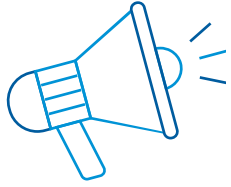


# New Career Entrants to Public Service: **Lessons for Employers from Fellowship Applicants**

January  
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## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Gerald Young (MissionSquare Research Institute) and describes the results of a survey conducted in collaboration with Lead For America. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance and insights of Cam Watts and Reed Shafer-Ray (Lead For America), and Joshua Franzel, PhD, and Rivka Liss-Levinson, PhD (MissionSquare Research Institute).



## Introduction

The Great Resignation has led to considerable speculation and research around the reasons that employees are leaving or staying with their current jobs. MissionSquare Research Institute – in cooperation with the International Public Management Association for Human Resource (IPMA-HR) and the National Association of State Personnel Executives (NASPE) – has conducted surveys of human resource directors in state and local government since 2009 to explore drivers of recruitment and retention. In addition, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute has conducted a series of surveys asking state and local employees how the pandemic has impacted their work, finances, and job outlook.

MissionSquare Research Institute conducts research on state and local government workforce issues to help those governments serve as employers of choice. An important part of that goal is the recruitment and retention of new generations of workers. To better understand this crucial component of the workforce, the Research Institute partnered with Lead For America (LFA), a national service program building the next generation of public service leaders, to conduct a survey of LFA fellowship candidates to gauge their motivation toward public service, their impressions of the application process, and other career aspirations. This survey, fielded from April 11 to May 25, 2022, garnered a total of 102 responses.

For additional context, several figures are also compared to data from the Research Institute's annual workforce survey of state and local human resources managers (most recently conducted in March-April 2022) and its state and local government employee viewpoint survey (most recently conducted in November-December 2021; see References).

### Among the key survey highlights:



**Meaningful work** was identified as the top priority (Figure 1)



**71% expect to serve in an entry-level position** for 1-2 years prior to receiving a promotion (Figure 10)



32% found state/local salaries competitive, while **83% found benefits to be competitive** (Figures 4 and 5)



81% identify the likelihood of applying for a position to be influenced by **personal recommendations** (Figure 13)



77% see it as very important that their employer is mindful of creating an **inclusive and welcoming** environment for all identities (Figure 9)



62% indicate that COVID-19 has made them more interested in employment in **public service** (Figure 15).

Table 1 **Survey Respondent Demographics**

**Median age (years): 22**

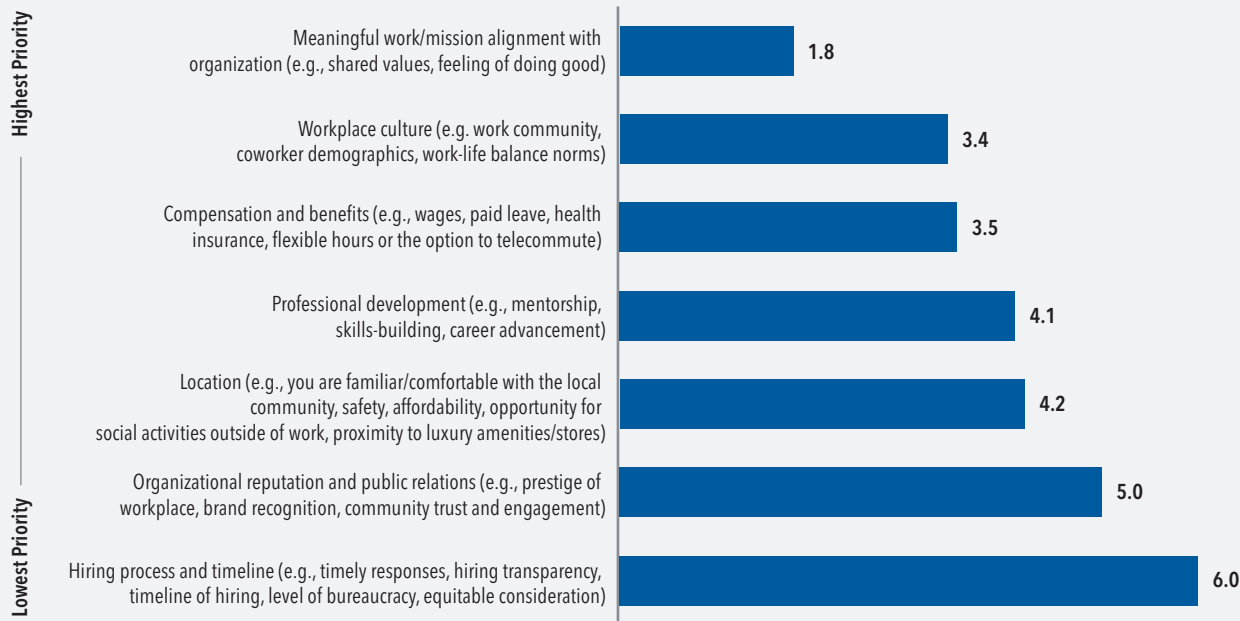
| Gender                  |     | Race/Ethnicity            |     | Region    |     | Jurisdiction Type |     |
|-------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|-----------|-----|-------------------|-----|
| Female                  | 52% | White or Caucasian        | 56% | Midwest   | 38% | Suburban          | 34% |
| Male                    | 47% | Black or African American | 14% | South     | 24% | Urban             | 31% |
| Prefer to self-describe | 1%  | Asian or Pacific Islander | 9%  | Northeast | 20% | Small town        | 28% |
|                         |     | Hispanic/Latinx           | 8%  | West      | 17% | Rural             | 6%  |
|                         |     | Native American           | 2%  |           |     |                   |     |
|                         |     | Two or more races         | 12% |           |     |                   |     |

