

A close-up portrait of a woman with voluminous, curly dark hair, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a yellow top. She is smiling warmly at the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

NEOGOV

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Mastering the Art of Doing More With Less

10 Best Practices for Optimizing Operations Across the
Candidate and Employee Lifecycle

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Overview

2 Importance of Operational Efficiency

What is Operational Efficiency?
Efficiency Across the Employee Lifecycle

4 10 Best Practices for Operational Efficiency

1. Start Candidate Sourcing
2. Accelerate Hiring Processes
3. Leverage Recruiting Software
4. Standardize the Onboarding Process
5. Update Onboarding Portal
6. Set Clear Goals for New Hires
7. Combine Multiple HR Systems
8. Implement Employee Self-Service
9. Systematize Performance Evaluations
10. Provide Training Resources

15 How to Get Started

OVERVIEW

PEOPLE AND MONEY ARE THE SCARCEST RESOURCES IN PUBLIC SECTOR HR.

Government agencies face staff shortages, creating extra work for employees who fill the gap, thereby eroding work-life balance. With limited payroll, HR professionals struggle to hire qualified candidates and provide raises to high performing employees.

These challenges form a negative cycle of employee turnover and hiring low- to mid-range candidates. In a post-covid era, HR pros may see a light at the end of the tunnel, but [U.S. labor statistics](#) tell a different story.

Recruiting and retention challenges will be exacerbated by demographic trends. By 2030, all baby boomers will be 65+ and the population entering the workforce (aged 16–24) will continue to decrease rapidly. By 2034, older adults will outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history. The result? **More people will be leaving the workforce than entering it, causing labor shortages for decades to come.**

Operational efficiency is your solution to scarce resources. It's the art of doing more with less, letting your agency deliver high quality services at scale with less people and money. Think of the implications. With optimized and automated processes, your team can focus on critical tasks. With a smaller staff, you can reallocate payroll to other important things:

- Competitive salaries for top talent
- Raises for high performing employees
- Employee development opportunities
- High-impact contractors and vendors
- Technology solutions

If you're able to master the art of doing more with less, you'll be at the leading edge of the public sector. But more importantly, scarce resources will be a thing of the past. Keep reading to learn how this is possible.



BY 2030, ALL BABY BOOMERS WILL BE 65+ AND THE POPULATION ENTERING THE WORKFORCE (AGED 16–24) WILL CONTINUE TO DECREASE RAPIDLY.



IMPORTANCE OF OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

WHAT IS OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY?

Operational efficiency is the art of doing more with less by reducing waste, all while maintaining top-notch services.

Waste is any resource – time, effort, money, people, technology, etc. – that adds cost without creating value for employees or constituents. Do any of these examples resonate?

Your agency onboarded a solution that isn't a good fit for your agency's needs. So even though you're still paying for it, it's not being fully utilized.

time, money, technology

Your team has bottlenecks. Work has to pass through an employee with exclusive knowledge or a supervisor who wants to review everything.

people and time

Your team is using outdated, manual processes to complete routine tasks like data entry, or you hired someone to handle those routine tasks.

time, effort, people

Your team is frequently sidetracked from more important tasks by employee questions and requests about payroll, benefits, time off, etc.

time and people

The last two examples raise an interesting point: **busyness doesn't equate to productivity**. While putting out fires may feel productive and provide a sense of satisfaction or importance, it's a reactive approach that will hinder your team's ability to serve employees and constituents.

