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ADDRESSING FEMA'S RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES: LESSONS FROM TEACH FOR AMERICA

by

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June 2021

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   This thesis is a single-case study of Teach for America's model for recruitment and selection of young adults. The civil service has struggled with recruitment, which is becoming increasingly urgent as its workforce ages. Human capital challenges are at the center of mission failures in government. National service is an indicator of civic engagement, which is necessary for the functioning of democracy. The Federal Emergency Management Agency remarked on its goal to "cultivate the next generation of emergency managers" in its 2016 *Human Capital Strategic Plan*, and yet its challenges with recruitment persist. On the other hand, Teach for America is a shining example of recruitment to national service while the government is struggling. The civil service has yet to address long-standing challenges with its organization, particularly its human capital systems that control recruitment, hiring, selection, and performance management. These challenges undermine public trust in government and also have a direct impact on recruitment. To examine the civil service's recruitment shortfalls, this study examined Teach for America's model. This study provides recommendations and a summary of findings that may inform government leaders who wish to recruit and hire young adults.

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ADDRESSING FEMA'S RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES: LESSONS FROM TEACH FOR AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a single-case study of Teach for America's model for recruitment and selection of young adults. The civil service has struggled with recruitment, which is becoming increasingly urgent as its workforce ages. Human capital challenges are at the center of mission failures in government. National service is an indicator of civic engagement, which is necessary for the functioning of democracy. The Federal Emergency Management Agency remarked on its goal to "cultivate the next generation of emergency managers" in its 2016 *Human Capital Strategic Plan*, and yet its challenges with recruitment persist. On the other hand, Teach for America is a shining example of recruitment to national service while the government is struggling. The civil service has yet to address long-standing challenges with its organization, particularly its human capital systems that control recruitment, hiring, selection, and performance management. These challenges undermine public trust in government and also have a direct impact on recruitment. To examine the civil service's recruitment shortfalls, this study examined Teach for America's model. This study provides recommendations and a summary of findings that may inform government leaders who wish to recruit and hire young adults.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CISA	Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency
CNCS	Corporation for National and Community Service
CSRA	Civil Service Reform Act
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
MSPB	Merit System Protection Board
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
PMF	Presidential Management Fellows
SES	Senior Executive Service
TE	Teacher education
TFA	Teach For America
USA	United States of America

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"When you have disciplined people, you do not need hierarchy. When you have disciplined thought, you do not need bureaucracy. When you have disciplined action, you do not need excessive controls."[1]

In 2016, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) stated its objective to "cultivate the next generation of emergency managers."[2] Despite that intention, only 10 percent of FEMA's 2020 workforce were young adults under age 30, which is far below the overall share of that age group in the national labor market.[3] FEMA has documented troubles with short staffing that resulted in mission failures in response to catastrophes like Hurricane Maria and the 2018 Camp Fire.[4] To respond to the nation's disasters and meet individuals and communities' needs, FEMA needs to build a qualified workforce by attracting talent. Achieving FEMA's human capital goals requires a commitment to recruiting young adults with strategy and clarity. Teach For America is an example of commitment to quality recruitment and selection that yields positive results.

This research intended to understand the causes for FEMA's short-staffing, and in particular, why the agency has not been successful in recruiting young adults. Data that might inform those answers were not widely available without issuing data requests or obtaining specific permissions. Thus, the research took a broader approach and used existing literature about the federal government's recruitment challenges, generally. This study focused on the successful elements, processes, mission, and organizational traits that contributed most directly to TFA's success. This thesis evaluates whether, to what extent,

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[1] James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap--and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001), 13.

[2] Federal Emergency Management Agency, *FEMA Human Capital Strategic Plan* (Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2016), 2, https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/ 1465232797001-0884912c49ec300ced75c391a0dc81dc/HumanCap_Final_Version.pdf.

[3] "Data, Analysis & Documentation: Raw Datasets," U.S. Office of Personnel Management, December 2019, https://www.opm.gov/data/index.aspx.

[4] Christopher Currie, *2017 Hurricanes and Wildfires: Initial Observations on the Federal Response and Key Recovery Challenges*, GAO-18-472 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2018), https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/694231.pdf.

and with what modifications the TFA model might apply to the civil service, specifically for disaster relief missions, in an admittedly different context. This study seeks to answer: How can FEMA learn from the Teach for America model to improve its recruitment of qualified young people?

The research revealed that the civil service's systemic failures undermine both recruitment and public perception, which exacerbates its workforce challenges. The Merit System Principles create rigid systems for hiring and performance management, which do not yield the best results. Due to its systems' rigidity, the federal government has documented challenges with inflated performance reviews and unqualified employees.[5] The dysfunction and resulting mission failures undermine public trust in government and reinforce stereotypes about government work. The rigid systems are commonly referred to as "red tape."

This study also examined TFA, which is a national service program distinct in its appeal. TFA created a program that enabled participants to make a difference by serving a two-year term with additional non-teaching career prospects.[6] Knowing the value of the social connections and cachet, TFA widely markets its alumni network, highlighting its high-profile alumni as leaders in government or prestigious private sector companies.[7] By increasing access, reducing costs, and offering a robust social network attracts participation.

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[5] Robert Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Distribution of Performance Ratings across the Federal Government*, GAO-16-520R (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2016), https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677016.pdf; Robert Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: OPM and Agencies Need to Strengthen Efforts to Identify and Close Mission-Critical Skills Gaps*, GAO-15-223 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2015), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-223.pdf.

[6] Adam Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well: Credentialism and Teach For America," *Journal of Teacher Education* 63, no. 1 (January 2012): 10, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487111422071.

[7] "Life as an Alum," Official, Teach for America, accessed September 19, 2020, https://www.teachforamerica.org/life-as-an-alum.

TFA built an organizational culture that focuses on measuring results and discipline, thereby creating a ripe set of conditions for successful recruitment.[8] Evaluation and continual data collection inform the internal goals and strategy of the organization. By "setting up systems for accountability and continuous improvement," TFA refines its processes from public engagement, recruitment, selection, training, development, and performance management. One example is how TFA learned its highest-performing Corps Members' qualities and how to recruit more of them.[9] TFA's research revealed that its top performers did have common characteristics, which TFA has continually measured and adjusted over time. Performance evaluation creates data, which in turn informs the recruitment, selection, and training processes. TFA continuously measures results in every facet of its organization.

Three distinct themes were apparent across both the civil service and TFA. The study concludes with themes that influence public perception and have a direct recruitment link: measuring results, adaptation and modernization, and public engagement. Each theme presents as a successful component of TFA's model and conversely appears as a failed system in the civil service. TFA focuses on measuring results precisely, continuously adapts to young adult's preferences, and uses aggressive marketing and branding tactics. In contrast, the civil service has superficial performance standards, has not made meaningful updates to its systems since the Civil Service Reform Act (1978), and has growing public distrust.

Providing a clear pathway (or several) for young Americans to serve the nation is vital to a functioning public service sector and the beneficiaries of its programs. As such, job-seekers looking for meaningful work can, and do, seek employment opportunities outside of the government sector. Young people especially turn to private and non-profit

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[8] Jim Collins, *Good to Great* and *Built to Last* author, influenced Kopp. In his research about great companies, Collins found that successful organizations shared a characteristic that he deemed the "culture of discipline." Adam Bryant, "Charisma? To Her, It's Overrated," *New York Times*, July 4, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/05/business/05corner.html; Collins, *Good to Great*.

[9] Wendy Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...: The Unlikely Triumph of Teach For America and What I Learned Along the Way* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 176, http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=903543.

organizations, like TFA, that offer them the chance to make a difference. This study concludes with recommendations for the civil service to compete in the 21st century to recruit talent and maintain a healthy workforce.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Recognizing a looming wave of retirements for its employees, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) stated its goal to "cultivate the next generation of emergency managers" five years before this thesis writing.[1] FEMA recognized its workforce as its "most valuable asset" and devised a strategy with goals and objectives to recruit, develop, and retain talent.[2] Despite FEMA's stated intentions, its workforce shortages and lack of developed staff slowed response efforts after Hurricane Maria.[3] This research intended to understand the causes for FEMA's short-staffing, and in particular, why the agency has not been successful in recruiting young adults. Data that might inform those answers were not widely available without issuing data requests or obtaining specific permissions. Thus, the research took a broader approach and used existing literature about the federal government's recruitment challenges, generally. Instead of diagnosing FEMA's challenges, this thesis conducted a single case-study to highlight an organization, TFA, that does exceptionally well recruiting young adults.

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Of the numerous human capital challenges for the civil service, the longtime struggle to recruit young adults into its workforce is trending in the wrong direction.[4] Difficulty in recruiting Millennials, specifically, is well-documented and demographic data from the Office of Personnel Management demonstrates there is a severe underrepresentation of them in the federal workforce. Only 7 percent of civil service employees are under 30 years old, despite accounting for nearly one quarter of the nation's

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[1] Federal Emergency Management Agency, *FEMA Human Capital Strategic Plan* (Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2016), 6, https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1465232797001-0884912c49ec300ced75c391a0dc81dc/HumanCap_Final_Version.pdf.

[2] Federal Emergency Management Agency, i.

[3] Currie, *2017 Hurricanes and Wildfires*, 1.

[4] The term "young adult" refers to people under the age of 30-years-old, which can include members of more than one generation. In 2020, both the Generations Y "Millennial" and Z are included in this definition.

labor force in 2019.[5] In 2010, the same age group made up 13 percent of the federal workforce, indicating the share of young adults is declining.[6] The nation's largest employer of around two million federal employees might reasonably be expected to reflect the demographics of the country, but the disparities are remarkable, particularly as they apply to age distribution.[7]

Civil service leadership realized the government had numerous personnel management challenges, among them recruiting Millennials, and sought to understand why. Authors and researchers published books about the new generation entering the workforce, which was insightful for government leaders who were planning civil service reform efforts.[8] In 2000, the U.S. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs prepared a report for the President that cited troubling new research about Millennials that suggested young adults were disinterested in working for the federal government, which was also a characteristic of their predecessor Generation X, but warned that the disinterest was growing.[9] The 65-page report declared the civil service was facing a "human capital crisis," and stated a concern about the aging workforce in the first paragraph.[10] At the heart of this crisis was the inability to attract talent, competing against the private and non-profit sector organizations that workers, particularly young adults, held in higher esteem. The report concludes with recommendations to improve the attractiveness of the civil service by offering competitive pay, more employee flexibility, speeding up the hiring process,

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[5] "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/cps/demographics.htm#age; Office of Personnel Management, "Data, Analysis & Documentation."

[6] Office of Personnel Management, *Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics: Demographic Profile of the Federal Workforce as of September 2010* (Washington, DC: Office of Personnel Management, 2011), https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/demographics/2010-demographic-profile/.

[7] Paul C. Light, *The True Size of Government: Tracking Washington's Blended Workforce, 1984–2015* (New York: The Volcker Alliance, 2017), https://www.volckeralliance.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Issue%20Paper_True%20Size%20of%20Government.pdf.

[8] Paul C. Light, "The Empty Government Talent Pool: The New Public Service Arrives," *Brookings Review* 18, no. 1 (2000): 20, https://doi.org/10.2307/20080889; Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

[9] G.V. Voinovich, *Report to the President: The Crisis in Human Capital* (Washington, DC: United States Senate, 2000), https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/120000ogmhumancapitalrpt.pdf.

[10] Voinovich, 1.

expanding professional development opportunities, and emphasizing performance over tenure.[11] Scholarly research about extrinsic motivations support that those findings are no doubt relevant, but intrinsic motivation authors might argue that the regulatory recommendations are not enough.[12] In the competition for top talent, especially for recent college graduates exploring all the possibilities, the federal government is losing, in part, because it has no cachet.

The federal government has struggled with its public perception for decades, ranging from feelings of distrust to those of outright hostility.[13] Think tanks, non-profit organizations, government agencies, newspapers, and scholars have widely surveyed the public and researched underlying causes for those perceptions.[14] Perhaps the most succinctly stated summary is that there is "a mentality that everything that government does is stupid and bad and the people in it are stupid and bad."[15] Though public perception literature is not always about talent recruitment, the two are "inextricably" linked.[16]

[11] Voinovich, *Report to the President*.

[12] Nevbahar Ertas, "Millennials and Volunteering: Sector Differences and Implications for Public Service Motivation Theory," *Public Administration Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 517–58, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24772881; Bradley E. Wright, "Public Service and Motivation: Does Mission Matter?," *Public Administration Review* 67, no. 1 (January 2007): 54–64, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00696.x; and Donald P. Moynihan and Sanjay K. Pandey, "The Role of Organizations in Fostering Public Service Motivation," *Public Administration Review* 67, no. 1 (February 2007): 40–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00695.x.

[13] Pew Research Center, *How Americans View Government* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 1998), https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/1998/03/10/how-americans-view-government/.

[14] John Hudak, "The U.S. Civil Service: Protectors of the Republic," *FixGov* (blog), November 13, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2019/11/13/the-u-s-civil-service-protectors-of-the-republic/; Michael Lewis, *The Fifth Risk* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), http://link.overdrive.com/?websiteID=312&titleID=4188453; Gallup, Inc., "Government," Gallup, April 20, 2007, https://news.gallup.com/poll/27286/Government.aspx; Ron Fournier, "The Outsiders: How Can Millennials Change Washington If They Hate It?," *The Atlantic*, August 26, 2013, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/08/the-outsiders-how-can-millennials-change-washington-if-they-hate-it/278920/; Partnership for Public Service, *Building a Federal Civil Service for the 21st Century: The Challenge of Attracting Great Talent to Government Service* (National Academies Press (US), 2003), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK36382/; Lowell H. Hattery, "The Prestige of Federal Employment," *Public Administration Review* 15, no. 3 (1955): 181–87, https://doi.org/10.2307/973015; and Robert Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Talent Management Strategies to Help Agencies Better Compete in a Tight Labor Market*, Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Government Operations, Committee on Oversight and Reform, House of Representatives, GAO-19-723T (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2019), https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/701649.pdf.

[15] Lewis, *The Fifth Risk*, 41.

[16] Hattery, "The Prestige of Federal Employment," 181.

Organizations known for poor-performance deter high quality applicants, further affecting the engagement of their workforce.[17]

Based on research and policy recommendations, like those made by the Committee on Governmental Affairs, the civil service set out to make regulatory changes and create new employment pathways. Attracting talent, especially Millennials, is a concern for the federal government, as demonstrated by its investment in research and programs.[18] For example, national service programs have been expanded.[19] Another indicator is that the Office of Personnel Management published reports specific to Millennials.[20] Administrators have made remarks about the importance of engaging Yet, the downward trend has not reversed course.[21] The government recognizes the problem, and has taken steps forward, but those efforts failed to increase the share of young adults in the federal workforce.

While the civil service created new programs and remove regulatory barriers, influencing the way people *feel* about the federal government is not concrete. Leaders make general statements about their aspirations to revitalize the federal workforce and to inspire

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[17] Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (Epub Edition: HarperCollins, 2011), http://api.overdrive.com/v1/collections/v1L2BaQAAAJcBAAA1M/products/9f2bffe3-4fba-45ee-a74a-c1506c36f331.

[18] Office of Personnel Management, *Millennials: Finding Opportunity in Federal Service* (Washington, DC: Office of Personnel Management, 2014), https://www.opm.gov/fevs/archive/2014files/fevs_millennialsreport.pdf; Robert Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Key Talent Management Strategies for Agencies to Better Meet Their Mission*, GAO-19-181 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2019), https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/698084.pdf; Katherine Archuleta, "Millennials: Finding Opportunity in Federal Service," Office of Personnel Management, *Director's Blog* (blog), October 8, 2014, https://www.opm.gov/blogs/Director/2014/10/8/Millennials-Finding-Opportunity-in-Federal-Service/; and Office of Personnel Management, *The Pathways Programs: Their Use and Effectiveness Two Years after Implementation* (Washington, DC: Office of Personnel Management, 2016), https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/students-recent-graduates/reference-materials/report-on-special-study-of-the-pathways-programs.pdf.

[19] Corporation for National and Community Service, *Congressional Budget Justification* (Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service, 2011), 19–20, https://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/2011_budget_justification.pdf.

[20] Office of Personnel Management, *Millennials: Finding Opportunity in Federal Service*.

[21] Lisa Rein, "Millennials Exit the Federal Workforce as Government Jobs Lose Their Allure," *Washington Post*, December 15, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/millennials-exit-the-federal-workforce-as-government-jobs-lose-their-allure/2014/12/15/ea3d4418-7fd4-11e4-9f38-95a187e4c1f7_story.html.

young people to serve, which compares to the famous efforts of President John F. Kennedy. In his inaugural address, President Kennedy influenced American youth by saying "ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country."[22] His successors expanded national service programs and made similar pleas for youth to engage in public service, including President Barack Obama who said he would "make government cool again."[23] Though President Obama inspired an "army of young voters," federal workforce data indicates he was not successful in motivating an "army" of public servants.[24] Civil service leaders are aware of the negative impact of poor public perception on its recruitment success, but the problem is not easy to solve.

The decades-long decline in public perception of the federal government is deep-rooted and intentional.[25] Approval is divided along political party lines, which is generally a debate over "the optimal size of government."[26] With Republicans being more likely to support policies that reduce the size of the government, they are also more likely to believe that federal employees are overpaid, unqualified, and lazy.[27] As such, politicians have implemented policies based on those beliefs, and have reduced the size of the federal

[22] "Historic Speeches: Inaugural Address," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, January 20, 1961, https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/inaugural-address.

[23] Steve Berg, "Clinton Invokes JFK and Peace Corps in Call for a New National Service Plan," *Star Tribune*, March 1993, ProQuest; Hannah Seligson, "'Ask Not': The Shift in Public Service Since JFK's Famous Appeal," *Washingtonian* (blog), October 30, 2013, https://www.washingtonian.com/2013/10/30/ask-not-jfks-continuing-lure-of-government-service/; Ben Smith, "Obama Plans to 'Make Government Cool Again,'" *POLITICO* (blog), September 11, 2008, https://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0908/Obama_plans_to_make_government_cool_again.html.

