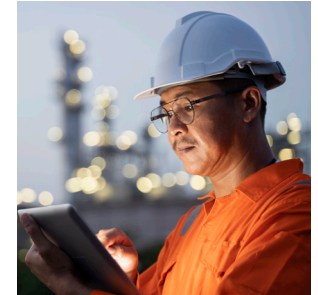September 2021

Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the public service workforce

Report prepared by MissionSquare Research Institute
formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence at ICMA-RC

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Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

As campaigns for racial justice have risen throughout the country, there has been a related increase in focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the public service workforce. This is often seen through the lens of facilitating more equitable and responsive provision of services to the public, but it may also be of value internally in contributing to employee recruitment, retention, and development.

This report presents data on diversity in public service organizations – in state and local government, education, health care, and related nonprofit organizations. It also compares historical and current public service diversity figures to those of the broader workforce. Aspects of diversity discussed include race, ethnicity, age, gender, and other categories (to the extent that data is available), such as LGBTQIA+ identification, veteran status, cognitive diversity, religion, and language.

Public service agencies face multiple challenges related to diversity, such as those in Table 1.

Considering how costly recruitment is in terms of both money and time, public service agencies can ill afford to bypass talented candidates or see them grow dissatisfied and leave the organization.

Beyond the data itself, this report also explores why diversity, equity, and inclusion in the public service workforce are important for the organization and for the communities being served.

Table 1 **Workforce challenges and diversity data**

Challenges	Diversity data
Lack of diversity in certain key positions like management or public safety, potentially leading to issues of trust within the community or problems retaining diverse candidates	African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and women are **underrepresented** among police officers and police supervisors. African Americans and Hispanics are underrepresented among managers and professionals, and women are underrepresented among local government chief administrative officers, such as city managers.
Ongoing waves of retirements and a need for effective succession planning	Among state and local employers, **52% expect the largest percentage of retirees** will be leaving their workforce in the next few years.
Industries and occupations that have significantly higher representation by one demographic group, which may lead to greater impacts on that group in cases of economic or pandemic-fueled displacements	In 2020, at a time when many libraries closed or laid off staff, **83% of librarians were women.**
Discrimination in the workplace can have a toxic effect on retention	Almost **10% of LGBT employees have left an employer** due to feeling unwelcome
Finding talented staff may be a matter of targeted outreach to diverse pools of candidates	More than **20% of employed veterans** work in state or local government, education, or health care
Technological change impacting the conduct of particular occupations and the balance of diversity within the organization	With office productivity software improvements and other workforce changes, state and local government secretarial employment is projected to **decline by at least 18%.**

Source: Various; see detailed discussion below.

Regarding the terms used in this report, they are presented as used in the underlying sources. As an example, since the data on the ethnic breakdown of the workforce comes from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which uses the category Hispanic, that term is used in the corresponding graphs and discussion. In some cases, such as with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity, the acronyms used are likewise specific to the data source.

Why DEI?

It is often said that diversity is a source of society's strength, just as the United States motto of E Pluribus Unum (out of many, one) implies that all members of society bring their own unique experience, creativity and talents to the workforce.

Diversity in recruitment serves a very immediate need for public service organizations in that it expands the pool of potential job candidates. In the **2021 State and Local Government Workforce Survey**, which MissionSquare Research Institute conducted in partnership with the International Public Management Association for Human Resources and the National Association of State Personnel Executives, more than 50% of respondents identified various health care, public safety, skilled trades, and engineering positions as being hard to fill, with information technology and maintenance workers also in high demand.

To meet those needs, recruitment efforts include direct outreach to colleges (27% of survey respondents), targeted neighborhoods and demographics (17%), and veterans and military family members (13%). With attitudes about public service starting early in life, governments are also helping to develop civic curricula or other partnerships with K-12 schools (4%).

These strategies illustrate the value of DEI initiatives. Rather than simply relying on a single jobs board, employers recognize that diverse audiences are best reached by a mix of platforms, associations, or media most appropriate to their varying education, industry, technological proficiency, geography, primary language, or demographics. This requires efforts that increase connections with candidates that typically would not have considered a position in public service.

Once employees are hired, it is just as critical that they are welcomed as valued contributors to the organization. This can take the form of training, orientation, or onboarding programs, but is more durably exemplified by ongoing trust and inclusion in decision making, leadership development, and employee engagement. Among the employee retention programs most often cited were several that dealt with diversity (see Table 2).

Table 2 **Programs used to encourage employee retention and development** (selected responses)

Program	
Leadership development	50%
Workplace DEI training	45%
Cross-training	39%
Internships/apprenticeships	32%
Mentoring	16%
Collaborative/distributed leadership	13%
Stay interviews	11%
Employee affinity/resource groups	10%

Source: **State and Local Government Workforce Survey**, MissionSquare Research Institute, 2021.

17% of state and local governments' recruitment efforts include demographic or neighborhood-specific outreach

The full range of retention programs cited in the survey is much longer, including employee assistance programs, offered by 91% of state and local governments. The examples in Table 2 demonstrate a focus on further developing employees' skills; finding new ways they can contribute; and recognizing talent and building a sense of belonging through internships, mentoring relationships, affinity groups, and "stay" interviews (conducted long before employees might consider leaving for opportunities elsewhere).

Affinity or resource groups can be of particular value when newly recruited staff are among very few in a particular demographic on the team. This approach has been used for various demographic groups within a workforce, such as Black employees and veterans in Minneapolis and a women's leadership program in San Antonio.[1] It can also be extended among multiple employers within a region, as the workforce development coordinator at the California Social Work Education Center described in helping orient employees to jobs in smaller or rural counties.[2]

Representation within the workforce can help raise the profile of programmatic or facility issues that may reflect oversights by the organization. Obvious examples would be the historical lack of women's restrooms at the Supreme Court or of convenient women's restrooms that were not "Whites only" in the early days of NASA. Others include facilities for transgender, nursing, or disabled employees; accommodations for Muslim employees to perform their daily prayers; or scheduling flexibility for parents to work around childcare drop-off and pick-up times. Such factors may not be as high profile as salary and health benefits, but sufficient inconveniences or insensitivities can drive talented employees to look for work elsewhere.

Finding peers within the organization and receiving positive feedback and support can help both the employee, who is settling into the organization, and the public being served, who can see themselves reflected in the workforce. This visibility is valuable not just in short-term hires who soon leave, but also as long-term employees who rise through the ranks, can impact decision making and policy, and in turn can contribute to greater community trust building and belief in the results achievable through a career in public service.[3]

With a more representative workforce, the organization can also better engage the public through effective targeted outreach methods. In addition to utilizing newspaper legal notices, they can conduct outreach to faith groups, neighborhood associations, community liaisons, large-print senior-focused publications, non-English language news outlets or other specialty media, social media groups, and direct peer-to-peer contacts.

Fostering positive outcomes for the public offers an ethical justification for increasing equity in service delivery in areas like maternal health, where Black and Native American women are 2-3 times as likely to die in childbirth as White women.[4] Within education, several studies have shown correlations between students having a teacher of the same race and positive student impacts, such as higher test scores or lower dropout rates.[5]

For those who look to the bottom line, greater inclusion of women in public sector leadership is positively correlated to economic development results.[6] And across a range of occupations, staff diversity has been shown to have a positive impact on productivity, quality decision making, and financial success.[7]

This report is focused on DEI in the public workforce, not in the provision of public services – although the two are often related. As such, regarding law enforcement, most of the discussion is on the balance of people of various backgrounds working in policing or other public safety roles, not on disparities in patrol or arrests in marginalized communities, even though greater attention to diversity and inclusion in the workforce may contribute to greater equity community-wide. This is not to minimize the importance of these community issues, but rather to leave those for a much more in-depth discussion elsewhere (**see Resources**).

Greater inclusion of women in public sector leadership is positively correlated to economic development results.

Staff diversity has been shown to have a positive impact on **productivity, quality decision making, and financial success.**

Range of employers

As noted above, the scope of this report includes state and local government as well as education, health care, and nonprofit organizations in service to the community.

This focus on "industries" such as education – whether the provider is a state university, a public school district, or a private or parochial school – recognizes the commonalities across certain employers, while also allowing for further data breakdowns where available. For additional detail, please see the issue briefs **A Cross-Sector Review of Public Service Employment** and **Postsecondary Education Staffing**.

The industry and occupational categories used in this report align with data available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which is also supplemented below by other sources as appropriate, such as local government-specific research by groups like the International City/County Management Association or Engaging Local Government Leaders (**see Resources**).

Trend data through 2020

To begin an understanding of diversity in the public service workforce, trend data is presented below. For gender, race, and ethnicity, this data stretches from 2005-2020 (as released in January 2021); for age, it runs from 2011-2020.[8] To put each of these categories into perspective, it is also helpful to consider the share each represents of the total workforce (see Table 3).

Of these categories, the share of women in the workforce has remained somewhat steady since 2005, while the percentages have increased more significantly among Blacks or African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics. The 2020 Census data reveals slightly higher figures for Hispanics within the overall population (18.7%) than in the workforce (17.6%), and also provides more detail on the reporting of two or more races or some other race, which together represent as much as 25% of the total population.[10]

In the sections below on gender, race, ethnicity, and age, specific industries and occupations are spotlighted. These are intended to display a variety of functions within public service, without constituting an exhaustive review. In addition, as job functions become more specific (e.g., urban planners), such detailed breakdowns by demographic groups are not available.

Table 3 **Percentage representation within the total workforce[9]**

Category	Percentage of total workforce in 2020	Change since 2005
Women	46.8%	+.04%
Blacks or African Americans	12.1%	+1.3%
Asian Americans	6.4%	+2.0%
Hispanics	17.6%	+4.5%

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 1 **Top three public service employers by industry (in millions)**
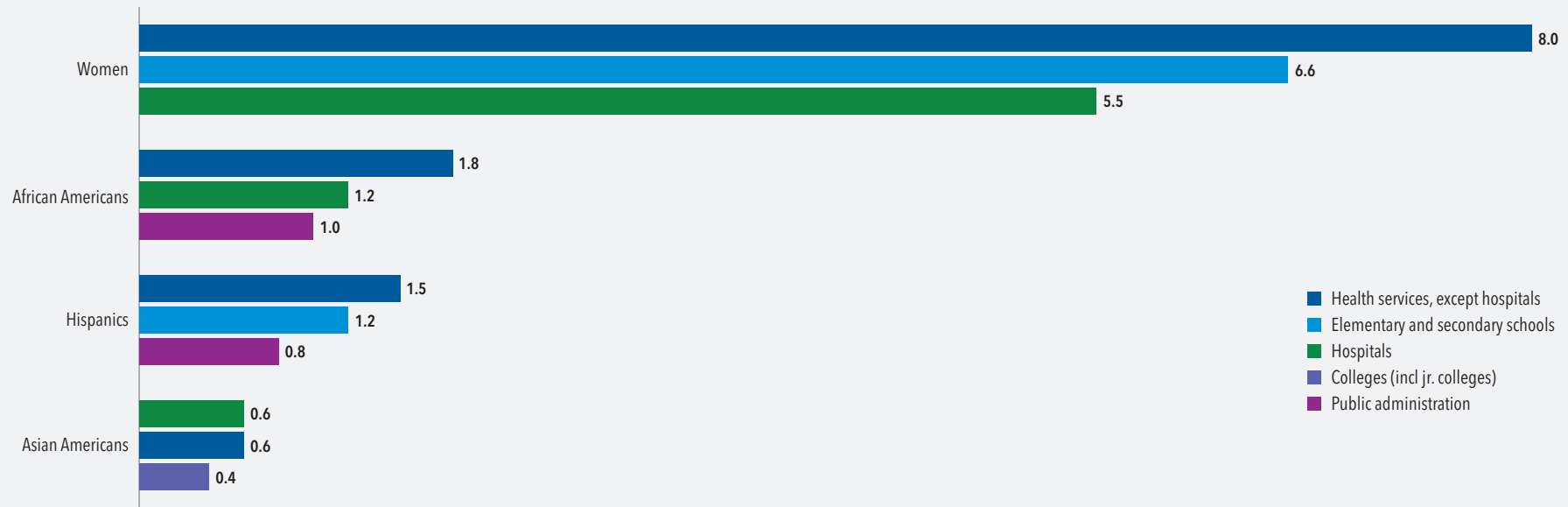
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Total employment in those industries is: health services, 10.3M; elementary and secondary schools, 8.7M; hospitals, 7.3M; public administration, 5.9M; colleges, 3.8M; and social assistance, 3.1M.

By way of summary, the most common jobs by gender, race, and ethnicity in 2020 are as shown in Figure 1, with health services other than hospitals being the top employers among women, African Americans, and Hispanics, and hospitals being the number one employer among Asian Americans.

Representation in any career field may be the result of a mix of decisions by hiring authorities and individual job applicants, as well as long-standing cultural or educational system assumptions about aptitude or preference for certain types of work, such as within science, technology, engineering or mathematical (STEM) fields.

In sharing the data below, the Institute is neither recommending any maximum range of acceptable divergence from the overall workforce statistics in Table 3 nor making any judgments about circumstances for a particular metropolitan job market or employer. Rather, this report is intended to facilitate informed conversations about the extent to which imbalances in hiring or recruitment may exist, so that human resource managers, DEI officers, and others can strategize about how best to address those issues.

Gender

Since women represent 46.2% of the workforce, and per the 2020 U.S. Census, 50.8% of the total adult population, the figures that follow present women's share of the public service workforce with 50% as the midpoint, with values lower than 50% indicating that women are generally underrepresented in a particular profession, and values higher than 50% indicating that they are overrepresented.

