



**Talent-*to*-
Industry
Exchange**

PUBLIC SECTOR

A Labor Analysis of Public Sector Occupations in Greater Kansas City

MID-AMERICA REGIONAL COUNCIL

APRIL 2021



This labor analysis was produced by the Mid-America Regional Council with support of the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City and KC Rising, a broad business and civic partnership working to strengthen the regional economy with focused attention on three economic drivers: trade, people and ideas. The report is an initiative of the Kansas City Government-to-University (G2U) Network, a partnership with the Volcker Alliance to build regional networks of governments and universities to address critical governance challenges.



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*Cover photos from 2017 and 2019 Public Sector Career Expos.
Photos taken by MARC staff.*



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What Is a TIE?

The Talent-to-Industry Exchange (TIE) concept was introduced by the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) in 2016 as a tool to gather real-time industry and labor market information and to inform strategies for growing the region's talent pool, strengthening the talent pipeline, and aligning employer and educational stakeholder interests. The concept was recommended by the KC Rising Pilot Project Task Force team and was adopted as the signature strategy in Year Two of KC Rising.

A TIE brings industry representatives and educators together to determine the labor skill needs of the industry and how educators can better help meet these needs. It begins with clarifying the industry of interest and then uses available databases to conduct a labor market analysis that describes the trends affecting the industry and the occupations that are in high demand. However, such databases typically tell only part of the story. Industry leaders and educators are then engaged through surveys and focus groups to validate, extend and refine the labor market analysis, with the goal of developing a shared understanding of needs and developing a plan to address them.

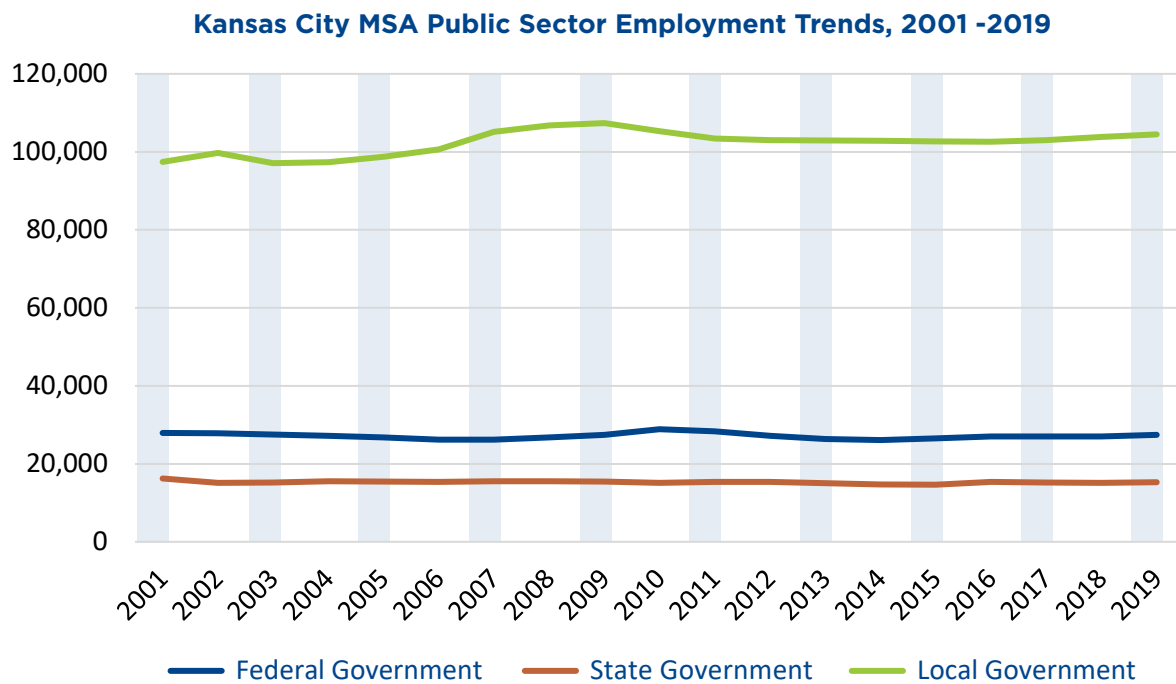
This TIE was undertaken as part of the Kansas City Government-to-University (G2U) initiative sponsored by MARC and the Volcker Alliance. The G2U initiative is an innovative approach to addressing identified critical governance challenges by building structured regional networks of governments and universities. G2U convenes public servants at all levels of government with leaders from proximate universities to strengthen the talent pipeline into public service and to promote productive research exchanges. G2U aims to catalyze a robust local marketplace that can sustainably connect government hiring and research needs with local university capacity.

This is the fifth TIE completed by MARC, following [Life Sciences, Global Design \(which covers the engineering, architecture and construction industries\)](#), [Skilled Trades and the Tech Sector](#). This TIE is different from prior studies. There were various resource limitations to this study, such as funding streams, access to data (explained later) and limited time to analyze the full scope of the public sector. A more manageable focus was identified early on. Typically, a significant portion of the analysis is devoted to examining the Kansas City region's competitive position in the industry relative to a set of benchmark metros determined by KC Rising—looking at relative employment concentrations, wages and growth rates. The public sector does not compete across metros for market share, as it primarily serves the local area. The competition between the private sector and public sector exists, but it is slightly different in this case as both sectors are continuously competing for talent rather than to provide a set of goods and services across multiple market areas, the U.S. and the world. Unfortunately, existing databases on occupations often do not separate occupational data by type of employer. Hence, this TIE relies more on survey data and focus groups to assess where demand is highest, which occupations are hardest to hire, and the degree to which the public sector is able to compete with the private sector for talent.

Additionally, the breadth of occupations available in the public sector posed analytical challenges. Virtually any job performed in the private sector is also performed in the public sector. A series of filters were applied to reduce the number of occupations to be analyzed to something analytically manageable.

THE PUBLIC SECTOR CHALLENGE

Employment growth has remained flat for the last 20 years, with little or no growth. In large part, this reflects the fact that resources available to provide public services have also been flat in real terms, that is, after adjusting for inflation. Combined, the lack of observable growth contributes to perceptions that there is little opportunity for advancement in a public sector career, making it difficult to attract and retain workers.



Source: Jobs EQ

At the same time, government workers are being asked to do more:

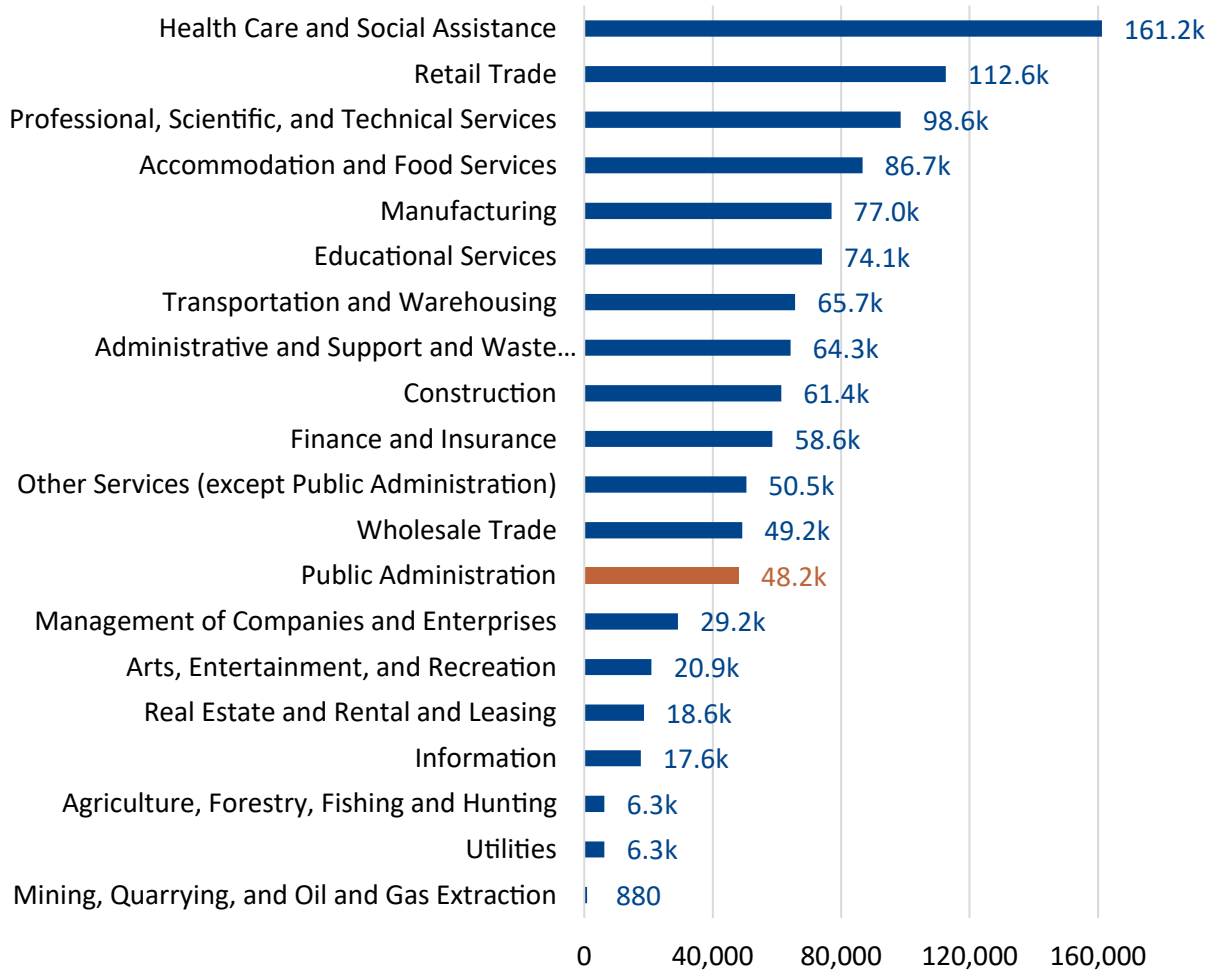
- Provide a wider array of public services with increasing quality and customer satisfaction.
- Perform more sophisticated tasks.
- Manage more complex projects.

The only way for the public workforce to satisfy these demands with limited resources is to become more productive. This puts a premium on continuously upgrading skills, which includes technical skills as well as improvements to project management and keeping subject area expertise current.

DEFINING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Employment is typically classified by industries, which are defined by the goods and services they produce, not whether the employer is public or private. In this scheme, health care, retail trade and professional services are the largest industries in the Kansas City economy. The public administration industry, which most closely corresponds to the notion of public sector employment in this standard industrial classification scheme, is a middle-sized industry about a third as large as health care.

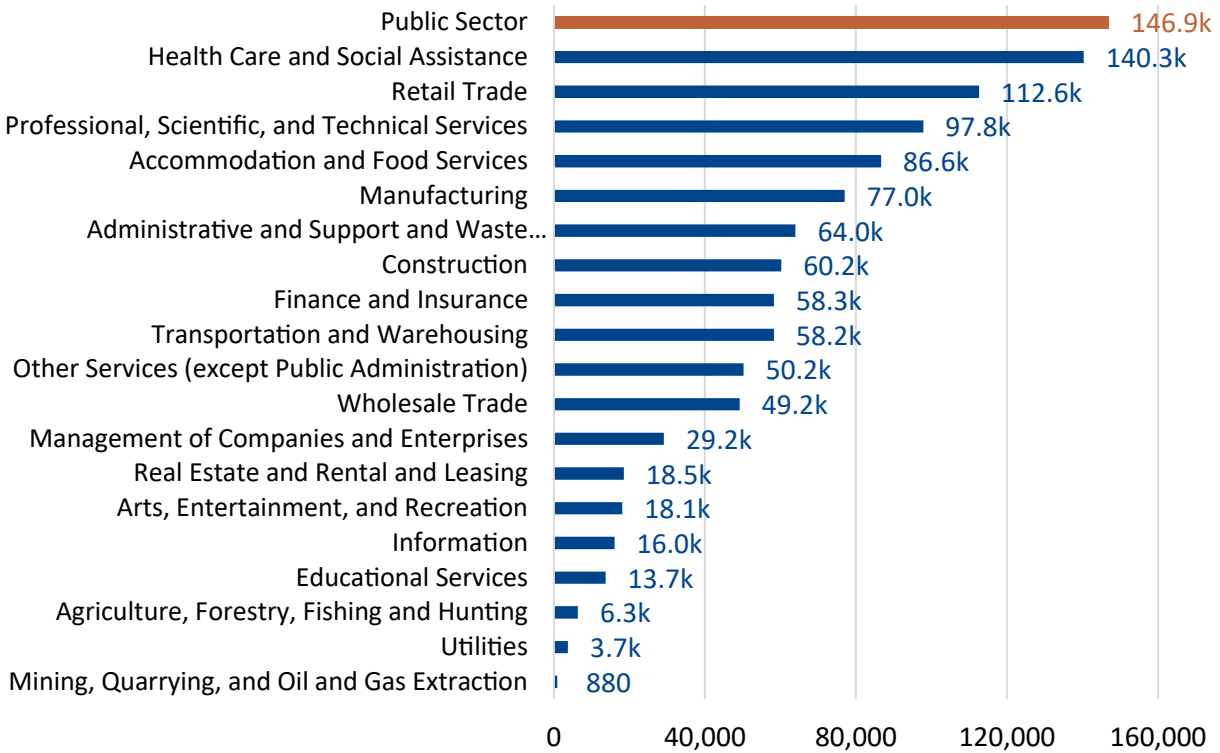
Total Employment by Industry, 2020 Q2



Source: Jobs EQ

Yet federal, state and local governments run many hospitals and most schools, as well as some utilities and transportation operations. If we were to subtract the public employees from these industries and aggregate them with public administration, the resulting “public sector” would be the largest industry in the Kansas City economy, employing 147,000 workers.

