State of the Commonwealth HR

December 2025

One Commonwealth

Changing the Game from Competing for Talent to Growing & Strengthening Talent

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dhrm

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The Commonwealth of Virginia

The Commonwealth of Virginia's workforce makes a difference in the lives of Virginia's citizens and communities by providing programs, supporting services, and creating infrastructure. The Commonwealth employs nearly 140,000 individuals across the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government and independent state agencies, with roughly 57,000 of those individuals being classified employees.

The Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) is the central human resource agency for the Commonwealth of Virginia and is dedicated to providing a broad range of leadership, services and guidance to the Commonwealth and its stakeholders. DHRM is a valued resource providing critical human resource infrastructure to all state agencies, such as Cardinal HCM, PageUp (recruiting, performance management, and onboarding), and the COVLC.

We develop and interpret policies; provide guidance for employee relations challenges, investigations, compensation and classification reviews, and workforce development needs; offer and manage a Shared Services Center; manage employee health insurance and wellness programs; and manage the Workers' Compensation program and provide safety training. The Commonwealth's HR leaders are critical, and our resources are provided to enable success.

Message from the Director

How do you address the current perception that high performance is just rewarded with more work?

This was a question posed at DHRM's conference last fall. Though our discussion at that time outlined potential strategies we can use to address this perception, I shared that even if an employee were to leave an agency for other opportunities but remain within the Commonwealth, it's still a win.

I think we can all agree with that statement, but will admit, it feels like there is something missing from it. Searching for that missing piece is what sparked the theme for this inaugural issue of DHRM's State of the Commonwealth HR publication.

What is that missing piece? *A One Commonwealth mentality.*

Yes, that probably sounds harsh. But beginning any type of cultural shift often seems that way at first because it requires an honest, and sometimes brutal, reflection of the current state of things.

But more important is the opportunity this presents. One where our HR teams across the Commonwealth can step up to the plate and lead our entire workforce in this new arena.

This begins with an honest reflection of who we are, our strengths, and our weaknesses.

The team that put this publication together worked across all of DHRM office areas to bring multiple perspectives to common issues. Their work highlights new insights and innovative strategies we can employ today, both at the agency level, and collectively as a Commonwealth.

So as you read through the publication, I encourage you to keep an open mind. My hope is this will provide you not only with strategies to address some of the points within the publication, but to also spark new conversations within your teams and with DHRM. Remember, DHRM is your trusted partner and resource for all HR matters.

I am proud of everything our HR Community has, and continues, to accomplish each and every day. And together, I know we can turn One Commonwealth from an idea into reality.

One Commonwealth

Changing the Game from Competing for Talent to Growing & Strengthening Talent

One Commonwealth, the idea of inter-agency collaboration, is nothing new. We see elements of this philosophy being employed today from several state agencies. But what was once an ideal to strive for has now become an imperative.

Across the entire Commonwealth, agencies are facing increased competition for talent on a variety of factors. Rather than fueling that by also competing with ourselves, we can change our approach to strategically position us to leverage the strengths of agencies collectively - like chess.

And by changing our approach, we change the game. A One Commonwealth mentality would leverage our resources across agencies to strengthen and grow talent internally. Think of it as adding pieces to the chess board that agencies alone, and especially private sector organizations, do not have access to.

To do that, we conducted an extensive analysis of the Commonwealth's workforce. Exploring aspects of recruitment, retention, internal mobility, engagement and leadership offered data-driven insight into the current state of the commonwealth's workforce and HR.

This inaugural issue of DHRM's State of the Commonwealth HR shares highlights from that analysis through a variety of articles. Each centers around a specific perspective and offers strategies for agencies to address related challenges, while also describing how each contribute to a One Commonwealth approach.

Analysis Methodology - Why we Used a Representative Sample

Our analysis utilized a sample of 38 agencies, representing nearly 28,000 employees across 12 secretariats. Though this may not include every agency, the sample is large enough so that the trends and key findings can be representative of the entire Commonwealth's workforce.

