



Future-proof your professional development strategy:

4 simple ways to attract, train,
& retain employees

The next generation of workers

State and local leaders are all too aware of the fiscal imperative facing government agencies today: Do more with less. For those tasked with training and ensuring that workers keep pace with ever-changing policy and procedural changes, the repercussions are manifold.

A closer look at the forces affecting these agencies reveal:

- **A dramatically changing workforce.** As baby boomers are exiting the government workplace, organizations risk decreased productivity during transition periods as well as the loss of institutional knowledge.
- **Recruitment and retention challenges.** Filling the vacancies left by retirees often proves challenging, with steep competition for millennial candidates from private sector companies.
- **Outdated technology.** At the state and local levels, training programs are hampered by systems ill-equipped to support new learning methodologies and the needs of today's mobile, dispersed workforce.

The abundance of information on how to address these challenges can be daunting. Agencies seeking to differentiate themselves in a scalable way must sift through an endless supply of technology solutions. Rather than empowering leaders, it can lead to information overload.

This guide can help. We've curated the essential insights you need to develop a roadmap for success, so you can emerge with clear criteria for finding the right partner to help develop or modernize your learning program.

Did you know:



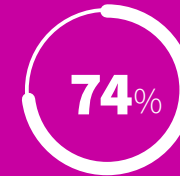
Higher turnover
2 years
is the average tenure of today's millennial workers



Increased hiring expenses
\$4,129
is the average cost per hire for organizations*



Recruitment & retention
91%
of state & local leaders rank this as their #1 priorities**



Succession planning
74%
leaders cite succession planning as a top workforce issue

* Source: Society for Human Resources' Human Capital Benchmarking Report 2016. www.shrm.org/about-shrm/press-room/press-releases/pages/human-capital-benchmarking-report.aspx

** Source: Center for State & Local Government Excellence Survey, 2017

1

Assess what professional development means to your workforce

Training is a matchmaking process—it requires developing employees in a way that satisfies their needs while furthering the company’s objectives.



It’s not enough for today’s workers to be complimented for “a job well done.” They also crave continuous personal and professional development. In fact, they see the two as intertwined.

Government agencies that don’t offer clear learning opportunities risk higher-than-average employee attrition rates. Given what’s at stake—loss of institutional knowledge and a steady stream of re-hiring expenses—state and local leaders must consider the professional development interests of incoming millennial workers.

This next generation of employees knows that to stay relevant in a technologically fluid marketplace, they’ll need to reinvent themselves constantly and will look to their employers to help them do so. Given the financial constraints of luring candidates with competitive salaries and benefits, a government training organization could instead leverage a robust learning program as a means to better attract and retain these workers.

Creating a professional development program isn’t a “one and done” event. It’s important that L&D leaders regularly take the pulse of the forces driving employees’ job satisfaction, to keep pace with their evolving needs—and prevent the “brain drain” that could result from a stagnant workplace.

Take action

Identify the skills gaps:

- Do recent graduates entering the workforce possess the skills needed to effectively contribute and succeed in their jobs?
- Given the aging population that's due to retire, what skills do your prospective new employees need?

Survey workers:

- Does the current development program meet their needs?
- What changes would they like to see?
- Where do they turn to find the information they need to do their jobs better?
- How do they perceive learning opportunities from their supervisors?
From their peers?

Assess current and projected turnover:

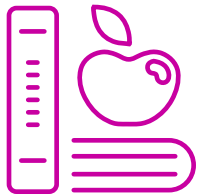
- What is the average tenure of your workforce?
- Do certain departments have higher attrition than others?
- Do you anticipate a wave of future openings due to retirements?
If so, how will you manage critical knowledge transfer to new employees?

2

What is a core competency?

“
A cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that affects a major part of one’s job, that correlates with performance on the job, that can be measured against well-accepted standards, and that can be improved via training and development.”

S. B. Parry,
The Quest for Competencies



Focus on core competencies

Competency-based education (CBE) has gained traction in colleges and universities over the past decade, but how does it apply to training programs at the state and local government levels?

Simply put, CBE is a win-win for both the employee and the agency. It enables workers to progress through training at their own pace while empowering the organization to accurately assess mastery and establish quantifiable benchmarks. It offers the personalization that today’s workers demand, along with the scalability that state and local governments need.