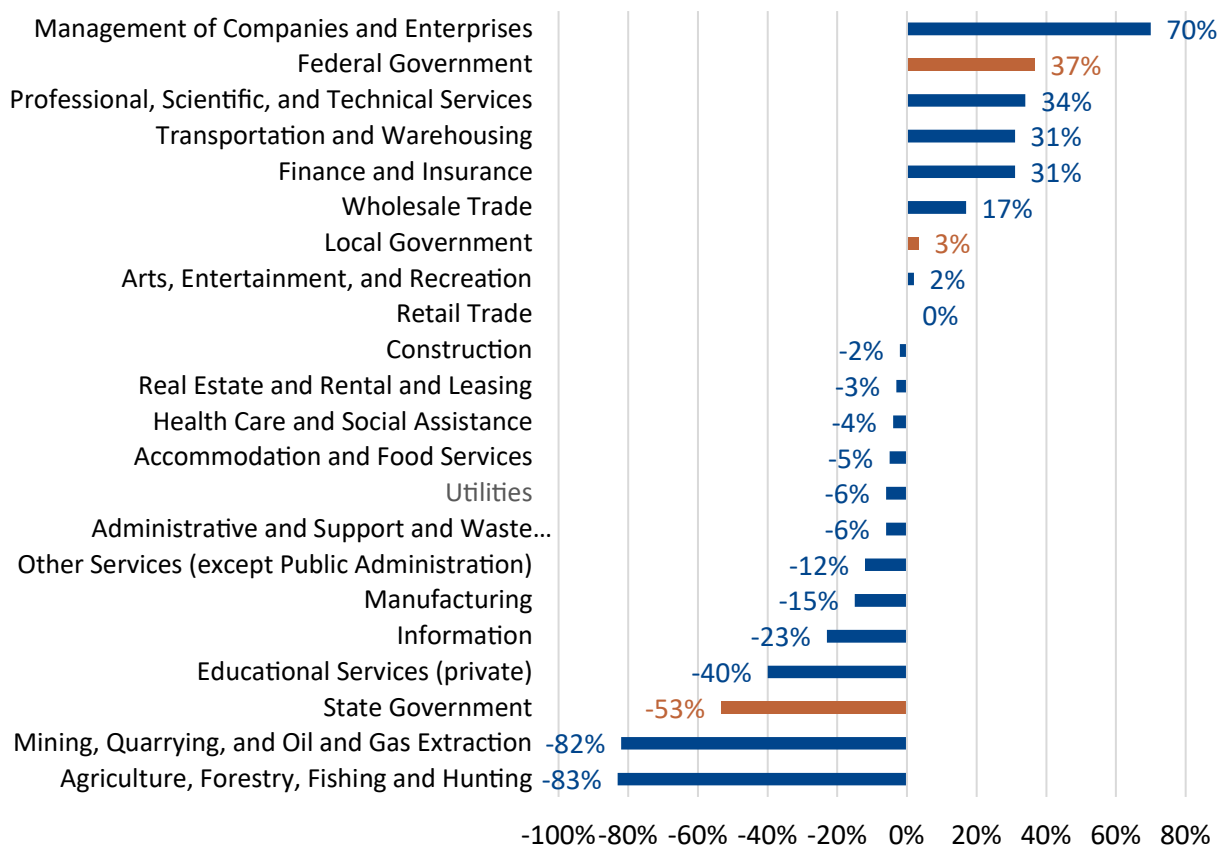
Public Sector and Private Sector Employment by Industry, 2020 Q2



Source: Jobs EQ, author calculations

Regions grow by exporting goods and services to the larger U.S. and global economies, bringing outside dollars into the region where they are spent and re-spent as the dollars circulate. Jobs that provide services to local residents result from that circulation and are essential, but they are driven by the influx of dollars from outside the region. Industries in which a region specializes tend to be those in which it exports services to the rest of the U.S. Comparing the share an industry has of a region's employment to its share nationally provides a measure of the region's degree of specialization. Those industries in which the region employs a larger fraction of its workers than the nation reflect industries where the region has a competitive advantage and likely exports goods and services to the larger economy.

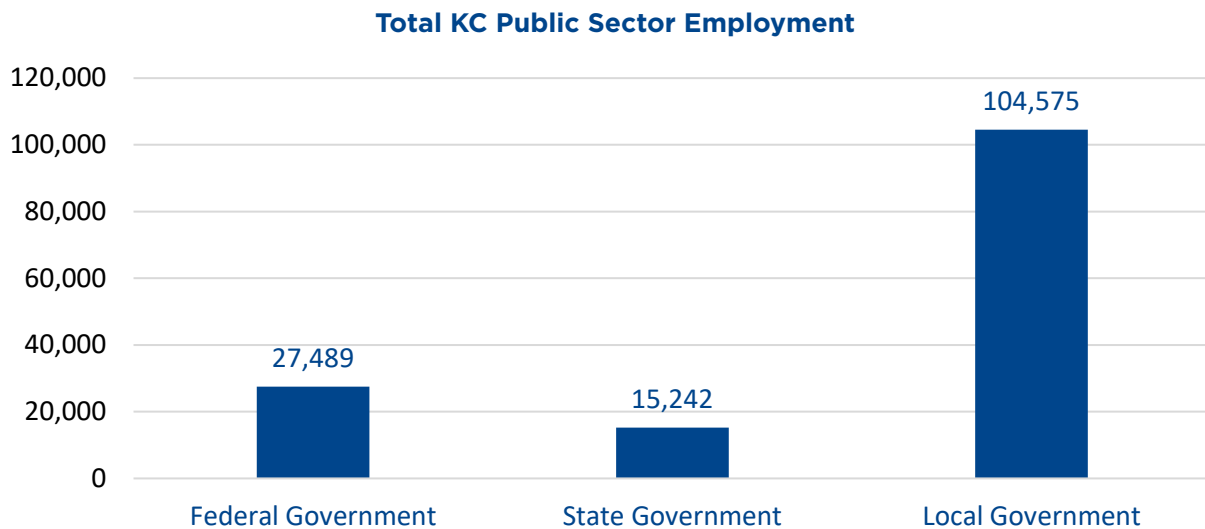
KC Employment Specializations
Share of KC Employment Relative to Share of U.S.



Source: Jobs EQ, author calculations

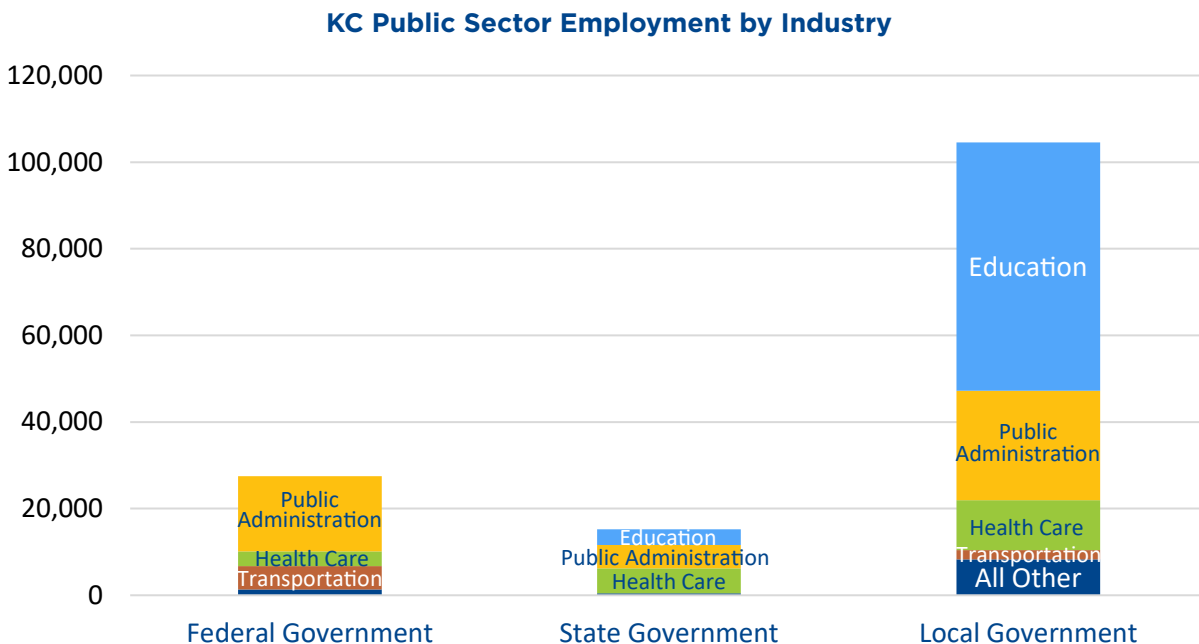
Management of companies is the region's largest specialization, largely the result of the Greater Kansas City's ability to offer high-quality, low-cost real estate and workers to national companies that are headquartered elsewhere. But federal government is second, followed by professional, technical and scientific services; transportation and warehousing; finance and insurance; and wholesale trade. Of these, federal jobs have an especially large economic benefit as virtually all of the money to pay for their salaries and the services they provide come from the rest of the U.S. and so is net new to the region.

If we look at public sector employees by level of government, local government accounts for 70% of public sector employment, while federal and state employees account for about 20% and 10%, respectively.



Source: Jobs EQ

Examining the industries in which local government employees work, it is evident that more than half work in schools, followed by public administration and health care. Federal employees in the Kansas City metro are mainly engaged in public administration while state employees are split relatively equally between health care, public administration and education.

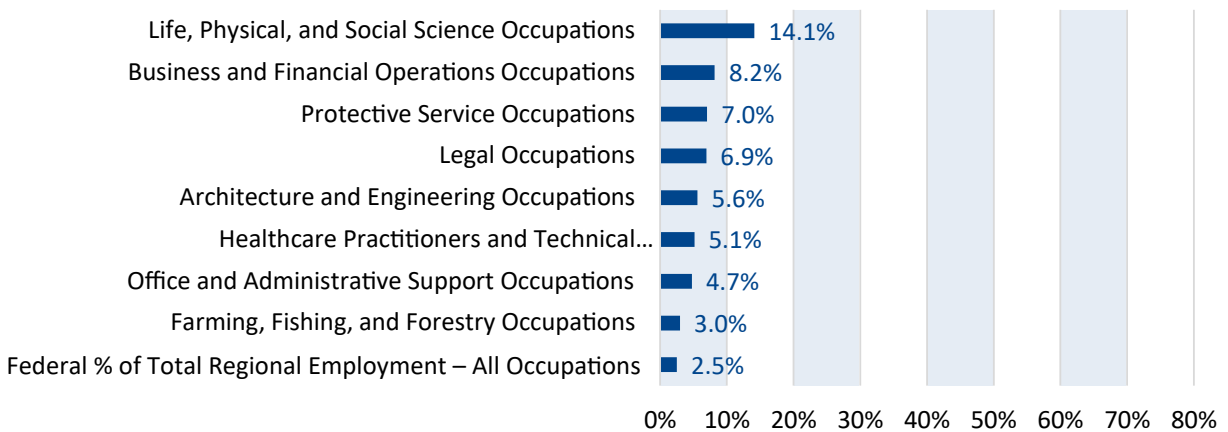


Source: Jobs EQ

Public sector employment covers a broad range of occupations. Almost every type of job available in the private sector is also available in the public sector. There are some, though, in which the public sector specializes. These differ by level of government.