Why did we choose to use a sample instead of a full data set? Since the Commonwealth utilizes multiple data systems and agencies submit several plans to DHRM, we needed a way to be able to compare and cross reference information from the multitude of data sources. Which included ensuring that each data source reflected the same agencies.

For example, if one data source (such as Cardinal HCM) included information from an agency that did not submit an annual workforce plan, it may present inconsistencies between the two sources and lead to inaccurate findings.

Mandated plans submitted to DHRM, such as the Employment Opportunities Plan (EOP) and Annual Workforce Plan, provide important insights for DHRM to measure the effectiveness of key initiatives and to align our efforts to best support agencies across the Commonwealth.

To ensure the accuracy of our analysis, Agencies included in the sample were selected based on meeting all four of the following criteria:

1. Cardinal HCM is utilized by the agency.
2. PageUp RMS is utilized by the agency.
3. The agency submitted an FY24 EOP.
4. The agency submitted an FY24 Workforce Plan.

Though most agencies met the first two criteria, the Employment Opportunities Plan (EOP) and/or the Annual Workforce Plan were not submitted by some, which required us to remove them from the sample.

Data Integrity: Empowering Decisions, Driving Value

State of People Analytics

Part I: The Importance of Data Integrity – A Call to Action

In today's data-driven HR environment, *data integrity is the foundation for sound decision-making, operational efficiency,* and employee trust. Accurate and timely data entry enables agencies and other key stakeholders to remain compliant with policy, support pay transparency and respond quickly to legislative and executive mandates. However, when data is incomplete, outdated, or incorrect, the consequences often cascade far beyond a single data point.

The downstream impacts are significant. Inaccurate data can lead to employees being over- or underpaid, delays in salary adjustments, and/or errors in leave balances and benefits eligibility.

"Data Integrity is the foundation for sound decision-making, operational efficiency, and employee trust."

Misaligned job classifications may distort workforce analytics, hinder equity reviews, or compromise the accuracy of budget requests. When flawed data is used to populate reports and data within HR Data Insights (HRDI) or the Statewide dashboard, it impacts the Commonwealth's ability to monitor trends, justify funding, and develop strategic workforce plans.

That's why *data integrity must be a shared priority at every level*. Whether you're entering an employee specific transaction, reconciling workforce reports, or using analytics to shape agency strategy, your role in ensuring data accuracy directly contributes to the quality and impact of public service delivery.

This is a call to action. Take time to verify information, audit regularly, and fix discrepancies promptly. A few extra moments of diligence today can prevent costly corrections and confusion tomorrow. When we treat HR data with care, we empower ourselves, our teams, and the Commonwealth to lead with confidence and make informed decisions.

Explore HR Data Insights

HR Data Insights (HRDI) is a powerful query tool that allows agencies to filter and download historical employee and transaction data, which is sourced directly from Cardinal and transformed into user-friendly formats.

HRDI is available through the DHRM SecurePass portal, which serves as a gateway to multiple DHRM applications. To access HRDI and other tools, staff must complete SecurePass training. If you haven't done so already, we encourage you to complete this short training at your earliest convenience so you can make building your own queries possible.

Where should you start? Now that we've recognized the importance of data integrity, it's time to act. Here are a few steps to begin strengthening your agency's data practices:

- **Conduct a Data Audit:** Start by reviewing key fields such as FLSA designation and employee classification. Even a simple spot-check can uncover patterns that need correction.

- **Review Available Job Aids:** Utilize the tools and resources already available to support data accuracy. These job aids provide step-by-step instructions to ensure correct data entry the first time.

- **Establish a Routine Review Process:** Build in regular checks at monthly or quarterly intervals to catch errors early and improve long-term data quality.

- **Encourage Communication Across Teams:** Data integrity improves when HR, payroll, and IT coordinate closely. Make time to align on procedures and expectations.

- **Audit ideas:**
  FLSA Status Audit
  Reports to Field Audit

- **Helpful Job Aids:**
  Mismatch Data Cheat Sheet
  Managing Position Data
  Employee Class Overview
  All Cardinal Job Aids

Even small improvements made consistently can lead to meaningful change. Start where you are—and build from there.

