



Work from anywhere can work for anyone

Modern governments can attract,
engage, and retain workforce



Plan for a workforce for the future

One drizzly March 2020 day, Gloria rode the subway to the office as usual. When she got there, she had to send her entire state agency staff home to help keep them safe. How could her employees work virtually? Would they have phones, computers, and network access they needed to do their jobs? Could managers lead their scattered teams? How would employees learn new processes? Would they give up and quit? Gloria knew she had to take care of her team and make sure they were able to provide the important services on which residents depended. She stayed up all night digging for answers in every contingency and crisis plan she had. Nothing spelled out what to do if operations went virtual overnight.

Everything changed that day. All sectors, including Gloria's and her peers' government organizations, had to rethink how they did business overnight. Some industries coped better than others, but no one was fully prepared. Many government organizations learned the importance of attracting, engaging, and retaining employees. Some realized they needed to **accelerate their modernization timeline**, then adapt their **workforce planning and engagement strategies** to function within a modern structure. The worker pipeline challenge was already growing. Between 2001 and 2017, the number of graduates going into federal, state, and local jobs dropped 15 percent.¹ Leaders in modern governments witnessed how, by using an employee-centric lens, they could evolve their organization to stay relevant and reflective of a diverse workforce. This article offers tips for creating flexible work environments that can help attract, engage, and retain your workers—no matter what crisis hits.

Why modern government is important

Government agencies in the U.S. must modernize in order to keep up with changing user needs, regulations, and health and public safety requirements. Leaders of modern governments rethink business processes and service delivery models to more effectively achieve their mission. This article is one of a series that features how modernizing affects the government workforce and the user experience, improves security and public trust, and accelerates the digital journey. KPMG team members offer insights intended to help guide governments in their modernization efforts to encompass all processes, technologies, policies, and the workforce so each works together to create connected, powered, and trusted organizations.



¹ "Fewer graduates are choosing government jobs," The Hill, May 14, 2019.





Attract: Adopt a new way to recruit

The pandemic forced governments to change their recruiting processes. Workforce planning before 2020 for many agencies was a headcount exercise to determine budget allocations and staffing needs. People looking for jobs have choices, so leaders must think more strategically to attract employees.

Including new approaches in a **strategic workforce plan** improves recruitment hiring timelines, and builds skills and capabilities to fulfill future needs. For example, in the private sector, it takes 36 days on average to fill a position according to the Society for Human Resources Management. A 2020 study found the average public sector time-to-hire was 119 days, three times slower. The study found state governments fill open positions in 96 days on average, and finding qualified hires at local levels takes the longest at 130 days.²

Government leaders no longer have to rely on historical hiring trends or out-of-date job descriptions to attract employees. **Technological advancements** allow government organizations to provide **what the future workforce expects**, including expanded and faster virtual recruiting efforts.

As hybrid and remote roles become standard for public sector organizations that are able, modern governments that adopt flexible **work-from-anywhere principles can continue to attract skilled talent** like their commercial counterparts and potentially expand their recruiting pipelines to the regional or national levels. What attracts employees to a job has changed. For example, organizations must treat millennials and generation Z

candidates as consumers to build a sustainable remote work environment. In a recent study, 39 percent of the 1,000 U.S. adults surveyed, and almost half of millennials and generation Z, said they would consider quitting if their employer did not offer remote work.³

Government agencies also must focus on the growing need to **increase underrepresented talent within recruiting pipelines**. In early 2021, the White House issued an executive order requiring the federal government to “pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.”⁴ State and local governments should follow the same guidelines so everyone has opportunities to earn a living wage and potentially improve area economies.

Each government agency should revisit its diversity, equity, and inclusion policy and guidelines to make sure they take into account flexible and other new work approaches. Virtual-friendly tools enhance human resource software to enable more accurate, fair, and efficient talent decisions. For example, some use artificial intelligence to analyze data across the entire employee lifecycle. This allows the system to accurately screen and match talent while automating administrative recruiting tasks. Some recruiting software also provides data-driven insights on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As skills evolve and the fight to attract candidates with the right skills intensifies, job seekers are in control. They have multiple employers from which to choose and an assortment of ways to evaluate prospective employer brands to determine if they fit with the organization and its values. Government agencies have an opportunity to build an attractive brand of which job seekers want to be a part.

² “Public Sector Time-to-Hire Report 2020,” NEOGOV, August 2020.

³ Anders Melin, Misyrilena Egkolopoulou, “Employees are quitting instead of giving up working from home,” Bloomberg News, June 1, 2021.

⁴ “Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” The White House Briefing Room, January 20, 2021.



