

## A Briefing

from GBC's  
Research Analysts  
March 2012

The Government Business Council (GBC) analyzed the defining characteristics of Millennials—those Americans born between 1980 and 2000—and developed a ranking of the most millennial-friendly federal agencies considering the generation's interests, values and skills.

# Minding the Leadership Gap: Attracting Millennials to the Federal Government

The federal government will need to hire more than 200,000 highly skilled workers for a range of critical jobs as the Baby Boomers approach retirement.<sup>1</sup> Members of the Millennial generation, a group born after 1980 and nearly equal to the Baby Boomers in size, will be the recruitment target.

According to studies of the habits and preferences of Millennials, interest in public service is widespread; yet few have entered the federal workforce or plan to do so in the near future. Government, at all levels, will face a crisis if recruitment efforts are not modified to attract the Millennial generation.

---

## Who is a Millennial?

Also known as Generation Next, Generation Net or Echo Boomers, Millennials possess a unique set of interests, values and skills that sets them apart from prior generations. Millennials are:

- **Diverse.** Millennials are the most ethnically and racially diverse generation yet, and are also considered the most tolerant. Minorities make up 39 percent of Millennials, compared to just 27 percent of Baby Boomers and 20 percent of those born during the Great Depression and World War II.<sup>2</sup> Millennials are aware of this diversity; liberalism and tolerance are some of the top ways they see themselves as unique.<sup>3</sup>
- **Busy.** Used to balancing demanding school schedules and extracurricular activities, Millennials retain their busy lifestyles after graduation. Many play in adult sports leagues, attend clubs, and participate in other activities outside of working hours. While Millennials are often dedicated workers in the office, they are not interested in the 60 hour workweeks common to their parents' generation.
- **Tech-savvy.** Millennials grew up with technology and rely on it to improve their academic, professional and personal lives. Twenty-four percent of Millennials say that technology is what makes their generation unique. Millennials outpace older Americans in virtually all types of internet and cell phone use and three quarters of them have created a social networking profile. Millennials are so attached to their phones that 83 percent have slept with their cell phones on or right next to their beds.<sup>4</sup>
- **Service-oriented.** Millennials are more concerned with the importance of their work than the salary attached to it. In the 2011 National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Student Survey, college students revealed that the ability to improve the community ranks almost as highly as a strong starting salary when searching for their first job.<sup>5</sup> This attitude

is reflected in the popularity of service programs like Teach For America<sup>6</sup> and AmeriCorps.<sup>7</sup> While domestic service is popular, international work is equally if not more appealing to this generation. Part of the Millennials' interest in international service is consistent with the high percentage who participated in service trips or study abroad programs; student participation in study abroad has more than tripled over the past two decades.<sup>8</sup>

- **Team-oriented.** While prior generations may have preferred to work alone, Millennials are team-oriented and seek collaborative workplaces.<sup>9</sup> Ideally, Millennials want to work in small groups of two to three. As children, this generation participated in team sports, play groups and other communal activities.
- **Achievement-oriented.** Millennials prefer clear plans and expectations for their work, in addition to receiving constant feedback on how they are meeting or exceeding those expectations.<sup>10</sup> Many of this generation were raised under hovering “helicopter parents” who gave them constant attention and pressure to succeed. Millennials want to feel like they’ve made a difference in a relatively short period of time. Most do not see their first job as a long-term commitment and many plan to change careers, or at least jobs, several times throughout their lives.

### Where Are They Going?

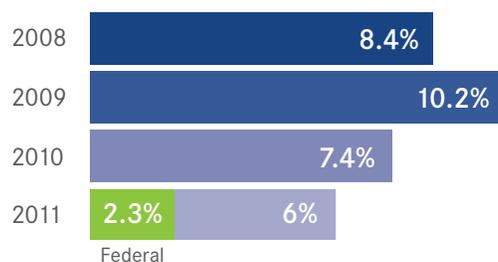
Only 2.3 percent of current college students plan to work for the federal government after graduation.