Part II: Data Integrity in Action – Three Perspectives

How does Data Integrity apply to you and your role? To illustrate how data integrity supports the Commonwealth's HR mission, we introduce three fictional characters whose roles reflect real responsibilities across our workforce. While their names and stories are illustrative, the value they place on accurate data is all too relatable.

Teddy holds a vital piece of the data integrity puzzle. Teddy works to ensure that each new hire, pay adjustment, and personnel action is properly entered and coded.

He understands that what may be perceived as a small error, such as an incorrect hire date, misapplied FLSA classification, or mismatched job code, can create ripple effects across payroll, reporting, and compliance functions.

Because of this, Teddy treats each entry as a critical building block in the integrity of the entire system.

Claire oversees an agency's HR operations and frequently uses data to identify workforce trends, inform compensation studies, and evaluate staffing needs.

She depends on accurate job titles, classification details, and employment histories to create reliable reports.

When data is inconsistent, it compromises her ability to plan effectively, delays initiatives, and can raise questions from leadership about the credibility of HR insights.

As a senior leader, Jan relies on aggregated workforce data to support budget requests, evaluate staffing models, and respond to inquiries from their agency's Secretary.

When the data is solid, Jan can speak with confidence about the agency's needs and accomplishments.

However, inaccurate or incomplete data makes it harder to advocate for resources or explain workforce shifts, ultimately limiting the agency's agility and public accountability.

Conclusion: Building Trust Through Better Data

Teddy, Claire, and Jan each play a different role, but their success depends on one common thread: accurate and trustworthy HR data. By treating data integrity as a shared responsibility, we can minimize errors, enhance efficiency, and drive smarter decisions at every level of the Commonwealth. So, what should you do if you find a data integrity issue? It's simple. Take swift action to correct the error(s). Let's continue working together to strengthen the value and reliability of the data that powers our workforce.

"...data Integrity must be a shared priority at every level."

Strategies to Ensure Data Integrity at Your Agency

Strategy #1: Incorporate Quality Assurance Steps

Embed validation into the data entry process by encouraging team members to pause and self-review each transaction before submission.

Taking a moment to double-check key fields such as effective dates, salary amounts, position numbers, and FLSA designations can prevent many common errors. To strengthen this practice, consider incorporating a third-party quality assurance (QA) step, where a peer or team lead briefly reviews transactions before they are finalized.

In partnership with Cardinal, efforts are underway to establish more effective data controls, such as error prevention messages and system blocks, to catch certain errors at the time of entry.

These improvements, paired with strong QA processes at the data review and entry phase, will significantly reduce downstream issues, rework, and increase confidence in the data we rely on every day.

Strategy #2: Run Targeted Audits

Implement quarterly audits to proactively identify and correct data errors or inconsistencies.

These audits don't need to be time-consuming. Simple exception reports such as mismatches between job codes and titles, pay rates that fall outside band limits, or mismatched FLSA and position data can be reviewed in a short amount of time and easily worked into a busy schedule.

Even brief, targeted reviews can uncover recurring issues, support cleaner data, and reduce the likelihood of downstream problems.

Addressing errors promptly and tracking recurring issues over time can help improve processes, reduce systemic errors, and inform training priorities.

Strategy #3: Make Data Stewardship a Team Expectation

Treat data integrity as a core responsibility across teams by embedding data quality goals into performance expectations.

Setting clear standards such as maintaining error rates below a defined threshold can help create a shared commitment to accuracy. Just as important, is cultivating a culture where asking questions, seeking clarification, and acknowledging mistakes is encouraged.

Creating space for open dialogue not only reduces the likelihood of repeated errors but also builds trust and accountability. Support this effort with micro-trainings, job aids, and checklists so every staff member understands not just how to enter data, but why accuracy matters.

When data stewardship is built into daily work, and reinforced by a supportive environment, it leads to long-term improvements in data quality and decision-making.

