

NEOGOV

RESEARCH INSIGHTS:

PUBLIC SECTOR HR RESPONSES TO COVID-19

APRIL 2020

THE UNEXPECTED AND FAR-REACHING EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC have tested the resilience of employers and employees alike. Public sector and higher education organizations are some of the most impacted, with essential government bodies and schools continuing to function in the face of strongly encouraged or mandated stay-at-home orders.

To help the community by sharing some insights and lessons learned so far, NEOGOV polled HR professionals at government agencies and higher ed institutions. 241 organizations responded (224 government and 17 higher education) over the course of 7 days (from March 23-30, 2020).

To get a better understanding of how priorities have shifted and learn how other HR professionals have adapted, here are the findings.



CONTENTS

1 Working Remotely

2 Impact on Recruiting

3 Public Sector Priorities

4 Concerns & Lessons

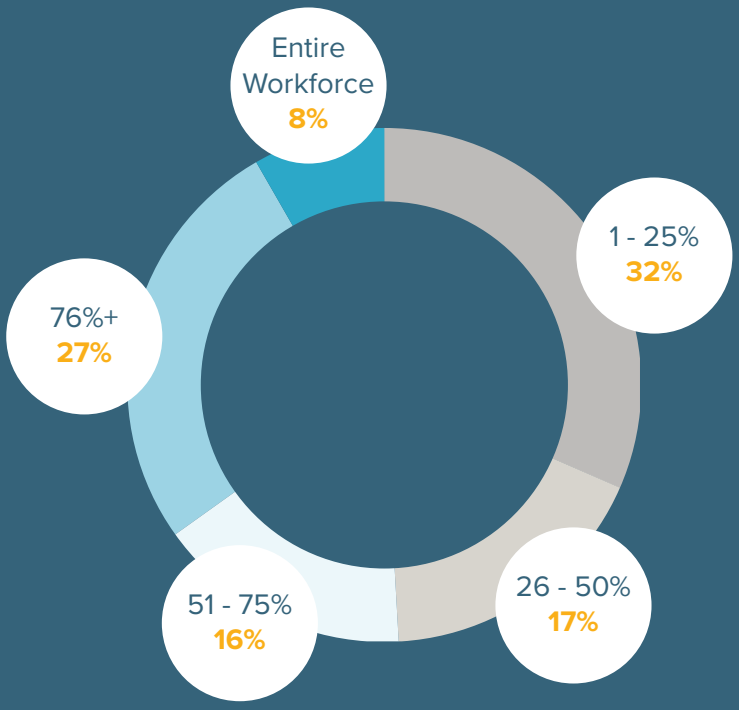
WORKING REMOTELY

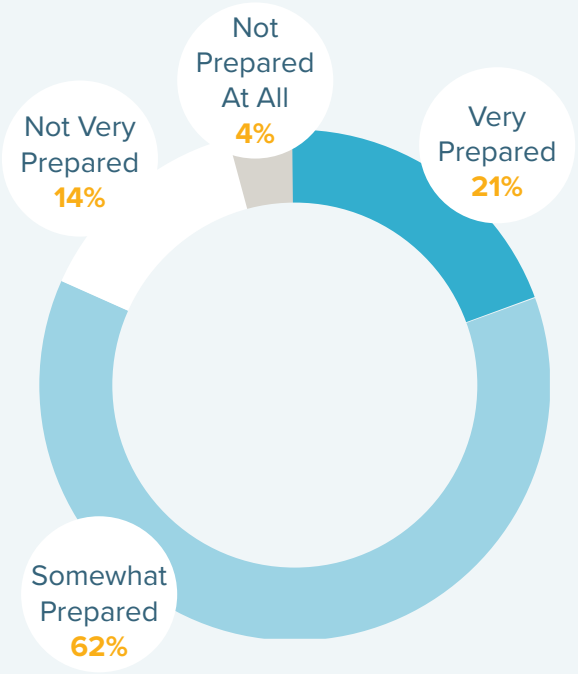
51% OF RESPONDENTS

stated that at least half of their organization is currently working remotely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes nearly 8% of organizations whose entire workforce is working remotely.

Figure 1

What percentage of your organization is **currently working remotely** as a result of COVID-19?





A MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS (76%)

felt only moderately or not very prepared to handle employees working remotely, which highlights the need for additional planning in the future to facilitate a more seamless transition to telecommuting.

