



NEOGOV

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THE

# *Quiet Crisis*

IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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# AN UNPRECEDENTED NUMBER OF JOB OPENINGS **CURRENTLY REMAIN UNFILLED** IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

20% of state and local government agencies have reduced services to citizens due to staffing shortages.

## HOW CAN AGENCIES RECOVER FROM THIS HIRING CRISIS?

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# OVERVIEW

The public sector faces some of the most significant hiring challenges of any segment in today's hyper-competitive job market.

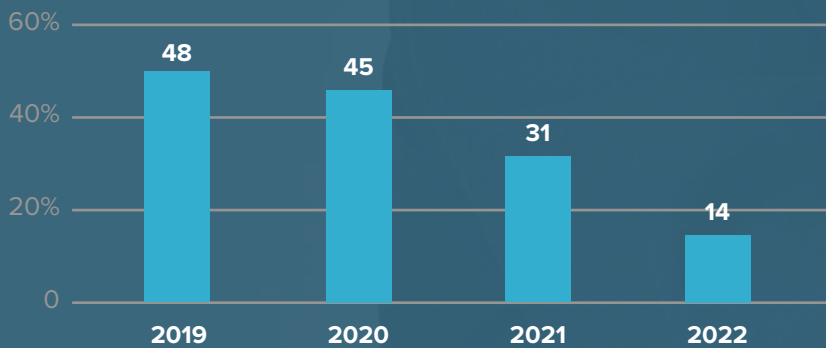
A mass exodus of workers to the private sector, increased competition in the job market, and a rise in job openings due to the Silver Tsunami of recent retirees have combined to force public sector HR departments into a vicious hiring cycle.

The resulting consequences are burnout in existing public sector employees, cost increases due to overtime pay, and a sharp reduction in services provided to citizens

Figure 1

## Number of Applicants Per Open Job, 2016 - Jan 2022

Source: 2022 applicants from 67,000 applications on GovernmentJobs.com.



Public sector organizations must adapt their hiring processes to fill job openings with qualified candidates. To compete today, you need to consider new strategies for making government jobs more attractive to applicants, how to position yourself in front of the best candidates, how to modernize your hiring processes, and ways to appeal to an increasingly tech-savvy generation of workers.

As the creator of GovernmentJobs.com, NEOGOV noticed specific trends in hiring data that precipitated two follow-on surveys. Since 2021, there has been a 45% increase in public sector job openings and a 56% decrease in applicants per job. These trends inspired us to speak to both HR directors and job seekers to find answers.

Read on to discover an in-depth look at the surprising data surrounding this quiet crisis in the public sector and discover strategies for how government organizations and public sector HR leadership can overcome these challenges to compete in an ever-evolving job market.

THE NUMBER OF  
OPEN JOBS ARE UP BY  
**45%**  
IN THE LAST YEAR FOR  
THE PUBLIC SECTOR

# THE NEW LABOR MARKET

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The jobs market managed to rebound after the pandemic-induced recession. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, over 400,000 jobs have been added every month for the past year. But the pandemic has forever altered how employees and job seekers view their careers and the way they work.

***The Great Resignation*, now often described as *The Great Reshuffle*, has demonstrated a significant shift in the mentality and expectations of current job seekers. Current candidates want higher pay, flexible work options, and more meaningful work, and they aren't afraid to leave for better opportunities elsewhere.**

These new expectations have created a devastating cycle of labor shortages across the entire job market. Hiring is difficult for every organization today, but no group faces more significant challenges than the public sector.

## THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN JOB OPENINGS AND JOB APPLICATIONS

NEOGOV conducted an analysis of 67,000 applications received on GovernmentJobs.com in 2022 and discovered the gap between job openings and job applications had grown significantly. The increase in public sector job postings from Q1 in 2021 to Q1 in 2022 has grown a staggering 45%! Yet **the number of applications per open job decreased by fifty-six percent.** On average, only 14.3 job seekers applied for every open job.

NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS PER OPEN JOB ARE DOWN BY

**-56%**

IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

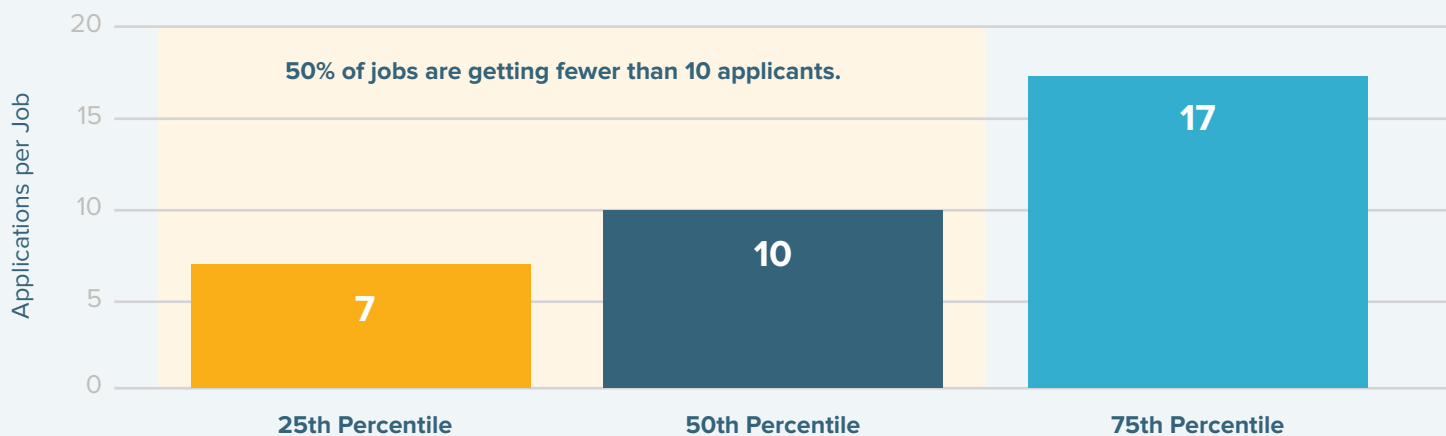


The issue becomes more apparent when considering the data split into quartiles. **The bottom quarter of job postings only received 7 applicants per open role!** The data gets starker when you realize these numbers don't even consider whether applicants are hireable or if they meet basic requirements for the role.

Figure 2

### Applications per Job by Quartile, Jan 2022

Source: 2022 applicants from 67,000 applications on GovernmentJobs.com.

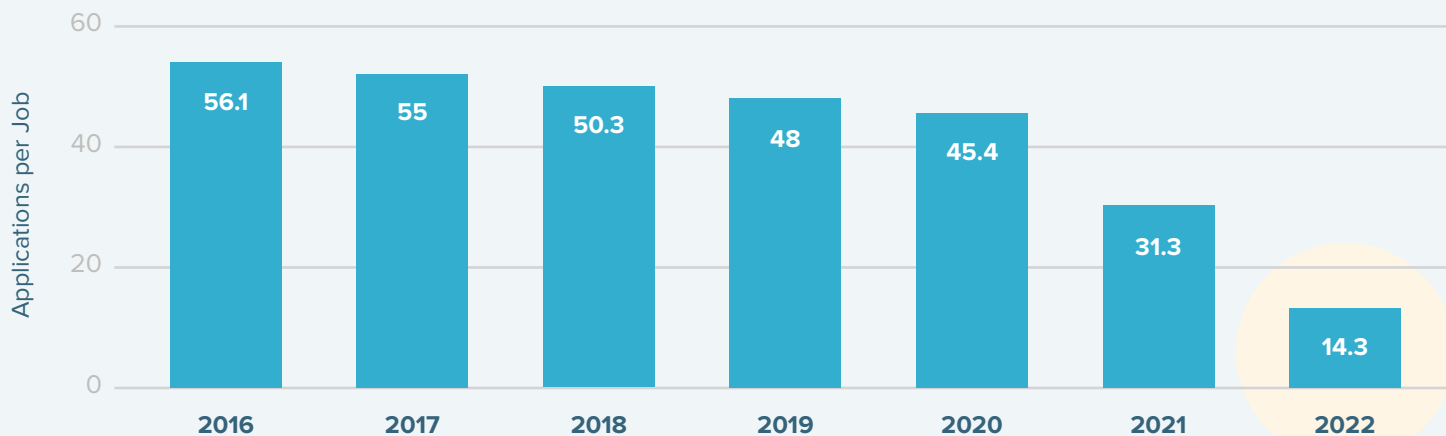


When comparing this trend over the past six years, you discover **applications per job in the public sector have decreased by 74 percent.** In one year alone, from January 2021 to January 2022, applications decreased by over 50 percent.

