

govCIO OUTLOOK

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IN MY OPINION

LAVERNE COUNCIL,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR IT
& CIO, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS

CIO INSIGHTS

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CSRA: TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN SECURITY APPROACH

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The Workforce Dilemma

By Jim Smith, CIO, State of Maine



Jim Smith

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he numbers can be sobering: for some states it is 30 to 50 percent; for the state of Maine, it is 24 percent. It is the projected number of state IT workers who will be retiring in the next two years. That is a seismic change; for Maine, we estimate that the baby boomers will be taking over 3,000 years of IT experience to the golf course and grandchild visits with them. It is experience that will be difficult to replace. Like most large organizations, Maine has hundreds of systems, hundreds of different technologies, and some systems that are over 30 years old.

This 'silver tsunami' retirement issue extends beyond Maine—it is an industry-wide issue. The National Association of State CIOs (NASCIO) reported in their 2015 workforce survey of 50 states that:

- Eighty-six percent of states reported difficulty in recruiting new IT employees.
- Forty-six percent of states report that it

can take five months to fill senior level positions.

- Sixty-six percent of states report a shortage of qualified candidates for state IT positions, impacting the ability to achieve strategic IT initiatives.

And it is an industry-wide issue—the Federal Department of Labor reports that more than 500,000 IT jobs are currently unfilled across the US, more than any other occupation.

So, what is a state to do? For Maine, we have made recruitment and retention a focus, and we have worked to build a public/private partnership to help.

Our first step in the State of Maine was to hire a dedicated resource, a Director of Workforce Development, to ensure we had focus on the issue. Our Director has extensive experience recruiting and retaining IT resources in Fortune 500 companies. Together, we developed a plan to revamp our recruiting and hiring process. And one of the first thing she did was to change the title of her area from Workforce Development to Workforce Innovation, to more accurately reflect the change from an older, paper intensive process of finding resources to a contemporary, social-media driven process.

The Environment

Beyond the statistic of 24 percent retirement, the environment is changing. The IT world our retiring resources entered back in 1970 and 1980 of mainframes and overnight COBOL overnight is now



CIO Jim Smith, Governor Paul LePage, and Workforce Director Kelly Rickert with four interns

a world of mobile, social media, data scientist, Business Process Management (BPM), big data, and cyber security. Our workforce today has to simultaneously support 40-year-old systems, the latest iOS/ Android capabilities and tablets and voice recognition and GIS and drones and body cameras. And, we now have five “generations” in the workforce, all with different sources of motivation. Further, we believe that the days of the 40-year state IT resource is ending; we believe that the younger workers will strive to have multiple jobs, in multiple industries. They might only work for us for two or three years; we have to make the most of that time, by getting them productive quickly, and knowing how to transfer knowledge efficiently.

In this rapidly shifting technical and social environment we have to think differently and use multiple approaches to find resources that can contribute.

Find ‘em – Step One, Modernizing Recruitment

In many states, recruitment processes that were developed in the 1970s and 1980s still exist; they reflect the regulations and formal approaches of government organizations—the job descriptions were often regulated, the requirement to advertise jobs in newspapers, etc. But, we knew we were not going to find today’s IT resource through newspaper ads, or through job descriptions that ask about Words Per Minute (WPM). So, we are working with our HR department to revamp our job descriptions (we have really interesting technology jobs, everything from radio tower communications to GIS to working with marine scientists) to build our brand, and we revamped our recruiting process to embrace social media and allow people to apply for jobs through smart phones or tablets. We have built a process to find the people where they are, and early statistics have been strong—we are seeing statistics of 40 percent – 50 percent increase in job applicants.

Building the Future Pipeline—Interns and Mentorships

Over the past years, we have evolved the existing state intern program from the older focus of learning about government to a disciplined focus of contributing to technical evolution in government. Maine’s IT interns contribute, and they write programs and systems that interface with the public. We make sure they have meaningful work.

We revamped our approach to ensure that hiring an intern was as disciplined as hiring an employee. We work with the universities to find the right candidates; we have team interviews to ensure the skills and attitude are right; and we built a very formal mentor program, with deliverables and metrics, to ensure that the intern has a strong experience:

- Interviewing and testing to find the right candidates
- Ensuring that they have meaningful work
- Providing dedicated mentors
- Providing ways for the interns to learn about what we do—lunch and learn sessions, sessions with agency leaders
- Providing social settings for interns to learn together

- Helping the colleges and other organizations understand what makes a successful intern/employee
- Dedicating sections of the IT employee newsletter to our interns—getting to know them

And there are some benefits to being a government organization—we created an ‘Intern Challenge’, where a group of interns, with a mentor, were given a business / technical problem to solve. At the conclusion, the team of interns presented their findings to the Governor. It was an exciting opportunity for them.

We are excited about the success of our intern and mentorship program—over 70 percent of our interns have become full time employees.

Building the Future Pipeline II—High School Technology Night

We believe that building the workforce of the future is more than hiring qualified candidates; we also need to tell the younger generations about IT careers and opportunities. To help with this, we created a ‘High School Technology Night’, where to date over 150 high school students have joined us for a four-hour session where we teach them about technology careers. They learn about everything from software engineering to development to business analysis. We show them exhibits on everything from cyber to GIS to 3D printing to technology used on snow plows. And, of course, we give them pizza.



The Way Forward

There are more things we are doing to find and recruit and retain the workforce of the future, including

- A revamped program to hire returning veterans
- Participation in the Federal ‘Tech Hire’ program, which is developing ways to quickly train future IT workers
- Focused IT career fairs
- Maine’s Project Login, which is working with universities to double the number of IT graduates in Maine.

For us, it is about focus—focus on modernizing our recruiting, focus on hiring the right candidate, and focus on helping them be productive. The world is rapidly evolving, and we believe that the 40-year IT employee of the last century is evolving into the shorter term, more mobile IT worker of today. For us, the challenge will be to find them quickly, help them be productive quickly, and ensure there is a smooth transition as resources try new things. **GC**