Overall Priorities

Respondents were asked to rank seven potential workplace considerations in order of their personal priorities, with 1 being the highest priority. The average priorities assigned

to each of those topics are shown in Figure 1. Meaningful work was identified as the top priority, and the hiring process and timeline was identified as the #7 priority.

Figure 1 **Please rank, with 1 being the highest, the following aspects of a workplace by how important they are when considering what job to pursue** (Average priority; n = 91)



## Compensation and Benefits

The importance attached to various components of compensation and other benefits are displayed in Figure 2. It is noteworthy that high wages are only identified as “very important” by 18% of respondents – while more than three times as many respondents identified leave as being very important. This may in part be in recognition that occupations in public service are not necessarily expected to offer high wages. Those attracted to those positions,

as shown in Figure 1, had only identified compensation and benefits as their third-highest priority out of seven.

This is not to say that fair compensation is unimportant. Indeed, when asked to rank compensation and benefits against each other, salary or other monetary compensation was the second-highest priority (see Figure 3).

Figure 2 **Compensation and benefits: How important is it to you that your next workplace has...** (n = 102)

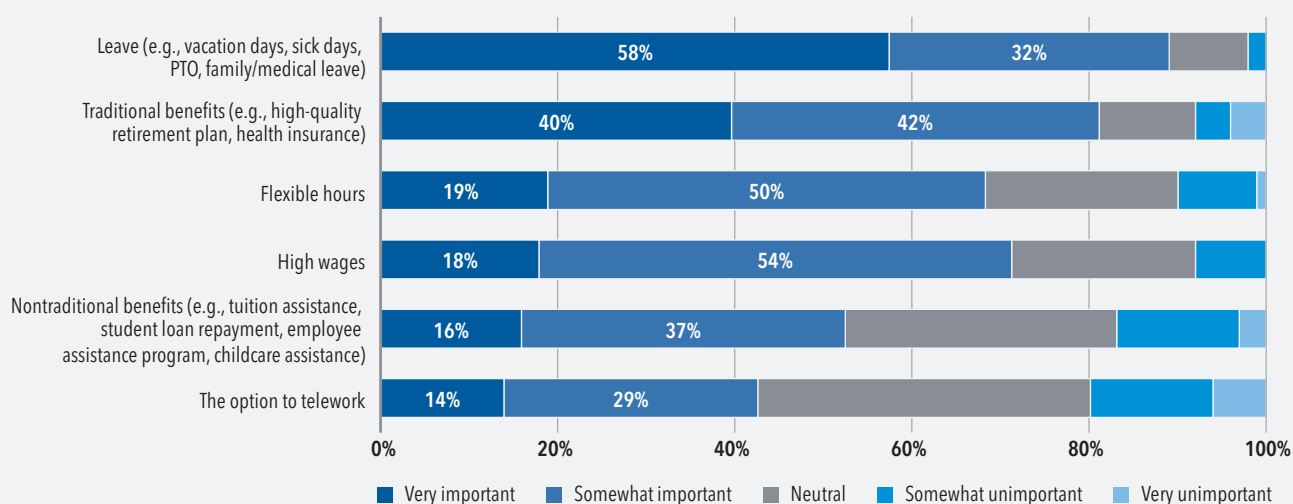
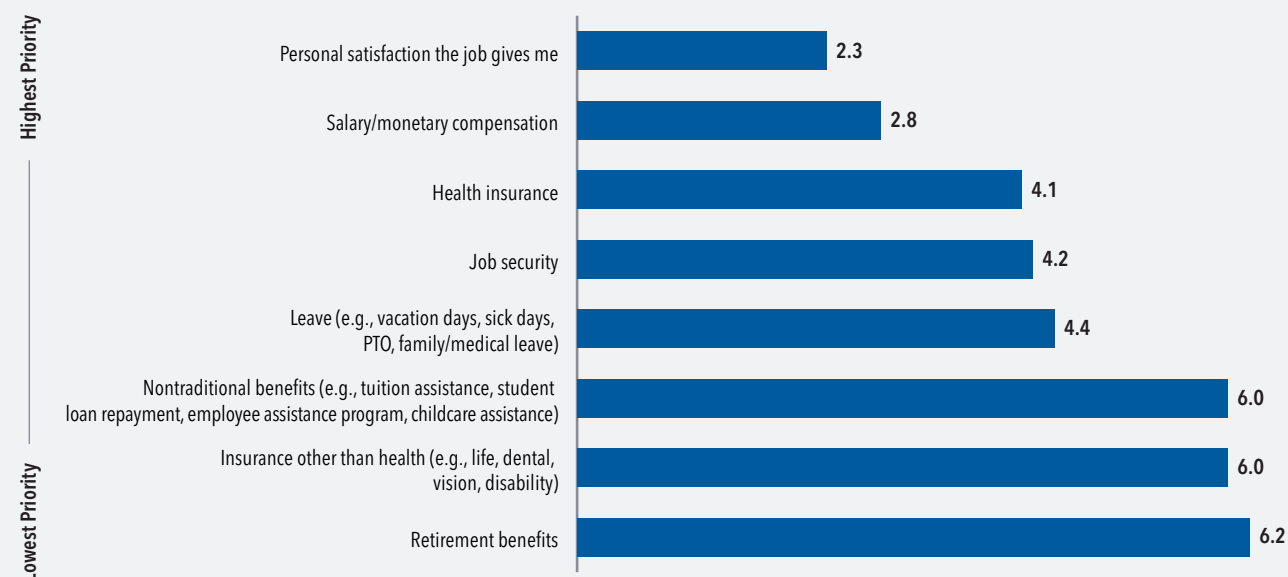