Figure 3

### Number of Applicants per Open Job, 2016 - Jan 2022

Source: 2022 applicants from 67,000 applications on GovernmentJobs.com.



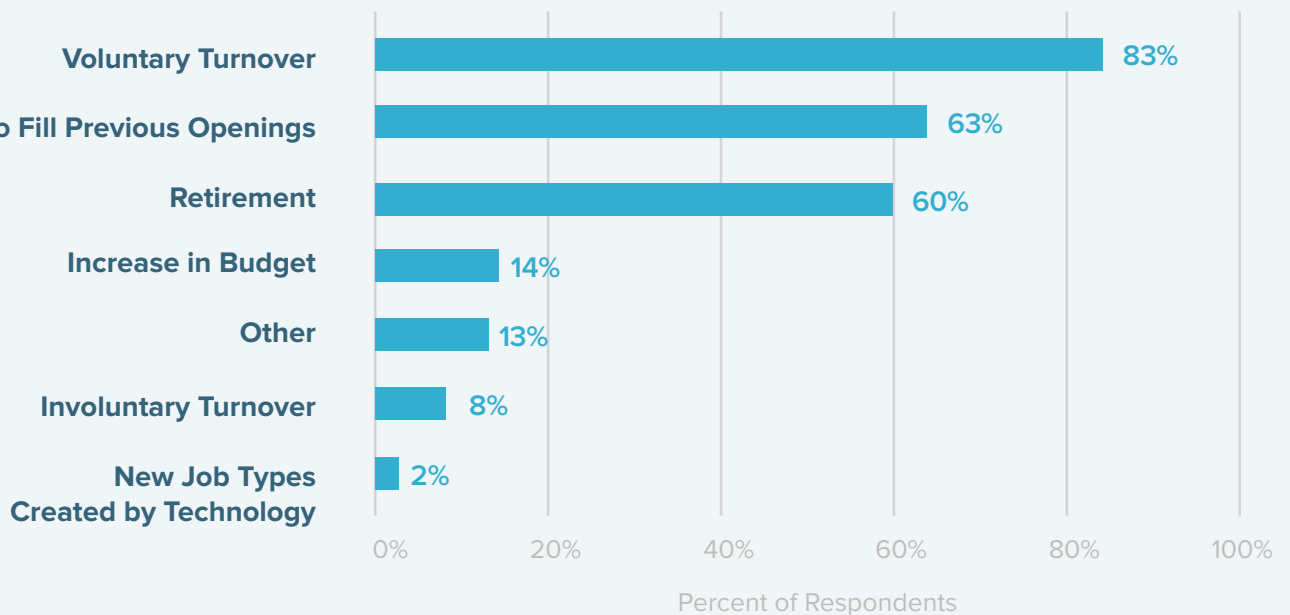
# INSIGHTS FROM PUBLIC SECTOR HR PROFESSIONALS

NEOGOV surveyed 299 public sector HR directors to gain first-hand insight into their current hiring situation. **Eighty percent of those surveyed responded the number of job openings is higher than an average year.** Half of those respondents said it was the highest number of job openings they'd seen in recent memory. All agreed it's an unprecedented time in the public sector.

Figure 4

What are the biggest drivers for the increase in recent job openings? (Select all that apply.)

Source: NEOGOV survey of 299 public sector HR directors.



**Of those surveyed, 217 cited voluntary turnover as the number one driver of increased job openings.** An inability to fill jobs over time and retirement are also having a significant impact.

Seventy-six percent of voluntary employee turnover was directly related to pay, with employees citing salary as the main reason for their exit. Opportunities in the private sector, opportunities in the nonprofit sector, the option for remote work, and greater work flexibility remain the other most significant reasons employees are departing the public sector.

