

**A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR  
THE PUBLIC SECTOR**



# The People Lab

**EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES FOR  
HIRING A STRONG AND DIVERSE  
WORKFORCE**

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# ABOUT US

The People Lab aims to transform the public sector, by producing cutting-edge research on the people in government and the communities they serve. We collaborate with governments and other stakeholders to evaluate strategies that can strengthen the public-sector workforce, improve public service delivery, and foster engaged communities. Our team brings together public management scholars, behavioral economists, political scientists and public policy experts who are committed to evidence-based policy making, and who use rigorous quantitative, qualitative, and experimental methods to better understand what works. All projects are co-designed with our partners to ensure feasibility and scalability.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Government employers in the United States face a growing challenge in the workforce. Federal employees are older and closer to retirement than the overall labor market, and nearly a third (32%) will become eligible for retirement by 2025 (Partnership for Public Service, 2019; U.S. GAO, 2019). The federal government employs nearly four times fewer workers under the age of 30 than the broader workforce, and there are roughly twice as many employees over 60 than there are under 30 (Partnership for Public Service, 2019). State and local governments face similar concerns, and the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred even greater numbers of eligible employees into retirement (Mission Square Research Institute, 2021). Meanwhile, younger workers may be less interested in working for the government (Rose, 2012; Fowler & Birdsall, 2020). As a result, agencies at all levels may see large numbers of their workers leave in the coming years and may have trouble attracting new talent at the same rates.

In addition, the public sector, like many other sectors of the labor market, faces challenges with inclusion and diversity in the workplace. Though the public sector employs greater shares of workers of color than the private sector (Nelson & Tyrell, 2016; Pitts, 2011), employees of color are often less likely to occupy senior positions (Partnership for Public Service, 2019). Moreover, some public service professions, such as police forces, are often strikingly more white than the communities they serve (Leatherby & Opiel, 2020), which may have important implications for community trust and safety.

So the "people problem" facing public agencies in the next few years is clear: how to attract, select, and retain a new cohort of applicants and employees with diverse skills and from diverse backgrounds (Hewlett Foundation, 2021).

Behavioral science research has begun to yield insights that can help. This resource guide offers some evidence-based lessons for public sector employers working to build a talented and diverse workforce. The first two sections address the decisions made by candidates by providing strategies that encourage candidates to apply and to remain in the hiring pipeline. The final section presents tactics targeting the decisions that hiring teams make during the selection phase, so that hiring teams select the best candidates.

# STRATEGIES:

## Attracting a diverse set of applicants

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To strengthen the government workforce, employers will need to reach a broader pool of qualified candidates. Research indicates that employers can attract new audiences by changing the way that open positions are presented to the public (for example, through ads or job postings) and the way that recruitment outreach is conducted. Some of these techniques are designed to attract more attention or appeal to a wider variety of career motivations. Other language changes can help candidates form more accurate impressions of the necessary qualifications for the job.

The following strategies have been effective for attracting new audiences or more diverse sets of candidates:

## Avoid jargon in job ads

Some evidence suggests that minimizing jargon in job advertisements may widen their appeal. Applicants use a number of signals during the hiring process, including job descriptions and messages, to form impressions of potential employers and their own fit with the organization (Connelly et al., 2011). Beyond simply adding complexity, details about hiring rules, labor agreements, and bureaucratic structures may signal, however inaccurately, a job dominated by bureaucracy. One survey experiment found that removing this type of language in job advertisements increased the intent to apply for a government job among college students (Sievert et al., 2020).

