

World Café Results

The success of state government is largely dependent on the ability of its workforce to accomplish its goals. The recruitment and retention of qualified employees is essential for the continuity of state services. Consider your personal experience as an agency leader or human resources professional and answer the following questions.

1. What distinguishes state government from other employers that might be helpful in improving recruitment and retention practices?
2. What are state government's current recruitment and retention challenges?
3. How can state agencies build a culture that encourages retention of employees?

Louisiana State Civil Service is currently reviewing the information provided at the session in order to synthesize and prioritize the information and needs, and to determine next steps. SCS will reach out to its HR partners to collaborate on these steps at the appropriate time.

The following pages contain a summary of the major themes discovered during the session. It does not reflect every answer provided. It is important to remember that responses to these questions may be a desired state that would require formal policy changes.

1. What distinguishes state government from other employers that might be helpful in improving recruitment and retention practices?

Participants noted that traditional employment benefits of state government are still useful in recruiting and retaining employees. Those benefits include the following:

- **Retirement Plans**
- **Health Benefits**
- **Annual and Sick Leave**
- **Compensatory Leave**
- **Holidays**
- **Career Growth/Promotional Opportunities**
- **Stable Employment**
- **Public Service**

While these benefits continue to serve as a foundation, overall responses indicated that traditional benefits coupled with recruiting efforts that connect a candidate to the mission and purpose of work is an opportunity that needs more focus. Opportunities exist to help hiring managers “**sell**” state government as an employer of choice during the recruitment process and on-going development of current employees.

As a background, research often indicates that millennials and post-millennials are not seeking career paths solely for paying their bills. The new workforce seeks a job with a purpose and the opportunity for personal development.

First, state government offers a wide variety of occupations that have a direct impact on the welfare of citizens. This uniquely positions state government in appealing to job candidates/employees who are seeking **meaningful work with a purpose**. The state offers a large number of entry-level jobs that allows individuals to contribute value. Secondly, participants felt that Louisiana was moving in the right direction with training programs directed at **professional development**.

Further answers to this question consisted of the following:

- **Flexible Work Schedules/ Work Life Balance.** While the use of such flexibility differs from agency to agency and between different jobs, be open to flexibility if the nature of work lends itself to the opportunity.
- **Rewards and Recognition.** Current civil service rules are beneficial; however, more awareness on how they can positively affect retention is needed. Agency budgets often limit use.
- **State as One Employer.** Employees should be encouraged to further their career in state government. Help employees understand the potential career paths and do not discourage movement between agencies. Statewide “branding” recommended. We are one of the largest employers in the state and should identify as “One State”.

- **Diversity in the Workplace.** While the nature of work is often diverse, the state should continue to work toward diversified hiring. Hiring of individuals with disabilities. Do not miss a candidate because they do not conform to the perceived “norms” of society.
- **Public Service (Volunteering).** There are many opportunities for volunteering within programs operated by the state. Consider policies that allow employees the opportunity to volunteer a certain number of days per year. (Connecting the employee to the agency’s mission).
- **Uniform Classification Plan and Pay Plan.** Some participants viewed the uniform application of classification and pay as a benefit. The use of career progression groups and defined pay increases offers an established path for candidates/employees. Conversely, others felt the uniform application tied their hands and lacked flexibility.

Participants recognized the reality that some state jobs will continue to be difficult to fill due to the nature of the work. However, every attempt should be made to link each job to the overall mission of the individual agency.

Other notable answers:

- Word of mouth appears to be the largest advertiser in state government.
- A need for more user-friendly websites for applicants.
- A stronger emphasis on an accurate reflection of job duties when advertising vacancies. (Using example of work from job specifications doesn’t always work best)
- Training geared at professional development should be a priority.
- More awareness of post-employment benefits needed.
- Promote deferred compensation program.
- Promote the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

2. What are state government's current recruitment and retention challenges?

While traditional benefits such as **Health Benefits, Retirement Plans and Employment Stability** proved to be a theme among distinguishing state government from other employers, not all participants viewed them as attractive. Some answers suggested that these benefits might not be as important to some job candidates and employees. Some suggested that benefits have been reduced thereby turning them into challenges – for example, numerous changes to retirement plans (no longer having 30 years at any age as an option), increased healthcare costs and growing concern over employment security with recurring budget problems.

