of federal workers report that they worked from home at least once per week in 2011.¹² The federal government is being outpaced by the private sector, and with federal wages unlikely to compete, workplace flexibility is one attainable method to attract and retain talented workers.

Making Mobile Work

After the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, certain federal agencies are struggling to modernize mobility policies and capabilities. The Act requires each agency to establish a telework policy and directs agencies to designate a Telework Managing Officer, among other actions to support mobile work options. Despite the new measures, one in four federal employees were not approved to telework even though they held a position that allowed for teleworking and two-thirds of federal employees have been notified they are ineligible to telework in 2011.¹³ Furthermore, “few agencies purchase all necessary equipment for teleworkers (18%) while over a third of agencies report that they ask teleworkers to purchase their own equipment” like laptops and smartphones (37%).¹⁴

Mobile work policies today involve more than answering a few phone calls from home. Mobility allows a manager to send email from anywhere from a smartphone or access vast databases from a personal laptop. And when workers are in the office, technologies can unchain employees from their desk through on-site wireless coverage and tablet use. Advances in video and streaming technology permit cross-country, face-to-face meetings or training sessions without the hassle of airport security. The availability of proprietary data and information will only become more accessible as federal agencies move to cloud-based services.

In an analysis of the 2011 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, the National Labor Relations Board, the Railroad Retirement Board, and the Office of Management and Budget scored lowest in terms of employee satisfaction. These agencies are struggling to update teleworking programs and instill a culture of greater flexibility amongst managers. Additionally, agencies such as the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice showed low rates of regular telework (one or more days per week), correlating with their high rates of teleworking ineligibility.¹⁵

Satisfaction with Telework Program: Top 5 Agencies

General Services Administration (76.2%)
Nuclear Regulatory Commission (76.1%)
Office of Personnel Management (76.0%)
Securities Exchange Commission (68.9%)
Environmental Protection Agency (67.9%)

Dissatisfaction with Telework Program: Top 5 Agencies

National Labor Relations Board (41.1%)
Office of Management and Budget (41.0%)
Railroad Retirement Board (35.9%)
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (33.3%)
Social Security Administration (28.9%)

Several agencies, though, have responded to worker demand for teleworking options and the results are clear. Agencies such as the General Services Administration, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Office of Personnel Management have high rates of regular telework and high rates of teleworking eligibility. Employees show high levels of satisfaction with teleworking

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Firms with flexible work policies, including teleworking options, have seen up to a 70 percent drop in voluntary turnover.

- “Micro Success Story: Ryan, LLC,” Corporate Voices for Working Families”¹⁰

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programs. It is no surprise that these agencies are also ranked in the top ten best agencies to work for by the Partnership for Public Service.¹⁶

Eligibility to Telework: Top 5 Agencies

National Science Foundation (92.6%)
General Services Administration (91.4%)
Nuclear Regulatory Commission (85.2%)
Office of Personnel Management (82.0%)
Environmental Protection Agency (81.2%)

Ineligibility to Telework: Top 5 Agencies

Veteran's Affairs (83.7%)
Social Security Administration (81.0%)
Department of Justice (79.2%)
Department of Defense (74.8%)
Department of Homeland Security (72.1%)

Workers Teleworking at Least Once a Week: Top 5 Agencies

Office of Personnel Management (53.5%)
General Services Administration (47.8%)
Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (37.2%)
Housing and Urban Development (37.1%)
Federal Communications Commission (35.2%)

Workers Teleworking at Least Once a Week: Bottom 6

Department of Defense (3.9%)
Department of Homeland Security (3.9%)
Department of Justice (4.0%)
Veteran's Affairs (4.1%)
Office of Management and Budget (4.1%)
National Labor Relations Board (4.1%)

In response to recent initiatives, agencies have stepped up their support for telework programs and are working to correct these issues, while others have begun to fall behind the curve. The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 allows agencies even greater independence in determining teleworking eligibility policies and requires increased support for teleworking options. Workplace mobility offers agencies a cost-effective means to retain the employee experience of today and recruit the talent of tomorrow.

¹"FedScope: Federal Human Resources Data," U.S. Office of Personnel Management, last available quarter: December 2011. <http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/employment.asp>

²"Federal Leaders Face Challenges Attracting Top College Graduates to Government Service," Partnership for Public Service, Published February 6, 2012. <http://ourpublicservice.org/OPS/publications/viewcontentdetails.php?id=170>

³"2011 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey," U.S. Office of Personnel Management, accessed: March 12, 2012. <http://www.fedview.opm.gov/>

⁴47%, "2011 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey."

⁵Some figures place the total number of federal teleworkers as low as six percent, such as the U.S. Office of Personnel Management Telework Data Call published in the Office of Personnel Management report, Status of Telework in the Federal Government, presented to Congress February, 2011. Accessible at: http://www.telework.gov/Reports_and_Studies/Annual_Reports/2010teleworkreport.pdf

⁶Michael B. Baker, Business Travel News, November 10, 2011. <http://www.businesstravelnews.com/Travel-Management/Obama-Order-Calls-For-Federal-Travel-Spending-Cuts/?ida=Government&a=mgmt>

⁷"The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown About Telecommuting: Meta-Analysis of Psychological Mediators and Individual Consequences," Ravi S. Gajendran and David A. Harrison, PhD, Pennsylvania State University; Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 92, No. 6. <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2007/11/telecommuting.aspx>

⁸"Status of Telework in the Federal Government," U.S. Office of Personnel Management, February 2011. http://www.telework.gov/Reports_and_Studies/Annual_Reports/2010teleworkreport.pdf

⁹"Best Benefits: Telecommuting," CNN Money, updated February 7, 2011. <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/bestcompanies/2011/benefits/telecommuting.html>

¹⁰"Micro Success Story: Ryan, LLC," Corporate Voices for Working Families, Accessed March 12, 2012. http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org/system/files/Micro%20Success%20Story_Ryan%20Inc.pdf

¹¹"Work-Life Balance and the Economics of Workplace Flexibility," Executive Office of the President: Council of Economic Advisers, March, 2010. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/files/documents/100331-cea-economics-workplace-flexibility.pdf>

¹²"2011 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey."

¹³"Status of Telework in the Federal Government."

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵"2011 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey."

¹⁶Ibid.