George Jackson:	Good afternoon everyone. Thanks for joining us today. I'm George Jackson, vice president of events at GovExec, and your host for today's program, "How Embracing DEIA and Early Talent Strengthens and Empowers the Federal Workforce," sponsored by Yello and produced by GovExec.
	Today's human capital leaders face no shortage of challenges in their work, to build the next generation of public sector talent, a complex hiring landscape, competition with private enterprise, and use of outdated technologies, all challenge their ability to hire the people they need and deliver for the citizens they serve. In tackling these issues, it is essential that government leaders take a collaborative approach to deliver robust solutions and partnership with the public and private sectors, and explore new ways to build the federal workforce of the future. What actions can they take to strengthen workforce planning efforts in the short and long-term? We'll seek to answer this question and others with a great group of panelists today, Wonzie Gardner is chief human capital officer at the National Science Foundation. Wonzie, welcome. Great to see you again.
Wonzie Gardner:	Thank you.
George Jackson:	His colleague, Charles Barber, is NSFs chief diversity and inclusion officer. Dr. Barber, welcome.
Charles Barber:	Thanks, good to be here.
George Jackson:	And John Newman, director of federal programs at Yello. John, great to see you again.
John Newman:	Thank you.
George Jackson:	So John, kick us off. Tell us a little bit about your background, how you come into these topic areas.
John Newman:	So first and foremost, thanks again for putting this together, we're very excited to be here. But a little bit about myself and our organization. I oversee our federal program here at Yello. I oversee a team who's responsible for the overall success and growth of more than 40 federal customers who are currently using Yello Solutions today, with nearly 15 years of work experience in the software industry, and more than 10 years specifically in the GovTech industry. So very excited to be here and speak more collaboratively about Yello's overall solutions as well.
George Jackson:	Wonzie, how about you? How did you land at NSF? Tell us a little bit about your background.
Wonzie Gardner:	Hey, George, thank you very much. It's an honor to be here with Chuck and John and to talk about this, 'cause I think this is so key to us. I backed in here, I've got

27 years of experience. I was in the Air Force, retired colonel, I was a mission support group commander where I had IT, HRM, and those mission support things up under me. When I retired, I started USDA, worked at the Food Nutrition Service Agency, and then I came to NSF in 2014, worked administrative services, and I backed in this job. I got this job and I went to become a DD, or hire head, of administrative services. Then I was asked to be the deputy office head and information resources management, which is part of the CHCO office as well.

So I took over in 2018, I believe it was, '19, and it's been a meteoric rise ever since then, working on human capital for professionals here at NSF, and at OPM. And so, learned how to look at things from an HR perspective on this side, but taking all the other stuff I learned throughout my career to make sure it all manages and matches together. So I think it makes for a very good blend of opportunities and responsibilities I've had in the past.

George Jackson: Thank you, sir. Dr. Barber, great to see you again. I understand that your role is relatively new within NSF, is that right?

Charles Barber: Absolutely, just newly established as a part of the CHIPS and Science Act in January was when I was onboarded here at NSF. And George, I'll just go right into my background, if that's appropriate. Army Veteran, which gave me the experience to really appreciate how to work with folks from different backgrounds and different cultures, given that lots of experience in both HR and culture, and in my opinion, that's where DEI intersects. And given that experience, to be able to work in those disciplines at all levels, in government, military, and in private sector, to me, that's what makes the CIO effective. And it also gives me that great appreciation about why my role and my relationship with Wonzie as CHCO is so important to the success of the foundation. So excited for the conversation today.

George Jackson: Wonzie, he set me up for my next topic here, sign of a really good panelist, of course.

Wonzie Gardner: Okay.

George Jackson: Talk to me about some actionable steps that NSF is taking right now to streamline, to automate, the hiring process. I gave that context at the top of the program, there's a lot of competition right now.

Wonzie Gardner: Hey, George, it is. But before I get there, I want to just say that having Dr. Barber here, Chuck here, is there the combination of some ideas and contexts, concepts we had, about bringing diversity into our organization. He talked about CHIPS and Science Act, but I think even if we didn't have the act, we knew at NSF we had to move in a different direction. And I don't want to steal Chuck's thunder, but I do think that what he is going to talk about is an output we're looking at. And so, bringing him here, bringing him on board and putting him on

equal status, where he reports out across the enterprise, both internally and externally, has been really great for us. And so, we're looking for great things.

Now, to your question, how do we compete, how do automate? One of the big issues we're looking at as we try to look at our workforce is, how do we bring in young people in a way where they are excited, we can bring them in a process where they're going to help us out? And our internships have been greatly increased. Internships have been an integral part of what we do, and so we've increased those 20% this year, paid internships, so we can have people coming in early on and bring them on. Because I tell people all the time, government's like an apprenticeship. You've got to be on board to understand how we work and understand what needs to be done in the various organizations. You may have the technical skills or a degree for a particular job, but the government is very, very unique when I look at how we work versus private sector.

And so, the other part is, we're looking, we're trying to streamline as much as we possibly can, the hiring process. One of the things that I've noticed with our young people, and that's what we're talking about, that the process for entering government is very laborious. We're trying to change that. I think from my standpoint, it takes 81 days for me to hire someone on board from the moment they do an application to I get them to what we call our, "Security cleanse apparatus." John probably can hire somebody in about a week's time and they're on board. I've got to be able to shorten that piece so I can bring those same people on and track them, and so they are interested. So we're also trying to make sure that we have some internships where they can go to school, come back and see what we're doing, see how they fit in there. And so, we're taking those innovative steps, and we're trying to also take in more of an AI approach and use a robotic process automation to take care of those different things as we move forward.

And finally, the second part I look at, we're looking at talent teams to how we bring people on board, actually looking at what we actually need, me doing talent assessments of our people, and making sure that we get a certificate, those people on their certificate are the right people, that we can choose out those top 10 for any particular job we have as we move forward in our enterprise way.

George Jackson: Wonzie, I'd like to stay with you for just a moment. That talent assessments aspect isn't something I've heard before, and I think our audience would value that information greatly. What goes into those?

