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Written statement prepared for

**The House Committee on Oversight and Reform**

**Subcommittee on Government Operations**

Hearing entitled,

**“The Future of Federal Work”**

December 1, 2021

## Introduction

Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the Subcommittee on Government Operations, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee to discuss the future of federal work. My name is Michelle Amante and I am the Vice President of Federal Workforce Programs at the Partnership for Public Service. The Partnership is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to building a better government and a stronger democracy. To achieve this mission, we work to inspire a new generation to pursue public service, develop federal leaders and help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal government.

The Partnership was founded on the premise that any organization's best asset is its people, and our programs and research empower federal employees with the skills, knowledge and networks they need to fulfill their agency's mission and serve the public. The Partnership offers a variety of programs to strengthen federal employees' leadership skills, prepare them to build strong teams and empower them to work across organizational boundaries. We also work with agencies on issues such as attracting top talent, engaging and supporting their workforce and fostering innovation. For example, our cross-sector Cybersecurity Talent Initiative<sup>1</sup>—a public-private partnership with Mastercard, Microsoft, Workday, and Accenture—provides recent graduates in cybersecurity-related fields with an initial two-year placement at a federal agency. Before the end of their federal service, participants are provided opportunities for full-time employment with the program's private sector partners. The Call to Serve Network,<sup>2</sup> a community of more than 700 colleges and universities, connects federal agencies with institutions of higher education to promote federal service and recruit the next generation of public servants. And in partnership with the Boston Consulting Group, we produce the annual Best Places to Work in the Federal Government<sup>®3</sup> rankings, which track federal employee views of their agencies over time and help highlight best practices that drive employee engagement and agency success. Through these and many other initiatives, we help federal employees achieve better outcomes for the people they serve.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the country in unprecedented ways, upending traditional patterns of working, living and governing. As our government responded to the pandemic, changes in how the federal workforce does the people's business have happened at warp speed. As we move past the initial disruption caused by the pandemic, we must sustain and build on innovations spurred by the need to respond to COVID-19. If we seize the moment, our government will have an opportunity to recruit talented individuals wherever they are and build a federal workforce that better reflects the diversity of our country. We can create a culture more in line with today's mobile workforce, spur innovation and use of new technologies, develop more customer-focused services and strengthen the federal government's collaboration with state, local and tribal governments as well as the private and non-profit sectors.

Throughout the pandemic, the work of our federal community has been showcased to the world, from developing a vaccine in record time to collaborating across government to get vital services to the public. We should leverage the moment to bring a new bench of talent into public service. Federal jobs offer mission-driven work with opportunities to help solve the biggest challenges facing our nation, including a

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<sup>1</sup> Partnership for Public Service, Cybersecurity Talent Initiative. Retrieved from <https://cybertalentinitiative.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Partnership for Public Service, Call to Serve. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/programs/call-to-serve-colleges-and-universities/>.

<sup>3</sup> Partnership for Public Service, Best Places to Work in the Federal Government. Retrieved from <https://bestplacetowork.org/>.

pandemic. In 2020 and earlier this year, the Partnership released multiple reports<sup>4</sup> showcasing examples of government innovation and adaptation to serve the American people amid the worst public health crisis in a century. Leaders supported the rapid adoption of new and existing technologies, employees found smarter and better ways to overcome obstacles to serve the public, and there was an unprecedented level of collaboration among agencies, across levels of government and between the public and private sectors. While some aspects of the government’s response did not meet initial success or continue to evolve, what’s clear is that the “future of work” is already here. We must build upon government’s success stories and learn from areas where government has fallen short.

### **Challenges Facing the Federal Workforce**

The federal government has long struggled with recruitment, engagement, retention, innovation and leadership in managing its workforce. Since 2001, strategic human capital management has consistently appeared on the “High Risk List” produced every two years by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), primarily due to mission-critical skills gaps and the high percentage of employees eligible for retirement that threatens to erode the institutional knowledge and continuity needed to see long-term projects through to results. Presidents of both parties, including President Trump and President Biden, have made strengthening the federal workforce a key component of their President’s Management Agenda.

A Partnership for Public Service survey<sup>5</sup> of 300 government leaders during the pandemic found these leaders facing challenges and gaps that were present before COVID-19 hit, including a shortage of employees with skills related to emerging technologies, data science, change management and business process reengineering. The respondents cited a number of barriers to overcoming these challenges, including the lengthy federal hiring process, uncompetitive compensation compared to the private sector, a lack of qualified candidates applying to fill open roles, insufficient agency understanding of future skills needs and a dearth of relevant training programs.

