

NEOGOV

TOP 10

PUBLIC SECTOR HR TRENDS FOR 2021



2020

HAS PROVEN TO BE A YEAR **UNLIKE ANY OTHER** SEEN IN MOST OF OUR LIFETIMES

with irrevocable changes to the way we live and do business because of COVID-19 and continued societal challenges around race/ethnicity as well as socioeconomic status. However, public sector agencies must continue to move forward in order to support the communities they serve, and HR must support the employees that do the work for those communities.

With that in mind, we surveyed over 200 local, county, and state government HR leaders to get a sense of what's on the horizon for 2021 to ensure success in the face of the pandemic and beyond. **Here are the 10 initiatives they're prioritizing in the coming year:**



1 TAKING ACTION ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACROSS ALL STAGES OF THE EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE

Of the top recruitment initiatives for 2021, diversity and inclusion was the number one priority among our respondents, with 42% stating they would be increasing those efforts in the new year. In the face of 2020's nationwide movements on racial justice, it's no surprise that agencies are looking to ensure they accurately represent the communities they serve. Specific areas of interest include blinding personally identifiable information (PII) on resumes and employment applications to reduce bias during early candidate evaluation, developing more structured interview criteria using a rubric or scale, and deeper analysis of where bias exists in the hiring funnel.

Agencies are also looking beyond the recruitment phase to ensure their workforce is a place that truly engenders diversity and inclusion after a candidate is hired. That means building more comprehensive sensitivity training programs for managers, hosting table talks on topics such as social justice with speakers both from inside and outside the organization, making sure employees have a safe space to interact with peers from different backgrounds, and creating opportunities to give candid feedback to their managers and HR.

2 PROMOTING EMPLOYEE MENTAL WELLNESS & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

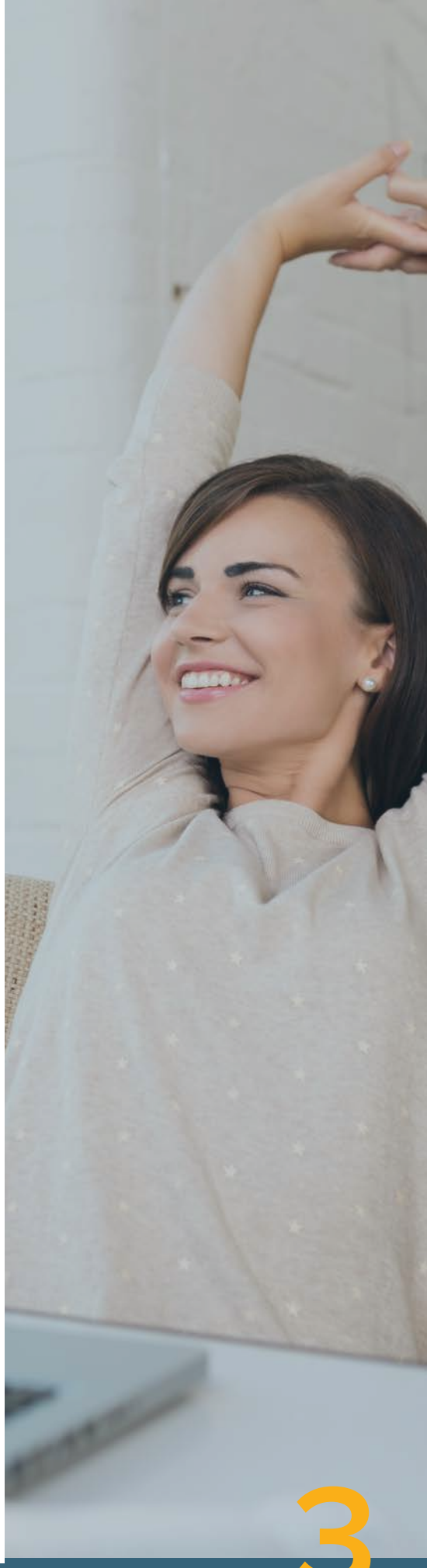
2020 was emotionally overwhelming for employees and managers alike in unprecedented ways, which prompted organizations to shift their focus to the mental well-being of the workforce. More commonly, managers were encouraged to regularly check in with employees on a personal level and HR spent more time considering how to improve employee frame of mind. In 2021, we will continue to see HR place a greater emphasis on supporting employee mental health through training tools and resources for managers.