Wonzie Gardner: Well, we're partnering with OPM and our own talent assessment teams to make sure we have a particular job, we're looking for the right skillset, not a resume, but a right skillset, and we can actually ask the right talent questions to make sure, through a series of interviews with a person, for example, we can tell whether or not they have the skills, knowledge, and capabilities to do that particular job. We have found, going forward, when we do these talent

assessments, the selection criteria, the selection pool, is much better for the agencies. And so, we're trying to make sure that we are doing a talent assessment. What talent does a person really have, bring to our agency, versus, "Skills," they say, listed on a resume. And so, we have these various questions we can ask through our various processes to make sure that accountants, that they're looking at our jobs, and accountants, we're looking at how their actual talent and skills to do the job we require for them to do.

George Jackson: John, I want to get back to that automation point. I'm going to tease out a couple of things here, but Wonzie's statement about how do we bring young people in, and the focus more on AI, on these talent assessments, on robotic process automation, seems to me like moving technology more seamlessly into those processes is an important step that a lot of agencies are taking right now. If you draw back from NSF, what are you seeing across the public sector, John?

John Newman: Yeah, it's a great question, and I think first and foremost, and the theme to much of what I will be speaking to today, is the need for organizations to be proactive in everything that they do. If your organization is simply posting jobs and vacancies and hoping people apply, you're about 10 to 15 years behind the curve. And it's absolutely paramount and critical that organizations take the proactive steps necessary to get their name out there, and focus on their employer brand, and explain their mission, tell their story, so that candidates can resonate with that and ultimately apply for a position.

And there are a couple of key pieces, I think, that organizations must do in order to do that effectively. One, leveraging technology. It's a no-brainer in today's world. There are too many candidates out there and technology is absolutely paramount for organizations to pipeline the right set of candidates, and it creates an environment where organizations can focus on the quality of candidates, not necessarily the quantity of candidates. We'll speak to more of that here in a minute, but I think another key piece of being proactive is organizations having dedicated recruitment and outreach teams. A lot of organizations have that now, but many still don't, and you have to have the personnel in place, along with partnership with technology and partnership with industry, in order to be effective in that.

So those are a couple of key pieces, I think, and technology really drives the efficiency overall in casting that wide net and allowing for organizations to truly be proactive in identifying top quality talent for their organization.

George Jackson: Dr. Barber, I was watching you out of my second monitor here in the office, and something jumped out there for you. Go ahead.

Charles Barber: Well, I think this particular part of the conversation is actually, it demonstrates the power of the relationship that I have with Wonzie as a CHCO, he and I, we talk on a regular basis. We're very well aware about being able to really take advantage of that full spectrum of diverse talent that society has to offer, for

the sake of national security, for the sake of advancing science. But we also know that we want to recruit folks who want to be here, and as a part of our DEI efforts, we want to make sure that we're creating that environment where we really can increase belonging and increase that inclusive leadership.

And so, one of the things we looked at doing is building a DEI maturity model, which is basically a five face continuum that uses both quantitative and qualitative data to really assess where our leaders and organization fall on a continuum, but it also provides a roadmap so that leaders and organizations can create those successive chapters to really increase belonging. And so, we look at this from the full employee lifecycle perspective. Bringing them in is just one part of it, but we also want to look at how do we retain that talent as well. And there's some other things that we can get into in terms of our underrepresentation model and things of that nature, but I'm pretty sure that'll come up later in the conversation.

George Jackson: Absolutely, sir. So Wonzie, you mentioned these talent assessments, but I know from prior to this going on the air that you're also looking at internships, you're looking at fellowships, you're looking at apprenticeships. You have a lot of tools in your toolbox there. What are those as your larger succession planning, your larger talent management strategy, sir?

Wonzie Gardner: George, if I can, before we move on to that, can I go back to what John mentioned-

George Jackson: Of course.

Wonzie Gardner: ... about when we were looking at people? I think also, one of the things I failed to mentioned earlier, before, when you came to the federal government, we were looking for that person looking to stay 20, 30 years, this was going to be their career. They came in, they did not leave the federal government. That model has changed. What I'm looking for is that part, that young person, who wants to come in for a little while, work with the federal government, maybe go out to private industry, private enterprise, to figure out what they're doing over there, come back and forth, especially on the HR side. Why is that so important?

Well, this younger generation, they're not looking for the same thing that we had before. And one of the things I tell my colleagues on the CHCO council is, we've got to change our methodology, how we look for people, and how we staff ourselves moving forward. We've got to make sure we get that quick win. We bring them in, they do something for us, we give them an opportunity to come back out to the private side, and then come back in at a commensurate rate when they mature through different things. And I think that's going to be the model that's going to make us successful as we move forward in trying to level set and reset the federal government. It's so important we do that.

And one of the ways that we want to look at that, again, as you mentioned earlier, those paid internships and those different strategies, we do not hire only young people, but people in different genres that can help as we do things. As Chuck will tell you, in our line of business, National Science Foundation, we have a lot of, we call it, "IPAs," inter-personnel people bring in to do our science. That's a very niche group that we have to use to make sure we can advance science forward. We're also looking at those various niche groups in our other mission support areas that can come in and help us do a particular job right away, perhaps move back out and move forward, from our IT support to our guys in HRM and our other mission support side of the house. So our internships and our pathway programs we're using, George, they're very integral to us to look at how we're doing that.

In addition, we're advertising a lot differently than we did before in the years past, strictly USAJobs or monsters.com. We're finding out that a lot of our younger clientele we look for are not looking at USAJobs, they're looking at Handshake, they're looking at LinkedIn, things like that. We're also going out to minority serving institutions, to Chuck's point, and other MSIs and HBCUs, to make sure we're attracting that kind of talent, to make sure they know that. Because one of the things I tell people all the time, if I fish from the same pond every day, I'm going to get the same type of person. I've got to expand that pool to make sure that we're attracting a diverse talent to bring to our agency and to the federal enterprise.

And why is it so important to me and others like Chuck? We want to make sure that our federal work force looks like America's quilt, it has all different colors, genres and things, as we move forward. So it's very important that we do that as we try to level set and make our employees look like the rest of the country.