[24] Ralph R. Smith, "'Ask Not What Your Country Can Do for You' vs. Making Government 'Cool,'" *FedSmith.Com* (blog), June 15, 2014, https://www.fedsmith.com/2014/06/15/ask-not-what-you-can-do-for-your-country-vs-making-government-cool/.

[25] Lewis, *The Fifth Risk*.

[26] Pew Research Center, "Little Public Support for Reductions in Federal Spending," *Pew Research Center*, April 2019, 29, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/04/11/little-public-support-for-reductions-in-federal-spending/; Fiona Hill, "Public Service and the Federal Government," *Voter Vitals* (blog), May 27, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/public-service-and-the-federal-government/; Light, *The True Size of Government*.

[27] Lisa Rein and Ed O'Keefe, "New Post Poll Finds Negativity toward Federal Workers," *Washington Post*, October 18, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/17/AR2010101703866.html.

workforce in relation to the size of the nation's workforce.[28] Any story of government mishandling a situation has the potential to become "the face of government waste or stupidity" and used for political ends.[29] Politicization presents a grander challenge to civil service leaders today than to President Kennedy. Influencing a new generation to serve the nation will not come from an impassioned speech and a new program.

The nature of government work, what most refer to as public service, is no longer solely executed by government organizations. Non-profit and private sector both offer jobs that qualify as meaningful work and give individuals the opportunity to serve others. Paul C. Light refers to this market evolution, and also the title of his book, as *The New Public Service.*[30] Millennials are motivated to make a social impact, but do not perceive government service as the primary means to that end.[31] Instead, Millennials are looking for socially-responsible private companies or non-profit organizations, which confuses the predecessor generations who understand that one must choose between doing good and doing well.[32] Light argues that in the 21st century, doing good and doing well are not mutually exclusive, and the private and non-profit sectors have leveraged that idea to attract talent, and government has not.[33] The civil service is competing for talent in more ways than before.

The civil service has not realized the organizational and cultural shifts required to compete in the 21st-century economy and culture. Its unwillingness or inability to shift is, at least in part, causal to mission failures that haunt its departments and agencies, including the response to Hurricane Maria, cyber-attacks, and its pandemic response. The shifts in culture and strategy are endemic. They include the now-familiar characters of a

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[28] Partnership for Public Service, "Federal Workforce" (Washington, DC: Partnership for Public Service, 2019), https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FedFigures_FY18-Workforce.pdf.

[29] Lewis, *The Fifth Risk*, 62.

[30] Paul C. Light, *The New Public Service* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

[31] Fournier, "The Outsiders."

[32] Sue Shellenbarger, "Doing Well vs. Doing Good: Parents Struggle with Their New Grads' Idealism," *Wall Street Journal*, June 29, 2006, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB115153441487793521.

[33] Light, *The New Public Service*.

generational divide, technological adoption, adaptation, global competition, and the spectrum of ideological shifts present within each of these.

The generation gap in the federal government has measurable impacts, including national security implications. The downward trend in engagement with young adults indicates that there will be an even smaller share of Generation Z in its workforce, widening the gap even further. A generational "imbalance" and a lack of critical skills in the federal workforce, the Committee on Government Affairs argues, may reduce the government's "ability to respond effectively and rapidly to threats to our national security."[34] Government agencies are short-staffed in specialized roles like cybersecurity, and have already realized the consequences of lacking technical expertise, skills that digital-aged generations are more likely to possess.[35]

B.   RESEARCH QUESTION

How can FEMA learn from the Teach for America model to improve its recruitment of qualified young people?

C.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature indicates a consensus among scholars that the federal government has significant human capital challenges and competes with the private and non-profit sectors in attracting talent to its workforce. Why the government sector has fewer young employees and how employers might recruit them into public service yields more debate. The literature revolves around a central theme that the federal government has a shortage of qualified employees and a large percentage of the workforce is expected to retire in the near future, resulting in a skills gap. Academic scholars, government practitioners, and private researchers have all contributed to the body of literature, with a general consensus that the subject of recruitment and retention in the public sector is worth researching, but they diverge on policy recommendations. The debate concerns why disproportionately few

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[34] Voinovich, *Report to the President*, 45.

[35] Partnership for Public Service, *Building a Federal Civil Service for the 21st Century*.

young people work for government agencies and how to best recruit them into public service careers.

1.   Generational Theory

This section of the literature review will identify theories about generational differences in the workplace. The first section will evaluate research studies related to the understanding of workplace values. The second section will discuss the study of public service motivation and how it relates to workforce recruitment. Finally, the last section will identify recommendations in literature for the federal government improving its appeal to younger generations as an employer.

The social identity of a generational cohort is shaped by their shared experiences, and generations also inflict their worldview on their environment, which has measurable impacts. Generational theory generally explains that there is a cohorting effect, in which groups are shaped in similar ways by shared experiences.[36] In ecological terms you can see a drastic reduction in consumption among Millennials and Gen Z – which will directly impact the human caused climate change created then ignored by generations previous.[37] And that is just water bottles and straws. Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z *all* have examples of how they reinvented work, the act of working, workspace, and the meaning of employment.

There is so much literature written about Millennials, and most of it can be parsed out into two thought-categories: one in which Millennials are socially conscious and civically-minded; the other describes them as "entitled," "narcissistic," "self-absorbed,"

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[36] William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: Quill, 1991).

[37] Nita Jones, "Anti-Excess Consumerism," *Wunderman Thompson Intelligence* (blog), November 5, 2019, https://intelligence.wundermanthompson.com/2019/11/anti-excess-consumerism/.

and "lazy."[38] The primary text that made early optimistic characterizations of Millennials was *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* by Strauss and Howe.[39] Mainstream news picked up on the few studies that characterized Millennials as narcissists and that became the popular rhetoric about the youngest generation. Some went as far as to call it a "narcissism epidemic."[40] Clichés like Millennials received excessive "participation trophies" and think they are "special" snowflakes were born.[41] Many authors criticized the studies about narcissism, and the resulting popular rhetoric, as age-old and recycled from each generation as a new one enters the same life-stage (emerging adulthood).

A popular narrative that labels Millennials as the self-centered "me" generation.[42] However, recalling the previous quote from Socrates, this narrative repeats for each new generation and holds little meaning.[43] The phrase coined by Strauss and Howe twenty years prior has been recycled to describe Generation Z: "The Next Great Generation."[44] Though potentially untrue, generational stereotypes may be accepted schools of thought for government leaders. For example, the Senior Executive Association President expressed concerns about the "public service ethos in the up-and-coming young leaders in the federal government" and discussed the Senior Executive Service's (SES) plans to

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38 Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*; Niraj Chokshi, "Attention Young People: This Narcissism Study Is All About You (Published 2019)," *New York Times*, May 15, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/science/narcissism-teenagers.html; Max Nesterak, "Me, Me, Me: The Rise of Narcissism in the Age of the Selfie," *NPR.Org*, July 12, 2016, https://www.npr.org/2016/07/12/485087469/me-me-me-the-rise-of-narcissism-in-the-age-of-the-selfie; Joel Stein, "Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation," *Time*, May 20, 2013, https://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/; and Jean M. Twenge, "Millennials: The Greatest Generation or the Most Narcissistic?," *The Atlantic*, May 2, 2012, https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/05/millennials-the-greatest-generation-or-the-most-narcissistic/256638/.

39 Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*.

40 Raina Kelley, "Are We in a Narcissism Epidemic?," *Newsweek*, April 17, 2009, sec. Culture, https://www.newsweek.com/are-we-narcissism-epidemic-77513.

41 Nesterak, "Me, Me, Me"; Stein, "Millennials"; Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

42 Twenge, *Generation Me*; Twenge, "Millennials"; Stein, "Millennials."

43 Refer back to the Socrates quote from the introduction.

44 Julian E. Zelizer, "The Next Great Generation," *The Atlantic*, May 7, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/next-great-generation/611290/.

"restor [e] that public service ethos."[45] By characterizing the lack of interest as a lack of ethos, the SES seems to be recycling the myth that Millennials are not service-oriented.

Erroneous assertions about what motivates Millennials and, soon, Generation Z have a negative impact on government's marketing approach. Specifically, Millennials are often categorized as narcissists who are not civically engaged or interested in public service.[46] Some argue that the nation needs civic education and programs to instill civic duty in young people to solve this problem.[47] The issue with that notion is that it places the blame on the younger generations rather than taking an introspective look at possible failures. Most studies and research show that young people are mission-driven, idealistic, altruistic, and desire to serve.[48] "Ninety-three percent of Gen Z says that a company's impact on society affects their decision to work there."[49] Tom Ross, the Volcker Alliance president, worked in partnership with the Public Partnership for National Service and admitted that Millennials are service-oriented. Still, the government now competes with other sectors. He says that Americans "have lost a little bit of the sense of public service being in the government."[50] He suggests the solution is to instill a public service ethos in young people, which is similar to the recommendations to "revitalize civic education."[51] Government leaders naturally assume new generations should fit within the existing civil service model, instead of adapting the model to compete for talent. Meanwhile, the private

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45 Nicole Ogrysko, "Bound by Constraints of 40-Year-Old Rules, Civil Service Ready for a Rebuild," Federal News Network, August 15, 2018, https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2018/08/buttoned-in-40-year-old-rules-civil-service-bursting-at-seams-for-a-rebuild/.

46 Ertas, "Millennials and Volunteering."

47 National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve: The Final Report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service* (Washington, DC: National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, 2020), 3, https://www.inspire2serve.gov/sites/default/files/final-report/Final%20Report.pdf.

48 Ertas, "Millennials and Volunteering."

49 David Stillman and Jonah Stillman, *Gen Z @ Work: How the Next Generation Is Transforming the Workplace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 11, https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=1F83878A-3E69-4422-B3AA-1B4D50CF3DF5.

50 Ogrysko, "Bound by Constraints of 40-Year-Old Rules."

51 Ogrysko; and National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*.

and non-profit sectors are wooing American youth as government leaders wonder *what's wrong with kids these days?*

2. Workplace Motivation

Similar to the literature about motivations for changing careers or employers, substantial research explores generational motivations for choosing a particular position or job sector. Some argue that young people are less interested in working in government service than in the past.[52] But others disagree, asserting that college juniors and seniors have high interest in working for the government but lack knowledge about federal employment.[53] The Partnership for Public Service and the Office of Personnel Management conducted a collaborative study with six universities to understand the status of student interest in government careers.[54] The researchers surveyed more than 3,200 students and found that the majority of young people had positive perceptions about federal employment. Authors cite the Partnership for Public Service study to support the notion that the federal government should provide a better pathway for young people to enter federal service through improved recruitment efforts.[55] Both studies have limitations, using small sample sizes of survey respondents. Furthermore, the Partnership for Public Service only asked respondents about their level of interest in each sector, but did not evaluate how likely students might choose employment with one sector over another, so some students who were interested in government service were also interested in the public sector. The theory of public service motivation is an emerging research subject, and there is not yet enough evidence and studies to conclude what motivates anyone, let alone young people, to choose a public service career over other sectors. The research in this subject

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[52] Peter D. Hart, *Calling Young People to Government Service: From "Ask Not..." to "Not Asked"* (Washington, DC: Council for Excellence in Government, 2004), www.web.archive.org/web/20060927143803/www.excelgov.org/admin/FormManager/filesuploading/FINAL_Richardson_Poll_Report.pdf.

[53] Tom Shoop, "Pumping Public Service," *Government Executive* 39, no. 13 (August 1, 2007): 54, ProQuest; Light, "The Empty Government Talent Pool."

[54] Partnership for Public Service, *Back to School: Rethinking Federal Recruiting on College Campuses.* (Washington, DC: Partnership for Public Service, 2006), http://www.books24x7.com/marc.asp?bookid=26380.

[55] Light, "The Empty Government Talent Pool."

area may be helpful in answering the research question presented in this thesis, though the studies are limited in quantity and most authors call for additional research on this subject.

Job-seekers gravitate towards organizations that create an environment where employees can make a difference in their community or society. There is a substantial body of literature by psychologists and other scholars that have studied workplace motivations across sectors and generations alike.[56] The consensus in the literature is that job seekers are most interested in "meaningful work, the usefulness of job to a society, and general altruistic motivation."[57] The Government Accountability Office (GAO), the agency investigating government mishaps, published a report that current federal employees desired "autonomy," "meaningful work," and the opportunity to innovate.[58] Most people drawn to public service do so in the hopes of having meaningful work.

In the workplace, employees are motivated by a sense mission and purpose. Most organizations have some semblance of a mission statement, followed by values or principles that support the overall vision. There's evidence that both employees and organizations consider mission as an important factor in the workplace. For example, Gallup, Inc. conducted research on American workplaces for over 20 years and consistently found that the most productive employees understood "their organization's mission and purpose."[59] For-profit private organizations, like Goldman Sachs, are shifting more resources towards social efforts, in part to better attract talent who want "to do good."[60] The notion of "corporate social responsibility" has gained traction to align with social and

[56] Frederick Herzberg, *Work and the Nature of Man* (New York: Crowell, 1966); Richard J. Hackman et al., "A New Strategy for Job Enrichment," *California Management Review* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1975): 57, ProQuest.

[57] Wright, "Public Service and Motivation."

[58] Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Key Talent Management*, 43.

[59] Gallup, Inc., *State of the American Workplace* (Washington, DC: Gallup Inc., 2017), 97, https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238085/state-american-workplace-report-2017.aspx.

[60] Stephanie Strom, "Businesses Try to Make Money and Save the World," *New York Times*, May 6, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/06/business/yourmoney/06fourth.html.

ideological shifts in the 21st-century economy and culture.[61] Organizations that positively impact society are most engaging as workplaces, and therefore desirable.

One of the central debates focuses on whether workplace values differ between generations. Many authors have concluded that each working generation holds fundamental values, and competing ideas explain then and why they are important to employers. One part of this debate concerns whether the younger generation values long-term career stability. For example, some authors have identified Millennials as "job hoppers" and have highlighted that idea in its research.[62] The Government Business Council published a report that described the Millennial generation as more willing to change careers and jobs than its predecessor generations.[63] The shift is in part due to Millennials entering a competitive labor market after college, and also a willingness to change jobs in search of organizational culture to better suit their needs.[64] Private research firms have conducted national surveys revealing higher turnover rates among young people and the openness of Millennials to pursue new job opportunities.[65] On the subject of Millennial turnover, not all researchers agree that the phenomenon reflects a generational characteristic. In one particular study, the research examined Millennials in the federal workforce specifically, and concluded that turnover was higher among young people but discovered that both young people and Baby Boomers had similar motivations for leaving their positions or the public sector altogether.[66] The author argued that employee engagement was a stronger indicator for turnover than generational characteristics. The

[61] David Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility*, Paperback ed (Washington, DC: Brookings Inst. Press, 2006), 1.

[62] Amy Adkins, "Millennials: The Job-Hopping Generation," *Gallup Business Journal*, May 12, 2016, https://www.gallup.com/workplace/231587/millennials-job-hopping-generation.aspx.

[63] Mike Maciag, "Millennials Face Hurdles Breaking into Public Sector," *Governing*, October 2013, https://www.governing.com/topics/mgmt/gov-more-millennials-going-to-private-sector.html; Zoe Grotophorst, *Minding the Leadership Gap: Attracting Millennials to the Federal Government*, A Briefing from GBC's Research Analysts (Washington, DC: Government Business Council, 2012), https://www.govexec.com/media/gbc/docs/gbc-issue-taleo-32012_final.pdf.

[64] Maciag, "Millennials Face Hurdles Breaking into Public Sector."

[65] Adkins, "Millennials"; Maciag, "Millennials Face Hurdles Breaking into Public Sector."

[66] Nevbahar Ertas, "Turnover Intentions and Work Motivations of Millennial Employees in Federal Service," *Public Personnel Management* 44, no. 3 (September 2015): 401–23, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026015588193.

Harvard Business Review compiled multiple research findings to conclude that myths about Millennials lacked supporting data, or that some of the differences should be attributed to stage of life rather than generation.[67] Researchers from George Washington University and the Department of Defense conducted a collaborative quantitative study about "meaningful differences" between generations in the workplace and found that they "probably do not exist."[68] There is a wealth of literature on the subject of workplace values among generations, and most studies have different definitions of values and subsequently different criteria for measuring the importance of each value to survey respondents. The George Washington University study has the largest sample size of data (19,000 respondents) to support its findings, but quantitative research is limited without a nuanced explanation to the data. Understanding whether there are significant differences between the generations in the workplace would be valuable information for employers to recruit and engage employees.

3. Federal Workforce Trends

The looming "retirement wave" in the public service sector is well-documented and discussed in the literature, and authors tend to disagree about the extent to which the aging workforce in the federal government is problematic, and there are too few mid- and entry-level employees to replace them.[69] The federal "retirement wave" prediction dates back to 2001, when the GAO first identified human capital management in the federal workforce as "high risk."[70] Senator George Voinovich's report to the president declared a "human

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[67] Bruce N. Pfau, "What Do Millennials Really Want at Work? The Same Things the Rest of Us Do," *Harvard Business Review*, April 7, 2016, https://hbr.org/2016/04/what-do-millennials-really-want-at-work.

[68] David P. Costanza et al., "Generational Differences in Work-Related Attitudes: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 27, no. 4 (December 2012): 375, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-012-9259-4.

[69] Voinovich, *Report to the President*; Partnership for Public Service, *Building a Federal Civil Service for the 21st Century*; Courtney Buble, "The Aging Federal Workforce Needs 'New Blood,' Experts Say," *Government Executive*, August 30, 2019, https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2019/08/aging-federal-workforce-needs-new-blood-experts-say/159585/.

[70] Government Accountability Office, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, Report to Congressional Committees, GAO-13-283 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2013), https://www.gao.gov/assets/files.gao.gov/assets/gao-13-283.pdf.

capital crisis" in the federal government.[71] Most authors in the mid-2000s cited this report and the GAO report as justification for predicting the imminent retirement wave. Other publications cited the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) data as primary source to discuss federal workforce challenges.