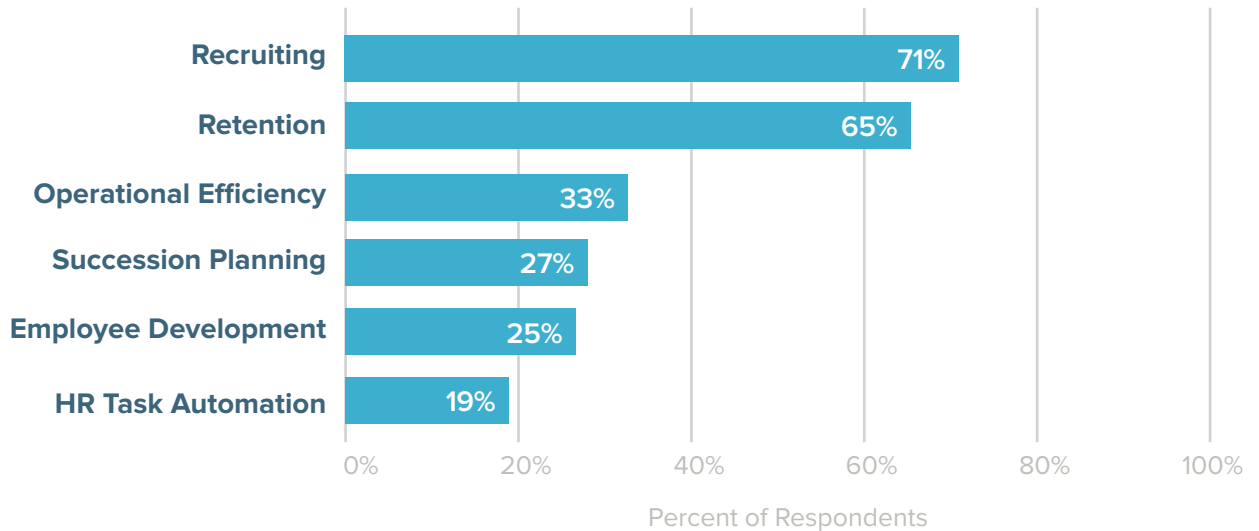
By taking a proactive approach and removing operational hiccups, your team can invest its resources in higher priorities that deliver more value.

EFFICIENCY ACROSS THE EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE

According to a [NEOGOV survey of 700+ public sector HR professionals](#), 46% said their agency's operational efficiency was average or poor. It makes sense, then, that 33% of HR pros reported operational efficiency as a top priority in 2023, only preceded by recruiting at 71% and retention at 65%.

Figure 1

Top Priorities in 2023

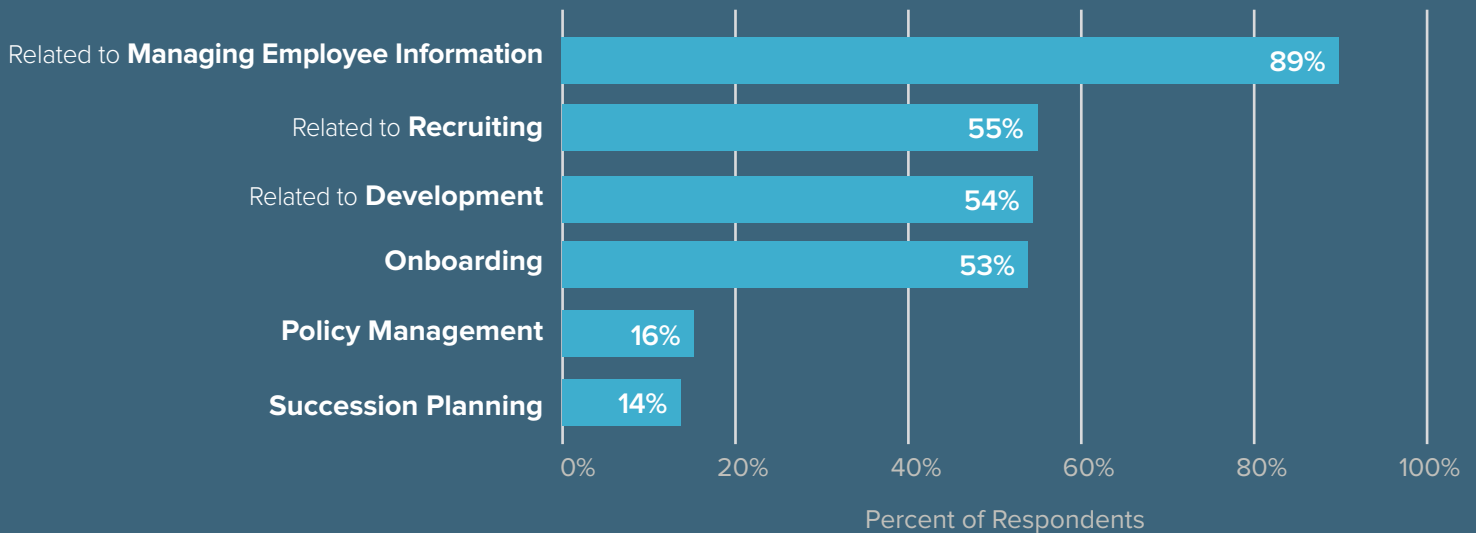


Each of the six priorities listed here relate to operational efficiency. Agency operations touch the entire employee lifecycle, from recruiting top talent to succession planning and everything in between, including the many processes that impact employee retention.

Now let's get more granular, looking at task automation as it relates to the employee lifecycle. In our survey, we also asked respondents what HR processes they want to automate. Your peers selected all options that applied.