Charles Barber:	George, I love what Wonzie just said, "America's quilt." That's [inaudible 00:15:52].
George Jackson:	I'm going to use that in the future, Wonzie.
Wonzie Gardner:	Okay.
George Jackson:	I will credit you, sir. I promise.
Wonzie Gardner:	Listen, I'm going to trademark that, okay? A patent.
George Jackson:	John, add to that talent management strategy portion of the conversation, if you would. Give us some additional context there.
John Newman:	Yeah. I think one thing Wonzie mentioned that's, I think, really powerful as well is embracing change, and the audience that federal agencies are going after, let's call it the, "Gen Z" audience. And that audience is very different from audiences of past generations, and it's really important to know your audience

and know how they want to be interacted with. And going back to the theme of being proactive, candidates expect and want to be engaged with all the time. And you have this idea of creating a high touchpoint environment to candidates who haven't even yet seen a job or even know who your organization is, and gets into this whole entire part of your employer brand and really selling your mission and explaining your story and explaining how you're committed to diversity in the workforce, and that's what Gen Z wants to hear.

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John Newman: ... committed to diversity in the workforce, and that's what Gen Z wants to hear in order for them to be ultimately attracted to that particular job vacancy. They're very particular in how they want to be engaged with, and what we've seen in our data and our customers tell us is they really value authenticity. And authenticity requires many touch points. It requires higher levels of engagement, rather than, again, the old school method of posting jobs out there to USAJobs and hoping that people apply.

You really have to embrace the technology in order to do that. No one has the bandwidth with the resources that they have to just one-off send a one-off email to a candidate, hoping they apply. You have to put this into the ecosystem of constantly nurturing this talent and telling your story, building out those proactive pipelines, in order to ultimately convert what we're considering these prospects and leads and passive talent who might be a fit for the organization one day, to convert them into actually applying for a position. You have to leverage technology to do that effectively.

George Jackson: John, if I could stay with you for a moment, what does the future look like there with constant engagement? If emails are out or telephone calls are out, or at least a smaller part of the broader strategy, what else is in the mix there that is really effective out in the state-of-the-art workplace engagement, hiring, recruitment side of things?

John Newman: Well, I don't know that emails and telephone calls are out necessarily. I think they're very much in, in fact. But it's mixing that as part of the strategy with your broader recruitment and outreach process. So it's mixing in emails with phone calls and it's leveraging social media. Those are the channels that these younger Generation Z candidates, that they're on. So you have to find them in the appropriate places. You have to find them on the LinkedIn channels and wherever else they're engaging through those different methods, and it's important to continue to engage with them.

But it's more so around, I think, telling your story than it is... What you tend to see oftentimes is, when an organization has a priority and a requirement to fill a bunch of vacancies, it's, "Here's a job opening, click here to apply. Here's a job opening, click here to apply." You're not telling your story. All you're doing is trying to put a butt in a seat. And if you can tell your story, and again, send

quarterly newsletters to candidates explaining how you're committed to diversity in the workforce and, for Generation Z, a simple touch point such as wishing them good luck on finals, if they're a student in school, that tells a story and that's branded to your organization. So it's that warm, nurturing touch point that goes the extra mile and that differentiates you as an organization, from everyone else who's just simply posting out jobs and saying, "Hey, here's a job, go apply. Here's a job, go apply." And it's really setting yourself apart from the others.

George Jackson: Dr. Barber, I want to go to a different topic, but before I do, anything stand out there in John's remarks, the personalization aspect, and maybe how it can have a really strong impact on those recruiting of the right folks you mentioned earlier in the program?

Charles Barber: I think John's remarks, and Juansie's remarks both, these are the types of human capital officers that folks should be excited about. Because if you listen to both of them talk, the underlying theme from both of their remarks is that diversity and merit do not have to be at odds with each other. And I think if you look at the things that Juansie and I are doing here, the communication we have with each other, we are demonstrating just that. And John's progressive thought leadership is right along those same lines as well. So just proud of both of them.

George Jackson: Juansie, you mentioned the Chico Council earlier. If you could put on that hat for us and the audience for just a moment and maybe talk through some actions that are being taken to strengthen workforce planning efforts in the long term. You can do that with your NSF hat or with your Chico hat, but look out to the future for us 5 or 10 years, and when you look back, what efforts are you taking now that will result in the successes that you're looking for?

Wonzie Gardner: I think that both of those hats are interchangeable because as the NSF representative on the Chico Council, and then being blessed with my colleagues to be on the steering committee, one of the things we look at is the long range health of the federal enterprise, not just an agency. One of the things we're trying to do is to level set, to make sure that is what we talk about... The future work, for example. How we all work. I've got to make sure, and we talk about this all the time, is that I'm not robbing Peter to pay Paul. Because unlike John in the private sector, in the federal enterprise, we have to have a level playing field because one job can be transferred to another.

So I've got to make sure... One example is that if I allow administrative professionals or HR personnel and one organization to be fully remote and another organization, they are not allowed to do it that way, then we're going to have a bleeding off from one organization to another. So we're trying to level set by job positions, job categories across the enterprise, how we're going to do that.

The other one that I look at is talent management, talent acquisition, talent strategy, maintenance how we do those. When we talk about talent management, how do we manage a job series like HR professionals for example? How are we going to manage it across the entire enterprise to make sure that the development goes on, let's say, in the Commerce Department is the same development we're doing in the National Science Foundation, DOD, any of my other agencies across the federal government to make sure that we're growing our people in a way that they can go back and forth between various agencies, to make sure they're doing the work for human capital management, for example.

When I talk about the talent acquisition, we also look at share certificates. In years past, every agent did their own certificate for the same type of job, which caused things to slow down. One of the things we're really proud of right now, we're using what we call share certificates, where someone at DOD versus someone at NSF versus some at Commerce or NOAA can get the same type of person on one certificate. And why that's so important, when we've gone through the talent assessment, those people in that cert, we were already saying they are a good fit for the federal government. Now it's my job as a Chico and National Science Foundation to see where they're a good fit for the agency.

And when I use the word fit, I want to make sure we're all clear about this. This has nothing to do with sex, gender, or who you are and all kind of stuff, but do you have the mindset? Do you have the focus? Do you have the lens to do the work we're asking to do at the National Science Foundation and how will you integrate in that whole entire process? I think that's so very important and so key.

Before in the federal government, we didn't look at that, but to be competitive with John and other people, we've got to make sure that the people we're bringing in understand what our mission is, what our goals are, our strategic goals, and where we want to be in three to five years. So I've had the opportunity to do that for NSF on the Chico Council, along with my other peers, as we try to level set for the federal government as we move forward.