Overall, the federal workforce is 2.5% of the overall regional workforce. Its concentration in high-skill occupations, however, is significantly higher than average, accounting for 14% of scientific occupations, 8% of business and financial occupations, 7% of legal occupations, and nearly 6% of architecture and engineering occupations.

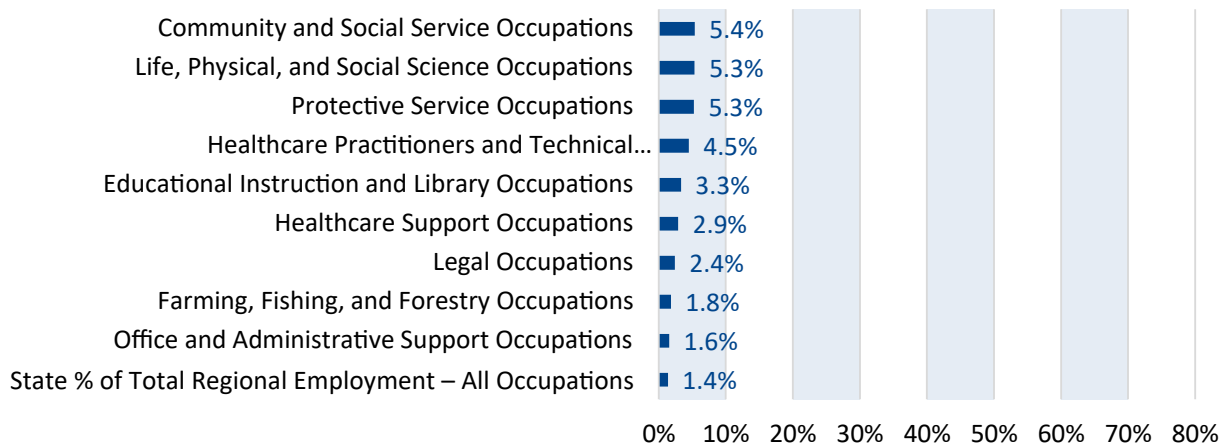
Federal Government Share of Metro Occupations Where Share is Above Average



Source: Jobs EQ

State government accounts for 1.4% of all Kansas City metro workers and also shows a higher concentration in high-skill occupations. These include community and social service occupations, scientific occupations, health care occupations and educational instruction occupations.

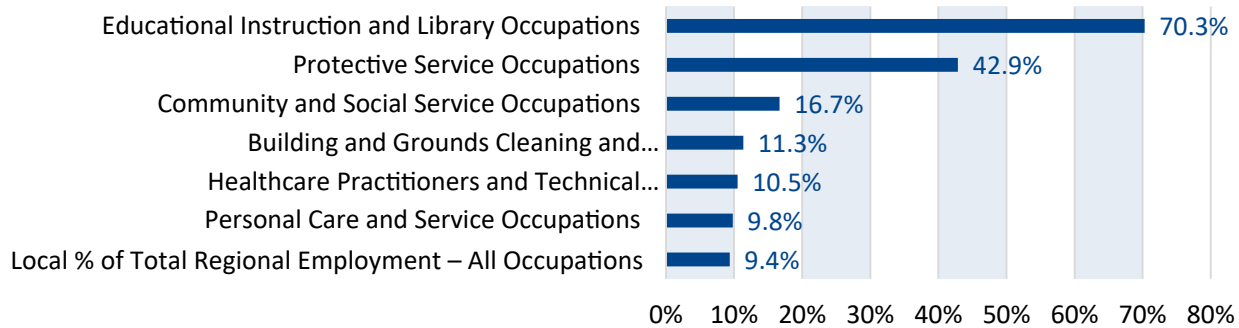
State Government Share of Metro Occupations Where Share is Above Average



Source: Jobs EQ

Local governments account for 9.4% of all metro employees and its occupations are distributed among a wider set of skill levels more representative of the general population they serve. Local government employs a majority (70%) of the region’s educators and librarians and nearly half (43%) of its protective service occupations, mainly police and fire. It also employs higher-than-average numbers of community and social workers and maintenance workers (17% and 11%, respectively), as well as health care practitioners (10.5%).

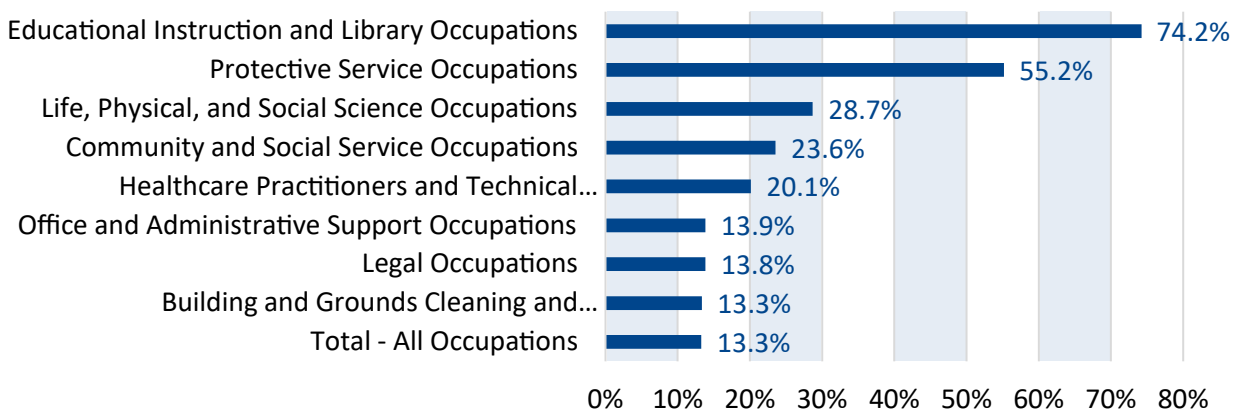
Local Government Share of Metro Occupations Where Share is Above Average



Source: Jobs EQ

Taken together, the public sector employs three quarters of the region’s educators and over half its protective services workers. It also employs nearly 30% of its scientists, a quarter of its community and social service workers, and a fifth of its health care providers. The importance of the public sector to the region’s economy cannot be overstated. Not only is it the largest industry in the region, but the public sector educates our children, keeps us safe and healthy, and conducts the research that underpins technological and economic progress.

Total Public Sector Share of Metro Occupations Where Share is Above Average

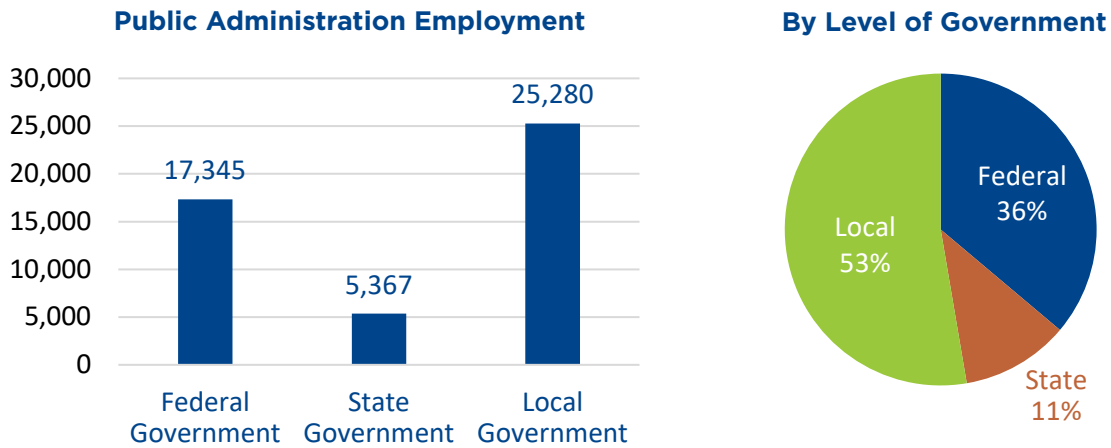


Source: Jobs EQ

FOCUS OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR TIE: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

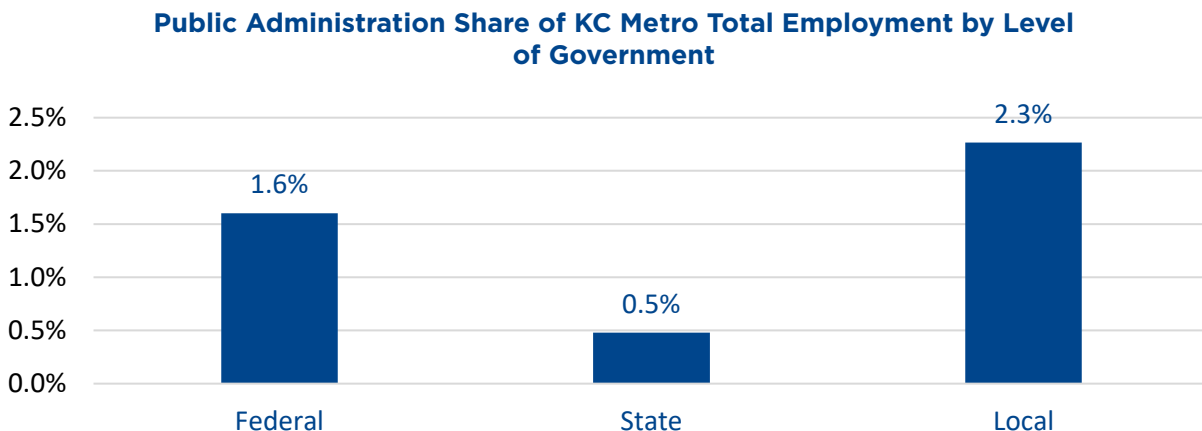
As part of the Government-to-University initiative, this TIE will support all levels of government in attracting and retaining the talent needed for public service. However, education and protective services are primarily a local responsibility. Moreover, the recruitment and retention issues faced by teachers and police officers are different from each other and from those of the general government. The component of public service that all levels of government share is public administration, especially that portion performed in federal, state and offices. That, then, will be the focus of the rest of the labor analysis in this TIE.

While local government comprises 70% of all public sector jobs, this large proportion is reduced to 53% when looking only at the portion working in public administration. Federal employees comprise just over a third of public administration workers, while state employees comprise just over 10%.