### Avoiding jargon in job descriptions

Typical job advertisement	Job advertisement without jargon
<p>The federal state of Berlin continually hires trainees (pay grade 13 TV-L):</p> <p><b><i>For a full-time employment in the scope of duties for the second entry grade of service class 2 (non-technical administrative service).</i></b></p> <p>The advertised position is temporary, lasting for a total of 24 months. The trainee program principally offers <b><i>the opportunity to become eligible for a tenured appointment (second entry grade of service class 2, nontechnical administrative service) and thus</i></b>, the opportunity of future appointment as a tenured civil servant</p> <p>Furthermore, we offer....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b><i>Payment in accordance with TV-L pay level 13.</i></b></li> <li>- <b><i>Becoming acquainted with the public administration's structures and processes.</i></b></li> <li>- <b><i>Diverse array of municipal and ministerial tasks as well as diverse functions which prepare for taking over responsibilities.</i></b></li> </ul> <p>- Professional and theoretical support at the institute for administrative science at the academy for administration in Berlin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-reliant work at the different positions, supported by the employees in the administrative divisions and the colleagues of the HR department of the senate department for home affairs and sport.</li> <li>- Compatibility of family and career: This includes flexible working hours and job location arrangements. This is true for executive positions as well.</li> </ul>	<p>The federal state of Berlin continually hires trainees (pay grade 13 TV-L):</p> <p>The advertised position is temporary, lasting for a total of 24 months. The trainee program principally offers the opportunity of future appointment as a tenured civil servant.</p> <p>Furthermore, we offer....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professional and theoretical support at the institute for administrative science at the academy for administration in Berlin.</li> <li>- Self-reliant work at the different positions, supported by the employees in the administrative divisions and the colleagues of the HR department of the senate department for home affairs and sport.</li> <li>- Compatibility of family and career: This includes flexible working hours and job location arrangements. This is true for executive positions as well.</li> </ul>

Reproduced from Sievert et al. (2020)

## Include only essential job qualifications & use objective wording

Research has shown that using narrow, specific, and objective language to describe job qualifications can help promote gender diversity in recruitment. Language choice is an important aspect of recruitment, because men and women may draw different conclusions about the skill level required for the job when qualifications are worded subjectively. This can result in a gender skill-gap in the applicant pool, in which the female applicants are more highly credentialed, on average, than the men, suggesting that qualified women have decided not to apply (Coffman et al., 2019).

In one randomized controlled trial, researchers made several changes that closed the gender skill gap in the applicant pool. The changes included removing preferred qualifications, removing ambiguous descriptors (e.g., “excellent”), and describing qualifications more objectively (e.g., by replacing “fluency” with “experience”). While these changes did not close the gender gap in application rates, overall application rates increased, driven by increases among lower-skilled women and higher-skilled men. As a result, female and male applicants more closely resembled one another in skill level (Abraham & Stein, 2020).

In another series of experiments, using job descriptions that were rated as more objective closed the gender gap between men’s and women’s ratings of their own qualification for the positions, by bringing men’s self-evaluations more in line with those of women (Coffman et al., 2019).

### Using objective wording in job descriptions

<b><i>Instead of...</i></b>	<b><i>Try...</i></b>
<i>Deep</i> analytical expertise	Analytical expertise
SQL <i>fluency/proficiency</i>	Experience with SQL
<i>Superior</i> organizational, time management, & prioritization skills	Organizational, time management, & prioritization skills
Must <i>excel</i> in executing in highly stressful and ambiguous situations	Must be able to execute in highly stressful and ambiguous situations
<i>Exceptional</i> verbal and written communication skills	Verbal and written communication skills

Reproduced from Abraham & Stein (2020)

## Highlight new information to appeal to different motivations

See Lessons from the Field on page 6

Public sector recruitment strategies have traditionally focused on attracting candidates by appealing to **public service motivation (see glossary)**. While this may be effective at targeting a subset of qualified applicants, using the same tactics will only continue to interest similar candidates. Some research has found that calling attention to the other benefits of working for the government may attract more candidates and more interest from historically underrepresented applicant groups. For example, messages emphasizing the career benefits and the challenge of police work increased overall application rates and were especially effective at recruiting women and candidates of color (Linos, 2018). In a different study, framing public service as a chance to “change the system” increased application rates from younger applicants (Scieपुरa & Linos, 2020).

## Personalize outreach messages & choose an appropriate messenger

When sending recruitment outreach, employers may wish to include the recipient’s name when possible. Personalizing messages with the recipient’s name can attract the reader’s attention, which may increase the likelihood that they will read the messages. This method has been used successfully in several studies to improve response rates (Weill et al., 2018).

