

Speaker 1:

CW staff writer Chris Riotta.

Chris Riotta:

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for joining us over the last two days. I know we're winding down. It's been really wonderful to hear about a lot of the incredible work that's going on across the federal government, a lot of the initiatives, and to also learn a little bit about the threat landscape that the organizations across the public and private sector are currently dealing with. Obviously, all of that work and addressing that threat landscape rests on the workforce. So I'm really excited to have with me today some incredible panelists to discuss some ongoing innovative ways and projects and efforts across federal government to hire the next generation of the cyber workforce.

Chris Riotta:

So with me today, I have Cynthia Kaiser, deputy assistant director of the Cyber Division and Cyber Policy of the Intelligence and Engagement branch of the FBI. Karen Wetzel, manager of the NICE Framework, the National Initiative for Cybersecurity and Education at NIST. And Cindy Cisco, director of the Talent Acquisition Office at CIA. Thank you so much for joining me, ladies.

Cindy Cisco:

Thank you.

Chris Riotta:

Looking forward to our conversation. But before I begin, I do have a question to poll for the audience. So please go ahead and respond in your mobile or on your laptop. We can take a look at that, I think in real time, as it comes in. So the question is, what is the greatest challenge in building the cyber workforce of the future? Hopefully our conversation will address some of those challenges and also touch on some innovative solutions.

Chris Riotta:

So, while you folks add that in, I'll just let you ladies go ahead and introduce yourselves one by one and maybe discuss a little bit about how your work sort of intersects with the conversation that we're having today. Start with you.

Karen Wetzel:

Hi, I'm Karen Wetzel, I manage the workforce framework for cybersecurity at NICE, which is part of NIST under the Department of Commerce. Our program is completely focused on workforce and cyber workforce and looking at that broadly speaking. So we work with not only a career awareness at the K-12 levels up and through higher ed as well as in with education training, and then of course into recruitment and retention. So it's really across the board, both public and private, small and large, all industries.

Cindy Cisco:

Thank you. So I'm Cindy Cisco, I'm the director of Talent Acquisition Office at the CIA. We recruit for all of the occupations, so it's over 100 plus. So shameless plug here on [cia.gov](http://cia.gov). If you're interested in any

type of occupations, I think we cover them all. I'm very interested in seeing what the results are of the survey because your challenge is are challenge as well.

Cindy Cisco:

So we are looking for talent to counter cyber threats and drive technological innovation to advance our mission. Recently this year we changed our approach of how we hire within the organization. We moved from an open application model to an invitation to apply model, which means we allow people to submit resumes expressing interests in up to four occupations, and then based on their knowledge, skills and abilities, we may reach out to them to see if it currently meets a need that we have. This allows us to retain information and reach out at a later date when we do have a need. And so we encourage and are looking for people with a lot of STEM skills as well as other experiences across the organization.

Cynthia Kaiser:

Hello, my name's Cynthia Kaiser, as noted, I'm a deputy assistant director within FBI Cyber. And you know what that really amounts to is I get to look across the threat landscape every day, and I think everybody here, anybody listening in, knows that the threats that we're seeing, the tactics that we're seeing, the adversaries use, the targeting we see it increases every day. You can look at the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center or IC3 and see that financial crimes, those losses from either cyber enabled financial crimes, et cetera, have increased by a billion every year. In 2022 alone, that was 10.3 billion, and we know that that's a conservative number. We know that adversaries also are not just, say, doing the traditional financial scams or even intelligence collection, they're looking to influence companies, influence people, influence society, and it's against that backdrop that I like to tell people that even though we work with a lot of scary things every day, I have one of the best jobs in Washington because I get to experience what it's like and work with people every day who are keeping their friends, families and communities safe.

Cynthia Kaiser:

And there's really nothing better than feeling that way, but there's nothing worse than also seeing that there's gaps where we know we could be doing more. And that's really where my role in the workforce planning and workforce hiring comes in is trying to go out, actively recruit, help fill those gaps and work across the enterprise to ensure that we're well positioned to keep America safe.

Chris Riotta:

It's interesting, we already heard some really innovative sort of solutions that are taking place currently to address these issues. And as you ladies are speaking, it was so fun to sort of watch these results come in. It was almost like watching a very tight election. It looks like retaining talent kept the lead pretty much the entire time, so hopefully we can dig into some of that. But it looks like the issues span across the board. Ensuring diversity in the talent pipeline, clearly got some votes for that as well. We have training employees on emerging tech and budgetary limitations as well, which I'm sure that's a problem across the board.