One Commonwealth

One Standard for Data Integrity

Under the One Commonwealth approach, we must all recognize that data integrity isn't the job of just one person or one team. It's a shared responsibility across all agencies, roles, and systems.

Every data point entered, reviewed and analyzed, or reported contributes to a larger picture of agency and the Commonwealth workforce and operations.

When we ensure data is accurate, complete, and current, we empower leaders and practitioners to conduct meaningful analysis and make informed, equitable, and timely decisions.

Whether it's preparing for a compensation review, responding to legislative inquiries, or planning for future staffing needs, data integrity is the foundation.

Upholding this standard across the Commonwealth strengthens not only our systems, but also our collective ability to serve with excellence.

Expanding Our Ability to Reach New Talent
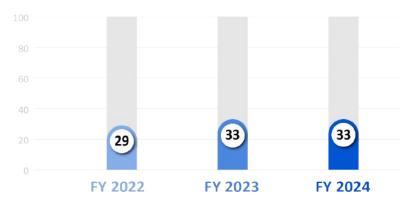
Does recruitment feel like you're running endless laps around a track, repeating the same cycle over and over? If you feel that way, you're not alone.
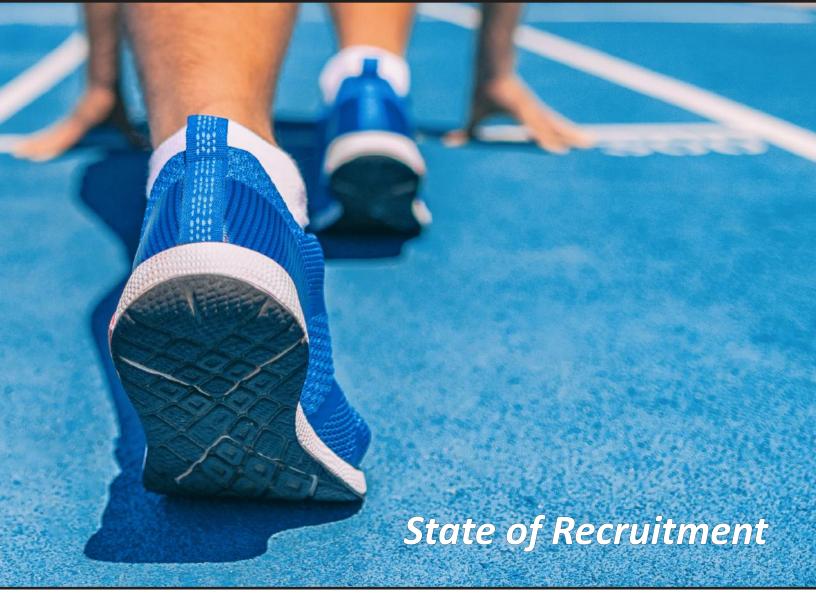
Agency workforce plans submitted over the last three years have shown an increasing emphasis on recruitment efforts. From the sample of agencies in our analysis, nearly a third of all workforce strategy objectives have been related to recruitment.

Despite this, the challenges related to recruitment that were reported in the workforce plans remained the same. The two most common obstacles agencies have been facing were the availability for talent and the competition for talent.

Percent of Workforce Plan Objectives Focused on Recruitment

FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
29	33	33

Top recruitment objectives included elements related to targeted recruitment efforts, strategies to become an Employer of Choice and to influence the agency employment brand, sourcing new talent, and/or partnerships with internal and external agencies.

State of Recruitment

A Potential Preference for State Service

Why have these obstacles continued over the years? One way to answer that question was to assess whether we are reaching a wide range of candidates (width) and the quality of the candidates that submit applications (depth).