Other top challenges consisted of:

- **Salaries.** Lack of consistent pay increases has led to pay compression and low morale. While flexibilities and improvements have been made, difficulties still exist in the ability to offer competitive salaries with the private sector for certain jobs.
- **Budget.**
- **Job Appointments.** There is an increased use of job appointments vs. permanent appointments in state government and there is a need to educate stakeholders that providing permanent appointments is not necessarily growing government payrolls.
- **Supervisory Training.** It is imperative that we train supervisors how to appropriately supervise and to get them trained prior to becoming a supervisor.
- **Rewards and Recognition.** There may be a lack of funding to initiate.
- **Uncertainty in Work Expectations with 2019 Gubernatorial Election.**
- **Demanding Workloads.** There are less employees and more work.
- **Posting Vacancies.** The process is stale, too process driven. The challenge is accurately demonstrating career paths. Seek improvements to use more social media sites that can link back to LA Careers.
- **Employment Testing.** How can we use an individual's competencies rather than a test score to justify hiring? Seek ways to improve access to testing, (currently limited to in-person).
- **Licensing.** Many jobs/agencies require licensed individuals in certain areas and it can be difficult to find licensed applicants. Connect with Community Colleges, Technical Schools and Universities for specific needs.
- **Retooling Health Insurance.**
- **Establishing Effective Interviewing Skills.**
- **Branding State Government.** Strive for a consist brand that is more appealing.
- **Need More Innovation.** Being innovative may often be overlooked because it may appear as an unnecessary cost to taxpayers. Start using private industry techniques and justify the return on investment to our taxpayers.
- **Job Titles.** Some areas are outdated. We need a fresh look at job titles in the classification system and more job assessments.
- **Change takes too long.** Build relationships between agencies and civil service that promote efficiency.

- **Perception of State Employees.** Spotlight the workforce and use every option available. Have the Governor and Agency Heads speak publically about the work their agencies do.
- **Social Security.** There are concerns over the next generation of workers not looking for retirement but portability and flexibility.
- **Knowledge on Civil Service Rules.** Provide opportunities for knowledge development and transfer.
- **Communication.** How can we get supervisors and employees to communicate effectively to get the job done?
- **Organizational Structure.** Government organization structures do not align with the expectations of millennials and post-millennials.
- **Lack of Qualified Applicants.** How can we improve? For example, do we need more targeted recruitment initiatives?
- **Cronyism and Favoritism.** Develop trainings to bring awareness to the damaging effects of these areas.
- **Generational Differences.** Don't overlook the value of understanding differences and working together.

3. How can state agencies build a culture that encourages retention of employees?

Culture is an important aspect of state government. Building a positive culture takes time and energy. Participants collectively acknowledged that in order to create a culture that encourages retention, buy-in from the top is critical.

The following answers were provided by participants:

- **Recognition from Leadership.** Leaders need to provide a vision of what a positive culture in their agency looks like and lead by example. Do not be afraid to seek feedback from employees on your current culture and take initiatives to move to the desired state.
- **Standardized On-Boarding/Communication.** Applicants should be on-boarded with a consistent brand. Encourage Civil Service to establish a consistent on-boarding process with flexibility for agency content. Seek user-friendly technology; applicants do not want a paper process.
- **Work Life Balance.** Look for ways to improve. Be open to telecommuting and flexible schedules if the work allows.
- **Demonstrate Total Compensation.** Show employees what they are receiving in terms of salary, benefits, leave and retirement (Big picture).
- **Enhance Benefits/Wellness Benefits.** On-site fitness facilities were suggested. Continue access to Wellness Programs currently offered.
- **Provide Opportunities for Professional Development.** Build up your employees to move up in state government, even if it is at a different agency.
- **Building Networks.** Employees should have access to networks throughout state government. How can we connect them? Remove silos within your own department and agencies.
- **Ask Employees.** Directly ask let them! What do they think will improve retention?
- **Establish Clear Career Path.** Perform on-going succession planning. Help supervisors show employees their potential options. Assist in developing competencies that will build leaders.
- **Pay Equity.** Educate employees on the Uniform Pay Plan. Explain why it exists; address in-equities when necessary.
- **Continue Efforts to Raise Pay Scales.**
- **Improve the Current Performance Evaluation System.** It is burdensome and needs to be interactive and electronic.
- **Job Shadowing.** There is a need for cross training. Learning other jobs may provide employees with an overall understanding of an agency's mission, which could lead to greater fulfillment.
- **Provide Proper Tools.** Ensure your employees have access the appropriate tools and technology. Invest in Technology.
- **Non-Traditional Workplace Appearances.** Is your current workplace appearance policy necessary? Evaluate policies and make decisions that are in the best interest of the work.
- **Teach Leaders Soft Skills.** There is a need to build skills such as communication, teamwork, and empathy that assists leaders in navigating their work environments.
- **True Pay for Performance Model.**

- **Statewide Engagement Survey.** Civil Service should conduct a statewide engagement survey in order for state agencies to gauge the current culture.
- **Promote Creativity.** Encourage employees to take risks. Acknowledge both success and failures as an opportunity to grow.

Overall, feedback from the World Café Session was valuable. While the answers provided on this outline only show common themes, participants also shared best practices, ideas, concerns, frustrations and most importantly connectivity. Participants suggested that the greatest value of this exercise was the ability to connect with their peers and reaffirm their overall mission of providing essential services to our citizens.