When considering the larger industries within public service, women are fairly evenly represented within public administration[11] (48% of those in working in that field; see Figure 2). Women comprise a larger share of those working within social assistance

(86%), health care (75-78%), and education (70%), and a smaller share of those working in utilities (21%). In none of these areas has women's representation changed significantly over the last 15 years.

Greater variation can be seen when considering individual occupations, such as within health care, where the percentage of women working as registered nurses has decreased from 92% in 2005 to 87% in 2020, while the percentage working as physicians and surgeons has risen from 32% to 40% during this time (see Figure 3).

Within education and library services, women currently represent more than 98% of all preschool and kindergarten teachers, 80% of elementary and middle school

Figure 2 **Percentage of women in health care, social assistance, and public administration**
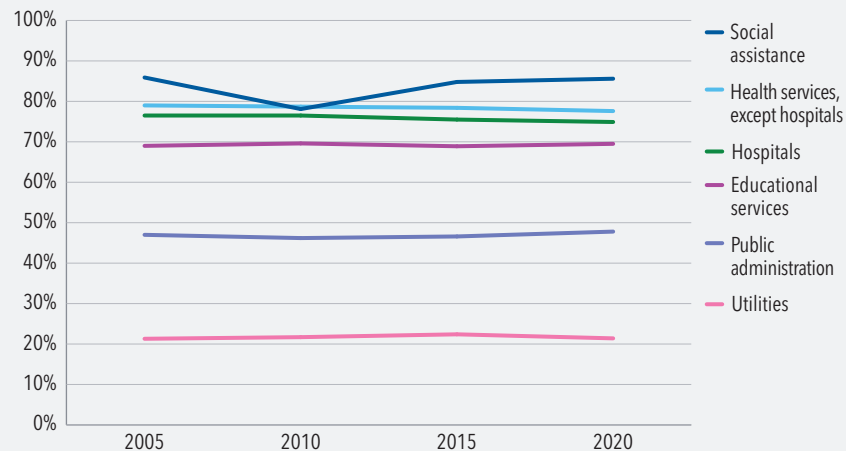
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 3 **Percentage of women in health care occupations**
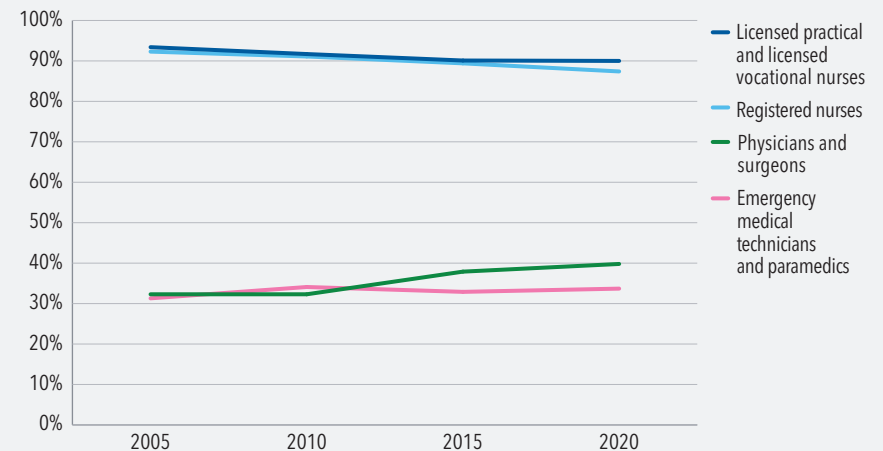
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

teachers, and 59% of secondary school teachers (see Figure 4). Historically, at higher levels of schooling, women have represented a smaller share of the workforce, although their share of employment among postsecondary teachers has increased from 44% in 2005 to 51% in 2020, cutting the gap between that segment and secondary school teachers by more than half.

The most dramatic change in this figure is in the percentage of teacher assistants who are women, which dropped from 91% in 2015 to 80% in 2020. This demographic shift should be considered in light of the fact that the total workforce of teacher assistants increased significantly over this time period, from 960,000 people to 1.2 million (+27%). As a result, while women now represent a lower percentage of the total, in raw numbers women have increased from 861,000 teacher assistants in 2015 to 977,000 in 2020. While the employment data does not specify at what level the teacher assistants were assigned, the addition of any large number of employees to the workforce brings with it the potential for more rapid change in demographic representation.

Over the same five years, total elementary and middle school teacher employment increased by 7% and total secondary school teacher employment decreased by 16%. In neither case did the percentage of women in those jobs change significantly.

In protective service (Figure 5), the highest percentage of women are working in corrections (32%). Increases since 2005 can be seen among the shares working as detectives (from 24% to 26%) and police officers (from 14% to 17%), while the shares of police supervisors (13%) and firefighters (4%) have remained lower.

Security guards are included here not as an occupation most directly involved in the public service sphere, but as a comparison to a similar function that exists primarily within the private sector. Although there was some fluctuation over the past 15 years, women still represent about 25% of those working in in security – about what their share was in 2005 – and 8% higher than the share working as police officers.

Figure 4 **Percentage of women in education and library services**
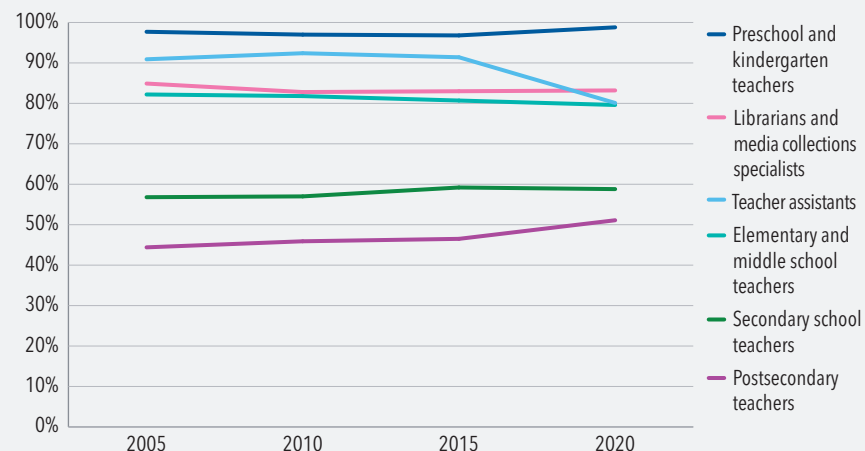
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 5 **Percentage of women in protective service occupations**
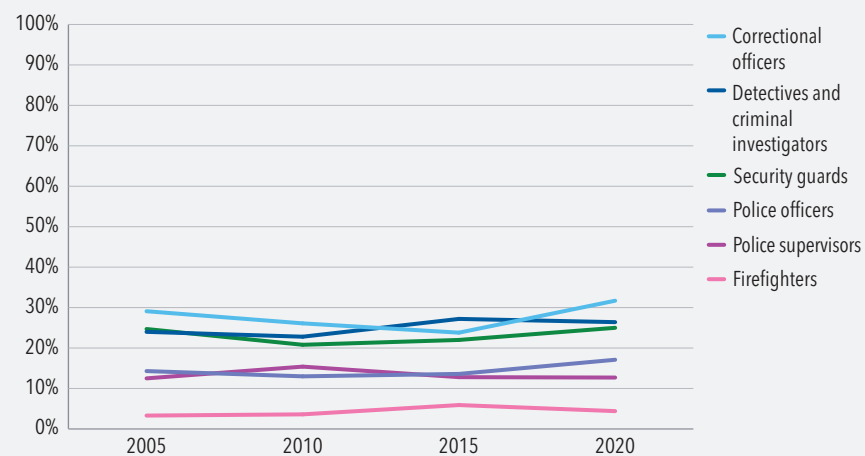
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of women in other common public service occupations, and Figure 7 shows the percentage of women in other occupations that exist both in public service and in other fields. Both show some jobs where women represent the majority of those employed, such as secretaries and administrative assistants (93%) and recreation workers[12] (64%), as well as some where women are underrepresented, such as highway maintenance and landscaping workers (both 7%). In the two STEM fields shown, the trends are mixed, with the share of women increasing among civil engineers (from 13% to 16%) but decreasing among computer support specialists (from 33% to 26%).

The management and professional occupations category deserves further attention. Figure 7 shows this field remaining fairly stable, with women at 50-52% of the total workforce. This might indicate an even balance between men and women, but there are a few caveats. First, as noted in the figure title, this is a summary of all public and private sector occupations for that very large category of jobs, ranging from accountants to attorneys, CEOs to midlevel supervisors. Although it is possible to consider individual positions in more detail, the same public and private sector mix would apply.

Figure 6 **Percentage of women in other public service occupations**

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 7 **Percentage of women in other occupations (public or private sector)**
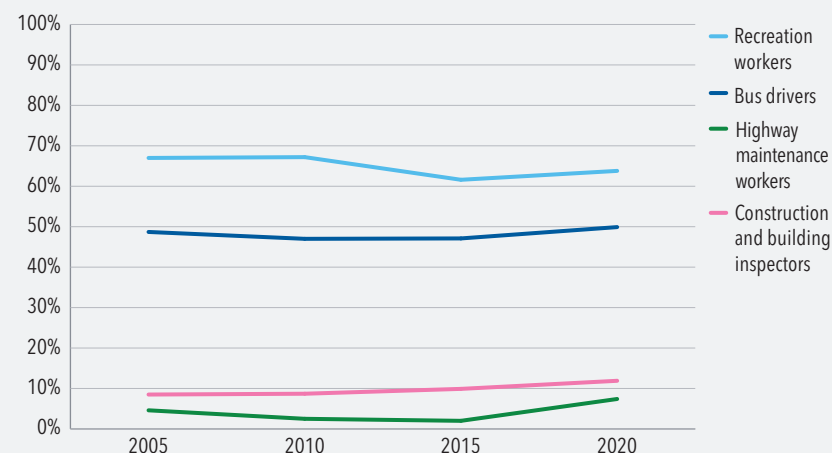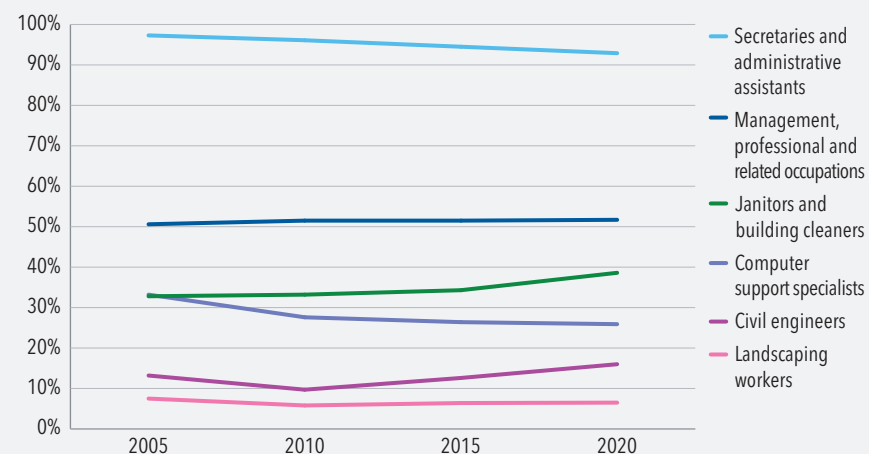

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Thus, it may be more instructive to consider figures more specific to public service. Among the most illustrative are the share of women among those earning a master's in public administration (MPA) and those working as local government chief administrative officers (CAOs) or assistant CAOs (see Figure 8).

In 1974, women represented just 1% of local government chief executives. Despite the fact that women are now 71% of the graduates of MPA programs, their numbers in national and state-specific data still trail far behind – generally below 20%, although slightly higher if also including assistant CAOs. Reasons for these disparities may include a mix of career decisions on the part of individual employees and decisions by appointing bodies not to select women for those positions. Discussions of these reasons as well as strategies in place to increase the number of women in such leadership roles are cited further in the **Resources section**.

Race and ethnicity

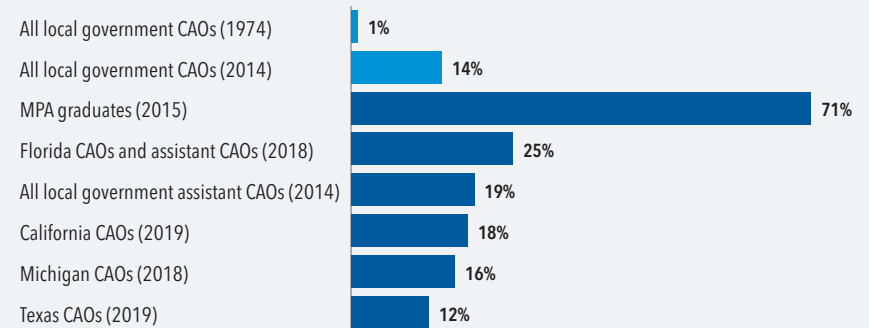Since racial and ethnic groups represent a smaller share of the overall population than women do, rather than present the related figures with 50% as the midpoint, the figures that follow compare the shares of those working in individual job categories with the share of each race or ethnicity in the overall workforce, thus showing the differential above or below what might be expected, represented by a differential of 0%. Where possible, the same scale is used (-30% to +30%) to facilitate comparisons across groups.

Differentials shown are in raw percentage points. For example, since Hispanics represent 17.6% of the overall workforce, employment of 10.6% for a particular occupation would equate to a differential of -7.0%. Further examples are discussed below.

African Americans

In Figure 9, the 2005 value for educational services for African Americans is close to zero (0.2%). This is because the percentage of African Americans in the total workforce was 10.8%, and the percentage of workers in the educational services industry who are African American is 11%. In 2020, the African American share of the total workforce had grown to 12.1%, but educational service employment was 10.8%, so the differential is now -1.4% (due to rounding).