Numerous researchers, scholars, and practitioners share concerns with Senator Voinovich. Human capital challenges are inextricably linked to recruitment and hiring, and the failure to compete with private and non-profit organizations in the 21st century. Paul C. Light, Donald Kettl, and Max Stier, on behalf of the Public Partnership for Public Service, have all published works that discuss the many ways government has remained stagnant for the past four decades.[72]

Some authors recently pointed out that retirements remained steady from 2008 until FY 2017.[73] A minority used the OPM data as evidence contradicting the "retirement wave" theory from the previous decade. However, the OPM released data in 2019 that the federal government experienced a sharp 24 percent increase in retirements during FY 2018.[74] In general, academics and journalists cite GAO reports and OPM data to discuss the state of the federal workforce, and most agree that agencies are struggling to fill vacancies, particularly for SES positions. Furthermore, authors agree that the data reveals an underrepresentation of young people employed by federal agencies.

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[71] Government Accountability Office; Voinovich, *Report to the President*.

[72] Donald Kettl et al., *No Time to Wait: Building a Public Service for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Public Administration, 2017), https://www.napawash.org/uploads/ Academy_Studies/No-Time-to-Wait_Building-a-Public-Service-for-the-21st-Century.pdf; Donald F Kettl, *Sharing Power: Public Governance and Private Markets* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993); Light, *The New Public Service*; Light, *The True Size of Government*; Partnership for Public Service, *Building a Federal Civil Service for the 21st Century*; and Max Stier, *Improving the USAJobs website* (Partnership for Public Service, 2016), https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ Stier%20Statement.pdf.

[73] Office of Personnel Management, *Executive Branch Retirement Statistics: Fiscal Years 2008 – 2017* (Washington, DC: Office of Personnel Management, Office of Strategy and Innovation, Data Analysis Group, 2018), https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/reports-publications/executive-branch-retirement-statistics-fy2008-2017.pdf.

[74] Katelin P. Isaacs, *Federal Employees' Retirement System: Summary of Recent Trends*, CRS Report No. 98–972 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/98-972.pdf.

4. Credentialism Theory

The emphasis of national service is on the collective benefit to the public and not on the individual advantage for the participant. National service programs seem like the most obvious pipeline for young people to enter public service in long-term employment, but the extent to which this is true is unclear. Recruiting the best and brightest is a struggle for most national service programs, with young people opting for paid positions through private and non-profit organizations. Eligibility requirements for participating in national service programs are typically lower than that of full-time employment positions, usually requiring at minimum a Bachelor's Degree. National service programs typically accept applicants with a high school diploma or equivalent, and no prior work experience. In contrast, TFA's acceptance rate hovers around 10% or lower, which makes the organization appear more selective than other national service programs. FEMA may apply lessons learned from TFA and offer individual incentives, as opposed to societal benefits, in order to attract talented young people to national service.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study focused on the successful elements, processes, mission, and organizational traits that contributed most directly to TFA's success. This thesis was designed to evaluate whether, to what extent, and with what modifications the TFA model might be applied to the civil service, specifically for disaster relief missions, an admittedly different context. The research process for this thesis began as a comparative case study between FEMA Corps and TFA, and found little existing public information about the former national service program. As a result, the research method was adjusted to a single case study, drawing conclusions about successful recruitment approaches from Teach For America that may broadly apply to federal agencies.[75] The TFA as a single case study was selected due to its classification as a national service programs, its connection to the civil

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[75] Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in *Alexander L. George: A Pioneer in Political and Social Sciences*, ed. Dan Caldwell, vol. 15 (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 191–214, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90772-7_10; Arend Lijphart, "The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research," *Comparative Political Studies* 8, no. 2 (July 1975): 133–77, https://doi.org/10.1177/001041407500800203.

service through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), and its possible applicability to federal agencies that also partner with the CNCS. The federal government recognized TFA's work as national service, and The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) endorsed TFA as an AmeriCorps partner.[76] Case studies are most appropriate for hypothesis-testing and to capture complex causality, and to find applicability even in admittedly different contexts.[77] The research explored difficulties in the federal civil service system with engaging emerging generations, then identified specific elements of TFA that conversely resonate with recent college graduates, and concluded with possible applications for federal agencies that sponsor national service programs, using FEMA as a specific example. The purpose of the case study method is to identify applications of TFA's model for FEMA to consider in its efforts to recruit the newest addition to the federal workforce--Generation Z.

1.   Additional Research Questions

Research Question #1: What are the federal civil service's recruitment efforts, and in what ways are they effective or not?

Method: Evaluate the Pathways Program, USA Jobs, and Merit System Protection Board objectives; whether criteria are being met

Research Question #2: Why does TFA demonstrate successful recruitment; and to what extent does its success compare to other public service recruitment methods?

Method: Obtain qualitative data about TFA's organizational strategy, and quantitative data for application and acceptance rates

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[76] Dana Goldstein, "Teach For America's Next Act," *Vox*, September 5, 2014, https://www.vox.com/2014/9/5/6079493/teach-for-america-criticism-changing; Teach for America, "Learn More About Teach For America's Nationwide Impact," Teach for America, accessed August 24, 2020, https://www.teachforamerica.org/what-we-do/impact.

[77] Jack S. Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 1 (February 2008): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/07388940701860318.

2. Scope and Limitations

The scope of this thesis will identify possible explanations for successful recruitment approaches in public service. Using the findings from the research method presented, the conclusion will include recommendations for opportunities to improve talent recruitment at FEMA. This thesis will not address reasons why prospective university students choose national service or job opportunities in other sectors. The research identified in the literature review covers career choice and public service motivation in depth. The comparative case study will add insight to the literature about specific recruitment tactics and civil service program structures.

The discussion about formal processes covers the civil service in general and does not necessarily account for actions and policies at the department- or agency level. Information about agency-specific recruitment, hiring, and training practices is not generally publicly available and, therefore, cannot be evaluated in this thesis. However, The Merit System Principles bind federal agencies, and this section will cover the discussion about the civil service structure generally.

TFA's success is likely due to a specific set of conditions and its comparability is complex, given that TFA and other national service programs differ in more than one way.[78] Despite the research method limitations, using TFA as a case to gain a "comparative perspective" sheds light on recruitment to the civil service.[79]

E. DEFINITIONS

This section offers the following definitions of commonly-used terms to inform readers of the author's intent. Many of the terminologies may be debated, but were written with an intended meaning throughout the chapters. The Pew Research Center studies generational cohorting, attributes, and attitudes. Though there are other authors cited that

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[78] Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); and Stanley Lieberson, "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases," in *What Is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*, ed. Charles C. Ragin and Howard Saul Becker (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 105–18.

[79] Lijphart, "The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research," 159.

may have different thresholds between generational cohorts, the differences are marginal. For the purpose of this thesis, a variance of a few years does not affect the research nor this writer's conclusions. Pew Research Center reminds readers "that generations themselves are inherently diverse and complex groups, not simple caricatures."[80] This research is primarily concerned with young people which may include high school graduates, recent college graduates, other young adults, Generation Z, and Millennials.

Baby Boom Generation: The U.S. Census Bureau officially recognizes the Baby Boom Cohort as those born between 1946 and 1964, famously attributed to "the surge in post-WWII births."[81]

Civil Service: "The 'civil service' consists of all appointive positions in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the [Federal] Government of the United States, except positions in the uniformed services."[82] Most federal employees are appointed through the competitive civil service, under the Office of Personnel Management's Merit System.[83] Excepted and Senior Executive Service employees are also included in the definition of the civil service, but the distinction is not relevant to this thesis.

Federal Government Service: "The total of all periods of military and civilian Federal service considered for retirement, reduction in force, and leave purposes."[84]

Federal Merit System: "A complete system of personnel selection and management based on an integrated set of personnel policies, procedures and practices

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[80] Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," *Pew Research Center Fact Tank* (blog), March 17, 2019, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins.

[81] Sandra L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman, "The Baby Boom Cohort in the United States: 2012 to 2060," *U.S. Census Bureau*, no. P25-1141 (May 2014): 16, https://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p25-1141.pdf; Dimock, "Defining Generations."

[82] 5 U.S. Code § 2101

[83] 5 USC § 2301

[84] Department of State, *Glossary of Civil Service Terms* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2016), 8, https://careers.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Civil-Service-Glossary-of-Terms.pdf.

designed to accomplish three basic objectives: (1) to recruit a competent work force; (2) to insure a stable work force; and (3) to provide equal opportunity for employment."[85]

Generation X: Those born between 1965 and 1980.[86]

Generation Y (Millennial): "Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 23 to 38 in 2019) is considered a Millennial."[87]

Generation Z: Those born after 1996 are considered a part of Generation Z. Notable distinctions between this cohort and its predecessor include no memory of the September 11 attacks, and familiarity with "mobile devices, WiFi and high-bandwidth cellular service" is assumed.[88]

National Service: There are different definitions of national service in the literature and some prefer to distinguish between military and civilian service. Under the National and Community Service Act of 1990, there is no specific definition of the term "national service," but the act covers "programs that perform national service to meet unmet educational, human, environmental, and public safety needs, especially those needs relating to poverty." The Act also references private and non-profit organizations as service programs. The National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service combined both military and civilian programs in its research efforts. The U.S. House of Representatives introduced the Universal National Service Act which included the following national service definition as: "Military service; or Civilian service in a federal, state, or local government program or with a community-based organization, provided that...the organization is engaged in 'meeting human, educational, environmental, or public safety needs.'"[89] Though this bill did not pass, the definition best fits the intent of this research.

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[85] Department of State, *Glossary of Civil Service Terms*.

[86] Dimock, "Defining Generations."

[87] Dimock.

[88] Dimock.

[89] H.R. 748 (113th): Universal National Service Act. This law was introduced and Congress did not pass the law; however, the definition is resembles the meaning of the term "national service" as intended by this writer.

Public Service: Author Eugene McGregor interprets public service as an "American institution [that] is sustained by persons whose careers have been distinguished by public accomplishments rather than mere service as bureaucrats or as officials in appointed positions or elected offices. Certainly, the institution has been staffed by civil servants and elected public officials, but the list would be incomplete without the mention of journalists, belletrists, businessmen and businesswomen, diplomats, school administrators, engineers, lawyers, and even college professors."[90] Author Paul C. Light also argues that public service is not government-specific and private and non-profit organizations also engage in public service activities.[91] This writer asserts that both the private sector and the non-profit sector are increasingly competing with the government for providing public services.

Young People (or Young Adults): This thesis refers to young people as anyone under 30-years-old. Federal personnel data includes a threshold at age 30, which means there is available information about the number of people under 30 who are current government employees. Chapter III discusses Teach For America, which primarily recruits recent college graduates. Not all recent college graduates are under 30, but TFA's participants are likely overwhelmingly below that same threshold.

F.   THESIS ROADMAP

The following summary offers a roadmap through the thesis chapters. Chapter I introduced the problem, the proposed research question and design, defined terminology, and a summary of the literature referenced in this thesis. Chapter II discusses the problem in depth, with particular attention paid to the federal government's recruitment challenges. Chapter II is divided into three sections starting with a summary of the civil service's organizational dysfunction, then the chapter discusses how that dysfunction is compounded by systems and lack of targeted or competitive recruitment. Chapter II then demonstrates how these challenges worsen public trust in government, making federal service less

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[90] Eugene B. McGregor, "The Institution of Public Service," *Public Administration Review* 42, no. 4 (July 1982): 304, https://doi.org/10.2307/975969.

[91] Light, *The New Public Service*.

attractive to top performers. Chapter III presents the Teach For America case study, beginning with a summary of TFA's elite reputation, the chapter then explores how the organization engages with the public to create an attractive image. Then the chapter shows how TFA's appeal draws applicants and how the organization selects high-performing candidates. Next, TFA's model is analyzed and triggers for success identified. Chapter IV presents recommendations for a new model for the federal government based on this analysis.

II. CIVIL SERVICE: ITS ROLE, REPUTATION, AND EFFORTS TO RECRUIT

This chapter discusses how organizational dysfunction, compounded by regulatory barriers, results in poor public perception of the civil service. Each factor contributes to a workforce deficient in Millennials, a circumstance that unchanged will result in a workforce deficient in Generation Z. Human capital challenges, especially as they pertain to the age gap and resulting skills gap, are at the core of mission failures in government. The assertions of this section are as follows: (1) government is, broadly speaking, politicized and dysfunctional; (2) recruiting and hiring processes are noncompetitive in the 21st century; and (3) public engagement fails to articulate government's mission and purpose for recruitment.

Government has a responsibility to serve the tax-paying public, and relies on its workforce to effectively govern. Without talented employees, federal agencies fall short of the nation's expectations. For example, FEMA faced public criticism after its response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, when life-saving commodities took over two months to reach people in need.[92] The GAO found FEMA's mission failures were due to understaffing and unqualified personnel.[93] The Mayor of San Juan stated that the federal government's "inefficiency and bureaucracy" brought unnecessary death to Puerto Ricans.[94] The National Academy of Public Administration published a white paper summarizing other mission failures throughout the federal civil service and found a common denominator: "The Federal Government's human capital system is fundamentally broken."[95]

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[92] Office of Inspector General, *FEMA Mismanaged the Commodity Distribution Process in Response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria*, OIG-20-76 (Washington, DC: Office of Inspector General, 2020), https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2020-09/OIG-20-76-Sep20.pdf.

[93] Currie, *2017 Hurricanes and Wildfires*.

[94] Robert Valencia, "'Puerto Rico Is a Stain for FEMA and Trump's Reputation,' Says San Juan's Mayor," *Newsweek*, September 11, 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/2018/09/21/san-juan-mayor-slams-trump-fema-after-hurricane-maria-1114137.html.

[95] Kettl et al., *No Time to Wait*, 1.

Perhaps the mayor had a poor perception of the federal government, or her statement was politically motivated. The GAO reports and the NAPA paper, though, highlight real program management problems in the civil service and demonstrate measurable impacts. Hurricane Maria was a worst-case scenario, in which thousands of people died. Had FEMA been equipped with enough qualified staff, would the supplies have reached people in time to save lives?

The evidence overwhelmingly supports the idea that agencies have a talent recruitment problem, which leads to mission failures. Government failures perpetuate public distrust, and in turn, a poor reputation undermines its ability to recruit. The government needs the talent to operate and to honor the public's expectations. But people who believe that FEMA's incompetence caused people to die, true or not, may not be inspired to work there.

The civil service holds no allure for Millennials, and the consequence is substandard program management. Millennials are motivated to make a social impact but do not perceive government service as a means to that end.[96] As mentioned earlier, only 7 percent of federal workers are under 30, disproportionately fewer than the share of the national labor force.[97] The average age of FEMA employees is rising; approximately 30 percent of its workforce will be eligible for retirement by 2021.[98] The underrepresentation of young adults within FEMA will exacerbate existing staffing shortages as its employees retire. FEMA recognizes that it needs enough qualified, diverse staff to carry out its mission.[99]

Laws bind the civil service system in ways that constrain hiring, recruitment, selection, performance, technology, and pay. Job applicants can expect to wait at least three months to start a job with the federal government, for example, due to the hiring system's

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[96] Fournier, "The Outsiders."

[97] Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey"; Office of Personnel Management, "Data, Analysis & Documentation."

[98] Federal Emergency Management Agency, *FEMA Human Capital Strategic Plan*.

[99] Chris Currie, *Emergency Management: FEMA Has Made Progress, but Challenges and Future Risks Highlight Imperative for Further Improvements*, GAO-19-617T (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2019), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-617t.pdf.

design.[100] The Department of Defense still uses floppy disks, a term likely not known by Generation Z.[101] Highly-qualified candidates may move on and choose to work for an organization that uses a modern application platform and that will onboard them in two weeks. In this regard, policies and regulatory barriers partly justify the public's negative perception.

A.   THE CIVIL SERVICE LEGACY: ORGANIZATIONAL DYSFUNCTION

Stereotypes about government work paint it as bureaucratic, unchanging, inflexible, inefficient, rife with low-performers, low paying, and incompatible with new ideas.[102] Public opinion data show that people believe the government is less effective in achieving results than the private sector. According to a Gallup poll taken in 2019, 70 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that "businesses can do things more efficiently than the government."[103] Though stereotypes are generic, this section will highlight specific examples of dysfunction in the civil service. Technological deficiencies, poor performance, and seniority pay contribute to poor public perceptions of the civil service and may deter potential candidates from government work.

1.   Adapting to the 21st Century

Civil service is slow to adapt due to formal structures and outdated policies. In a white paper written by the National Academy of Public Administration, the panelists described government adaptation thus: "[g]overnment occupations and the nature of much government work have changed radically, but the government's human capital system has barely changed at all. The result is like trying to negotiate the high-speed Internet with only

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[100] Nicole Ogrysko, "98 Days and Counting, Will Federal Hiring Ever Get Easier?," Federal News Network, March 9, 2020, https://federalnewsnetwork.com/mike-causey-federal-report/2020/03/98-days-and-counting-will-federal-hiring-ever-get-easier/.

[101] David A. Powner, *Federal Agencies Need to Address Aging Legacy Systems*, GAO-16-696T (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2016), https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677454.pdf.

[102] Rein and O'Keefe, "New Post Poll Finds Negativity toward Federal Workers."

[103] Gallup, Inc., "Government."

an old electric typewriter."[104] The system that guides workforce management has remained unchanged for 40 years, despite the changing workforce.[105] The Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) was signed into law by President Jimmy Carter in 1978, and that was the last significant formal policy effort to address concerns about the federal workforce.[106] When Congress passed the law, many more clerical positions and far fewer workers who had college degrees constituted the federal workforce.[107] Today, "the culture of work has changed dramatically," with far more college educated job-seekers and increased job mobility.[108]

The outdated civil service system has resulted in a skills gap and mission failures. Forty years ago, Congress did not design the civil service structure to accommodate data analysts or network security engineers because those jobs did not yet exist.[109] The skills missing from the federal workforce are still emerging, but the OPM and the GAO have identified specific needs in cybersecurity and telecommunications.[110] In a report written in 2015, the GAO noted short-staffing and increasing retirements resulted in "delays" and "cost-overruns" for some agencies.[111] Federal agencies attribute the skills gap to at least two significant cyber-attacks.[112] Government agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), have expressed concerns about national security and agree that talent recruitment is the solution.[113] Nearly two-thirds of Generation Z will hold jobs that do not yet exist, which will exacerbate the skills gap if the government does not adapt.[114]

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[104] Kettl et al., *No Time to Wait*, 12.