George Jackson: Dr. Barber, John, I'd love both of your perspectives on a subtopic here, but that competitiveness that Juansie mentions makes me think that agencies, that organizations have to stand out in that type of environment. Dr. Barber, I know you've been working on an under-representation model inside of NSF. That might be one potential area where you stand out. There could be others, but way in there, Dr. Barber, and then John, I want to come to you on that competitiveness aspect as well, sir.

Charles Barber: Yeah, so in the DEI space, we are routinely asked, "What kind of metrics are you putting in place to really show that you're making progress?" And let me just preface this by saying diversity is a deliberate outcome that will not happen overnight. So here's where we have an opportunity to really focus on the

organizational change efforts needed to really get after those DEI outcomes over time. And so, one of the ways we are doing that here is I'm working really closely with Juansie and his team, but we've taken our various federal occupational specialties and linked them to analogs with data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Census Bureau and Department of Labor, pulled in the employment profiles and the diversity characteristics, and now we can tell you the level of diversity that can be achieved if that segment of society were available.

Now, this has absolutely nothing to do with quotas or affirmative action. This is making under-representation actionable through an equity lens because what it does is once you can identify those areas where you're under-represented, the model walks you through a series of steps. It's going to ask you to look at historical hiring trends. It's going to ask you to look at if you've updated your position descriptions or your job characteristics. Have you looked at sexual harassment complaints because that impacts retention of talent, discrimination complaints, et cetera. And then we've also baked in a predictive analytic because we looked at projected census information, historical workforce information. Now we can tell you when we can reach population parity as well.

But really when you step back at the 30,000 foot level, George, what this does is it allows NSF to put a framework in place where we're going to continuously be competitive with the private sector, no offense John, but advancing the diversity dimensions, that's just an added benefit. So when you talk about that competitive nature, that's what that under-representation model is able to do for us.

George Jackson: John, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I would imagine you do want agencies like NSF to be competitive with the private sector. Am I reading that right?

John Newman: Yeah, definitely. I think it's critical. Well, you have to take a step back and understand what others are doing successfully in order to implement things within your own program, within your own organization. I think one part of that in understanding the, or standing out from the crowd and understanding that competitive lens is most importantly not putting all your eggs in one basket. We understand you have to have the dedicated workforce and the teams in order to be proactive with that approach. You have to leverage technology. You have to understand and know your audience. We've touched on those topics already, but think about it from, we've gone back to, again, internships and things like that of younger generations. Where are those younger generations? They're typically in schools and you have to partner with schools, you have to partner with diversity organizations to get access to those candidates in order to be able to tell that story.

I think it goes very much to Dr. Barber, we're preaching here about how NSF, it's really ingrained in everything they do. Diversity, equity, and inclusion is a part of

all of that, but you have to have the means to tell that story and explain that to everyone because not every candidate knows that, let alone do they even know what the National Science Foundation is all about. So again, not putting your eggs all in one basket, having the means in which to tell that story.

And then I think also another critical piece which we haven't really mentioned yet, is allowing data and metrics to really help advance that strategy. And again, it goes back to technology. If you don't have technology, if you have a very manual process in place and a very reactive approach, you have no data, you have no metrics. And what senior leaders across organizations are saying is, "Oh, where is this talent coming from? We hired these people. They seem to be great. Where'd you find them?" No one really knows the answer to that. So you have to have a data-driven approach and strategy and process built out. Everything going back to the very beginning, to sourcing and finding talent, to engaging and pipe-lining with talent, to speeding up the actual process after a candidate has applied. And you have to have the means and visibility across the entire spectrum to allow the data to tell that story and ultimately make those changes within your process.

Charles Barber: Yeah, quantitative and qualitative data, both-

Wonzie Gardner: Yes. Yeah.

Charles Barber: Both types of data.

John Newman: Absolutely.

George Jackson: Juansie, I cut you off a moment ago there, sir. You want to jump in on that?

Wonzie Gardner: Yeah. I sure do.

George Jackson: The employee recruitment.

Wonzie Gardner: Yeah. And I just wanted to echo something. I want to make sure that my colleague, Chuck gets the credit for this. He always talks about diversity being the outcome, DEI being the outcome. And that is so critical in a merit based system where the best candidate rises up. We want to make sure to... Because I think Chuck hit on this, we want to make sure that we're not looking for a quota, we're not looking for anything like that. We're looking for the best candidate. And I think when you expand your pools and you look at DEI as being an outcome versus an input, and we ingrained what we're doing, it's so very important.

One of the things that I want to talk about a little bit here is that, in our enterprise, there is sometimes a rub between the CIO and the Chico that's not here. We are like symbiotic twins here. We are aligned at the hip because I know what Chuck is trying to do. It assists me in doing my job and vice versa,

because it's more important than just a hire. We got to make sure that we have a diversity of thought, diversity in all kind of things. When we look at a person, we look at our actions. Because I've been taught a long time ago, when I get varying views and perspectives about a issue or situation, I can come with a good decision because I'm getting various views. And it goes back to what John said about the data as well. It gives varying views. I get the data. I can make decisions based on data and based on what my people are seeing, the experience when I'm looking at that. I found that when people start thinking like me, I'm in trouble.

I'm always asking my staff, "Push back on me. Tell me something different." Because when they can't do that, they're not thinking the way they should be. Because as a Chico and as a senior leader, it's our responsibility to make sure that we're not just getting a bunch of yes men. I'm looking for original thought. If it's not original thought, tell me why I'm doing what I'm doing makes sense. And if it doesn't, then we have a issue there. So Chuck, I really appreciate you making that comment about diversity being the output of our conversations.

Charles Barber: And to me Juansie, it differentiates efforts that focus on organizational change work from just being perceived as activism.

Wonzie Gardner: Yes.

Charles Barber: It's important.

George Jackson: John, one topic we also haven't covered yet, and I'm going to just give a little context here. I've been covering public sector now for about 12 years, and in year one, this was a topic, they called it the "gray wave," which meant coming retirement of federal employees. And maybe that's happened in a number of different waves since then. But what actions are currently being taken around this filling the gaps idea for retirees, for general turnover? How have those changed over time?