Figure 8 **Women as a percentage of MPA graduates and local government leaders**

All local government CAOs (1974)	1%
All local government CAOs (2014)	14%
MPA graduates (2015)	71%
Florida CAOs and assistant CAOs (2018)	25%
All local government assistant CAOs (2014)	19%
California CAOs (2019)	18%
Michigan CAOs (2018)	16%
Texas CAOs (2019)	12%

Source: ICMA Task Force on Women in the Profession, Women in Local Government, California City Management Foundation, Women Leading Government – Texas Chapter, Michigan 16/50 Project, and Hannah-Spurlock and Silverboard; See Resources.

Figure 9 **Differential of African Americans in health care, social assistance, and public administration vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Social assistance
- Public administration
- Health services, except hospitals
- Hospitals
- Educational services
- Utilities
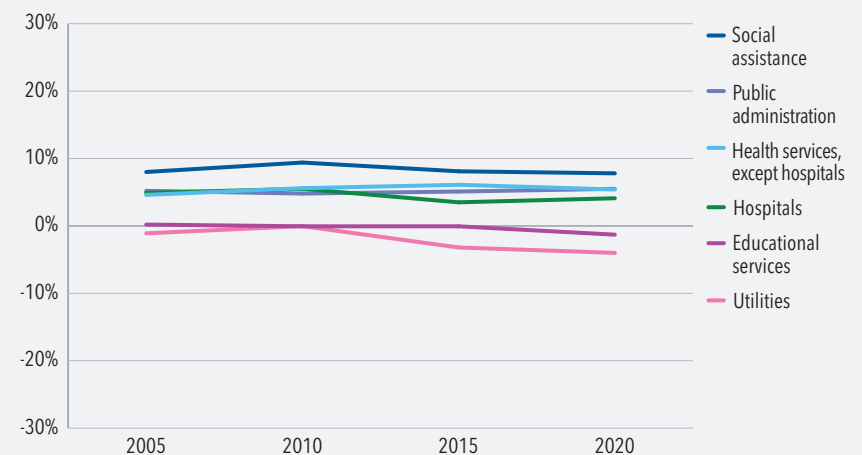
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Such differentials show that African Americans are 7.8 percentage points more likely to be employed in social assistance than their presence in the overall workforce might suggest. This may be related to various factors, based on educational and career decisions by those individuals, decisions made by hiring authorities, and other societal factors.

Unemployment rates are not considered in these calculations, just the overall workforce (See "Unemployment and diversity").

Figure 10 shows that African Americans represent a larger share of licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses (a 13.5% differential) compared to workforce, and a smaller share of physicians and surgeons (-3.8%).

Figure 10 **Differential of African Americans in health care occupations vs in total workforce**
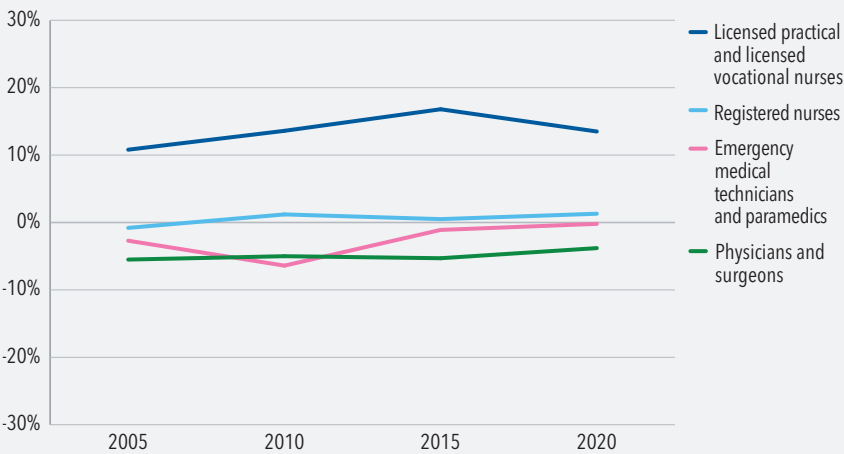

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Unemployment and diversity

The proportions of people in particular jobs vary not only with their education and chosen career paths, but also with unemployment rates. Even in a strong economy, unemployment rates may be higher for some demographic groups than others. But as the economy shut down with the pandemic, certain industries like hospitality and public service sectors with higher proportions of women or minorities (e.g., education, libraries, recreation, and public transit), may have been more directly impacted by layoffs, furloughs, temporary closures, or longer-term contractions.

Unemployment rates in Table 4 may be compared to the nationwide figures of 12.9% in the second quarter of 2020 and 5.8% for the second quarter of 2021.

Table 4 **Unemployment rate by gender, race, and ethnicity, 2020 and 2021**

	2nd qtr 2020 (12.9% nationwide unemployment)		2nd qtr 2021 (5.8% nationwide unemployment)	
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
White	10.9%	13.3%	5.2%	4.9%
Black or African American	16.2%	16.1%	10.0%	8.5%
Asian American	13.0%	15.8%	5.7%	5.6%
Hispanic	15.2%	18.7%	6.7%	7.8%

Source: Unemployment rates by age, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

For all education and library services positions shown in Figure 11, the differential is between +1.5% and -5.6%. Of these, the greatest change was among preschool and kindergarten teachers, from a +3.9% differential in 2005 to a -0.1% differential in 2020. In raw numbers, the number of preschool and kindergarten teachers itself declined, from 719,000 to 535,000, while the number of African Americans working in this occupation declined from 106,000 to 64,000.The protective service employment differential was highest in corrections, which was also the area of most significant increase from 2005 to 2020 (see Figure 12). In total, African Americans represent 33% of all corrections employees, or 114,000 people.

Figure 11 **Differential of African Americans in education and library services vs in total workforce**
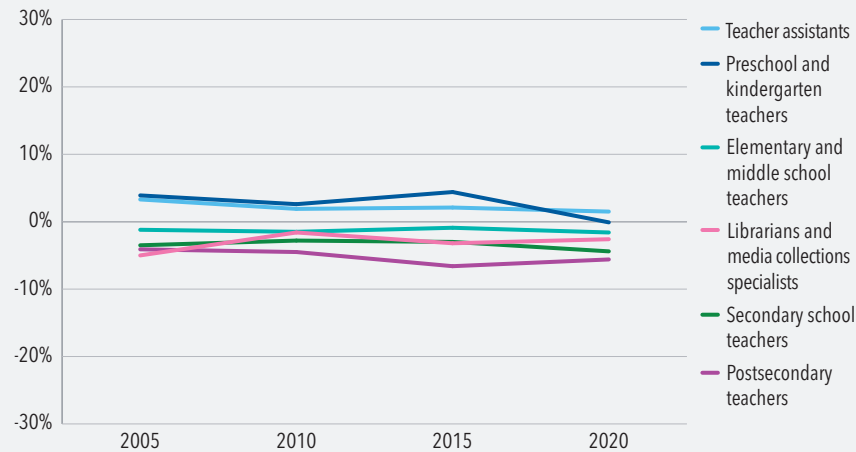
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 12 **Differential of African Americans in protective service occupations vs in total**
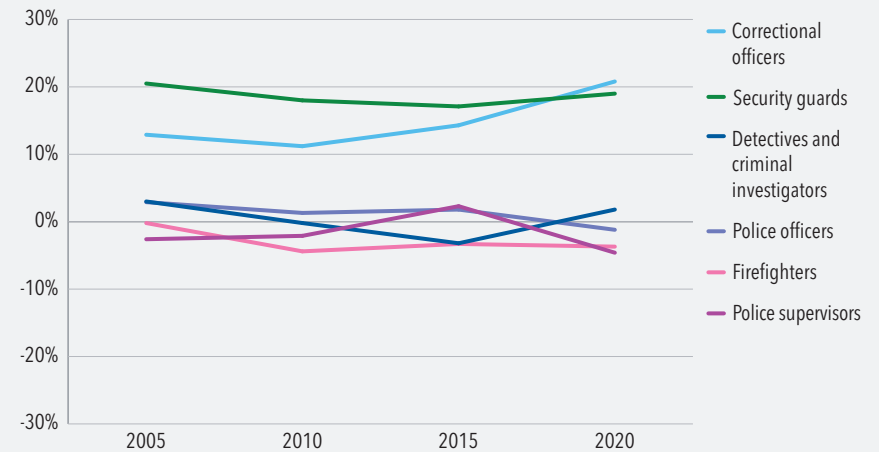
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

African Americans are slightly better represented among detectives (1.8% differential) than among police supervisors (-4.6%).

In other public service occupations and other occupations (that may be split among public and private sectors; see Figures 13 and 14), African Americans are more highly represented among bus drivers (a 17% differential – which equates to 29% of all bus drivers or 112,000 employees) and less highly represented among civil engineers, declining from 19,000 employees in 2005 to 16,000 in 2020.

Figure 13 **Differential of African Americans in other public service occupations vs in total workforce**

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 14 **Differential of African Americans in other occupations (public or private sector) vs in total workforce**
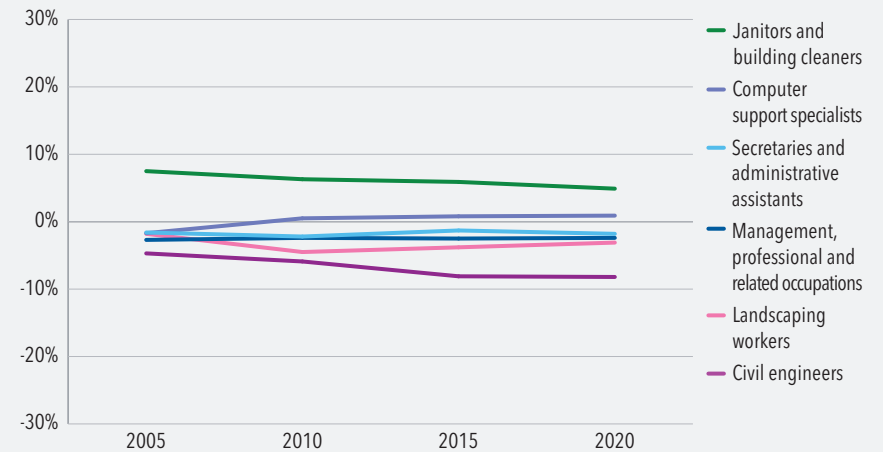
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Asian Americans

Asian American representation among the industries shown in Figure 15 is within +/- 3 percentage points of overall representation within the workforce.

The health care occupation in which Asian Americans most outpace their representation in the overall workforce is physicians and surgeons (a 15% differential; see Figure 16). In raw numbers, this represents 212,000 employees in 2020.

Figure 15 **Differential of Asian Americans in health care, social assistance, and public administration vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Hospitals
- Health services, except hospitals
- Educational services
- Social assistance
- Utilities
- Public administration

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 16 **Differential of Asian Americans in health care occupations vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Physicians and surgeons
- Registered nurses
- Emergency medical technicians and paramedics
- Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses
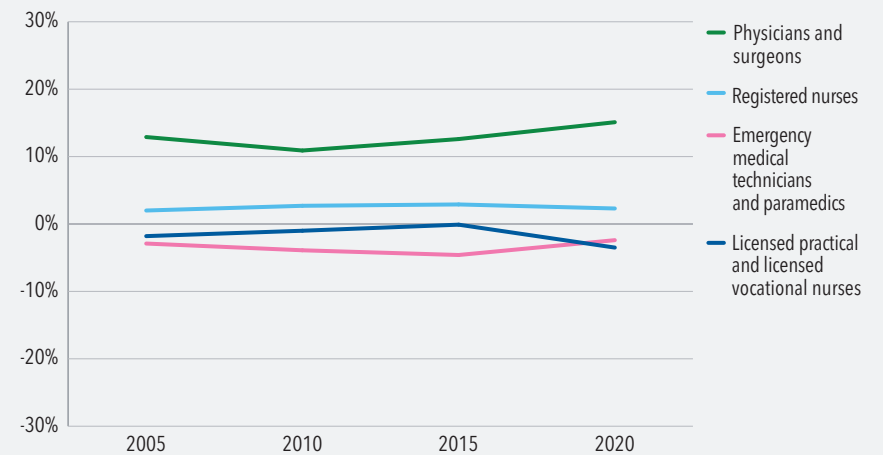
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Among education and protective service occupations (see Figures 17 and 18), most positions have a slightly negative differential, indicating that there are fewer Asian Americans working in these jobs than in the overall workforce. The occupation that has a significantly more positive differential is postsecondary teachers (+4.8%).