Chris Riotta:

Maybe if you wouldn't mind coming from your own unique perspectives, you can discuss what some of your unique challenges are at your specific agencies and organizations. Whoever wants to kick it off, maybe closest to me.

Karen Wetzel:

So what my job is actually to help the entire federal workforce. So with the NICE Framework we define 52 different work roles, several work roles in seven different categories. And these are used to be able to define what tasks people in those roles do and the knowledge and skills they need in order to complete those tasks. So our effort is really to be able to help assist everybody. It's in the room. It's be able to actually make sure that we are able to assess our workforce to identify what is needed in our candidates and as we're hiring to help with up-skilling and re-skilling and the training that's needed. And so it's really by establishing that common language that helps us do that, it helps us make sure that we're identifying candidates that are actually going to be able to do the jobs that we're asking them to do, to be able to understand what kinds of things we're going to need to build out in the future, and to be able to assess trends as well. Understanding what work rules of critical need there are, how do we engage with that and how do we engage with our agency partners.

Karen Wetzel:

So I look at it from a big picture in order to see how can we support all of these different efforts and all of the things that were on that poll in order to be able to figure out how can we do this together as a ecosystem.

Chris Riotta:

Just really quick, there was some votes for something else. Would you happen to know, across the board, what might something else be?

Karen Wetzel:

Well, certainly in federal workforce I think some of the big issues that tend to come up are things like not having enough entry level positions, that we're having requirements where we're over overloading, that purple unicorn. So being able to ask for things that aren't really needed. And partly that's done because we might not be able to explain very well what we're looking for and so we ask for everything in the kitchen sink. So being able to understand specifically what you're looking for, how to phrase that, and in a way that's going to make it so that the candidates are looking at these can actually evidence their capabilities is going to be really important. If we're only having people who are at the very high levels or asking for years of se of service, we're not going to ever be able to get people in there. We're not going to help with some of those other issues like the retention and the increased opportunities. So it really is a whole of the picture.

Chris Riotta:

Interesting.

Cindy Cisco:

For us we're looking for individuals with a broad range of degrees, certifications and or experiences. And I say and or experiences because we're not just living with folks with degrees. We recognize that relative work experience and years of relative work experience factor into our decisions about hiring folks as well. So that's really key. But for degrees, we are looking for folks with individuals that have cyber or information security degrees, computer engineering, computer science degrees, network software engineering, information systems, data analysts, computer network, digital forensics. So it's a broad range of categories. I think you need all of those to be able to bring to the table.

Cindy Cisco:

Some of the other challenges were... And that's why I was curious to see, because you thought it was for polling for a vote coming in, I thought it was on a game show. It was very, very exciting to see all the information coming through. But some of the other challenges we have is just competing with ourselves in the federal government space because we're all looking for those individuals with those skills, as well as with private industry. And so salary comes into play, remote work capabilities and ability to do that comes into play for us. We do require people to work in secure spaces, so that's a challenge that we're facing. But we believe that we have a mission like no other. So again, [cia.gov](http://cia.gov).

Cynthia Kaiser:

We're certainly feeling the strain at FBI in terms of being able to hire an appropriate cyber workforce for the challenges that we have. And not only just say the training and experiences necessary for cyber professionals, but you can stole the words out of my mouth, like this idea that we have inconsistent standards across the federal government for STEM hiring and incentives. That can cause kind of just cascading or roundabout vacancies occurring even among ourselves. But I do think stepping back and saying maybe sometimes when we're making these comparisons between the federal government and the private sector, we get a little probably stuck in either or instead of thinking about how a really good cyber career probably includes both. We aren't looking necessarily for someone to give us 40 years. If you want to, that's great. But I think it makes a really rounded career when, especially new grads, it's a great place to come into to the FBI. We have extensive training programs, great mentorship, really amazing opportunities, travel, great things to work on.

Cynthia Kaiser:

You know, can work at the FBI for 5, 10 years, you can spend your 20s making a difference in your 30s making money. And you can go back and forth because when you go into the private sector, then you have an immense skillset that you wouldn't have had if you'd spent those 10 years just at the private sector either. So I think there's a really good way that we can balance out some of the strain across the hiring ecosystem to be able to make a really big impact in industry and across all of the various federal missions.

Cindy Cisco:

And I concur with Cynthia, her great point about that going back and forth between private and federal government. That's something that we're looking at as well. In fact, we've always had the ability for people who leave to come back pending on knowledge, skills and abilities and what they've done during that time that they've been gone. But we're looking to promote that more with their rehire program, letting people know it's okay to come back and people leave for a variety of reasons, not just for pay. We saw that during COVID where people took a break to deal with either childcare or elder care issues and now-

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Cindy Cisco:

... a break to deal with either childcare or elder care issues and now that that's stabilizing a little bit and we're in a much better place, we want to make sure that they know that the agency's a place to come back to.

