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HRIS BUYERS GUIDE FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR

What Every Leader Should Know

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WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS

Buying a Human Resources Information System (HRIS) seems like it's about finding the right software—but in the public sector, what does that actually mean?



With different needs than the private sector, **government and public safety agencies can't be retrofitted with any random system on the market.** Selecting the right HRIS for a public agency has less to do with the software and more to do with simplifying the complexity of public sector function: disconnected systems, outdated timekeeping processes, rigid compliance frameworks, and teams stretched too thin.

This guide is designed to help public sector leaders make a confident, informed decision about purchasing an HRIS. It will help you define your priorities, avoid common pitfalls, align internal stakeholders, and choose a system that meets your needs today while providing the flexibility to grow and change with you for years to come.

With **over 20 years of experience serving more than 6,000 government agencies**, NEOGOV understands the unique challenges of public sector HR. Our HRIS is purpose-built for public agencies, offering a streamlined, secure, and fully integrated suite—from core HR and benefits to payroll and time and attendance.

This guide includes key features to look for, worksheets to map your pain points, priorities, stakeholders, and implementation, tips to calculate ROI, and more, so you can find the right HRIS for your needs. Let's go.

WHY PUBLIC SECTOR AGENCIES **NEED AN HRIS**

Across the public sector, HR teams are being asked to do more with less—fewer staff, tighter budgets, more complex compliance requirements. You're managing payroll, timekeeping, benefits, onboarding, scheduling, and compliance, often across several disconnected systems. It's inefficient at best—and risky at worst.

A modern HRIS brings those moving parts into one centralized system, reducing errors and helping your team work more efficiently. Here are the common problems facing public agencies and how an HRIS helps solve them.

Problem 1:

You're Managing Too Many Disconnected Systems

Employee data lives in different places—payroll in one system, benefits in another, scheduling and time off tracked manually or on spreadsheets. Every small change requires multiple redundant updates and introduces opportunities for human error.

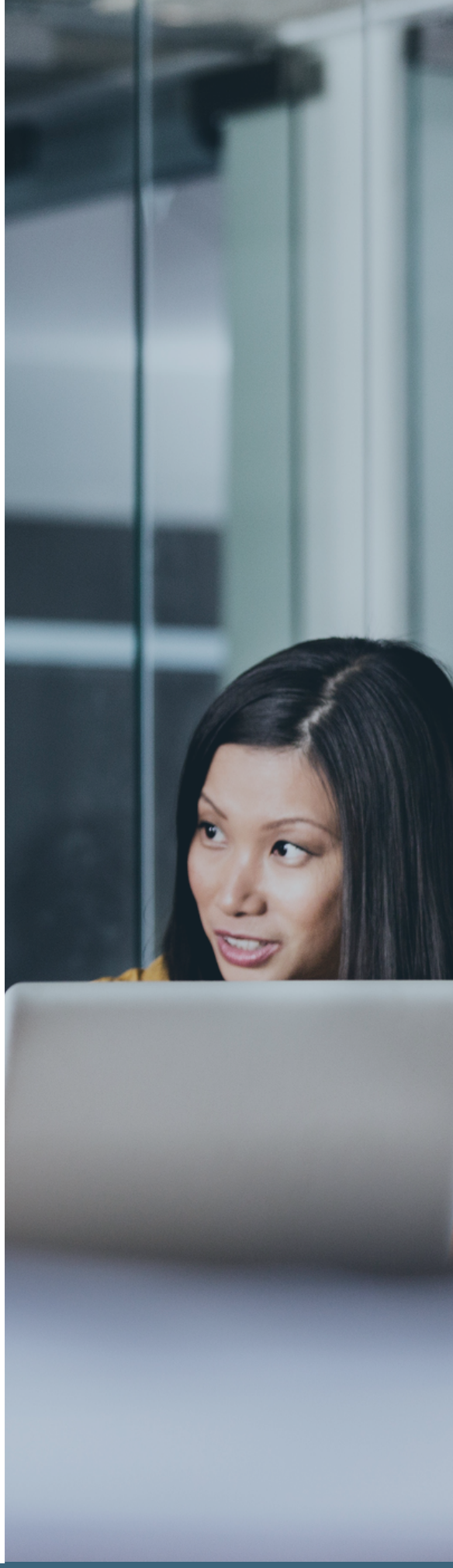
The HRIS Solution: Centralizes your employee records into a single source of truth. When a job title or department changes, that update flows across payroll, benefits, and time tracking automatically.