[105] Light, *The True Size of Government*.

[106] Ogrysko, "Bound by Constraints of 40-Year-Old Rules."

[107] Ogrysko.

[108] Light, *The New Public Service*, 3.

[109] Ogrysko, "Bound by Constraints of 40-Year-Old Rules."

[110] Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: OPM and Agencies*, 1–2.

[111] Goldenkoff, 9.

[112] Kettl et al., *No Time to Wait*, 4.

[113] Kettl et al., 6.

[114] Stillman and Stillman, *Gen Z @ Work*, 85.

Mainstream news media share examples of government being technologically outdated, which results in poor public perception. Specific instances may not be an overall reflection of the government's use of technology but highlight a significant problem. For example, news media circulated a story featuring Jared Kushner stating that the government was still using floppy disks.[115] Kushner was not wrong; the information came from a GAO report that discusses the floppy disks and notes that some agencies use "systems that have components that are...at least 50 years old."[116] The GAO found that the reason for not advancing technology in government agencies is the lack of investment, specifically a $7.3 billion decline in spending since 2010.[117] Evidence supports general assumptions that the government is technologically behind the private sector and is not adapting to the 21st century.

Lack of modernization deters tech-savvy online job-seekers, mostly young Millennials and Generation Z. Researchers published findings of a national survey that high school and college students consider "technological sophistication" when choosing an employer.[118] Organizations now offer potential applicants an "easy apply button," which is likely to be an expectation for Generation Z entering the workforce.[119] The creator of JobSnap, a platform that allows job-seekers to create short videos to apply for jobs (as opposed to submitting a resume), says he made the platform "specifically for Gen Z," knowing that they were "impatient" with filling out multiple job applications with the same information each time.[120] Recognizing that the current process for applying for jobs is not

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[115] Lance Ulanoff, "Department of Defense Still Uses 8-Inch Floppy Disks and Other Disturbing Details from Jared Kushner's Speech," *Mashable*, June 19, 2017, https://mashable.com/2017/06/19/dod-using-8-inch-floppies-per-kushner/; Bloomberg TV, "Jared Kushner Says Government Must Move Past Floppy Disks," June 19, 2017, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2017-06-19/kushner-says-government-must-move-past-floppy-disks-video; and Tim Hwang, "The Government's Failure to Keep Up with Technology Is Hurting All of Us," Government Executive, accessed November 8, 2020, https://www.govexec.com/management/2017/12/governments-failure-keep-technology-hurting-all-us/144345/.

[116] Powner, *Federal Agencies Need to Address Aging Legacy Systems*.

[117] Powner.

[118] Stillman and Stillman, *Gen Z @ Work*, 88.

[119] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, 68.

[120] Stillman and Stillman, *Gen Z @ Work*, 87.

on par with modern platforms, one report recommended that USA Jobs be updated to improve "its interoperability with outside vendors, and the way it functions to facilitate hiring to make it easier to attract and employ talent."[121] An online application process alone is not enough to compete for future recent college graduates.

Leaders in government are resistant to changing technologies, which in hierarchical decision-making structures undermines modernization efforts. In 2008, for example, instead of relying on in-house programmers, companies started using open-source platforms, like GitHub, to improve software for various uses. Microsoft crowdsourced its software to be adapted for Mac Operating Systems, which was then completed by freelance programmers.[122] In 2016, the White House implemented the Federal Code Source Policy which not only enables federal agencies to participate in such platforms, but directs them to do so.[123] Additionally, the federal government implemented its own open-source platform known as Code.gov to facilitate agency's software improvements and builds.[124] However, a three-year study revealed that only a few agencies are taking advantage of either Code.gov or GitHub.[125] Through discussions with software development civil service employees, the author found that agencies that were not participating in open-source software improvements were generally opposed to changing processes, and that upper management directed decision-making in those agencies.[126] Conversely, the agencies that participated in open-source software platforms most also gave employees autonomy over their programs.[127] Hierarchical organizational structure combined with

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[121] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, 68.

[122] Thomas L. Friedman and Oliver Wyman, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations* (New York: Macmillan Audio, 2016).

[123] Tony Scott and Anne E. Rung, "Federal Source Code Policy: Achieving Efficiency, Transparency, and Innovation through Reusable and Open Source Software" (memorandum M-16-21, Washington, DC: Executive Office of the President, 2016), https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/memoranda/2016/m_16_21.pdf.

[124] "Sharing America's Code," Code.gov, accessed November 22, 2020, https://code.gov/federal-agencies/compliance/dashboard.

[125] Joseph Castle, *Federal Source Code Study* (Code.gov, 2020), https://github.com/GSA/code-gov/blob/master/docs/FederalSourceCodeStudy/FederalSourceCodeStudy.pdf.

[126] Castle, 84.

[127] Castle, 84.

resistant leadership is a principal reason for lack of innovation in government, in addition to the aforementioned policy constraints.

OPM data support the notion that civil service employees desire to make their work more efficient, but feel stifled by their organizations and leadership. The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey revealed that civil servants may have innovative ideas, but often lack authority to implement them, consistent with the findings from the Code.gov study mentioned above. The Public Partnership for National Service summarized findings from the survey below:

> The government-wide innovation score was 63.2 out of 100 this year, nearly identical (63.3) to our previous report. The vast majority of employees (91.5 percent) said they are looking for ways to perform their jobs better, but far fewer (59.2 percent) reported that they are encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things. In addition, only 38.8 percent said that creativity and innovation are rewarded in the workplace. These scores suggest that the government needs to improve and is at risk of falling behind as the nation's problems and challenges grow more complex. Federal workers are motivated to drive change, but need stronger support from their organizations and leaders to do so.[128]

The data also suggest that innovation in government is improving overall, but is inconsistent across federal agencies. The DHS ranks toward the bottom on innovation, but its sub-component Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has over 200 projects listed for open-source usage.[129] Also worth noting is that the OPM opened seven projects related to USA Jobs on GitHub.[130] Some agencies have taken advantage of advanced technologies like open-source software platforms, while others have not.

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[128] Partnership for Public Service, *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government Analysis: Achieving a Culture of Innovation* (Washington, DC: Partnership for Public Service, 2012), 2, https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/2011-best-places-to-work-in-the-federal-government-analysis-achieving-a-culture-of-innovation/.

[129] "Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency," GitHub, accessed January 13, 2021, https://github.com/cisagov.

[130] "USAJOBS," GitHub, accessed November 22, 2020, https://github.com/USAJOBS.

2. Performance Management

The OPM recognizes that the federal government has a reputation for employing poor performers, and published a special report to counter the notion.[131] Other agencies, like the GAO and the Merit System Protection Board (MSPB), also examined the issue and have found concerns with performance in the civil service due to inadequate processes for measuring results. The MSPB surveyed employees in 2016; 63 percent of respondents "reported that they had, at some point in time, directly supervised one or more employees who...had failed at least one critical performance element."[132] The GAO has written numerous reports that "[f]ederal agencies have faced longstanding challenges developing modern, credible, and effective employee performance management systems and dealing with poor performers."[133] Data and GAO findings support the perception that the civil service is an environment of poor-performers.

Difficulties with removing low-performers from their positions are longstanding and have numerous causes, which are difficult to address within the current civil service system. As the MSPB puts it, "[c]omplaints about how difficult it is to remove poor performers are not new."[134] They say that the causes of poor performance in the civil service are "performance management, recruitment, placement, supervisory competencies,

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[131] Office of Personnel Management, *Poor Performers in Government: A Quest for the True Story* (Washington, DC: Office of Personnel Management, 1999), https://web.archive.org/web/20070226092124/https://www.opm.gov/studies/perform.pdf.

[132] Merit Systems Protection Board, *Remedying Unacceptable Employee Performance in the Federal Civil Service* (Washington, DC: Merit Systems Protection Board, 2019), 2, https://www.mspb.gov/MSPBSEARCH/viewdocs.aspx?docnumber=1627610&version=1633458&application=ACROBAT.

[133] Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Key Talent Management*; Robert Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Opportunities Exist for OPM to Further Innovation in Performance Management*, GAO-19-35 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2018), https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/695639.pdf; Robert Goldenkoff, *Federal Employee Misconduct: Actions Needed to Ensure Agencies Have Tools to Effectively Address Misconduct*, GAO-18-48 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2018), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-48.pdf; Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Distribution of Performance*; and Robert Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Improved Supervision and Better Use of Probationary Periods Are Needed to Address Substandard Employee Performance*, GAO-15-191 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2015), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-191.pdf.

[134] Merit Systems Protection Board, *Issues of Merit: The CSRA, 40 Years Later* (Washington, DC: Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 2018), 4, https://www.mspb.gov/MSPBSEARCH/viewdocs.aspx?docnumber=1540524&version=1546183&application=ACROBAT.

and agency culture."[135] The MSPB identified the selection process as a primary cause for poor-performance, which resulted in a suboptimal job fit for candidates, and employees feeling uninspired in their positions.[136] The first recommendation from the MSPB is "to hire the right people in the first place to address performance issues."[137] The uninspiring working environment of the civil service is directly related to the ineffective selection and hiring process. It results in a feedback loop fostering a negative reputation, which does little to attract high-quality talent to the workforce.

Selecting better leaders boosts performance more than downsizing or laying off workers. For one, poor performance among top-ranking leadership has a more significant effect on the workplace culture. In a study about private companies, their performance, and strategies, researchers found that layoffs for "lower-level workers" proved counterproductive, but using "rigorous" selection criteria for upper management and senior-level positions positively correlated with performance.[138] The author likened "layoffs and restructurings" to "wantonly swinging the ax on vast numbers of hardworking people" and asserts that poor-performing companies employed the downsizing model.[139] Admittedly, the civil service is a different context than that of private companies. Rather than massive layoffs, addressing leadership concerns would keep high-performance employees who are results-driven and attract higher-quality candidates.

The civil service system also has a reputation for rewarding employees for tenure rather than performance. Though the CSRA "established a pay for performance system," the pay structure reflects the ineffective performance evaluation process.[140] The results are that employees receive pay increases across the board, regardless of actual

[135] Merit Systems Protection Board, *Remedying Unacceptable Employee Performance*, 1.

[136] Merit Systems Protection Board, 2.

[137] Merit Systems Protection Board, 1.

[138] Collins, *Good to Great*, 53.

[139] Collins, 54.

[140] Merit Systems Protection Board, *Issues of Merit*, 3.

performance, limiting funds available to give "deserved" raises to the highest-performing personnel.[141]

Performance is not only a personnel issue but an organizational issue as well. A common theme among GAO findings is that agencies often fall short of mission expectations due to understaffing or lack of qualifications and training. One report consolidated multiple examples of mission failures caused by short-staffing, specifically the Internal Revenue Service, the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Homeland Security.[142] Two federal agencies suffered nefarious data breaches due to "inadequate security--and the lack of enough cyber-employees."[143] The compilation was hardly complete, highlighting only a few examples. Another example is FEMA's inability to adequately respond to three consecutive major hurricanes in 2017, with too few staff and significant mission failures.[144] One author wrote that "[i]n fact, of the 34 areas that GAO identified as "high-risk" in 2017—areas especially prone to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement—the agency found that 15 of them had severe gaps between the skills agencies needed and the skills they had on board."[145] The lack of high-performing staff leads to mission failures, furthering the civil service's reputation as an ineffective organization staffed with under-performing employees.

3.   Politicization

Despite the research that layoffs do not improve performance and the reports that clearly show federal agencies need more high-quality staff, political pressures to reduce the government's size lead to additional staffing challenges. The public divides along party-lines regarding the government's optimal size; Republicans desire a smaller civil

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[141] Merit Systems Protection Board, 3.

[142] Kettl et al., *No Time to Wait*, 5.

[143] Kettl et al., 5.

[144] Currie, *2017 Hurricanes and Wildfires*.

[145] Kettl et al., *No Time to Wait*, 14; J. Christopher Mihm, *Progress on Many High-Risk Areas, While Substantial Efforts Needed on Others*, High-Risk Series, GAO-17-317 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2017), https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/682765.pdf.

service, and Democrats prefer the opposite.[146] As such, Republican administrations seek budget cuts, and even more recently, in 2017 the Executive Office of President Donald J. Trump issued a hiring freeze, preventing agencies from addressing staffing shortfalls.[147] Additionally, President Trump stated that there would be a "long-term plan to reduce the size of the Federal Government's workforce."[148] The federal workforce's politicization and vacant positions have tremendous consequences for its ability to achieve its mission.[149] Adjusting staffing levels for political ends is not new. For example, President George W. Bush left vacant positions in the Environmental Protection Agency and the Bureau of Labor to appeal to the partisan belief that the private sector can police itself and believes that regulation stifles competition and efficiency.[150] The systematic approach to reduce government is not accidental but negatively affects the civil service as an employer. Despite the overwhelming evidence that agencies require more, high-quality personnel to achieve results, the politicization of the overall government's size leads to counterproductive measures, like hiring freezes.

Politicization undermines the civil service's effectiveness. With political appointees cycling in and out of federal agencies, the vision often changes, making it difficult to operate.[151] One of the findings of the Commission was that "disparaging characterizations of public servants...demoralize [s] those who currently serve and undermine [s] the ability to recruit future public servants."[152] Another author writes that politicians often blame bureaucrats to shift attention away from themselves when

[146] Pew Research Center, "Little Public Support for Reductions in Federal Spending."

[147] Mick Mulvaney, "Comprehensive Plan for Reforming the Federal Government and Reducing the Federal Civilian Workforce" (memorandum M-17-22, Washington, DC: Executive Office of the President, 2017), https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/memoranda/2017/M-17-22.pdf.

[148] Mulvaney, 1.

[149] Lewis, *The Fifth Risk*.

[150] Lewis.

[151] Lewis.

[152] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, 12.

government actions are unpopular.[153] Popular opinion reflects political influences. For example, data from a Gallup poll show that FEMA and DHS appear to draw approval along partisan lines among some federal agencies.[154] Still, it is impossible to recruit people under the promise of serving a particular assignment if that mission is shifting and changing with political appointments.

B.   HIRING AND RECRUITMENT

The civil service's many dysfunctions, as identified in the previous section, may be helped by recruiting and hiring high-performing people at all levels of government. However, current procedures present a significant barrier for hiring recent college graduates and other young people, compounding the problems above. In many ways, the civil service has failed to adapt to current trends that attract job-seekers. For example, young adults may be unsure about long-term career goals and are open to numerous possibilities.[155] However, the civil service is "designed to sustain thirty-year careers with one way in" and "one way out."[156] The civil service relies on an abundance of committed candidates who are knowledgeable about the federal application process and are tolerant of hiring delays.[157] This section will identify regulatory barriers as they pertain to recent college graduates seeking entry-level government positions.

[153] John J. Dilulio, "Against Federal 'Leviathan by Proxy' and for a Bigger, Better Full-Time Federal Workforce: Public Administration Review," *Public Administration Review* 76, no. 4 (July 2016): 537, https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12598.

[154] Lydia Saad, "Postal Service Still Americans' Favorite Federal Agency," Gallup, May 13, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/257510/postal-service-americans-favorite-federal-agency.aspx.

[155] Alanna Gillis, "Identity Exploration or Labor Market Reaction: Social Class Differences in College Student Participation in Peace Corps, Teach For America, and Other Service Programs," *Qualitative Sociology* 42, no. 4 (December 2019): 615–38, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-09433-z; Ertas, "Turnover Intentions and Work Motivations of Millennial Employees in Federal Service"; and Costanza et al., "Generational Differences in Work-Related Attitudes."

[156] Light, *The New Public Service*, 1.

[157] Light, 1.

1.   Career Pathways

The OPM's primary initiative is the Pathways Program, which includes the Internship Program, the Recent Graduates Program, and the Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF) Program. The GAO provides a summary of the Pathways Program:

> The federal government's Pathways Programs, which consist of the Internship Program, the Recent Graduates Program, and the Presidential Management Fellows Program, were designed to promote employment opportunities for students and recent graduates by providing distinct paths to federal internships and potential careers in government. The Internship Program provides paid opportunities for students (high school, vocational, technical, undergraduate, and graduate) to work in agencies and explore federal careers while still in school. Students who successfully complete academic and program requirements may be eligible for non-competitive conversion to a term or permanent civil service position.[158]

Agencies manage Pathways individually, but in 2016 there were only 64 agencies that participated in Pathways.[159] The OPM found that under the Pathways Program, the average age for hired interns was 25, the average age for recent graduates was 32, and for PMFs was 31.[160] The OPM also found that "agencies are not relying on the Pathways Programs to fill Government-wide mission-critical occupations (MCOs) to a significant degree," and there are concerns about leadership pipelines and "succession planning efforts."[161] The OPM also found that agencies were improperly administering the PMF program by failing to post vacancies to the PMF finalists' OPM platform.[162]

The OPM conducted one special report evaluating the Pathways Program's effectiveness, and it appears as though there is no continuous process for measuring and

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[158] Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Talent Management*, 8–9.

[159] It is unclear how many federal agencies exist, there are likely between 137 and 443 agencies. Office of Personnel Management, *The Pathways Programs*, 7; and Clyde Wayne Crews, Jr., "How Many Federal Agencies Exist? We Can't Drain the Swamp Until We Know," *Forbes*, July 5, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/waynecrews/2017/07/05/how-many-federal-agencies-exist-we-cant-drain-the-swamp-until-we-know/.

[160] It is worth mentioning that there currently is no requirement for federal internships to be paid opportunities. Office of Personnel Management, *The Pathways Programs*, 16.

[161] Office of Personnel Management, 18.

[162] Office of Personnel Management, 20.

evaluating its implementation. The report also found that most agencies were unaware of the program's requirements, resulting in a diminished experience for participants. For example, the appointed Pathways Program participants say that their agencies did not provide adequate mentoring and development in general. The OPM wrote that despite the requirement "to assign mentors to all Recent Graduate and PMF hires...assignment of mentors varies greatly," and nearly half of program participants reported either not having a mentor or "not sure."[163] The OPM found that agencies have failed to properly implement the Pathways Program due to agency hiring managers reporting inadequate training.[164] The OPM also found that agencies were not always completing the Pathways Program's reporting requirements, and they recommended "developing tracking tools to aid in monitoring."[165] There is only one defined pathway for college graduates to enter the civil service in entry-level positions, and it is unclear how effectively agencies are using this method.