Chris Riotta:

Yeah, it's interesting. I've never heard that messaging before by the way. That's wonderful. Make money in your thirties and do good public service in your twenties. But I think it touches on something that's actually happening. There's some sort of a cultural shift, it feels like, especially in some of your agencies in the IC, where there's this focus of course on retaining top talent, but they're also trying to expand the workforce base that they're looking at, to bring into the space. And I think that speaks to some of these hiring initiatives and the way that you folks are thinking about expanding the diversity of the talent pool.

Chris Riotta:

Can you maybe speak a little bit to some of the initiatives that you're thinking about when it comes to hiring and recruitment, to expand that sort of diversity of thought that you're thinking about bringing on?

Cynthia Kaiser:

Happy to kick it off, diversity is a core value of the FBI and it's something that we really seek to ensure. I mean, we want to look like the population that we protect, and there's an element there to leadership as well, where you can't be what you can't see. And so, ensuring I think that we have that diversity, that we also though, in tandem with that, make people actually feel like they belong. That it's not just about bringing people together who look different, assimilating them and making them all think the same. It's about actually thinking differently. It's about actually being different and having kind of that diversity of thought and diversity of backgrounds and experiences and perspectives.

Cynthia Kaiser:

And I think one good example of this is the FBI's aiming to have what we call a model cyber squad in all 56 of our field offices over the next several years. And we already have over half of them like that today.

Cynthia Kaiser:

A model cyber squad has intelligence analysts, special agents, data analysts, digital operations specialists, staff operations specialists, computer scientists, and it brings all those groups together. Some highly technical, some greater investigations, some great at analysis and writing. It brings everybody together to be able to have great results.

Cynthia Kaiser:

And one resulted highlight is if... Many of you may have read about our take-down of the Hive ransomware variant a few months ago, where we were able to stop Hive from obtaining over \$130 million in ransom payments. We were able to provide decryption keys for that ransomware to hundreds of victims across the U.S. and the world, and able to take down that infrastructure. Well, that was led out of our FBI Tampa office, which is a model cyber squad. The people that went ahead and did that amazing operation, not everybody came in with a computer science degree. Some of them were taught cyber skills when they got in and some of them are leveraging their other great skills. And it's about bringing that full mix together that enables us to have amazing results.

Chris Riotta:

And just to be clear, these cyber squads are all across the country, it's geographically diverse as well?

Cynthia Kaiser:

That's exactly right. It allows us to, I think, have a great presence and be a part of the communities that we serve.

Chris Riotta:

Interesting.

Cindy Cisco:

For us, for some of the recruiting initiatives that we're looking at is we want to start really, really early. So we want to help foster that STEM education. So we have a K-12 program. So we would get them at the very, very beginning, and have them start thinking about that career. So when they do go to college or they go to take a job, they start thinking about what they can do and what those opportunities are that are available to them.

Cindy Cisco:

So we do recruitment at a wide variety of academic colleges, universities. We have a huge focus on making sure that we are representing, or going to places where the underrepresented communities with the MSI, the minority serving institutions. We have paid internship opportunities. We also have a scholarship program, which is a great program. It's needs based and it's for individuals who are selected. Not only do they get the opportunity to intern with us, they get up to \$25,000 in scholarship funding, as well as they're considered a full-time employee and they get full-time salary while they're going to school. So again, it's very competitive. It's a great... I know, there was an ooh and ah from the crowd, so thank you for that. But that's something that we're looking at.

Cindy Cisco:

We also recognize that it's not just folks that are just coming out of college, we're also looking for mid-career professionals. So we do a lot with professional organizations across the United States, and you'll see us showing up at a number of different events. If you were at South by Southwest, we were there. So we'll show up where you may not expect us to, and we'll be there where you do expect us to do, so that we're looking at that as well. We also recognize that our veterans bring a lot of skills to the table. And so, there's a lot that we do with outreach with them as well.

Karen Wetzel:

It really is a lot of what we've been hearing already, it's looking at this from a skills-based perspective too, which Cindy, you mentioned earlier. It's making sure that we're not putting limitations on the field that we're pulling from, so that we can bring in diversity, we can have a workforce that's going to be well-rounded, as well as be able to look forward to the future.