John Newman: Well, I think a couple things. One, it's no surprise that, I believe it's more than 30% of the federal workforce is eligible for retirement in the next five years, and that's a huge, huge, huge red flag. But it goes back to, again, how are you replacing that workforce and the organizations who already have the dedicated resources from a recruitment and outreach standpoint to go out and find that next generation of talent, and you have the vacancies and you have the ability to fill those positions with younger generations of folks. You have to start there.

But then again, it goes back to what I talked about earlier of understanding that audience. We hear, some federal organizations that we work with are not only just engaging with candidates at the college level and even the entry level, but you have organizations who are interacting with high school students and looking at different STEM programs and really, again, without even... Some of these candidates aren't even eligible to apply for a position, obviously, but it's

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part of that employer brand and getting your name out there to build that trust along the way. So that when these candidates are eligible to apply for a position in three, five, seven years time, they know, "Oh, hey, NSF helped us out with this," or, "I remember this high school course that I took, and NSF came in and spoke and gave a presentation about this." Those are the connecting pieces, I think, when I said earlier about Gen Z values authenticity. Those are the pieces that they're going to remember and help you set yourself up for success and ultimately build up those pipelines to replace that aging workforce that's eligible to retire.

George Jackson: Dr. Barber, I want to pull on another thread that John raised earlier too, about data and metrics and the use of them to advance strategy. For you, what role does data play in tracking, in achieving successful-

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George Jackson: ... play in tracking, in achieving successful DEIA, and hiring goals inside NSF?

Charles Barber: I would tell you, again, whether it's quantitative data or qualitative data. Using the data makes conversations in this space evidence-based and not just opinion-based. That is so important because that's going to also help to keep conversations consistently constructive. Anytime that you can use data to not just be data driven, but to be data informed, and then ultimately data inspired, that is absolutely important and why data plays such a critical role in being able to drive success in the DEIA space.

George Jackson: Wonzie, you mentioned the C-Suite and your work on communication with those folks earlier in the program, and I'm wondering if those types of conversations are happening between you and the agency's chief information officer, or the agency's chief data officer, or folks that hold similar titles. Are you having conversations about data? And what do they put in front of you to help better inform decisions more broadly about hiring, about recruiting the right people, and the speed with which you're doing that?

Wonzie Gardner: Chuck will tell you, we have those conversations all the time on our executive leadership team. And so much so that, we consider ourselves a small agency right now, and as you mentioned earlier with the CHIPS and Science Act, there's a lot of money that potentially is going to come to NSF. So we want to position ourselves in a way that we can be most responsive to the American taxpayer, most responsive to the frontiers of science, and even more responsive to how we onboard, how we maintain our staff.

One of the things that we're doing that we've talked about is we're going to hire another senior executive to takeover all of IT. When I got here in 2014, I had what we call operational IT, the IT infrastructure, some applications, and then we had a CIO that looked strategically outward facing and things. But to be a larger, more mature organization, we need to put all that IT together and add

that data piece to it, and the CDO or the CTO, all that will be housed in one area, so we can have that person have a higher focus on both our IT instruction and data analytics moving forward.

Your question about how we look at data, that's going to, as Chuck mentioned, inform some of the decisions we make as far as how we hire people. One of the things we talk about is having more data analytics or data scientists on board to help us look at the data. Because without those type of people that can interpret the data and use the data the right way, it's just really just more information. So we've got to make sure that we hire the right people to do that.

And so, one of the things we've made a committed effort, is to hire more data scientists at NSF, at the right strategic location, where we can actually look at our data, tell what it's forecasting. We'll be more predictive than reactive. And also, so we can make the decisions on our human capital management on the data we're seeing as we move forward.

And to John's point earlier about our recruitment and things with people start retiring, we're letting the data drive that because all of our occupation skills are not retiring at the same time. We got to look at that and we got to ask ourselves which ones are the most critical. All our jobs are valuable, but some jobs are more critical than others. So we're going to let data drive to us on how we need to look at that and how we need to support that.

Because John, just like in the private sector, I too am concerned about, "The graining," of the rest of the federal enterprise, because a lot of us are getting up there, where we can retire. We want to make sure that we leave something for those behind us, because in the federal government, we learn by apprenticeship, we learn by seeing what others are doing, we learn by experiences that others have gone through to make sure we get there, because there's really no manual how to do that, because we have the technical skills, but the federal government's has retired different visas. You know it is. And so, we got to make sure that we have those apprentice type programs, where people can learn how to work in the federal space.

George Jackson: Dr. Barber, I want to come to you in just a moment because I think there's a cultural component to this that really ties everything together. But before I do, John, step back a bit from NSF, step back a bit for a moment from DEIA initiatives, and talk about the end state as far as data monitoring. How do organizations gauge success around these larger initiatives?

John Newman: Yeah, it's a really good question. Again, data is everything, and you have to understand it in order to make those changes and improve your own processes.

Take for example, I mentioned earlier, you can't put all your eggs in one basket, and let's just talk about a proactive strategy of organizations going out to and investing in recruitment events. You have campuses, you have diversity

organizations, you have tons and tons of different ways to interact and engage with candidates at the upfront, and really kind of tell your story for that very first initial interaction, which is so critical to the process and pipeline and candidates effectively.

But as you build out that strategy and you go to dozens of recruitment events, and some of our customers quite frankly go to hundreds and hundreds of recruitment events, it depends on how you're set up and if you have the bandwidth to do so, but you have to understand the output of that and the success of that. So whether you're going to five to 10 recruitment events per year or you're going to dozens or even hundreds of recruitment events per year, you have to know the outcomes of that.

And at the end of the day, when someone asks you, a senior level executive says, "Oh, hey, how was that event last week? Did we get any hires? Did we find anyone?" If you're not leveraging technology, once again, you have no way of really telling that story. Perhaps you're giving your response based on what your mood was, and if you were in a good mood last week or not, or you had a couple great interactions, but a couple of sour interactions. Let the data tell that story, so you have more of a quantitative approach in saying, "Okay, hey, we went to this two or three day recruitment event, we engaged with 150 candidates. Of those 150 candidates, 25% of those were what we consider top tier or top quality candidates. We extended this many on the spot offers at this recruitment event," and so on and so forth. That tells your story. That tells your return on the investment.

