

Bridging the DOT workforce gap today

DOT leaders are seeking new ways to attract, retain and develop talent to meet the demands of expanded infrastructure programs.



Departments of Transportation (DOTs) nationwide face significant challenges: a wave of retirements, fierce competition for skilled personnel, expanded capital programs, and increasingly complex operating environments. This compels DOTs to reevaluate their workforce strategies to ensure they have the talent needed for current and future demands.

Many DOT employees are eligible to retire within the next one to five years, particularly at the leadership level, where experience and institutional knowledge are crucial. In parallel, the digitization of infrastructure and emergence of new infrastructure types means that DOTs need new and different skills to deliver on their expanded capital programs.

Moreover, the private sector, which has traditionally supported DOT staffing, is also struggling to fill positions, creating a competitive labor market. Private sector employers often offer higher salaries and better benefits, making workforce issues a top priority for DOT strategic planning.

The retirement wave and knowledge management

One of the most pressing concerns for DOTs is the impending retirement wave. As a high proportion of employees approach retirement, DOTs must act swiftly to preserve institutional knowledge and ensure a smooth transition. Effective knowledge management and succession planning are paramount to mitigating the risks associated with this demographic shift.

This "retirement wave" has a significant (potentially disproportionate) impact on the leadership levels of DOTs. It also calls into question an organization's knowledge management and succession planning processes, tools, and enablers. To address this, DOTs are focusing on strategic planning and organizational design, aiming to reshape and refocus their organizations. This includes initiatives such as:

- Strategic planning and organizational design
- Operating model assessment for productivity and efficiency
- Enhanced recruitment and retention strategies
- Employee engagement and performance management
- Knowledge management and succession planning

By implementing these strategies, DOTs can effectively manage the impact of the retirement wave and simultaneously reconfigure their organizations to harness the talent of the future.



Funding opportunities and workforce development

With the expansion of capital programs nationally, DOTs are seeking to understand funding sources available to support development of a ready construction workforce. FHWA formula funding is currently being used by states to support targeted training and education for all levels. It is also being used to provide essential enablers to job seekers such as personal protective equipment, tools, childcare, and temporary lodging.

DOTs are central to decisions about how these critical resources are prioritized and deployed. This underscores the need for DOTs to adopt data-driven approaches to workforce planning and development. Key initiatives in this area include:

- Quantitative investment analysis
- Assessment of vacancy data
- Workload demand evaluation
- Centralized initiative repository

By utilizing these tools and strategies, DOTs can ensure they are well-positioned to meet the workforce demands of current and future projects.

Talent attraction and retention

The recruitment and retention of skilled personnel present a formidable challenge for DOTs. In the post-COVID-19 era, they are contending with private sector entities that can offer more compelling remuneration and benefits. To maintain a competitive edge, DOTs must innovate their strategies for talent acquisition and retention.

DOTs must align efforts and assess effectiveness to address these challenges. This includes initiatives such as:

- Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and branding
- Compensation, rewards, and benefits
- Workforce development initiatives
- Partnerships with workforce development offices

By implementing these measures, DOTs can bolster their appeal as employers and preserve their current workforce.

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Holistic solutions for workforce challenges

In response to the multifaceted nature of workforce challenges, DOTs are advised to implement comprehensive solutions that capitalize on human resources, procedural, and technological strategies. This integrated approach has the potential to not only resolve workforce supply issues but also boost productivity and efficacy.

KPMG outlines a five-step process for building a workforce of the future:

1. Size your workforce demands
2. Identify any workforce gaps
3. Assess options to address areas of need
4. Develop targeted action plan
5. Begin implementing actions

By following this process, DOTs can ensure they are well positioned to meet the workforce demands of today and tomorrow.

As DOTs navigate the complex landscape of workforce challenges, they must adopt innovative and holistic solutions to ensure they remain competitive and effective. By focusing on knowledge management, workforce development, talent attraction and retention, and holistic solutions, DOTs can build a workforce that is resilient, skilled, and capable of meeting the demands of the future.

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