Figure 3 **Please rank how important each of the following specifics benefits are to you, with 1 being the highest** (Average priority; n = 101)



The lowest of the eight items prioritized, retirement benefits, is likely a function of two aspects of LFA placements:

- 1) the expectation that the position is not necessarily the start of a long-term career with the employer, and
- 2) the low median age of the respondents (22 years old).<sup>1</sup>

Two additional compensation questions show the candidates' sense of how the wages and benefits offered by state and local government employers compare with the overall labor market. Figures 4 and 5 show that 32% feel that wage compensation is competitive, while 83% feel the benefits compensation is competitive. (See also: [How Does This Compare?](#))

### Organizational Reputation and Public Relations

The reputation of the employer as a great place to work was rated highly by survey respondents, either as very important (42%) or somewhat important (47%; see Figure 6).

### How Does This Compare?



#### Motivation

**59%** of state and local government employees value serving their community during this difficult time.



#### Compensation

**44%** of HR managers feel their wage compensation is competitive, while

**85%** of HR managers say their benefits compensation is competitive.

Source: 2021 MissionSquare Research Institute survey on Continued Impact of COVID-19 on Public Sector Employee Job and Financial Outlook, Satisfaction, and Retention; 2022 State and Local Government Workforce survey

Figure 4 **Do you feel the wage compensation offered by state and local government employers is competitive with the labor market?**

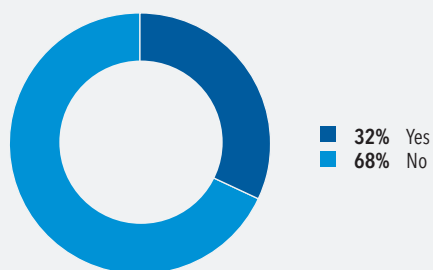


Figure 5 **Do you feel the benefits compensation offered by state and local government employers is competitive with the labor market?**

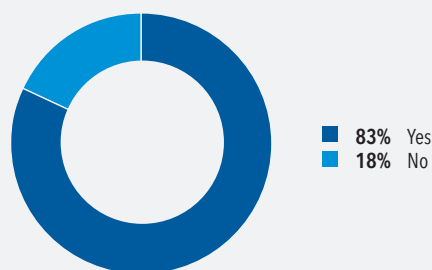
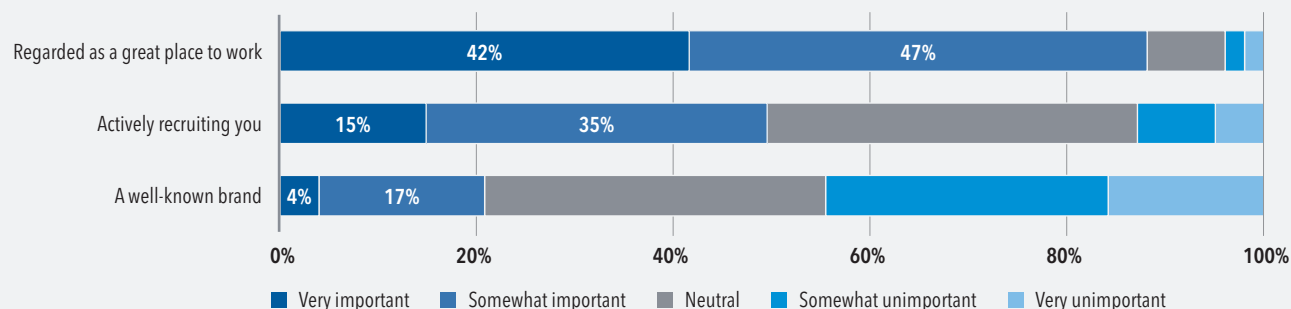