Other key statistics on the federal workforce reinforce how much must be done to build the workforce of the future:

- Just 6.9% of full-time federal workers are under the age of 30. By comparison, almost 20% of the employed U.S. labor force in 2020 was under age 30. In the federal IT workforce, there are 16 times more employees over the age of 50 than under age 30.<sup>6</sup>
- On the other end of the spectrum, of the full-time employees on board as of the beginning of fiscal year 2019, 25% will be eligible to retire by the end of 2021; 35.4% will be eligible to retire by the end of 2024.
- Today, every federal agency has fewer employees under age 30 than they did in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see Bright Spots in the Federal Government’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/blog/the-federal-government-faced-down-pandemic-challenges-delivering-bright-spots-during-a-dark-time/>.

<sup>5</sup> Partnership for Public Service, American Council for Technology–Industry Advisory Council, and MeriTalk, “Resilient,” January, 2021. Retrieved from [https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Resilient\\_.pdf](https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Resilient_.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Statistics on federal employees are drawn from Office of Personnel Management FedScope data on the federal workforce unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>7</sup> Analytical Perspectives, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2022-PER/pdf/BUDGET-2022-PER.pdf>.

- To build stronger entry-level pipelines, government must pay its interns, yet the number of paid internships in government dropped from more than 60,000 in 2010 to about 4,000 in 2020.<sup>8</sup>
- Of the full-time employees under 30 who voluntarily quit federal service in fiscal year 2019, over 73% did so with less than 2 years of federal tenure, suggesting that many young people do not have a positive work experience in the federal government.
- Data also show major diversity challenges in the federal workforce, which grow even greater at the higher echelons of service. For example, only 36.1% of the career Senior Executive Service are female, and only 23% of the career SES are people of color.
- It takes the government an average of 98 days to bring new talent on board – more than double the time in the private sector.<sup>9</sup>
- The Partnership’s 2020 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® employee engagement score was 69 out of 100, lagging behind the private sector by 8 points and suggesting that more can be done to cultivate a highly engaged, high-performing federal workforce.
- About 83% of major federal departments and agencies struggle with staffing shortages and 63% report gaps in the knowledge and skills of their employees.<sup>10</sup>
- According to the Partnership’s 2020 Survey on the Future of Government Service, just 32% of senior government leaders say their agency has a strategic recruitment plan that is aligned to its workforce needs.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Pandemic Experience: Creating a Moment for Transformation**

COVID-19 was and continues to be a profound destabilizing force on the lives of the American people and the entire globe. Organizations of all sizes and across sectors have been forced to confront and answer unprecedented questions about how to continue doing work over the past two years. To maintain operations, enterprise leaders have grappled with how to protect the health of their employees so they remain able to perform their jobs, how to shield their clients and customers from infection in publicly-accessible settings, how to adapt to cascading challenges like lack of childcare and supply chain disruptions and how to adapt their organizations’ work to meet newly emerging public needs.

The pandemic has shown the dedication, resiliency and resourcefulness of the federal workforce. At many agencies, employees bravely remained on the front lines in jobs that cannot be performed remotely, while others—within the span of a few weeks—shifted to telework, under a framework established over a decade ago by the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010. According to the most recent Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, 59% of federal employee respondents reported that they teleworked every day during the peak of the pandemic compared to 3% before the pandemic.

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<sup>8</sup> Office of Management and Budget (OMB), “Analytical Perspectives, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2022.” Retrieved from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2022-PER/pdf/BUDGET-2022-PER.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Office of Personnel Management, “OPM Issues Updated Time-to-Hire Guidance,” February 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.opm.gov/news/releases/2020/02/opm-issues-updated-time-to-hire-guidance/>.

<sup>10</sup> Office of Personnel Management, “2018 Federal Workforce Priorities Report,” February 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/human-capital-management/federal-workforce-priorities-report/2018-federal-workforce-priorities-report.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Partnership for Public Service, “Survey on the Future of Government Service,” October 2020. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/survey-on-the-future-of-government-service/>.