Karen Wetzel:

So making sure that we aren't only relying on those shortcuts of maybe this degree or this certification. At times, those may be necessary, but is it really across the board the case? Is it going to be so you're looking at what kinds of skills people are bringing in through non-traditional approaches and how can we do that. And that's, again, where the NICE Framework can help, and that it identifies the tasks, knowledge and skills for common work rules. And so, that gives people a sense of where to start and

helps with those connections through things like K-12, with academia, with the curriculum and the courses that align to our roles, so that there can be that pathway.

Karen Wetzel:

Our strategic plan focuses on a few things that are in this space, and that includes modernizing the talent management programs, so that we can, and build out career paths as well, so that people who are interested in this profession know how to get into this profession, have ideas about where they would want to go, as well as then have... They're not stuck once they come in the door. That's really a big issue, is how do we get people in the door, is by showing them that they have a career that they can build, showing them that there are ways for them to continue on into the field and be able to continue to grow. And then it is also that K-12 awareness too.

Karen Wetzel:

As I mentioned, we have 52 different work roles and it's not just the traditional computer science kinds of roles. It's not just about coders. The broad variety of work that can take place here, whether it's someone who's in policy or if it's someone who's doing all sorts of analysis, it can run the gamut. And so, being sure that you were explaining that and being able to pull people in because then they might be interested in also shifting over mid-career. It could be that you're looking at people within your own agency already who are interested in this and providing them opportunities as well. So it's having that big pool from which to choose that helps people to come into this field.

Chris Riotta:

I think that's a great point, what you just mentioned about bringing folks who might already be at the agency or at the organization, who might have an interest but may not necessarily know the specifics.

Chris Riotta:

What sort of continual education and training programs do you think should be in place? Or agencies might be able to implement in order to make that happen?

Karen Wetzel:

This is where it comes down to assessment though, right? It's about understanding what your needs are and being able to help people understand what they need to develop in order to go forward. It's, again, having to look at it as a whole, and being able to build that out from, again, our perspective, it is if we can align these things to the work roles, that helps. Because then people are able to see exactly what it is that they're missing, be able to see which of these things may be close, but that they can translate over into the cyber area.

Karen Wetzel:

We're starting to introduce competency areas too. So for those emerging areas, that things aren't maybe established as well, we're understanding that there's going to need to be knowledge and skills there and how do we make sure that there's going to be training that's spun up around those emerging areas. I think it's just something you have to constantly be on, but also make sure it's being fed into the right areas.

Karen Wetzel:

I hear stories a lot of times about people who have taken training and then it didn't get them anywhere. If you take the training just because and not understanding how that's going to be applied, that's going to end up being a problem. So how do we make sure that it's directed training that's going to actually help them with their career.

Chris Riotta:

And I'm interested in hearing everyone's thoughts, but just a quick reaction. Is there ever an issue with cross agencies, perhaps with making sure that those employees complete the training? And what sort of incentives might work in making sure that those are completed?

Cindy Cisco:

I think for us, the agency's been known to be a learning organization. We have put a lot of time, attention, focus on training and making sure our officers have the training that they need in order to do the work that's been asked of them. Whether they come in with that trade craft, that understanding of what needs to be done, or whether it's something that they need to gain on the job or specialized training that we do.

Cindy Cisco:

So we have a lot of internal training. We also sponsor a lot of external training as well, that the agency will reimburse the individuals for doing. And that is an incentive in itself, because in order to get reimbursed you need to make sure that you've completed the training and that sort of thing.

Cindy Cisco:

So there is a lot of focus for us on training and it's continuous, because the space that they're working in is changing all the time and you can't necessarily rest on what you knew five years ago or coming out of school 15 years ago, right? It's continuously changing. So I think the workforce recognizes that and the leadership recognizes as well. And we've made the investment to make sure that happens.

Karen Wetzell:

It's about building that culture of continuous learning.

Cindy Cisco:

Right. Yes.

Cynthia Kaiser:

And I think when you look at the FBI and how we're thinking about recruiting the cyber workforce of the future, it actually involves assessing employees as they're onboarding for cyber skills. It involves determining if we can help up-skill existing employees and then also recruiting and expanding that recruiting of cyber professionals in industry or just across the U.S.

Cynthia Kaiser:

Now, when you look at those, part of our continual training model is we've developed something called the Accelerated Cybersecurity Training Program, which is supposed to bring people who have maybe an aptitude for cyber but not a lot of specialized training, and it can take them from novice to really that intermediate, intermediate-advanced in under two years, which is pretty great.