Despite these numbers, employee benefits remain a bright spot for the public sector. **Only nine percent of those surveyed reported benefits contributed to voluntary turnover.** The public sector has long been recognized for offering comprehensive benefits packages and this data confirms that benefits remain an attractive component of government work.

*"The pandemic forced us to close some public-facing facilities for most of 2020, some employees did not return when we reopened."* - NEBRASKA RESPONDENT

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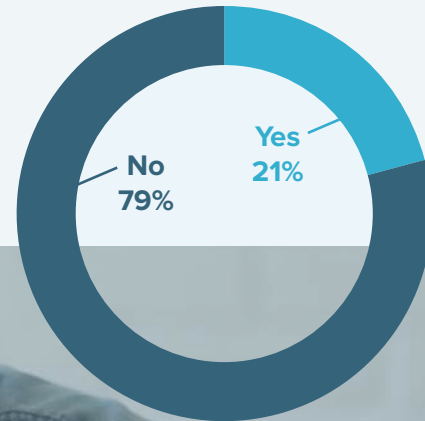
## ARE YOU ABLE TO FILL CURRENT JOB OPENINGS?

Job openings would not be an issue if agencies could fill them with qualified candidates. But **seventy-nine percent of agencies cannot currently find qualified candidates** for open positions, providing a clear answer from a competitive job market.

Figure 5

Are you finding enough qualified candidates to fill your roles?

Source: NEOGOV survey of public sector HR directors.



## WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF UNFILLED JOB OPENINGS?

The consequences are wide-ranging and severe. There's staff burnout, low morale, higher overtime costs, increased voluntary turnover, and the continuation of a vicious cycle.

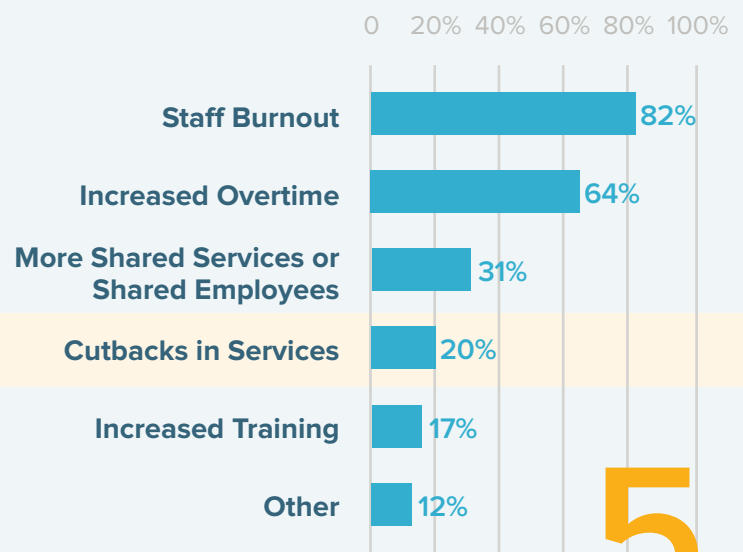
But that's not the worst of it.

**Staffing shortages have forced twenty percent of reported public sector agencies to cut public services.** If this alarming trend continues over the next quarter, over forty percent of public sector agencies will cut services to the public.

Figure 6

Have recent hiring challenges resulted in any of the following?

Source: NEOGOV survey of public sector HR directors.



*“Our police department is experiencing the most problem [sic] with recruitment. **Half of our patrol positions have gone unfilled for over a year.** This corresponds to a shortage of officers per shift and less police presence.”*