*Additionally, it’s important to think outside of the box when developing a list of the core competencies that your organization needs. When surveyed about the skill sets their agencies were looking to develop, the top three responses were: interpersonal, written communications, and technology.***

Hallmarks of a CBE program include:

- Learners can access learning regardless of time, pace, or place
- Performance expectations are known from the beginning
- Time can vary, but learning is held constant
- Learners do not need to engage with content if they can demonstrate proficiency
- Dashboards and visualization tools allow learners to track their progress

And the benefits to organizations are clear:

- Decreases time to completion
- Increases relevance
- Increases trainee proficiency
- Saves on travel expenses by shifting to online/hybrid delivery
- Reduces productivity loss due to employee absence
- Frees up time for trainers to coach and mentor

** Source: Center for State & Local Government Excellence Survey, 2017

Take action

Define the training outcomes:

Work with functional leaders to determine what learners need to know, think, or be able to do as a result of the learning unit.

Identify gaps:

Assess how your current program supports the desired outcomes, and identify any gaps.

Define assessments to measure core competencies:

Use assessment results to evaluate trainee performance, as well as to identify strengths and areas for growth.

Choose a solutions partner:

Identify a partner that possesses both the technological platform to support CBE and the depth of expertise in the field of L&D.

Establish benchmarks:

Use aggregate assessment results to diagnose opportunities for program improvement.

Wisdom from the trenches

“
*Incorporate
peer-to-peer
collaboration.*”

Collaboration doesn't need to be en masse or in real time. By encouraging employees to help each other—which could just as easily be via instant message in a collaboration tool as it can be sitting next to someone—you're also making each of them think about what they're learning.

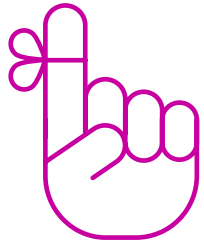
It's obvious but true: if it isn't clear to someone why they're being asked to complete a piece of learning, they won't engage with it. Saying “because you have to, it's for compliance” isn't enough. Somewhere, there's a reason why your employees are being asked to take this course. Share it with them.

“
*Put yourself in
the employee's
shoes.*”

“
*Snack on
information
rather than
indulge.*”

That snack could be watching a three-minute video, reading a short article, checking details of coursework, or even taking a test. If your course doesn't work properly on a mobile device, you're blocking this preferred way of learning.

3



The forgetting curve

The forgetting curve hypothesizes the decline of memory retention in time, suggesting that if newly acquired knowledge isn't reinforced within a matter of days, the likelihood of retaining it is dramatically impacted.

Create engaging experiences. And beat the forgetting curve.

Now that you have a sense for the core competencies you'd like to develop, it's time to think about how to produce them. For today's connected learners, it's all about personalization—tailoring experiences to their unique interests and needs. This is where learning science intersects with today's technology.

With legions of digital content solutions available, it can be tempting to go “all in” with an exclusively online solution. But studies show that a blended approach to learning is more successful, offering a well-rounded program that includes online, mobile, and in-person training. Be sure to create “engaging experiences” that span all forms of learning delivery.

What is microlearning?

“*Microlearning is a way of teaching and delivering content to learners in small, very specific bursts. The learners are in control of what and when they're learning.*”

elearningindustry.com



A return to “corporate” universities

Increasingly, government organizations are formalizing a hybrid approach to learning and development. They focus on a strategic plan for contextual learning that furthers their missions:

Which pieces of information are more appropriate for an online training program?

Which training activities benefit best from interpersonal interaction and demonstration?

The answers to these questions are used to structure the virtual and physical composition of the organization’s “university.”



Take action

Design content that can be immediately applied:

Timing is the key to retention. Ensure learners have an opportunity to apply learnings right away.

Use real-world scenarios to allow people to practice what they learn:

Especially for areas where the agency has experienced consistent errors or issues, provide training exercises that offer an opportunity for participants to “learn from their mistakes” during training—instead of making them on the job.

Leverage peer-to-peer learning using online collaboration:

Tap into your own network of experts by connecting mentors with more junior employees online, regardless of where they’re based.

Incorporate multimedia elements (such as video and gamification):

For example, a public-speaking course may require participants to record themselves giving a speech as a creative way to demonstrate mastery.