Source: Jobs EQ

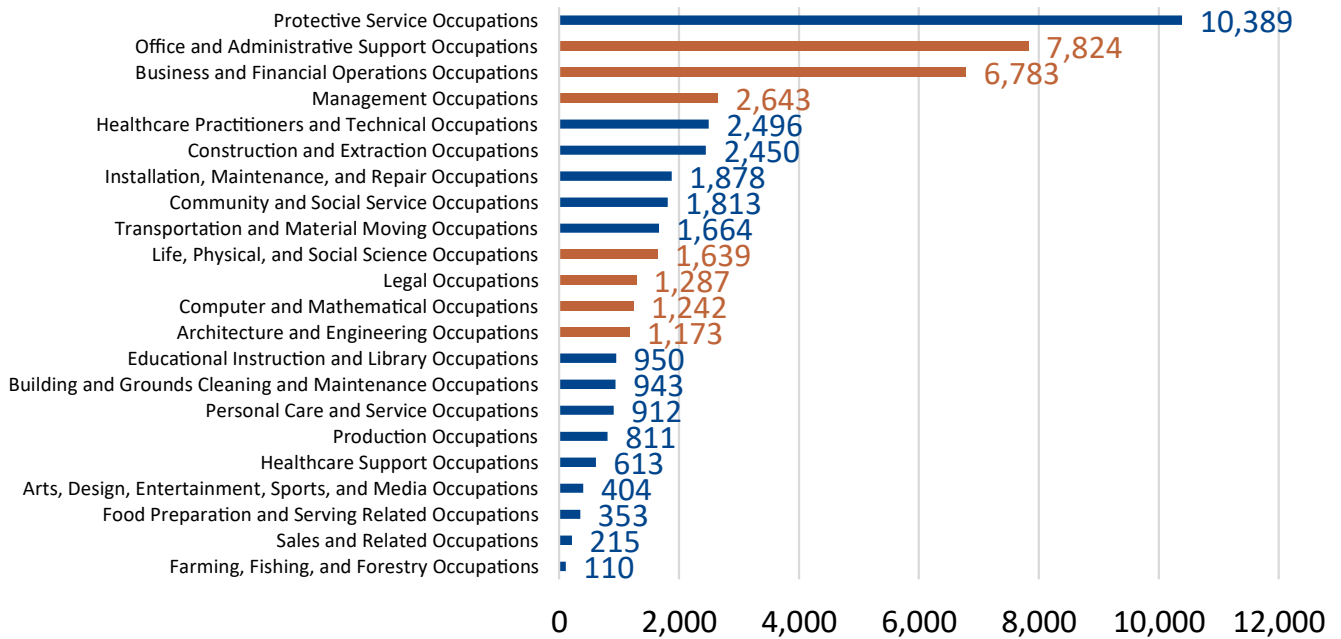
Overall, the public administration portion of the public sector comprises 4.3% of total metro employment, with 2.3% in local public administration, 1.6% in federal and 0.5% in state.



Source: Jobs EQ

Public administration still covers a fairly broad set of occupations. It includes the protective service occupations; they are the largest single category. Other categories of public administration workers perform their jobs in the field or in facilities other than city halls and federal office buildings. These include health care practitioners and construction and maintenance workers. Those occupations most likely to be more office-oriented are highlighted below and were used to set boundaries on the kinds of occupations to examine in more detail.

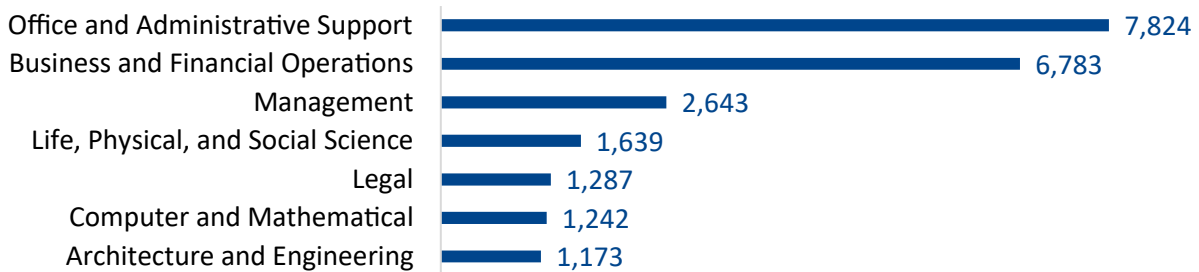
**Occupation Distribution of the Public Administration Industry
Principally in City Halls and Federal Office Buildings**



Source: Jobs EQ

The occupations that remain total about 23,000 and account for just under half (46%) of all public administration workers.

KC Public Administration Office Employment Occupations



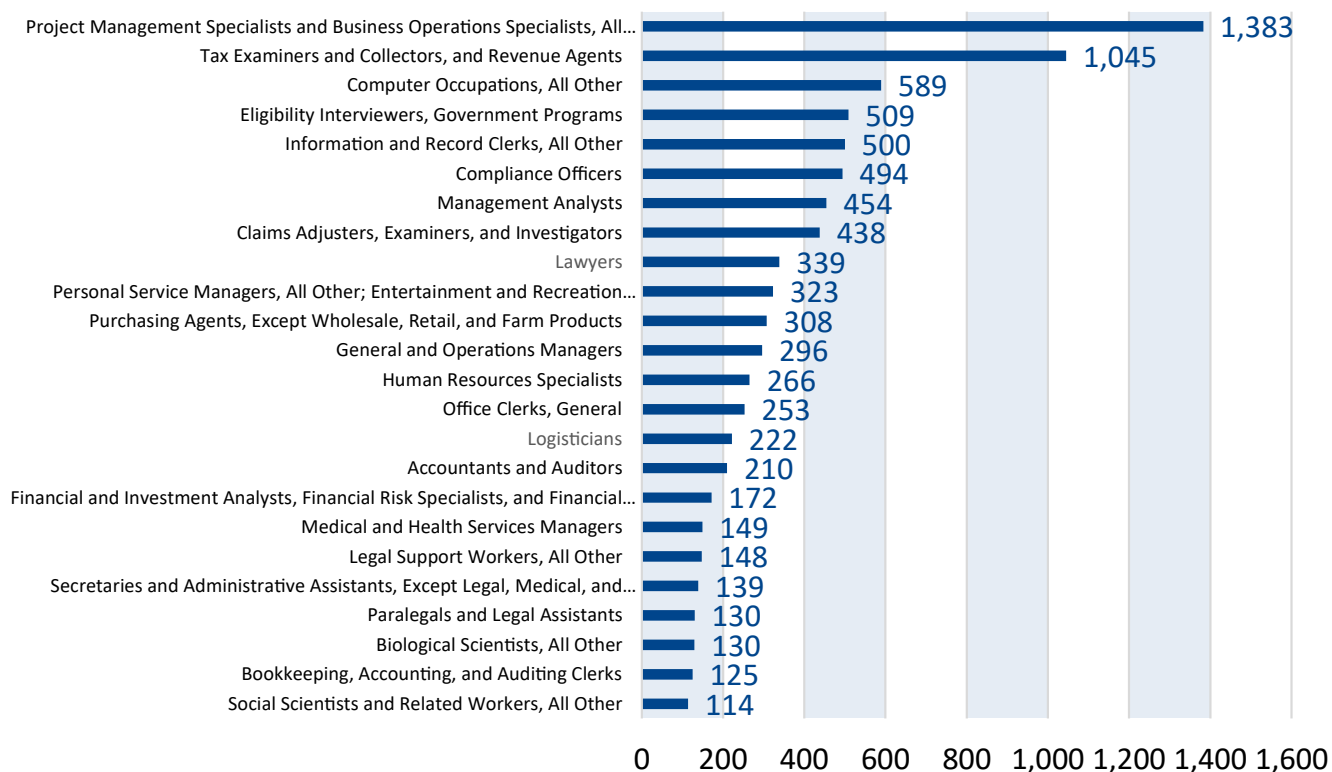
Source: Jobs EQ

DETAILED PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OFFICE-ORIENTED OCCUPATIONS

To provide a closer look at the wide variety of jobs performed in the public sector, even when limited to those that are more office-oriented, we can disaggregate the above occupations, which are classified by two-digit Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) codes, into six-digit SOC codes by level of government.

In the federal government, the largest office jobs are project management and business operations specialists and tax examiners. These are followed by miscellaneous computer occupations, program eligibility interviewers, information clerks and compliance officers.

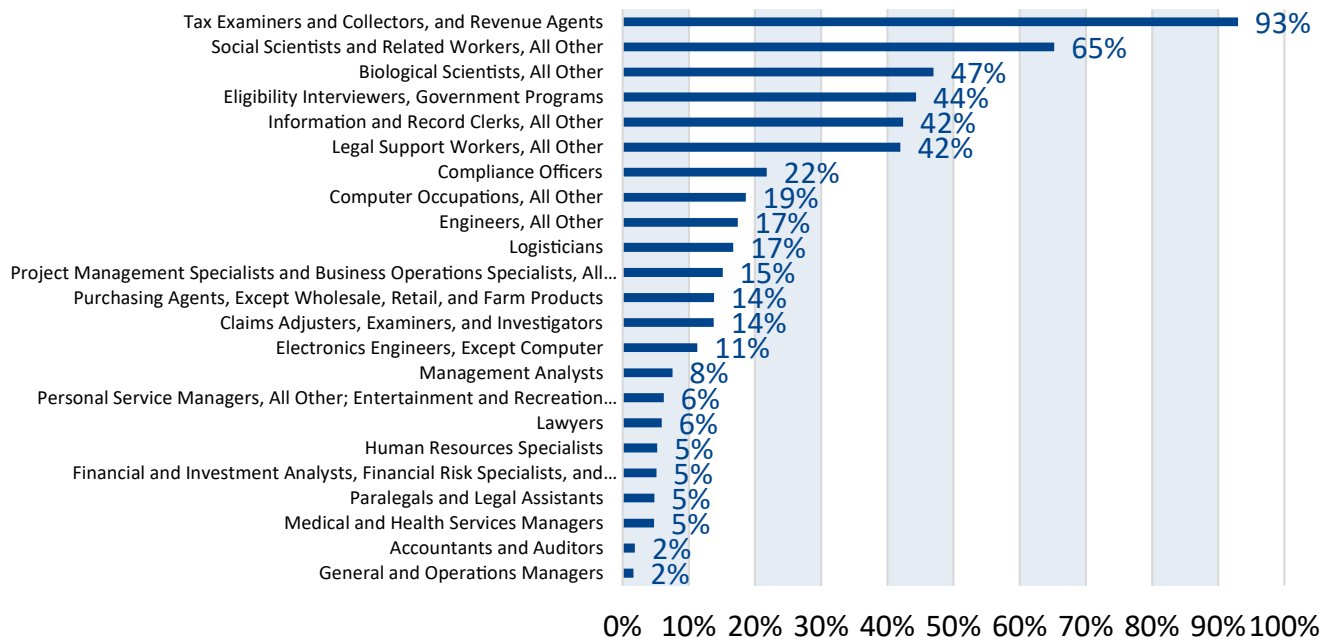
Federal Public Administration Office Employment in Largest Occupations



Source: Jobs EQ

Given a federal public administration share of overall metro employment at 1.6%, any occupation with a share greater than that represents occupations in which federal employees are relatively concentrated. Interestingly, the occupations where federal workers exhibit the greatest specialization are not always the largest. Some smaller occupations where the federal government nevertheless employs a sizable fraction of the region’s total employment include social scientists (65%), biologists (47%) and, to a lesser extent, engineers (17%), logisticians (17%) and purchasing agents (14%).

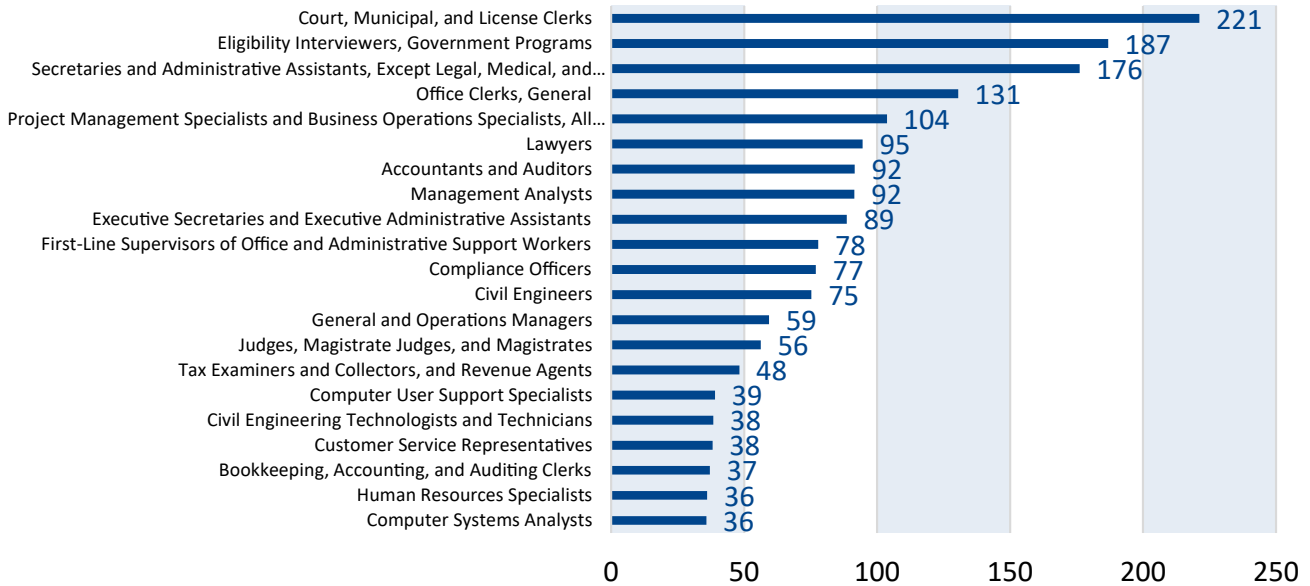
Federal Public Administration Office Employment in Largest Occupations Where Share is Greater Than Average (i.e., 1.6% of Metro), Sorted by Share



Source: Jobs EQ

State public administration workers only account for 0.5% of the region’s overall workforce, so no single occupation has more than 250 workers at this detailed level. Court clerks, program eligibility interviewers and administrative assistants are the largest, each with about 200 workers. These are followed by office clerks, management and business operations specialists, lawyers, and accountants.