Figure 6 **Organizational reputation: How important is it to you that your next workplace is...** (n = 101)



<sup>1</sup>Millennial employees are less likely to be motivated by traditional employee benefits and may also not have a complete understanding of those benefits' financial value. See: [Worker Opinions About Employee Benefits: Differences Among Millennials, Baby Boomers, and Generation X Have Implications for Plan Sponsors](#), EBRI Notes, vol. 36, no. 12, December 2015.

## Hiring Process and Timeline

Regarding the hiring process, measures relating to transparency and communication were rated as most important, with timeliness of hiring and application complexity ranked as less important considerations (see Figure 7).

## Workplace Culture

The aspect of workplace culture rated most important was a culture of intellectual engagement (62% very important) – far above whether the organization has other young people (very important; see Figure 8).

Figure 7 **Hiring process: How important is it to you that your next workplace...** (n = 101)

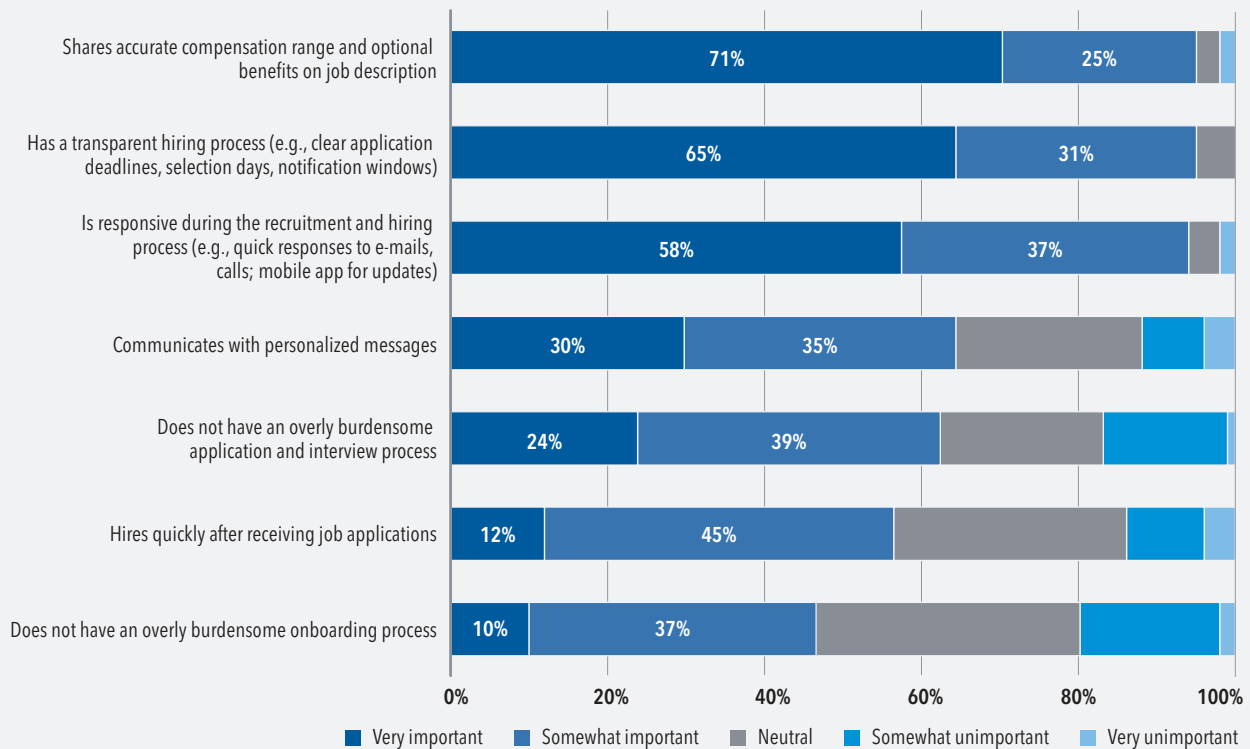


Figure 8 **Workplace culture: How important is it to you that your next workplace...** (n = 101)