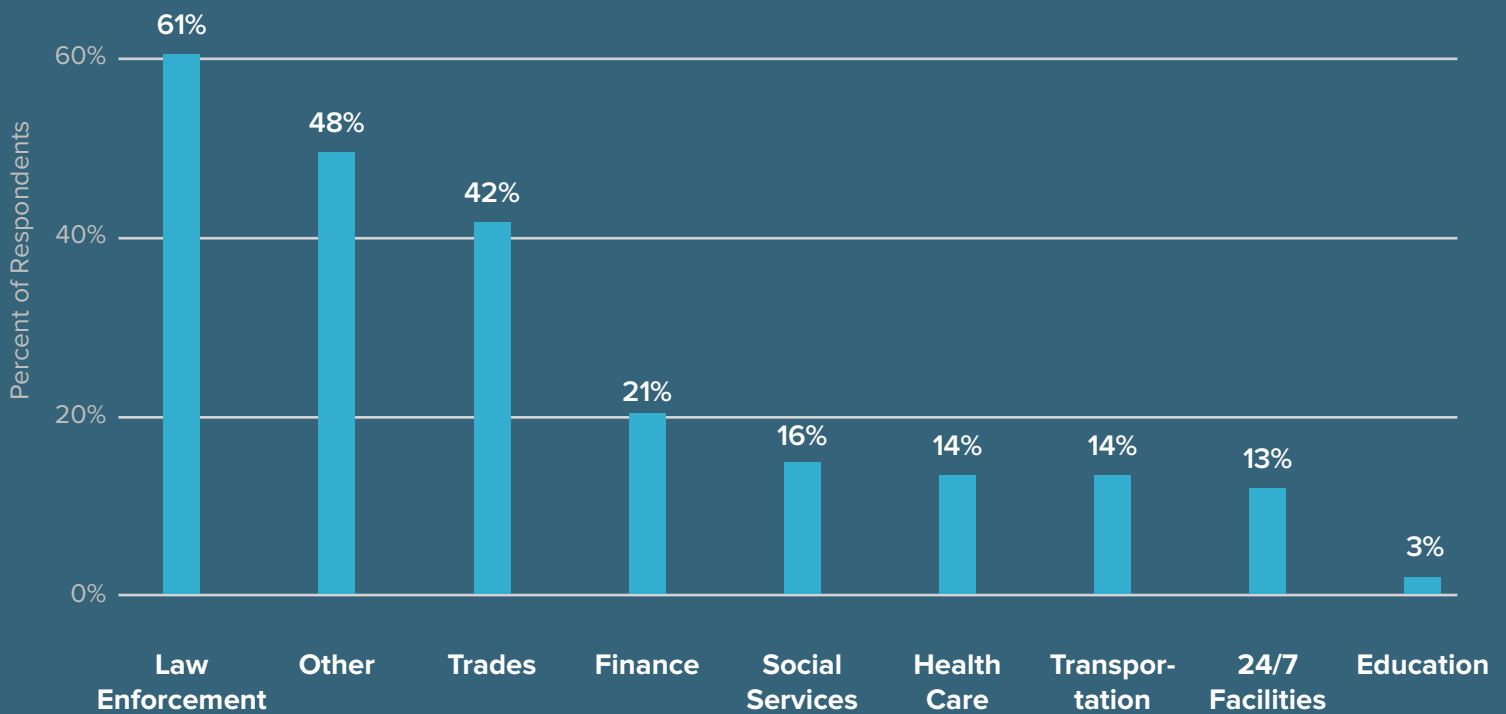
- ARKANSAS RESPONDENT



Figure 7

What are the top areas in which you have trouble finding qualified candidates?

Source: NEOGOV survey of public sector HR directors.



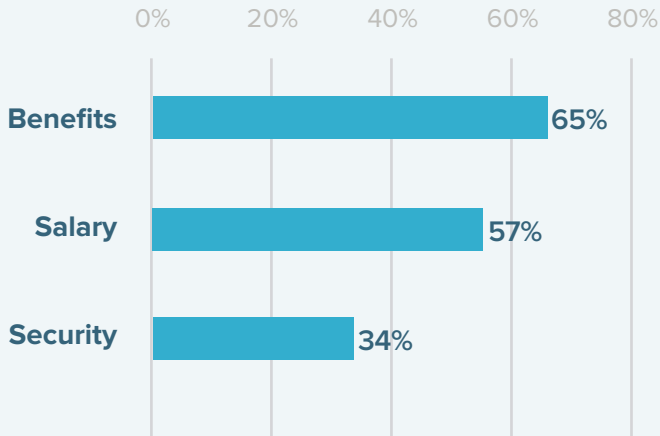
**Sixty-one percent of public sector HR directors reported law enforcement as having the most difficulties with recruitment.**

The survey validated the significant challenges HR departments face in filling open roles and demonstrated the impact staffing shortages have on the services citizens receive. But how do agencies reverse this trend? Find answers in the next section with our survey of job applicants and discover valuable insights into their job-seeking experience.