Problem 2:

Payroll and Timekeeping Are Slowing You Down

Public sector payroll isn't exactly straightforward, and systems designed for the private sector aren't built to handle it. Most struggle with step-and-grade scales, union rules, overtime policies, and employees who hold multiple positions. Managing all that manually—or across multiple platforms—takes time and invites costly mistakes.

The HRIS Solution: Automates complex pay rules, integrates directly with time tracking, and ensures payroll runs are accurate the first time. No more triple-checking spreadsheets or last-minute fixes.





Problem 3:

Compliance Is Getting More Complicated

From FLSA and ACA to union contracts and EEOC reporting, public agencies face increasingly complex compliance challenges. Most off-the-shelf systems don't offer the tools or flexibility to keep up, and making errors can be expensive both financially and in terms of lost morale and public trust.

The HRIS Solution: Helps you stay compliant with built-in public sector logic, automated reporting, and easy audit trails—so you're prepared when the state auditor or legal team comes asking questions.

Problem 4:

Employees Want Self-Service— But You're the Middleman

Employees want to view pay stubs, update benefits, or check their time off balance—but without a centralized system, they can't do it easily. Instead, they contact HR for help. Multiply that by dozens or hundreds of employees, and answering basic questions becomes a full-time job.

The HRIS Solution: Empowers employees with self-service tools so they can handle common tasks without HR acting as the go-between. This improves the employee experience while giving HR time back to focus on bigger priorities.to every part of your process.

Problem 5:

Your Team Is Wasting Time on Manual Work

When systems don't connect, HR teams spend hours re-entering data, chasing forms, and correcting errors. This is repetitive, time-consuming work that takes focus away from strategic initiatives.

The HRIS Solution: Replaces manual processes with automated workflows that move faster with fewer mistakes.the right system brings clarity, control, and confidence to every part of your process.

Why a Purpose-Built HRIS Solves So Many HR Problem

Most HR software isn't designed for the public sector. **A HRIS that *is* helps you meet your agency's unique challenges head-on, without the workarounds and time wasters.** Whether you're overseeing citywide payroll or handling onboarding for seasonal workers, the right system brings clarity, control, and confidence to every part of your process.

KEY FEATURES & BENEFITS TO LOOK FOR

Choosing the right HRIS can feel overwhelming. **The good news is public sector agencies share many of the same core needs**—and many of the same pain points. Once you know what problems you're trying to solve, focusing on the capabilities to do that will help cut through the noise.

Start with a solid foundation in core HR—this is where employee data lives and where your daily workflows begin. Then consider how benefits, time and attendance, payroll, and scheduling connect to streamline operations. **When these pieces work together, your team spends less time on busywork and more time on what truly matters.**

Core HR: Your Single Source of Truth

Everything starts here. If your employee records are scattered across systems or locked up in spreadsheets, the rest of your HR processes are already at a disadvantage. Core HR should give you one place to manage the basics: job history, department changes, salary adjustments, certifications—all of it.

This eliminates duplicate data entry by syncing across payroll, benefits, and timekeeping, and it simplifies compliance reporting for EEOC, ACA, and other regulations. With reporting tools that actually work in a way that was designed for the public sector, you won't spend hours pulling compliance data by hand.

A reliable Core HR system lays the foundation so you can spend less time managing records and more time supporting your team.

Main Takeaways:

A solid Core HR system **centralizes data, streamlines workflows, and ensures compliance** while reducing errors and redundant work.

Benefits Administration: Making Enrollment Manageable

Benefits administration can quickly become overwhelming. Multiple plans, carriers, eligibility rules, and enrollment periods create complexity that can bog down HR teams.

The right HRIS lets employees enroll online with clear plan options and access their benefits information at any time. Behind the scenes, automatic syncing with carriers through EDI 834 transactions cuts down manual errors and speeds up processing. This frees your HR team to focus on benefits strategy rather than paperwork.

Main Takeaways:

Online enrollment, clear plan transparency, and automated carrier syncing **reduce errors and lighten HR's workload**.