Figure 2

How equipped is your organization to handle **remote/teleworking?**

IMPACT ON RECRUITING

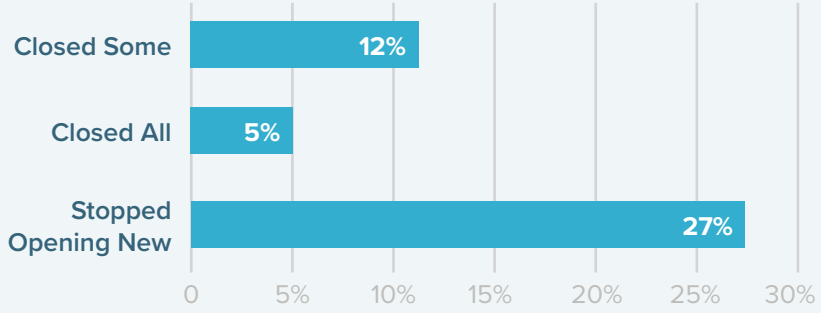
88% OF RESPONDENTS indicated that COVID-19 had impacted their hiring process in some form or another.

JOB REQUISITIONS ▸

27% stopped opening new job requisitions, and 17% closed some or all job requisitions.

Figure 3

How has this impacted your hiring process with regard to **job requisitions?**

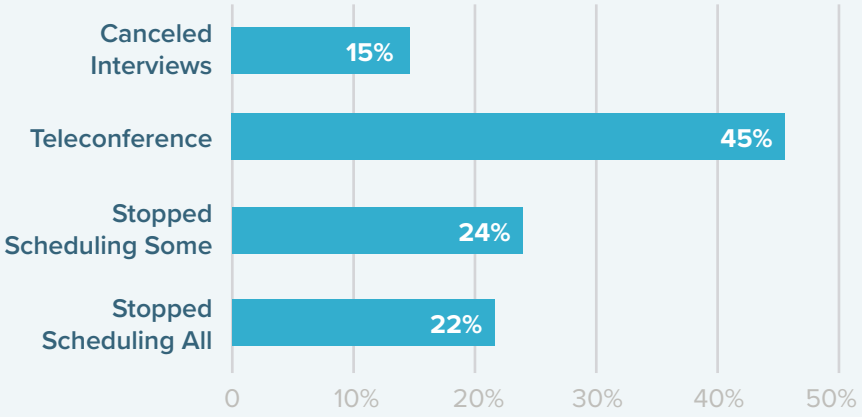


INTERVIEWS ▸

15% canceled interviews, and 46% stopped scheduling some or all interviews. For those still conducting interviews, 45% are now conducting interviews over teleconference.

Figure 4

How has this impacted your hiring process with regard to **interviewing candidates?**

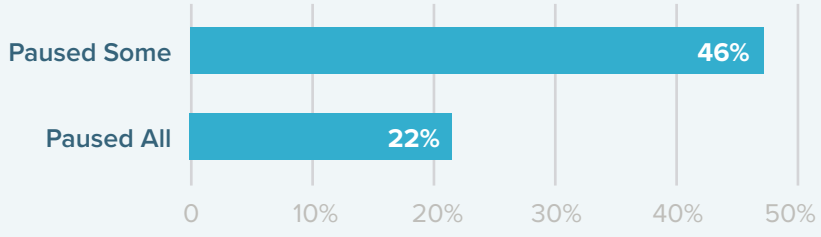


HIRING ▸

68% indicated that they had paused some or all of their hiring.