Choosing the messenger is another important consideration when planning outreach messages to potential candidates. Depicting a messenger with whom recipients can identify or whose role they can imagine themselves filling in the short-term, such as a mid-level manager, can boost response rates (Weill et al., 2018). A carefully chosen messenger can at times be equally or more important than personalization using the recipient’s name. In one randomized field experiment, including a job seeker’s name didn’t increase attendance rates to recruitment sessions, but adding the *sender’s* name did (Sanders & Kirkman, 2019).

# LESSONS FROM THE FIELD:

## Attracting a diverse set of applicants

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### *Highlighting the personal benefits of the job to increase diversity in police recruitment*

Many recruitment messages for government positions emphasize that the job will provide applicants with an opportunity to serve the community. However, our research with the Behavioral Insights Team and several police workforces suggests that highlighting the other benefits of a career in a government organization can attract more attention and can be an effective way to entice non-traditional applicants to apply for jobs. In this research, prospective applicants were randomly assigned to receive one of several versions of recruitment messages printed on postcards. The results were striking: messages emphasizing the personal benefits -- such as the challenge of the job and the career benefits -- were three times more effective at recruitment than conventional recruitment messages that emphasized serving the community. Further, messages focused on personal benefits were particularly effective at attracting women and candidates of color (Linos, 2018). The particular messaging may be different depending on the job and the applicants you are trying to recruit. However, the results are strong evidence that highlighting the benefits of public service jobs beyond serving the community can attract more candidates.

## *Emphasizing systemic change to bring young people into government service*

Sciepura and Linos (2020) conducted a pilot study with Govern for America to examine what kinds of recruitment language are most effective at enticing a young and diverse set of applicants to consider work in the government. In that case, we found that framing government fellowships as an opportunity to “change the system” was the most effective approach for motivating college graduates from diverse backgrounds to dedicate their early careers to work in government. The specific test in that case compared messages that frame careers in government as a chance to “change the system” to messages highlighting the opportunity to either (a) “challenge oneself,” or (b) “join the movement.” Ultimately, candidates who were sent messages highlighting opportunities to “change the system” were 47% more likely to complete an application compared to those who were sent messages framed around “challenging oneself”, and 39% more likely to complete an application relative to those who were sent messages urging them to “join the movement”. Importantly, our initial findings suggest that the “change the system” message framing is even more motivating for candidates from diverse backgrounds, specifically, cisgender female, gender-nonconforming, trans and non-binary applicants.

# STRATEGIES:

## Keeping talented and diverse sets of candidates in the hiring pipeline

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Once candidates apply, employers must ensure that as many qualified people as possible remain in the hiring pipeline. Like all organizations, government agencies face competition for highly qualified employees. However, the public sector faces some unique challenges, such as hiring timelines that can extend well beyond those of the private sector, making a focus on minimizing voluntary attrition from candidate pools all the more important.

Further, while racial and gender diversity in applicant pools is critical to employing a diverse workforce, not all candidates are equally likely to progress through the hiring process. Aside from voluntary attrition, drop-off resulting from racial performance gaps on some standardized assessments can widen racial disparities in the candidate pool. This is another area where administrative data can provide critical insights into the points at which disparities emerge in the process. Addressing the drivers of disparities in voluntary and non-voluntary attrition can help public sector employers retain more qualified candidates in their applicant pools.

The following strategies have proven effective for retaining candidates in the applicant pool and reducing disparities in attrition:

## *Reduce or bundle the number of steps applicants must complete*

**See Lessons from the Field on page 12**

Many government recruitment processes involve multiple steps for the applicant, often including one or more assessments and other verifications of eligibility. These steps can be characterized as a form of **administrative burden** (Moynihan et al., 2015). Unnecessary administrative burden during recruitment may negatively impact public servant applicant pools, and reducing the number of steps in the recruitment process (for example, by providing the opportunity to take multiple assessments in one day) has been associated with increased candidate retention (Linos & Reisch, 2020). However, care should be taken when changing recruitment processes, as removing steps that allow for candidates' self-evaluation of their qualifications can risk reducing the quality of the applicant pool (Linos & Reisch, 2020).