Choose a partner—not a piece of technology

Organizations need a framework for success; not a set of disconnected widgets. Government training leaders shouldn't be bogged down with connecting the technology dots—"this system" for content, "that system" for delivery. Rather, they should be free to focus on the information and skills required for employees to succeed, and let their partner do the heavy lifting.

Consider these selection criteria when evaluating prospective partners:

- ✓ Possesses a deep understanding of the needs of both learners and instructors
- ✓ Is well-versed on pedagogy and new learning strategies
- ✓ Offers a customizable platform that can be tailored to your needs
- ✓ Demonstrates a strong commitment to customer satisfaction
- ✓ Is organizationally aligned to promote your success (such as offering a formalized cohort program and a dedicated client support division)
- ✓ Provides a wealth of resources (annual and community training events, best practices, etc.)
- ✓ Is familiar to your workers (e.g., Blackboard's entrenched experience within the university sector means that your employees likely already have experience using our solutions)



Choose a scalable, enterprise-grade technology platform that:

- ensures consistency of message, permitting course material to be updated from a central control point.
- provides ease of access, allowing participants to connect with course material and fellow learners from anywhere with an internet connection.
- integrates training tools into a single portal that can be configured and managed by each division in your organization.
- provides a blended learning experience, incorporating experiential practice, group collaboration, learner preparation, and instructor guidance and feedback.
- includes the ability to schedule and manage courses, classroom time, and webinars outside the learning management system (LMS).
- ensures the organization's ability to control enrollments.
- tracks learner progress.
- improves the reporting process.



Take action

Leverage the **partner and technology selection criteria** shared in this e-book to assess prospective vendors.

Conduct your own research to look beyond the marketing headlines and and reveal true past performance—case studies, client lists, and available resources that reveal a depth of knowledge (or perhaps lack thereof).





Summary

Weeding through an ocean of information about the latest professional development trends and technologies can steal valuable time away from organizational leaders pursuing their core missions, and may lead to decision paralysis.

Given that the risks of stagnation are high within governmental agencies—escalating employee attrition and opportunity cost in the form of reduced productivity—it's imperative that organizations cut through the clutter and chart a clear path forward today.

Four simple steps to structuring a framework for success and future-proofing your professional development program:

1

Make professional development job one

Workers value continuous learning and professional growth. Centering a professional training program on this north star will not only benefit the organization by increasing productivity, but will also likely reduce turnover as well.

2

Focus on core competencies

Deconstructing existing training content and reconstructing it as core competencies can empower organizations to employ the mutually beneficial approach of competency-based education.

3

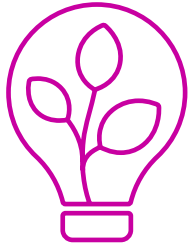
Create engaging experiences

Develop a comprehensive program that includes a mix of multimedia, microlearning, and in-person activities. E-learning solutions should serve as complements to—not replacements of—in-person engagement activities.

4

Choose a partner—not a piece of technology

When evaluating solutions, consider the benefit of leveraging a partner that not only offers leading-edge technology, but also understands the intricacies of learning and the governmental industry.



A successful learning program strategy must not only address today's needs but also scale for those of tomorrow.

Working with an experienced partner who offers a comprehensive solution, understands the business of learning, and demonstrates a commitment to customer service frees up organizational leaders to focus on their core mission: training and retaining a productive workforce.

Blackboard can help

The task of assessing your L&D program and strategizing the next steps to take it into the new millennium can be overwhelming. But with the right partner, it doesn't have to be.

For more than 20 years, Blackboard has pioneered the way learning is delivered, from K-12 to higher education to the business world. We have set the standard by which 100 million individuals learn today—including those students who will likely become your prospective applicants tomorrow.

Blackboard understands the unique training needs of businesses, supporting more than 1,600 corporate, healthcare, and government clients and 10 million employees worldwide. We can help you bridge any gaps in design and development, and enable you to deliver effective content that will have a direct impact on your organization.

Learn more: [Blackboard.com/government](https://blackboard.com/government)

Additional resources:

The National Defense University & Blackboard [video]

Training technology: learn, grow or become obsolete [webinar]

20 essential questions to drive organizational learning [e-book]

The effects of corporate learning on employee recruitment and retention [e-book]

6 golden rules to training employees [whitepaper]