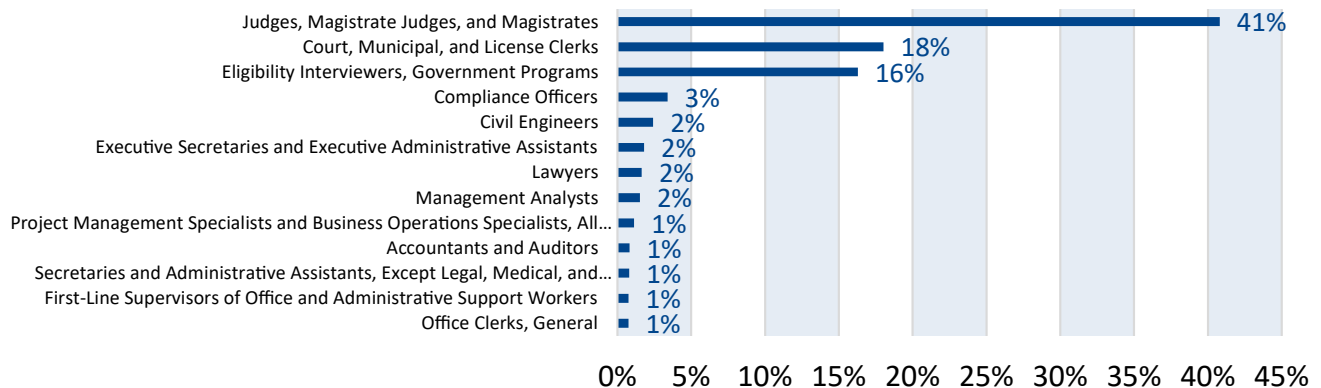
State Public Administration Office Employment in Largest Occupations



Source: Jobs EQ

Again, the occupations that are the largest are not always the ones exhibiting the greatest relative concentration. In particular, state-level (i.e. district) court judges account for 41% of all the judges in the region. Though state compliance officers are only a small share (3%) of the region’s total number, this is still six times greater than state public administration’s overall share of metro employment. The same can be said about state civil engineers, lawyers and management analysts, whose 2% share of the region’s total for these occupations is still four times larger than would be expected from the average for state public administration workers.

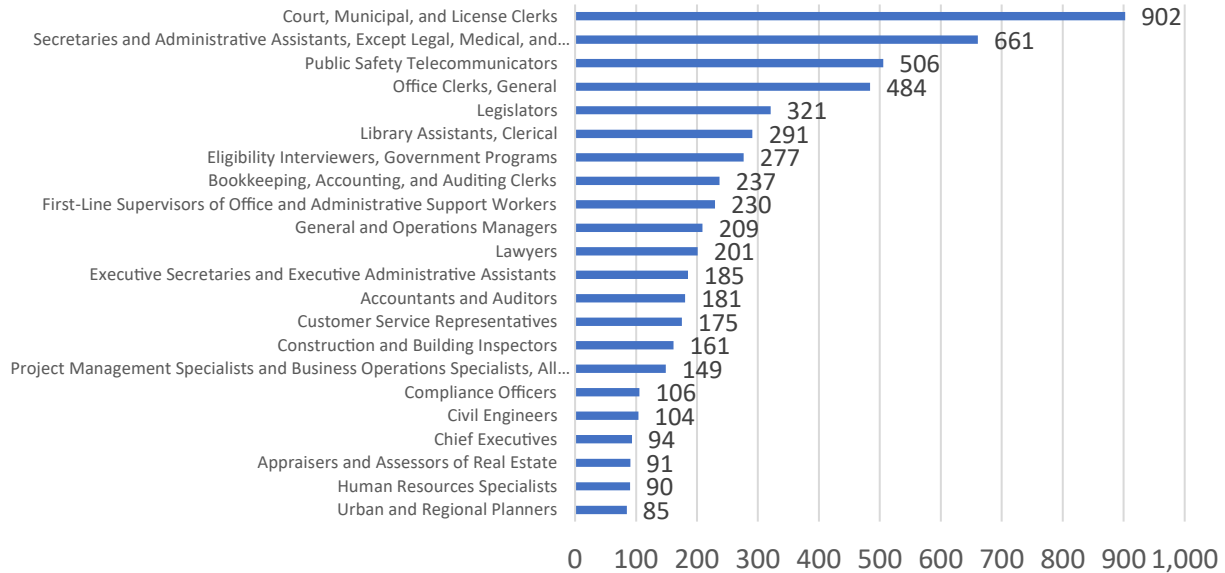
State Public Administration Office Employment in Largest Occupations Where Share is Greater Than Average (i.e., 0.5% of Metro), Sorted by Share



Source: Jobs EQ

The largest local government office-oriented occupations include court, municipal and license clerks, administrative assistants, public safety telecommunicators (which are classified as an office and administrative support occupation) and general office clerks.

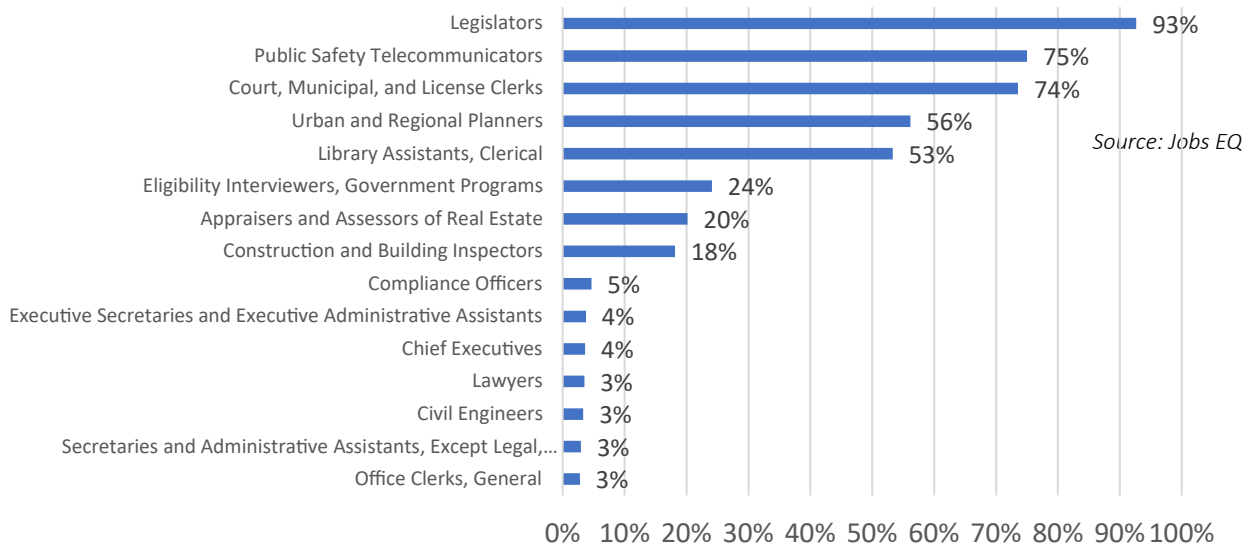
Local Public Administration Office Employment in Largest Occupations



Source: Jobs EQ

Though local public administration workers are 2.3% of the metro area workforce, local government employs an outsized proportion of many of the occupations directly associated with delivering public services. Some 93% of the area’s legislators and elected officials are employed by local governments, followed by 75% of its public safety communicators, 74% of its court and municipal clerks, 56% of its urban and regional planners and 53% of its library assistants. Local government also employs roughly a fifth to a quarter of the region’s program eligibility interviewers, its appraisers and assessors, and its building inspectors.

Local Public Administration Office Employment in Largest Occupations Where Share is Greater Than Average (i.e., 2.3% of Metro), Sorted by Share



Source: Jobs EQ

Summed across all levels of government, the largest office-oriented public administration jobs are in project management and business operations, tax examiners and court, municipal and license clerks, followed by administrative assistants and program eligibility interviewers.

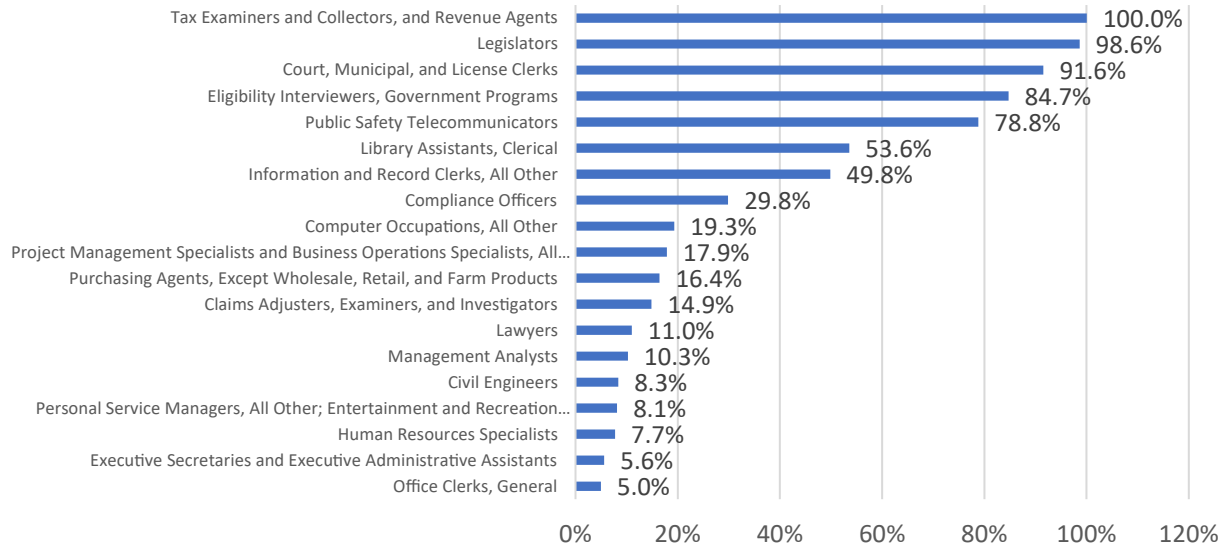
Total Public Administration Office Employment in Largest Occupations



Source: Jobs EQ

Overall, public sector public administration jobs account for 4.3% of the metro’s total employment. Some occupations—tax examiners, legislators, court clerks, program eligibility interviewers and public safety communicators—are only performed by the public sector, or nearly so.

Total Public Administration Office Employment in Largest Occupations Where Share is Greater Than Average (i.e., 4.3% of Metro), Sorted by Share



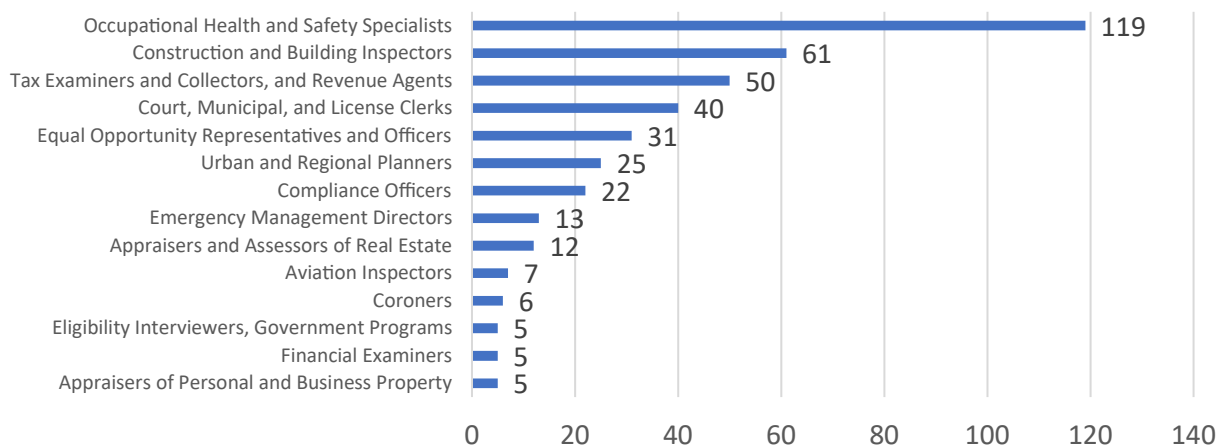
Source: Jobs EQ

But even for several more common jobs, the public sector accounts for an outsized proportion of employment, often double the public administration average, especially for higher-skill occupations. These include computer occupations, project management and business operations specialists, purchasing agents, claims adjusters, lawyers, management analysts, civil engineers and human resource specialists.