Figure 2

HR Processes to Automate in 2023



Now that we've set the stage, these results will dictate the topics we investigate further. In the remainder of this report, we'll explore best practices for optimizing operations across the employee lifecycle, with a focus on recruiting, onboarding, managing employee information, and development.



10 BEST PRACTICES FOR OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Broadly speaking, there are three approaches to optimizing operations, and we recommend a combination of all three:

1. **Better managing your team**
2. **Optimizing processes**
3. **Automating routine tasks with technology solutions**

As we explore operations across the employee lifecycle – recruiting, onboarding, managing employee info, and development – it will be done through this lens.



RECRUITING

According to our survey, the top recruiting challenges for government agencies are finding qualified candidates (67%), offering competitive salaries (53%), and slow hiring processes (36%). Let's examine how operational efficiency can help with these challenges.

Figure 3
Top Recruiting Challenges



#1 SOURCE ACTIVE CANDIDATES

Most organizations focus on recruiting active Gen Z and Millennial candidates. This makes sense, but it's the same thing that your public sector peers across the country are doing. So if you want to compete for top talent, you have to do it better and/or expand your candidate sourcing options.

BUILD A BRAND PRESENCE IN THE APPLICANT MARKET

Write job descriptions focused around your ideal candidate. Every applicant wants to know WIIFM (what's in it for me?), so lead with benefits. Highlight opportunities for growth and advancement. One technique is attaching value to healthcare benefits, time off, work-life balance, mission, etc. Value could be an estimated dollar amount (in addition to salary) or an emphasis on something your candidates care about, like finding purpose in their jobs.

Technology solutions like candidate relationship management (CRM) software can help you build a brand presence and open new channels for sourcing. Here are some other channels you can leverage:

- Create an employee referral program
- Promote your agency's culture on social media
- Circle back to past candidates who may be qualified for a new job
- Network with passive candidates on LinkedIn
- Source candidates for future positions
- Use public sector job boards like GovernmentJobs.com

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Recruit unexpected active and passive candidates for full-time and part-time roles.

Boomerang employees:

Employees who voluntarily leave an organization and later return. If they were high-performing employees once, they can be again.

Baby boomers:

From our survey, **only 6%** of HR pros were interested in hiring baby boomers. Although all baby boomers will be retirement age by 2030, it's a demographic with qualified candidates and low competition.

Retirees:

From our survey, **only 5%** of HR professionals were interested in hiring retirees, making it an easy demographic to recruit for part-time or temporary positions.

Veterans:

Officers are usually in their 40s or 50s when they retire, and they're not ready to stop working. Take advantage of your government agency status and put veterans through the Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA) process.





#2 ACCELERATE HIRING PROCESSES

Time-to-fill is an important metric for auditing and improving your agency's recruitment process. Time-to-fill starts when a job requisition is created and ends when a candidate accepts a job offer.

Most public sector agencies try to fill vacancies within 80 days, but data from the past few years shows it's closer to 100–120 days on average. According to a [SHRM benchmark report](#), the private sector fills vacancies within 36 days, meaning **the public sector takes about 3x longer on average.**

Applicants to government jobs report frustration with slow hiring processes, limited communication, lengthy background checks, complexity of applications, and time consuming and repetitive processes. This highlights a key operational issue, one that often results in the churn of qualified candidates. **To improve the candidate experience, consider optimizing your recruitment operations in these ways:**

- Simplify applications
- Communicate clearly and often with candidates
- Reduce minimum qualifications
- Shorten the background check process
- Leverage technology

Without efficient recruiting operations, the public sector can't compete with the private sector for top talent. When people start actively looking for a job, they either want or need one soon, not in 3–4 months.

#3 LEVERAGE RECRUITING SOFTWARE

The right technology is one of the fastest ways to accelerate the hiring process, and your HR peers agreed. **55% of survey respondents want to automate tasks and processes related to recruiting** – applicant tracking, candidate sourcing, and candidate relationship management. In other words, they're looking for a comprehensive recruiting solution.

Recruiting software can save you time and improve time-to-fill by helping you automate and simplify tasks and processes like...

- Sourcing candidates
- Posting jobs on multiple job boards
- Monitoring job posting health
- Scoring and pre-screening applicants
- Implementing equitable hiring practices
- Modernizing communication with candidates
- Conducting background checks
- Reporting on recruitment data
- Eliminating paper from HR processes

Audit your current recruiting processes, starting with the tasks above. **How much time does it take to complete these tasks without recruiting software?** With recruiting software, you can free up valuable time for higher priority HR initiatives. You may even be able to thrive with a leaner, more agile team.