## *Simplify language & leverage nudges in messages*

**See Lessons from the Field on page 12**

Every message sent to a candidate during the hiring process is an opportunity to retain them in the hiring pipeline. Long messages that contain jargon or complex language can increase the effort needed from the candidate to interpret and act on the information. This may reduce the likelihood that candidates will take action (Moynihan et al., 2015), so it is important that employers clearly and simply state the actions needed from candidates.

Messages sent to candidates during the hiring process also present an opportunity to utilize simple **nudges**. Nudges can take several forms and often involve making an action more convenient to complete (Sunstein, 2014). Nudges based on social information, such as providing information about what most people do, have been effective for promoting a variety of actions (Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Cialdini, 2003). For example, one study incorporated social information in an email message to applicants by telling them, "Most people can complete [the assessment] in two weeks or less (Linos & Reisch, 2020)."

Another type of nudge adds elements of **social reciprocity** to a message. For instance, in a different study, text messages to job seekers that contained both the sender's name and a sentence telling the recipient, "I booked you a place. Good luck," were more effective for increasing attendance at employer recruiting events several other versions of messages (Sanders & Kirkman, 2019).

### *Send reminders*

Employers should send reminders to candidates when the next step in the selection process requires a candidate's action. Reminders are simple, low-cost nudges that have been widely and effectively used to help ensure people complete certain steps or take action, from contributing to savings accounts (Karlan et al., 2016) to completing important forms (Triplet et al., 2016) and attending medical appointments (McLean et al., 2014). Reminders help reduce administrative burden by calling attention to immediately actionable steps (Sunstein, 2014).

### *Use language that evokes a sense of belonging & reaffirms values*

The use of assessments can be a powerful tool for measuring candidates' abilities to think and apply skills that will be relevant to their job responsibility. However, standardized assessments can also introduce new racial and gender disparities that have more to do with applicants' state of mind during the assessment than with their actual qualifications (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Research has consistently shown that many of the racial and gender gaps observed on standardized tests can be attributed to performance anxiety that interferes with achievement - what is called "**stereotype threat**" in the academic literature (Osborne, 2001).

Below are two approaches that may be effective at combating stereotype threat and closing the racial and gender achievement gaps for candidates from marginalized groups.

1. **Values affirmation exercises** - Cueing candidates to reflect on their core values related to the job opportunity can help to re-establish their sense of self-worth. This has been shown to mitigate stereotype threat and narrow performance gaps on assessments (Miyake et al., 2010; Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Linos et al., 2017).
2. **Embedding welcoming language** - Since candidates from marginalized groups may experience more **belonging uncertainty**, carefully crafted messages that signal a candidate's belonging can reduce anxiety, improving their performance as a result (Linon et al., 2017).

One randomized field experiment found that embedding value-affirming and welcoming language into an email invitation for a standardized online test led to performance improvements for candidates from marginalized backgrounds, with no effect on white candidates (Linon et al., 2017). In this study, nonwhite candidates who received the modified email experienced a 50 percent increase in the probability of passing the test and raised their average percentile ranking by 12 percentage points, an 80 percent narrowing of the racial performance gap.

Embedding welcoming language	
Traditional message	Welcoming message
<p>Dear [Candidate's Name],</p> <p>This message has been sent on behalf of [Recruiter's Name]. You have been invited to complete the following online assessment:            * Police Constable Situational Judgment Test.</p> <p>Please be advised this stage of the assessment will close at [TimeDate]. Once the Situational Judgment Test has been completed you will not be contacted again until [TimeDate]. Please note there is no appeals process for this stage.</p>	<p>Dear [Candidate's Name],</p> <p><b><i>Congratulations! You successfully completed the Behavior Style Questionnaire and have been selected to participate in the next stage of the assessment process: the Situational Judgment Test.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>When you're ready</i></b>, you can access the assessment website here: [CandidateUrl]. This online assessment will close at [TimeDate] and we will contact you after [TimeDate] to let you know whether you were successful.</p>

Reproduced from Linon et al. (2017)

# LESSONS FROM THE FIELD:

## Keeping talented and diverse candidates in the hiring pipeline

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### *Improving police recruitment by reducing administrative burden*

In one study with a large police force, simplifying and shortening a required form early in the process increased the number of candidates who remained in the recruitment pipeline and increased the likelihood of appointment to the job by 5.5 percentage points, without affecting the quality of the applicant pool.