Furthermore, creating safe psychological environments where employees can more comfortably share their personal experiences, frustrations, and emotions with managers will take on more importance. “Working remotely removes managers from some of the usual cues that let them in on what an employee might be actually feeling, so it is critical that they adapt their typical observations and lead with empathy,” according to Gartner.

3 MORE EFFICIENT CANDIDATE SCREENING

For years, the public sector has typically insisted on conducting in-person interviews with candidates. However, agencies that continued to hire during the pandemic had to replace traditional onsite interviews with video interviews. The ease and success many had with the format has led to a greater comfort level with the technology, and to many saying they will continue to use video interviewing after the pandemic is over.

Recognizing the efficiency of evaluating candidates via two-way video conference, HR leaders say they will pursue additional ways of optimizing the evaluation process in 2021 using technology. One-way interviews where a candidate records their answers to a variety of questions that HR can watch later are already gaining interest as a way to substantially speed up the screening process.



4 MODERNIZING THE NEW HIRE EXPERIENCE

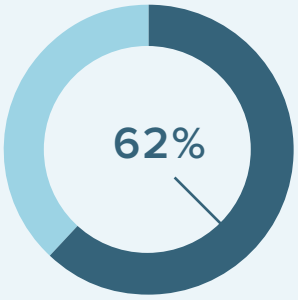
With the fallout from COVID-19 showing no signs of immediate improvement, the need for a cloud-based platform that streamlines HR processes that have been plaguing the public sector for decades will take center stage for many agencies in the coming year.

Close to one-third (30%) will make developing a more automated, organized, and online onboarding program their top priority. A further 22% indicated that remote onboarding in particular was something they hoped to perfect. This will undoubtedly involve not only ease of access to first day and week paperwork for employees, but also considerations about how to welcome new employees into the fold in a virtual environment. Creating branded portals with welcome videos, photos and virtual agency tours, as well as assigning tasks for colleagues to spend time getting to know the new hire (like setting up a one-on-one call), will help mollify these concerns.

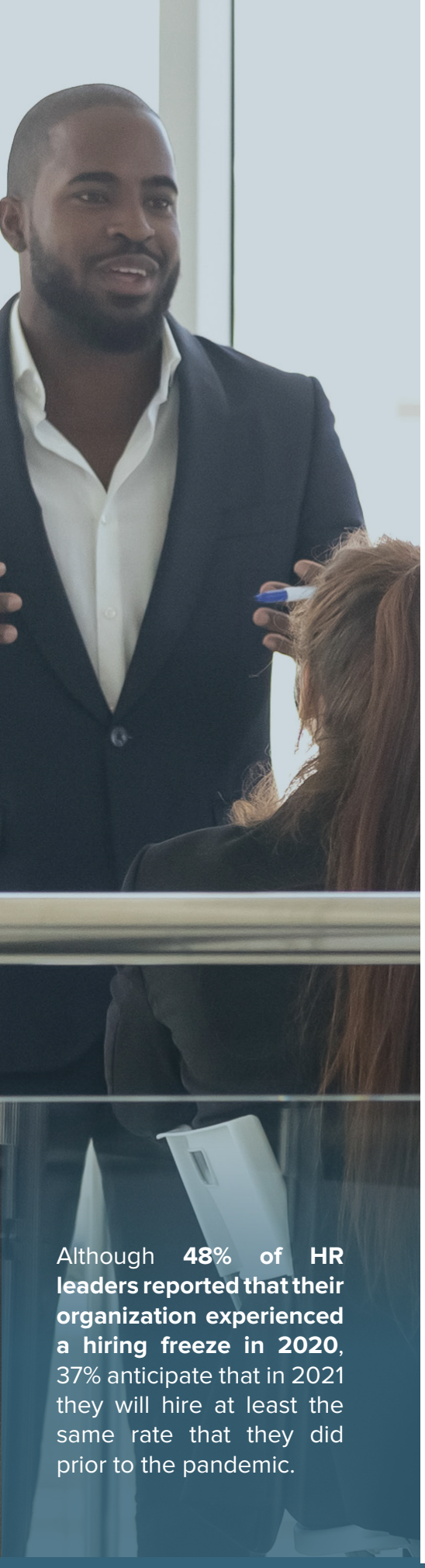
5 ANTICIPATING A MORE DISTRIBUTED WORKFORCE IN PERPETUITY

Because the end date for when many agencies will return to the office at full capacity is not yet in sight, there will continue to be the need to support a completely remote workforce, or some combination of partially remote and partially on-site. Many agencies had to go remote at a moment's notice and somewhat haphazardly; so, after making it work for 2020, they will undoubtedly be looking to refine some of the systems and processes they put into place.