Figure 8

If you prefer government jobs, what are the most appealing factors? (Select all that apply.)



70% OF THOSE THAT RESPONDED TO THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION LISTED **PROCESS, COMMUNICATION AND TIMELINESS** AS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.

## APPLICANT PERSPECTIVES OF PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS

Government jobs have traditionally been known for job security, the opportunity to do meaningful work, and an attractive benefits package. But does this perspective remain in a constantly evolving job market?

HR directors who understand the primary reasons behind a candidate's desire to pursue a career in the public sector are more prepared to improve recruiting processes and stand out in a competitive landscape. NEOGOV gained valuable insights from 609 survey respondents who applied to public sector positions via GovernmentJobs.com in 2019 or later.

**Sixty percent of respondents cited benefits as the primary reason to work in the public sector.** Benefits far outweighed salary and stability when they responded to what attracted them most about public sector work. Notably, many cited a lack of career and professional growth as the primary deterrent against pursuing public sector work.

The survey also asked hires about their experience with the application process in the public sector. In response to an open-ended question on the positives of the hiring process, **fifty-five percent reported an appreciation for the clarity of requirements, the clear delineation of the process, and clear salary expectations.** Transparency and clarity remain critical elements for public sector HR teams to maintain as you enhance your recruitment marketing approach.

Survey respondents voiced the need for a more timely application process, the option for an online application, and better communication throughout the hiring process. **Seventy percent of respondents to our open-ended question listed process, communication, and timeliness as extremely important.** For public sector HR teams to develop a steady pipeline of talent it's necessary to consider these answers and work to modernize hiring and recruitment processes that engage and nurture candidates.



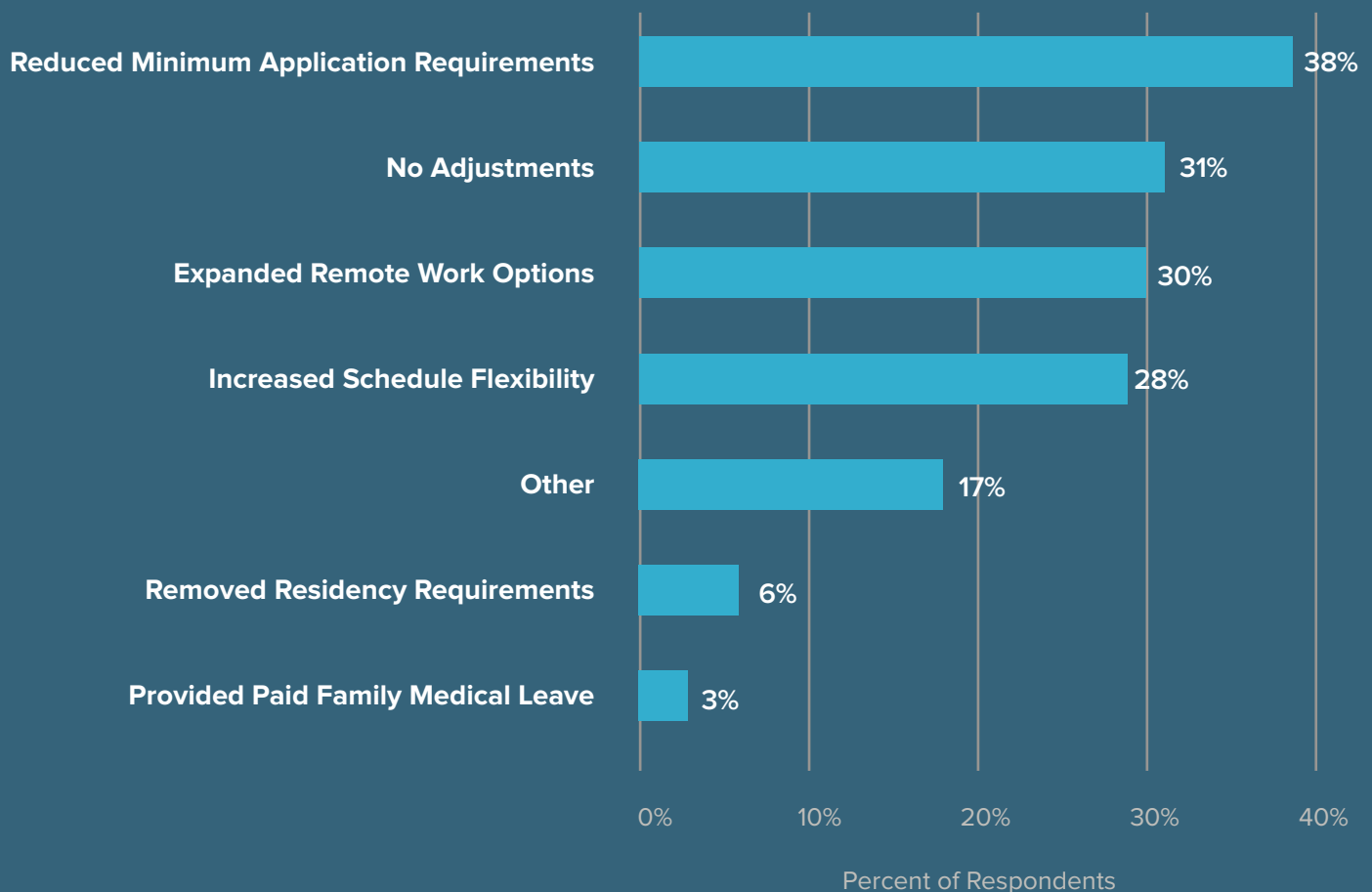
# SOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW NORMAL