Time & Attendance:
Automate the Details

Time tracking in public agencies is rarely straightforward. Managing FLSA compliance, shift differentials, leave accruals, and union rules manually or across disconnected tools creates compliance risk and drains time.

An integrated Time & Attendance solution automates these complexities. Mobile and geofencing options make clock-in easier for field staff, while seamless payroll integration eliminates manual exports and errors. The result: fewer mistakes, easier audits, and smoother payroll runs.

Main Takeaways:

Automation of complex time rules and mobile-friendly clock-in options **improve accuracy and reduce admin burden.**

Payroll:
Accuracy Built In

Government payroll is notoriously complex. Agencies need to handle multiple positions, step-and-grade scales, union rules, overtime policies, premiums, tax updates, and retroactive pay calculations—all of which can overwhelm generic payroll systems.

A public sector-focused payroll solution builds compliance into every paycheck. It supports automatic tax updates, employee self-service for pay stubs and tax forms, and manages multiple roles and premiums without manual workarounds. This ensures payroll accuracy and gives your team confidence with every run.

Main Takeaways:

Built-in public sector rules, self-service access, and automation **reduce errors and improve payroll confidence.**

Compliance and Risk:
Get Ahead of Audits and Obligations

Time tracking in public agencies is rarely Public agencies can't afford to take chances when it comes to compliance. Between federal labor laws, local ordinances, union contracts, and internal policies, there's a lot to keep up with, and the consequences for missing something can be steep.

That's why it's important to choose an HRIS that treats compliance as a main, core feature. Look for a system that helps you stay audit-ready at all times. That means tools for tracking certifications and expirations, alerts for policy updates, automated reporting for things like ACA and EEOC, and digital documentation of processes and approvals.

With the right tools in place, your team can spend less time stressing about what might slip through the cracks—and more time strengthening your workforce.

Main Takeaways:

An HRIS with built-in, focused compliance tools helps your agency **stay organized, reduce risk, and respond quickly** to audits or legal inquiries.

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COMPLIANCE & RISK AUDIT CHECKLIST
for Public Sector HRIS Software

☐	System supports audit trails for all employee record changes (who changed what, when)
☐	Role-based access controls are configurable by HR, not IT
☐	Supports automatic record retention policies per state and federal guidelines
☐	Tracks compliance training and certification expiration dates
☐	Allows secure document upload and storage with version history
☐	Flags missing or outdated compliance documents automatically
☐	Includes EEO, ADA, FLSA, and FMLA tracking/reporting tools
☐	Supports OFCCP and other public sector-specific reporting requirements
☐	Provides data encryption at rest and in transit
☐	Regularly updated to comply with changing labor laws and regulations
☐	Allows secure sharing of audit documentation with internal or external reviewers
☐	Integrates with background check and e-verify systems
☐	Includes alerts for policy acknowledgement completion
☐	Logs login attempts and security access events for review
☐	Supports digital signature and acknowledgment tracking
☐	Allows bulk auditing of compliance records by category or department

EVALUATING **VENDORS**

Buying an HRIS is a major investment—not just financially, but in time, training, and change management. That's why choosing the right vendor is just as important as choosing the right system. You need a partner who understands the public sector, stands behind their product, and won't leave you hanging after the contract is signed. When you're shopping around, these are the questions to ask.

1. Do they understand the public sector?

Government HR comes with its own set of rules, approvals, and reporting headaches. You need a vendor that doesn't just say they work with government agencies—they need to get it. That means pre-built compliance tools, flexible workflows for union rules, and real-world examples of helping public agencies succeed.

Key questions to ask:

- What percentage of your clients are in the public sector?
- Do you offer out-of-the-box compliance reporting (e.g. EEO, ACA)?
- How do you support civil service rules or union-specific workflows?

2. What's the implementation process really like?

Even the best system can fall apart with a bad rollout. A good vendor will have a structured, transparent implementation plan—and they'll adapt it to your team's bandwidth and existing tech stack. Look for collaborative planning, realistic timelines, and strong project management.