It's not inexpensive to go to recruitment events and to create this process and this strategy. And you have to be able to tell the return on the investment in order to make it effective. If you go out there and spend tens of thousands of dollars and just partner with schools because they're part of an alumni network, or you say, "Okay, hey, we need to partner with HBCUs," but you don't know the outputs of what those HBCUs are and which HBCUs are the best for your strategy specifically, in filling your vacancies, you have to have the data there in order to tell the story. And ultimately, as you invest in more and more technology, there's an investment in all of it, and you have to know what the return is on that investment overall.

George Jackson: Dr. Barber, culture can be somewhat tough to measure, although there are things like the federal employee viewpoint survey, that certainly put data behind a lot of those bigger areas. Talk about culture and its role in this larger conversation we're having.

Charles Barber: Well, well first of all, whenever this panel is viewed, if you listen to what John and what Wonzie and what I've said to some folks, they're going to have a very comprehensive people and culture strategy, because everything that we've talked about today would actually wrap up into a very nice people and culture strategy for an organization.

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I mean, if you think about success of agencies to include NSF, the culture that has gotten us to where we are today is not the same culture that's going to get us to where we're going. Wonzie and I talk about this on a daily basis. We get it.

And this is also the reason why we're going to get ready to pivot our DEI efforts into more of a culture... Culture is the underpinning of everything that we do in terms of DEIA. That's going to help us with sustainment. And so, being able to kind of tie all these things to culture, and a more sustainable way, that's what's going to make this work enduring and long-term and not just episodic.

George Jackson: Wonzie, what did we miss?

Wonzie Gardner: I don't think that we missed anything, to be quite honest, because this is the ongoing conversation. One that needs to be had by leaders across the entire spectrum, whether you're in the private industry industry or in the public sector.

And one of the things I liked about what Chuck said, and one of the things he's ingrained in my head, if I follow the data and look at what the data's telling me, not data I've created internally, but from the Census Bureau and other places like that, I can talk about diversity in a way that's non-threatening to everyone. Let's be honest guys, DEIA is one of those topics where people get very uncomfortable if the ground rules are not set.

One of the things that I think NSF has been so blessed with, and I know Chuck is doing a lot of this in the federal enterprise too, his maturity model, what he talks about when he talks about diversity, equity, inclusion, access, accessibility, it puts in a framework that's not threatening to people. It has nothing to do with my perspective, but everything to do with what my business model, my business goals are, how I'm going to do that.

So we're trying to look at DEI from a cultural standpoint, of it's who we are. It's what we say we do. It's about improving our mission. Because, again, when we bring in people from across America's quilt, we bring those kinds of things people in, we are making sure that we're reaching all parts of America. We're making sure that we're all represented, not for representation's sake, but just because we bring more to bear to this mission, to our agents, to our organization when we look across the spectrum.

I once had a boss that told me this. He says, "Wonzie, when I start hiring people that look like me to think like me my organization dies. If I want my organization to live, I've got to hire people that not only think like me, but people that think counter to what I'm thinking, so I can make sure that we're looking at things from all perspectives. Because when you look at things from one lens only, you lose out."

So hiring a Chuck Barber, for example, the NSF, for hiring someone from mid-America, hiring someone from the deep south, hiring someone from the

northwest. At NSF, that's what makes us great. So we've got a real unique culture.

And I'm going to end on this last note, we weren't number two in the best places to work for nothing. We did it because we put these things into practice. We did it because we want to make sure that we're doing the right thing for the right reason, to move our mission forward. So I'm just proud of this conversation. John, Chuck, I'm honored to be here with you guys. I've had a ball talking about this subject with you guys.

George Jackson: John, any final thoughts?

John Newman: I'd be reiterating everything that's already been discussed. I think, again, it's just so very critical for organizations to stay proactive in their approach, think outside the box, partner with industry in ways that maybe you haven't done so before, be open to change, and allow data to tell a story. Technology is everything. If you're not embracing it, quite frankly, you're very far behind in the times. And it's an important way to set yourself up, and set yourself up for success for the future when it comes to recruiting and hiring talent.

George Jackson: Well, America's quilt fused with data, you've been watching how embracing DEIA and early talent strengthens and empowers the federal workforce.

I've had a great group of guests today, Dr. Barber, Wonzie Gardner, John Newman. Thank you, all three, for being here. Really appreciate your time and insights,

Charles Barber: Great discussion. Thank you.

John Newman: Appreciate it.

George Jackson: And thank you, our audience, for tuning in. Be sure to keep an eye on GovExec for continuing coverage of the top hiring issues. Final thank you to Yello for helping make conversations like this one possible. For GovExec, I'm George Jackson. Have a great day.

John Newman: All right, and thanks everyone for joining that first segment. This next segment will be taking you through some of Yello's technology offerings to further provide an understanding of how Yello is being leveraged across the federal government to streamline recruiting and hiring processes for many organizations.

First and foremost, I think one important piece to cover and understand is that Yello is a FedRAMP authorized solution. We obtained our FedRAMP authorization in April of 2022, something that we're very proud of. It took several years to obtain this, and Yello is FedRAMP authorized.

In talking a little bit more about Yello's technology and really just defining what is Yello. Easily put, Yello is a talent acquisition software designed to simplify the recruiting and hiring process. When you think about recruiting and hiring, that can mean a lot of different things, as far as streamlining and simplifying, but Yello is really designed to serve as more of a one-stop shop to help organizations add more efficiency overall, whether that's from helping organizations effectively source and find talent, proactively create pipelines of future talent and drive more engagement with that talent, or advancing that talent through a hiring funnel to streamline that overall process and ultimately speed up that process to fill positions.

Yello really serves as a one-stop shop to help organizations get there. As an organization, we've been around for more than 15 years, and we really got our start in the public sector around 2017 or '18 timeframe, when... At the time, we worked with one federal agency, and now we're working with more than 40 federal agencies to help with that overall streamlining of capabilities.

Quick glimpse into some of the organizations. We'll speak to a handful of these different use cases here today, but obviously that's grown tremendously over time and we've put a lot of work and effort into that and into those different use cases.