The same study evaluated the impact of *bundling multiple steps* in the application process in order to simplify the application process. Ultimately, candidates who were offered the opportunity to complete several of their required assessments on a single day were more likely to remain in the recruitment process longer than a similar group of applicants who were not offered expedited testing. Applicants who were offered expedited testing were also more likely to pass their interview and to be hired.

However, when considering how to best reduce steps in the application process, it's important to consider potential trade-offs. Steps that help candidates make meaningful determinations about their fit for the role can enhance the efficiency of the hiring process for both employers and candidates. For example, removing an initial self-screening tool, which helped candidates assess their own eligibility for the position, was associated with a decrease in the quality of the applicant pool (Linos & Reisch, 2020).

## *Improving completion of an online assessment using behavioral nudges and simplified language*

Another randomized experiment tested the impact of language changes in an email inviting candidates to take an online assessment. The control group received the standard invitation email, while the experimental email simplified the message and leveraged nudges in several ways. First, the number of words was reduced from 450 to 215. Next, the following sentence was added: “Most people complete [the assessment] in two weeks or less.” This was designed to create a positive social norm and anchor candidates on a two-week time frame. Language referencing the option to complete the assessment in person was removed, creating a strong default for candidates to complete the assessment online. Finally, a text message reminder about the assessment was sent to candidates one week after the initial email. Ultimately, candidates who received the modified email invitation were 8 percent more likely to complete the assessment, 16 percent more likely to do so online, and 56 percent more likely to complete it within two weeks compared to candidates who received the standard email invitation. These changes did not appear to affect the quality of the applicant pool (Linos & Reisch, 2020).

# STRATEGIES:

## Selecting the best candidates

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Hiring decisions can be subject to a number of unconscious thinking errors. Some information collected during the hiring process is not strongly related to actual job performance and can interfere with interviewers' abilities to make accurate judgments (Levashina et al., 2014; Dana et al., 2013). This elevates the importance of using validated methods to select candidates. Research also shows that widespread racial disparities in hiring persist, despite growing recognition of the problem and efforts to increase workforce diversity (Quillian, 2018). Unconscious factors such as **implicit bias** and **affinity bias** are often important drivers of this intractable problem. While many of the influences on our decisions lie outside of conscious control, employers can plan around these problems by using the following evidence-based strategies to help minimize judgment errors and enhance fairness in the hiring process:

## *Test anonymizing resumes*

Anonymizing job applications and resumes by removing names and demographic information can protect against implicit bias in the early stages of the hiring process. Evidence suggests that this strategy only works under some conditions, though, so employers should consider testing with a subset of their applicants prior to implementation. Several large-scale experiments in the public sector showed that anonymous recruitment eliminated disparities in call-back rates for underrepresented groups and, in some cases, also increased job offers (Rinne, 2018). However, the success of this strategy may depend on the specific employer's context and other equity strategies already in place. At least one study showed that anonymous recruitment caused lower callback rates for underrepresented groups, perhaps by interfering with pre-existing affirmative action efforts (Rinne, 2018). In addition, anonymizing resumes does not prevent potential **implicit bias** in later stages of the hiring process, so it is important that it is used in conjunction with inclusive and equitable practices throughout the process.