-The Partnership for Public Service<sup>11</sup>

While the characteristics of Millennials may make them strong candidates for public service, fewer are pursuing government jobs than in past years. The Partnership for Public Service’s analysis of the 2011 NACE Student Survey reveals that the percentage of students who plan to work for government—local, state or federal—is in decline. College students increasingly prefer the private sector, graduate school, and non-profit work.<sup>11</sup>

In 2008, 8.4 percent of students planned to work for government after graduation. In a time of economic uncertainty, 2009, that number reached an all-time high of 10.2 percent before dropping to 7.4 percent in 2010. Now, just six percent of college students plan to work for public sector institutions and only 2.3 percent want to work at the federal level.<sup>12</sup>

College Students Planning to Enter Government After Graduation



Source: Partnership for Public Service and NACE, 2012.

## Which Federal Agencies Might Millennials Join?

College students or recent graduates who are considering public sector careers might first look to those Millennial-friendly public institutions. The Government Business Council has crafted a ranking of the most millennial-friendly federal agencies, drawing primarily on data from the Office of Personnel Management's 2011 Employee Viewpoint Survey (EVS).<sup>13</sup> The full methodology is located in the appendix.

### Most Millennial-Friendly Agencies

Federal agencies received points as indicated:

#### +3 points

- High levels of supervisor attention
- High levels of performance feedback
- High levels of positive recognition

#### +2 points

- Work-life balance
- Clear job expectations
- Training needs assessed

#### +1 point

- Cooperative environment
- High levels of citizen engagement through social media
- High population under 40
- High levels of diversity
- Global focus

Rank	Agency	Score	Current Openings on www.usajobs.gov*
1	Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)	17/20	5
2	National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)	16/20	36
3	Federal Trade Commission (FTC)	15/20	4
4	Department of Commerce (DOC)	14/20	100
4	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)	14/20	8
4	Office of Personnel Management (OPM)	14/20	10
7	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	13/20	3
8	Department of State	12/20	30
9	Department of Treasury	10/20	50
10	Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC)	9/20	5
10	Federal Communications Commission (FCC)	9/20	6

\*as of March 15, 2012

Of the federal agencies that contributed to the 2011 OPM EVS, only eight scored 50 percent or better on the Millennial-friendly scale. These results could imply that the current state of federal employment may not appeal to the Millennial generation. To avoid a human capital crisis when the Baby Boomers retire, agencies must make changes to attract America's youngest workers.



Good people go fast. They're not going to wait around three, four or five months for the federal government.

-John Sepúlveda

Assistant Secretary for Human Resource and Administration  
Department of Veteran Affairs



## How Can an Agency Attract a Millennial?

Broad changes to an agency culture require years, yet 40 percent of the federal workforce is already above age 50<sup>14</sup> and nearing retirement. In the short term, all federal agencies can adopt Millennial-friendly recruitment tactics. Employers should emphasize the aspects of public service that appeal to America's youngest generation of workers and increase communication throughout the federal hiring process.

Students who plan to enter public service start their employment search earlier than those entering other sectors,<sup>15</sup> but are no more likely to have a job in hand than students planning to work in other sectors. Though federal hiring reforms have shown promise, the process remains slow, especially for positions requiring security clearances. The Nuclear Regulatory Agency takes 125 days to bring on a federal hire and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration process takes 98 days, according to the most recent OPM data.<sup>16</sup>

Without further improvement to the speed and clarity of its hiring processes, agencies risk losing qualified applicants to private companies or non-profit organization that put forth methodical application processes and early offers.

As John U. Sepúlveda, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration at the Department of Veteran Affairs, told managers at a *Government Executive's* February 7th Leadership Briefing, "The federal government has to get the right people and hire them as quickly as possible. Good people go fast. They're not going to wait around three, four or five months for the federal government."

—By Zoe Grotophorst and Erin Dumbacher (editor)

<sup>1</sup>"Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Promoting Public Service to America's Youth," The Brookings Institution, 28 September 2011, [http://www.brookings.edu/events/2011/0928\\_public\\_service.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/events/2011/0928_public_service.aspx).

<sup>2</sup>"Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change." Pew Research Center, 24 February 2010, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/02/24/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change/>.

<sup>3</sup>Pew Research Center, 24 February 2010.

<sup>4</sup>Pew Research Center, 24 February 2010.

<sup>5</sup>"Federal Leaders face Challenges Attracting Top College Graduates To Government Service," Partnership for Public Service and the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 06 February 2012.

<sup>6</sup>Jordi Gassó, "Life after Yale: The Roads Less Traveled," Yale Daily News, 02 March 2012, <http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2012/mar/02/life-after-yale/>.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Brown, "No—Nearly One Million Times," Huffington Post, 15 February 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-brown/amicorps-funding\\_b\\_1280200.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-brown/amicorps-funding_b_1280200.html).

