Accenture Public Services Insights

Recruiting and Retaining Talent in the Public Sector: The Differences that Make the Difference

High performance. Delivered.
In a recent survey of more than 70 public sector leaders from 18 states, Accenture found that roughly two-thirds (64%) reported that it was difficult to attract and retain talent. Only one in 10 felt prepared to meet their talent management challenges. Those challenges are most acute for filling management and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) occupations.

What can be done to help public sector leaders attract and retain the talent they need?

THE OPPORTUNITY. Research shows that public sector leaders should focus on the differences that make the biggest difference to attract and retain the workforce they need to deliver public service for the future.

Good News, Bad News
When it comes to judging whether work in the public sector is attractive, experience matters. Accenture recently surveyed 1,103 US-voting age citizens about working in the public sector. Nearly half of those who are employed or have been employed in the public sector say it is an attractive place to work. But among those with no experience in government work, only 20% said they would find work in the public sector attractive.

Figure 1 visually demonstrates the scale of this “experience gap.”

This gap points to an opportunity to improve the public sector “brand” to attract those without experience.

At the same time, however, this research shows that getting people hired is not enough—their experience on the job matters as well. While half of those with experience in government described working in the public sector as attractive, the other half were either neutral (28%) or considered such work unattractive (24%).

For public service leaders on the dual horns of this dilemma, what can be done to better attract those with no experience while at the same time retaining the talent they already have? Our research offers key insights.
The Differences that Make the Difference

The public sector continues to have the edge when it comes to job security, benefits and retirement as attractive attributes. By the same token, public sector attractiveness is hurt by compensation, but other attributes of public sector employment are equally or more important—especially those that determine the nature of the work experience. They are the differences that make the difference (see Figure 2).

When it comes to retaining talent, our research indicates, not surprisingly, that more than six in 10 citizens identify “regular compensation increases” as important. However, the next six most important retention factors focus on the nature of the experience (see Figure 3).
In Summary
Public service leaders already recognize that defining, discovering, developing and deploying talent will be the greatest challenge they face if they are to successfully deliver public service for the future. Our research shows that to succeed they must:

1. Attract a larger percentage of people to public service—especially millennials
2. Retain those they do attract by enhancing their experience on the job

In doing both of these they can build on the public sector’s traditional strengths with respect to job security, benefits and retirement. But those alone will not be enough. They will also need to greatly enhance the attractiveness of those job attributes that can make an even bigger difference, including:

- Effectiveness of leadership and mentoring
- Length and simplicity of the recruiting and hiring process (2/3 of people want it to be 8 weeks or less)
- Opportunities for professional development and career advancement
- Flexibility of work arrangements
- Opportunity to do challenging work

Methodology
In March 2015, Accenture conducted an online survey of US voting-age citizens. The purpose of the study: to gauge citizen attitudes toward public sector careers and employment, identify factors that make public sector employment attractive, and determine how to improve recruitment and retention of public sector employees. Study results are based on a census-representative sample of 1,103 US voting-age citizens. Results for citizens are statistically significant with a confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

As part of the same study, Accenture surveyed public service leaders to identify talent management approaches they use, compare their perspective to citizen attitudes and preferences, and determine how to improve recruitment and retention of public sector employees. Results are based on an online survey completed by 72 leaders from 18 states and the city of New York in March and April 2015.

Reference
1 http://www.icmarc.org/documents/educcom/briefing201210.pdf

For More Information
To learn more about the Accenture Public Services Pulse Survey or Accenture’s offerings for state, local and federal government visit: www.accenture.com/PublicService

About Accenture
Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with more than 336,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world’s most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. The company generated net revenues of US$30.0 billion for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 2014. Its home page is www.accenture.com.