



THE TALENT SHIFT:

Smart, Practical and Innovative Ways to Attract and Retain High Performers in Government

WHAT'S CHANGING, AND WHY IT MATTERS



Over the past few months, we've worked closely with government panels and public sector leaders across Queensland and there's one message that is loud and clear: *hiring is harder, expectations have changed, and traditional recruitment methods aren't enough anymore.*

Attracting and retaining high performers now means being faster, more flexible, and far more focused on the candidate experience and growth pathways. This paper combines **three practical tools you can use right away**, with **four more innovative strategies** that are helping public sector leaders get ahead of the market.

The Problem for Hiring Managers

Public sector teams are under pressure. You're asked to deliver more, modernise services, and build strong teams, often without the speed, flexibility, or brand power of the private sector. Add to that:

- » Lengthy recruitment timelines
- » Increasing demand for digital, data, policy and leadership skills
- » Burnout and disengagement of current staff
- » A perception gap around what government work offers.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone!

The Risk of Standing Still

Without an updated approach, public sector teams face:

- » Losing high calibre candidates mid process
- » Gaps in key capability areas like digital, policy, and leadership
- » Reduced engagement from existing staff
- » Longer hiring cycles and increased project delays.

Three Practical Solutions You Can Apply Today

These strategies are simple to implement yet often overlooked and can immediately improve hiring results by reducing recruitment delays, improving candidate quality, and building engagement, without overhauling your entire hiring process.





1. Lead with Purpose in Job Ads and Interviews

Lead with impact, don't bury it in bureaucracy. Today's workforce,

especially early and mid career professionals, want to do meaningful work. The public sector has a strong value proposition, but it's often lost in technical job ads. McKinsey research¹ also shows a strong sense of purpose drives performance, loyalty, and resilience. The Government has a powerful value proposition but many departments just aren't telling the story clearly. This strategy helps you make an emotional connection with candidates by showing them how their work matters. It boosts attraction by giving meaning to the role from day one.

What to do:

- » Rewrite job ads to lead with impact and mission, not duties. Instead of starting with role duties, begin with a short paragraph on the purpose and impact of the role. e.g. "Your work will directly shape Queensland's approach to clean energy transition."
- » Coach hiring panels to connect the dots between the role and the bigger picture. Communicate the 'why' behind the role and purpose of the organisation during interviews.
- » Share real stories about how the team is making a difference. i.e. In interviews, give real examples of team projects and their outcomes to bring the work to life.



2. Streamline the Hiring Process

Most top candidates enter the job market and find a role within 10 days².

High performers won't wait 6-8 weeks for an offer. If your process is slow or experiences delays, the better candidates move on... fast! Focussing on improving your 'speed to hire' will reduce the risk of losing top candidates who receive other offers before your panel even meets.

What to do:

- » Use pre qualified talent pools and expressions of interest. Connect with HR and other hiring managers in the organisation to leverage other recruitment processes.
- » Map your current hiring process and look for delays. Then create a "fast track" process that eliminates unnecessary steps and uses clear timelines e.g. schedule tentative dates for key activities, including panel coordination and approvals.

- » Design an inclusive recruitment process that promotes diversity – select panel members that provide gender and cultural diversity, provide training for panel members in anti bias techniques and inclusive language, use structured interview scoring to ensure fair and consistent assessments.
- » Move fast but thoroughly.



"Coach hiring panels to connect the dots between the role and the bigger picture."



3. Build Growth Opportunities Inside the Job

If talent can't grow, they'll go. Career stagnation is one of the top reasons people leave. Micro development

keeps people engaged without waiting years for a promotion. Gartner³ research shows that learning and career development is the top driver of employee satisfaction and retention today. Boost retention by helping people see a future in your team, without having to wait for a promotion.

What to do:

- » Offer small, high impact learning projects or stretch opportunities within and between teams. e.g., temporary leadership roles during leave periods, or leading small projects across departments.
- » Use microlearning tools. Subscribe to platforms like LinkedIn Learning or provide in house training videos to upskill staff regularly without pulling them away from their work.
- » Recognise and reward continuous learning and skills development. Add "learning achievements" into performance reviews or team meetings.

1 McKinsey & Co. (2023), *State of Organizations Report*

2 LinkedIn Talent Solutions (2024), *Global Talent Trends Report*

3 Gartner (2024), *Future of Work Trends*

Four Strategies to Attract Better Talent

To attract better talent, it's time to think differently. The following emerging strategies are gaining traction across forward thinking teams. They take a bit more planning, but they deliver long term competitive advantage.



1. 'Skills First' Hiring Instead of Credentials Only

Focus on capability, not just qualifications. Gartner data also shows 30% of high performers don't meet traditional credential criteria but outperform in a role. Skills first hiring also increases diversity and innovation. This strategy opens your candidate pool by focusing on what people can do, not just where they've been or what degrees they hold.

What to do:

- » Shift job requirements to focus on key skills, not degrees or years of service. Redesign evaluation criteria to include "essential capabilities" vs. "qualifications and experience only."
- » Use task based assessments to evaluate real capability. e.g., case studies, presentations, simulations and role playing in interviews.
- » Encourage cross sector and lateral entry pathways. Adjust eligibility pathways to welcome career switchers or those from adjacent industries – especially in digital and data roles.