Ask if you'll receive:

- A dedicated implementation manager
- Timeline milestones and communication check-ins
- Support for data migration from your old system



EVALUATING **VENDORS**

3. Will your team actually use it?

Adoption matters more than features. A tool your team won't use is just shelfware. Make sure the system is intuitive, cleanly designed, and doesn't require a PhD to run reports or update records. Ask to see how everyday users—HR generalists, supervisors, employees—interact with the platform.

Test-drive it with these prompts:

- Can HR run a basic headcount report in under five clicks?
- Can employees find their pay stubs or request time off without help?
- Are permissions role-based to avoid overwhelm?

4. How does customer support work — really?

Everyone promises "excellent customer service." But what happens when something breaks at 4 PM on a Friday? Ask about average response times, dedicated account managers, and whether support is U.S.-based. Better yet, talk to current customers about their support experience.

Ask these questions:

- How do we contact support—phone, chat, ticket?

5. Will it integrate with your existing systems?

Even the most powerful HRIS won't help much if it lives in a silo. Public agencies often rely on a patchwork of systems—payroll, finance, time tracking, learning management. Your HRIS should be able to exchange data with them, whether through built-in connectors or an open API. Integration doesn't have to be perfect from day one, but it needs to be part of the plan.

What to find out:

- Which platforms do you integrate with today?
- Do you offer APIs or flat file export options?
- What kind of support do you provide during integration setup?

6. What's the real cost over time?

A lot of systems seem affordable—until you factor in add-on fees for things like reporting, training, or advanced tools. Get clarity not just on the initial quote, but on the total cost of ownership over the next five years. That includes implementation, annual support, and potential fees as your agency grows.

Look beyond the sticker price:

- Are updates and new features included in the subscription?



7. Can they grow with you?

The system you need today might not be the system you need five years from now. Maybe you'll expand into online recruiting. Maybe your agency will centralize HR across departments. Look for a platform with modular flexibility—one that can evolve with your goals without requiring a full reimplementation.

Think long term:

- Can we add or remove products or features later without penalty?
- How often is the platform updated, and how is user feedback incorporated?
- Do you have examples of agencies who scaled over time with your system?

8. Are they transparent and easy to work with?

This one's harder to measure, but just as important. Look for signs of clear communication and mutual respect in every interaction—from your first sales call to your last demo. A good vendor is honest about their limitations and proactive about solving problems. If they're evasive or overly slick now, that won't get better later.

Red flags to watch for:

- Vague or generic answers to detailed questions
- Over-promising timelines or capabilities
- Dodging reference requests or live demos



PUBLIC SECTOR HRIS
FEATURE COMPARISON

This table compares the features of out-of-the-box HRIS software with no customization, workarounds, or 3rd party additions. It also assesses whether or not these features function cleanly and intuitively in the public sector space.

Has feature? ☑ Yes ☒ No ⊡ Limited

Feature	NEOGOV HRIS	ADP Workforce Now	UKG Pro	Workday HCM
Built for Public Sector Compliance	☑	☒	☒	☒
Step & Grade Payroll Support	☑	☒	☒	☒
Union & Collective Bargaining Workflow	☑	☒	☒	☒
Public Safety Scheduling	☑	☒	☒	☒
Automated Public Sector Compliance Reporting	☑	⊡	⊡	⊡
Integration with Government Finance Systems	☑	☑	☑	☑
Employee & Manager Self-Service	☑	☑	☑	☑
Role-Based Security & Data Privacy	☑	☑	☑	☑
Vendor Support & Implementation (Public Sector Focus)	☑	☒	☒	☒
Cloud-Based with Low IT Burden	☑	☑	☑	☑

KEY STAKEHOLDER CONCERNS **& HOW TO ADDRESS THEM**

Even when the need for a new HRIS is clear, getting buy-in isn't always easy. Every department will have its own priorities—and its own objections. Anticipating those concerns early can help you lead better internal conversations and keep momentum moving forward.

HR will worry about disruption.

They've spent years building workarounds to make broken systems function. They're not just asking "Will this work?"—they're asking "Will this be worth the change?" Focus on how the new system reduces manual work, keeps them in compliance, and gives them more time for strategic tasks.

Finance and payroll will be cautious about risk.