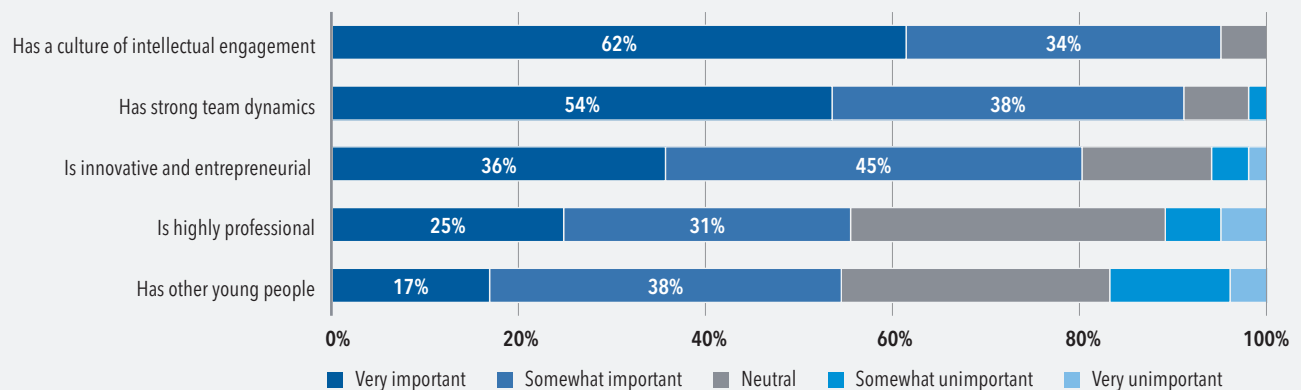
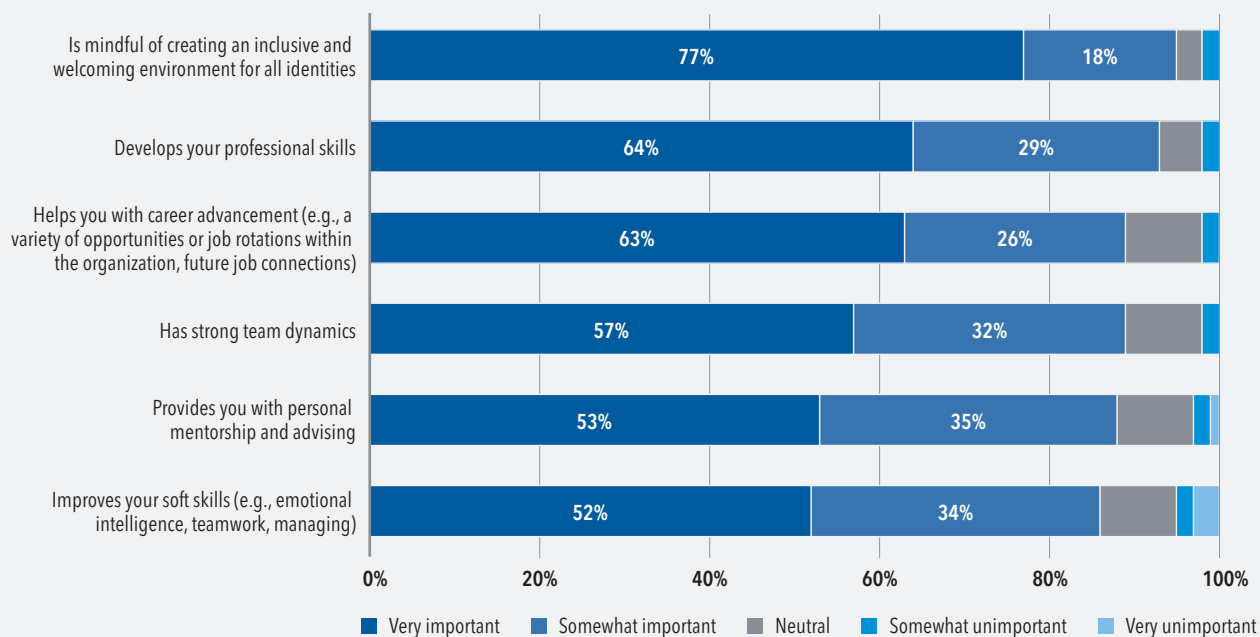
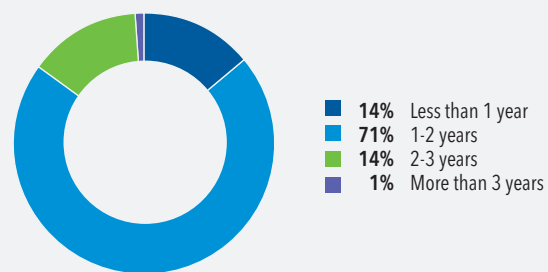


Figure 9 **Professional development: How important is it to you that your next workplace...** (n = 101)

## Professional Development

While each of the professional development topics surveyed had a majority rating them as very important, the highest-rated statement was that the workplace is mindful of creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all identities (77% very important; Figure 9).