Agencies that had long-term investments in distributed work teams seemed to transition to maximum telework more efficiently in March 2020. For example, the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) for years has allowed employees to work effectively and efficiently from home. Before the pandemic, the agency had 11,000 employees regularly working remotely at least one day a week—nearly 88% of its workforce. The agency had the knowledge and tools to quickly move to a virtual environment and used clear performance metrics and best practices for telework oversight and management. USPTO measures and best practices can be a model for agencies across government seeking to modernize their agencies' workforce and move into a hybrid work environment while setting high individual performance standards.

Moving forward, telework should be a key tool for attracting a qualified, diverse workforce from all areas of the country and from diverse backgrounds. Options to work remotely full- or part-time can encourage participation in the workforce by people who otherwise might have been excluded or discouraged from certain jobs. For example, telework allows the government to draw from diverse geographic applicant pools. While 85% of federal employees already live and work away from our nation's capital, telework allows federal offices to hire more deeply from their local communities. At the same time, it also allows talented individuals located outside of those areas to contribute to agency missions. As another example, telework can encourage workforce participation by individuals with disabilities whose accommodation needs keep them at home.

Agencies innovated workforce management and service delivery in other ways beyond telework. For example, the Veterans Health Administration used newly granted hiring authorities and onboarded roughly 20,000 new employees, shortening the time it takes to bring new staff onboard from 94 days to just 10 to 12 days.<sup>12</sup> When Congress paused student aid payment requirements, Financial Student Aid Services used targeted and personalized communications to inform different segments of its customer base about the policies and how borrowers could be affected.<sup>13</sup> As a result, in 2020, borrowers remained relatively satisfied with the experiences of applying for, receiving and repaying federal student aid, with ratings for those experiences exceeding federal averages.

Our December 2020 "Bit by Bit"<sup>14</sup> and January 2021 "Resilient"<sup>15</sup> reports highlight additional success stories of how federal agencies modernized to deliver federal services during the pandemic. For example, people who rely on the Indian Health Service increased their use of the agency's telehealth platform 15-fold. Veterans also increased their use of telehealth appointments. The Department of Energy created the National Virtual Biotechnology Laboratory to connect national laboratories and allow researchers remote access to the technical and scientific capabilities of the labs. And a new automated VA chatbot allowed veterans to get quick answers and more readily access services. Going forward, these types of innovations

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<sup>12</sup> Partnership for Public Service, "Government for the People: Profiles on the Customer Experience: Outpatient Health Care Services for Veterans," 2020. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/our-work/customer-experience-2020/outpatient-health-care-services-for-veterans/>.

<sup>13</sup> Partnership for Public Service, "Government for the People: Profiles on the Customer Experience: Federal Student Aid Services," 2021. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/our-work/customer-experience/cx-2021-fsa/>.

<sup>14</sup> Partnership for Public Service and Microsoft, "Bit by Bit: How Governments Used Technology to Move the Mission Forward During COVID-19," December 2020. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Bit-by-Bit.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Partnership for Public Service, American Council for Technology–Industry Advisory Council, and MeriTalk, "Resilient," January 2021. Retrieved from [https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Resilient\\_.pdf](https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Resilient_.pdf).

can help agencies improve customer experience and engage people they may not have reached before, such as families limited by time constraints from visiting federal offices in person.

As the government seeks to improve service accessibility, online tools should be augmented with in-person, telephone and paper-based services when appropriate for agency missions. Broadband access and tech-savviness are uneven both for federal employees and communities across the country, and some jobs simply cannot be performed remotely. How programs are implemented should depend on an understanding of the populations they serve and the best means to achieve desired outcomes.

### **Looking Ahead**

How can we apply the lessons of the COVID-19 era to federal workforce management decisions in the future? Here are ways that Congress can support the federal workforce and create the best environment for the future of work:

#### **Invest in leadership development.**

A transformation of the workforce and how federal employees do their jobs will not be possible without also reimagining leadership in the federal government. Good leaders motivate and advocate for their employees, build trust and create the conditions necessary for employees to perform at their best. The civilian side of government should take a lesson from the military side, where people are viewed as an asset, not a cost, and where investments in leadership development are critical to the strategy for success.