The federal government also sponsors various national service programs, some of them in partnership with federal agencies. Some of the national service programs have fast-track hiring processes with partner agencies. One example, FEMA Corps, is a national service program created to engage young professionals in emergency management and achieving cost savings for taxpayers.[166] The program was intended for FEMA Corps Members to replace intermittent employees at a lower cost.[167] Though FEMA Corps is also advertised as a "fast-track" to government service, it is generally known as "low-

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[163] Office of Personnel Management, 23.

[164] Office of Personnel Management, 24.

[165] Office of Personnel Management, 26.

[166] Michael Widomski, "Announcing the Creation of FEMA Corps," *Federal Emergency Management Agency* (blog), March 13, 2012, https://www.dhs.gov/blog/2012/03/14/announcing-creation-fema-corps.

[167] Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Fact Sheet: Innovating Cost-Saving Partnership to Strengthen Disaster Response and Expand Opportunities for Young People" (Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency, March 13, 2012), https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1826-25045-2512/nccc_fema_partnership_fact_sheet.pdf.

wage" work.[168] FEMA Corps participants can expect to earn $4,000 for 10–12 months of service.[169]

2.   Underinvestment

For recent college graduates, the government takes a passive approach to recruitment and typically relies on candidates finding positions through USAJobs, rather than aggressive recruitment of the most qualified. An example of a passive recruitment strategy sends recruiters to "seasonal career fairs" or hosts information sessions.[170] In an evaluation of the Pathways Program, the OPM found that "close to half of the PPOs interviewed stated their agencies do not conduct recruitment and outreach activities due to the influx of applicants through USA Jobs postings. Hiring managers also cited budget constraints as a reason for not conducting such activities."[171] The OPM further wrote that "relying solely on USA Jobs postings" may not be the best approach to attracting the best candidates.[172] Without using aggressive tactics through colleges and universities, the federal government is disadvantaged in the competition with the private and non-profit organizations that actively woo the students for post-graduation job opportunities.

Agencies face budget limitations, which partially account for taking the passive approach instead of an aggressive recruitment model. Ongoing partnerships with hundreds of universities would require significant staffing and financial resources to sustain. Agencies that participated in the Pathways program cited budget concerns to justify reliance on USA Jobs as a recruitment method.[173] The GAO acknowledged the need for

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[168] Max Rivlin-Nadler, "The Young, Low-Wage, Temporary Disaster Relief Army," *The Nation*, September 25, 2013, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/young-low-wage-temporary-disaster-relief-army/.

[169] "NCCC Benefits," AmeriCorps, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/americorps-programs/americorps-nccc/nccc-benefits.

[170] Partnership for Public Service, *California's Talent Gap: Recruiting and Hiring a New Generation of Federal Employees* (Washington, DC: Partnership for Public Service, 2019), 7, https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Californias-Talent-Gap-2.pdf.

[171] Office of Personnel Management, *The Pathways Programs*, 7.

[172] Office of Personnel Management, 12.

[173] Office of Personnel Management, 12.

federal agencies to recruit on college campuses more actively and to build brand awareness and "noted the importance of active campus recruiting that goes beyond infrequent outreach to college campuses...[a]ctive campus recruiting includes developing long-term institutional relationships with faculty."[174] Though the OPM recognizes active engagement effectiveness and the current lack of activities among federal agencies, the OPM falls short of recommending investing resources in talent recruitment. In response, the OPM issued the recommendation to "[e]xplore low-cost or cost-neutral outreach activities."[175] Despite recognizing that the civil service appears either unwilling or unable to invest funding for the need to shift away from passive recruitment methods.

The federal government pays employees at all levels less than the private sector does. Though the Merit System Principles state that pay should be commensurate with equivalent positions in the private sector, the data from 2018 salaries supports that all levels of federal jobs pay less than the private sector.[176] The impact of non-competitive pay is that highly-skilled candidates will have a financial incentive to choose private sector careers over the civil service, undermining recruitment.

Though the pay is not necessarily the most important motivator for attracting talent (as opposed to meaningful work), unpaid or extremely low-paid opportunities deter highly-skilled candidates from considering the civil service. The Pathways Program and national service programs offer paid and unpaid positions. In a two-year study conducted from 2017 - 2019 by The National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (hereafter "The Commission"), the researchers "repeatedly heard from both program managers and participants that the low stipend amount discourages those who aspire to pursue national service opportunities and hinders those without outside assistance from participating."[177] Because some federal agencies can appoint volunteer, unpaid, interns, those without an

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[174] Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Key Talent Management*, 25.

[175] Office of Personnel Management, *The Pathways Programs*, 13.

[176] Federal Salary Council, "Level of Comparability Payments for January 2020 and Other Matters Pertaining to the Locality Pay Program," Memorandum (Washington, DC: Federal Salary Council), accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/general-schedule/federal-salary-council/recommendation18.pdf.

[177] Office of Personnel Management, *The Pathways Programs*, 45.

existing stable income are disadvantaged, which may prevent highly-skilled students from participating.[178] The Commission recommends that the federal government pay all interns to "expand the socioeconomic diversity" of the workforce while also increasing "competitiveness with the private sector."[179] The government is primarily offering low-paid or unpaid opportunities to recent college graduates, which does not attract the best people, but rather only the most financially-secure people.

Though the GAO contends that the federal workforce is not always competitive with the private sector in terms of pay, agencies may expand upon other flexible benefits to draw in talent.[180] The GAO recommends non-pay-related services based on the argument that some people are motivated by other extrinsic factors.[181] For example, the interviewed employees stated that they were interested in wellness incentives, flexible work arrangements, and "paid parental leave."[182] Through research, the data means that the GAO contends benefits and flexibility may be a motivator for its workforce and, therefore, in attracting talent.

3. USA Jobs

The federal hiring system standardizes job descriptions, language, resume requirements, hiring authorities, and selection criteria. Standardized job descriptions and language are vague to the layman, and those with prior federal experience or connections have an advantage. Job-seekers rely on clear information, and the Commission found in its research that position descriptions were "unintelligible."[183] In the report, the Commission provided one specific example from the U.S. Digital Service:

> We did an analysis of what an application looked like for a software engineer in the private sector at a major company versus USAJOBS. The former was a paragraph long, stated the mission, and had an easy apply

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[178] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, 75.

[179] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, 75.

[180] Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Talent Management*, 1.

[181] Goldenkoff, 10.

[182] Goldenkoff, 10.

[183] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, 68.

button. The USAJOBS [posting] was seven pages long, and the description of what the job was, was three-quarters of the way down the page.

—Eddie Hartwig, U.S. Digital Service[184]

Because the federal hiring system uses inexpensive methods to sort applications, candidates who are unaware of the inner-workings face a disadvantage and possible rejection. The system automatically rejects applications that do not follow its required format:

For each work experience you list, make sure you include:
- Start and end dates (including the month and year).
- The number of hours you worked per week.
- The level and amount of experience–for instance, whether you served as a project manager or a team member helps to illustrate your level of expertise.
- Examples of relevant experiences and accomplishments that prove you can perform the tasks at the level required for the job, as stated in the job announcement. Your experience needs to address every required qualification.[185]

Even the most interested candidates may be disqualified because the civil service "review systems...emphasize the presence of specific keywords rather than [conduct] a holistic assessment of an applicant's qualifications."[186] While it is common practice for employers who receive large volumes of applications to use similar methods, there is still a likelihood for quality applicants to be erroneously rejected by algorithms.[187] Ultimately, the civil service loses out on talent by using oversimplified application-sorting methods rather than taking a "holistic" approach to review candidate qualifications.

The volume of unqualified applications overwhelms the system, and the best possible methods for evaluating candidates are cost-prohibitive. Agencies are relying on

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[184] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, 68.

[185] "What Should I Include in My Federal Resume?," Official, USAJobs, accessed October 9, 2020, https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/faq/application/documents/resume/what-to-include/.

[186] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, 68.

[187] Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016).

questionnaires to parse out applicants. Still, the candidates' ratings are not "rigorously validated," and supervisors are reporting that they consistently have difficulty "getting a pool of quality candidates."[188] Before USA Jobs, the hiring process included a narrative section, which gave human resources personnel better insights about candidates.[189] The civil service intended to speed up the hiring process by using questionnaires, but cost-effective "automation" undermines quality.[190] Policy-makers attempted to solve one problem, marginally reduced the wait-time for applicants, but created another.

Data support the government's slow hiring process and its inability to provide instant updates to candidates as incompatible with 21st-century requirements. On average, applicants can expect to wait over three months to start their jobs after applying for a federal government position.[191] In 2018, the OPM issued a memorandum highlighting the importance of "keeping applicants informed throughout the hiring process."[192] Since the OPM began tracking data, there have been slight improvements, but the current wait time is still long.[193] Through their two-year research study, the Commission found that the impact on potential candidates was significant, and the "long wait period results in many top candidates accepting other job offers."[194] Even for applicants who are willing to wait, or at least know to expect the wait-time, there are inaccurate updates on their applications'

[188] Merit Systems Protection Board, *Addressing Misconduct in the Federal Civil Service: Management Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Merit Systems Protection Board, 2016), 4, https://www.mspb.gov/MSPBSEARCH/viewdocs.aspx?docnumber=1363799&version=1369157&application=ACROBAT.

[189] Merit Systems Protection Board, *Improving Federal Hiring through Better Assessment* (Washington, DC: Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 2018), 5, https://www.mspb.gov/MSPBSEARCH/viewdocs.aspx?docnumber=1534415&version=1540061&application=ACROBAT.

[190] Merit Systems Protection Board, 19.

[191] "OPM Issues Updated Time-to-Hire Guidance," U.S. Office of Personnel Management, February 25, 2020, https://www.opm.gov/news/releases/2020/02/opm-issues-updated-time-to-hire-guidance/.

[192] Mark D. Reinhold, "Keeping Applicants Informed throughout the Federal Hiring Process" (memorandum, Washington, DC: Office of Personnel Management, 2018), 1, https://chcoc.gov/content/keeping-applicants-informed-throughout-federal-hiring-process.

[193] Office of Personnel Management, "OPM Issues Updated Time-to-Hire Guidance."

[194] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, 68.

status, which can be a source of frustration with the process.[195] The slow processing times and the lack of updated information throughout the process can be a deterrent for highly-skilled candidates, or at least non-competitive with other job prospects who are faster and more reliable.[196]

C.   MISSION AND PURPOSE

Overall, the concept of "public service" is no longer specific to the government.[197] Increasingly, private sector and non-profit organizations are competing with the government for various missions that serve the public and the talent that drives them.[198] For example, Lockheed Martin administers city and county welfare-to-work services through nonprofits like Catholic Charities. Lockheed Martin employs "former government and nonprofit executives who are moving to the big paychecks, leaving a deforested public sector in their wake."[199] Organizational dysfunction, and resulting government mission failures, have left a gap in services for private and non-profit organizations to fill. But government is recruiting as if it is still the only avenue for meaningful work opportunities. The result is that the civil service does not resonate with the public, nor with young people writ large.

1.   Public Engagement

Public service has a negative reputation in many ways, especially as an employer. Even negative views of non-employment-related matters undermine the once-held cachet of civil service. For example, public trust in government has eroded over time, reaching historic lows recently. Of the people surveyed in the Pew Research study, only 17 percent of respondents thought the government does what's right "always or most of the time."[200]

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[195] Reinhold, "Keeping Applicants Informed throughout the Federal Hiring Process."

[196] Reinhold.

[197] Hill, "Public Service and the Federal Government."

[198] Light, *The New Public Service*.

[199] Light, 7.

[200] Pew Research Center, *Public Trust in Government: 1958–2019* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/04/11/public-trust-in-government-1958-2019/.

In the competition for talent, those who desire to work for an organization that has a positive impact on society may not consider government service.

The reputation of the civil service has declined since World War II, reaching "historic lows" in the past year.[201] The federal government as an employer, in relation to the national workforce as a whole, has shrunk significantly over the past 50 years in relation to per capita growth.[202] In 1932, researchers started exploring the concept of occupational prestige; one study surveyed 7,000 people in 11 different cities and found that 72 percent of respondents thought that federal jobs had a "high" or "very high" level of prestige.[203] But by 1955, as Lowell H. Hattery notes, the value of public service declined, which negatively affected its ability to attract talent:

> [T]he level to which federal employment prestige has dropped indicates a critical condition that will have an increasingly deleterious effect on the quality of federal administration. We have sufficient research data to move fully into planning both short- and long-range action programs to improve the federal employment position. In the effort to achieve more effective government through improvement in the employment situation it is important to attract more high-quality applicants for federal employment, to reduce the turnover rate, and to improve the general desirability of federal service which is, of course, inextricably related to employment and turnover.[204]

One counterexample to the government worker's lack of prestige is the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Former astronaut Kathy Sullivan remarked that most people were knowledgeable and interested in her work at NASA, and especially "loved" astronauts.[205] Sullivan says that NASA's prestige is no accident. Its public relations approach not only allowed NASA "to tell its story to the world," but the

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[201] "Public Trust in Government Near Historic Lows," Pew Research Center, September 24, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/chart/public-trust-in-government-near-historic-lows/.

[202] Hill, "Public Service and the Federal Government"; and Partnership for Public Service, "Federal Workforce."

[203] Leonard D. White, "The Prestige Value of Public Employment," *American Political Science Review* 26, no. 5 (October 1932): 910–14, https://doi.org/10.2307/1947144.

[204] Hattery, "The Prestige of Federal Employment."

[205] Lewis, *The Fifth Risk*, 193.

federal government recognized the importance of public trust to its mission.[206] Other federal agencies, in contrast, do not have heroic astronauts or any comparable marketing. Where no other story exists, conditions are ripe for routine government disparagement.

The public's confidence in government has been on the decline since the late 1950s, around the same time that Hattery published his findings that government was losing its occupational prestige.[207] Six years later, President Kennedy called upon American youth to serve the nation, and the world, and created the Peace Corps to achieve that end.[208] The Peace Corps quickly grew to a force of 15,000 volunteers by 1966, becoming emblematic of a nation in which most Americans were motivated to serve.[209] The burst of inspiration during the Kennedy administration was short-lived, as social movements grew against the Vietnam War and Jim Crow laws, which reflected the eroding "public's confidence in the country's institutions and in the people running them."[210]

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[206] Lewis, 193–94.

[207] Pew Research Center, *Trust and Distrust in America* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. U.S. Politics & Policy, 2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/07/22/how-americans-see-problems-of-trust/; Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, "The Decline of Confidence in American Institutions," *Political Science Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (1983): 379, https://doi.org/10.2307/2150494; and Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, "The Confidence Gap during the Reagan Years, 1981–1987," *Political Science Quarterly* 102, no. 1 (1987): 1, https://doi.org/10.2307/2151482.

[208] "History," Peace Corps, accessed October 6, 2020, https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/history/.

[209] "President Kennedy Establishes the Peace Corps," This Day in History, February 27, 2020, https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/peace-corps-established.

[210] Lipset and Schneider, "The Decline of Confidence in American Institutions," 380.

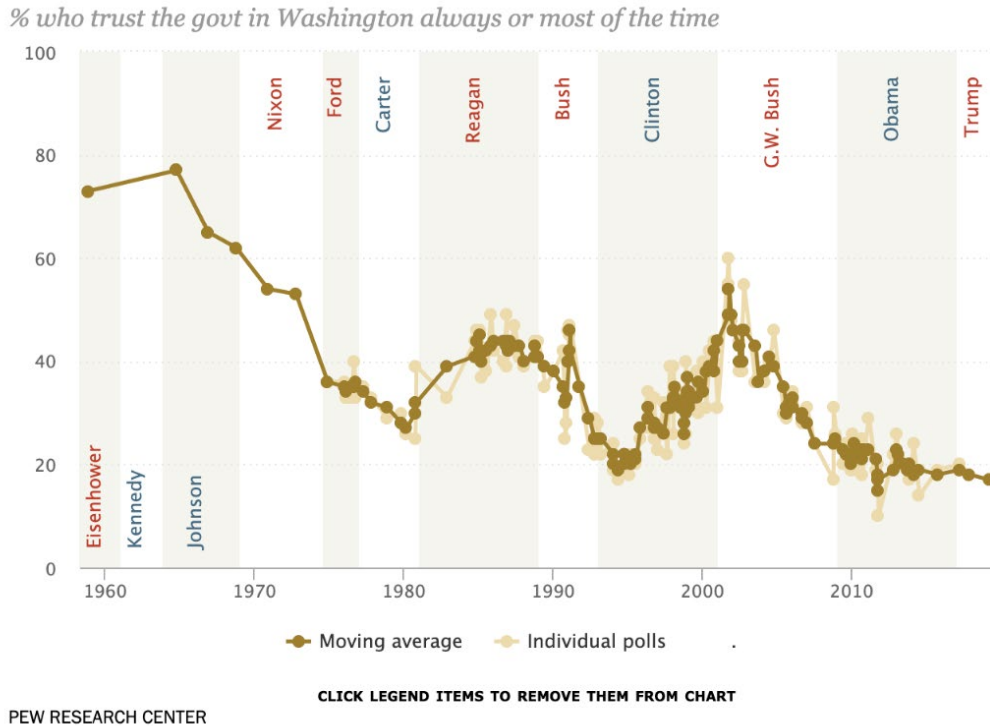% who trust the govt in Washington always or most of the time

Figure 1.　Trust in Government Poll.[211]

The reputation of government may be measured in public trust, which fluctuates, but has been on a downward trend for some time, reaching a historic low in 2019.[212] Data from multiple polling and research companies support the assertion that public trust in government has declined since the 1960s.[213]

2.　Competing with the Private and Non-profit Sectors

The decline in public perception results in the government's inability to attract young people to its workforce. For starters, some young people are civically disengaged and are unaware of government service opportunities. Though Millennials view

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[211] Source: Pew Research Center, *Public Trust in Government*.

[212] Pew Research Center, "Public Trust in Government Near Historic Lows."