Whether with their current employer or a future one, a large majority (71%) expect to be earning a promotion within 1-2 years in an entry-level position (Figure 10).

Figure 10 **How long do you expect to be in an entry level position before receiving a promotion?**



## Mission Alignment with Organization

In assessing organizational alignment, most rated their personal values and the organizational mission statement as the most important aspects to consider (see Figure 11).

Mission alignment may also be expressed in the results to be achieved, with 86% indicating it's very important that their workplace is improving the community (see Figure 12).

## Outreach Methods

The survey also asked respondents what methods of employer outreach were most likely to impact their application decisions. Of these, personal recommendations were identified as having a lot of impact (81%; see Figure 13).

Figure 11 **Please rank, with 1 being the highest, how you determine if a workplace aligns with your values?** (Average priority; n = 99)



Figure 12 **Mission alignment: How important is it to you that your next workplace...** (n = 99)

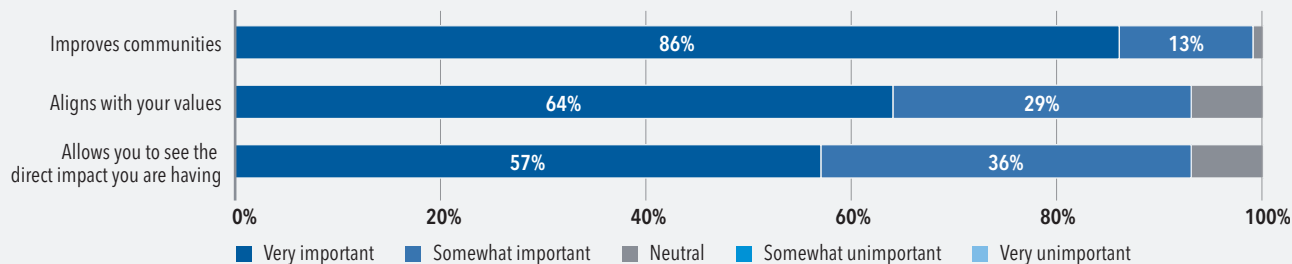


Figure 13 **Outreach methods: How much do each of the following affect your likelihood of applying for a career opportunity?** (n = 101)

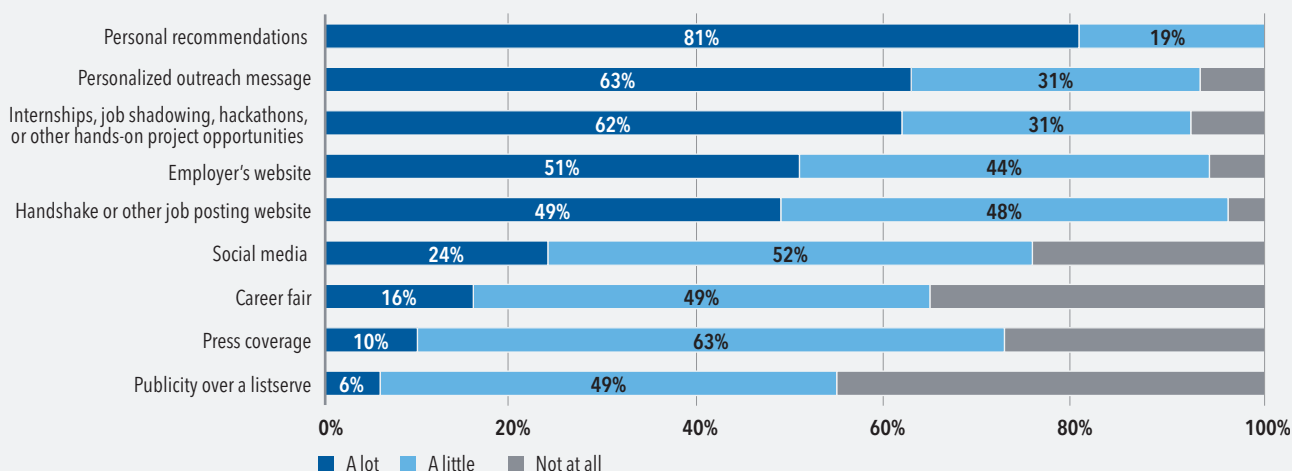
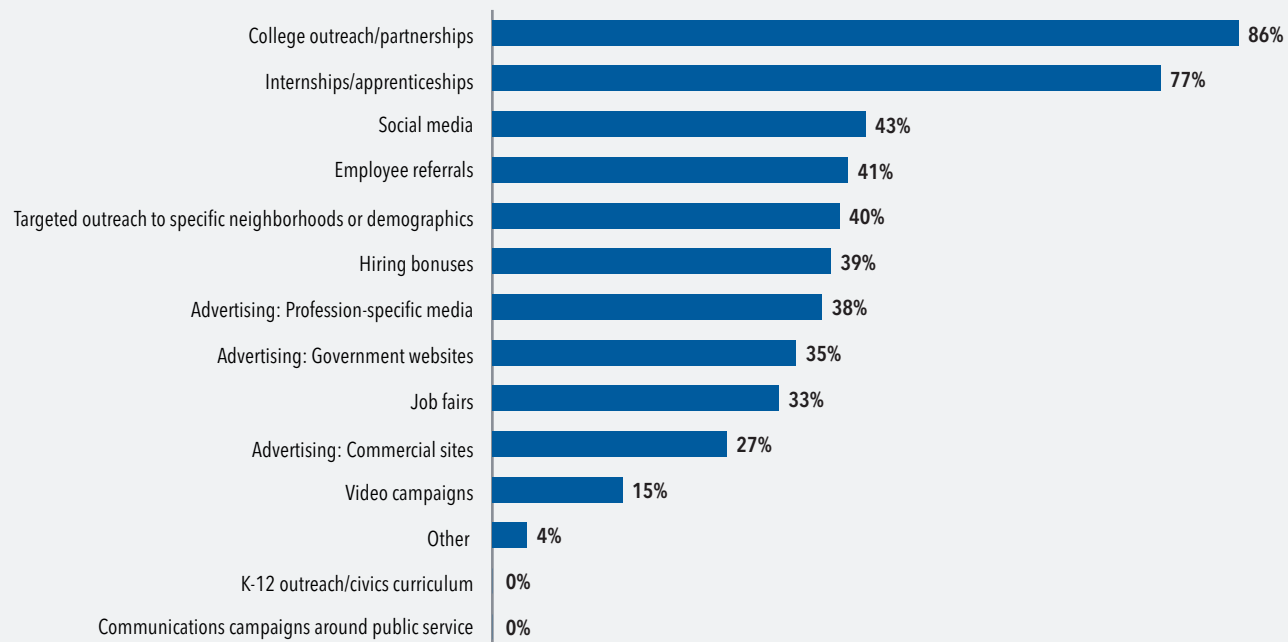