## *Evaluate candidates jointly*

Some research indicates that evaluating candidates jointly (e.g., by comparing two resumes or assessments against each other), rather than evaluating them sequentially appears to lead to fairer hiring decisions. In one study, presenting information about two candidates' performance on an assessment simultaneously to decision-makers completely eliminated the gender bias in hiring decisions that was observed when candidates' scores were presented sequentially. Joint evaluations led to hiring decisions that were more attuned to a candidate's past performance rather than their gender (Bohnet, van Geen, and Bazerman 2016). This finding builds on earlier research demonstrating that evaluating options separately tends to encourage "gut instinct" decision-making (along with more implicit biases), whereas comparative evaluation makes it easier to judge complex attributes, such as "performance" (Bazerman & Moore, 2009).

## *Use structured interviews with questions focused on job-relevant competencies*

If interviews are used in your hiring process, structured interviews are recommended. Structured interviews use a set of questions that are asked in the same order in every interview. These types of interviews are better predictors of a candidate's later job performance (Macan, 2009) and they help to minimize group-based disparities in evaluators' ratings when compared to unstructured interviews (Levashina et al., 2014).

The best interview questions are developed based on a job analysis so that topics remain focused around the necessary skills. Questions that are not directly job-relevant should be avoided. Further, including a mix of situational judgment questions and past behavioral questions may provide more information than using either question style alone. Research indicates that situational judgment questions, which ask the candidate how they would handle a hypothetical situation, appear to primarily measure knowledge and/or cognitive ability, while past behavioral questions, which ask how candidates handled past job situations, tend to measure experience (Levashina et al., 2014).

## *Use a structured evaluation process to score interviews*

Pairing structured interviews with structured evaluations can further improve decision-making in the selection process. The following strategies are key components of structured evaluations:

- *Use standardized rating scales with clear anchors* for each interview question. Anchors are the labels at each end of the rating scale that help interviewers think objectively about the question. Clear anchors help minimize group-based differences in ratings.
- *Score the responses immediately* following each interview question, rather than waiting until the end of the interview. Memory for events is heavily influenced by the availability of information in the mind (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), including how recently the information was received (Lee et al., 2008) and how atypical or unusual the information was (Morewedge et al., 2005). Likewise, interviewers' judgments about a candidate's response can be influenced by extraneous factors if they must rely on their memories when scoring the interview. Scoring responses immediately can help protect against these irrelevant influences.

- *Score the candidates independently* of other interviewers. Our judgments are sensitive to the influences of others' opinions, sometimes without our realizing it. Encouraging interviewers to discuss candidates only after they have individually scored their interviews helps harness the "wisdom of crowds" (Surowiecki, 2018) and can protect against the possibility of raters' opinions influencing others' judgments (Lev & Sinan, 2013; Lorenz et al., 2011; Kahneman et al., 2021).

### An example of a standardized rating scale with clear anchors

**Interview Question:** Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself at work. How did you go about ensuring that you would achieve it?

1	2	3	4	5
Does not provide a clear example of a goal and/or a strategy to achieve it		Provides a clear example of a goal and demonstrates an understanding of how to set goals and attain them		Demonstrates thoughtfulness in goal setting, anticipating obstacles, and planning for contingencies

### Diversify & lengthen the final, "short lists" of candidates

The gender and racial make-up of the candidate pool, particularly the final short-list of candidates, may influence hiring decisions. One series of small laboratory studies found that being the only woman or only candidate of color in a finalist pool led to zero odds of being hired. However, the odds greatly increased when there were at least two such candidates in the finalist pool (Johnson et al., 2016). Having only one woman or person of color in the pool may highlight their difference from the rest of the group, triggering a bias in favor of the candidates who fit the de facto norm. Having multiple such candidates reduces this tendency. These findings corroborate results from an earlier, similar experiment on the gender make-up of the applicant pool (Heilman, 1980).

Simply making a longer shortlist may help to ensure that finalist pools are more balanced with respect to race and gender. For example, a different series of laboratory studies, extending shortlists from three candidates to six candidates resulted in more women being considered for stereotypically male roles (Lucas et al., 2021). This is consistent with other research showing that people deviate more from their **mental models** when they spend a longer time thinking of alternatives.

