

## Reforming Private-Public Hiring Essential for Tech Modernization

Experts in private-sector hiring see recruitment of industry executives as key for building federal human capital and preventing brain drain.

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Bringing executive-level tech talent to the federal government is a recruitment area that has become increasingly crucial amidst the ongoing modernization push across federal agencies. This focus on drawing new leadership presents a special quandary for recruiters in light of both the institutional barriers as well as the challenges in sustaining human capital amidst a large swath of public-sector executives nearing retirement age.

For recruiter Foxhound Partners based outside Washington, D.C., efforts to

streamline the notoriously complex private-public hiring pipeline stem from that focus.

"Agencies need to find a way to prevent brain drain," said Manager and Co-Founder Mike Wall. Leadership "carries a lot of technical expertise."

The scope of this demand has led to a focus on reforming the broader hiring process. Most federal agencies "have no one on the inside whose job is 100% private-sector recruiting," Wall said. Prior methods of drawing federal tech talent are not well suited to meeting the scope of this demand — particularly the extant hiring portals used to draw new employees to federal service. "People who have to go through USAJobs are often turned off ... it can be a very frustrating process."

Executives with a long tenure in private industry often find it difficult to navigate the comparatively opaque and slow-moving federal hiring process. Wall described this as one of the major barriers to building necessary human capital and technical expertise among the upper echelons of management.

There are other practical considerations to contend with, Wall said, including the compensation differentials between private industry and the federal government. It is, therefore, crucial to target executives with a special interest in public service.

"You have to find someone who genuinely cares about the mission," Wall said. "People want to serve because it offers a different pace."

For defense-minded executives, this offers the additional benefit that hires "get to work on projects that actually make a difference for warfighters and veterans," he added.

Executives with an interest in public service often use time in the federal government to build experience that allows them to subsequently establish private-sector firms that work adjacent to the federal government and further their former agency's mission. This allows a twofold benefit that recruiters can present to potential hires. "You're going for the mission, but also to grow personally and professionally," Wall said.

The quick transformation of federal hiring process is a necessity, Wall said, noting that “it’s hard to recruit from inside government, and this is where private-sector hiring is crucial.”

This demand for executive-level talent is only slated to increase over the upcoming decade.

“In 2020, there will be even more agencies looking for outside help — and this is only going to increase with time,” Wall said. “The government is facing challenges in getting both executive- and junior-level talent.”

The solution appears to lie in streamlining the executive-level hiring process, Wall continued, as well as creating leadership track positions for junior staff who wish to gradually assume positions of greater responsibility within federal agencies.

Wall proposed that federal agencies should focus on programs to foster technical and leadership skills, gradually increasing both over a young professional’s tenure in public service.

Looking forward, the solution for reforming government hiring practices in the long term may lie in answering, “How do we help young professionals find a management track position and emerge as the next generation of federal leadership?” Wall concluded.

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