Figure 17 **Differential of Asian Americans in education and library services vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Postsecondary teachers
- Teacher assistants
- Librarians and media collections specialists
- Secondary school teachers
- Elementary and middle school teachers
- Preschool and kindergarten teachers
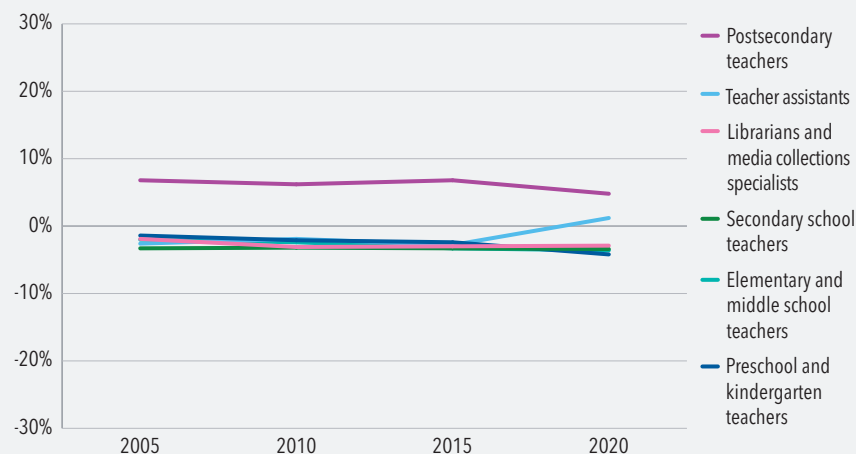
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

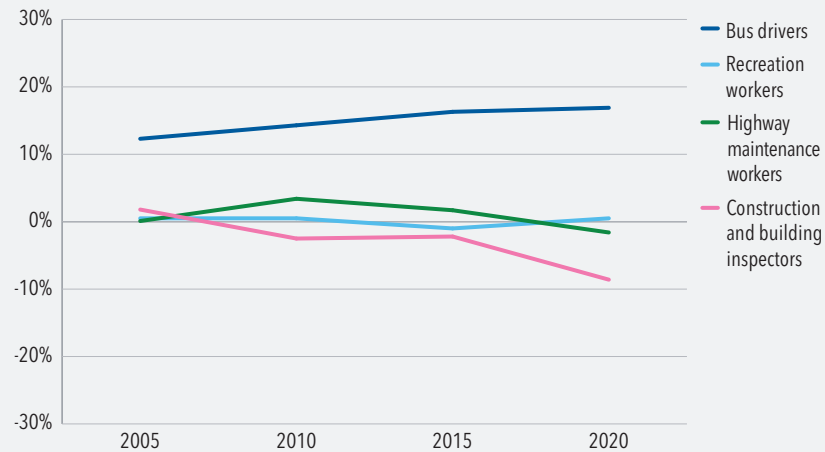Figure 18 **Differential of Asian Americans in protective service occupations vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Security guards
- Correctional officers
- Police officers
- Police supervisors
- Firefighters
- Detectives and criminal investigators
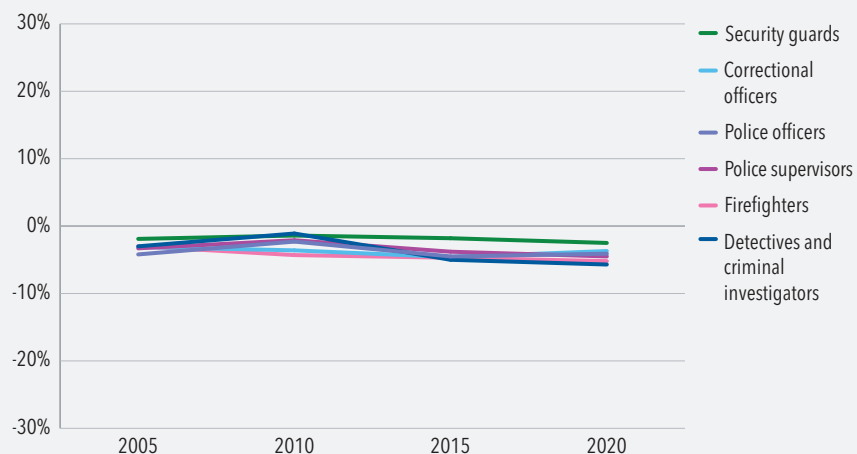
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

What do state and local HR managers think?

Is there gender balance in the workforce?

54% of HR managers said the workforce is **balanced**

Source: 2021 Workforce Survey, MissionSquare Research Institute

Does the racial/ethnic composition of the workforce reflect the community?

41% of organizations with 500+ full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) said **yes**

20% of organizations with under 500 FTEs said **yes**
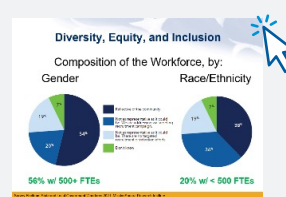
View report: **Survey findings: state and local government workforce 2021**

On both questions, **19%** indicated their organization is **not as representative** as it could be, but there are no targeted recruitment or retention efforts to address that.

The other public service occupations analyzed in Figure 19 all show slightly negative differentials (from -1.9% for construction and building inspectors to -5.7% for highway maintenance workers).

Positions common to both the public and private sector (Figure 20) show an increase in representation among computer support specialists (from a +1.1% differential in

2005 to a +4.3% differential in 2020). The two fields in this "other" category with the largest differentials are civil engineers (7.2% differential) and landscaping workers (-5.4% differential).

Figure 19 **Differential of Asian Americans in other public service occupations vs in total workforce**

- Construction and building inspectors
- Recreation workers
- Bus drivers
- Highway maintenance workers
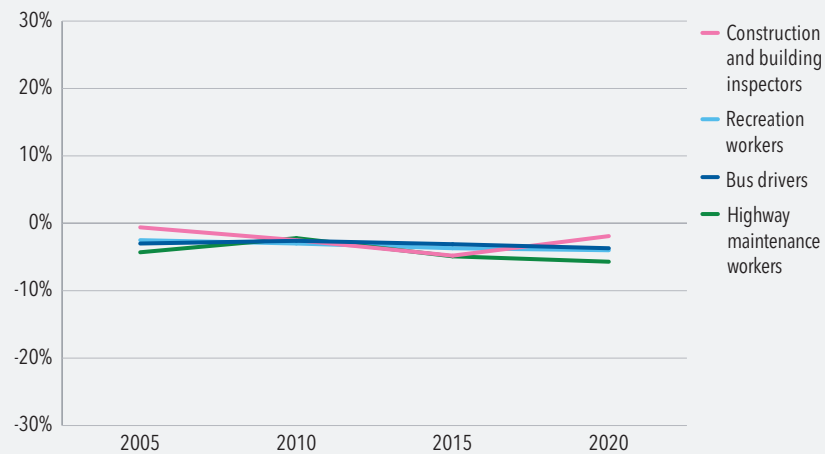
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 20 **Differential of Asian Americans in other occupations (public or private sector) vs in total workforce**

- Civil engineers
- Computer support specialists
- Management, professional and related occupations
- Janitors and building cleaners
- Secretaries and administrative assistants
- Landscaping workers
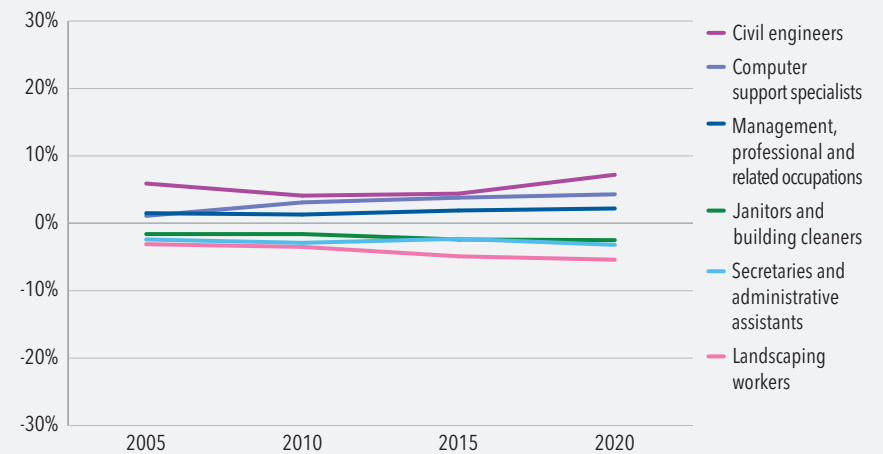
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Hispanics

Among the industries shown in Figure 21, Hispanics are most underrepresented in hospitals (-7%) and educational services (-5.1%).

Hispanics are underepresented among licensed practical nurses or licensed vocational nurses (-2.3%), but that representation has increased significantly since 2005 and exceeds representation for other health care occupations.

Figure 21 **Differential of Hispanics in health care, social assistance, and public administration vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Social assistance
- Health services, except hospitals
- Utilities
- Public administration
- Educational services
- Hospitals

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 22 **Differential of Hispanics in health care occupations vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses
- Emergency medical technicians and paramedics
- Physicians and surgeons
- Registered nurses
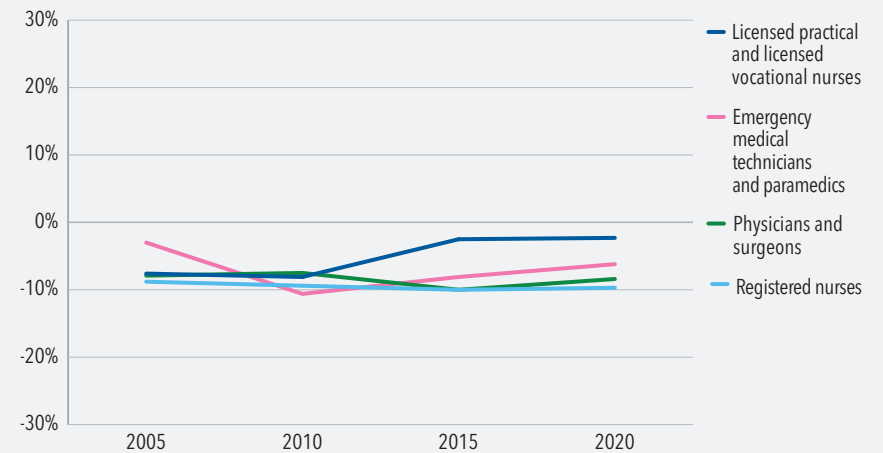
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 23 **Differential of Hispanics in education and library services vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Teacher assistants
- Preschool and kindergarten teachers
- Elementary and middle school teachers
- Librarians and media collections specialists
- Secondary school teachers
- Postsecondary teachers

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 24 **Differential of Hispanics in protective service occupations vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Security guards
- Detectives and criminal investigators
- Police officers
- Police supervisors
- Firefighters
- Correctional officers

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Representation in education positions has remained fairly stable, but there have been declines in the share of Hispanics working as teacher assistants (+0.8 to -1.0% differential) and postsecondary teachers (-9.0% to -11.4%; see Figure 23).
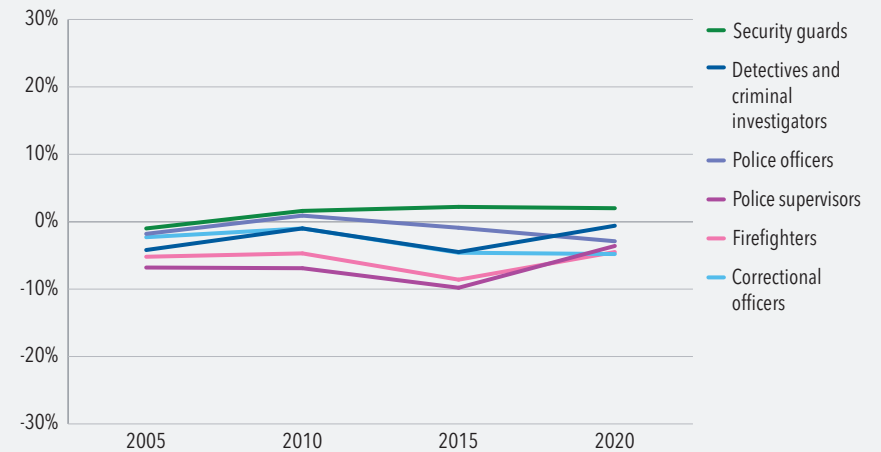
As is the case with African Americans and Asian Americans, Hispanics are underrepresented among police officers (-2.9% differential; see Figure 24). Representation of Hispanics in protective service employment is lowest among firefighters (-4.5% differential) and correctional officers (-4.8%).

Among other public service occupations, Hispanics are underrepresented in each of the occupations in Figure 25 (-5% to -7.2% differential).

For other occupations that may more commonly be found in both the public and private sector in Figure 26, Hispanics are much more highly represented

as landscaping workers (+26.9%) or janitors (+16%), and underrepresented in management or other professional roles (-7.2%).