ONBOARDING

In our survey of 700+ government HR pros, **53% said they wanted to streamline onboarding tasks and processes.** Onboarding is a new hire's first impression of your agency, and it directly impacts time-to-productivity, a metric worth tracking as you improve operations.

According to a research brief by Brandon Hall Group, organizations that invest in their onboarding process improve new hire productivity by over 70% and retention by 82%. Here are some strategies for optimizing operations:

#4 STANDARDIZE THE ONBOARDING PROCESS

Organizations that rely on a structured onboarding program report a 54% increase in new hire productivity. Standardized processes establish clear direction for tasks and due dates, keeping all stakeholders – HR, hiring managers, and new hires – on track with mandatory paperwork, orientation, required training, check-ins, etc., thereby creating a positive and consistent experience for all new hires.

The right onboarding software for your agency will standardize onboarding operations and help you meet new hire reporting requirements for W4s and I9s, PRWORA, and compliance training. Some solutions, like NEOGOV, provide an integration with E-Verify. And some solutions, as part of a larger talent management system, let you assign training tasks in the onboarding tool and complete them in the training tool.

Figure 4

Onboarding Program Effects

Source: Forbes



#5 UPDATE ONBOARDING PORTAL

Everyone wants to feel welcomed, especially new hires. The right onboarding solution can help here as well, providing a self-service onboarding portal that welcomes employees and manages their tasks.

Onboarding portals act as a central hub where new hires can access onboarding resources, agency goals, job expectations, team structure, and assigned training, as well as connect with supervisors and teammates – all prior to day one.

If you decide to invest in onboarding software, remember to keep the self-service portal updated. Information needs to be accurate, engaging, and complete for a new hire to start a successful career. Our data shows that **employers with an up-to-date portal** (i.e. updated within six months of an employee's start date) **have a 16% higher retention rate.**



EMPLOYERS WITH
AN UP-TO-DATE
ONBOARDING PORTAL
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RETENTION RATE

#6 SET CLEAR GOALS FOR NEW HIRES

Supervisors should set clear, measurable, and achievable goals for their employee's first days, weeks, and months on the job. So instead of guessing what their supervisor wants, employees can prioritize tasks that are critical to organizational goals.

Employees can take up to eight months to achieve productivity, so think beyond the short term when setting priorities. New hires need to be aware of their responsibilities, as well as your expectations, both now and in the future. Setting regular check-ins helps with this, giving employees an opportunity to ask questions and managers the time to provide direction. For more on employee goals, jump down to best practices #9.

MANAGING EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

In our survey, **89% of government HR pros said they wanted to automate tasks and processes related to managing employee information** – time and attendance, benefits, payroll, and core HR. In other words, a comprehensive HRIS.

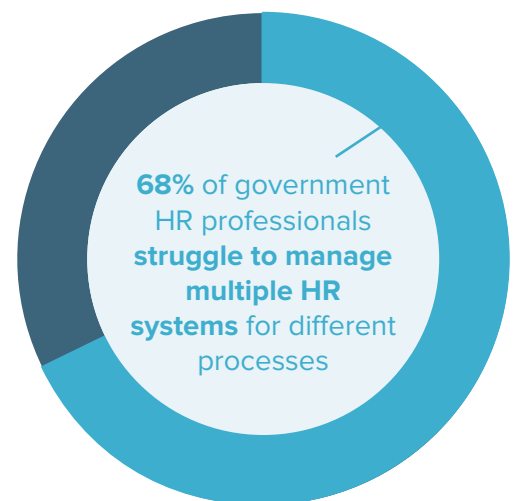
The problem is many public sector agencies use multiple, disparate HR systems, which lead to wasted time, people, and technology resources.

#7 COMBINE MULTIPLE HR SYSTEMS

According to a recent NEOGOV poll, **68% of government HR professionals struggle to manage multiple HR systems for different processes**. There are several reasons for this struggle:

1. Most HR information systems don't integrate with one another.
2. Disparate systems create siloed data, which means data has to be manually reentered in every system any time an employee is hired or promoted or needs contact information updated.
3. Disparate systems make “big picture” reporting difficult, because there are separate reports for each system.
4. Disparate systems require multiple logins and entry points to access data.
5. Lack of integration with other HR and HCM solutions like talent management systems.

Figure 5
Multiple HR Systems



By using a single solution for your time and attendance, benefits, payroll, and core HR, you avoid these challenges.

