The Federal Workforce: Characteristics and Trends

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Abstract
Understanding the characteristics and trends of the federal workforce is important because, among other things, agencies accomplish their missions via that workforce. Total personnel costs (direct compensation and benefits) for all federal employees (civilian and military, current employees and retirees) were estimated at more than $523 billion in 2008, and civilian personnel costs in the executive branch alone were estimated at about $194 billion. Three cabinet departments — the Departments of Defense (DOD), Veterans Affairs (DVA), and Homeland Security (DHS) — accounted for almost 60% of the nearly 1.9 million executive branch civilian employees in 2008. The duty stations for more than 35% of these employees were in four states (California, Virginia, Texas, and Maryland) and the District of Columbia, and DOD was the top federal employer in 35 states. DOD also employed more than 90% of federal civilian employees in foreign countries, and was the top federal employer in U.S. territories. The federal workforce grew by more than 120,000 employees between 2000 (the low point during the last 10 years) and 2008, with the growth concentrated in homeland security-related agencies and DVA. Civilian employment in other agencies (including DOD and most independent agencies) declined during the last 10 years.

The number of blue-collar and clerical federal jobs declined between 1998 and 2008, but the number of professional and administrative jobs increased during this period. The percentage of the federal workforce that was made up of minorities also increased, but the percentage that was women remained almost constant. Although women and minorities represented an increasing portion of the growing professional and administrative groups, the representation of women and minorities in the Senior Executive Service was less than their presence in the overall workforce. The federal workforce was somewhat older in 2008 than it was in 1998, but the average length of service declined from 15.2 years in 1998 to 14.7 years in 2008.

The number of white-collar employees in the General Schedule (GS) pay system declined during the last 10 years, while the number of employees in agency-specific pay systems (primarily at DOD and DHS) increased dramatically (from less than 1% of the workforce in 1998 to 16% in 2008). If these trends continue, the GS system will cover less than half of the federal civilian workforce by the year 2020. The average salary of the workforce was $69,061 in 2008, but average salaries varied substantially between and within federal agencies and pay systems.

Although the federal workforce has grown somewhat in recent years, a 2006 study estimated that the “hidden” federal workforce of contractors and grantees grew by more than 50% between 1999 and 2005, when it reportedly included more than 10.5 million jobs in 2005. That figure is more than twice as large as the combined total of all three branches of government, the U.S. Postal Service, the intelligence agencies, the armed forces, and the Ready Reserve.

This report will be updated when September 2008 data for the federal workforce become available.

Comments
Suggested Citation
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About the data: Workforce data and trends give employers strategic context for managing and developing a high-performing workforce. Unless otherwise noted, all data reflect the executive branch workforce only (excluding higher education). The data source for most information is the statewide Human Resource Management System (HRMS). Most pages are updated annually at the end of COVID-19. Get latest updates, multilingual resources, and details of Gov. Inslee's Safe Start proclamation: Coronavirus.wa.gov. About us: Understanding the characteristics and trends of the federal workforce is important because, among other things, agencies accomplish their missions via that workforce. Total personnel costs (direct compensation and benefits) for all current and retired civilian and military federal employees were estimated at nearly $590 billion in 2010. Current non-postal civilian personnel costs in the executive branch alone were estimated at nearly $230 billion. According to Office of Personnel Management's FedScope database, three Cabinet departments—the Departments of Defense (DOD), Veterans Affairs—Federal statistical agencies can help this process by offering additional demographic, geographic, and educational details in their tabulations of workforce indicators.

2. Base human capital and recruitment strategies on established customer segments, not on spurious generational differences. Governments should consider basing their human capital strategies not on supposed generational characteristics but, rather, on employee segments defined by lifetime milestones. Our research suggests that Millennials behave much the same as other generations did once they find a steady job, form their own families, and start their careers. The results from Accenture Federal Services worked with Government Business Council to survey federal employees about AI. This report shares workforce views on intelligent technologies and their own readiness to work with them. The report also identifies clear steps to engage the workforce and increase the likelihood of success with AI and other intelligent technologies. Share. View full report. While there is little dispute about the need or urgency to transform the federal workforce, there remains significant uncertainty about how to make it happen. That’s especially true when it comes to integrating artificial intelligence (AI). Federal managers are having a hard time filling technical and mid-level management positions. The historical drivers for bringing people to the federal workforce—high salaries, good benefits, and job security—have. Page 193 Share Cite. Suggested Citation: "5 Federal Energy and Extractive Industry Workforce Issues." National Research Council. 2013. Emerging Workforce Trends in the U.S. Energy and Mining Industries: A Call to Action. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/18250.