Cynthia Kaiser:

We put a lot of money into being able to ensure that these folks can gain the cyber skills, gain the investigative skills, gain the analytics skills they need to be able to tackle cyber threats. And that's in addition to the generous tuition reimbursement, student loan repayments, all the things that we have. I mean, the Bureau's paid for degrees for me, I like to tell people that, because I think people don't think when it gets to the government and be able to get that grad degree, and it's fantastic.

Cynthia Kaiser:

Putting that aside, I think we also have to talk about training in terms of diversity and inclusion. And part of that to me, not just the mandatory ones, but tying all of that to actual innovation is so important. Ensuring that people understand how including others and bringing everybody together with it, maybe aren't traditional federal employees, and gets you to a point where you can have ideas that you've never had before. And I think part of that's the lived experience and just continual... Part of that's leadership intent and ensuring that people just hear those anecdotes, hear those stories, and know how to harness it, to...

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Cynthia Kaiser:

... hear those anecdotes, hear those stories, and know how to harness it to make sure that we're demonstrating that great inclusive workplace that we know we want to be.

Chris Riotta:

Yeah. Yeah. I think we're all really looking forward to seeing the cyber workforce strategy that is hopefully coming out at some point this year. I've been really looking forward to getting my hands on that. From what I hear, it's going to address a lot of what we've been discussing, and I love what you mentioned about diversity and inclusion, because I've heard that that's going to be a big focus as well. But a lot of the strategy should focus on best practices and a lot of what we might already know that should just be implemented across the board.

Chris Riotta:

So I'm wondering, what would you like to see in the strategy, or what are some best practices that you think generally should be followed by all agencies and can be implemented today?

Karen Wetzel:

I'm biased because I'm on the working group that's been developing the strategy, so it's great. I think it's looking at the whole point of the ONCD was to start having us all work together to be able to leverage these leading practices, to be able to understand that together we are stronger than trying to do the competition and making sure that nobody's talking at the same level. So I think that's what this strategy is going to do. It's going to help us communicate better, help us with everything that we've talked about here, the recruitment, the training, the career path, all of that.

Karen Wetzel:

I think it is about looking at.... I'm not going to speak specifically to what's in it just because it hasn't been released yet, but I think it is going to be able to let us take these efforts and bring them up to inter-

agency kind of focus, and then see how we can apply that across multiple agencies. Have it be a test bed for new trials, to be able to do so in a way that's going to be more effective than if just one agency's going to do it.

Karen Wetzel:

I think some of the examples that we've been hearing from Cindy and Cynthia here are the things that I imagine are going to be areas of focus there. But I'm not going to...

Cindy Cisco:

Yeah, I think one of the things that we've done, and I think it will resonate with both of Cynthia and Karen here, is consistency in job titles and descriptions. Because we all have our own and starting to say, "Does this equal this, equal that?" So having some consistency. And also making sure that it resonates with the people who are looking for opportunities as well. So it may be complete sense to all of us up here. We may be consistent, but if it doesn't resonate to those who are looking for jobs, then you're losing people.

Cindy Cisco:

So that's one of the things that we've been taking a look at and seeing do our job titles, do our occupations, our descriptions make sense to those who are looking for jobs? And we need to continue to do that. And I think that will continue to change over time. That early and often inconsistent engagement. It's not showing up once and then ghosting the organizations or the universities or the colleges. It's making sure that you're a constant presence there and that it's a win-win opportunity for both elements.

Cindy Cisco:

I mentioned the program that we have to encourage folks who have left, that the agency is a place that they can possibly come back to. But also we have an employee referral program, because our best recruiters are the folks that work at the organization. They know exactly what the job is, what it is that they do, and for what they can share what they do. So we also look to that and look to our workforce to help us as well.

Cynthia Kaiser:

I think I'm most excited about the workforce strategy in developing the consistency in the hiring and incentive practices across the board. Because the fear that I have is if Cyber Com or if SISO or CIA calls, there's not someone else on the other line to answer the phone because we had such vastly different hiring practices and systems and titles, and it's confusing for people coming in. Certain agencies get plussed up, others don't. That imbalance doesn't make us better, it doesn't make us safer. So being able to ensure that we're recruiting off of our mission, we're bringing people on board, we're using the personal connections, the outreach to our communities, but that we're also not just taking from each other, that we're bringing people in.

Karen Wetzel:

And that's where we're already starting to see some improvements. We're seeing that with the OMB legislation that's out for draft right now, where being able to address some of those things... I'm just ticking my... There's the authority to establish alternative cyber workforce classification pay systems,

expanded flexibility, the selection, the pay authority, the skills incentives. A lot of the things we've talked about today is covered in that. That has been brought up at that working group level for early review and in consideration to be able to make sure that what comes out is going to be meeting needs.