Between July 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025, nearly 2,000 positions from the sample of agencies were posted for recruitment. Positions that remained open as of March 31st and those that reflect a continuous recruitment cycle were excluded from the analysis.
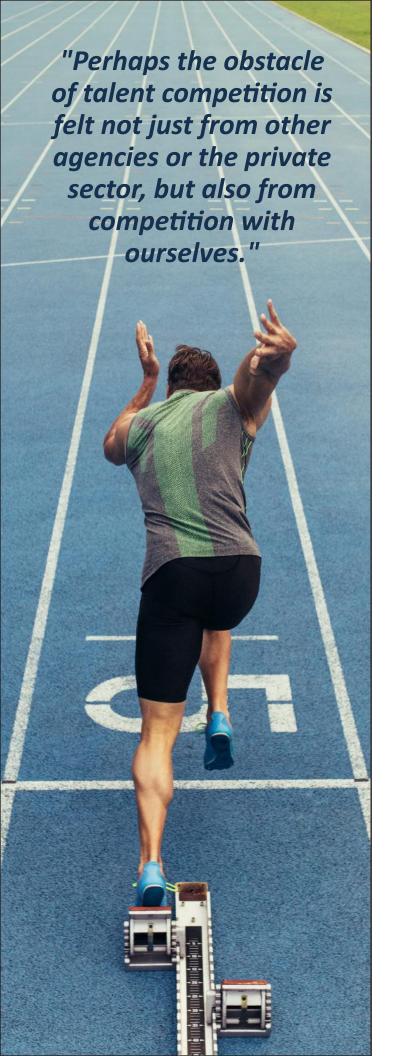
The total unique applications submitted in PageUp exceeded 35,000. This certainly indicates we are reaching a wide enough range of candidates. Breaking down the total applications received between current state employees, those with prior state experience, and external applicants illustrates most applications were from external sources.

Over the same time period, just over 2,000 individuals were hired. That equates to hiring 5.63% of all applicants, or the applicant hire rate.

What does that tell us about candidate depth?

Since the applicant hire rate is low, that could be saying we are not reaching the "right" candidates for positions. But let's not jump to specific conclusions just yet.

> *"Perhaps the obstacle of talent competition is felt not just from other agencies or the private sector, but also from competition with ourselves."*

Breaking down the hiring data the same way, the graphics on page 17 highlight that more internal applicants were hired with an applicant hire rate of 16.5%. Those with prior state experience had an applicant hire rate of 7% and external applicants had an applicant hire rate of 2.7%.

The hiring data for veterans and leadership positions demonstrate this same trend, signaling a possible preference for state service among applicants, either consciously or unconsciously.

Though prior state government experience can be a great asset to an agency, could this potential preference be constricting our view of what a "right" candidate is? It would be as if we are trying to run a race around the track against others while limiting our speed and pace. Perhaps the obstacle of talent competition is felt not just from other agencies or the private sector, but also from the competition with ourselves.

It is not just about us reaching the "right" candidates but also revisiting how we define "right" candidate for positions. Doing so can grant access to new talent pools and increase the amount of talent entering the Commonwealth's workforce.

Infusing New Talent Into Your Agency

If you were to attract new skills, perspectives, and experiences to your agency, what would happen? Maybe the different experiences could lead to an innovative solution. Or new perspectives could uncover opportunities that streamline processes to better serve the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Better yet, could accessing new talent elevate the engagement and capabilities of your agency's entire workforce? It's certainly possible. Just imagine the impact from filling only a portion of the current vacant positions at your agency. Doing that could promote a more positive employee experience and support career growth by re-balancing a portion of the workload.

But it will take deliberative strategies and conscious effort to achieve that. Here are our top three strategies:

Percentage of Total Applicants and Hires
by Applicant Type

Internal Applicants

16.5%
Applicants
Hired

17.9% **53.3%**
of all Applicants | of all Hires

Prior Employee

7.0%
Applicants
Hired

9.2% **11.7%**
of all Applicants | of all Hires

External Applicants

2.7%
Applicants
Hired

72.9% **35.1%**
of all Applicants | of all Hires

Percentages of applicants hired (applicant hire rate) is based on total applications received by the sample of agencies for this publication from July 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025. Only positions that were posted and closed within this period were included in the analysis. Position that remained open after March 31, 2025 were excluded to ensure all positions for the analysis completed the full recruitment cycle.