In 2019, the Partnership developed the Public Service Leadership Model<sup>16</sup>, recognizing the unique nature of leading in government, centered on stewardship of public trust and commitment to the public good. We believe this model should be the standard for leaders—both career and political—across the federal government. The model identifies the core values that leaders must prioritize and the critical competencies they must master to achieve their agencies’ missions and desired impact. These include setting a vision, empowering others and being accountable for results. We were proud to create this model with a nonpartisan group of distinguished leaders from across sectors, and in the months to come we hope to work with Congress, the executive branch and others to improve and measure overall leadership effectiveness.

#### **Sustain momentum for transformation and celebrate success.**

Just as you are doing today, Congressional committees should be examining the ways in which the government has already transformed over the past two years and finding ways to sustain momentum for further innovations. This subcommittee in particular can keep moving the ball forward by highlighting successes at agencies that should be embraced across the government and encouraging agencies to update strategic plans and policies to align with the new reality of work.

In particular, it will be important for the government to update the framework for telework and remote work. The experience of last year has shattered old expectations about the workplace. While some jobs cannot be performed by telework, agencies should embrace the new reality that a large number of jobs can be performed partially or wholly outside the traditional office setting. Telework has enabled federal

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<sup>16</sup> Partnership for Public Service, “Public Service Leadership Model.” Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/our-work/public-service-leadership-model/>.

employees to be more productive, nimble and resilient. And it will help agencies reduce their real estate footprint while being able to recruit, hire and retain talent wherever it is, allowing more Americans to serve their country and bringing a more diverse workforce into the federal government. To be clear, this is not about a larger workforce; it is about a workforce that is more efficient and effective on behalf of the public it serves. And regardless of whether an employee works at a federal worksite, remotely, or some hybrid combination, it is critical for agencies to have performance standards and hold employees – and their managers and supervisors – accountable for delivering results.

**Reaffirm OPM as the strategic leader for human resource functions across the entire government and strengthen agency HR capabilities.**

Through oversight and legislation, Congress can ensure that OPM has an elevated, forward-leaning role in helping agencies solve problems. OPM could have an immediate and positive impact by prioritizing the modernization of recruiting and hiring and should provide the vision to help Congress create a modernized personnel system for government. In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Congress tasked the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) with conducting a review of OPM, which was delivered to Congress in March of this year. The NAPA report reaffirms the importance of OPM's leadership and independence and makes many smart recommendations for Congress to consider on how best to position OPM to lead the workforce into the future, including shifting OPM from a compliance-based to a strategic and risk-based approach. The Partnership welcomes the introduction of Chairman Connolly's Strengthening the OPM Act, H.R. 6066, as a first step in implementing the NAPA recommendations.

Much hard work is needed, and Congress will also need to continue to closely monitor and support OPM's budget needs, particularly for IT modernization and moving OPM away from a fee-based model. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 provided an additional \$32 million to OPM to compensate for lost revenues due to the transfer of the background investigation function to the Pentagon and increased IT modernization needs, but the agency continues to face funding challenges at present.

In addition to strengthening OPM, Congress needs to ensure that we have human resource offices across government with the requisite skills, capacity and tools. There are outstanding and innovative HR professionals across the government, but there are also skills gaps in their offices. Congress should jump-start efforts to increase the skills and professionalism of the federal HR community by requiring OPM to provide technical training to HR specialists, conducting a review of overall training needs and how those needs can be met, and funding IT needs of the HR community. Congress should also ensure that agencies undertake strategic workforce planning and make sure that Chief Human Capital Officers have a voice in the strategic and budget planning processes so that agency leaders will be informed of the HR needs necessary to carry out their policies and programs.

**Get young people in government.**

Government needs young talent, not only to replace those nearing the end of their careers, but also to bring in new skills to government that will help the country confront a range of public challenges and opportunities. Multiple factors account for the scarcity of young talent in the public sector: the federal government's brand is suffering; job opportunities are both hidden and scarce; jobseekers face many barriers to finding work; and federal agencies are failing to retain young people who do join government.

Today's college students are interested in making a difference, but rarely consider the federal government as a place where they can do so. Government will never attract top talent and meet its workforce needs if it doesn't simplify the federal hiring process, utilize private sector best practices and make a concerted appeal to bring young people into government.