Figure 5

How has this impacted your hiring process with regard to **hiring?**

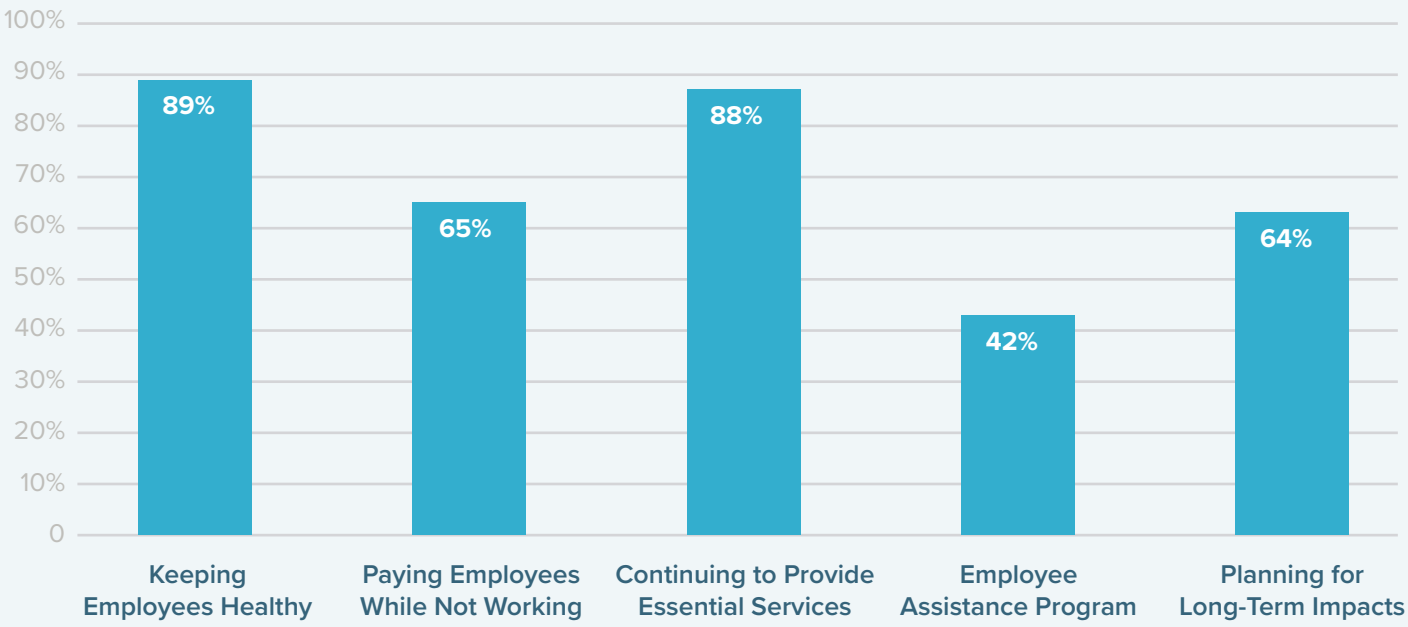


PUBLIC SECTOR PRIORITIES

Keeping employees healthy (89%) as well as continuing to provide essential services (88%) topped the list of current HR manager priorities.

Figure 6

What are your **top priorities** as an HR manager at your organization during this uncertain time?



ON EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT

When asked the open-ended question of how HR teams are promoting employee engagement, the most common themes were:

- Reinforcing the importance of maintaining regular communication
- Holding meetings using video conferences
- Ensuring employees were held accountable for their responsibilities
- Sending out motivational quotes daily to keep morale up
- Encouraging remote employees to interact with their team members (not just their managers or direct reports)
- Assigning learning courses to support professional growth
- Providing employees with creative projects during downtime

Managers cited apps like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Facebook Groups as means for remaining connected.

CONCERNS & LESSONS

"Communication is important to the 10th power. Positive attitudes and attributes along with daily grace are needed in working with everyone."

Survey Respondent

ON CHIEF CONCERNS FACING ORGANIZATIONS AMID THE CRISIS

Critical budget shortfalls were the overwhelming concern of most respondents when asked the open-ended question on chief concerns amid COVID-19. Grappling with how to pay employees who may not be working, the challenge of potential layoffs, and/or keeping the doors open in general as a result of the crisis are also on the minds of many respondents.

Additionally, the health of employees is a continued concern amid fears of the virus spreading and the necessity of certain employees to continue working in office or in the field.

Not surprisingly, agencies who provide critical services to the general public were concerned with maintaining them. These included utilities, transit, police and fire, jail population, and others.

"Being able to sustain our workforce in the long-term – with pay – while maintaining services and productivity is crucial."
Survey Respondent

ON LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Most respondents agreed that the landscape is changing daily and the need for agility in adjusting is important:

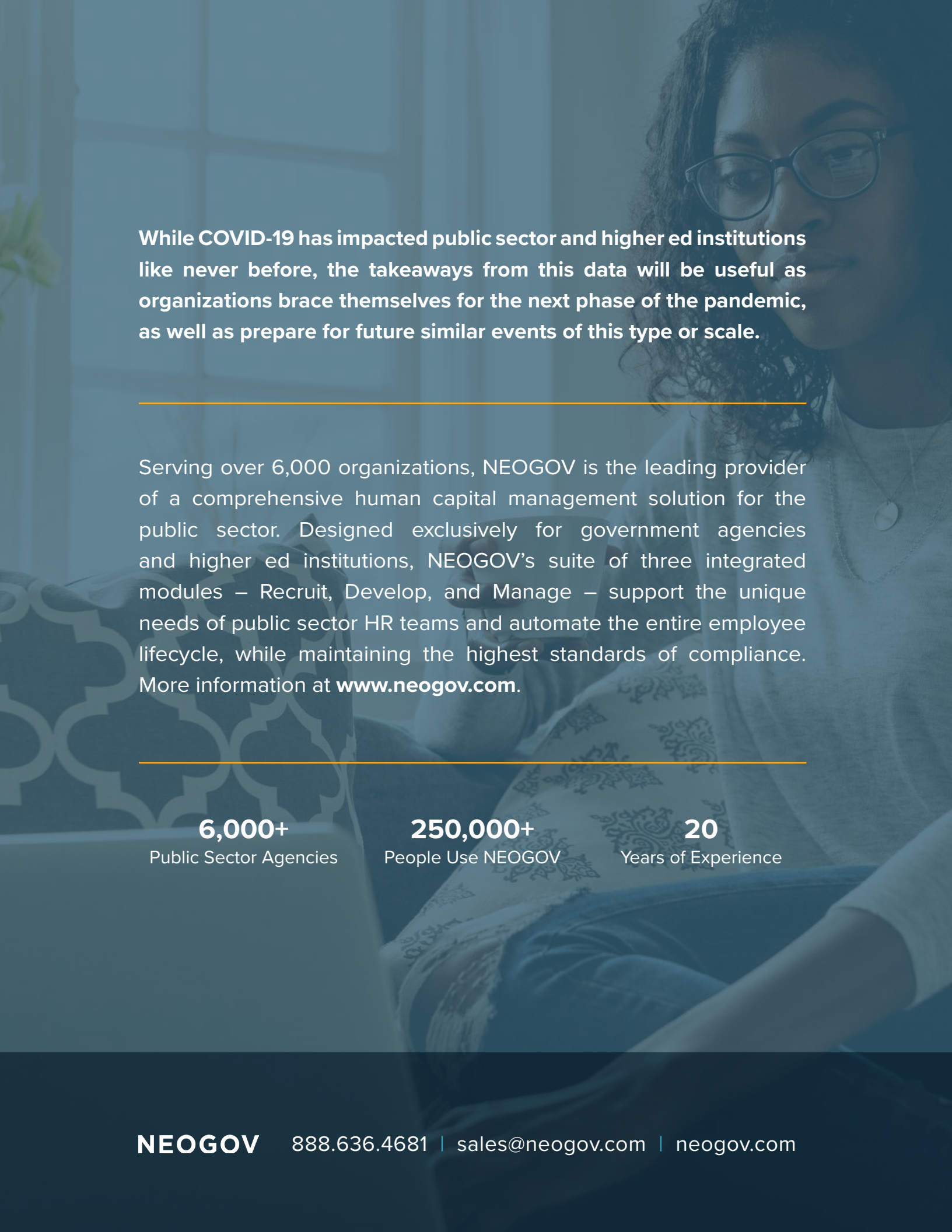
"The best contingency plans are being tested during this time, and there are many unforeseen developments. You can't be too prepared. No one saw this coming, and we as HR professionals must be flexible, innovative and creative."
Survey Respondent

Others admitted that their organizations were unprepared for one or more aspects of working remotely, whether it was cross-training, access to technology and critical tools, or their ability to react quickly.

"We were behind the ball on technology and current trends like remote work to be able to keep working. Many employees have desktop workstations, which increased the need for laptops and tablets. We need to do more ahead of time and establish strong networks."
Survey Respondent

Some advocated for learning from the situation and acknowledging what could be addressed better in the future.

"The best teacher is necessity. It will be easier to revise our policies now that we have actually experienced it."
Survey Respondent



While COVID-19 has impacted public sector and higher ed institutions like never before, the takeaways from this data will be useful as organizations brace themselves for the next phase of the pandemic, as well as prepare for future similar events of this type or scale.

Serving over 6,000 organizations, NEOGOV is the leading provider of a comprehensive human capital management solution for the public sector. Designed exclusively for government agencies and higher ed institutions, NEOGOV's suite of three integrated modules – Recruit, Develop, and Manage – support the unique needs of public sector HR teams and automate the entire employee lifecycle, while maintaining the highest standards of compliance. More information at **www.neogov.com**.

6,000+
Public Sector Agencies

250,000+
People Use NEOGOV

20
Years of Experience

NEOGOV 888.636.4681 | sales@neogov.com | neogov.com