Engage: Fulfill a modern employee value proposition

In the past, set work hours, attractive pensions, and job security were enough to engage workers. Many people now look for **flexibility, transparency, and safety** to thrive in new work realities.

Flexibility comes in many forms, from flexible work hours to allow for personal obligations or family care to the ability to visit an office as needed or for networking opportunities. Of course, some agencies, like those that utilize Sensitive Compartmented Information Facilities, require workers to be on site. For those that are able, offering flexibility may require policy and procedure changes, along with redefining what productivity and accountability look like. With traditional office walls melting away, the modern employee value proposition must also give employees the flexibility to click a button to access learning, benefits, and career opportunities, anywhere and anytime, the same way they book an Airbnb, order an Uber, or select groceries for home delivery.

Government agencies have an opportunity to discuss how to continue offering their employees flexibility while effectively measuring their productivity. There is no single way to measure productivity. Instead, teams should work together to define an approach that works for their people and the work that they do. For example, Tennessee is allowing each state agency to decide what work model is best suited to satisfy employees while serving their communities. As a result, employees are more engaged and productive, and the state has reduced its real estate

investment by lessening the need for physical workspace.

A House Oversight and Reform Committee member recently called for federal employees to return to the office. "If it is the administration's intention to prolong remote working arrangements, then it is appropriate to hold a comprehensive policy discussion around related issues."⁵ Emulating a flexible consumer experience should be a top priority for governments to engage and retain their employees rather than reverting back to old ways of work.

Transparent communication is a critical part of organizational culture. Agencies should talk about their cultures with candor. They should also use engaging media to encourage dialogue. As workers return to offices, many seek more employer-provided mental wellness resources. Wellness is especially important to millennials and generation Z, which now make up 46 percent of the full-time U.S. workforce.⁶ An organization's ability to offer resources that support mental and physical wellness is a pillar of transparency.

Employees expect their workplaces to be **safe**. They should find a clear employee safety commitment in organization values alongside the pledge to support inclusion and individual respect. With a strong culture at the forefront, governments need enforceable, widely communicated policies surrounding workplace safety that address preventing illness, physical safety, and employee discrimination.

The current workforce generations have similar but varying preferences for what they value in the workplace according to these Gallup pulse study results. Well-being and ethical leadership appear for all three generations.

⁵ Nicole Ogrysko, "Time for Federal Employees to Return to the Office, Congressman Says," Federal News Network, May 18, 2021.

⁶ "4 things gen Z and millennials expect from their workplace," Gallup pulse study, March 30, 2021.

What employees look for in their employer, by generation, Gallup pulse study (March 30, 2021)

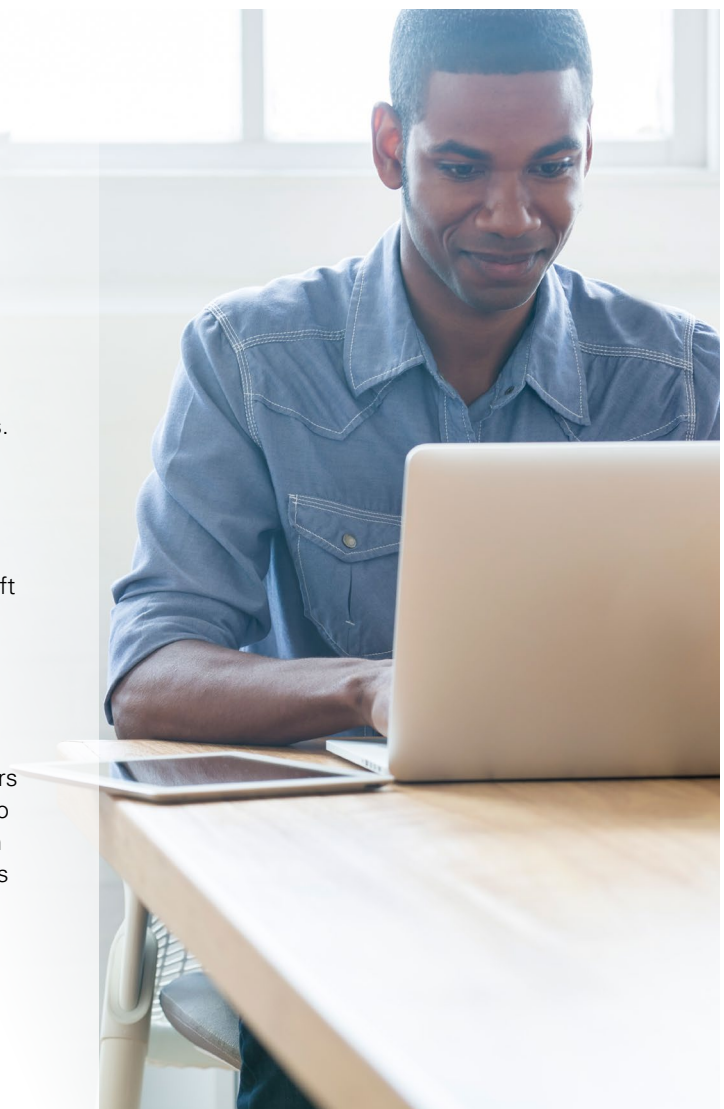
Young Millennials and Generation Z: 1989–2001	Older Millennials: 1980–1988	Generation X: 1965–1979 and Baby Boomers: 1946–1964
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization cares about employees' well-being. 2. The organization's leadership is ethical. 3. The organization is diverse and inclusive of all people. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization cares about employees' well-being. 2. The organization's leadership is ethical. 3. The organization's leadership is open and transparent. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization's leadership is ethical. 2. The organization cares about employees' well-being. 3. The organization's financial stability.