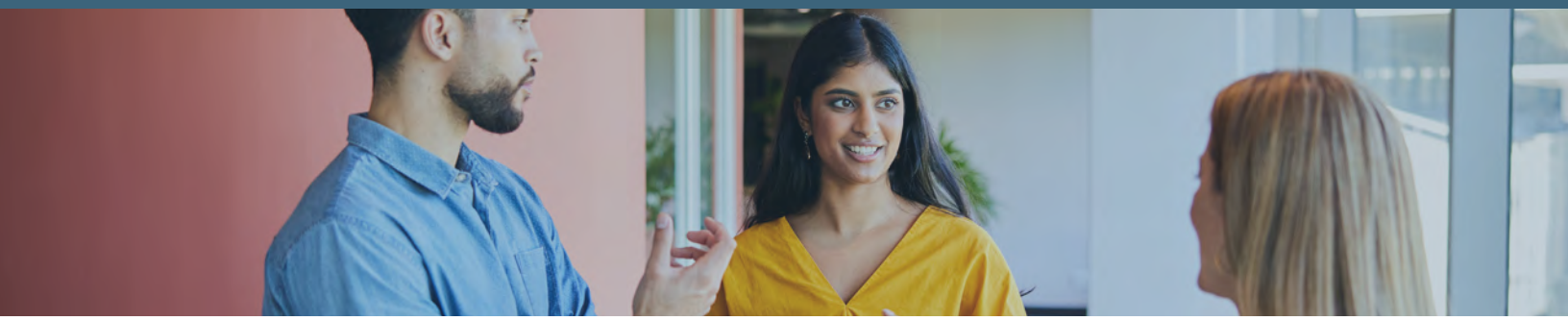
Their biggest fears are errors, delays, and messy integrations. Speak directly to how the system improves accuracy, simplifies reporting, and reduces double entry. Bonus points if you can show clean handoffs to the general ledger.

IT won't want a support headache.

Security and long-term support are their top concerns. Emphasize things like role-based access, SOC 2 compliance, and vendor responsiveness. If the HRIS is cloud-based with a low IT lift, make that clear up front.

Leadership wants to see ROI.

They're thinking about budgets, optics, and long-term value. Frame the conversation around efficiency, reduced risk, and how the system supports broader goals—like digital transformation or talent retention.



Find Your Champions

Most people have a hard time with change—but there will be people on your side who are excited about a newer, better system. These internal champions can help you improve buy-in across your agency.

How do you identify them? **Look for team members who are respected by their peers, open to change, and understand both the day-to-day challenges and the benefits a new HRIS can bring.** Ideal champions communicate well, are solution-oriented, and have influence within their department to help build trust and momentum. Get them involved early, and they'll help smooth the way and keep things moving.

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STAKEHOLDER MAPPING WORKSHEET

Name	Title	Dept.	Role in Buying Process	Key Concerns	Potential Responses / Solutions
John Example	*Benefits Specialist*	*HR*	*End user, influencer*	*Ease of use for managing open enrollment* *Integration with benefits carriers* *Accuracy of employee records*	*Demo intuitive benefits solution with guided workflows* *Show real-time data sync with carriers* *Share peer case studies from other agencies*



MAKING **THE CASE**

When it comes time to justify the investment, features won't be enough. You need to show value. That means **translating system improvements into time saved, errors reduced, and outcomes** your leadership team actually cares about—like cost efficiency, risk mitigation, and employee engagement.

A modern HRIS can deliver measurable returns within the first year. But the specifics matter. Here are a few areas where agencies are seeing the biggest impact—and how you can make the case internally.

Time Savings That Compound Over Time

Manual payroll and benefits processes can eat up days every pay cycle. Sacramento Housing used to spend up to three full workdays just processing payroll. Now? It takes 30 minutes. That adds up to **over 1,250 hours saved per year**—time that can be redirected to more strategic work.

At the League of Minnesota Cities, moving from paper-based processes to an integrated HRIS saved the team hours every week. Open enrollment, timesheets, approvals—they're all faster now, with less back and forth.

Use this when building your case:

- Time saved per payroll cycle × # of cycles per year
- Time saved during open enrollment and benefits changes
- Time saved processing direct deposit, W-4s, and approvals

Fewer Errors = Less Risk and Rework

Manual work increases the risk of mistakes. And in HR, those mistakes come with real consequences: incorrect paychecks, compliance issues, and costly rework.