As far as a customer use case and just understanding more of how Yello's used across the federal government, this success story, I think helps to tell a lot of that story. This particular DOD civilian organization really had no proactive recruiting and hiring strategy prior to utilizing Yello, and they built out a team and put the resources forward, but also realized the need to have technology in order to get those end results. And they really, in a nutshell, took a 180-day hiring process and brought it down to around 45 to 60 days by utilizing Yello's capabilities. And even ahead of just the hiring and speeding up that process, one of their main goals was to really create a proactive environment to get their name out there and focus on their brand and partner with schools and universities and organizations to recruit talent and build out those proactive pipelines to drive more engagement and ultimately fill higher quality candidates.

In looking at the overall product offering of Yello, we focus on four different areas, and it really kind of is designed to focus on everything from the top of the funnel of sourcing and finding talent to, again, pipelining that talent, and then helping streamline the application process and speed up the time to fill open vacancies.

So in subsequent slides, I'll take you through more of these individual capabilities, but starting from the left to the right, Yello offers a sourcing database, which you can license access to, which immediately gives you access to more than seven million candidates within this platform.

A couple of unique call-outs about this particular database is that it's very heavily focused on the DE&I component, and more than 70% of the seven million candidates in this database identify as underrepresented minorities.

Another interesting call out within this database is the focus on early talent, and more than 90% of this database are candidates who are either active students or most recently graduated within the last one to four years.

In addition to that, Yello has an event management capability, which again, in the theme of today's conversation and being proactive, allows organizations not only to go out to events, but take a technology-first approach and really digitizing that entire experience out at recruitment events. Whether that strategy is for in-person events or virtual events, however you're initially interacting with candidates, the goal here is to...

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John Newman: However, you're initially interacting with candidates. The goal here is to centralize that entire effort and digitize it across the entire strategy and ultimately understanding the return on that investment and how and where you're interacting with candidates.

CRM stands for candidate relationship management, and this is a really critical piece to centralizing all of the efforts and building out those proactive pipelines. So when you go out to all these recruitment events, when you're sourcing from different databases and finding that talent, traditionally, everything lives in different places. And Yello CRM is designed to centralize every candidate that you've ever engaged with and bring them into one specific place that's a searchable and filterable database where you're organizing those talent pipelines.

Once you have that talent organized in one single place, the goal here is to drive more engagement with these candidates and nurture these candidates with the goal of converting them from prospects and leads and candidates and actually into applicants through your different channels and means of engagement. Last but not least would be the application management offering. And this is typically leveraged for organizations who are leveraging direct hire authority or have direct hire authority eligible positions.

And again, instead of managing this process in various spreadsheets or a SharePoint site behind the scenes, the idea is to manage it all centrally in one place. This is a workflow-based module and solution that really allows for when a candidate first applies to a position to by way of a workflow, progress them through all the different steps and statuses and hiring statuses until an ultimate hiring selection has been made on that particular candidate. But it helps from a leadership level understand how many candidates are in our pipeline, how many candidates have applied for these positions, where are they in this, what's

part of the process are they in how long have they been in these steps and statuses, and potentially what changes can we make to help speed up that overall process to streamline everything again from start to finish.

Last but not least, the solution also does integrate with USAJobs, and we can speak to that here in subsequent slides. So to go back a little bit more in-depth on these different modules, I'll just take you through a couple of slides and introduce this at a high level. So the Yello sourcing database, again, this is just a quick peek into what that looks like, but really offers you a place to streamline that overall process in sourcing and finding candidates.

Again, the unique call-outs here of more than 70% of the database identify as underrepresented minorities. This database is also comprised of candidates from more than 7,000 campuses across the country. And again, more than 90% of the database identify as either students or recent graduates. But a couple of unique pieces here behind the scenes is that this is a continually growing database. On average around 20,000 new users are added to this platform every single week, and it's really helping organizations connect with candidates and also connect candidates with employers who have licensed access here.

Moving to the event management piece, I think this is a critical area in which organizations, federal agencies specifically have begun to think of that proactive strategy in putting together a framework and an infrastructure in which allows them to go out to campuses and schools and organizations and partner with diversity organizations to meet and interact with candidates. And as you build out that strategy as an organization, again, it's paramount that you're leveraging technology to understand what's working and what's not working. So if you think about all the different capabilities tied to that, I'll first go through more of an in-person process, and this visual helps to really tell the story and understand our whole premise with Yello and leveraging technologies for organizations never to deal with paper again.

We don't want you to have to collect a paper resume and then manually behind the scenes scan it and upload it to a system in the backend; we want to digitize everything from the initial interaction with candidates and capturing their information on a digital intake form all the way through ranking and scoring those candidates by way of having that quick initial interaction with them and then automating all the follow-up thereafter.

And then if you take this more in a virtual approach as well, really again, centralizing everything from all of your in-person interactions as well as virtual interactions with candidates and streamlining that approach where all candidates are residing in one central place. From a process flow standpoint, I've obviously touched on the visual of the digital check-in, but there's a lot more that goes into managing recruitment events overall that someone at your organization is ultimately responsible for, everything from pre-event and identifying which events to even participate in to the administrative

components and understanding what staff members are going to attend those events. Are we engaging in any additional presentations outside of the event, inviting candidates proactively to register or RSVP for that event ahead of time.

Again, the idea is to centralize everything in one specific place and draw out more of a streamlined approach from start to finish with all of your interactions with candidates. Whether that's an in-person event and you're interacting with candidates there, or again, you're maybe hosting a webinar info session about your organization and candidates are interacting with you in a virtual capacity, the goal is to streamline every candidate interaction into one place and automate all your follow-ups thereafter.

Just quickly, virtually, a lot of organizations are also leveraging our capabilities. Again, whether it be info sessions or virtual classroom presentations or coffee chats, just another means to proactively set yourself up for success as an organization and get your name out there rather than maybe relying on the traditional career fair that's been around for decades now, but another way to really kind of stand out against the competition and getting your name out there and interacting with candidates in a more proactive manner.

So now that we've effectively stood up a strategy and we're participating in recruitment events, we're digitizing that process, we're able to understand the return on the investment, which we'll get into more data and metrics here momentarily. This is another means in which you're kind of taking this to the next step, and that's getting into more of the candidate relationship management piece. And as you cast that wider net to find and source the talent from events, from databases and whatnot, it's really critical to have that centralization and bringing all your candidates into one searchable database and creating more of that, what I like to call like a resume database or resume bank in which you can find all those candidates interactions. And we have customers who have participated in, again, dozens of recruitment events or in some cases hundreds of recruitment events, and they've interacted with tens of thousands of candidates over the last several years.