Retain: Train your talent

If Gloria had told her employees a year ago that they would work virtually today, her team would not have believed her. Despite the reputation for being ill-prepared to handle rapid change, government organizations moved away from traditional ways of working. Fast. The pandemic forced the move, but it is working. Such changes in the way people work have resulted in a massive need to reskill and upskill employees in new, creative ways since day- or week-long classroom training was not possible.

Upskilling employees will be a vital component of successfully adopting new ways of working. Employees now value and expect to learn in the flow of their daily tasks. Only 53 percent of government employees are satisfied with the training they receive compared with 66 percent of private sector employees.⁷ Artificial intelligence enables bite-sized learning that allows employees to refresh their skills from anywhere and at any time. For example, Microsoft is integrating social-driven, accessible learning opportunities into Microsoft Teams to enable employees to learn while they work.

People value convenience as the nation experienced when consumer spending skyrocketed at one-stop, big-box retailers such as Target during the pandemic.⁸ Learning must adapt to meet these consumer expectations for easy access while in the moment. A shift to convenience and self-service inspires employees to take a more active stance in their learning journey. It also encourages them to seek out knowledge when they need it instead of when employers advise or require it. In spite of high expectations, only slightly more than 4 in 10 federal employees feel their employer rewards creativity and innovation.⁹ Achieving the goal to provide flexible training will require governments to invest in new learning tools and technologies as well as the know-how to use them.



⁷ Best Places to Work in the Federal Government, BestPlacestoWork.org, 2019.

⁸ "A tale of two pandemics: Big-box stores rake in record profits while small businesses fold," NBCNews.com, August 20, 2020.

⁹ "Partnership for Public Service 2020–2021 Impact Report," Partnership for Public Service, 2021.

Embrace work from anywhere

Government organizations have learned over the last several months how they need to operate differently to attract, engage, and retain their workforce. Employees are no longer resources. They are diverse consumers with distinct needs. Government leaders need to actively work to understand these needs. The organizations must provide an experience that equally supports the organization and the employee throughout their career. This may mean flexibility in work schedules and locations for agencies that are able; nontraditional ways of recruiting to support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; and more opportunities to learn in the flow of life.

Every government organization is unique. We challenge you to ask questions such as these that will help you and your employees succeed:

- When recruiting new employees, does your organization use criteria that tie to your agency’s values?
- How do you incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and practices to achieve short-term and long-term goals?
- What discussions take place in your organization about actively engaging new and incumbent employees?
- How do you review, manage, and implement diversity, equity, and inclusion programs that produce meaningful results and engage your people?
- When considering retention, what strategies does your organization use to continue to be an attractive option to employees while also accurately measuring productivity in hybrid work environments?



KPMG hopes to continue to challenge government agencies to self-reflect and think more critically about their employees and the way that they attract, engage, and retain talent. KPMG helps government organizations improve processes, systems, and services. As a result, each agency that is able can better allow work from anywhere to appeal to current and future employees while also focusing on the services they provide and the citizens they serve.