Karen Wetzel:

So I think we're already seeing, even before the strategies come out, some things that are helping in that space. Encouraging, for instance, with the USAJOBS to use the special indicator field for work roles, for instance. It's there and available, but not many agencies know about it. So going to that idea about having consistent job descriptions and recruitment approaches, if we take advantage of some of the things that have been put into place that maybe not everybody knows about yet, this is a way that the ONCD group can actually start helping to promote that and help with the consistency that we've tried to get to but haven't been able to because we've not had that same place to have these discussions.

Chris Riotta:

Right. Yeah. There are so many multi pronged, complicated challenges that seem to be getting addressed. On the other hand though, there there's something just as simple as trying to meet people where they are, offering these jobs on the right job boards, and even explaining what the job is in a way that might make sense. You can have a very similar job at Google in federal government. And it sounds like completely different things. One is a language that most people can read and understand, the other one is a little bit more outdated.

Karen Wetzel:

Nuanced.

Chris Riotta:

Nuanced we can say. So I'm wondering if you can just talk to some of the efforts that are being made just to really boil down those descriptions and introduce more, I don't know if the word is general or conversational messaging about what these jobs and these roles really offer.

Karen Wetzel:

Well, certainly that's where the NICE Framework comes in. By defining these roles and the work that's happening, it does allow for that common language. We came out with a revision in 2020, and we've been making updates to our content since then. So we're updating our knowledge and skill statements so that they are easily understood and aren't just using government speak, but things that are going to be equally useful in private and public industries. We've been working with groups like LinkedIn to be able to see what is it that they're seeing in terms of the job titles, and how does that relate to our work roles?

Karen Wetzel:

We have, with the NICCS tool that shows the NICE Framework, it has common job titles that are used in our different work roles. So we're making those connections already, and that's something that we're building out more. Because as we've been hearing, this isn't just our issue. This is a whole of nation issue and it's an international issue. If we all are able to start to work together in a common way, it's going to help. Already we work very closely with some of our international partners and they're developing their

own frameworks based off of the NICE Framework as well. So it's really having that common language going through forward in all of these different approaches is going to help hopefully address that.

Cynthia Kaiser:

I think there's a push out to the communities as well. Instead of just relying on the more colloquial language or consistent language on a website, being able to really go out and talk to the people one-on-one or in groups that we really want to bring on board. At the FBI and every one of our 56 field offices across the US, we have recruitment coordinators. They'll go out into the community. We're at a lot of different conferences. So from RSA to Women in Cybersecurity to AFROTECH, there's a lot of great places to go where you just talk. You can talk through what is a digital operations specialist, what's a data analyst, what's the difference, and get a better sense of what it's really like to work with or for all of us.

Cynthia Kaiser:

I think as a part of that, we also are really pushing ourselves out just with events. So we have diversity agent recruitment events in cities across the US. We also have various projects with different universities and colleges, including Project Beacon, which is a distinct effort with Historically Black Colleges and Universities to ensure that we're recruiting more directly from populations we've previously just not incorporated as well as we should have at the FBI. So there's really, I think, that personal element, getting out there, talking to people, humanizing it, that helps us get a better sense out there of what's available and what we can offer.

Cindy Cisco:

And I would just echo what Cynthia has already said. A lot of outreach. Most of our recruiters or subject matter experts, they're folks that have done the job themselves, and so they can speak to that when they meet with individuals, whether it's at colleges, universities, or professional organizations.

Chris Riotta:

Yeah. Yeah. It's amazing to hear that you guys are meeting people where they are because I think that that's so important, and expanding that diversity and thought in the folks that are in the workforce. Obviously funding is a big challenge that we've heard a little bit about. It was one of the responses on our election board. Just wondering what sort of advice you might have maybe for agencies that don't have as much of the resources as they would like to bring on talented cyber workforce folks. What should they be? How can they get around funding challenges?

Karen Wetzel:

There are so many opportunities though in this field. As you were saying, you come into this and this is an opportunity to grow and develop capabilities that really can help you make this into a good career. So really showing the mission importance of what we do. I think that's something that the government has, a unique position unlike anything [inaudible 00:34:23]. So being able to really take advantage of that and push that forward, but showing that this isn't just a dead-end career. Showing that once you come in the doors, that there's opportunity, either within a single agency or across agencies. There's things like the federal rotation programs, there's the cyber opportunities website, that there's an opportunity. This isn't just a one-off and we're going to ring you dry. It's about what can we do for you if you're coming to us.