Well, rather than just simply meeting a candidate at an event and encouraging them to go find your jobs in USAJobs and go apply, it's really important, and where organizations are setting themselves apart are by really owning those follow-up interactions and leveraging the technology to reach mass audiences within the CRM component. And one key takeaway within this is not only just building the pipelines and organizing those talent databases by tags and folders and different ways to organize the talent, but it's driving more engagement and nurturing content with candidates.

So within the Yello database, you have different communication template libraries in which you can drive ongoing content to those candidates, and that can be in a one-off fashion or in more, again, strategically campaign fashion where you are engaging with candidates by email campaigns and text messaging

campaigns. And a lot of the data tells us that on average, it takes around seven to 10 touch points for a candidate to actually interact with your brand and your organization. So again, it goes back to the whole idea of being proactive and building out that recruitment and outreach program and having the content and engaging an authentic content that interacts with those candidates with the goal of converting them into applicants longer term.

But going back to the data, it's understanding the success of that. So all of these efforts so far from understanding the success of an individual recruitment event to driving more engagement and understanding what type of content is in, is interacting with candidates and what type of content are candidates more tuned to respond to, and understanding that overall data-driven approach to ultimately get to that proactive piece of building out those proactive talent pipelines.

Last but not least would be getting into the application management piece. And I think this is a critical piece really beyond the actual application process. So everything up to this point has been more pre-application and more front-end-facing of building out your brand, building out your presence, sourcing talent proactively, organizing that talent, driving more engagement. But what happens with the actual application process, and a lot of organizations who are leveraging direct hire authority eligible positions and taking advantage of that are using Yello to capture the candidate's information rather than, for example, having a note on your career page to submit your resume or submit your transcript to this generic email inbox and we'll monitor this manually and keep an eye out and interact with you.

This technology and capability here allows you to capture the candidate's information in a Yello-powered application. And again, they enter into a workflow to a customized workflow to help manage that entire application and hiring process from a completed applicant all the way up until a hiring selection has been made. So this visual just gives you a bit of an example of what a workflow might look like. And again, when leadership turns around and asks the question, how many people have applied to these positions, where are we in the process, how long has it taken, with a very quick glimpse into different dashboards and data points, you have the answers to all those questions right at your fingertips.

This would be an example of a Yello-powered job board page. So again, when you're promoting your positions, the amount of times we see organizations who have a careers page on their website, and from a candidate-facing perspective, it says, look at our vacancies or check-out our openings on USAJobs. One of the challenges with that is, again, you're a lot of times you're not doing enough to differentiate yourself as an organization. And this example here, you have a customer-branded page where all of your job vacancies reside, and this is where the integration with USAJobs comes into play. You can pull preexisting vacancies from USAJobs into Yello as well as those direct hire authority eligible positions

and capturing that process for candidates very seamlessly. So from a candidate perspective, they would very simply see your job vacancies that exist, click on the job description, understand if this might or might not be a fit for them.

And then in the event that a candidate is required or this position is required to go out to USAJobs, very simply a candidate would be redirected to USAJobs to complete that actual application in that position over in USAJobs. Alternatively, rather than having a candidate submit an email to an inbox that you're maybe manually monitoring on the backend, those candidates can also submit their information in a Yello-powered application, which would then enter into the workflow that you saw previously. You'd be notified anytime a new candidate hits that inbox or hits that workflow. And then you can subsequently progress those candidates in that workflow and added visibility, but ultimately streamline the overall process and engagement with those candidates. But really what all this leads to is again, the big topic of conversation in the first segment is around understanding the data and allowing the data to help you position yourself successfully and stand out from the competition.

And one thing that Yello does, I think extremely well is create those insights and understanding what's working and what's not working. So if we think about that from everything that we've talked about here today, now if an organization is leveraging technology, they have a quick glimpse into, again, what's working and what's not working. And if you think about that just from an event-recruiting standpoint, and for an example here where an organization is maybe participating in dozens of recruitment events or hundreds of recruitment events, and there's maybe a blended approach of virtual events as well as in-person events, need to know, do in-person events perform better, do virtual event perform be better? Is a traditional career fair the best way to interact with a candidate, or should we host more of our own info sessions and webinars to get our name out there proactively if we have the resources to do so?

Again, the data tells the story and what's working and what's not working. Everything from that first interaction with a candidate at a recruitment event in sourcing and finding those candidates to the number of touch points it takes for a candidate to actually apply to a position and allowing the data and the reporting to help tell that story and set yourself up for success as an organization down the road. So these are just example metrics that are pulled out of a Yello-powered environment for organizations to understand those takeaways and overall results. And as you begin to mature in that strategy and you're going out to recruitment events, I think a very important takeaway is understanding again, the event types and what types of interactions are actually creating a higher conversion rate into candidates who are ultimately applying for those hard-to-fill positions. And again, the data helps you tell that story and really understand that.

And even outside of the events, it all goes back to being proactive and leveraging technology to help tell your story and get your name out there. And

in this example here, you have tons and tons of data and metrics around all of your different proactive pipelines that you've built, and how many candidates are in your pipeline pool, how many candidates are you engaging with, how many touch points does it take. If you look at this, not only at the individual touchpoint level, but over the course of a week or month or several months or over a course of a year, even when in the year is the best time to interact with candidates, to where are the candidates typically dropping off in the process, but again, really leading you to more of that data-driven understanding to help mature your organization, understand what's working and what's not.

So with that, again, Yello is being leveraged in many, many different use cases. It's very rare that a customer comes to us and says, Hey, we need to streamline the entire process from start to finish. So we take more of an approach to really identify what the challenges are and then really align those different modules that you just saw here today and helping kind of prove success initially, but then also look at a near-term approach, but then also a longer term approach in determining what success might look like.

So with that, that concludes everything from an overview portion. We highly encourage you to interact with us. My contact information is here listed below. You can also learn more on our website at yello.co/government-recruiting. You can request subsequent demos from us and our team would interact with you furthermore, to understand what your needs are and ultimately take a deeper dive into the solution with you.

With that, thank you all for your time, and thanks for joining conversation today.

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