Figure 25 **Differential of Hispanics in other public service occupations vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Bus drivers
- Construction and building inspectors
- Highway maintenance workers
- Recreation workers
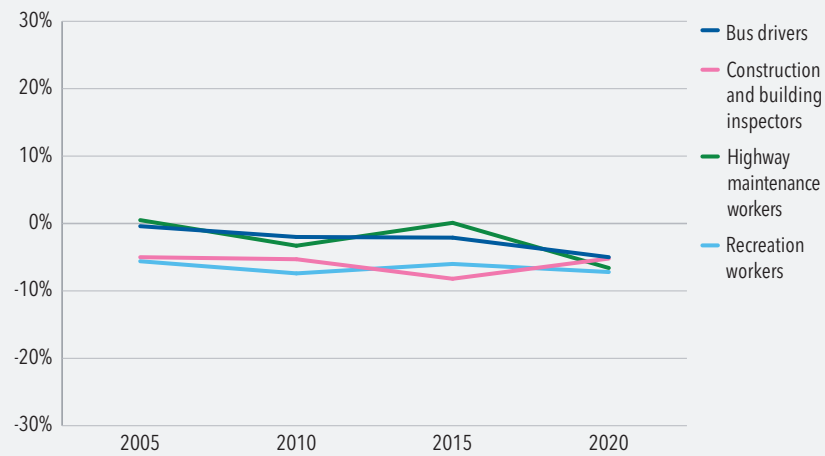
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

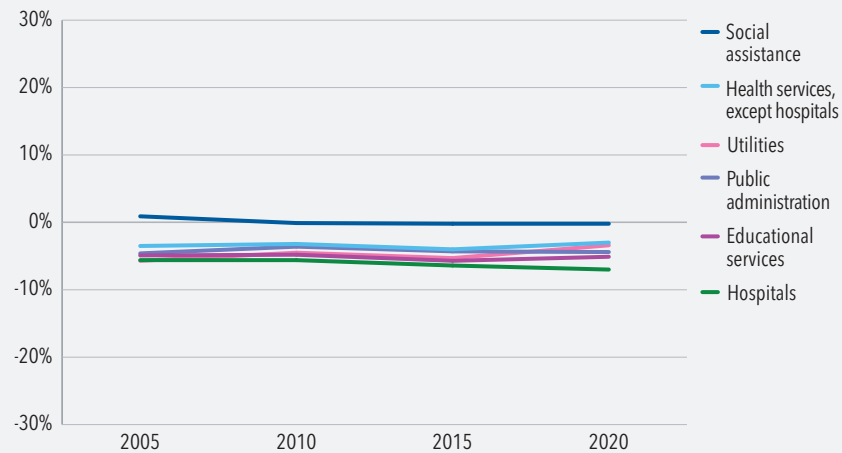Figure 26 **Differential of Hispanics in other occupations (public or private sector) vs in total workforce**

Legend:
- Landscaping workers
- Janitors and building cleaners
- Secretaries and administrative assistants
- Civil engineers
- Computer support specialists
- Management, professional and related occupations
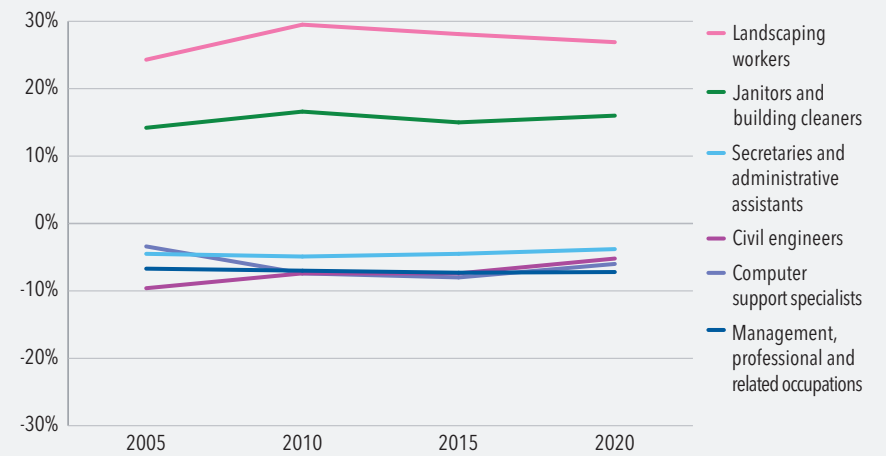
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Age

Age diversity within the workforce is a function of the education required to begin providing the services (such as in medical fields), the seniority required to move up within the ranks, and historical growth patterns of certain professions (such as with the baby boom generation joining the workforce or the development of technology-related fields).

In general, the median[13] age of public employees tends to be higher than that of non-public employees, potentially due to the shorter tenure of private sector workers or

the public pension benefits that accrue to longer-tenured public employees. An illustration can be seen in Figure 27, where hospital and health services employees – which both tend to have longer paths to career entry – still have lower median ages (42-43 years) than public administration[14] (46 years) or other general government employees (49 years).

The impacts of education requirements and seniority may be seen in the figures that follow, with higher median ages for physicians (46 years; see Figure 28),

Figure 27 **Median age in health care, social assistance, and public administration**

Legend:
- Other general government and support
- Public administration
- Utilities
- Health services, except hospitals
- Hospitals
- Social assistance
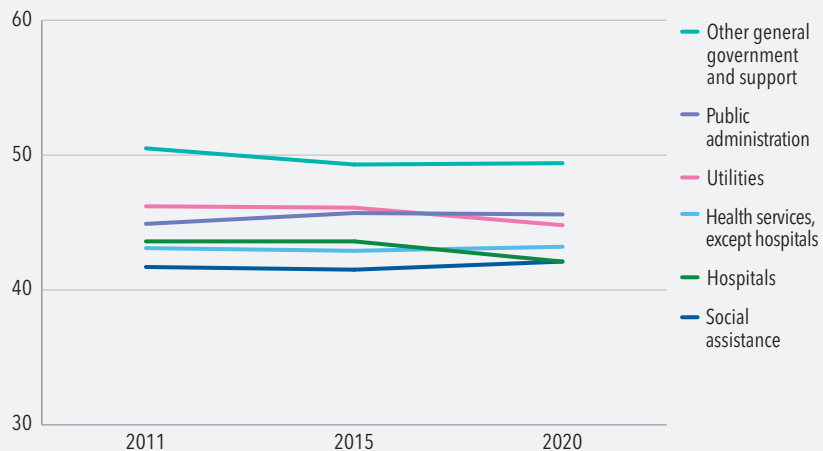
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 28 **Median age in health care occupations**

Legend:
- Physicians and surgeons
- Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses
- Registered nurses
- Emergency medical technicians and paramedics
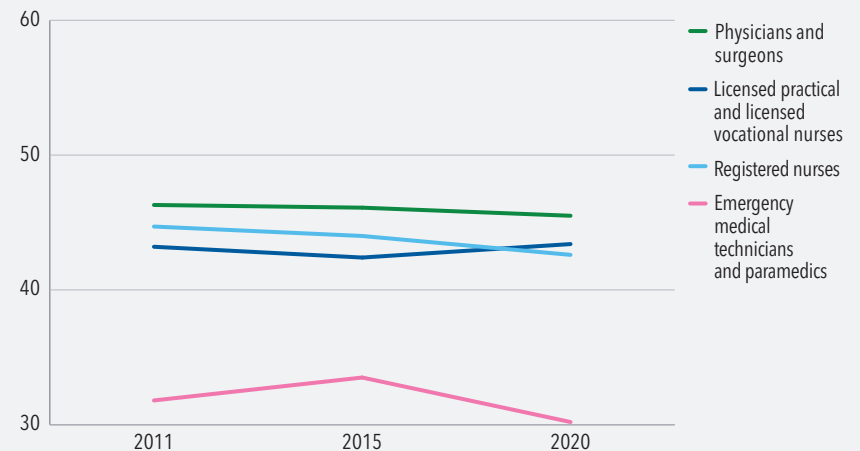
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 29 **Median age for education and library occupations**

Legend:
- Librarians and media collections specialists
- Postsecondary teachers
- Elementary and middle school teachers
- Secondary school teachers
- Preschool and kindergarten teachers
- Teacher assistants

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 30 **Median age in protective service occupations**

Legend:
- Police supervisors
- Detectives and criminal investigators
- Security guards
- Police officers
- Correctional officers
- Firefighters

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

postsecondary teachers (48 years; see Figure 29), and police supervisors and detectives (46 and 44 years, respectively; see Figure 30).

By contrast, teacher assistants in 2020 have a median age of just 38 years (see Figure 29). The significant drop in median age from 44 years in 2015 may relate to the expanded workforce in this occupation as noted previously (see discussion under Gender), which corresponded to the share who are 25 to 34 years old expanding from 16% to 27% of the total.

For public sector protective service occupations, median ages tend to be lower than other nonprotective service positions due to pension provisions that commonly allow for younger retirement ages. As shown in Figure 30, police officers, correctional officers, and firefighters in 2020 all have a median age of 40.

The difference from the private sector can be seen most clearly in the percentage of employees who are 65 or older. In 2020, among police officers and even detectives and police supervisors, the percentage 65 or older is ≤4%. Among private security guards, who would not have the benefit of a public pension plan, the total who are 65 or older is 12%.

Figure 31 **Median age in other public service occupations**

- Bus drivers
- Construction and building inspectors
- Highway maintenance workers
- Recreation workers

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 32 **Median Age in other occupations (public or private sector)**

- Secretaries and administrative assistants
- Janitors and building cleaners
- Management, professional and related occupations
- Total employed
- Civil engineers
- Computer support specialists
- Landscaping workers

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In Figure 31, two other categories of public service employees with higher median ages that may be cause for concern are bus drivers (55 years) and construction and building inspectors (53 years). In the first case, the retirement of large numbers of those drivers may lead to gaps in transit or school bus routes. And in the second case, the difficulty of hiring skilled trades people (reported by 57% of respondents in **Survey Findings: 2021 State and Local Government Workforce**) may mean that the candidates being sought by permitting agencies are also being heavily recruited by private sector construction companies.

Regarding positions common in both the public and private sectors (Figure 32), the median age for secretaries and administrative assistants has risen from 48 years in 2011 to 49 years in 2020. Over that time, the number of people with that job description has dropped by 28%.

Bus drivers, diversity, and employment trends

Sometimes multiple demographic characteristics and trends interact. As shown in **Figures 13** and **31 (left)**, a large percentage of bus drivers are African American, the median age of drivers is high, and as discussed in the **Employment projections section**, the occupation is susceptible to future automation. Depending on the timing of upcoming retirements and technological developments, as well as lingering concerns about COVID-19, employers could face workforce gaps, shifts in the diversity of the organization, or new capital investment and training needs.

Table 5 **Percentage of employees approaching retirement**

	Percentage 55 and over			Percentage 65 and over		
	2011	**2015**	**2020**	**2011**	**2015**	**2020**
Total (public and private sectors)	21%	22%	**24%**	5%	6%	**7%**
Management. professional	23%	24%	**25%**	5%	6%	**7%**
Public administration	23%	24%	**25%**	4%	5%	**6%**
Social assistance	22%	24%	**25%**	5%	7%	**8%**
Highway maintenance workers	22%	32%	**35%**	5%	4%	**7%**
Secretaries and administrative assistants	30%	32%	**35%**	6%	8%	**9%**
Postsecondary teachers	31%	31%	**37%**	10%	12%	**15%**
Librarians	43%	34%	**38%**	11%	11%	**14%**
Construction and building inspectors	36%	36%	**47%**	9%	11%	**19%**
Bus drivers	44%	41%	**50%**	16%	14%	**17%**

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Totals in the "55 or over" columns are inclusive of the percentage who are also 65 or over.

With technology-related efficiencies from customer relationship management applications and office productivity tools, it may be that as secretary vacancies arise, they are not being filled with new career entrants. Thus, the incumbents that remain may be longer-tenured employees or nearing retirement – 35% are age 55 or older (see Table 5). Since 93% of the more than 2 million secretaries nationwide are women (see Gender, Figure 7), continued change in the size of this cohort or its median age may alter the gender balance within the workforce.

Considering the aging of particular occupations, a number of positions that are common in public service show significant and growing percentages of employees who are 55 or over, or 65 or over.

For comparison purposes, Table 5 shows data for the overall workforce and for management and professional positions generally (which would tend to have older staff based on the experience necessary to reach greater levels of education or

responsibility), along with the public administration industry generally and specific public service occupations.

Where the median age of the workforce is high, succession planning should be even more of a priority, whether through intergenerational networking, leadership development, cross-training, or other strategies.

One option if key vacancies occur is to bridge those gaps temporarily with post-retirement return to work. Although there can be concern about double-dipping in pension benefits, most retirement plans include provisions for suspending pension payments or resuming contributions, facilitating rehiring for a maximum number of hours, salary or period of time, or receiving an exemption from such limits where there is a critical need. Depending on the state, this may include fire inspectors, STEM teachers, law enforcement, nurses, or other positions; see **Balancing Objectives in Public Employee Post-Retirement Employment Policies**.

Other forms of workforce diversity

The sections that follow address various other forms of workforce diversity. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review, but it presents data and discussion around various groups, either specifically within public service or more generally within the workforce.

Veterans

Veterans of the U.S. military who are currently employed total more than 8 million individuals.[15] Of these, 20.2% work in the public service fields of state government, local government, or education and health services. Looking specifically at each of those workforces, Table 6 shows what percentage of each workforce veterans represent.

In some cases, there are either formal preferences accorded to the hiring of veterans or outreach efforts to veterans groups or those approaching their military retirement or separation from service to make them aware of opportunities to continue their public service in another type of organization.

Often, those separating from the military are presumed to be interested in careers in public safety, but while that is one potential career path, expertise in more specialized fields (e.g., health care, information technology, construction, maintenance) or in team supervision and management justify a more general recruitment effort. In regions with a significant military base footprint, the establishment of military liaison roles within surrounding organizations or of cooperative staffing or training efforts may help

to facilitate both recruitment efforts and a broader understanding of the workforce interests of local veterans.[16]

While some serve a more limited period in the armed services, veterans can qualify for military retirement after 20 years of service. This means many of those ready to start an encore career may be in their 40s or younger and bring both relevant experience and a long period of continued working years to their next employer — a significant benefit to those public service organizations that are facing succession-planning challenges as key staff of the baby boom generation retire. As of 2021, more than 3 million veterans are 44 years old or younger, representing 33% of male veterans and 47% of female veterans.[17]

Service-connected disabilities impact 26% of veterans, and while unemployment among disabled veterans is sometimes higher, as of August 2020, the unemployment rates were at 6.2% for disabled veterans and 7.2% for non-disabled veterans. It should be noted that the extent of a disability may range widely and may have no bearing on the ability to continue working.

In accepting post-military employment, disabled veterans are as likely to work in the state or local government as are nondisabled veterans or nonveterans (see Table 7). Federal agencies, on the other hand, employ twice as many disabled veterans as do state and local governments.

Table 6 **Veterans as a percentage of public service workforce**

Industry	Veterans as a percentage of total workforce
Education and health services	3.2%
Local government	5.8%
State government	5.7%

Source: Employment Situation of Veterans News Release, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 18, 2021.

Table 7 **Percentage of employed veterans and nonveterans working in the public sector**

Percentage of total employed veterans and nonveterans working in		
	State or local government	Federal government
Veterans with disabilities	11.8%	19.3%
Veterans without disabilities	10.1%	9.0%
Nonveterans	11.2%	2.5%

Source: Employment Situation of Veterans News Release, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 18, 2021.