[213] Lipset and Schneider, "The Decline of Confidence in American Institutions"; Lipset and Schneider, "The Confidence Gap during the Reagan Years, 1981–1987"; Pew Research Center, *Public Trust in Government*; Gallup, Inc., "Government"; and Sean Illing, "Why so Many People Who Need the Government Hate It," *Vox*, August 17, 2018, https://www.vox.com/2018/8/17/17675100/suzanne-mettler-government-citizen-disconnect-welfare.

government work as a potential opportunity to help people and do meaningful work, they do not equate public service with government service.[214] Young Americans are prefer non-profit and private organizations that have a public service-like mission over government work.[215] Even college graduates from public administration programs are shying away from government, which prompted one author to say "if government is having trouble recruiting and holding students who have made public service the centerpiece of their graduate training, imagine the difficulties elsewhere in the recruiting process."[216]

Recent college graduates and other young people are generally unaware of government functions and possible career pathways in the civil service. In contrast to President Kennedy calling upon then-young Americans to serve, one author found in a survey that Millennials were simply "not asked."[217] Additionally, the Commission found that a significant factor in declining public service participation was "a lack of awareness."[218]

The federal government's challenges with personnel management are visible to job-seekers, and make government careers less appealing. Public service and government service are not synonymous, which means service-motivated young adults have other options besides government. As Paul C. Light put it, "[w]hen young Americans are asked to picture themselves in public service careers, particularly at the federal level, they picture themselves in dead-end jobs where seniority, not performance, rules."[219] He also added that "Government is not even winning the battle among young people who have already made the decision to spend their careers serving the public--those battles are being won by

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[214] Hart, *Calling Young People to Government Service*, 3.

[215] Ertas, "Millennials and Volunteering"; Hart, *Calling Young People to Government Service*; Light, *The New Public Service*.

[216] Light, *The New Public Service*, 14.

[217] Hart, *Calling Young People to Government Service*, 7.

[218] National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, 61.

[219] Light, *The New Public Service*, 2.

private firms and non-profit agencies"[220] In the next section, this thesis will evaluate one of those non-profit agencies winning the battle for talent.

D.   CONCLUSION

The policies and procedures that guide federal hiring, selection, and performance evaluation result in public perception problems. The civil service system troubles have persisted despite the passage of the Civil Service Reform Act in 1978. The MSPB conducted a review of the goals outlined in the CSRA and found that in 2018, "we hear many of the same complaints heard then: it is too hard to fire Federal employees; it takes too long to hire; Government cannot attract the best people; employees are paid for longevity rather than performance; managers do not effectively manage the workforce; whistleblowers are punished for reporting waste, fraud, and abuse; and so forth."[221] All of these complaints about the formal organization of the civil service undermine its reputation with the public, and some directly affect the process by which potential job-seekers choose federal employment or not.

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[220] Light, 3.

[221] Merit Systems Protection Board, *Issues of Merit*, 2.

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III. TEACH FOR AMERICA

Founded in 1990, Teach For America (TFA) recruits candidates from universities to serve the nation by teaching in underserved K-12 schools for two years. After completion, TFA participants, known as "Corps Members," may remain in the field of education, seek careers in the public or private sectors, or yet pursue post-graduate education. Wendy Kopp, the TFA founder, envisioned a teacher corps that would draw top-performing college graduates by "surrounding it with an aura of status and selectivity."[222] Because TFA only accepts top applicants into its program, its alumni network has grown into "a very exclusive club," consisting only of "the best of the best."[223] At its peak in 2013, TFA received over 57,000 applications from recent college graduates, which were all Millennials. Recruiting teachers to teach in rural or low-income schools is a national challenge, considering that teaching positions in under-resourced schools are typically hard to fill, even by people who aspire to be educators. Each step in TFA's recruitment process is driven by measuring results and adapting as necessary. Continuous improvement, especially in regards to identifying and selecting the best candidates, is vital to TFA's success in recruiting young adults. The assertions of this section are as follows: (1) TFA's marketing and branding showcase its mission and purpose for recruitment; (2) continuous performance measurement informs the organization of its best participants; (3) aggressive recruitment practices target TFA's desired candidates; and (4) TFA fosters a network of future career prospects for its participants. This chapter discusses how TFA appeals to recent college graduates by engaging with the public, and creating an organizational culture around excellence. The layout of this chapter is ordered: (1) overview of TFA's cachet; (2) summary of its mission and public engagement; (3) description of its hiring and performance systems; and (4) its recruitment of young adults.

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[222] Kopp, *One Day, All Children …*, 8.

[223] David Labaree, "Teach For America and Teacher Ed: Heads They Win, Tails We Lose," *Journal of Teacher Education* 61, no. 1–2 (January 2010): 1, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347317.

A.   CACHET

TFA provides an opportunity for its participants to "do good" and "do well." Traditionalists might think that one has to choose between the two propositions and cannot have both. That notion led to research exploring if, and to what extent, job-seekers will accept reduced pay in exchange for meaningful work.[224] The idea that one does or ought to personally sacrifice to serve in a mission-driven setting is not new. In 2004, Sandra Day O'Connor said, "[o]urs is a Nation built on pride in sacrifice and commitment to shared values--on a willingness of our citizens to give of their time and energy for the good of the whole."[225] Shortly after O'Connor's speech, the *Economist* published a piece that asserts job-seekers faced this proposition between "doing well" and "doing good" and called it "the same tired old clichés."[226] TFA goes against the cliché, offering an opportunity to serve the nation without sacrificing additional opportunities to do well.

Whether doing good and doing well is a viable proposition may be a generational point of contention, one in which previous generations accept that service accompanies "major personal sacrifice," and younger generations do not. The generational conflict over values likely contributes to the unappealing reputation of unpaid volunteer national service, which used to have cachet when volunteerism was not as costly.

Instead of forcing applicants to choose between elite companies or graduate programs and national service, TFA partners with competing organizations to connect participants with future opportunities. In other words, TFA participants can do both national service and another, lucrative opportunity afterwards. Without TFA's partnerships and promises for future opportunities, non-traditional teaching jobs, which are low-paid,

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[224] Jing Hu and Jacob B. Hirsh, "Accepting Lower Salaries for Meaningful Work," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (September 2017): 1–10, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01649; Shawn Achor et al., "9 Out of 10 People Are Willing to Earn Less Money to Do More-Meaningful Work," *Harvard Business Review*, November 6, 2018, https://hbr.org/2018/11/9-out-of-10-people-are-willing-to-earn-less-money-to-do-more-meaningful-work; and Tammy Erickson, "Meaning Is the New Money," *Harvard Business Review*, March 23, 2011, https://hbr.org/2011/03/challenging-our-deeply-held-as.

[225] Sandra Day O'Connor, "Text of Sandra Day O'Connor's Commencement Address (2004)," Stanford News, June 13, 2004, http://news.stanford.edu/news/2004/june16/oconnor-text-616.html.

[226] Schumpeter, "The Cult of the Faceless Boss," *The Economist*, November 12, 2009, https://www.economist.com/business/2009/11/12/the-cult-of-the-faceless-boss.

are certainly not competitive with elite corporations. Therefore, TFA's appeal to service-oriented graduates who had not considered a career in education is distinct. TFA created a program that enabled participants to make an "immediate, catalytic impact" in their two-year term and effect "systemic change to ensure educational equity" in the long-term.[227] TFA connects its members "to nonteaching career ladders."[228] Knowing the value of the social connections and its reputation, TFA widely touts its alumni network, highlighting its high-profile alumni as leaders in government or prestigious private sector companies.[229] By increasing access, reducing costs, and offering a robust social network attracts participation.

Employers that have a strong reputation and a culture of high-performance are most attractive to Millennials. Using insights from market research about Millennials, TFA learned the importance of having a strong reputation, which was useful to its outreach strategy.[230] In an online survey of 4,364 Millennials conducted by Opinium Research in 2011, the study found that "reputation matter [ed]" to college graduates considering career prospects.[231] Millennials were interested both in the organization's reputation as making a positive impact and employing "the best and brightest people."[232]

Rather than making assumptions about its reputation and standing among top-performing college students, TFA partnered with consulting firms to conduct market research and adjust their strategy. Massive investment in recruitment, market research, branding, awareness campaigns, materials, interview questions, hiring process, selection criteria, on-campus recruiters, and performance measurement leads to improved targeting. It is improved messaging focused on four basic understandings: "Though the problem of educational inequality was enormous and grave, it was solvable; the TFA mission was

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[227] Donna Foote, *Relentless Pursuit: A Year in the Trenches with Teach For America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 194.

[228] Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well," 10.

[229] Teach for America, "Life as an Alum."

[230] Pfau, "What Do Millennials Really Want at Work?"

[231] PwC, *Millennials at Work: Reshaping the Workplace* (San Francisco: PwC, 2011), https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/Documents/millennials-at-work.pdf.

[232] PwC, 10.

working; each recruit had the potential to make a real difference, and the experience would enable corps members to develop leadership qualities that would lead to a lifetime of impact and meaning."[233]

The cachet that comes with TFA is also a source of its controversy. TFA participants are seen mainly as individuals with privileged backgrounds who attended elite universities.[234] There is a backlash against the notion that select (mostly white) college students from elite universities can and should teach underprivileged (predominantly minority) kids in low-income communities.[235] The premise of that argument is that the benefit is mainly to the Corps Members, at the expense of the students who suffer the negative impacts of high teacher turnover.[236] David F. Labaree, professor at the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University, says that traditional teaching programs are unable to compete with TFA for top talent, who are primarily attracted to the short-term nature of TFA and its connections to elite opportunities:

> Teach for America (TFA) is a marvel at marketing, offering elite college students a win-win option: by becoming corps members, they can do good and do well at the same time. Teacher education (TE) programs are in a hopeless position in trying to compete with TFA for prospective students. They cannot provide students with the opportunity to do well, because they can offer none of the exclusiveness and cachet that comes from being accepted as a TFA corps member. TE has always offered students the chance to do good, but this prospect is less entrancing when they realize that TFA's escape clause allows graduates to do good without major personal sacrifice. More than that, it promises to be a great career booster that will

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[233] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 277.

[234] Rolf Straubhaar and Michael Gottfried, "Who Joins Teach For America and Why? Insights into the 'Typical' Recruit in an Urban School District," *Education and Urban Society* 48, no. 7 (September 2016): 627–49, https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124514541463.

[235] Emma Brown, "Teach For America Retools Efforts to Recruit Graduates from Top Colleges," *Washington Post*, May 31, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/teach-for-america-retools-efforts-to-recruit-graduates-from-top-colleges/2016/05/31/c07bfba4-1d14-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html.

[236] Mariah Dickinson, "The Teach For America Story from a Voice of Dissent," in *The Poverty and Education Reader: A Call for Equity in Many Voices*, ed. Paul Gorski and Julie Landsman (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2013).

pay off handsomely in future income and prestige. In short, the competition between TFA and TE is a case of "heads they win, tails we lose."[237]

B.   MISSION AND PURPOSE

TFA's mission is to make excellent education accessible to all children.[238] Founder Wendy Kopp was troubled by inequity in the American education system and believed that motivated young adults might share her passion.[239] Teacher shortages combined with lack of resources make schools in some communities difficult to staff, undermining student achievement.[240] TFA's purpose is to expand access to education by recruiting highly-motivated college graduates without any prior teaching education or experience required. Applicants are service-oriented and therefore drawn to the mission of TFA. Consistent with the research cited above, people are motivated by meaningful work. In one research study, the authors found that a primary motivation for joining TFA was the opportunity to "give back."[241] The college graduates who apply to TFA are typically "idealistic, intelligent, well-organized, dedicated and ambitious" and are committed to TFA's mission.[242]

TFA's alternative pathway to teaching without credentials provided a national service solution to teacher shortages. Difficulty in staffing schools is a condition of the American education system and not necessarily a national service problem. Still, TFA provided a pathway by bypassing traditional credentialing processes in the field of education.[243] The need for quality teachers is particularly urgent for low-income

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[237] Labaree, "Teach for America and Teacher Ed."

[238] "Teach For America Tackles the Challenge of Educational Inequity," Teach for America, accessed September 20, 2020, https://www.teachforamerica.org/what-we-do/the-challenge.

[239] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*

[240] Emma García and Elaine Weiss, *The Teacher Shortage Is Real, Large and Growing, and Worse Than We Thought* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2019), https://files.epi.org/pdf/163651.pdf.

[241] Straubhaar and Gottfried, "Who Joins Teach for America and Why?"

[242] Straubhaar and Gottfried, 22.

[243] Depending on the school placement, some schools may require that TFA participants acquire teaching licenses or certifications during its assignment, however teaching credentials are not perquisites for joining TFA as a Corps Member. For example, TFA participants have faced increasing regulations overtime and nonetheless remains just as popular. In 2003, New York adopted a new requirement for TFA Corps Members to work towards their credential while teaching, and thus by the end of their service-term, the TFA teachers will have taken some of the same coursework as traditional-route teachers. Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well," 12.

communities.[244] Teachers describe their work as stressful, disappointing, or even hostile, which researchers say deters people from the profession.[245] Authors who are critical of the traditional teacher credentialing process argue that education-based curricula and certification are "expensive and time-consuming" and thus "unappealing."[246] An alternate route to the classroom, such as the national service model employed by TFA, without the time and money investment on behalf of the college student, is most appealing to high-performers who would not otherwise consider teaching.[247]

Instead of a background in education, TFA Corps Members undergo five to eight weeks of intensive instruction over the summer before starting their positions in the fall. Participating school districts partner with TFA to hire Corps Members as full-time teachers for their service duration.[248] Summer Institute, combined with in-service development, forms the formal training institution of TFA that makes the national service program possible: preparing teachers for the classroom in a condensed time with ongoing support and professional coaching.[249] Institute is rigorous and known by all corps members as a challenging experience.[250] Anyone can apply regardless of their undergraduate degree or teaching background because of the onboarding and training structure.

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[244] Emma García and Elaine Weiss, *Challenging Working Environments ('School Climates'), Especially in High-Poverty Schools, Play a Role in the Teacher Shortage* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2019), 1, https://files.epi.org/pdf/162910.pdf.

[245] García and Weiss, 7.

[246] Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well"; Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, *The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them: A Manifesto* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999), https://fordhaminstitute.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/teachergrogg7.pdf; and Frederick M. Hess, "Tear Down This Wall: The Case for a Radical Overhaul of Teacher Certification," *Educational Horizons* 80, no. 4 (2002): 169–83, www.jstor.org/stable/42927125.

[247] Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, *The Teachers We Need*.

[248] There are no prerequisites for teaching to be accepted into TFA, however each state has different regulations for what must happen prior to a participant's first day in the classroom. All states require some form of an interim credential for a TFA Corps Member's first year. All states require that TFA participants undergo testing and the rigor varies by state. The testing and credential requirements are no different than other non-traditional teaching pathways.

[249] Margaret Raymond, Stephen H. Fletcher, and Javier Luque, *Teach For America: An Evaluation of Teacher Differences and Student Outcomes in Houston, Texas* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2001), https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4959/b8578ee62bcd9f1b6b78edde0bb01fad9cb1.pdf.

[250] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 3.

1.   Controversy

People have "deeply divisive" opinions about TFA. Journalists, academic researchers, education practitioners, and alumni are outspoken in favor of and opposition to TFA's model.[251] The arguments range from the skepticism of inexperienced teachers, evidence of lower student test scores, high turnover rates, privatization of schools, and the exploitation of minority students to benefit white, privileged TFA teachers.[252] Critics and advocates come from all backgrounds. In an *Atlantic* article, one TFA Alum wrote that TFA "had not prepared [them] adequately."[253] Another Alum, who started an award-winning education company, said that his TFA experience instilled in him a critical thinking mindset for life.[254] Each discussion is publicized by mainstream news sources, possibly affecting public attitudes about TFA and its reputation.

TFA's decision to recruit participants with no background or education in the teaching profession drew criticism from those who believe extensive instruction and certifications are necessary.[255] In 2006, academic Linda Darling-Hammond published her first report about TFA's ineffectiveness in the classrooms, explicitly noting that students with TFA teachers had lower reading scores than those with credentialed teachers.[256] Other researchers responded to Darling-Hammond with counter-evidence and questioned

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[251] School principals, parents, and students have positive views of TFA, but that is not relevant to recruitment. Sara Mead, Chuong Carolyn, and Goodson Caroline, *Exponential Growth, Unexpected Challenges: How Teach For America Grew in Scale and Impact* (Boston: Bellwether Education Partners, 2015), https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwther_TFA_Growth.pdf.

[252] Linda Darling-Hammond et al., "Does Teacher Preparation Matter? Evidence about Teacher Certification, Teach For America, and Teacher Effectiveness.," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 13, no. 42 (October 12, 2005): 1–51, https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v13n42.2005; Olivia Blanchard, "I Quit Teach for America," *The Atlantic*, September 23, 2013, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/09/i-quit-teach-for-america/279724/; Dickinson, "The Teach For America Story from a Voice of Dissent"; and Susan Moore Johnson, Sarah E. Birkeland, and Heather G. Peske, *A Difficult Balance: Incentives and Quality Control in Alternative Certification Programs*, Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2005).

[253] Blanchard, "I Quit Teach for America."

[254] TFA Editorial Team, "Alumni Spotlight: Colin Seale," *TFA* (blog), February 13, 2017, https://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/alumni-spotlight-colin-seale.

[255] Darling-Hammond et al., "Does Teacher Preparation Matter?"

[256] Darling-Hammond et al.

her research methods.[257] Some studies showed that TFA teachers' students scored higher than traditional teachers.[258] Others yet denounce systems that measure teacher effectiveness and the notion of credentials.[259] Ultimately the results are conflicting.[260] The debate over student test scores appeared to have little impact on recruitment but perhaps fueled additional controversy.