# CONCLUSION

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This resource guide has laid out a number of techniques for attracting strong and diverse sets of candidates to government positions, keeping candidates in the hiring pipeline, and increasing fairness in the selection process. Though these techniques are based on the latest research in the science of recruitment and hiring, each hiring context is unique, so it is difficult to predict with certainty how effective any specific technique will be in each context. Some techniques that work in one setting may not accomplish the same goal in a different hiring environment.

These strategies are also not comprehensive, and it will be important to consider additional tools and approaches that may be more specifically tailored to the particular needs of an agency or hiring team. For instance, gathering feedback from both accepted and rejected candidates on their experience during recruitment can provide valuable insight into the hiring process and potential strategies that may not have otherwise come to mind, especially those affecting applicants' perceptions of fairness in the process and their impression of the organization (Linos & Reinhard, 2015). Some city governments have also applied racial equity toolkits to analyze the recruitment and selection process, which can help to identify and remove structural barriers (Nelson & Brooks, 2016).

Finally, new strategies should be continuously evaluated for their impact. It is critical to pilot-test any approach with a small group or in a single department in order to identify potential unintended consequences and to help ensure that the strategy in question is likely to work as expected. Furthermore, continued monitoring and evaluation is critical to assess how any strategy is working as it is rolled out agency-wide.

Below, we have included additional guidance and resources to complement and expand on the methods and case studies included here.

# APPENDIX: HOW TO GET STARTED

As discussed above, it can be challenging to determine which recruitment and selection strategies will be effective for a particular workplace or a particular problem. However, developing a thorough understanding of the problem and the context in which it occurs can help. Here, we provide a brief introduction to using behavioral mapping to identify the best point of intervention in the recruitment process. In addition, we recommend examining the entire employee life cycle holistically to ensure that retention issues do not undermine progress achieved through recruitment and selection practices.

## Thinking behaviorally

Before applying behavioral strategies to a recruitment process, we recommend analyzing all the steps in that process using a technique called *behavioral mapping*.

Behavioral mapping involves creating a flowchart of all the steps in a recruitment process and the people who participate in it. Mapping each step helps to identify the specific points in a process where opportunities for intervention exist and isolate whose behavior may need to shift for the initiative to succeed.

This section details the steps in behavioral mapping, where each step begins with a question to guide the creation of the flowchart.

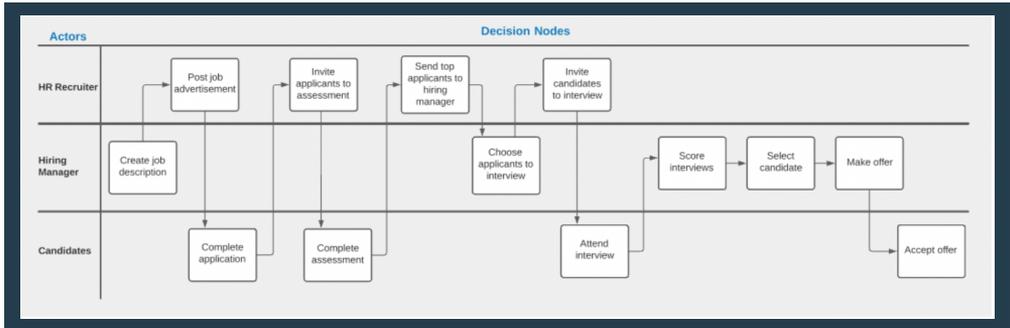
### 1. *Who participates in the recruitment and selection processes? Whose decision-making affects the outcome?*

List all the *actors* who participate in the process. Three groups that commonly participate in the hiring process are depicted in the figure, though this should be tailored to each organization's specific process.



## 2. What actions do each of these groups perform?

List all the *steps* in the recruitment and selection process in order, according to the actors who perform them. These become the *decision nodes* in the flowchart, and each one represents a possible point at which a behavioral strategy could be used. Below is a simplified behavioral map of a typical recruitment process.



## 3. What do you want people to do differently and when?

Finally, each decision node is analyzed to identify where problems or disparities occur. If relevant administrative data exists, it may be used to determine where bottlenecks or points of high dropoff occur in the recruitment process. For example, examining the representation of candidates by demographic group at each decision node and identifying any points at which gaps widen among groups is a useful starting place for determining where the need for intervention exists. Since each decision node is mapped to an actor, identifying a decision node to target also reveals the group whose behavior must shift.