Attracting qualified applicants has proven especially difficult for the public sector in today's challenging job market. Considering the following questions can help provide answers as public sector organizations refine their hiring strategies for the future. How can you get in front of qualified candidates? How can you make government jobs more attractive to applicants? How can you modernize hiring processes? How can you appeal to an increasingly tech-savvy generation of workers?

Figure 9

Have you changed job conditions or qualifications in the following ways to attract more applicants?

NEOGOV survey of 299 public sector HR directors.



Traditionally, the public sector has maintained a less flexible approach to work. But the needle is moving toward a more adaptable work environment. **Figure 8 shows that of 241 respondents, sixty-nine percent of organizations are changing job conditions to fill job postings.** Forty-one percent are reducing the minimum qualifications for their jobs to attract more candidates, and thirty percent have expanded remote work options.



# WHAT CAN WE DO?

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*"More engaging job postings, faster turnaround time in contacting candidates, investing more time in onboarding and the new hire journey..."* - MAINE RESPONDENT

In addition to making public sector jobs more attractive to applicants, today's job market requires new methods for finding and recruiting candidates. Online job boards, digital ads, and social media are helpful new tools.

Public sector HR directors able to speed up the hiring process will give themselves a significant competitive advantage. Conducting interviews virtually and providing a quicker turnaround time from application to offer are strategies to consider for your agency.

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## MODERNIZING YOUR PROCESSES IS ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO OBTAIN QUALITY CANDIDATES IN TODAY'S NEW NORMAL.