By automating overtime, benefits syncing, and payroll calculations, agencies like the League of Minnesota Cities have **eliminated manual calculations altogether**, reducing errors and cutting down on rework. For Sacramento Housing, the ability to handle premiums, leave types, and differential pay within the system means they're no longer relying on a maze of spreadsheets.

Red flags to watch for:

- Fewer corrections = fewer hours spent fixing problems
- Built-in rules = stronger audit readiness
- Less exposure to wage and hour compliance risk



Employee Self-Service is **100%** automated

A Better Employee Experience

Employees may not see the backend system, but they'll feel the difference when things work as they should. With self-service tools, employees can access pay stubs, benefits, and balances without submitting tickets or sending emails. That convenience builds trust and morale, and in the long run can reduce turnover.

For example, after implementing NEOGOV, League of Minnesota Cities staff gained visibility into their vacation and sick balances for the first time—no more guesswork, no more confusion. When systems are intuitive and responsive, it improves morale and cuts down on small frustrations that add up.

Key Outcomes:

- Faster answers to everyday HR questions
- Fewer support requests to HR/ payroll
- Improved transparency and employee satisfaction

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Once the decision's made, the real work begins. But with the right partner—and a little upfront prep—implementation doesn't have to be overwhelming.

For agencies adopting the full suite, implementation typically takes **5 to 8 months per product**, depending on how many internal resources you can dedicate and how complex your existing processes are. If you're starting with just one or two products, you'll likely move faster. The more organized you are at the start, the smoother everything will go.

Here's what to pull together ahead of kickoff:

Employee data: Names, titles, departments, start dates, and anything else you want in your new system. A simple spreadsheet is a great place to begin—your implementation manager will help you shape it from there.

Benefit plan details: Gather plan documents, eligibility rules, and any contribution structures your team uses. The cleaner this data is, the easier enrollment will be.

Time & attendance rules: Union rules, accrual rates, shift differentials—now's the time to organize them so they can be built into the system properly.

With NEOGOV, you're supported all the way through.

One of the biggest benefits of choosing NEOGOV is the hands-on support. You won't be handed off to a help center or expected to figure it out alone. Every implementation includes a **dedicated team, tailored timeline, and full configuration support** to get your agency up and running with confidence.

Download NEOGOV's implementation checklist to help prepare you for a successful rollout





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FINAL CHECKLIST
Getting Started

☐	Identify agency pain points across HR, Payroll, Benefits, and more
☐	Create a desired feature shortlist
☐	Involve key stakeholders early to address concerns
☐	Engage internal champions
☐	Request demos that show workflows, not just features
☐	Check vendor's public sector experience and support
☐	Confirm security features and cloud hosting
☐	Calculate your agency's ROI using NEOGOV's templates
☐	Gather clean and accurate employee and benefits data
☐	Set a realistic implementation timeline with your vendor
☐	Plan regular communication to keep your team informed

WHY NEOGOV:

A Purpose-Built Public Sector Partner

Most HR systems are built for the private sector, and it shows when government agencies try to make them fit their complex needs. Workarounds become standard, compliance is manual, and public agencies are left trying to make a square peg fit a round hole.

NEOGOV was built differently.

With more than 6,000 government agencies using the platform, NEOGOV understands the challenges you're dealing with every day—disconnected systems, rigid pay structures, union rules, and audit pressure. That's why the HRIS is purpose-built to handle them without requiring custom code or compromise.

What Sets NEOGOV Apart:

One login, one record of truth: All your HR data in one place, synced across products.

Easy reporting and audit trails: Pull reports in minutes—not days—and stay ready for whatever oversight comes your way.

Flexibility for department-specific rules: Whether you're managing parks, police, or public works, the system adapts to your structure.

Built-in compliance support: FLSA, EEO, ACA, and union rules are part of the system, not just an afterthought.

NEOGOV is HR software, but it's also an all-encompassing HR solution. With us, you can expect a partner that understands how government agencies work and builds tools to help them work better.

We serve the people that serve people.