An integrated HRIS stores employee data in one central location, so when an employee is hired or promoted, you only have to input the data once. And with the right solution, like NEOGOV, employee data can flow into other talent management software (recruiting, onboarding, development, etc.).

An integrated HR system lets you pull data from a single source of truth for comprehensive reporting. Get a big picture view of time, benefits, and payroll data without having to play connect the dots between disparate systems. Access information or run reports on certain employees or departments in real time, knowing the data is up-to-date and complete.

There are many other benefits to consolidating your divergent systems into a single HRIS, including maintaining compliance with complex public sector pay and time rules, as well as the latest tax legislation. Are you ready to simplify your HR information systems?



#8 EMPLOYEE SELF-SERVICE

Many HR professionals are bogged down with tasks that employees could be doing themselves – updating contact info, adjusting direct deposit accounts, tracking PTO, answering numerous questions about HR policies, adding beneficiaries, and more.

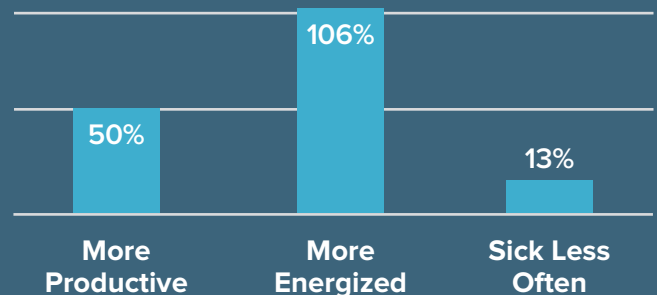
With a self-service portal, employees can update their information and answer their own questions without having to interrupt your HR team. Most employees don't want to bother HR, preferring to make the changes themselves.

Are you concerned that self-service will lead to data errors? If your HRIS solution comes with approval workflows, you have nothing to fear. Approval workflows trigger approvals for managers and HR staff when employees update contact info, direct deposit accounts, beneficiaries, etc.

There's nothing to lose. By empowering employees with a self-service tool, they feel trusted and you save time. According to SHRM, employees who feel trusted are 50% more productive, 106% more energized at work, and sick less often (13% fewer sick days).

Figure 6

Employees Who Feel Trusted Are...





EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

In our survey of 700+ public sector HR professionals, **54% said they wanted to automate tasks and processes related to employee development** – specifically, performance management and continuous learning opportunities.

There are two facets to employee development. In combination, they improve workplace culture and retention.

1. **Evaluating performance** to assess an employee’s strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in knowledge or experiences.
2. **Learning opportunities** for continual growth, increased productivity, less bottlenecks, and higher satisfaction.

#9 SYSTEMATIZE PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

Performance evaluations provide the insight needed to offer feedback, increase productivity, and improve employee retention. Evaluations should be conducted on a regular basis and tied to key performance metrics: job competencies and KPIs.

Job competencies are the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are critical to successful job performance. Employee performance needs to be measured against job-specific competencies.

Your department and **employee goals**, or KPIs, should trickle down from the agency’s goals. As employees accomplish their annual goals collectively, so will the department. And as each department reaches its goals, so will your agency. KPIs need to be measurable and trackable.



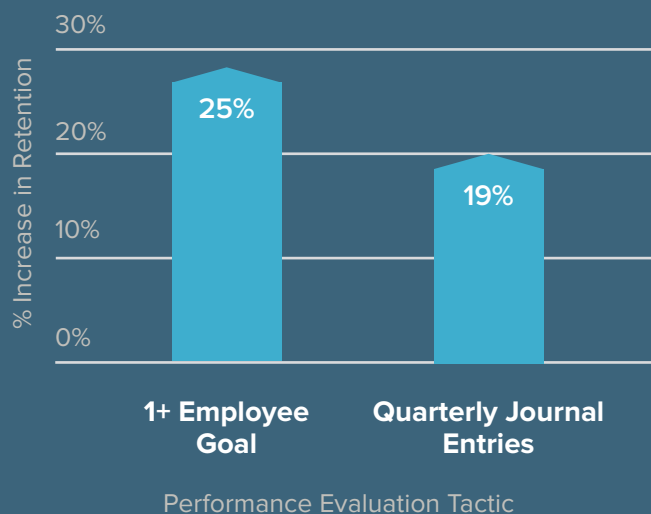
According to NEOGOV data, **employees with at least one goal on their performance evaluation are 25% more likely, on average, to stay at their agency.** Why? When employees have specific targets, they are more engaged in their jobs, especially when they understand how their targets impact organizational goals.