Looking at the qualities that veterans bring to the workforce, more than 60% of local government human resources directors report that veterans perform better than civilians in terms of their work ethic, teamwork, reliability, resilience, goal orientation, and assertiveness.[19]

Another large population to consider recruiting is that of military family members, who may be highly skilled in their respective fields but only living in a particular area for the term of an active duty family member's latest rotation. Rather than take the view that a job history with a series of shorter-term placements is a sign of career instability or indecision, it is worth considering what skills such employees might bring to the organization for however long they may be part of the team.

Disability and cognitive diversity

As with any category of diversity, those with physical disabilities or cognitive diversity contribute greatly to the public service workforce, and jurisdictions like San Francisco have made outreach to disabled job candidates a formal part of their recruitment efforts.

The most common industry in which disabled individuals are employed is education and health services, which accounts for 21.2% of all workers with a disability.[20] Public administration employs 5.2% of all workers with a disability. Both these totals are close to the share of workers in these industries without disabilities (22.5% and 4.6%, respectively).

Without regard to the work being performed, there is a higher percentage of people with a disability working for a government employer (14.6%) than for a private sector employer (13.9%).[21]

Just as the overall field of education and health services includes a high proportion of women, this is also the most common industry for women with a disability (33% of all those with a disability). By comparison, just 11% of men with a disability work in education and health services.

Cognitive diversity is an attribute that may not be as readily apparent among job applicants as a physical disability. As a result, it is a difficult aspect of the public service workforce to quantify. In the overall workforce, rates of employment for young adults with emotional or learning disabilities may range as high as 95%, while only 58% of those with autism may find employment.[22] Lower rates of employment may relate to conversational or intellectual ability, but such rates may also be affected by job descriptions that are overly prescriptive in terms of educational attainment, scores on civil service exams, or other criteria that may have more to do with long-standing

Diversity and geography
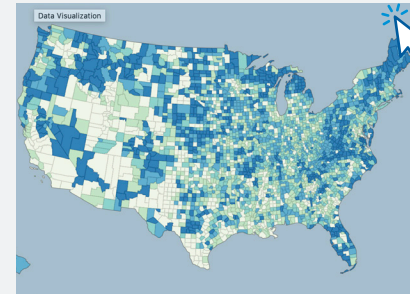
View report:
2014-2018 median age in the United States by county
Source: Median Age by County, U.S. Census Bureau

Lack of diversity in the immediate job market need not be a barrier to diversifying the workforce, no matter whether an employer is in a metropolitan area or in a smaller, rural community.

Use of social media, direct outreach to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) or Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and engagement with student groups, community associations, or demographically focused specialty media can communicate the interest in attracting and welcoming a diversity of applicants. Outreach to college or even younger students can also assist in attracting or retaining talent for a community where the median age is high and younger workers are not aware of opportunities that do not involve heading off to a major city.

For those candidates who are not ready to commit to relocation, internships, hackathons, or volunteer community service projects can provide the opportunity to get to know the organizational culture and staff in a short-term period, and can align with summer, winter, or even spring school breaks. Building upon the remote work that's grown in the COVID-19 environment, online teamwork apps and **virtual internships** may mean a new hire does not need to plan for a long daily commute, even if they eventually relocate or accept a permanent position.

No matter how diversity is built, if new team members will be pioneers or among very few in their demographic cohort, prioritizing onboarding and inclusion will be key.

practice than actual job duties. For organizations struggling to fill vacant positions, the pool of potential candidates includes 50,000 new high school graduates each year who happen to be on the autism spectrum.[23]

Efforts to accommodate employees with a disability range from individual equipment or workplace needs to efforts to adjust the scoring or time limits on hiring exams and the creation of internships that allow people with a disability an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and increase their chances at securing a full-time position.[24]

Religion

Religious faith can neither be assumed by an employee's name or perceived race or ethnicity, nor should it impact any decisions regarding employment. Regardless, employers should be aware that religious diversity exists in their communities and that valuing that diversity can lead to improved outcomes in staff recruitment and retention.

In all U.S. states, Christianity is the predominant religion. However, beyond that, there is significant variation geographically in the largest non-Christian religious groups (see Table 8). For example, in Iowa, in most counties, the religious majority is Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Missouri Synod Lutheran, or United Methodist, but the largest non-Christian faith statewide is Islam.[25] In addition, there is a growing population

of Americans who do not profess any religious faith (23%).[26] To think of religion in our states, cities, or other public service organizations as homogeneous or that all employees are comfortable with a quasi-religious holiday celebration may run the risk of appearing tone deaf or inconsiderate of other cultures or viewpoints.

While there are no statistics collected for the number of religious adherents by type of employer, the state and national figures may help contextualize the diversity that exists in the local and state public service workforce. Such understanding, along with employee engagement efforts and sensitivity to dietary restrictions, religious dress codes, holy days, ritual hand or foot washing, and sabbath and prayer practices, can help organizations to accommodate those with a variety of beliefs (or no religious beliefs) and make them feel like valued contributors to the overall organization.[27]

LGBTQIA+ identity[28]

In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), but work environments, organizational cultures, and policy details may also vary by state or local jurisdiction.

As with religion, it is difficult to approximate the LGBTQIA+ population by employer, but there is survey data that estimates the population on a state-by-state basis (see Table 9).

Table 8 **Largest non-Christian religious groups**

Religious group	Number of states
Islam	20
Judaism	15
Buddhism	13
Hinduism	2
Baha'i	1

Source: Niraj Chokshi, "**Religion in America's states and counties, in 6 maps**," Washington Post GovBeat blog, December 12, 2013. Total includes Washington, DC.

Table 9 **LGBT population by state**

Percentage of the population that identifies as LGBT	Number of states
4.5% or more	19
4.1%-4.5%	3
3.7% to 4.1%	16
Below 3.7%	13

Source: LGBT Demographic Data Interactive, January 2019, The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. Total includes Washington, DC.

Data by employer or industry is limited, but two examples would appear to bear out these numbers, with estimates of an LGBT workforce of 4.6% at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and 4.7% of total health care workers nationwide.[29]

Discrimination is an ongoing concern, and not all those surveyed will be open about their sexual orientation, either in surveys or with their coworkers.[30] Such openness and identification may be more likely among younger generations, as more than four times as many 18-24 year-olds identify as LGBT as those who are 65 or older.[31]

Data from 2012 at the U.S. EPA shows that LGBT employees responded less positively on surveys about their work environment.[32] And directly impacting the workforce, almost 10% of LGBT employees have left an employer due to feeling unwelcome.[33]

LGBT health care workers may play a crucial role in guaranteeing patient access to care as some states are adopting or considering conscience clauses that allow providers to opt out of providing treatment to certain patients if those providers have a moral or religious objection to a patient's sexual orientation or identity.

In education, teachers have a particularly fraught position — as employees, as trusted resources for their students, as proxies for parents, and often as targets for those with their own political agendas. While 60% of middle and high school teachers expressed comfort supporting LGBT students, they indicated several external barriers to such involvement, including parental/community backlash (21%), lack of administrative support (11%), and potential risk to their jobs (7.5%).[34]

LGBT employees who work for a religious school or hospital may still face discrimination based on ministerial exemptions to the Supreme Court's ruling, even for those whose formal titles or roles do not involve direct ministry.[35]

Given such environments in health care and education, it would not be surprising that employees may not be open with their own sexual orientation or gender identity within the workplace.

Regarding government, the 2020 Municipal Equality Index of 506 cities of varying sizes around the country shows that 429 (85%) have employment protections for sexual orientation and/or gender identify, and the number of such jurisdictions increased in 38 states since 2019. In addition, 179 (35%) provided transgender-inclusive employee health benefits and 195 (39%) maintained an LGBTQ liaison for staff.[36] Nationwide, CivicPride facilitates inclusion, education, and professional engagement around the LGBTQIA+ workforce in local government management.

Language

Bilingual employees — whether they learned a second language as a child or as an adult — may be better able to engage with diverse communities of local residents, enhance student or patient outcomes, or communicate with coworkers. Wage differentials for bilingual skills are common for positions like registered nurses and some other state or local staff (e.g., public safety).[37] However, while bilingual skills are important for school employees as well, that work is often not recognized or compensated, and perhaps relatedly, 31 states have a shortage of bilingual teachers.[38]

About 22% of Americans speak a language other than English at home.[39] If an organization is paying some staff for bilingual abilities, it should consider whether there is a clear policy regarding that benefit. Is it limited to certain languages or job functions? Is it left to a manager's discretion?

Employers and DEI officers should also consider policies and practice for how language diversity is treated within the workforce. Is it regulated to ensure that English remains the official language for conducting business, or are employees accepted when using another language in conversing with coworkers?

National origin

Foreign-origin workers represent 17% of the total civilian workforce, with considerably higher representation in maintenance, computer, and health care support occupations (see Table 10).

Approximately half of these workers are Hispanic, and 40% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (see Table 11).

The share of non-native employment is up from 6.7% in 1980, and stems from both generalized trends in immigration as well as targeted recruitment by industry, such as in information technology, in which foreign-born participation more than tripled from 1980 to 2014.[40] As the U.S. population ages, growing demand for health care and personal service workers may also contribute to an increasing share of foreign-born employment.

Pursuit of higher education is a factor for many of those coming to America, who may or may not remain in the country after completing their degrees. COVID-19 contributed to a 72% decrease in international enrollments in 2020, and with 70% of international students originating from Asia, concern about anti-Asian hate crimes may also be a concern.[41]

Race and ethnicity may bear no relationship to national origin or religion, and there may likewise be no relationship between actual race, ethnicity, national origin, or religion and what they are perceived to be.

Just as with anti-Asian hate crimes today, in the aftermath of 9/11, there was a rise in attacks on those perceived to be of Muslim or Arabic background. In both cases, whether the attacker guessed rightly or wrongly about someone's race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin, innocent people have been victimized and made to feel unwelcome, and talented students or potential employees may have been dissuaded.

Appearance, name, manner of dress, accent, and other personal characteristics have no bearing on ability to perform the work. For employers, part of building an organizational culture that welcomes a diverse talent pool and retains those employees long-term is ensuring that everyone in the workforce understands that there is no toleration for discrimination — no matter where employees are from or where someone might think they're from.

Table 10 **Foreign-born workers as a percentage of total employees in select industries**

Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	35%
Computer and mathematical	26%
Health care support	22%
Health care practitioners and technical	15%
Education, training, and library	10%
Community and social service	10%
Protective service	7%

Source: Author's calculations based on Employed foreign-born and native-born persons 16 years and over by occupation and sex, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020. Industries that are predominantly private sector are omitted (e.g., sales, manufacturing).

Table 11 **Foreign-born workers by race, ethnicity, gender, and educational attainment**

Hispanic	35%
Female	26%
Bachelor's degree or higher	22%
Asian, non-Hispanic	15%
Black, non-Hispanic	10%

Source: Employment status of the foreign-born and native-born populations by selected characteristics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020. Educational attainment is among foreign-born workers 25 or older. All other figures are for those workers 16 and older.

Figure 33 **Percentage of adults 25 or older with a bachelor's degree or higher, 2016**

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
Asian	54%
White	35%
Two or more races	34%
Black	21%
Pacific Islander	18%
Hispanic	15%
American Indian/Alaska Native	15%
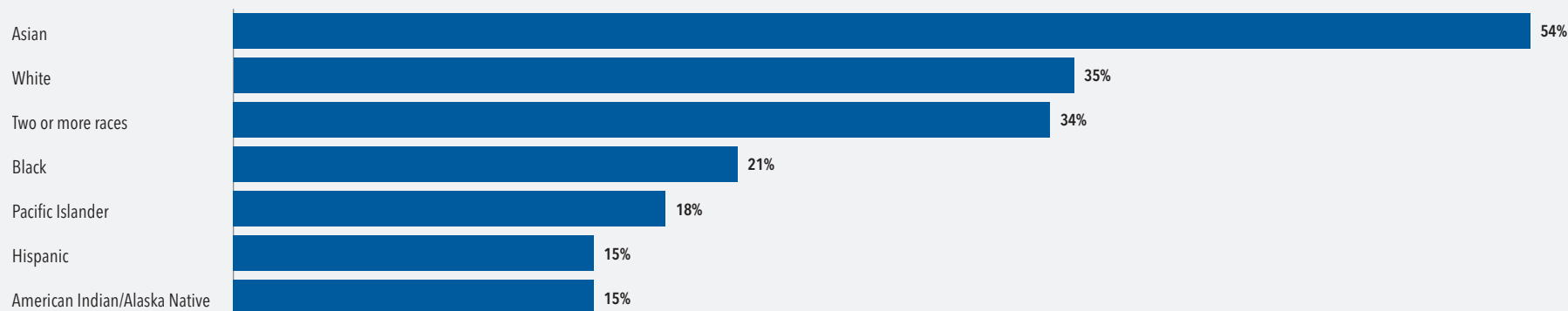
Source: **National Center for Education Statistics**, 2016.

Educational attainment

A diversity of educational attainment is not a value in and of itself, but it is closely tied to other types of workforce diversity. For example, in the hiring process, there may be minimum educational requirements set for a particular position. Some of these may be directly job-related (e.g., possession of a nursing license, a commercial driver's license, or current status with position-specific continuing education units). Others, such as a blanket statement of "bachelor's degree required," may limit the range of applicants that can be considered for a position. If individuals of a certain race or ethnicity are less likely to have the requested credential, the organization might miss out on otherwise-qualified individuals. For example, for prevalence of bachelor's degrees or higher by race and ethnicity, see Figure 33.

Another time to consider educational attainment is after employees have been hired. Where there is wide range of education levels among staff, organizational communications on complex topics should take that mix into consideration. For example, in explaining health or pension benefits, it may be of value to offer detailed statements of benefits, summarized infographics, and more interactive video or mobile apps to meet the learning styles of the full range of the workforce.