IDENTIFYING HIGH-DEMAND AND HARD-TO-FILL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OCCUPATIONS

Job postings provide an indication of the kinds of occupations the public sector seeks to fill. Given the restrictive public hiring environment resulting from the COVID-19 recession, positions where ads were posted likely represent those for which there is high need. Within the office-oriented occupations, federal, state and local government employers most often posted ads for occupational health and safety specialists, followed by construction and building inspectors, tax examiners and court, municipal and license clerks. Other occupations that appear to be high in demand include equal opportunity officers, urban and regional planners, compliance officers, emergency management directors, and real estate assessors and appraisers.

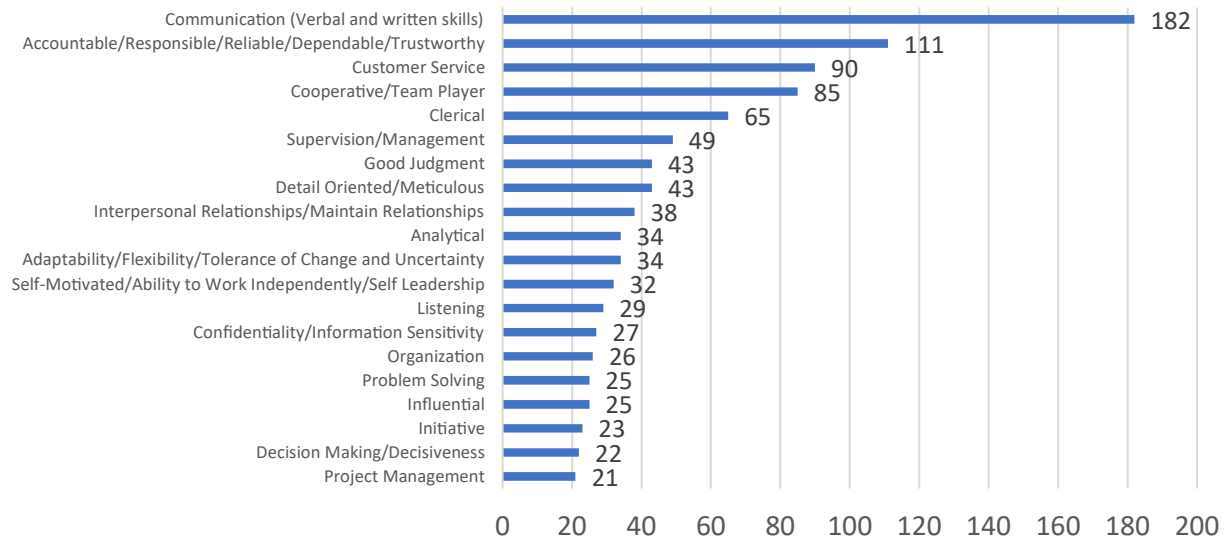
Number of Public Administration Job Postings by Federal Agencies and State and Local Governments Over Last 12 Months



Source: JobsEQ. Data reflect online job postings for the 365-day period ending 12/20/2020 for federal, state and local government employers

Soft skills described in the public administration job postings reflect the competencies required for public service jobs. Good oral and written communication skills; being accountable, reliable and trustworthy; having a customer-service orientation; and being a team player are the competencies sought most often. While communication skills, customer service and being team player are common competencies sought in many occupations, the emphasis on being trustworthy and dependable is more particular to public service jobs whose practitioners are entrusted with the health and safety of the community.

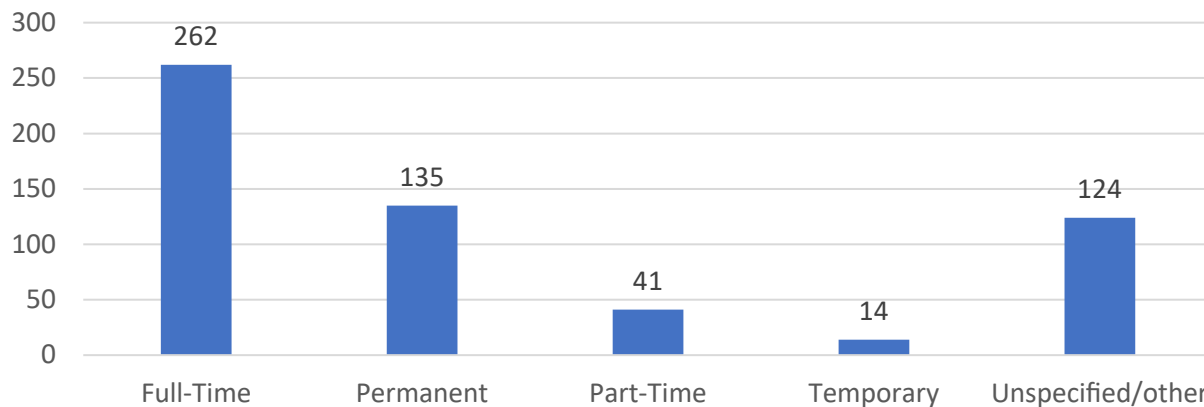
Soft Skills Required for Public Administration Jobs in Federal Agencies and State and Local Governments Over Past 12 Months



Source: JobsEQ. Data reflect online job postings for the 365-day period ending 12/20/2020 for federal, state and local government employers.

Also, of note is that most public administration jobs are listed as either full-time or permanent (or both), indicative of the stability of most public sector jobs. Given the current economic, social and political environment caused by the pandemic and protests following the George Floyd and other murders of Black persons and the 2020 elections, stability of public sector jobs can be attractive to potential job seekers.

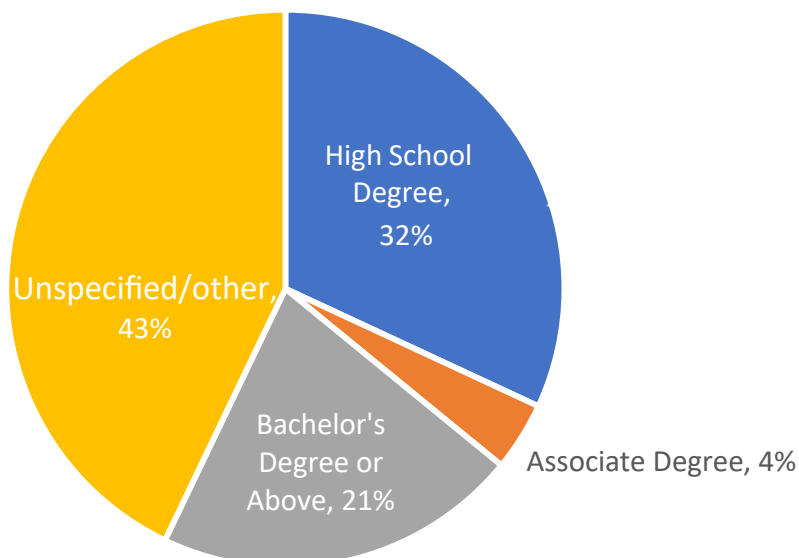
Job Types Specified in KC Public Administration Job Postings Over Last 12 Months



Source: JobsEQ. Data reflect online job postings for the 365-day period ending 12/20/2020 for federal, state and local government employers.

While the public sector has a high proportion of some high-skilled jobs, only a quarter of job postings in the last year specifically required a degree beyond high school, while a third required a high school degree. In the rest of the cases, a degree isn't specified, though the positions may require previous experience, technical abilities or other forms of certification.

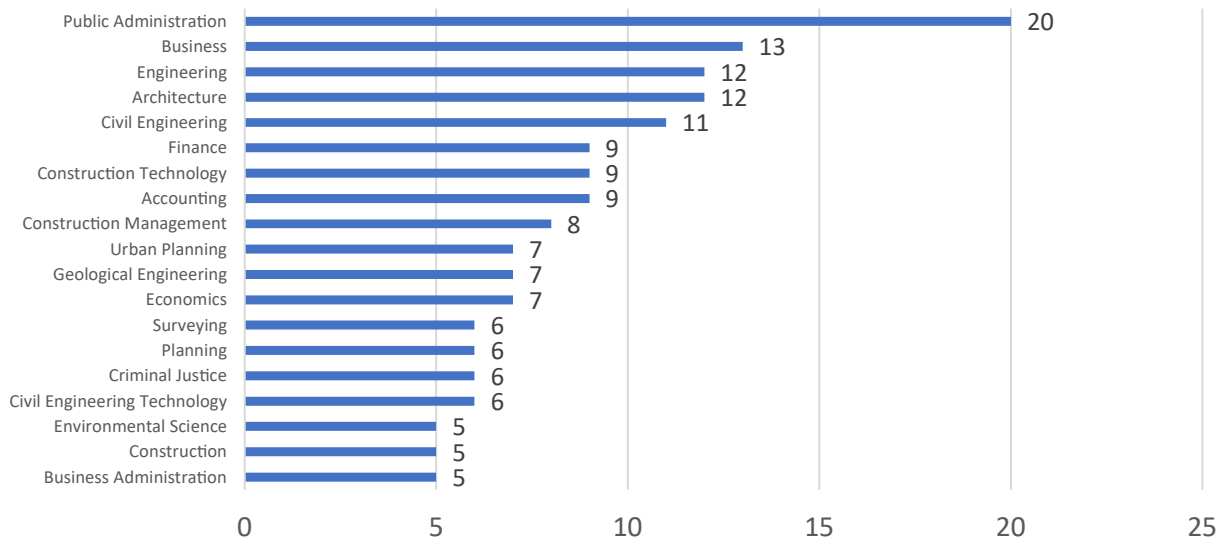
Minimum Education Level Required in KC Public Administration Job Postings Over Last 12 Months



Source: JobsEQ. Data reflect online job postings for the 365-day period ending 12/20/2020 for federal, state and local government employers.

Those positions that do require a degree most often align with university public administration programs, unsurprisingly. But, also, those earning degrees in business, engineering and architecture, finance and accounting, and construction technology and management also have skills that align well with public administration occupations.

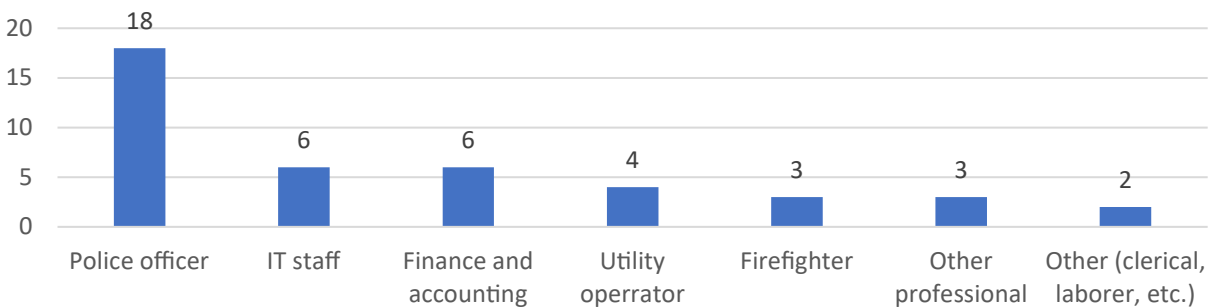
Educational Programs Specified in KC Public Administration Job Postings Over Last 12 Months



Source: JobsEQ. Data reflect online job postings for the 365-day period ending 12/20/2020 for federal, state and local government employers.