<sup>8</sup>"Fast Facts, U.S. Students Studying Abroad," Open Doors, 2011, [http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/~/\\_media/Files/Corporate/Open-Doors/Fast-Facts/Fast%20Facts%202011.ashx](http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/~/_media/Files/Corporate/Open-Doors/Fast-Facts/Fast%20Facts%202011.ashx).

<sup>9</sup>Neil Howe and William Strauss, "Millennials Go To College," American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Offices (AACRAO) and Life Course Associates, 2003, <http://eubie.com/millennials.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup>Howe and Strauss, 2003.

<sup>11</sup>Partnership for Public Service and the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 06 February 2012.

<sup>12</sup>Partnership for Public Service and the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 06 February 2012.

<sup>13</sup>Office of Personnel Management, "Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2011:

FedView Report by Agency, 2011, <http://www.fedview.opm.gov/2011/Published/>.

<sup>14</sup>Office of Personnel Management, 2011.

<sup>15</sup>Partnership for Public Service and National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2012.

<sup>16</sup>Stephen Losey, "Hiring times faster at many agencies, slower at some," Federal Times, 02 August 2011, <http://www.federaltimes.com/article/20110802/PERSONNEL02/108020308/1053/PERSONNEL02>.

## About Taleo

Leading organizations worldwide use Taleo on demand talent management solutions with Talent Intelligence to attract, develop, engage, and retain their workforce for improved performance. Taleo combines software, best practices, and services so organizations can build talent pipelines, improve time to hire, and align employee performance with organizational objectives.

## About GBC: Briefings

As Government Executive Media Group's research division, Government Business Council Briefings are dedicated to advancing the business of government through insight and analytical independence. The GBC Briefings team conducts primary and secondary research to learn and share best practices among top government decision-makers in the tradition of *Government Executive's* over forty years of editorial excellence.

For more information, contact Bryan Klopack, Director, at [bklopack@govexec.com](mailto:bklopack@govexec.com).

## Appendix:

### Defining the Millennial-Friendly Methodology:

To evaluate the extent to which federal agencies are "Millennial-friendly," GBC scanned secondary and primary research resources and compiled a set of criteria based largely on responses from employees within federal agencies in the form of the OPM 2011 EVS data. GBC selected the criteria below based upon an analysis of Millennial characteristics and goals, then awarded levels of importance to each in the form of points.

These findings differ from the "Best Places to Work" and "Best Places to Launch a Federal Career" data in that the ranking is based upon the interests of potential recruits, not the opinions of current employees.

- **Criteria earning +3 points:**
  - **High levels of supervisor attention**
    - » Top 10 agencies based on the aggregate percentage of strongly agree and agree: My supervisor/team leader listens to what I have to say.
  - **High levels of performance feedback**
    - » Top 10 agencies based on the aggregate percentage of strongly agree and agree: In the last six months, my supervisor/team leader has talked with me about my performance.
  - **High levels of positive recognition**
    - » Top 10 agencies based on the aggregate percentage of strongly agree and agree: Employees are recognized for providing high quality products and services.
- **Criteria earning +2 points:**
  - **Work-life balance**
    - » Top 10 agencies based on the aggregate percentage of strongly agree and agree: My supervisor supports my need to balance work and other life issues.
  - **Clear job expectations**
    - » Top 10 agencies based on the aggregate percentage of strongly agree and agree: I know what is expected of me on the job.
  - **Training needs assessed**
    - » Top 10 agencies based on the aggregate percentage of strongly agree and agree: My training needs are assessed.
- **Criteria earning +1 point:**
  - **Cooperative environment**
    - » Top 10 agencies based on the aggregate percentage of strongly agree and agree: The people I work with cooperate to get the job done.
  - **High levels of citizen engagement through social media**
    - » Top 10 agencies based on the twitter engagement score (questions-to-responses ratio) from <http://reports.expertlabs.org/fsmi/> as of the week ending on March 15, 2012
  - **High population under 40**
    - » Top 10 agencies with the highest percentages of employees under age 40
  - **High diversity**
    - » Agencies with top 10 scores for: Policies and programs promote diversity in the workplace.
  - **Global focus**
    - » All agencies with a global focus reflected in their mission statement, as posted on their .gov websites