Criminal history

A criminal background check may be appropriate for those dealing with financial recordkeeping or the care of minors, but where job applications ask about prior arrests or convictions, they may have the effect of disqualifying certain applicants, even where there may be no job-related reasons such arrest data might be relevant. And as with educational attainment, considering arrest data may disproportionately disqualify applicants of certain races or ethnicities, particularly if criminal enforcement has been focused on racially or ethnically homogenous neighborhoods.

"Ban the box" laws to prohibit asking such questions on job applications – often limited to public agency hiring – are in effect in at least 27 states and 150 cities and counties.[42] Data is mixed on the programs' efficacy, with several studies indicating more frequent hires among those with a criminal record when not disclosed until the interview or offer stage. Others indicate that there may be broader discrimination against all applicants of color during application review since criminal record is not an available criterion, although there is some evidence this is less of a factor in public employment. [43]

While a conversation about ethics, professionalism, and prior arrests may be appropriate at some point during a recruitment process, it need not be an immediate disqualifier on the application.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the degree to which people may belong to more than one demographic cohort, and as a result, may experience either differing levels of representation in the workforce, potentially differing treatment, or compounded discrimination.

For example:

- Across the private sector, women represent 21% of top managers, but only 3% of top managers are women of color. Black women are promoted more slowly and are less likely to receive support in the way of mentoring or recommendations for advancement opportunities.[44]

- In the context of COVID-19, 36% of disabled women feel they are "in the dark" within their organization compared to 22% of women overall and 20% of men.[45]

- Even in the ranks of those who ascend to leadership roles, such as among school principals or superintendents, women of color serve predominantly in more racially or ethnically diverse campuses. And among Latinx principals, women were twice as likely as men to have begun their careers as teacher assistants — a role in which they are typically assisting a non-Spanish-speaking teacher.[46]

- LGBT women of color and LGBT Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders experience more frequent workplace discrimination than LGBT people generally.[47]

- Job applicants who are both over age 45 and from underrepresented communities tend to require more job interviews before receiving a job offer than their younger peers.[48]

A complicating factor with intersectionality is the fact that research studies are not typically structured to allow for such analysis, whether due to a limited sample size, the lack of historical comparison data, or the difficulty of coding all of the various potential categories, such as for mixed race individuals — a grouping that is currently not available within U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data.

Nevertheless, employers should remain cognizant of the outsized impact that intersectionality may have on the workplace experience of their employees and on the likelihood that discrimination or harassment may lead to decreased morale, stifled opportunities for advancement that overlook talented candidates, or increased turnover.

Equity in the workforce

Many of the equity issues that arise in public service are in the delivery of those services to the public. But equity is an internal issue for the workforce as well. Even when the same benefit or policy applies to all staff, differences in employees' circumstances or working conditions may lead to inequitable outcomes.

Pay inequities arise over time, as the conduct of classification studies lags the positions' changing duties. If the positions for which classification studies are overdue tend toward large percentages of women or racial or ethnic minorities, there may be a perception that these inequities are being ignored. In governmental environments in particular, where salary information may be a matter of public record, such inequities can lead to staff dissatisfaction and turnover. And left unaddressed, such inequities can extend into employees' retirement readiness.[49]

Another route to inequity is the division between administrative and operational staff. This may be viewed by some as white collar vs. blue collar, but the category of operational staff can involve everyone from teachers to public works employees, as well as public safety and emergency medical technicians. An easy way to conceptualize this is to consider a staff meeting that might get called with 10-minutes notice. Administrative staff might be able to make room in their schedules to attend and stay in the loop, but a classroom teacher, a patrol officer, a crew fixing a water main, or staff currently in an operating room might be left out.

Even when there's plenty of time to plan a meeting, the ability to communicate with all employees can also be constrained by technology and distance. MissionSquare Research Institute has been involved in a grant program to support

the implementation or expansion of financial wellness programs for state and local government employees.[50] As the grantees have proceeded with their programming, they have found in-person or computer-based training as effective means of delivering content, but if operational or field staff are not able to attend in person or do not have a work computer on which to participate in the training, they are less likely to participate. Particularly in regions where staff members may have spotty access to reliable broadband from their homes, expecting those operations employees to participate in training on their own time might be unrealistic. And if that leads to fewer operational staff completing the financial wellness program, it might lead to negative outcomes in terms of their budgeting for expenses or readiness for retirement.

Looking at the training idea more broadly, an organization might make a leadership development or cross-training program available to all employees, but if administrative staff can take work time to complete the program from their desks, they might be more likely to benefit from future leadership or job transfer opportunities. And if there is already a demographic imbalance among those who are in administrative versus operational roles, such outcomes can perpetuate that imbalance.

Taking a low-tech approach to this challenge, one of the Institute financial wellness grantees – Milwaukee County Transit System – decided to reach out to its bus drivers and other operational staff via a "What's Poppin' with Your Future?" program that paired fresh-popped popcorn (or Pop-Tarts, popsicles, etc.) with in-person training and related resources provided in bite-sized chunks (puns intended). The program has proved popular with employees and has been copied by several other agencies.

In the pandemic environment, administrative vs. operational issues also arose around work from home – an option often not made available to "essential workers." Within the public service arena, that includes fields such as health care, where many of those workers in direct contact with potentially infected patients are women or people of color (see Intersectionality).

While employers were required to make quick decisions around immediate shutdowns and work from home implementation in March 2020, the intervening time has allowed opportunity to consider how work from home, amended duties, or layoffs impact various cohorts of employees and whether those impacts are being felt disproportionally.

On a more positive note, employers also compensate their employees for their time and talents. This typically takes the form of salary; health benefits; and some form of defined benefit, defined contribution, or hybrid retirement plan(s).

Equity and COVID-19

View report:
African American state and local employee views on COVID-19

Public service staff have been impacted by COVID-19 in terms of their physical health, stress and mental well-being, finances, and job duties. Some of these impacts vary with their job duties, age, gender, or race. The Institute has conducted a series of surveys of state and local government employees, with additional breakout reports available for **K-12 staff**, those at varying **career stages**, and **African American public sector employees**.

For example, 39% of African American state and local employees expressed concern about their risk of contracting COVID-19 while at work compared to 22% of all other employees, which may relate to the mix of jobs performed or to the inability for some of those tasks to be performed in a socially distanced manner.

African American respondents were also significantly more likely to say they were considering changing jobs (45%) compared to White respondents (28%) or others (33%).[51]

As with other issues of equity, employers may want to consider how policy decisions or working conditions may have particular impacts on specific workforce cohorts.

Click here to view the **July 2021 report**.

Pensions are a key tool in encouraging employee longevity, but not all employees will be motivated by the same benefits. Options that appeal to all generations – even those employees who do not intend to stay until they are vested in the retirement system – may achieve more positive results. Flexible work arrangements are one key priority for staff, as identified in the Institute's recent survey on public employee views on COVID-19 (click on image below), but depending on the worker's life stage, so are paid family leave (offered by 39% of state/local employers), home purchase assistance (2%), and student loan repayment (1%).[52]

Even modest investments in such programs could provide a bridge benefit to better engage employees before they become vested in or are ready to focus on their pension benefits. Or for those whose priorities lie elsewhere, voluntary insurance coverage for fertility, long-term care, or veterinary care may fill employees' varying needs with limited to no fiscal outlay on the part of the employer. One size or type of benefit does not fit all. Equity is also a consideration in terms of how recruitment processes are conducted.
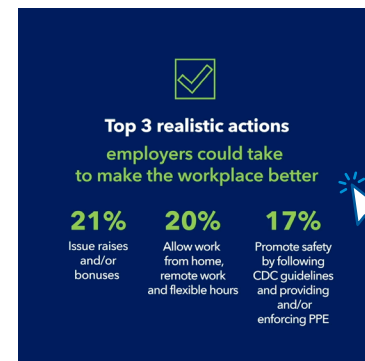
Where an applicant's name, address, graduation date, alma mater, student organizations, or other biographical information might provide a clue to their gender, race, ethnicity, age, or other demographics, such information might be omitted from the initial round of résumé reviews to avoid panelists bringing any preconceived ideas to their consideration. For example, many organizations recruit from HBCUs, but if the name of the college appearing on an application results in an applicant being considered by the hiring panel as a "diversity applicant," then perhaps the application process needs to be redesigned. Indeed, when names and other identifying information are "whitened," Black and Asian job applicants receive approximately twice as many requests for interviews compared to when their full and accurate information is provided.[53]

Electronic application forms may make it easier to mask such fields during initial résumé screening without the applicants feeling the need to lie on their applications, but technology in application review also brings some potential downsides.

According to the Institute's 2021 workforce survey, 11% of state and local employers are using artificial intelligence (AI) for applicant screening or interviews. Such apps can greatly improve the efficiency of reviewing large numbers of applications. But aside from the current recruitment problem being too few applications, use of AI also runs the risk of perpetuating various preconceived ideas of what makes a good job candidate – from "more of the same" assumptions that emphasize credentials over skills, to job history assumptions that might screen out military family members who have moved frequently. And from a racial, ethnic, or cultural standpoint, algorithms

within video-based AI apps that seek specific cues from facial expressions or speech patterns may be skewed to the cultural background of the people who programmed them or fail to recognize such cues depending on the applicant's skin tone. AI, like any technology, can be an important part of the recruiter's toolbox, but its programming and deployment should be carefully scrutinized to ensure that the results do not adversely impact any workforce demographic. (For more discussion on artificial intelligence in recruiting, see **Public Workforce 2030 Summit: Key Takeaways**)

Beyond an organization's direct payroll, an eye toward equity also justifies consideration of contractors and gig workers. In the Institute's **2020 workforce survey**, the top four occupations for temporary hiring (under a full year) were for fields that include high proportions of women (office/administrative support and accounting)[54] or people of color (maintenance work and custodial/landscape maintenance). As a result, while the full-time or even part-time staff may all receive equal benefits, where there is a reliance on gig workers or even longer-term contractors, these workers may not qualify for retirement plans, health insurance, sick leave, paid family leave, or other benefits. Particularly when employers are weighing the outsourcing of such functions, the impact of such decisions on workforce equity should be part of the discussion.

Top 3 realistic actions employers could take to make the workplace better

21% Issue raises and/or bonuses

20% Allow work from home, remote work and flexible hours

17% Promote safety by following CDC guidelines and providing and/or enforcing PPE

Watch video: **Research Institute survey shows importance of flexibility to employees**

Inclusion in the workforce

Equity in the workforce implies a consideration of how varying demographics are treated within the workforce, giving intentional consideration to equity of treatment and equity of opportunity.

Inclusion in the workforce assumes there is some existing level of diversity in the organization, but that maintaining, growing, and engaging that diversity is an organizational priority.

To conceptualize this, consider the difference between orientation, onboarding, and engagement.

Orientation implies that a new employee is provided with a roadmap – an organizational chart, list of key contacts, choice of health providers, and maybe an employee ID or keycard. This is a one-time step and often completed during the first week on staff.

Onboarding considers the lengthier process of getting acclimated to the organizational culture and may include various subsequent check-ins, recurring training opportunities, or mentoring links that can help a new employee feel more welcome.

Engagement includes onboarding, but also such components as satisfaction surveys and potentially Likert's consultative or participative styles of decision-making.

Including diverse staff in the organization might stop at the orientation stage, but this may leave new hires feeling isolated, particularly if they are among very few of their demographic within the overall organization or their department. For example, the homogenous nature of enrollment in information technology degree programs and of the IT workforce has led to programs like **GirlsWhoCode** and **BrownGirlsCode**, and might also lead employers to consider employee resource groups, networking events within or beyond the organization, or mentorships.

In addition, inclusion efforts may also include acceptance and encouragement of staff to be their true selves at work, whether in their hairstyles, manner of dress, cultural or religious practices, or in referring to themselves by their preferred personal pronouns. Such acceptance feeds not only a general sense of comfort and belonging, but also a 56% improvement in employee job performance.[55]

From an engagement standpoint, in workforces where there is an imbalance between administrative and operational staff demographics, a culture that values listening to employee input and encourages participation in decision making and leadership development can help overcome history or perceptions of glass ceilings standing in the way of advancement.

And where existing employees may be welcoming new staff into their ranks, discussions of implicit bias and harassment or discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, age, religion, national origin, or other real or perceived difference should be just as ongoing as the engagement process.

One caveat worth considering is that just because an employee happens to be part of a particular demographic, it does not mean they wish to serve as the voice of that demographic within the workforce, or to have an additional job duty handed to them as an official liaison to that segment of the community. With any such additional duties, appropriate consideration should be given to overall workload and compensation, just as it would for any new assignment.

In the Institute's research on recruitment and retention, one recurring theme is the value that people place on serving the public. This can be expressed in advertising campaigns, such as Denver's "Be a Part of the City You Love," or in individual employees' emotions, such as the 48% who say working in the public sector during the pandemic is a source of pride.[56] It is also echoed in fellowships that have been organized by **Lead for America**, which finds opportunities for new entrants to the public service sphere, many from diverse backgrounds, to make a difference in their home communities.