HR in particular will look for additional Cloud software solutions that help their department function more efficiently, along with broader use applications designed to build bridges between all departments of the organization. As one survey respondent put it, "We realized we are doing well together as a group. But we still need to work on things that this pandemic has brought to light."



62% of HR leaders plan to purchase form routing solutions that centralize, automate, and make it easy for employees to submit requests for a multitude of needs.



Although **48% of HR leaders reported that their organization experienced a hiring freeze in 2020**, 37% anticipate that in 2021 they will hire at least the same rate that they did prior to the pandemic.

6 LEVERAGING LMS TO CENTRALIZE TRAINING AND INCREASE AGILITY

Efficiently training employees is essential for an organization's long-term viability and fulfilling the ultimate goal of providing excellent service to citizens. Prior to the pandemic, a centralized online learning solution was viewed as a nice-to-have rather than a necessity. But now, it's practically a must-have for assigning and tracking training to remote employees. "We've enjoyed utilizing online learning and will likely continue offering it even if things return to a more normal pace," said one survey respondent.

As Gartner points out, when many workforces moved to working remotely as a result of the COVID-19, it "magnifie[d] the fragility of traditional training methods as too rigid, slow, time-consuming, and expensive." That's why when asked what their top employee development initiatives are for 2021, the top response from HR survey respondents was implementing online training technology (38%).

7 REDUCING AVERAGE TIME-TO-HIRE THROUGH DATA ANALYSIS

The public sector is not known for its efficient recruitment processes. In fact, NEOGOV conducted an analysis of over 8.2 million applications and 826,000 hires across the country and found that the **average time-to-hire for public sector organizations was 119 days.** According to SHRM, the average time-to-fill in the private sector is 36 days, less than a third of the time it takes to hire in the public sector. To compete for talent, the public sector knows they must improve their time-to-hire or risk losing qualified candidates.

During slower hiring periods is an ideal time to rethink processes to find ways they can be improved. Approximately one-fifth of HR leaders will prioritize reducing the time it takes to hire in 2021. Some will use ATS analytics tools to study each stage of the hiring process to uncover where bottlenecks exist and refine their strategies accordingly.

8 GAINING VALUABLE INSIGHTS FROM DEPARTING EMPLOYEES WITH IMPROVED EXIT INTERVIEWS

One area that often gets overlooked when considering the employee lifecycle is the exit interview. Once an employee sets sail for another job, it can be easy to stop considering their needs, but the valuable insights they can provide should be harnessed to make improvements for the rest of the workforce. Perhaps the employee hasn't felt adequate space to express their frustrations and concerns. Or, maybe your exiting employee is a superstar, and you'd like to leave the door open for them to return someday.

Either way, the exit interview is a great opportunity to make the employee feel heard, reduce the risk of negative reviews on Indeed or Glassdoor, and find out what you can do differently going forward.

9 POLICY CHANGES BASED ON 2020 EVENTS

As a result of proving that employees can still be productive when they're working remotely, the prospect of offering more frequent work-from-home opportunities beyond the pandemic is a serious consideration. In fact, 48% are considering permanently offering some employees the ability to work from home. "There were a lot of concerns in the past about permitting employees to telework," said one survey respondent. "But most of those concerns no longer exist."

Policies will also be changed to accommodate new long-term realities that have resulted from the uncertainties of the past year. A whopping 28% plan to redo their entire employee handbook. New or updated policies will likely include a renewed focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives, office layouts (based on disease spread), and parental leave practices, to name a few.