2. Enable Remote and Hybrid Roles

Flexibility is now a core benefit, not a perk. Flexible working arrangements have become a top deciding factor for talent and teams offering remote or hybrid roles are attracting a broader range of applicants and supporting inclusive work practices. Microsoft's research shows flexible work arrangements now rank higher than pay for many professionals. It's also a proven way to access talent in regional areas. This strategy helps you attract and retain diverse talent that value autonomy and balance.

What to do:

- » Offer location flexible roles with clear collaboration expectations. Identify which roles can be remote or hybrid without loss of productivity.
- » Support remote onboarding and team building. Use clear, consistent guidelines that allow flexibility while maintaining accountability.
- » Leverage digital collaboration tools. Ensure your team is utilising Teams, SharePoint, and secure cloud access and embedding opportunities to shadow other team members and have daily/weekly virtual check ins for the team.



3. Personalised Growth Using AI Powered Tools

High performers want tailored development, not one size fits all. AI tools can help employees track progress and pursue personalised development. According to Microsoft WorkLab⁴, employees who receive personalised learning are 3.5x more likely to stay with their employer long term. This strategy gives employees control of their development, helping them stay challenged, skilled, and loyal.

What to do:

- » Build effective development and individual learning plans. Track progress and reward it by recognising achievements in team forums or internal newsletters.
- » Promote the completion of online learning, through government LMS platforms and others that offer individualised content. i.e. LinkedIn Learning, Degreed, or Coursera.
- » Align learning with project opportunities and performance reviews. Designed to build key skills. i.e. match a staff member learning project management with a short internal project.



4. Enable Career Portability Across Government

Let people grow without leaving the sector. Talent doesn't want to leave the public sector, but they do want variety. Portability creates movement without loss of capability. The APS Mobility Framework⁵ and other similar models show that supporting cross agency movement builds engagement, capability, and long term loyalty. This approach builds retention and engagement by giving people career progression within the sector, not forcing them to leave for growth.

What to do:

- » Partner with other departments for short term talent exchanges. Engage in talent exchange programs across departments, using existing secondment or mobility frameworks.
- » Implement a digital "skills passport" for internal mobility. This can track staff skills, experiences, and development goals, helping you and other hiring managers match talent to roles quickly.
- » Use secondments to retain high performers, reduce churn and guarantee return to role to increase uptake and security for participants.

⁴ Microsoft WorkLab (2024), *New Rules of Work*

⁵ Australian Public Service Commission (2023), *APS Mobility Framework*

Final Thought: It's Time to Rethink the Way We Compete for Talent

Hiring and retaining great people in the public sector isn't about matching private sector salaries or perks. It's about creating a modern, flexible, and meaningful employee experience, starting from the first impression. If you're grappling with these challenges, you're not alone. We're happy to share tools, templates, and real world examples from teams who are making it work.

If you're curious about the practical initiatives we've introduced across our Government client groups, Michelle Bassett is available for a complimentary 30-minute conversation. It's not a sales pitch, just a genuine, open exchange of what's worked and how you might apply similar strategies.

We're committed to sharing our insights to support better outcomes across the sector.

» Email Michelle.Bassett@kingstonhumancapital.com.au with the subject heading **"Knowledge Sharing"**.

Need Help Bringing This to Life? That's What We Do!

At **Kingston Human Capital**, we work shoulder to shoulder with public sector hiring managers to deliver high quality recruitment outcomes, fast. We are Queensland owned, policy savvy, DE&I committed and deeply experienced in supporting government recruitment.

Through our **Recruitment as a Service (RAAS)** model, we handle the time-consuming tasks so you can stay focused on what matters most, making great hiring decisions and delivering impact in your role. We help you move faster, reduce risk, and improve hiring outcomes with support across every step of the recruitment process:

Crafting smart, targeted job ads that attract the right talent

- ✓ Screening and shortlisting candidates, plus coordinating interviews
- ✓ Managing panels, creating tailored interview questions, and providing scribing support
- ✓ Engaging candidates throughout to reduce drop-outs and keep momentum
- ✓ Delivering fair, bias-aware processes that hold up to scrutiny
- ✓ Providing clear selection reports and conducting thorough reference checks
- ✓ Supporting offer negotiation and seamless onboarding
- ✓ Wrapping up with post-hire feedback reviews to drive continuous improvement.

It's your process, with our expert support, designed to make recruitment faster, easier, and more effective.



Sources:

1 McKinsey & Co. (2023), *State of Organizations Report*

2 LinkedIn Talent Solutions (2024), *Global Talent Trends Report*

3 Gartner (2024), *Future of Work Trends*

4 Microsoft WorkLab (2024), *New Rules of Work*

5 Australian Public Service Commission (2023), *APS Mobility Framework*

We handle the time-consuming tasks so you can stay focused on what matters most.



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"I partner with hiring managers to deliver bespoke recruitment and development solutions designed to attract, train and retain skilled professionals."

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Can we help you solve your talent headaches?

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