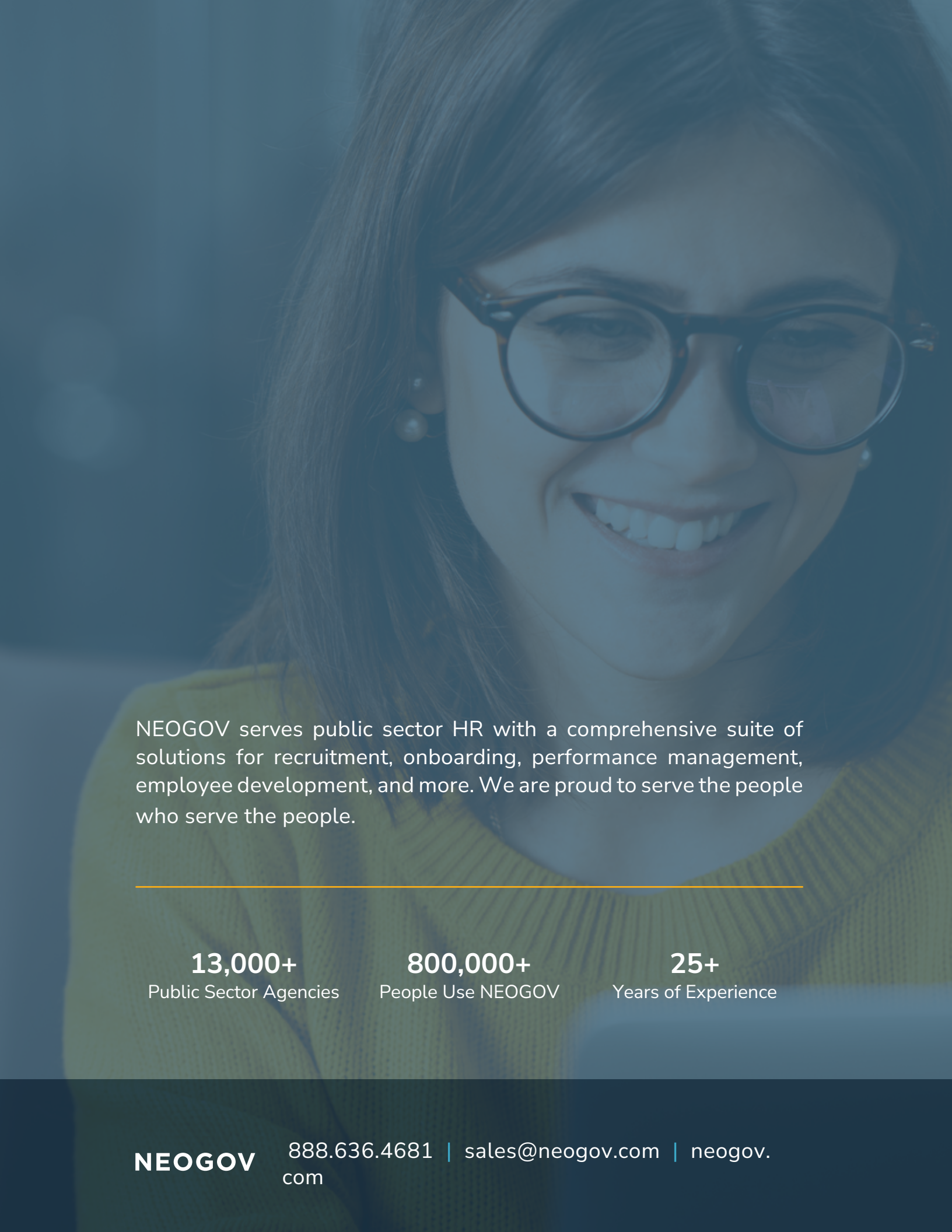
Let us help you with what comes next.

> Nobody believes me when I say **we found a solution that actually works**. The agencies near me do 90% of their process manually because of the amount of work keys. **NEOGOV can handle all our needs.**

Tracy Knighton
HR Program Manager,
Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency (CA)

> Our old timesheet system didn't show their vacation and sick balances. Now employees can go in and see those balances at any time—**it's much more convenient**.

Amanda Marthaler
Accountant II,
The League of Minnesota Cities



NEOGOV serves public sector HR with a comprehensive suite of solutions for recruitment, onboarding, performance management, employee development, and more. We are proud to serve the people who serve the people.

13,000+
Public Sector Agencies

800,000+
People Use NEOGOV

25+
Years of Experience

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