Some alumni and other external stakeholders raised social justice concerns and proclaimed that TFA's model had contributed to the inequities in education it claims to solve.[261] Authors often point out that TFA Corps Members are predominantly white and socio-economically privileged, which may reflect top universities and colleges and criticize its lack of diversity.[262] The implications of white, privileged elites teaching in underserved schools of predominantly minority students were not useful.[263] Corps Members, alumni, and prospective applicants raised concerns that the cachet of TFA membership had become a "pervasive sense of superiority."[264] One alum said that TFA pushed a plan to privatize public schools, ridden with "bad teachers and bureaucracy."[265] TFA hit recruitment struggles around this time, and the number of applications dropped 35

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[257] Donald Boyd et al., "How Changes in Entry Requirements Alter the Teacher Workforce and Affect Student Achievement," *Education Finance and Policy* 1, no. 2 (March 2006): 176–216, https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp.2006.1.2.176.

[258] Paul T. Decker, Daniel P. Mayer, and Steven Glazerman, *The Effects of Teach For America on Students: Findings from a National Evaluation* (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2004), 48, https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/publications/the-effects-of-teach-for-america-on-students-findings-from-a-national-evaluation.

[259] Dale Ballou, "Do Public Schools Hire the Best Applicants?," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 111, no. 1 (February 1996): 97–133, https://doi.org/10.2307/2946659; and Chester E. Finn Jr., "Getting Better Teachers--and Treating Them Right," in *Primer on America's Schools*, ed. Terry M. Moe, 486 (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2001), 348.

[260] Johnson, Birkeland, and Peske, *A Difficult Balance*.

[261] Brown, "Teach For America Retools Efforts to Recruit Graduates from Top Colleges."

[262] Straubhaar and Gottfried, "Who Joins Teach for America and Why?"

[263] Mariah Dickinson, "Teach For America: A Voice of Dissent," *Rethinking Schools*, accessed September 19, 2020, http://rethinkingschools.org/articles/teach-for-america-a-voice-of-dissent/; Blanchard, "I Quit Teach for America"; and Goldstein, "Teach For America's Next Act."

[264] Dickinson, "The Teach For America Story from a Voice of Dissent," 35.

[265] Eric Westervelt and Anya Kamenetz, "Teach For America at 25: With Maturity, New Pressure to Change," *National Public Radio*, December 1, 2014, https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2014/12/01/366343324/teach-for-america-at-25-with-maturity-new-pressure-to-change.

percent over three years.[266] The percentage of people of color who applied had also dropped nearly 10 percent to add insult to injury.[267] TFA followed-up with high-potential candidates who did not apply and found that "negative criticism of Teach for America influenced nearly 70 percent of these candidates' decisions."[268]

2.   Public Engagement

TFA responded to its critics, as well as to its recruitment data, by deliberately adjusting its mission and messaging. TFA wanted to come across as humble and inclusive instead of as superior. For example, TFA changed its core values in 2015, specifically to "confront issues of race, class, bias, and privilege."[269] Under-resourced communities saw TFA as an outside organization and were concerned that its program benefitted the Corps Members more than the students. TFA's new approach focused on relationships, especially with community-based organizations and minority leaders.[270] Though TFA had previously taken a passive approach to criticism from Darling-Hammond, it created a Public Affairs and Engagement Team that focused on any "misinformation or attacks that demand a quick response."[271] TFA shifted its mission and messaging to reflect humility and highlight the whole-community effort.

In part, recruitment success depends on TFA's ability to demonstrate its positive societal impact as central to the organization's mission. Through research, TFA learned that there are different "type [s] of altruists," and they were only attracting some of them, but losing others who thought they would best make a social impact "through law school

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[266] Admittedly, there is a caveat to using application data to evaluate whether undergraduate's perceptions of TFA factored into their decision to apply. College graduate applications to TFA, and other national service programs, coincide with labor market conditions. Applications rose during the 2008 Recession, and fell as the economy improved. Brown, "Teach For America Retools Efforts to Recruit Graduates from Top Colleges."

[267] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*, 141.

[268] Mead, Carolyn, and Caroline, *Exponential Growth, Unexpected Challenges*, 66.

[269] Mead, Carolyn, and Caroline, 63.

[270] Mead, Carolyn, and Caroline, 69.

[271] Mead, Carolyn, and Caroline, 68.

or some other postgraduate study program."[272] The Monitor Group conducted market research to understand target candidates' perceptions of TFA, and some found it "a grassrootsy, do-gooder organization," but TFA wanted to shift its branding to appear "smart, serious, and purposeful" and to "articulate the power of the TFA experience."[273] TFA needed to demonstrate that the experience of teaching in under-resourced schools "would make them better agents of change."[274] Additionally, TFA showcases its high-profile alumni as evidence of TFA Corps Members who made a long-term impact or became leaders in all professions after their service term. Social justice is. specially highlighted on their website, which tells prospective applicants "[i]f you want to shape and develop powerful social justice movements...Teach For America can help you pursue a social impact career and expand opportunities for marginalized communities in the classroom and beyond."[275] Millennials believe that individuals can make an impact, and TFA made the case that Corps Members could expect additional mission-oriented opportunities beyond the classroom through participation in its program.

C. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

TFA built an organizational culture that focuses on measuring results and discipline, thereby creating a set of conditions ripe for successful recruitment.[276] Evaluation and continual data collection inform the internal goals and strategy of the organization. By "setting up systems for accountability and continuous improvement," TFA refines its processes from public engagement, recruitment, selection, training, development, and performance management. One example is how TFA learned its highest-

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[272] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 194.

[273] Foote, 194.

[274] Foote, 194.

[275] Alexzandria Cormier-Hill, "3 Reasons Social Justice Advocates Join Teach For America," Teach For America, January 9, 2020, https://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/3-reasons-social-justice-advocates-join-teach-for-america.

[276] Jim Collins, *Good to Great* and *Built to Last* author, influenced Kopp. In his research about great companies, Collins found that successful organizations shared a characteristic that he deemed the "culture of discipline." Bryant, "Charisma?"; Collins, *Good to Great*.

performing Corps Members' qualities and how to recruit more of them.[277] TFA's research revealed that its top performers did have common characteristics, which TFA has continually measured and adjusted over time. Specifically, TFA looks for candidates who demonstrate "persistence, commitment, integrity, flexibility, oral communication skills, enthusiasm, sensitivity, independence and assertiveness, ability to work within an organization, possession of self-evaluative skills, ability to operate without student approval, and conceptual ability/intellect."[278] Performance evaluation creates data, which in turn informs the recruitment, selection, and training processes. TFA continually measures results in every facet of its organization.

TFA conducts constant performance evaluations and adjusts its desired results based on independent research, internal investigations, and external partners' guidance. Merely having a low acceptance rate for applicants is not by itself a good measure of recruitment success. Hiring decisions are made and then evaluated to test whether the selection criteria yielded the desired result--selecting candidates who would perform well using TFA's standards. Other organizations may have similar low acceptance rates based on many applications for few positions. Still, if they have the wrong selection criteria and no feedback process to test results, they will not succeed as TFA has. Take, for example, companies that use the software program Workforce Ready HR, which primarily serves as a means to "exclude as many people as possible as cheaply as possible" and is not designed to identify the best candidates who will be successful in their work.[279] Companies who use cheap and simple algorithms to eliminate a majority of applicants without testing whether rejected applicants went on to perform well elsewhere are missing out on top talent. Though, for those who are hiring for low-wage, short-term positions, perhaps this approach is sufficient. For TFA baked the continuous feedback process into its model, which validates its selective reputation of an organization built and run by elite college graduates.

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[277] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*, 176.

[278] Kopp, 35.

[279] O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction*, 109.

Hiring is a process for using information about an individual's past performance as a predictive measurement for how they will perform in a new position, which is a challenge for any organization.[280] Passive approaches pick the best among the applicants or find ways to eliminate as many candidates as possible cheaply. TFA's earlier passive approach worked well enough for its small cohort of 500 Corps Members. Still, they looked to improve that model by adopting a targeted approach, armed with insight and data about its best Corps Members, rather than using proxies to predict applicants' potential to succeed. TFA entered into contracts with consulting and market research firms that collected the data about prospective students who were considering TFA or other possible post-graduation pathways and helped TFA change its marketing materials over time.[281] TFA used independent survey results, which measured school principals' ratings of Corps Members and found numerous success indicators. Some examples were "openness to feedback...creating a classroom environment conducive to learning, and working with other faculty and administrators."[282] TFA also leveraged its relationships with colleges and universities to identify individuals who fit the profile based on its predictions. Using independent survey results and on-site college representatives, they could gain insight into the best performing Corps Members, identify shared characteristics, and use the conclusions to predict future applicants' performance potential. TFA continuously gathered feedback, measured, and adjusted its strategies.

1.   Selecting Candidates

TFA's priority was to establish rigorous selection criteria for its Corps Members. In its first year, with no brand recognition or experience, TFA managed to attract enough applications to meet two goals: onboarding an inaugural class of 500 Corps Members and only selecting the top 20 percent of applicants.[283] Today, the interview and selection

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[280] Ronald Dorman, "Shoot the Horse and Build a Better Barn Door: Exploring the Potential for a Superforecasting Methodology to Strengthen the DHS Leadership Selection Process" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), xi, https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=821440.

[281] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*, 151, 287.

[282] Kopp, 151.

[283] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*

process is known to college students as arduous, and there are preparatory courses, books, and consultant services for students who strive to become Corps Members.[284] Candidates know to expect a multi-stop application process including "an online application; a phone interview; presentation of a lesson plan; a personal interview; a written test; and a monitored group discussion with several other applicants."[285] Kopp said organizations prioritize the selection process "because they know that the surest way to meet their goals is to have great people at every level."[286] The level of competition among applicants is evidence of TFA's selective reputation, which is reflective of the organization's priorities.

TFA started with a high standard for its applicants but maintained the same level of selectivity as the organization grew and expanded. After a few years, TFA leadership wanted to expand to service more schools across the nation and employ more Corps Members. Still, to maintain its selectivity, the organization focused its efforts on recruiting applicants and waited to hit its target application numbers before expanding its Corps Member classes' size.[287] Not only did TFA maintain its existing standards, but they raised the bar, thereby increasing the competition for its Corps Member positions. For example, the earliest applicants could expect a 20 percent chance of being accepted into TFA. By 2005, with TFA receiving 17,000 applications, the competition was even more robust, with an 11 percent acceptance rate.[288] Selectivity is a critical component of a recruitment feedback loop, in which the more selective a position, the more sought-after it becomes.[289]

TFA Corps Members stand out as top talent among their peers. With high test scores and top grades, TFA's program participants are mostly recent college graduates with a strong academic background and campus leadership experience.[290] In 2010, universities

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[284] Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well."

[285] Michael Winerip, "A Chosen Few Are Teaching for America," *New York Times*, July 11, 2010, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/12/education/12winerip.html.

[286] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*, 76.

[287] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 201.

[288] Foote, 197.

[289] Foote, 202.

[290] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*, 149; and Straubhaar and Gottfried, "Who Joins Teach for America and Why?"

including Yale, Dartmouth, Duke, Georgetown, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported that "TFA hired more seniors than any other employer."[291] That year, 18 percent (293 people) of the graduating class at Harvard applied, but TFA admitted only 38 of them.[292] Of the rejected candidates that year, most were student leaders, one became a Fulbright scholar, and another "settle [d]" for law school at the University of Virginia.[293]

2. Measuring Results

TFA's performance measurement is also continuous in numerous ways. That continuity is a critical component of TFA's results-driven culture. For example, one of TFA's operating principles is "constant learning."[294] While some organizations barely provide semi-annual reviews, TFA is so performance-driven that feedback is a part of the culture and not a twice-a-year event. Staff and Corps Members alike "were constantly evaluated. The idea was to retain the highest number of top performers and the lowest number of nonperformers."[295] Donna Foote, who spent a year documenting TFA's inner workings, likened it to a Fortune 500 company. She witnessed TFA "[u]sing frameworks and rubrics, it set goals, made action plans, got feedback, collected and analyzed data, and held itself accountable for the results."[296] TFA adapts and refines its methods, which drives performance and communicates to staff and Corps Members whether they achieve results.

TFA clearly defines a pathway to success for its Corps Members and its staff by setting goals and measuring results. With performance being central to TFA's organizational culture, its workforce is motivated by challenge and achievement. Kopp wrote that "by focusing on goals rather than processes...we would turn them loose to meet

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[291] Winerip, "A Chosen Few Are Teaching for America."

[292] Tania deLuzuriaga, "Teach For America Taps Talent," *Harvard Gazette*, August 4, 2010, sec. Campus & Community, In the Community, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/08/teach-for-america-taps-talent/.

[293] University of Virginia typically ranks in the top ten law schools in the United States. Winerip, "A Chosen Few Are Teaching for America."

[294] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 188.

[295] Foote, 202.

[296] Foote, 193.

defined outcomes."[297] If TFA does not meet a goal, leaders challenge the staff and Corps Members to identify the causes and adjust and deliver results.[298] Low-performers find themselves out of place and leave the organization either by choice or by firing. Foote wrote that "[f]or the underperforming, it was not a comfortable place to work. Many of them self-selected out; others were pointed toward the door or dismissed."[299] The organization does not invest its resources in making low-performers into high-performers. Though challenging and rigorous, TFA's staff and Corps Members clearly understand what will make them successful in their positions.

TFA leadership granted Corps Members the liberty to choose how to achieve results and provide many success methods. Education is not a monolith, and there are numerous methods for teaching and student engagement. Rather than focusing on one strategy, TFA hopes that Corps Members will find an approach that fits their style and best achieves results. According to Kopp, "[t]o help them meet the measures, we developed a new curriculum that provided corps members with more of a road map for success instead of simply exposing them to a variety of strategies for instruction, classroom management, and the like."[300] A Corps Member's experience at TFA has elements of challenge and creative liberty guided through specific measurements of success.

3.   Salary

Accessibility is advanced in two ways: no experience necessary, and schools pay a living wage. TFA, unlike other teaching and national service programs, lowers the cost for participants, thereby increasing access.[301] Some researchers call TFA's approach "deregulation of entry," or more simply removing barriers to access, making it easier for

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[297] Kopp, *One Day, All Children …*, 113–14.

[298] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 189.

[299] Foote, 202.

[300] Kopp, *One Day, All Children …*, 140.

[301] Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well," 10.

young people to join a public service program.[302] TFA increases access by designing their program as a short-term commitment, guaranteeing an entry-level salary and benefits, and providing the training necessary to enter the teaching profession.

Through its partnership with AmeriCorps, TFA is a national service program, but it is not a volunteer program. TFA Corps Members are hired by a school district after its training at Summer Institute and are paid an entry-level teacher's salary throughout the term of its service. Corps Members can expect to earn between $33,000 and $58,000 instead of a strict volunteer basis, which is a characteristic of other CNCS-affiliated programs like AmeriCorps or Peace Corps.[303] The participants can also be granted other benefits like paid time off and health care coverage participation, depending on the school that hires them. The full-time salary is a unique TFA characteristic, as no other national service program (that I found) offers/guarantees Corps Members a paid full-time position for two years.[304]

TFA had its sharpest increase in applications as the economy recessed, and job market conditions became unfavorable for entry-level job seekers. Millennials graduated from college during the 2008 economic recession and faced a competitive job market. One researcher surveyed college students considering national service programs and found compelling evidence that labor market conditions and workplace values were the primary factors.[305] Another survey of Corps Members (as opposed to prospective applicants) revealed that participants were motivated by the mission and planned to "work in a more lucrative, more highly esteemed career track" after completing their service.[306] A third

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[302] Johnson, Birkeland, and Peske, *A Difficult Balance*; Edward Liu, Susan Moore Johnson, and Heather G. Peske, "New Teachers and the Massachusetts Signing Bonus: The Limits of Inducements," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 26, no. 3 (September 2004): 217–36, https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737026003217; Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Mary Kim Fries, "Sticks, Stones, and Ideology: The Discourse of Reform in Teacher Education," *Educational Researcher* 30, no. 8 (November 2001): 3–15, https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X030008003.

[303] "Salary & Benefits," Teach For America, accessed September 7, 2020, https://www.teachforamerica.org/life-in-the-corps/salary-and-benefits.

[304] Some CNCS-affiliated Youth Corps are local or state grant funded and may earn an hourly wage on a seasonal basis, but those positions are still distinct from TFA's full-time, salaried positions.

[305] Gillis, "Identity Exploration or Labor Market Reaction."

[306] Straubhaar and Gottfried, "Who Joins Teach for America and Why?," 22.

researcher characterizes TFA as a program that "provides its members time to think about future career trajectories while earning a teacher's salary."[307] TFA increases national service program access to those without financial backing from family or other means.

D.   RECRUITMENT

Because TFA designed its recruitment strategy around its target recruits and supported its assumptions about them using research-produced data, TFA was mostly successful in attracting the right people to apply, and therefore join as Corps Members. As discussed above, TFA built a profile of its ideal candidate and "built a recruiting framework around" the insights they learned.[308] That model focused on "brand awareness, knowledge of the issue and TFA's mission, and the considerations that were barriers to joining the program."[309] Using the same continual improvement process as it did with Corps Member performance, TFA adjusted its approach as necessary to attract its ideal candidates.

1.   Investment

TFA invested in recruitment after its initial low-budget approach was not yielding results. Initially, TFA took a traditional, passive approach to recruitment, which included marketing, a small college campus presence, and selecting the best of the applications. Its applications reached a historic low.[310] According to Kopp, TFA was losing out on quality candidates due to "underinvesting in recruitment."[311] TFA then shifted--it increased the budget and employed a targeted recruitment approach. Recruiters were aggressively wooing specific individuals with the assistance of alumni and college representatives.[312] TFA made more massive financial investments in digital recruitment with a new website, professional videography, and a well-designed national public advertising campaign.[313]

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[307] Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well," 12.

[308] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 278.

[309] Foote, 278.

[310] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*, 141.

[311] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 193.

[312] Foote, 193.

[313] Kopp, *One Day, All Children ...*, 142.