Cynthia Kaiser:

And I think we have a lot of additional elements that we can get out there better. Pay transparency is great. It's in the federal government. Merit-based promotions. Sometimes it can be easy to find in the private sector, sometimes hard. And we have that in abundance within the federal government.

Cynthia Kaiser:

We also have overtime, which I like to highlight to people in tech fields. My data analysts, who are working hour 41 and hour 42 of the work week, get overtime. So there's that salary and then there's extra. I think my folks also get to leave their job at the office, which, in today's day and age, is pretty amazing, because while you have to go to the office and work in a secure space, it's done. And you go home and you spend it with your family and you can't really just get pop back on for two hours to do this extra project.

Cynthia Kaiser:

So I think there's a lot of great work-life balance. There's a lot of great just transparency and knowing where you are. And there's a lot of great just the training and experiences that set you up for even greater success wherever you go later down the road.

Cindy Cisco:

And for us, some of our occupations have a hiring bonus associated with them. Some of them also have-

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Cindy Cisco:

... have a hiring bonus associated with them. Some of them also have a retention bonus associated with them. It all depends and we look at that on a regular basis to make adjustments and modify that based on what our needs are across the organization. There's also the STEM pay scale, which is different than the regular GS scale that I think most of the federal government takes advantage of and utilizes. The same that Cynthia mentioned, work-life balance is really, really important for us and so same, we can leave our work at home, I mean at home, sorry. Leave our work at work and go home. There's a huge focus on not only that work-life balance, but just the wellbeing of the workforce. So there's a number of initiatives that we have to make sure that we are balanced individuals.

Chris Riotta:

Yeah, there are a lot of interesting incentives and benefits that can be offered. I'm wondering, if you all had a magic wand and you could have one tool or resource or initiative project to help you really recruit the next generation of the cyber workforce, what would it be?

Karen Wetzal:

Good question.

Cindy Cisco:

Great question.

Cynthia Kaiser:

I think from our end, we are really excited about the OPM legislation. Would love to see that passed maybe alongside the marriage of authorities and appropriations would be nice within that. But I think being able to pay our folks, we're not going to maybe match private sector, but I think get closer so that they can make the choice for, because they want to come work for the FBI, they want to come work for CIA, or et cetera, that they're not feeling like they have to make a huge financial sacrifice to do so. I will say, if I can brag a bit, the FBI as a whole has a 1% attrition rate, which I think a lot of private companies would love to have. When we talk to our computer scientist and our engineers, our STEM-focused fields, it really is, it's the opportunities that they have and it's the mission.

Cynthia Kaiser:

They can go abroad and help a foreign government claw back from a cyber attack. They can learn and become better in their craft, better in their field, really know outlay from their own finances to do so. So I think being able for us to go out and bring people on board who just want to be, who do want to work with us, the magic wand would absolutely be ensuring that legislation moves forward and we're able to be that slightly bit more competitive than we need to be.

Karen Wetzel:

I have too many tools, I think. There's just so many that I think could be really helpful here. A lot of what we've been hearing about today, we've touched on some of them. Things like when we're doing our recruitment and making sure that these job descriptions are completely understandable and how do we connect it through to education? How do we connect it through to K-12? For me, the tool is a nice framework to be frank, and it's building that into all of these so that we can have that consistency and we can build out that ecosystem. Just how do we do that in a way that's going to be a little bit more effective? Because right now, working with not everybody being aware of it, not everybody being able to feed back into it, that that's limitation. So how we can make this more robust in order to answer a lot of these challenges we've been discussing today.

Cindy Cisco:

Chris, I'm going to take a pass because this is a big ask and so you have to make sure that you've thought it all the way through. So I'm going to have to come back to you on that one.

Chris Riotta:

That's all right. Well, I'll pass it back to you then actually, because I hear one big issue is the gap between hiring folks and then bringing them actually on board between getting security clearance approved. Can you speak a little to whether that's a challenge and what might be being done to address that?

Cindy Cisco:

Chris, that was not a question you had sent to me in advance.

Chris Riotta:

Well, [inaudible 00:40:07] question.

Cindy Cisco:

So we are doing a lot to streamline the experience without addressing the quality of the individuals that we bring in. So I think we've done a lot within the past year to bring some efficiencies into that space.

With the new program that I mentioned at the very, very beginning, the invitation tool apply versus the open application. We've seen lots and lots of interests of people who are submitting resumes, which is great. The demand is out there definitely for people wanting to come or to learn more about opportunities there within that space.