To further refine the identification of the local public sector occupations that are hardest to hire, MARC surveyed area city and county managers. This survey was not restricted to office employees, resulting in police officers being selected most often. But among the occupations that are more office-oriented, IT staff and finance and accounting positions were most often identified as hard to hire.

Local Government Hard-to-Hire Occupations September 2020 Survey



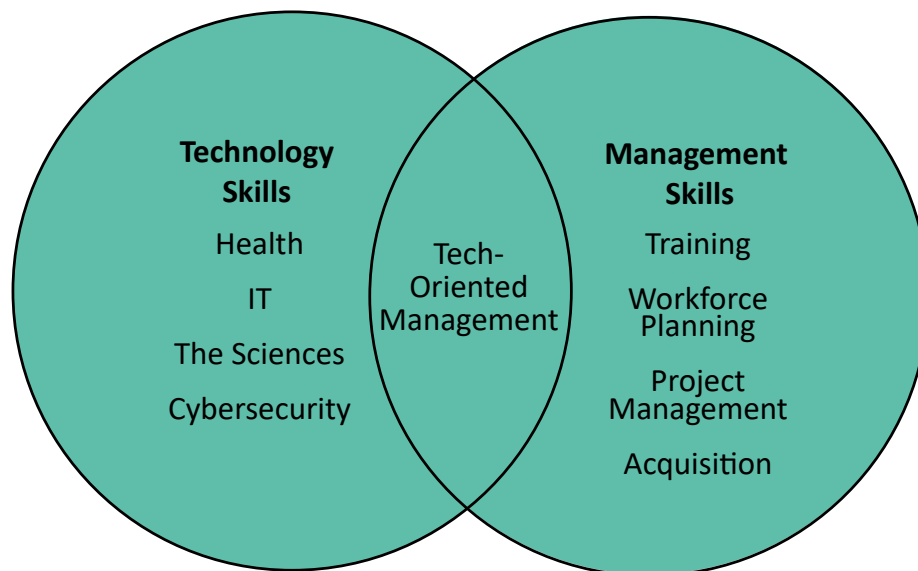
Source: MARC

Meanwhile at the federal level, a 2016 [memorandum](#) from the Office of Personnel Management identified the need to “close skill gaps within the following Government-wide high-risk mission critical occupations”: economist, HR specialist, auditor, acquisition, cybersecurity and the STEM fields.

Moreover, a 2019 [report](#) from the Government Accountability Office on high-risk areas for the federal government identified in Table 7: Skills Gaps Related to High-Risk Areas showed several technical and management skills in short supply. These were identified department by department, but those listed most often included health, IT, science and cybersecurity on the technical side and training, workforce planning, project management and acquisition on the management side.

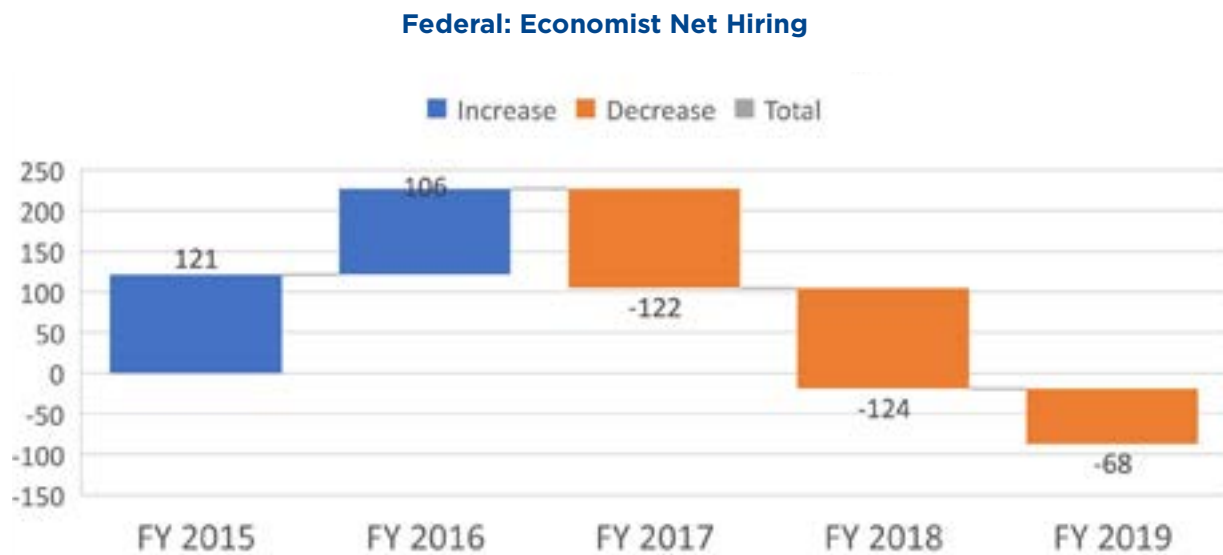
Synthesizing, there is increasing demand for what might be termed “tech-oriented project management.” Federal officials need to be able to manage complex projects where science and technology play key roles in program and service delivery. Management skills alone are insufficient, as are technical skills. Increasingly, managers need both in equal measure to fully understand the project requirements and successfully and consistently deliver results.

Skill Gaps are Concentrated at the Intersection of Technology and Management



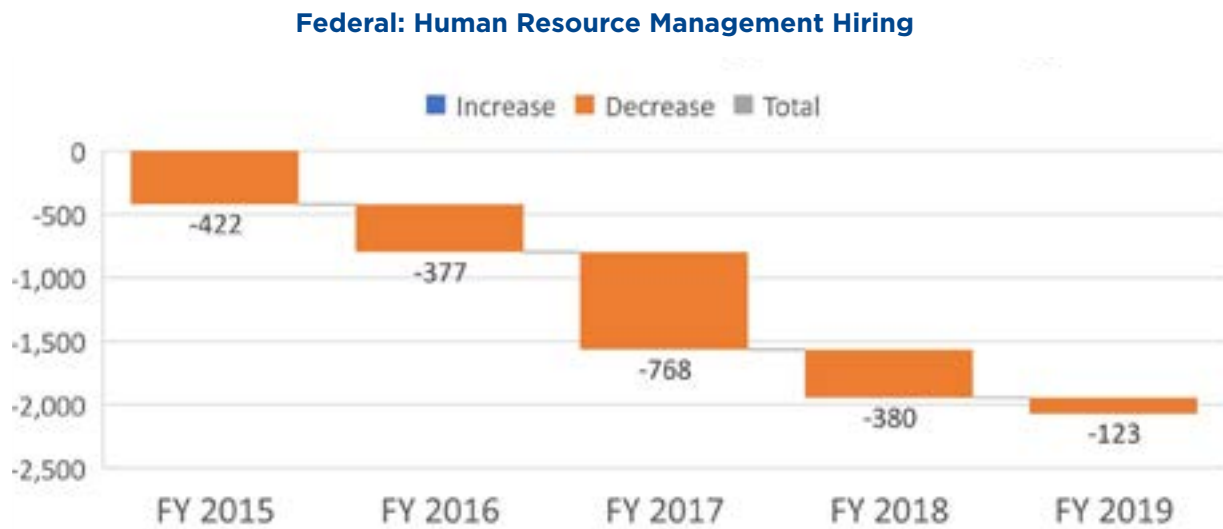
Based on Table 7, “Substantial Efforts Needed to Achieve Greater Progress on High-Risk Areas”, GAO, March 2019

The trends in federal hiring of some of these mission-critical occupations are telling. For example, while the number of economists increased between 2015 and 2017, since then, more employment levels have declined and currently sit below their 2015 level.



Source: FedScope, August 2020.

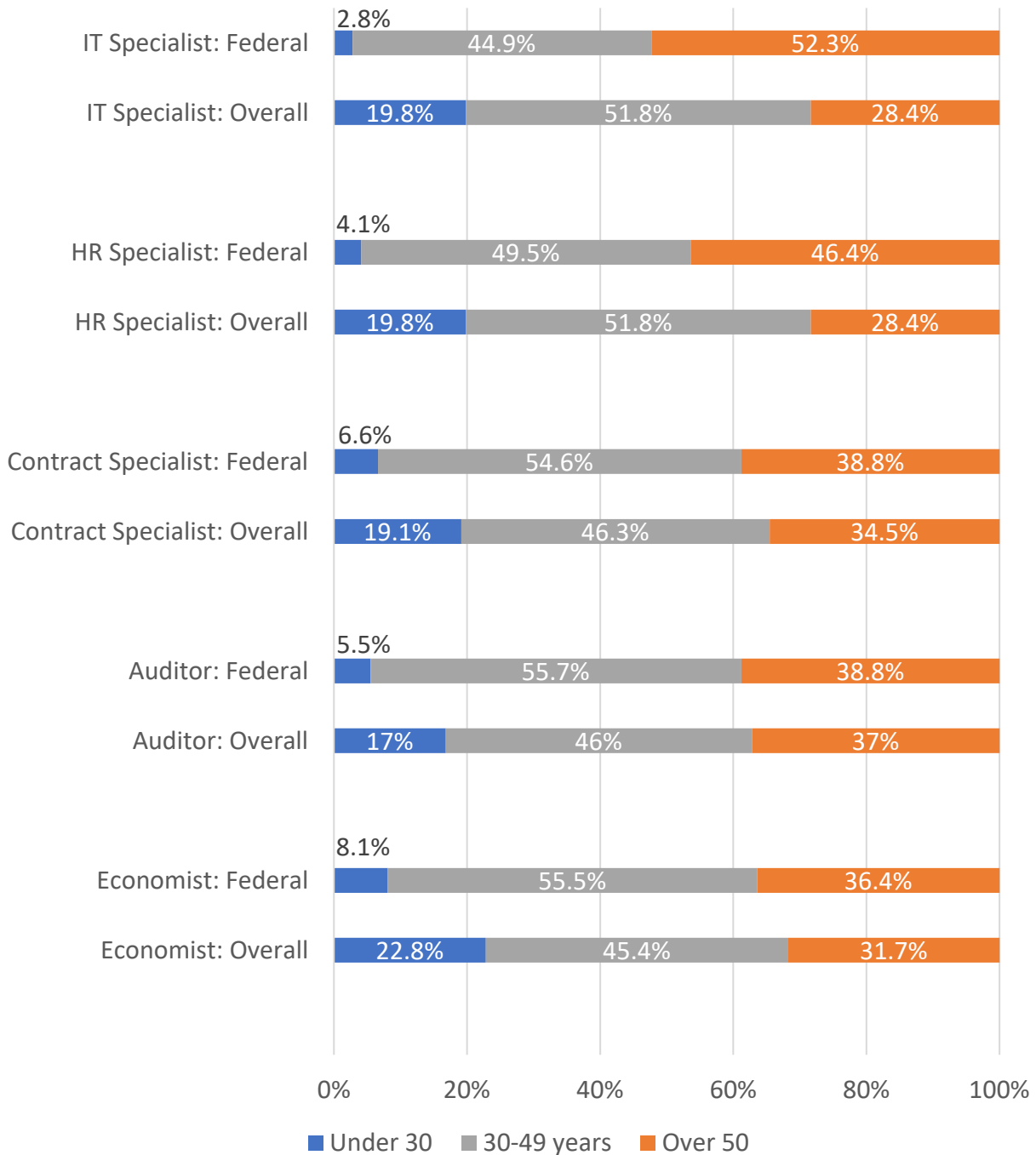
Concurrently, the number of human resource managers has declined consistently since 2015 and now number more than 2,000 fewer than five years ago



Source: FedScope, August 2020.

Such declines in net hiring are complicated by the fact that the existing workers in these critical occupations skew older than the overall workforce. The share of workers under 30 in each of them is one-third that of the rest of the economy and they also have a higher proportion of workers over 50. This is particularly acute for IT and human resources specialists, where approximately half the current workforce is over 50, compared to 28% in the general workforce.