Through this process, opportunities for intervention and the group whose behavior you may wish to shift should become clear. If, for example, many applicants never respond to the invitation to complete the initial assessment, the most relevant intervention may focus on shifting candidates' decisions at the point where they decide to complete the assessment.

## Be sure you're solving the right problem

Public sector employers, like many other employers, often face challenges with *retaining* workers, and these retention problems can undermine workforce diversity initiatives and recruitment strategies. A recent analysis, for example, showed that Black police officers were leaving the profession at a higher rate than new Black officers were joining, suggesting that a strategy focused on effective retention, rather than recruitment, could have made a larger impact on workforce diversity (Leatherby & Oppel, 2020). Employees of color, women, and other minority groups may be more likely to experience discrimination or harassment, less likely to have positive workplace experiences, and more likely to feel unsupported in the workplace. As a result, they may be disproportionately more likely to leave (McKay et al., 2007; Norlander et al., 2020). In addition, studies show that burnout, which is associated with turnover, affects large numbers of frontline public employees, and many will leave the workforce within their first years of service (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Before turning attention to new recruitment and selection strategies, it is critical that employers make every effort to ensure that their current employees stay. More inclusive workplace cultures have been associated with higher overall retention rates and may have enhanced effects for some employees from diverse backgrounds (McKay et al., 2007). In addition, higher levels of employee support can reduce burnout (Linos et al., 2021).

Analyzing employee turnover rates to assess differential turnover rates for different groups, as well as conducting meaningful employee exit interviews, can help to identify whether there is a need to balance recruitment and hiring initiatives with an emphasis on retention.

# GLOSSARY

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**Administrative burden** -

Interactions with the government that are perceived as onerous (i.e., programs or services that are experienced as having unclear requirements, being difficult or time-consuming to access, or causing stress) (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015)

**Affinity bias** - The psychological tendency for one to favor people who are perceived as part of their group above those who belong to an “out-group” (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014)

**Anchor** - Tendency for one’s judgments and decisions to be highly influenced by the first value that is presented (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Furnham & Boo, 2011)

**Belonging uncertainty** - Heightened sensitivity to cues about whether one belongs in an organization, caused by stigmatization (Walton & Cohen, 2007)

**Default** - Pre-selecting one option among several possible options, which usually results in an increased uptake of the pre-selected option (Jachimowicz et al., 2019). The tendency to remain with the pre-selected option is known as the default bias (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988)

**Formalization** - the extent to which rules, procedures, instructions and communications are written (Sievert et al., 2020)

**Implicit bias** - Discriminatory behavior that occurs outside of one’s awareness and intention, as a result of implicit (unconsciously held) attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes (Greenwald & Banaji, 2017)

**Mental models** - A mental representation of a concept or category based on what is considered “typical” (Lucas et al., 2021)

**Nudges** - low-cost interventions that alter the context in which decisions take place, removing unnecessary barriers and making it easier to take action (Sunstein, 2014)

# GLOSSARY

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**Public service motivation** -

Inclination to join a public service organization due to a strongly held desire to serve the public interest, beliefs in social equity, or personal identification with particular programs or policies (Perry and Wise 1990)

**Social reciprocity** - the tendency to want to act toward others as they act toward you (can be positive - a feeling of obligation to reciprocate kind acts, or negative - urge to retaliate for perceived slights)

**Stereotype threat** - Anxiety associated with worry about confirming a negative stereotype associated with one's racial or gender group

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## **TPL Policy Briefs**

- [Recruiting Young Talent to Government](#)

## **Other Publications**

- [Values Affirmation Workshop](#) (CIENCIA)
- [How to run structured interviews](#) (BIT)
- [Nudging: A very Short Guide](#) (Sunstein, 2014)

And for more support and resources on testing and evaluating new approaches, please see the [Library of Research Resources](#) compiled by the Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), or contact The People Lab.

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