Employees want feedback and direction, and the frequency of feedback impacts retention. Manager-to-employee feedback takes various shapes, ranging from formal to informal. On the informal side, you have email, Microsoft Teams, or face-to-face conversations (virtual or in-person). On the formal side, you have employee evaluations and “journal entries,” a medium for managers to provide consistent, documented feedback to employees based on competencies.

Journal entries help managers avoid recency bias when it’s time for annual reviews. And according to NEOGOV data from 200+ public sector agencies representing over 250k employees, **quarterly journal entries can increase retention by 19% on average.**

Figure 7

Ways to Increase Employee Retention



#10 PROVIDE TRAINING RESOURCES

In our survey, **22% of public sector HR pros reported limited development opportunities as one of the top three causes of turnover** in 2021 and 2022. Most employees want to grow in their careers, so learning opportunities can help improve agency culture and, ultimately, retention. A survey by ClearCompany found that **94% of employees would stay at an organization longer if their employer invested in their career development.**

Continuing education is an investment, not a frivolous expense or distraction. With the right training resources, employees can...

- Improve strengths and weaknesses identified during performance evals
- Gain skills and knowledge that increase productivity
- Discover other in-agency jobs better suited to their interests and skills
- Develop breadth of experience to solve more problems
- Reduce operational bottlenecks
- Find more satisfaction in their current job
- Be groomed for leadership roles as key leaders retire or leave

Learning opportunities come in many forms, the most common being virtual and in-person training courses. Other hands-on examples include mentoring, job shadowing, challenge projects, and career mapping.

Depending on your training solution, employees can self-enroll in a course that interests them, or managers can assign employees a course based on performance evaluations. NEOGOV data from 90+ public sector agencies, representing nearly 90k FTEs, shows that employees **who self-enroll in 3+ learning courses have 10% higher retention rates, on average.**

HOW TO GET STARTED

Operational efficiency equips your agency to deliver high-quality services at scale with as few resources as possible. It reduces wasted time, effort, money, people, and technology.

As seen in the best practices above, **operational efficiency is a combination of people management, process management, and technology management.** Your people will adopt the technology and the processes. Your processes will provide structure for the people and the technology. And your technology will make the people and the processes more efficient. Improving any one of these factors creates a ripple effect, positively impacting the other two factors and operations overall. In other words, it's okay to start small.

Every Operations Improvement Plan should include these three factors and, in addition to optimizing operations, will inevitably lead to a stronger agency culture and increased retention. Here are some tips to launching a successful Operations Improvement Plan:

Audit Current Operations: You may already be aware of operational hiccups within your agency. Audit and measure current operations to validate your assumptions.

Prioritize Projects: Based on your audit, which stages of the candidate and employee lifecycle are least efficient? For example, if your agency has critical job vacancies and your average time-to-fill is 120 days, you may consider prioritizing recruitment.

Review Technology Solutions: Explore technology solutions – talent management and HRIS software – that were built for the needs of public sector HR. Estimate the ROI and VOI (value on investment) of the top solutions. This estimate, in conjunction with benchmark data, will be added to your business case.

Create a Business Case: Justify your Operations Improvement Plan in a formal document. The data from this report, as well as your audit, is a good starting point. Clearly define your objectives, making sure they're observable and measurable.

Get Buy-in: Find an executive leader who is willing to join your project team, support the business case, and remain an advocate for the plan until completion. After your plan is approved by leadership, find a talented project manager.

Manage Implementation and Change: Work with your executive leader and project manager to outline the implementation steps, vendor selection process, and change management. Who will be impacted by your process improvements? Employee adoption will affect the success of your project, so it's important to communicate effectively, cast vision, and highlight benefits.

Cultivate Innovation: Foster a culture of innovation within your agency, so employees at all levels start identifying opportunities to optimize their processes.

Start Today: Start small and don't try to boil the ocean. Over time, the small wins will add up, get noticed, and make it easier to implement future change.

NEXT STEPS

Thanks for reading our report on **Operational Efficiency: Mastering the Art of Doing More With Less**. We hope these peer insights, data analyses, and resources have been helpful.

NEOGOV serves public sector HR with a comprehensive suite of solutions for recruitment, onboarding, HRIS, employee development, and more. To learn how NEOGOV's HR software can help your agency, [sign up for a free consultation](#) today.

13,000+

Public Sector Agencies

800,000+

People Use NEOGOV

20+

Years of Experience