Acceptance feeds not only a general sense of comfort and belonging, but also a **56%** improvement in employee job performance

Projected employment and demographic changes

Figure 34 **Projected employment change, 2019-2029**

Social assistance	25.2%
Ambulatory healthcare services	18.5%
Museums, historical sites, etc.	17.2%
Education: private	15.4%
Nursing and residential care	10.5%
Urban transit systems	5.8%
Health care: state hospitals	5.2%
Health care: private hospitals	4.9%
Health care: local hospitals	4.5%
Local government, general	4.2%
Religious, grantmaking, civic, professional, etc.	4.2%
School and employee bus transportation	2.3%
Education: state	1.8%
Education: local	0.3%
State government, general	-2.2%
Utilities	-7.7%

Legend:
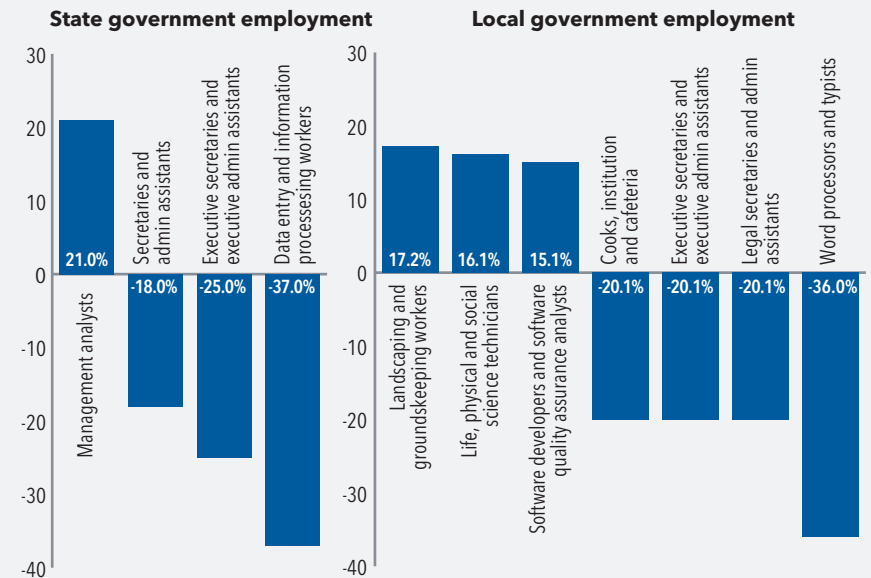- Education
- Healthcare
- Other

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

MissionSquare Research Institute's recent issue brief on **Public Service Employment** included projections on major employment categories from 2019 to 2029 (see Figure 34).

In addition to projected declines in utilities (-7.7%) and general state government (-2%), the Institute has also detailed a number of other sectors or occupations projected to experience significant employment changes over that time period, including secretarial positions (-18% or more; see infographic on **State and Local Employment** and Figure 35 below), local junior colleges (-12.9%; see **Postsecondary Education Staffing**), and corrections (-9.4% in state workforce and -4.1% in local workforce through 2029).

Figure 35 **Projected change in state and local government employment, by position: 2019–2029**

State government employment

Position	Change
Management analysts	21.0%
Secretaries and admin assistants	-18.0%
Executive secretaries and executive admin assistants	-25.0%
Data entry and information processing workers	-37.0%

Local government employment

Position	Change
Landscaping and groundskeeping workers	17.2%
Life, physical and social science technicians	16.1%
Software developers and software quality assurance analysts	15.1%
Cooks, institution and cafeteria	-20.1%
Executive secretaries and executive admin assistants	-20.1%
Legal secretaries and admin assistants	-20.1%
Word processors and typists	-36.0%

Source: National Employment Matrix, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as included in MissionSquare Research Institute infographic on **State and Local Employment**.

Declines in staffing among secretarial or customer service staff may relate to changing technology around office productivity tools or customer relationship management/311 apps. Technology might also play a role in a enabling a wider span of control among supervisors, with the number of state and local chief executives also projected to decline (see **Workforce of the Future**).

In a 2013 study, library and traffic technicians were identified as facing 90% or higher probability of computerization, with bus drivers, highway maintenance workers, and parking enforcement workers close behind.[57]

From a DEI perspective, the predicted decreases in secretarial and corrections staffing are noteworthy based on the high percentage of women (93%) and African Americans (33%) in those professions. Likewise, as there may be changes in staffing for libraries or bus drivers, these might also directly impact the employment of women or people of color in an agency's workforce.

Telemedicine, however, offers another example of how technology may impact staffing. The promise of telemedicine has been known for some time, but with the pandemic, that growth was jump-started, with virtual care now projected to grow from 11% of all health care spending to 20%.[58] This may mean more primary care appointments conducted online or increased access to specialists, particularly in rural areas where a consultation might otherwise entail a long drive. But despite the implementation of telehealth or even electronic medical records, health care employment is expected to increase (see Figure 34), with employees perhaps shifting their responsibilities or providing services in new ways, particularly as an aging population brings increased demand. As technology, demography, and local employment trends continue to evolve, public service agencies should consider the impacts on the diversity of their workforce, while looking to the additional training needs of the employees whose jobs might be changing; the targeted recruitment strategies that will identify new, talented candidates to join the organization; and the retention strategies that will encourage those employees to stay and grow with the organization.

Along with those projected changes in the demand for labor, the share of the population that is of working age will decline, as will the share of the population that is non-Hispanic White (see Figure 36). At the same time, the percentage of the population that is foreign born will increase.

Alternative scenarios over the long term show varying impacts from changes in birth rates and immigration patterns, but it is clear America will continue to be a nation with a diverse and changing workforce, which employers will need to consider in their recruitment and retention plans.

Figure 36 **Population projections, 2020-2030**
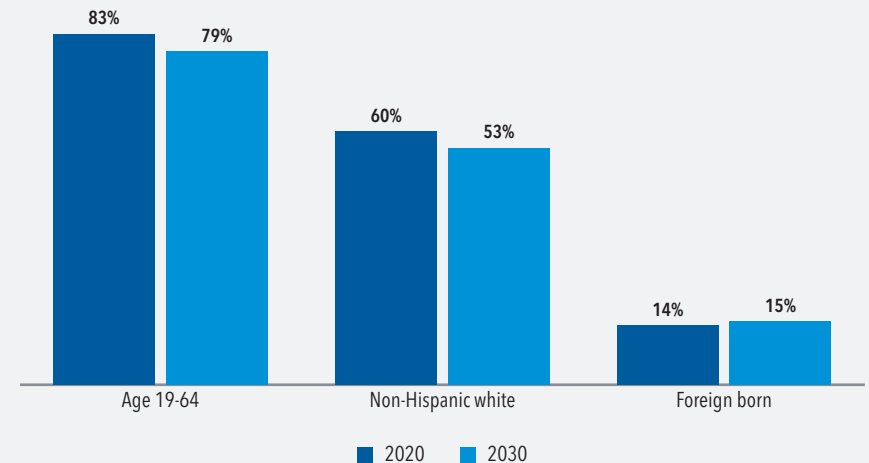
Source: **2017 National Population Projections**, U.S. Census Bureau.

Impacts on retirement and other benefits

Workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion can impact employee retention as well as retirement readiness, financial wellness, and the effectiveness of benefits offerings.

One key consideration for employers is whether those who are hired are likely to remain until they have become vested with the organization's retirement plan. This varies by industry, but median years of tenure for state and local government employees is 6-7 years, compared to 4 years for private sector employees, and 3 years for social assistance employees.[59]

Although 6-7 years might align well with many vesting schedules, there would remain a considerable number of employees leaving prior to that stage. Also of note is how median years of tenure has decreased since 2010 for government employees at both the local (-0.9 years) and state (-0.8 years) levels.[60]

Just as employers are marketing the value of public service to appeal to candidates' desire to make a difference in their communities, they may also need to market the value of retirement benefits – whether through onboarding programs, financial wellness education, or mentoring programs – to help employees of diverse ages and backgrounds consider the advantages to be gained from staying with a public employer longer term. (See also Equity in the Workforce above.)

Despite such outreach and communications efforts, some segments of the workforce may simply not be as motivated by retirement benefits as they are by other benefit offerings. For these employees, more immediate concerns may include being able to pay off student debt, find affordable housing within a convenient distance of the workplace, or access paid family leave. As an example, 75% of Black borrowers with student debt owe more than the original balance of the loan, compared to 60% of Latinos and 51% of Whites.[61]

In the pandemic environment, child care and flexibility have taken on renewed importance, particularly as some employees may be helping care for children or assist with distanced or hybrid schooling. In the Institute's COVID-19 research, 71% of state and local employees with children under 18 had to care for those children while working from home.[62]

Evaluating whether the interest in various benefits varies for diverse cohorts of employees may help tailor voluntary benefits offerings, maintain morale and engagement, and improve retention program effectiveness.

Conclusion

Diversity in the public service workforce exists along multiple, sometimes overlapping dimensions. Yet diverse employees' presence on the payroll is not a guarantee that diverse employees feel welcome and valued within the organization. This makes thoughtful onboarding and engagement a crucial part of employee retention and development.

Workforce diversity can pay dividends for the organization in terms of the trust it can help build with the public — whether in education, health care, public safety, housing and community development, or other fields. When area residents see themselves reflected in the public service workforce, hear from those agencies in their own languages, or feel listened to about their community concerns, there can be a more effective partnership for problem solving, and a more relationship-based pipeline to recruiting the next generation of employees.

Within the organization itself, diversity of viewpoints leads to more creative thinking and positive impacts on the financial bottom line.

Given that potential for positive organizational results, public service employers should consider:

- to what extent their current workforce is diverse

- how that diversity is likely to evolve

- what steps to take to foster that diversity

Whether an organization has the resources to establish a stand-alone position of a DEI officer or not, the functions of such a position are important and distinct from the more compliance-focused requirements of equal employment opportunity or civil service administration. Depending heavily on employee engagement skills, outreach to the public as part of targeted recruiting, quantitative abilities, and analysis of policy for impacts on equity and inclusion, successful candidates for a DEI officer may come from a variety of backgrounds – just like public service employees generally.

The data presented above provides a nationwide overview of historical and current diversity, as well as projected trends. More locally, employers should consider how their workforce is or is not reflective of the surrounding community, areas where recruitment or retention has lagged, or where the workplace or departmental culture has presented roadblocks to diverse employees feeling included and valued.

Even where a particular workforce might seem appropriately reflective of the community's diversity, onboarding, engagement, and a focus on equity within the workforce should be considered part of an organization's journey toward continuous improvement rather than simply a box to be checked. Likewise, equal opportunity on paper is an insufficient guarantee that the impacts on diverse groups within the workforce will remain equitable.

Through a commitment to regular evaluation of the impacts of its recruitment, hiring, pay, and promotion policies, employers can mitigate inequities, work toward a more effective recruitment and retention program, and build a diverse workforce that brings positive results in terms of employee morale, creativity, and productivity.

Next steps to consider

- **Designate a DEI officer**, whether there are the resources to do so as a stand-alone position or a need to start with those duties added to an existing staff person's responsibilities.

- **Evaluate the diversity** of current staffing and areas where there's room for improvement.

- **Think creatively** about recruitment. Even if the local labor market may not include a wide range of diverse candidates, consider internships, hackathons, virtual project teams, and other strategies that can help build relationships across a wider region, raise awareness of career opportunities, and emphasize the value and satisfaction of working in public service.

- **Reach out** to potential job candidates via proactive recruitment efforts, such as through HBCUs or HSIs, community groups, non-English language media and other specialty outlets, and military liaison offices.

- **Establish a regular engagement process** for gathering employee input to assess not just overall satisfaction, but also issues around discrimination, equity, and inclusion.

- **Build an inclusion program**, considering what employee resource groups, mentoring, or sponsorship opportunities might help diverse employees feel more engaged with the organization or among demographic or professional peers.

- **Add an equity lens** to policy discussions to identify and eliminate potential differential treatment based on protected classes of employees or intersectional segments of the workforce (e.g., administrative vs. operational staff).

- **Don't wait** until exit interviews to find out there's a problem that needs to be addressed.

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3. See also the discussions of community trust building and relationship-based recruiting in **The Model Police Officer: Recruitment, Training, and Community Engagement**, International City/County Management Association, 2018.

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8. Due to some recategorization of occupations by BLS, detailed age breakdowns from 2010 or prior are not compatible with more recent data.

9. Table 3 and the figures for gender, race, and ethnicity follow the categories used by BLS, showing those in the workforce who are 16 years of age or older. White individuals comprise 78.0% of the workforce. People of Hispanic ethnicity may be of any race, and thus the figures for race and ethnicity added together would exceed 100%.

10. Race and ethnic data in the 2020 Census show that the total of those reporting two or more races or some other race (83.7 million people) outnumber the total of those reporting as African American, Asian American, American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (82.2 million people), **2020 Census Statistics Highlight Local Population Changes and Nation's Racial and Ethnic Diversity**, U.S. Census Bureau, August 2021.

11. For Figure 2 and below, unless otherwise noted, the public administration industry totals include all subcategories except national security, economic program administration, and space research.

12. In figures for 2005-2015, BLS categorized "Recreation and fitness workers" as a single group. For 2020 only "Recreation workers" are included in the graph, with "Exercise trainers and group fitness instructors" now a separate category and potentially more likely to work in fitness centers rather than parks and recreation departments.

13. Considering the large number of employees, there is very little difference between median and mean figures, but median is used to avoid overemphasizing extreme values, particularly in smaller breakout categories.

14. Elsewhere in this analysis, where public administration data is presented, the portion that relates to national defense, economic programs, and space research is subtracted from the total. However, the median age data does not readily allow for such a calculation, so the total presented here includes those predominantly federal employees as well. Since defense personnel tend to skew younger, the median age for non-federal public administration staff would likely fall between the 46 and 49 years for public administration and other general government support as shown on the graph.

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26. **Religious Landscape Study**, Pew Research Center, 2021.

27. Kathy Gurchiek, "**Prayer and Meditation Rooms Can Increase Inclusion**," Society for Human Resources Management, March 23, 2018.

28. The categorization of LGBTQIA+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other nonheterosexual or nonbinary individuals. In this discussion, where an alternative abbreviation is used (e.g., LGB, LGBT), it is based on the acronym used or groups represented in the underlying research.

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