Chris Riotta:

Wonderful. Well, unless anyone has any final points, we'll leave it there and pass it off to our next speaker. But thank you everyone so much for joining us and thanks. I think we might have time for one. What's your question?

Speaker 2:

So there's a brain drain in this country. Historically, brain drain meant talent [inaudible 00:41:22] state, but it might be our brain drain in that...

Chris Riotta:

I'll repeat it afterwards as well.

Speaker 2:

... STEM candidates are going into other areas like athletics and other things [inaudible 00:41:36] high school are so raised up. I'm not saying raise up STEM above, but just put it on an equal platform because the poll was like, "How do you build?". Well, you got to start... I heard a couple comments about K through 12. What in each of your organizations do you deal with your employees to incentivize those employees going out into the schools and talking to folks, the grade four and five, the impressionable kids that see, "Oh, here's an FBI person that's highlighting STEM. Here's a NIS person, here's a CIA person highlighting," because all of your employees are spread across to 3000 counties in the country that they have a reach. I come from a military background, National Guard. We try so hard. We enter the schools all the time. I'm wondering that's a way to build. Are your organizations talking about that, tackling that, addressing that?

Karen Wetzel:

My program is essentially we're not doing cybersecurity for NIS. What we do is we are managing this cybersecurity workforce for the nation. That overstates what we're doing by a lot. But our mission is to help with this. One of the things we do is we have a K-12 component to our efforts. So that includes reaching out. We have a K-12 educators conference every year. So we are bringing them together so they understand about how to actually bring cyber into the schools, how do we bring it into curriculum, how do we do cyber security career awareness? There's a cyber security career awareness week every fall that we do a lot of programming around as well. So from our perspective, what we're doing is trying to do this not on an individual, one by one kind of basis, but how do we work with all of the people who are out there on the ground and be able to help support them bringing this home to their K-12 audiences. So there's a lot of work that's happening there and it's so much though.

Karen Wetzel:

So part of it is translating what can be sometimes a difficult field to know into something that's going to be more understandable so the kids who are interested or who have shown some type of capabilities will be able to help get them in the pathway towards to whether it's going straight into cyber right out of

high school, or it could be going into the two or four year institutions, but being able to give them those multiple career pathways rather than just saying, "This is the only way that you can come in," and taking advantage of things like that learning and employment records to be able to highlight all of their experiences, whether it's through capture the flags or after school clubs or whatever the case may be, and making sure the employers are recognizing the importance of those things as they're looking at how do they encourage students, whether it's in apprenticeships.

Karen Wetzel:

We had a massive apprenticeships effort earlier this year, and I guess it was last year now. So looking at it really broadly speaking because it's not going to be just one thing that helps. It's not just one conference that we go to that's going to make a difference.

Cynthia Kaiser:

I'd say as a parent personally, I think my kids are inundated with great messaging, like for coding and being in cyber fields. I know more of my kids' friends who want to be white hat hackers than want to be professional athletes who are like... I think that message, I think that's resonating. I think it's getting out there. The FBI, we sponsor a cyber camp that's a lot like space camp down in Huntsville. We've partnered with Girl Scouts to help admit, offer some of up their badges. I think that we just get into the community because we're out there. We have a lot of various summer programs or the like where we go out there and we talk to people. So I think that overall and just cyber in general for our youth, they're so natural at it. I don't think there's any kid who doesn't have some of these different gaming accounts and they are living that every day. Hopefully that brings itself up and we see a real different recruiting experience in the coming years.

Karen Wetzel:

It's also, I think, acknowledging where there are maybe issues, like where broadband may be difficult. So how do we encourage efforts to help make sure it's reaching into spaces where there may not be as easy access to spaces? We see already that there's data around how already some girls are not comfortable in the field early at ages because of some of the way approaches. So how do we encourage approaches maybe through Girl Scouts or things like that that are going to make sure that you're bringing a diverse group into cyber even at that young age. It's also understanding that there are going to be different pathways. So it's not necessarily only those who are just doing the cyber, but the understanding that, again, cybersecurity and cyber has a broad variety of needs in terms of capabilities. So encouraging everybody who has some slight interest to be able to do it. It's not just always about the coding or capture the flags, which sometimes can be off-putting for someone, especially who's a younger age.

Chris Riotta:

Right. Unfortunately, we've got to leave it there. But Cindy, Karen, Cynthia, thank you so much for your time. Appreciate it.

Karen Wetzel:

Thank you.

Cindy Cisco:



This transcript was exported on May 22, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Thank you.

Speaker 3:

Please welcome lookout federal security strategist, Jim Coyle.

Jim Coyle:

Well...

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