Programs that Congress should reinvigorate include the Pathways programs, which provide younger, early-career talent with exposure to and positive experiences working in government. The government needs to make it easier for students and entry-level talent to find – and be found – for federal jobs by creating a federal internship and fellowship database, improving the application process (including through continued improvements to USAJOBS), and ensuring that hiring platforms are easily accessible and mobile-friendly. Other needed improvements include ensuring internships are paid and easing agencies' ability to convert interns into full-time positions. Congress should also lift the caps on the expedited hiring authority for students and recent graduates, consider an ROTC-like program for federal service and hold agencies responsible for recruiting on campuses. We're excited that Chairman Connolly is introducing legislation intended to strengthen the Pathways program and to bring to fruition many of the ideas that the Partnership has recommended over the years. We look forward to working with the subcommittee on this legislation to build better pipelines for young people to enter public service.

### **Make diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) a central part of workforce strategy.**

With an aging federal workforce and evolving talent needs, a commitment to DEIA must be a cornerstone in the transformation of how the government recruits, hires, develops and retains talent. Gen Z and millennials now make up nearly half of the full-time U.S. labor force<sup>17</sup> and support for DEIA continues to have a profound influence on the way these cohorts perceive and experience their workplaces.

A commitment to DEIA ultimately leads to higher organizational performance by ensuring the door is open for all top talent and by inviting new and creative ways of thinking that empower better decision-making. In addition, a government that better reflects its people will also increase public trust in our democratic institutions. In other words, increasing DEIA is not only good for policy outcomes and constituent service, but also improves staff engagement and retention. Our Best Places to Work in the Federal Government® rankings also reinforce the value that employees place on support for diversity and indicate that there is more senior leaders can do.

Congress should support these efforts, and should help ensure that diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility are in the DNA of every department and agency in the federal government.

### **Modernize the civil service framework.**

Congress should start the hard process of updating the legal framework for the civil service, much of which dates back to laws passed in 1949 and 1978. The federal government needs cybersecurity experts, doctors, economists and emergency response specialists, but has a personnel system designed for phone operators. This antiquated system is an impediment to the government's ability to meet the needs of today's interconnected, technology-driven world and prepare for the challenges of the future. The

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<sup>17</sup> Gallup, "4 Things Gen Z and Millennials Expect From Their Workplace," March 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/336275/things-gen-millennials-expect-workplace.aspx>.



Partnership laid out a vision for civil service modernization in our 2014 report, *Building the Enterprise: A New Civil Service Framework*.<sup>18</sup>

As a starting point, Congress should enact the civil service recommendations of “Inspired to Serve,” the 2020 report of the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service.<sup>19</sup> After studying the federal civil service for over two years, the Commission issued bipartisan, consensus-based and thoughtful recommendations for improving talent management, including proposals to make federal hiring more efficient. We urge Congress to move forward on a bipartisan basis as quickly as possible to enact these proposals.

### **Promote the government’s mission.**

Both the world and the workplace are rapidly changing. Our government needs a new generation of young people to serve in a data-and technology-driven environment, with expertise in such sectors as cybersecurity, technology, engineering, finance and health care. Making the federal government an “employer of choice” requires greater awareness by the government of what employees want in the workplace, coupled with improved public perception of opportunities in federal service. As the federal government struggles to attract students and recent graduates, it is clear that more must be done to improve the government’s “brand.” Government shutdowns, hiring freezes and negative rhetoric damage the image of government and the people who serve.

Because of budget constraints, the federal government will always have a hard time competing with the private sector on pay, but agencies almost always have an advantage in offering employees a sense of mission. Our Best Places to Work® rankings regularly show that the match between employee skills and agency mission is a key driver of employee engagement, second only to effective leadership. Too often however, the dry and confusing language of federal job announcements fails to inspire. The federal government needs to do more to showcase the incredible array of professional opportunities it offers and to recognize the accomplishments and innovation of the current workforce. Without compelling and shared stories of success in government, government will struggle to become an employer of choice for the tech-savvy, forward-looking talent that it needs to attract.

This subcommittee can also play an important role in encouraging Congressional colleagues to recognize the successes of the federal workforce. Federal employees are often blamed for policy failures and rarely acknowledged when things go right. One way to revitalize the workforce is simply to change the tone and get away from the demeaning rhetoric that frequently characterizes the discussion of the federal workforce. Political leaders should celebrate outstanding contributions, such as the remarkable achievements of the nominees and winners of the Partnership’s annual Service to America Medals and the Presidential Rank Awards. As the leadership of this subcommittee has done on a bipartisan basis for many years regardless of which party is in the majority, we urge you to visit federal agencies in Washington and around the country to talk with federal employees about what is working and what would allow them to serve the American people most effectively.

