

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.

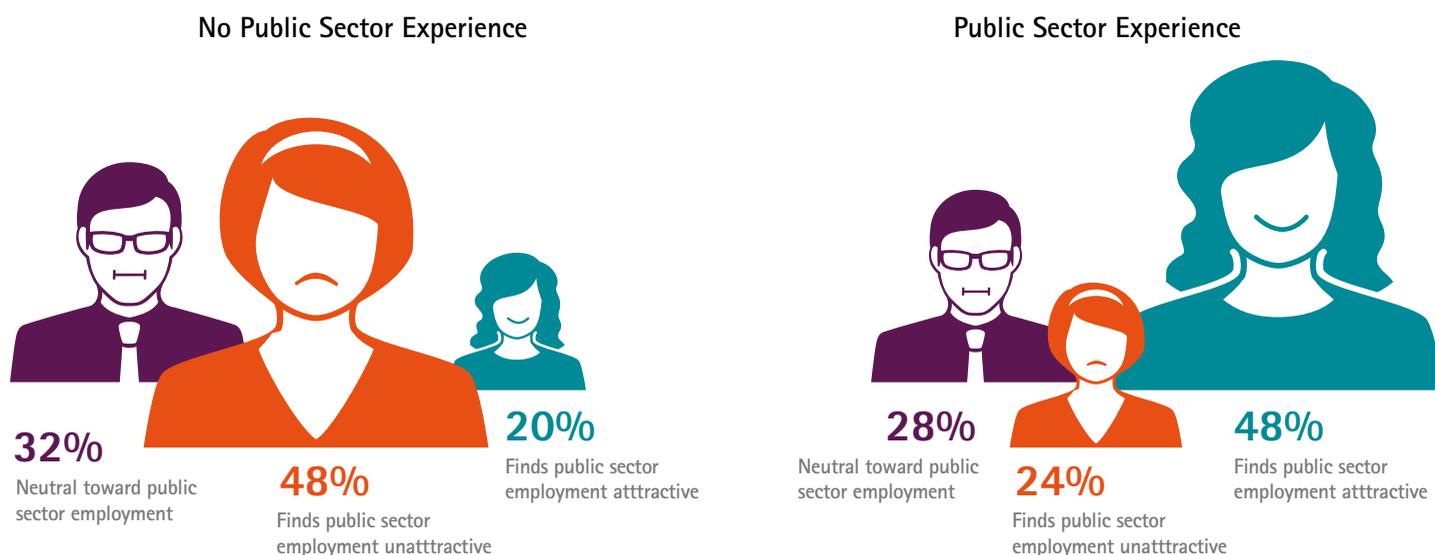
Figure 1 visually demonstrates the scale of this "experience gap."

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.

Figure 1. How attractive is public sector employment to you?

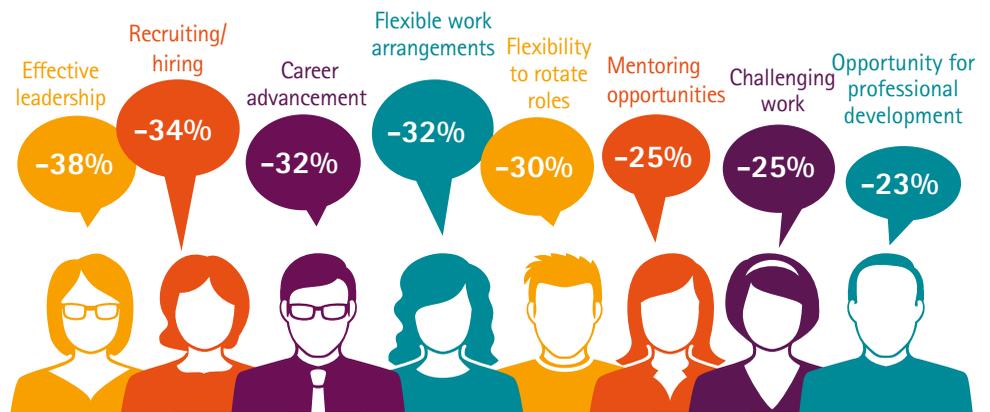


## The Differences that Make the Difference

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).

Figure 2. Attributes that most affect attractiveness of public sector employment vs. private

Difference in the population that finds public sector employment attractive compared to private sector employment



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).

Figure 3. Factors influencing retention

% Important



## The Millennial Factor

Millennials are becoming the largest generation in our workforce and will therefore be the focus for much of our new hiring. With so many baby boom employees in the public sector getting ready to retire, the perceptions and experiences of millennials take on even greater significance. From our survey and other research we know that:

1. A smaller percentage of millennials have public sector experience than citizens 45 and older, and the population as a whole. In fact, while those under 30 already represent 26 percent of the private sector workforce, they are only 14 percent in state and local government<sup>1</sup>. Thus, in the battle for talent the public sector is trailing its private sector competitors.

2. Millennials are more interested in STEM occupations than are citizens over 60.
3. Millennials are less likely to be attracted to the public sector by benefits and retirement options and are less likely to be motivated by compensation when it comes to retention. That means that other work attributes will make a bigger difference for them.

Conclusion: For millennials, the nature of the experience—effectiveness of leaders, the recruiting/ hiring process, flexibility of work arrangements, opportunities for professional development and career advancement—can provide the difference that makes the difference.

## 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

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.icmarc.org/documents/educomm/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](http://www.accenture.com/PublicService)

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