Steps to begin

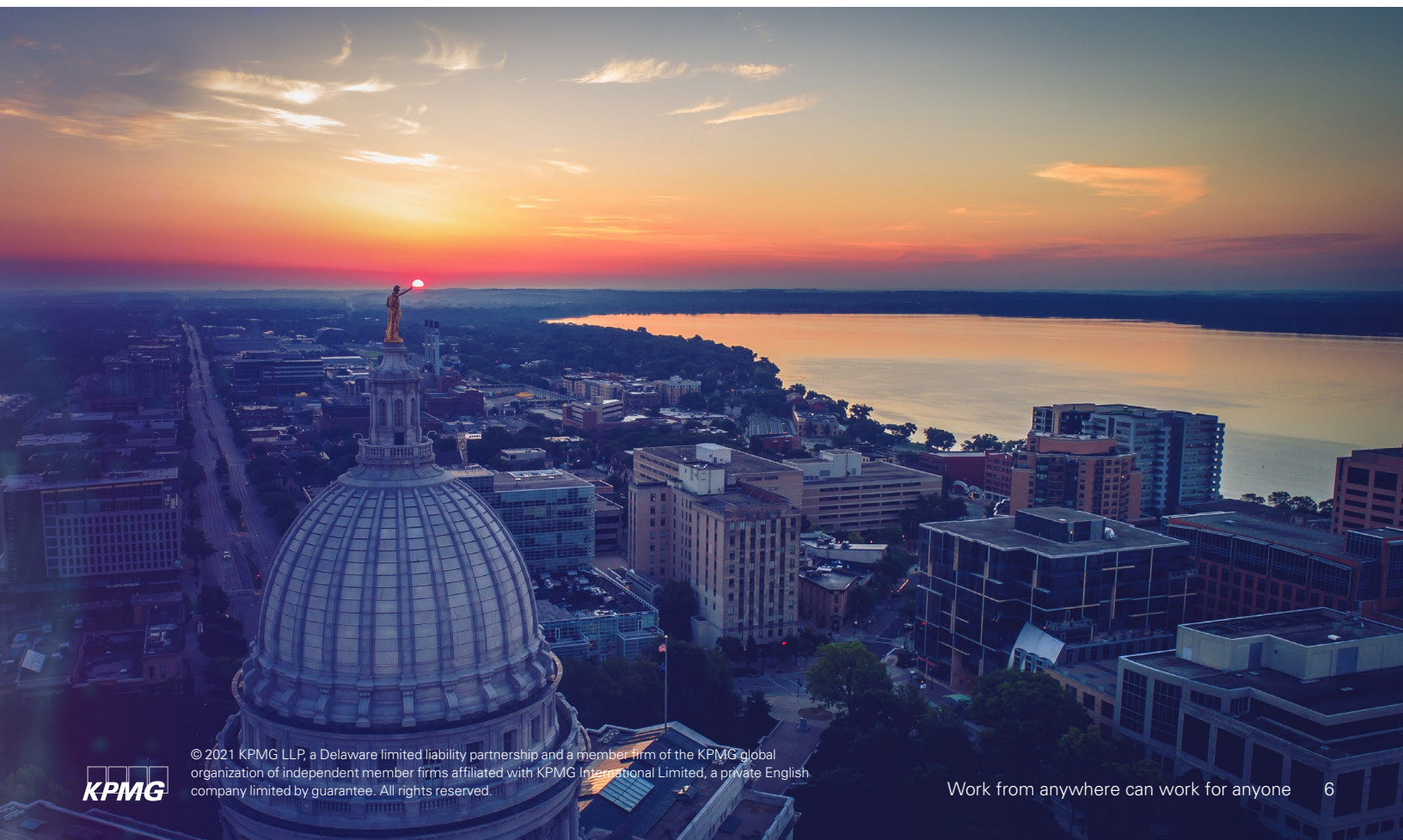
Governments owe their current and future employees great experiences. It is up to you to add what governments learned over the past year to your workforce strategy and seize the opportunity to make work from anywhere work for anyone. Take these steps to begin:

1. **Create a strategic workforce plan** that includes new recruiting processes and tools.
2. **Adopt work-from-anywhere** to appeal to millennials and generation Z and support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
3. **Reflect flexibility in the workplace** in your policies, procedures, and how your organization measures productivity and accountability.
4. **Practice diversity, equity, and inclusion.**
5. **Create consumer-like experiences to engage employees** to access learning, benefits, and career opportunities.
6. **Talk about organization culture with candor.**
7. **Provide mental wellness resources** to appeal to millennials and generation Z.
8. **Articulate employee safety practices clearly.**
9. **Adopt technology that enables learning and training** within the flow of employees’ daily work.

About KPMG

KPMG has worked with federal, state, and local governments for more than a century, so we know how agencies work. Our team understands the unique issues, pressures, and challenges you encounter in the journey to modernize. We draw on our government operations knowledge to offer methodologies tailored to help you overcome these challenges and work with you from beginning to end to deliver the results that matter.

The KPMG team starts with the business issue before we determine the solution because we understand the ultimate mission. When the way people work changes, our team brings the leading training practices to make sure your employees have the right knowledge and skills. We also help your people get value out of technology while also assisting with cloud, advanced analytics, intelligent automation, and cybersecurity. Our passion is to create value, inspire trust, and help government clients deliver better experiences to workers, citizens, and communities.



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