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<sup>18</sup> Partnership for Public Service, “Building the Enterprise: A New Civil Service Framework,” April 2014. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/building-the-enterprise>.

<sup>19</sup> National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, “Inspired to Serve: The Final Report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service,” March 2020. Retrieved from <https://webarchive.loc.gov/all/20200603205848/https://inspire2serve.gov/reports/final-report>

### **Create a workforce culture that embraces technology, innovation and collaboration.**

Our “Resilient” report summarizes a survey of 300 federal leaders and a series of roundtable discussions on the lessons of the pandemic. A key takeaway is that an agile workforce, cutting-edge cybersecurity, modern technology and continual innovation are all interdependent in creating resiliency in the federal government. The success of the federal workforce depends not only on the quality of its talent and its leaders, but also on a culture where employees are encouraged to try new ideas and make smart technology investments. The new workplace environment must also involve more collaboration between federal, state, local and tribal governments and the private and non-profit sectors. The Partnership’s “Roadmap for Renewing the Federal Government,”<sup>20</sup> describes the challenges the federal government faces in each of these areas and offers policy recommendations for Congress, the administration and agencies.

### **Embrace mobility but also double-down on retention efforts.**

Our federal personnel system is geared to the model of the lifetime federal employee. We value and need those who want to dedicate their whole careers to federal service. At the same time, we also must seize opportunities to recruit those who want to serve for shorter durations, especially as younger workers increasingly want more mobility in their careers. Just 35% of millennials expect to stay with their current employer for five or more years.<sup>21</sup> That said, there are notable correlations between those who plan to stay and those who believe their employers perform well on issues related to financial performance, community impact, talent development and DEIA.

To attract talent at all levels, Congress and the administration should work together to create new and innovative pathways—and expand existing ones—for diverse mission-critical talent to join public service through fellowships, talent exchanges and service corps.

The Partnership’s Cybersecurity Talent Initiative, which creates cross-sector opportunities for cyber graduates, is an innovative approach to attracting cyber specialists into government. Other federal programs like the U.S. Digital Service, 18F, and Presidential Innovation Fellows allow “technical tours of duty” with the federal government and are unique in helping promote and respond to an increasing desire for the next generation to be more mobile in their careers. Congress and the administration can look to these models for filling other hard-to-fill positions in government.

Talent exchanges can infuse the government with ideas, knowledge and processes from other sectors through creative means. They can strengthen agency workforces, support mission-critical work and lead to better collaboration among agencies and with the private sector. More could be done to remove barriers to their effectiveness. For example, Congress could amend the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) to allow for-profit entities to participate in IPA-enabled talent exchanges involving select agencies and mission-critical occupations on a permanent or pilot basis.

While making federal service more attractive for those who want short terms of service, the government at the same time should double down on retention efforts to entice new talent to stay in federal service.

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<sup>20</sup> Partnership for Public Service, “Roadmap for Renewing Our Federal Government,” September 2021. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/roadmap-for-renewal/>.

<sup>21</sup> Deloitte, “The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020,” June 2020. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html>.

Of the full-time employees under 30 who voluntarily quit federal service in 2019, more than 73% did so with less than two years of tenure. It's not enough to improve hiring processes without also focusing on retaining employees. Agencies need to focus on employee retention by adopting strategies like robust onboarding programs, mentorship programs, professional development opportunities and cross-agency or government collaboration initiatives.

Another way to build a workforce for the future is through reskilling and upskilling. Congress should allow agencies to appoint federal employees who have successfully completed reskilling programs to positions in their new field without having to move to a lower grade level, as proposed by the bipartisan Facilitating Federal Employee Reskilling Act (S. 1330). Finally, agencies should have clear performance metrics related to employee development and do more to capture data on why people leave government so that steps can be taken to address retention issues.

### **Preserve the merit principles.**

The merit principles should remain the bedrock of the federal civil service system. These principles serve the goal of providing the American people a competent, honest, productive government through an apolitical and professional career workforce. Whatever changes Congress or the executive branch considers should be consistent with these core principles.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to share these ideas with you today. Preparing our government to recruit, retain and manage the workforce of the future is a complex endeavor and will require sustained attention from both Congress and the executive branch. We look forward to working with you to move our federal workforce into the future.