Percentage of Total Veteran Applicants and Hires
by Applicant Type

Internal Applicants

16.2%
Applicants
Hired

18.4% **45.7%**
of all Veteran | of all Veteran
Applicants | Hires

Prior Employee

13.2%
Applicants
Hired

12.2% **24.6%**
of all Veteran | of all Veteran
Applicants | Hires

External Applicants

2.8%
Applicants
Hired

69.4% **29.7%**
of all Veteran | of all Veteran
Applicants | Hires

Percentages of applicants hired (applicant hire rate) is based on total applications received by the sample of agencies for this publication from July 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025. Only positions that were posted and closed within this period were included in the analysis. Position that remained open after March 31, 2025 were excluded to ensure all positions for the analysis completed the full recruitment cycle. Veteran applicants were identified as applications that voluntarily disclosed their veteran status.

Percentage of Total Applicants and Hires
for Supervisor / Manager Roles by Applicant Type

Internal Applicants

16.0%
Applicants
Hired

31.2% **82.1%**
of all Sup/Mgr | of all Sup/Mgr
Applicants | Hires

Prior Employee

3.1%
Applicants
Hired

9.3% **4.8%**
of all Sup/Mgr | of all Sup/Mgr
Applicants | Hires

External Applicants

1.3%
Applicants
Hired

59.5% **13.1%**
of all Sup/Mgr | of all Sup/Mgr
Applicants | Hires

Percentages of applicants hired (applicant hire rate) is based on total applications received by the sample of agencies for this publication from July 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025. Only positions that were posted and closed within this period were included in the analysis. Position that remained open after March 31, 2025 were excluded to ensure all positions for the analysis completed the full recruitment cycle. Supervisor and Manager roles were identified based on the position level field associated with the application position number in Cardinal HCM system.

Strategies for Infusing New Talent Into Your Agency

Strategy #1: Focus on Transferable Skills or Comparable Experience

Though prior state service ensures knowledge about our policies and procedures, some of those elements may be able to be learned through coaching or training.

Shifting your focus to the underlying knowledge and skills that state experience provides enables you to identify which elements can be transferred from different jobs and industries.

As a starting point, agency human resources can partner with hiring managers or recruitment panels to demonstrate how to spot opportunities for using transferable skills.

HR can also provide guidance on specific knowledge or skills that may be appropriate to consider as transferable

Strategy #2: Leverage Existing Programs and Partnerships

Do you know about the Virginia Values Veterans Employment Certification? What about the Alternative Hiring Process? Does your agency leverage these two programs?

These are just some of the existing programs to support the employment of specific talent pools, which in this case, are veterans and individuals with disabilities. With varying abilities and resources between agencies to recruit talent, using existing programs can be an easy way to introduce your agency to specific talent pools and establish new pipelines.

What about partnerships between Commonwealth agencies? There could be practically endless possibilities from collaborating with other agencies on recruitment strategies, so we won't list them here. But partnerships can provide a unique aspect to recruitment that can attract the attention of prospective employees.

Strategy #3: Beware of Affinity Bias

Affinity Bias. The unconscious tendency for us to favor others like ourselves. With a potential preference for state service, this may be influenced by those with state service experience using similar language and references that we use within the Commonwealth.

It's important to ensure there is an awareness of bias and use actions to reduce its impacts. Luckily, our recruitment practices have embedded strategies to reduce unconscious bias like using diverse recruitment panels. As recruiters and hiring managers may change overtime, it is important to revisit unconscious awareness and bias regularly.

You can also use strategy #1 about identifying transferable skills to increase awareness of affinity bias. That exercise can help you better relate to external candidates who may not use the same language we use in the Commonwealth.

Are you using the Alternative Hiring Process to its full potential?

The alternative hiring process isn't just about recruitment. If utilized to its full potential, it can also support existing employee retention and growing internal talent. How can you do that?

With approximately 1 in 4 individuals having a disability, it indicates an agency's workforce already includes individuals with disabilities, even if they haven't disclosed it. The alternative hiring process gives those employees an avenue to pursue new roles and grow professionally, further supporting employee retention at the agency.

What is Your Employment Brand?

The employment brand. Is it something we define or is it defined for us? Well, it depends.