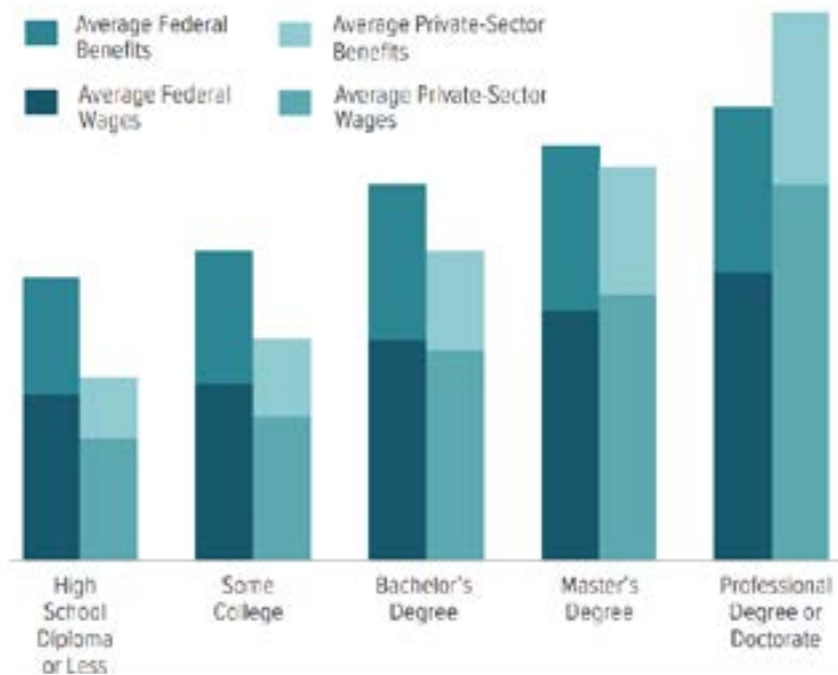
Age Distribution of Critical Federal Occupations



Sources: Federal data – “A Time for Talent,” Partnership for Public Service, August 2020. Data is for June 2019. Overall data – JobsEQ, author’s interpolation of published age ranges.

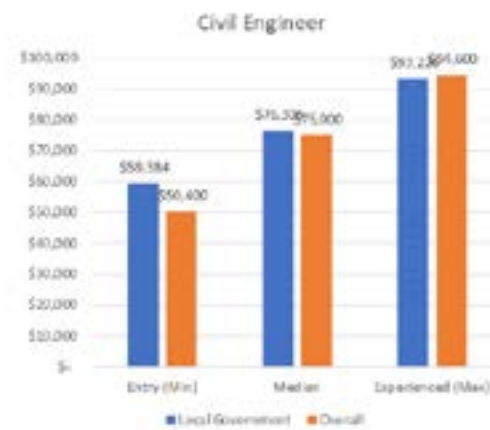
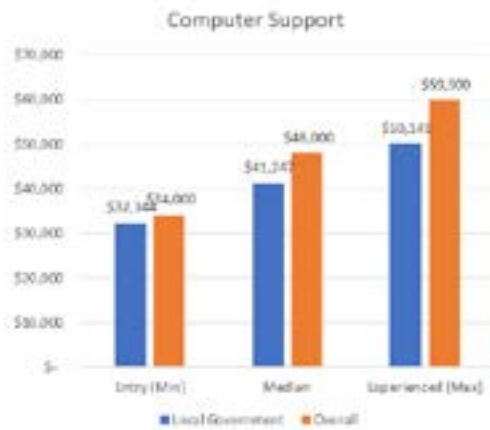
The reasons why young professionals are not entering the federal workforce are multifaceted and likely have as much to do with the complexity of navigating the federal hiring system as anything. However, one additional reason may be perceptions of the opportunity for advancement relative to the private sector. In general, entry-level federal jobs tend to earn superior wages to those in the private sector, but this advantage dissipates as workers advance in their careers. Superior benefits largely offset this, but their benefits are more difficult to communicate than higher wages. At the highest levels, federal compensation falls short of private sector compensation even after including the value of benefits

Comparing the Compensation of Federal and Private-Sector Employees, 2011 to 2015



Source: Congressional Budget Office

This data is for federal employees; the general tendency appears to hold true for state and local government employees, as well. Public jobs are usually good starting points for careers but advancement opportunities that result in higher pay may not keep pace with the private sector later in careers. Indeed, when we compare wages of some key occupations using MARC's local government survey, we see a similar pattern.



Sources: MARC Local Government Salary Survey, 2019.

Local governments offer generally competitive pay for entry-level positions and, in the case of civil engineers, offer superior pay. But at mid-career and later, the private sector tends to offer significantly higher pay. The exception is civil engineers where wages remain competitive even for experienced workers, though this may not reflect other forms of compensation, such as bonuses and stock ownership, that are more often provided in the private than public sectors.

In some cases, such as IT, the talent needed is simply in short supply for the private as well as public sector, both regionally and nationally. But in most cases, the talent isn't so much in short supply overall as that the public sector appears less able to compete for it. The above wage gaps are part of the reason why, but there is likely more to the story. Unfortunately, this is as far as the analysis of published data can take us. To fill in the rest of the story, we turn to the business insights derived from focus groups involving each level of government as well as local educators.

BUSINESS INSIGHTS

In addition to the quantitative data analysis, three focus groups were conducted among industry experts to gain qualitative insights into public sector recruitment and retention challenges:

1. College Educators and Career Services Professionals
2. Recent Public Sector Hires
3. Hiring Managers of Federal and Local Agencies

The key issues and themes that emerged from these conversations are as follows:

■ College Educators and Career Services Professionals

Higher education career services centers should be the primary connector between higher education institutions and public sector employers. Handshake and other technology tools are widely available but their utilization for public sector opportunities is not well understood. Career services professionals generally have more relationships with private sector industry and often do not know how to connect with government employers. Capacity is a challenge, too, as many career services centers are minimally staffed. Private sector companies with dedicated staff for recruitment are often more successful at accessing higher education career fairs and other resources.



“Most employers go directly to academic department heads or teachers who they know. Employers could expand their reach by working with career services.”

— Faculty Member

There are significant challenges with silos in higher education based on academic disciplines.

The best examples of experiential learning and career leads shared by the group were based on pre-existing relationships between a faculty member and a government employer. Networking efforts like G2U are working to expand and formalize connections between public sector employers and academia, but more is needed.

There is tremendous desire to expand opportunities for experiential learning. Faculty members are eager to work with government agencies to develop real-world challenges into class projects that align with curriculum and student goals. Often, successful projects must extend beyond the academic semester and that can be challenging for coordination.

Most in the focus group were unfamiliar with the Federal Pathways Programs that create a talent pipeline from internship to full-time employment within federal government agencies. There was a strong desire to learn more and understand how to connect students with these opportunities.

■ Recent Public Sector Hires

Recent hires chose to work in the public sector because they have an intrinsic desire to contribute to the public good. Pathways Programs are the primary route for accessing permanent, full-time federal jobs, and almost all in the focus group had participated in Pathways at some point. No one learned about Pathways from a career center and most had not utilized the campus career center

during their job searches. Rather, information was obtained through personal relationships with family or friends within the federal government or from specific faculty.

Recent hires expressed dissatisfaction with the pace and complexity of the hiring process.

USA Jobs, the portal for federal government job seekers and applicants, was described as clunky, time-consuming and frustrating. New hires were also required to complete a three-hour pre-employment assessment that was regarded as a tool to arbitrarily weed out applicants to narrow the candidate pool.

■ Hiring Managers of Federal and Local Agencies

Hiring managers agreed that it can be difficult to compete with the private sector on salary and benefits for certain jobs, but that was not identified as the primary barrier to finding qualified applicants.

At the federal level, the hiring preference for qualified veterans presents challenges. While all managers understood the purpose and importance of the veterans preference, in practice the program is keeping qualified candidates out of the hiring pool and often extending the hiring process. In addition, there is little post-military training or support to help veterans retool for federal jobs or identify federal jobs that best fit with their existing skill sets.

Federal managers confirmed what new hires reported. The Pathways Programs are the primary way that non-veteran job seekers can access federal jobs. They conceded that the program is only promoted through word-of-mouth and is not well advertised or understood within higher education. Some managers fully embrace the Pathways Programs as a way to recruit and train qualified talent. Others viewed hosting interns as a burden, indicating that more support or training may be needed for supervisors to conduct engaging, mutually beneficial internships.

Managers agreed with new hires that USA Jobs is clunky and inefficient. Federal agencies are not permitted to directly hire a qualified candidate. All hiring is routed through USA Jobs and, due to its complex algorithms, often qualified resumes are weeded out of the system and never reach the hiring manager. The hiring process at the local level is also perceived as cumbersome and outdated.

Local government and federal government managers agreed that more awareness is needed about the breadth of opportunities available in government jobs. The following were cited as hard-to-fill positions at the federal level:

- Engineers.
- Health care professionals (competition with



"I knew about Pathways because my mom has worked for my federal agency for years, but I don't think the program is well advertised."

— Recent Graduate



"The hiring process is slow and arduous. I had to turn down other job offers during the process. I had friends quit the process halfway through. If you did not already have a job, how do you pay the bills while you are waiting?"

— Recent Graduate

"The three-hour assessment was horrible. It had no relevance to the job I was seeking. Performing well doesn't help you get the job; it only serves to disqualify you."

— Recent Graduate

private sector salaries is the primary challenge in this industry).


- Big data (data analysts are prevalent, but there are fewer qualified applicants with the statistical background to manage large data sets).
- Commercial real estate.

At the federal level, career advancement potential is an advantage. Once inside the federal system, there are multiple opportunities for promotions and longevity. This is less prevalent at the local level. Retention is a bigger challenge as good employees leave when they hit an advancement ceiling due to limited opportunities within a single organization.

The following were cited as hard-to-fill positions at the local level:


- Public safety communications (dispatchers).
- CDL drivers.
- Engineers.
- Skilled trades.
- Police officers.

Both federal and local hiring managers agreed that it is difficult to know the right person to contact for experiential learning partnerships in higher education. There was enthusiasm for opportunities to build strong relationships with higher education faculty, staff and administrators who can help build a talent pipeline for the public sector. Attending career fairs is prohibitively expensive for public sector employers that don't have funds budgeted for that type of expense. There was strong consensus on the need to better market public sector career opportunities and to help applicants understand how a particular job makes a difference in the community.



“People don’t realize that we’re not just hiring political scientists. We need nurses, engineers and accountants in government, too. We hire for everything.”

— Federal Recruiter



“We have an image problem. People tend to have a negative view of government and don’t fully appreciate the work we do outside of police and fire.”

— Local Government Human Resources Director

■ RECOMMENDATIONS

The next step following the final review of this analysis is for the Kansas City G2U Network to engage work group members and others to develop an action plan to strengthen recruitment for public careers. An important part of the work is to continue to strengthen relationships between higher education and government agencies. The G2U work group identified the following strategies:

- Provide training for career services professionals on the Federal Pathways Program available in the Kansas City region to help place students in federal jobs.
- Equip career services centers to provide training opportunities for job seekers to successfully

navigate USA Jobs.

- Promote career services as a central portal for accessing higher education faculty to help break down academic silos.
- Provide more networking opportunities for educators, career services professionals and government employers, with special focus on the hard-to-fill occupations.
- Increase collaboration to improve outreach. There may be potential for a shared service in which multiple organizations work together to represent multiple public sector job opportunities at events around the region, thereby reducing the staffing and time commitments on any one agency.
- Expand outreach to different adult-serving groups such as KC Scholars and KC Degrees to promote public sector careers to adults.
- Expand outreach to educational and community organizations to promote public sector careers through large events such as state conferences for high school counselors and the regional bi-annual Public Sector Career Expo, organized by cooperating local governments. These events could inform teachers and counselors, students and parents about career opportunities.
- Expand internship and fellowship programs that serve as gateways to permanent employment. One model is a public administration fellowship that provides on-the-job training and education in exchange for a minimum work commitment (usually two years).
- Develop strategies to market the advantages of public sector careers.
- Expand experiential learning opportunities for K-12 and higher education students to address the workforce pipeline. The continuum of experiential learning includes awareness, exploration, preparation and training. There is desire from employers and educators to develop these opportunities.
- Conduct research on policies that are perceived as barriers to recruitment and make recommendations for appropriate changes (i.e. hiring processes, application portals, residency requirements, criminal records, restrictions on tattoos or facial hair, etc.).
- Research and recommend retention strategies at the local level to incentivize longevity in organizations that offer limited advancement opportunities such as tuition assistance and student loan repayment programs.



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