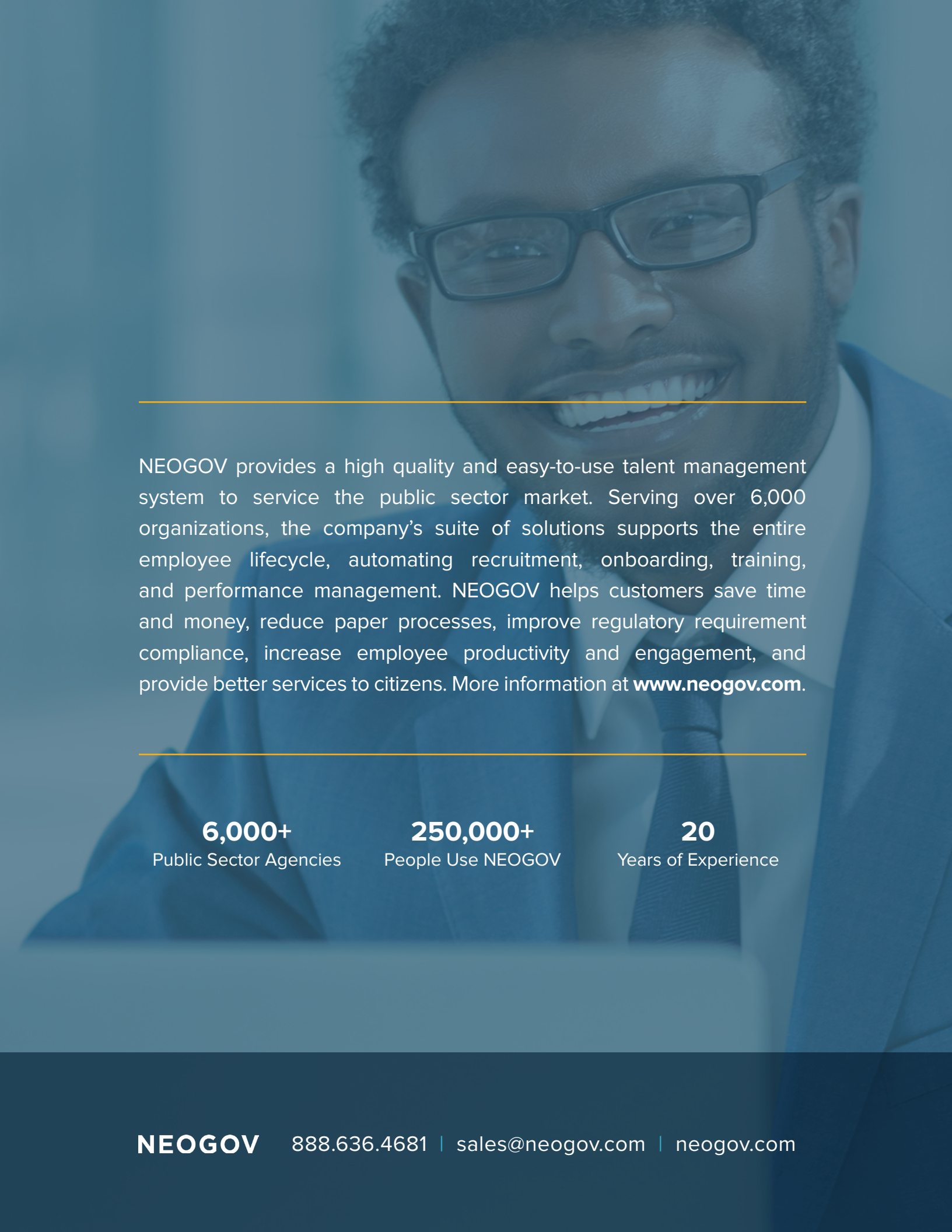
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Boosting your employer brand is a new tactic for the public sector, but in our technology-connected world, it's a necessary one. Practice adopting the lens of a "recruitment marketer" and work to develop creative new ways of refining your recruitment efforts.

The current hyper-competitive recruiting environment is new territory for the public sector. The right recruitment marketing tools will give innovative agencies the power to build an employer brand and authentically engage candidates throughout the hiring process. Many of our survey respondents have already begun making major operational changes like actively marketing their agencies to prospective employees and turning hiring into a full-time job. Technology can be a way of helping agencies level the playing field in today's new normal. Use it to bridge the hiring gap, stand out in a hyper-competitive job market, and maintain high levels of service across your agency.







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NEOGOV provides a high quality and easy-to-use talent management system to service the public sector market. Serving over 6,000 organizations, the company's suite of solutions supports the entire employee lifecycle, automating recruitment, onboarding, training, and performance management. NEOGOV helps customers save time and money, reduce paper processes, improve regulatory requirement compliance, increase employee productivity and engagement, and provide better services to citizens. More information at [www.neogov.com](http://www.neogov.com).

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