The employment brand encompasses the values, culture, and mission of an organization. It is also driven by the perceptions of both prospective and current employees.

If we take a proactive approach, we are able to define the employee value proposition- ensuring that our actions from hiring practices, talent development, and leadership interactions align with the culture we wish to represent. If we don't, it is defined for us.

So how do you know what your employment brand is? Just ask your workforce.

One Commonwealth

Leveraging the Commonwealth's Brand for Recruitment

Applying a One Commonwealth perspective to recruitment is rooted in the idea that when positions are posted, they are not just for the agency but also for the entire Commonwealth's workforce.

This idea enables you to leverage the overall Commonwealth brand as a public sector employer by layering it with your agency's elements to communicate a unique, fulfilling, and meaningful career to prospective employees. It would be like we are changing our approach to the recruitment race from running a full lap by ourself to a relay race.

What is the Commonwealth's employment brand? Though it hasn't been formally defined, it still exists. It exists in the perceptions of pro-

spective employees they glean information from public websites, online reviews, speaking with current employees about the work experience, or their personal interactions with state agencies.

So, the question is not what the Commonwealth's employment brand is, but rather are we highlighting the core aspects of what makes the Commonwealth stand out from our competition.

That answer would be specific to each agency, so we will leave it for you to explore. If you are unsure, please reach out to DHRM to learn more about statewide initiatives or resources available to all Commonwealth employees that may align with your recruitment strategies.

Pay? Benefits?...

Yes, pay and benefits are factors that are important to candidates and thus a source of competition. But rather than looking at them individually, we can embrace a total compensation approach to highlight our strengths.
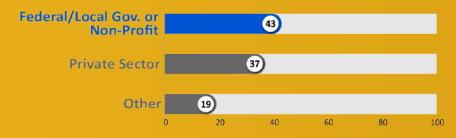
You can learn more about how you compare to other organizations through a partnership DHRM has with Mercer, which allows Commonwealth agencies to access national compensation data at a significantly discounted fee. For more information about participating, please contact compensation@dhrm.virginia.gov.

The good news is that also means other organizations also face this type of competition. The not-so-great news is there is less flexibility in ways to address this form of competition, especially for public sector organizations. However, one way to compete is to focus on our strengths, careers with purpose.

How can this help? Well, from the exit survey, participants who have left Virginia State government indicate what sector their new job is in.

The conventional thinking is that most employees leave to go to the private sector. But from the chart below, when adding those who went to the federal government, non-profit organizations, and local government, the total percentage exceeds that of the individuals who went to the private sector. This could signal that meaningful work and purpose are valued for some individuals, giving us a competitive advantage so a select group of talent.

Percent of Exit Survey Responses to "My new job is in the following sector:"

Sector	Percent
Federal/Local Gov. or Non-Profit	43
Private Sector	37
Other	19

The Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey invites classified employees who have voluntarily left employment or transfered within the Commonwealth to participate. The sample of agencies for this publication included a total of 461 exit survey responses. The percentages above is representative of the 157 responses that indicated their new job was outside of Virginia State Government.

...or Total Compensation?

Beyond Pay: Total Rewards Across the Commonwealth

As HR professionals across the Commonwealth, we understand that attracting and retaining top talent requires more than a paycheck. The State of Virginia's total rewards approach is a compelling story. One we help shape every day. Now we must also focus on effectively communicating it to current and potential employees.

Pay and Benefits: A Solid Foundation

While salary is a core element of the Commonwealth's value proposition, our strength lies in pairing pay with exceptional benefits. The Virginia Retirement System, affordable and comprehensive health coverage, generous leave programs, and supplemental offerings such as life insurance, disability coverage, and wellness resources create a package that's difficult to match. These offerings form a strong value proposition for both recruitment and retention purposes.

More Than Money: Purpose and Impact

One of our greatest advantages is the meaningful nature of the work we support. Whether it's advancing public safety, education, infrastructure, or community services, our employees contribute to the greater good of the Commonwealth every day. For many, that sense of purpose is just as important as financial rewards and one that should be highlighted when possible.