Figure 14 **When searching for new professional opportunities, what recruitment strategies by prospective employers do you find most effective?** (Select all that apply; n = 97)



A related question asked about employer recruitment strategies deemed most effective. College outreach/partnerships and internships were most often cited as effective (by 86% and 77%, respectively), with social media, employee referrals, and targeted outreach to specific neighborhoods or demographics cited by 40% or more (see Figure 14; for added context, see “What Do the Recruiters Think is Most Effective?”).

### What Do the Recruiters Think Is Most Effective?

-  **59%** social media
-  **57%** government websites
-  **56%** employee referrals
-  **27%** college outreach/partnerships
-  **17%** internships
-  **11%** targeted outreach to specific neighborhoods or demographics

**Note:** This data relates to all position recruitments, not just those for candidates who might be interested in programs like Lead For America.

Source: 2022 State and Local Government Workforce Survey, MissionSquare Research Institute, IPMA-HR, and NASPE

## Career and Future Planning

Figures 15-17 show respondents' attitudes toward public service, either based on the impact of COVID-19 (with 62% professing more interest in public service as a result) or if they are not selected for a fellowship. In the latter case, the most common alternate paths cited include service in the non-profit sector (a total of 36% of all respondents; Figure 16) or in their home community (58% indicating this was very likely; Figure 17).

Figure 15 In what ways, if any, has COVID-19 affected what you're seeking in your next employer? (n = 98)

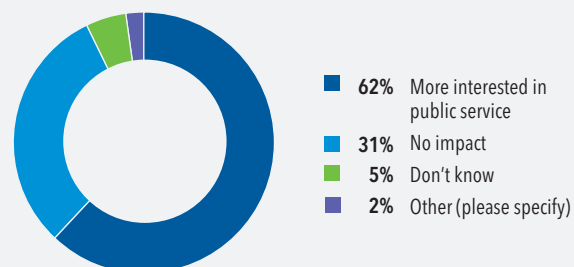


Figure 16 If you do not end up being selected as a fellow, what full-time opportunity would you most likely pursue instead? (n = 98)