Gartner asserts that ***"working from home is no longer a temporary experiment,*** *but a long-term reality for the majority of the workforce across industries, sectors, and geographies."*

10 GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT SUCCESSION PLANNING

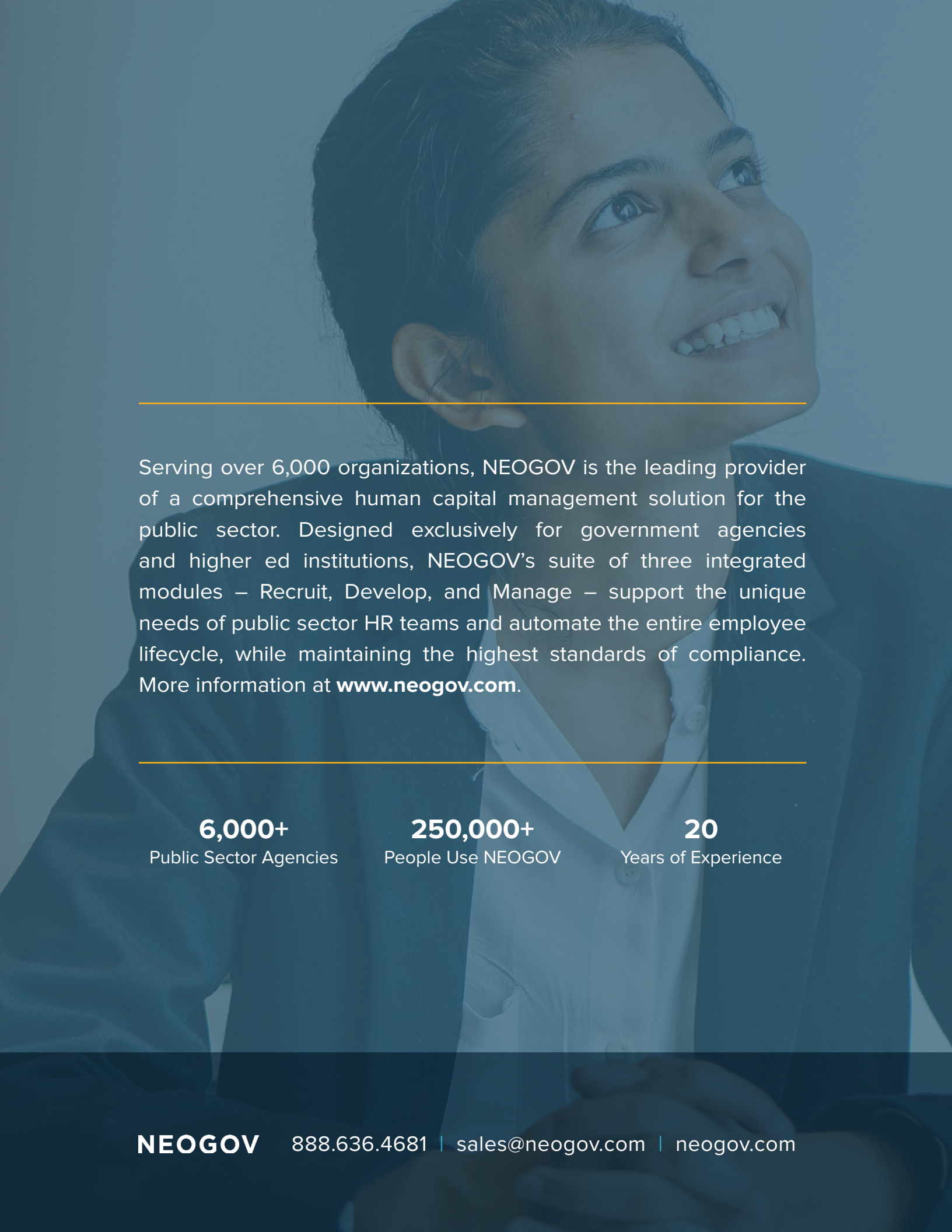
According to the Accenture, NASCA, and NEOGOV *2020 Job One Report*, only **30% of HR leaders in government organizations stated that the next generation of leaders was prepared** to fill vacancies of retiring leaders. Complicating matters, **79% of HR directors do not have centralized succession planning.**



In 2021, 26% of HR leaders will take control of the process at their organizations. Many will have to start with the basics – identifying which employees might retire, recognizing the skillsets most important for filling their positions, and then developing training that addresses the skills gaps of the employees who will be promoted into their vacancies.

Source: Gartner The Distributed Workplace of the Future Is Now





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