

# Attention, Government: Americans Want More than Pay in an Employer

**WASHINGTON** — A new survey of 1,200 adults shows Americans consider health benefits and security above all else in a job.

The poll, conducted by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence, indicates Americans rate pay the 10th most important quality in a job -- below retirement benefits, flexible workplace, potential for promotions, and creative and intellectual stimulation.

Experts agree these job priorities make the federal government an employer of choice. However, it's up to individual agencies to champion their respective selling points and deliver that message to the most ideal candidates.

"I think there's some good news there for the government, because what people see as important in a job is a lot of what the government provides," John Palguta, vice president for policy at the Partnership for Public Service, told cyberFEDS®. "But the government has not done a good enough job about selling its benefits package."

## The Results

As far as compensation goes, Palguta said pay must be a "satisfier."

"There's a level where people need to have a decent life, put kids through school and take the occasional vacation," Palguta said. "But this study is saying that people don't see becoming wealthy as a primary motivator."

And while the government still needs "to be in the ballpark" for compensation, it's more about the whole package, he added.

Surveyed Americans offered their views on which job characteristics were "very important":

- Health insurance: 84 percent.
- Job security: 82 percent.
- Environment with clear policies and procedures: 82 percent.
- Retirement or pension plan: 76 percent.

- Flexible, family-friendly workplace: 71 percent.
- Getting quick decisions at work: 69 percent.
- Working with talented managers: 68 percent.
- Having potential for promotions: 66 percent.
- Being creative and intellectually stimulated: 66 percent.
- Pay: 65 percent.

## How to Target

Palguta said it's "Advertising 101" for agencies to take this information and run with it by matching their recruitment and advertising pitches to what potential candidates look for in a job.

Overall, agencies are starting to do a better job constructing job announcements that zero in on the exciting mission and opportunities for promotion rather than a long description of the specific position.

"It's not simply just put it in USAJOBS and they will come," Palguta said.

## Whom to target

Jon Desenberg, consulting director for human capital management at the Performance Institute, told cyberFEDS® agencies must take recruitment into their own hands.

They also need to get their message to the right talent pool.

For example, if an agency is trying to increase diversity to address the underrepresentation of Hispanics in the workplace, simply posting on USAJOBS might not be enough. It may require advertising in Hispanic magazines and recruiting in the Southwest, where a greater portion of the Hispanic population lives, Palguta said.

It's also important to highlight benefits important to the most sought after candidates.

While the Thrift Savings Plan may appeal to mid-career employees, it may not be as effective for recent graduates.

■ 60% of respondents said the private sector offers opportunities for innovation and creativity, while only 11% said the same for civil service positions. ■

"It won't work with people who are 21 or 23 years old to talk about retirement and long-term investment," Desenberg said. "It's so far away from these folks."

## Changing perceptions

Some of the study's findings don't sit well with Palguta and show the government has work to do. Some 60 percent of respondents said the private sector offers opportunities for innovation and creativity, while only 11 percent said the same for civil service positions. Also, 52 percent said private companies provide the chance to work with the best and brightest people, but only 12 percent said the government does.

To turn this around, federal HR must set its standards high. When recruiting, don't be afraid to return the list of eligibles and request better people.

Agencies also need to highlight their successes.

"We need to change the reality but we also need to let people know about it," Palguta said.

For example, one out of every three recipients of the Nobel Prize has worked in government. Letting people know that and asking, 'Don't you want to join the best?' is something the government really needs to start progressing toward, Palguta said.

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