

Evidence-Based Policy to Rebuild the Federal Workforce

When addressing the rebuilding of the federal workforce, evidence-based policies can inform effective hiring and recruitment practices, training and development programs, morale and retention initiatives, and more. Data-driven methods and scientific theory should be applied when developing best practices, allocating funding, and creating federal workforce policies.

Challenges & SIOP Support

The past four years have seen an unprecedented exodus of employees leaving the federal government, leading to the need for a rapid and efficient rebuilding of the federal workforce. In order to ensure the effective implementation of the Biden Administration's policy agenda, a robust and well-trained workforce is critical. To this end, **the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) urges the application of scientific theory and research to ensure data-driven methods to enhance federal recruitment and selection processes, training and development programs, and other human resource management activities.**

Industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology is the scientific study of working and the application of that science to workforce issues to enhance individual, team, and organizational effectiveness. I-O psychologists bring over a century of expertise in understanding and predicting workplace behavior. Specifically, I-O psychologists have advised federal agencies and private businesses alike on hiring and recruitment tactics, effective employee development programs, improving morale and retention, leadership, organizational development, and a variety of other workplace topics. I-O psychology research can also inform evidence-based policy on adoption of technology, bias reduction in selection and promotion, and other important issues facing the federal workforce.

Recommendations

In addition to willingness to provide consultative support, SIOP has some initial recommendations for rebuilding the federal workforce. The following suggestions, while not a comprehensive list, reflect the input of I-O psychology experts and are based on extensive research on workforce topics. SIOP is available to connect you with specific workforce experts to further discuss each suggestion.

- Invest in social science research programs at the National Science Foundation, Department of Defense, and other federal agencies to better understand worker motivations and the science of organizations.
- Establish an Advisory Committee on Building the Federal Workforce Back Better, comprised of experts on industrial and organizational psychology, human resources, labor economics, data science, and other workforce science fields to advise on data-driven methods for hiring, retention and more.
- Establish an interagency technology task force comprised of federal stakeholders and non-federal experts to evaluate current use of technology among the federal workforce and recommend ways to improve familiarity, adoption, and efficient use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

*The **Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology (SIOP)** is a community of more than 10,000 members worldwide with the common interest in promoting the science, practice, and teaching of I-O psychology to enhance human well-being and performance in organizational and work settings. SIOP provides a platform for scientists, academics, consultants, and practitioners to collaborate, implement, and evaluate cutting-edge approaches to workplace challenges across sectors. More information can be found at: <http://www.siop.org/>*

- Launch a workforce planning process that evaluates current and future federal workforce needs across federal agencies to better inform federal investments.
- Conduct analyses of job descriptions, titles, and required skills across federal agencies to ensure up-to-date information is used in hiring and selection.
- Develop best practices for recruitment and hiring of federal employees to be distributed and implemented across federal agencies.
- Create an inter-agency job search and placement platform to allow for workforce mobility between agencies and improve retention of employees within the federal government.
- Enhance employee development by providing career assessment and external training opportunities for development of new skills and capabilities.
- Create cross-agency leadership training and development programs to promote succession planning and create a pipeline of future leaders in the civil workforce.
- Build inclusive workplaces by providing evidence-based training practices to raise awareness about biases and increase skills needed to reduce bias.
- Require regular evaluation of workforce policies and programs in hiring, training, and retention to ensure effectiveness and drive continuous improvement.

Again, SIOP members are ready and willing to further discuss these recommendations and provide additional expertise and insights to decision makers considering evidence-based workforce policies.

Case Study: Diversity and Inclusion Training

The topic of diversity training has been front and center in the federal workforce conversation since the Trump Administration’s September 2020 Executive Orders to roll back these efforts. If consulted on the front-end of these actions, I-O psychology researchers and practitioners would have been able to provide unique insight into the real value of these programs,ⁱ including one statistical summarization of the findings of 260 different studies across a variety of industries, occupations, and trainees that showed that people generally have positive reactions to diversity training and indicate that they have acquired new knowledge.ⁱⁱ Studies show that well-designed training integrated into a broader diversity and inclusion strategy can “increase awareness of bias and its lasting impact, plant seeds that inspire sustained learning, and teach skills that enable attendees to manage their biases and change their behavior.”ⁱⁱⁱ This is especially important as additional I-O psychology findings further confirm that reducing such biases – creating diverse and inclusive environments – can improve employee engagement, retention, and performance, as well as organizational financial outcomes.^{iv} I-O psychology experts can help with the design of improved programs and processes.

Expert Contacts

SIOP experts are ready and willing to assist the transition team and Administration regarding evidence-based findings related to rebuilding the federal workforce. To connect with SIOP experts, email Dr. Alex Alonso, Chair of SIOP's Government Relations Advocacy Team (GREAT) at: alexander.alonso@shrm.org.

These recommendations were developed with consultation from SIOP members, including:

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Case Study Sources

ⁱ Kalinoski, Z. T., Steele-Johnson, D., Peyton, E. J., Leas, K. A., Steinke, J., & Bowling, N. A. (2013). A meta-analytic evaluation of diversity training outcomes. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 34(8): 1076–1104.
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ⁱⁱ Bezrukova, K., Spell, C. S., Perry, J. L., & Jehn, K. A. (2016). A meta-analytical integration of over 40 years of research on diversity training evaluation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 142(11), 1227.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carter, E. R., Onyeador, I. N., & Lewis, N. A., Jr. (2020). Developing & delivering effective anti-bias training: Challenges & recommendations. *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 6(1), 57–70.

^{iv} Holmes IV, O., Jiang, K., Avery, D. R., McKay, P. F., Oh, I. S., & Tillman, C. J. (2020). A meta-analysis integrating 25 years of diversity climate research. *Journal of Management*, 0149206320934547.

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