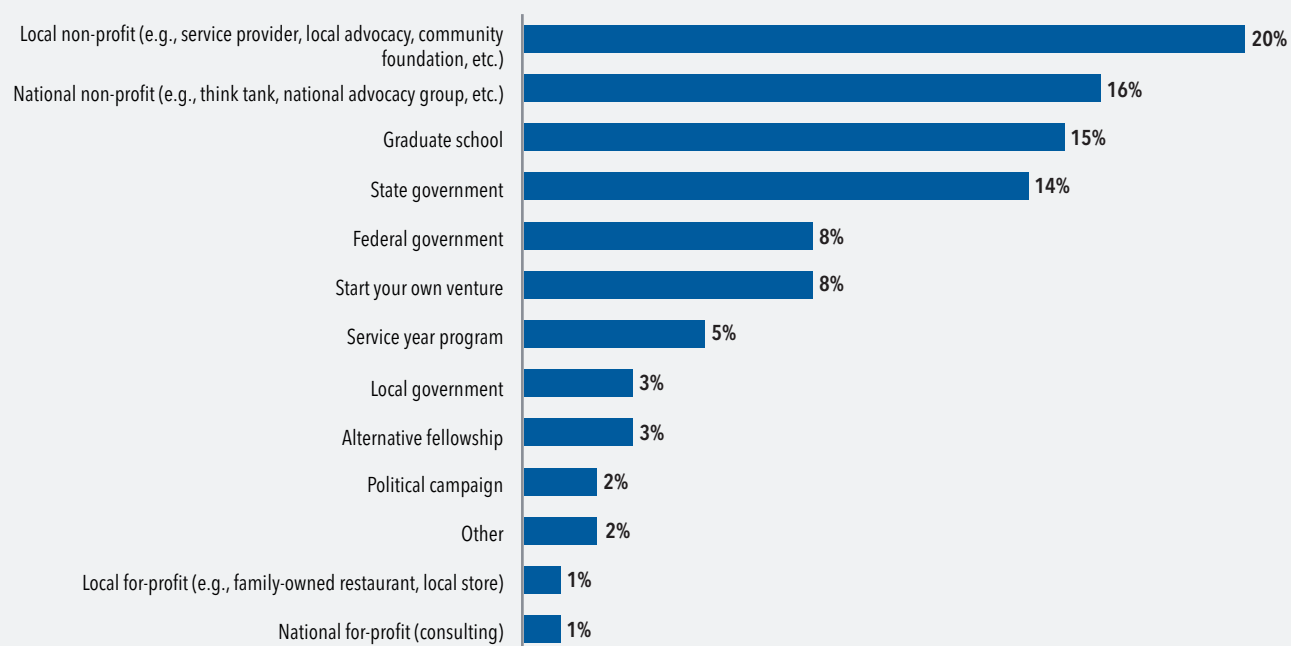
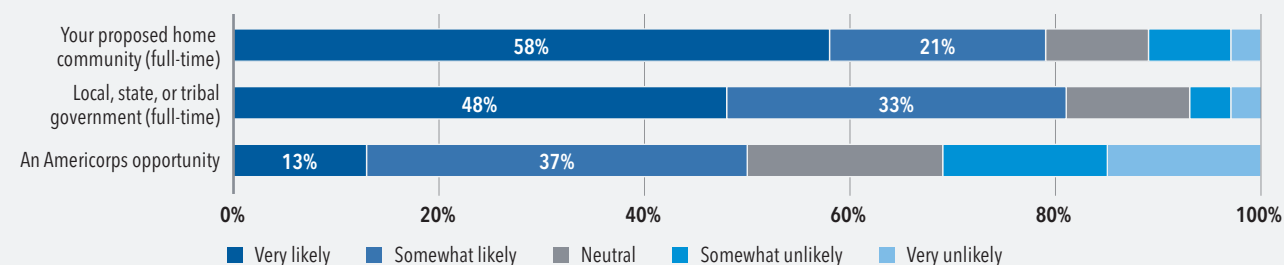


Figure 17 If you do not end up being selected as a fellow, how likely are you to still pursue service next year in... (n = 98)



## Next Steps

State and local government leadership and human resources staff or recruiters looking to make use of this information may want to consider the following:

**Emphasize the mission, not the tasks** – With meaningful work and personal satisfaction so highly rated, a job advertisement that leans more heavily on the results that can be achieved may be more likely to net interested recruits than one that focuses more on formal roles and responsibilities.

**Ramp up outreach** – College outreach and partnerships are ranked as the most important outreach methods. Consider moving beyond passive engagement through a job fair booth to more active partnerships, internships, virtual internships, hackathons, or other project-based opportunities to raise awareness of the services the government provides and how prospective candidates may become involved.

**Communicate around the value of the full compensation package** – Retirement benefits may not be the top priority among those just finishing college, but pensions,

deferred compensation, health insurance, and other benefits add up. For a cohort of recruits new to the working world, it is important to explain the full value of those benefits – both to those looking toward a long tenure as well as to those anticipating this job may be just one of many in their career trajectory.

**Consider what the candidates value** – Contrary to some generational stereotypes, flexible work arrangements were not the number one priority expressed, but they can be significant differentiators when weighing multiple opportunities in the job market. Organizational culture, transparency, and inclusion are other potential drivers of candidates' decision making, and those should be considered and clearly addressed either in the job listings or at the interview stage.

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## References

**State and Local Government Workforce Survey**, MissionSquare Research Institute, June 2022.

**Survey Results: Continued Impact of COVID-19 on Public Sector Employee Job and Financial Outlook, Satisfaction, and Retention**, MissionSquare Research Institute, March 2022.

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