TFA grew its footprint across college campuses, with the support of regional offices and a robust support network. Recruiters collaborated with college representatives, administrators, and faculty, leveraging connections through TFA's vast network of Corps Members and alumni to message the TFA experience on campus.[314] After four years of the aggressive recruitment approach, applications had more than doubled despite the increasingly competitive labor market conditions.[315]

2. Generations

Building selection criteria off of performance measurement, TFA seamlessly adjusted to the evolving generations, whether intentionally or not. The first year that TFA recruited top college graduates was in 1989, and those graduates were members of Generation X. It was not until 1999 that TFA started to recruit Millennials. Some would argue that there are already Corps Members who belong to Gen Z. The explosion of applications happened in the first five years of Millennials graduating from college, and "as it turned out, TFA was an almost perfect fit with the millennium zeitgeist."[316] The continued growth and interest among college graduates as the applicants transitioned from Generation X to Millennials suggest that TFA resonated well with more than one generation as a viable postgraduate opportunity.

By recognizing that the organization needed to adapt to evolving target recruit and applying the feedback loop of "build-measure-learn," TFA evaded challenges that come with new generations entering the workforce--challenges that the public sector has suffered.[317] TFA's extensive research revealed "important differences between the first generation of TFAers, Generation X, and the Millennials."[318] Galileo market research revealed that Millennials were motivated by challenging work, social impact, and personal

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[314] Kopp, 142.

[315] Kopp, 143.

[316] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 195.

[317] Eric Ries, *The Lean Startup: How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses* (New York: Crown Business, 2011), 8.

[318] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 195.

growth opportunities. Millennials were concerned about the opportunity costs of serving, TFA's effectiveness, and financial barriers to service.[319] Other research provided insight about Millennials' motives to make an "impact by doing meaningful work immediately," and also its belief "in the power of the individual to make a difference in society."[320] TFA researched 21st-century workplace motivations and used its findings to build its new recruitment model.

Naturally, as Millennials graduated amid a digital revolution, TFA increased its online presence and technological capabilities to market its program, target recruits, and apply for positions. TFA did not stop at the recruitment and application steps. They also increased their technological capabilities to support Corps Members throughout their service-term: "TFA increasingly turned to its website—not only for marketing but eventually for online training and teacher development, too. As it studied the cohort, it adjusted its marketing and recruitment strategies."[321] In 2020, TFA conducted its Summer Institute entirely online.[322] Americans are increasingly using online sources for information, and their use of print media has been declining.[323] TFA increased its technological capabilities because digital platforms are more engaging to younger generations. Adaptation improved ease of access both for targeted recruitment and for completing the application and on-boarding process.

3.   Term Limits

Limiting TFA's program to a two-year commitment is highly attractive to prospective college graduates who may want to do national service or try teaching but do not want to invest time and resources that may have a high opportunity cost. As established earlier, most people would not go through an arduous credentialing process to become

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[319] Foote, 277.

[320] Foote, 196.

[321] Foote, 196.

[322] I know this second-hand, will find a citation

[323] Elisa Shearer, "Social Media Outpaces Print Newspapers in the U.S. as a News Source," *Fact Tank* (blog), December 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/.

teachers knowing they would later switch careers.[324] Several authors have conducted interviews of TFA prospective applicants and found that "delayed career choice" was a common theme among the responses. One survey found that students considered national service programs as a backup and resume-builder for future career aspirations or graduate school.[325] Some researchers support the idea that the short-term service term through TFA is an attractive choice for college students who want to "explore teaching" while considering other long-term career options.[326] Yet another found that most participants viewed "TFA as an interim period before embarking on their long-term career aspirations in which they can support themselves while doing something interesting and rewarding, rather than as an entry point into the teaching profession."[327] Young adults considering different career options are unlikely to commit resources and time to a specific career or program, making TFA's short-term approach a better recruitment point.

Though some mainstream news media claimed that Millennials were job-hoppers and unlikely to remain in a career long-term, the myth has been debunked and corrected to show that career hesitation is tied to life-stage instead. Young adults, in general, are likely to be career hesitant, not just Millennials. Some theories claim that Millennials will change careers multiple times.[328] Others argue that job-hopping is related to relative positions in life-cycle and is not tied to generational cohorts.[329] Regardless of why some expected Millennials to be disloyal, TFA "aligned with college graduates' shifting career visions" and was successful in that respect.[330] The short-term nature of TFA's program is critical

[324] Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, *The Teachers We Need*; and Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well."

[325] Gillis, "Identity Exploration or Labor Market Reaction," 623.

[326] Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well"; Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky, "The Case Against Teacher Certification," *Public Interest*, no. 132 (1998): 17–29.

[327] Straubhaar and Gottfried, "Who Joins Teach for America and Why?," 7.

[328] Adkins, "Millennials"; and Jeanne Meister, "The Future of Work: Job Hopping Is the 'New Normal' for Millennials," *Forbes*, August 14, 2012, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2012/08/14/the-future-of-work-job-hopping-is-the-new-normal-for-millennials/.

[329] IBM Institute for Business Value, *Myths, Exaggerations and Uncomfortable Truths: The Real Story Behind Millennials in the Workplace* (Somers, NY: IBM Corporation, 2015), https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/report/millennialworkplace/#.

[330] Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well," 12.

for its success because it understands that young adults will continue to be long-term career avoidant.

4. Career Prospects

TFA leveraged its alumni network as a nexus to an array of professions and organizations.[331] The social connections are a critical component of its recruitment success. TFA markets itself as a springboard to other career prospects and argues that their service term in the classroom will help prospective applicants achieve long-term career goals.[332] Research that supports this notion contends that the benefits of social connections are a primary factor in applicants' motivations to join TFA.[333] Researcher Adam Maier refers to TFA's social network as a high-value credential that can be exchanged for future opportunities.[334] For graduates, TFA is an attractive option because participants "can easily exchange its credential for well-paid jobs or acceptance to top graduate schools."[335] TFA follows through on the credential promise by establishing robust partnerships. For example, Goldman Sachs, the elite banking institution that pays its employees handsomely, will automatically hire TFA participants upon program completion.[336] While it is no easy feat gaining exclusive membership into TFA's network, doing so guarantees future career prospects in any field.

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[331] Kopp, *One Day, All Children …*, 183.

[332] Foote, *Relentless Pursuit*, 194.

[333] Adam Maier and Peter Youngs, "Teacher Preparation Programs— and Teacher Labor Markets: How Social Capital May Help Explain Teachers' Career Choices," *Journal of Teacher Education* 60, no. 4 (September 2009): 393–407, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109341149; and Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well."

[334] Maier, "Doing Good and Doing Well."

[335] Maier, 11.

[336] Goldstein, "Teach For America's Next Act."

E.   CONCLUSION

TFA built an organizational culture that focuses on measuring results and discipline, thereby creating a ripe set of conditions for successful recruitment.[337] That culture makes TFA appealing for high-performing recent college graduates. By "setting up systems for accountability and continuous improvement," TFA refined its approach to public engagement, selection, performance management, recruitment, and development.[338] TFA's system informs the organization of its target candidates' preferences and motivations: mission, short-term service, long-term career prospects, and modest entry-level pay. TFA built its program based on those preferences and markets itself effectively. All of these components of TFA's model bolster its cachet, and some directly result in its success with recruiting young adults.

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[337] Jim Collins, *Good to Great* and *Built to Last* author, influenced Kopp. In his research about great companies, Collins found that successful organizations shared a characteristic that he deemed the "culture of discipline." Bryant, "Charisma?"; Collins, *Good to Great*.

[338] Kopp, *One Day, All Children …*, 176.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

A. INTRODUCTION

Characterizing the success of TFA as easily replicable would be a policy mistake, but the case study revealed themes that might be applicable to FEMA. Government leaders interested in recruiting young adults on an ongoing basis may consider certain components of TFA's model, and the recommendations in the section that follows. This thesis concludes with apparent themes from the research, recommendations for FEMA, a summary of findings, and suggestions for further research.

B. THEMES

The themes identified in this section were constant throughout the literature. Each theme is a component of TFA's model, and they contribute most directly to its recruitment success. The themes were chosen for their applicability to the civil service, and FEMA.

1. Measuring Results

Organizations measure and manage performance in different ways, some better than others. In extreme cases, leaders pay little or no attention to their employees' performance and they lack data to make decisions with any clarity or strategy. The civil service has little use for its performance management data, which overinflates employee success. Though OPM reports that 99% of civil service employees rated "fully successful" or better, first-line supervisors indicated they had employees who did not meet that standard.[339] The qualitative data and the quantitative data are telling different stories. When performance management systems fail to yield precise data, leaders are uninformed about critical decisions like selection and hiring, training needs, or even programmatic success. Leaders need accurate data to cultivate their best employees or programs or to pivot when results are suboptimal. Most of all, to improve the quality of employees is to select the right people in the first place. But who are the right candidates? Data will inform

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[339] Goldenkoff, *Federal Workforce: Distribution of Performance*, 6; Merit Systems Protection Board, *Remedying Unacceptable Employee Performance*, 2.

that decision. Knowing who performs best in the agency, or in a particular position within the agency, would be most useful to inform selection criteria.

Measuring results must inform every component, process, method, and decision. Establishing a measured process for talent recruitment is particularly important. TFA's model is one example of using a measured approach to identify and persuade individuals to choose its two-year service program instead of other opportunities. Meanwhile, the federal government continues to use suboptimal selection criteria which likely eliminates highly qualified candidates. With a measured process, federal recruitment personnel will know whether the system is eliminating desirable candidates or whether such candidates applied in the first place. Any component of the federal recruitment and hiring process may be hindering recruitment success, but can only be accurately identified by evaluating each part individually.

2.   Adapting to the 21st Century

The civil service is bound by the Federal Merit System, which will continue to hinder departments' and agencies' innovation efforts. Only Congress can change the regulations that dictate recruitment, selection, salary, and performance. However, departments and agencies can mitigate the negative consequences of the system. For example, the Federal Merit System grants agencies with a range of hiring authorities, and some are more flexible than others. If FEMA identifies entry-level positions for recent college graduates and other young people, the agency can post appropriately-typed positions that leverage the most flexible hiring authorities.

Young adults' growing disinterest in government employment will persist if government continues its passive, lackluster recruitment approach. Adopting aggressive recruitment practices similar to TFA's would have marginally improved results, even if leaders cannot solve other areas of government dysfunction. For example, the difficulty of applying through USA Jobs can be surmounted through one-on-one recruitment tactics. If recruiters can dedicate time to assist interested candidates with the convoluted and attenuated USA Jobs application process, they will be more likely be interviewed and ultimately selected. An individualized process requires significant resources. When TFA

decided to cut its recruitment budget, the quality of its applicants declined. Because TFA measures results, it reversed course and increased its recruitment budget.

Even though there are ways to circumvent the hiring process, the civil service still needs to fix that, too. It is another indicator that the government is behind and lives up to its reputation of being slow and red-taped. Furthermore, recruiters should spend time head-hunting targeted candidates and can do so more efficiently if they are not also spending time teaching applicants how to use and manipulate the USA Jobs process.

3. Public Engagement

Instilling public confidence in government institutions is directly linked to talent recruitment. How people view government affects whether they might consider employment. If hiring processing times and salaries were competitive with the other sectors, job-seekers might still perceive government work as the inferior option. The NASA example and the TFA case study show that public confidence in the mission can be equally as important as the mission itself. TFA is not without controversy, but it invests tremendous resources in its brand and its marketing approach. NASA is evidence that government agencies can make the same investment and attain public support and adoration.

Articulating mission and purpose is necessary to attract talent. Disaster relief missions is one responsibility of the federal government that might make a compelling story. NASA used the hero narrative to promote its mission and to showcase its astronauts. Perhaps FEMA can learn from this example. Where no other story exists, FEMA's mission failures dominate the agency's image.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recruitment is not a simple formula or a prescribed process. Whether or not a candidate selects an opportunity may depend on reputation, salary, mission, job-fit, growth potential, career versatility, organizational culture, or the hiring process. Certainly, a candidate's decision will depend on not one, but some unique combination of the above. Furthermore, the "best" candidate for one organization, or one position within that

organization, may not be the "best" candidate in a different place and context. Ultimately, TFA outperforms in recruitment not because it has the best playbook, but because it continuously tests its methods and updates its playbook based on new information. Therefore, this conclusion offers suggestions for how can FEMA can approach recruitment.

Build a system for continuous improvement by measuring results

- Establish desired results and measurable criteria for recruitment, selection, performance, and marketing. Continually measuring results is central to TFA's method, and a failure to gather feedback is present in all of the government's failed systems.

- Adopt aggressive recruitment tactics. With accurate performance data and improved selection criteria, the agency can target candidates and engage individually. FEMA should invest in campus recruitment teams who will build relationships with faculty and identify individuals who might perform well at FEMA. Though data and selection criteria may not be perfect predictors of a candidate's future performance, recruiting on an individual basis will yield more quality applications than passive recruitment. Stop setting up booths at job fairs, waiting for vaguely-interested passersby.

- The federal government must stop using low-cost methods for sorting candidates. Years of experience or prior military service are used as proxies to determine which applicants receive an interview, but this approach is untested, unchanging, and leads to suboptimal results. Establishing new selection criteria based on accurate performance data, not tenure, will yield better candidates.

- Give underrepresented groups influence over program design, especially where workforce diversity is concerned. If FEMA's stated objective is to recruit young adults, young adults ought to be leading that effort.

Gather data that informs the system

- Identify the best performers in the agency. The civil service's performance management system does not provide valuable insights, but it can supplement the existing process with additional evaluation. First-line supervisors can name outstanding employees, and there may be identifiable commonalities between them. Qualitative interviews with nominated high-performers may reveal patterns and provide insights. Information about the agency's current high-performers will inform targeted recruitment and selection efforts.

- Study target candidates' responses to FEMA's entry-level program offerings, marketing approaches, and hiring practices. Responses are data, and the agency should seek to understand the people it wishes to recruit.

Adjust course as necessary based on data and measured results

- FEMA should design entry-level positions to the needs and wants of its most-desired candidates. Leaders must stop making assumptions about job seeker's preferences and collect accurate information to inform program design. The agency must continuously collect data from target candidates who chose to apply or not to apply. To remain relevant in the 21st-century labor market, organizations need insight into job seekers' current motivations.

- Create an entry-level program that acts as a revolving door. Suppose the agency wants to substantially increase its recruitment of recent college and high school graduates. In that case, it should expect a continuous flow of new participants every summer after the school year. The agency needs to recruit, hire, and train at a pace that makes sense for people who may change jobs in two years.

- Government leaders must forget the notion that the thirty-year civil service career alone is desirable and attractive. Young people, especially, are

looking for meaningful work that may also propel them to other opportunities in the long-term. Agencies must create multiple pathways for entry and exit. Build a network of connections with universities, private companies, and non-profits to connect current employees to other future long-term opportunities.

- Cost savings cannot be the primary purpose of national service programs. Unpaid work shrinks the pool of potential candidates, limiting opportunities to those with financial stability, and excludes others who may demonstrate talent. Even modest salaries and benefits removes barriers to access for recent college graduates and other young people without other means of financial backing. Pay commensurate with other entry-level service opportunities is also more competitive with the private and non-profit sectors.

- Extend the service term for two years. The more extended training period prepares participants for their service. Increasing the service-term is better for both the agency and the participants provided that the position is paid.

- Change the name of FEMA Corps to something that clearly articulates its mission and purpose.

D.   SUMMARY

At the core of the federal government's personnel dysfunction is the inability to recruit and retain talent. The civil service lacks appeal, especially to young people, which limits the talent pool. In contrast, Teach For America's prestige among college graduates allows it to outperform other entry level service opportunities in recruitment. TFA's systems are responsive to its desired program outcomes and can quickly and effectively target optimal candidates. Conversely, the civil service's Federal Merit System is inflexible and leads to suboptimal results through poor selection or lack of response. TFA measures its staff performance and recruitment methodologies precisely, deeply, and in all aspects of their organization. Conversely, the federal system for recruiting, hiring, and measuring

its personnel is flawed and has been for decades. That system is devoid of a continual improvement process informed with precise data. Unmeasured systems are unlikely to achieve the best results; at best, they achieve suboptimal outcomes and at worst, total dysfunction.

The federal government's dysfunction undermines recruitment across the board. Though only Congress has authority to change the Federal Merit System, the civil service's subsidiary agencies have some ownership of dysfunctional systems and practices. Some of the previously identified issues may only be addressed by Congress members, either through behavioral changes or policy changes. The Commission on National Service, Kettl, Paul C. Light, and other authors referenced here have already made many recommendations for Congress, which have not been fully implemented. Some issues are solvable at the agency level, such as expanding a recruitment team and increasing college campus presence. To avoid repeating existing literature recommendations, this writer will conclude with advice specific to FEMA.

FEMA has demonstrated that recruiting young people is a priority by establishing a national service program to do just so. FEMA and TFA are ostensibly recruiting from the same talent pool of recent college graduates; TFA is much more successful. Assuming that overlap led to the research question: How can FEMA learn from the Teach for America model to improve its recruitment of qualified young people? The research resulting from that question identified fundamental flaws in the civil service that undermine its ability to recruit and retain talented and driven young adults. This thesis deconstructed TFA's model into components mirrored in the federal government, but which are superior in the former and dysfunctional in the latter. Though each organization selects and hires talent in admittedly different contexts, there are lessons from TFA's model that may apply to the federal government and FEMA.

Providing a clear pathway (or several) for young Americans to serve the nation is vital to a functioning public service sector and the beneficiaries of its programs. Programs that serve the public are not exclusively government-owned, and private and non-profit organizations also do work that serves the public. As such, job-seekers looking for meaningful work can, and do, seek employment opportunities outside of the government

sector. Young people especially turn to private and non-profit organizations, like TFA, that offer them the chance to make a difference. The civil service must be competitive in the 21st century to recruit talent and maintain a healthy workforce.

E. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This writer intended to do a comparative case study between TFA and FEMA but scaled back the research in the interest of time and due to the abundance of existing literature on the general civil service. FEMA data may become available through data requests or with obtained permission. Future researchers might evaluate FEMA's recruitment processes in detail, FEMA Corps and its temporary disaster reservist program in particular. State, local, territorial, and tribal emergency management offices nationwide may also be exemplary cases of successful recruitment. Universities that offer emergency management studies, certificates, and degrees may also have existing partnerships and pathways for recent college graduates to start their careers. Though TFA is a compelling case study for its prestige and popularity, there are limitations to its applicability in a different context. Further research evaluating other entry-level emergency management programs may inform leaders about recruiting recent college graduates and other young people.

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