Technical Talent Strategies to Build Capacity, Accelerate Priorities and Drive Change

Overview

The Biden-Harris Administration is confronting multiple challenges that require a coordinated, innovative and flexible response by the federal government. The recently released FY22 President's budget sets a solid foundation for leveraging the capacity of the federal workforce, along with necessary science, technology and innovation expertise from the private sector, to meet the challenges ahead.

However, hollowed out agencies and technical skills gaps mean agencies lack the capacity to implement needed programs. Agencies have to rapidly scale up personnel, ensure they have the necessary skills, and implement underutilized hiring mechanisms to fill out talent gaps.

While the goals laid out in the budget will allow agencies to address climate, continue to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, rebuild the economy, and increase equity across government programs and services, it requires a sustained focus on building and hiring diverse expertise to accelerate progress on these initiatives - which increasingly rely on modernized IT infrastructure and equitable delivery of services.

This is an historic opportunity, driven by critical need, to focus on driving systemic change across government to equip all federal agencies with the capacity required to build back better while bolstering and reinvigorating the federal talent pipeline.

The following proposals are offered as ways to tackle hiring challenges, build a diverse technical talent pipeline, and continue to rebuild the public trust in government and interest in serving. Day One Project and its partners stand ready to assist in fleshing out and supporting the proposals below.

Modernizing Federal IT Systems and Improving the Federal IT Workforce
Agencies facing skills and people gaps need to build technical capacity and scale already available internal talent programs to build a diverse workforce ready to implement on the biggest priorities.

- **Direct OPM, OMB, with the CIO and CHCO Councils, to update assessments** of technical and innovation skills gaps and critical talent needs within cabinet level agencies by the fall of 2021 with a goal of filling 5,000+ positions by the end of 2021. Assessments should update work already done by agencies in 2019 and address implementation challenges raised by GAO.

- **Ensure that PPO and agency leaders prioritize quickly filling critical procurement, delivery, and operations roles** by appointing leaders with significant modern technical expertise. Pair non-technical leadership with modern technical advisors and prioritize strong data leadership, especially in agencies pushing for AI and machine learning, and who have critical service delivery missions. Example: Senior Advisors for Technology and Delivery can give the Secretary or Deputy Secretary the capacity to ensure that Administration policies are delivered. They do this by

identifying critical technology and data gaps in key services and programs; and engaging key program and operations teams, and strong CIOs, CDOs, etc at the policy table to fill those gaps.

- **Appoint senior officials across Policy Councils (DPC, NEC, OSTP) to be accountable for addressing talent shortages**, in coordination with OMB, to ensure that essential talent is deployed in service of the Administration's priorities and national recovery strategy, and to coordinate across the President's Management Council and CXO Councils to create a strategic surge hiring plan.

- **Support the launch of the Digital Corps** at GSA with a near term goal of 50+ early career individual contributor technologists on the ground in agencies in the first half of FY22. This can be accomplished through elevation of the program to the PMC and the CXO Councils to ensure buy-in and utilization.

- **Expand [Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) guidance](#) to encompass funding for technical talent** needed to implement TMF funded projects. TMF funding plans should be required to include a staffing plan that incorporates current or additional capacity and skills needed for implementation.

- **Expand Existing Fellowship and Talent Programs and prioritize bringing in more diverse and more technical talent.** More specifically:

  - **Expand the Presidential Management Fellows Class of 2022** finalist pool and prioritize recruitment of diverse finalists for fellowship positions focused on data scientists, technologists, user experience experts, product managers and others with technology backgrounds.

  - **Dedicate 10-15% of FTE slots in agencies to the use of recent grads and internship programs** to bring in and convert early career tech talent from colleges and universities, focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility.

  - **Create a Schedule A(r) fellowship program at every cabinet level agency** or expand existing fellowship programs to scale to the full extent available to their agency and ensure a pathway to increase the term limit for these positions to fill critical skills gaps.

  - **Build sustainable agency digital teams by deploying USDS to help create teams within each cabinet level agency** and leveraging their knowledge of systems and skills to serve as a start-up mechanism for agency modernization efforts. This team would then transfer to an agency-led effort to tackle modernization projects over the long-term.

Rebuilding Trust in Government

In order to recruit and retain top talent, government must be viewed as a workplace where people's contributions are valued and vital to achieving missions and helping the country overcome challenges.

- **Create a White House point of contact within DPC to elevate and lead creation of a civic leave pledge** to gather cross-sector executives to build support for and action around encouraging employees to do a tour of duty with the federal government. Aim to have 25+ companies signing the pledge by the end of 2021.

- **Issue a call to service from the President, Vice President, and Cabinet officials to promote public service** and showcase the importance of serving in government to meet pandemic, climate, economic and other challenges.

- **Create a marketing and recruitment campaign targeting young people and people from underserved populations to work on the biggest challenges of their lifetime in federal agencies.** This could be achieved by reinforcing and resurrecting EO #13562 calling for recruitment and hiring of students and recent graduates. The campaign should prioritize building a pipeline focused on diversity, recruiting people and backgrounds with capacities including cybersecurity, evidence, evaluation and data scientists, software engineers, and human-centered and user design experts.

Achieving Better Hiring Outcomes

Agencies need to be directed and encouraged to leverage all flexible hiring mechanisms that allow for shorter term tours of duty by technical experts along with implementing hiring reforms to better equip agencies to recruit and retain internal and external talent.

- **Expand the February 4, 2021 Presidential Memorandum**, Memorandum on Revitalizing America's Foreign Policy and National Security Workforce, Institutions, and Partnerships, to create a companion task force to look at these issues for other critical occupations outside of the foreign service and national security workforce.

- **Create a community of practice supported by OPM for rapid and innovative hiring practices** along with a roadmap/website for flexible hiring authorities. Members of the CoP should include HR specialists, I/O psychologists, attorneys from offices of general counsels, and anyone else involved in the technical aspects of hiring.

- **Implement the provisions of E.O. 13994 section 2(d)** and use it as a pilot to build a scalable pathway to hire outside expert talent for mission critical priorities, including climate and infrastructure.

- **Initiate a concentrated push to rapidly hire technical experts by scaling the Subject Matter Expert-Qualifying Assessments** (SME-QA) from its pilot phase to help identify and hire approximately 1,000 permanent, highly qualified candidates in 2021. This includes training agency hiring leaders to run SME-QA programs themselves.

- **Utilize the career talent within government through strategic use of interagency details and fellowships that facilitate effective implementation of Administration priorities**, including deploying fellows to support specific priorities like the Federal Data Strategy with OMB, deliver the American Rescue Plan, addressing climate and infrastructure needs. Leverage existing programs such as the White House Leadership Development Program, PMC Interagency Rotation Program, CXO Fellows Program, to identify and surge fellows and alumni to targeted projects.