> "When we communicate the full picture... we bring the employee value proposition to life."

Supporting Work-Life Balance

Flexible scheduling, telework opportunities, and wellness programs reflect the Commonwealth's ongoing commitment to supporting employees as whole people, not just employees of the State. These policies enhance productivity, reduce burnout, and strengthen employee engagement, which are key drivers in sustaining a high-performing workforce.

Career Growth and Learning

The Commonwealth's investment in employee career and professional development includes training programs, tuition assistance, leadership development initiatives, and career mobility ensures employees have clear pathways to grow within the Commonwealth. This is an opportunity for human resources to play a pivotal role in guiding employees toward resources and programs that match their career aspirations and professional goals.

Total Rewards: A Strategic Advantage

When we communicate the full picture: fair and sustainable pay, outstanding benefits, meaningful work, work-life balance, and growth opportunities, we bring the Commonwealth's employee value proposition to life. As stewards of this message, we must leverage this information by actively communicating the total rewards the Commonwealth has to offer, turning it into a true strategic advantage.

Bridging the Gap Between Divergent Perspectives

State of the Employee Experience

The employee experience is always difficult to describe from just a single perspective. Doing so would be subject to a limited scope of perceptions and heavily influenced by potential bias. And yet, this task often falls just to human resources.

But if we examine themes of the employee experience from a larger group of employees, we have an opportunity to reconstruct the employee experience that incorporates a variety of perspectives.

We can then compare that with the description done by human resources, which is exactly what we did in our analysis.

Human Resources Perspective of the Employee Experience

We began our analysis by exploring how agency human resources describe their employee experience by using the agency workforce plans.

Part of the workforce planning process is to answer two questions: How does the agency want prospective employees to imagine their work experience and how does the agency want employees who are leaving to describe their work experience?
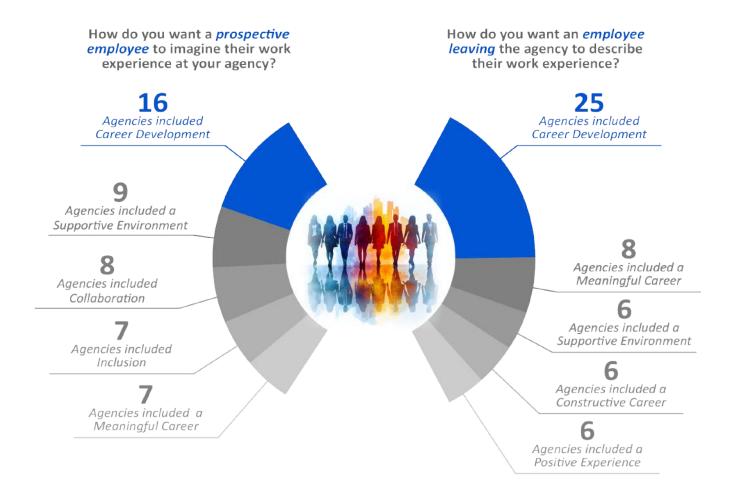
The top themes of the responses to both questions paint an ideal picture of the employee experience. It is described as a supportive and collaborative environment that provides meaningful work and opportunities to grow.

Aspects related to career development were overwhelmingly the most common response for both questions. These themes were also mirrored in other areas of agency workforce plans.
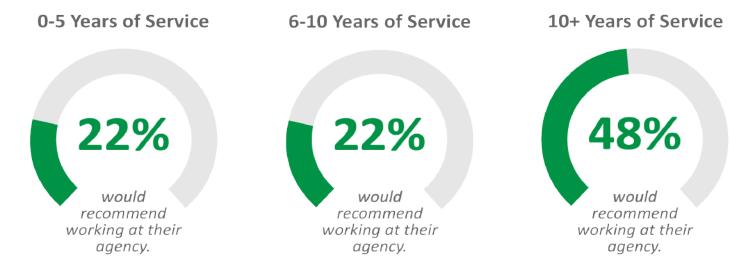
Items related to retention and career development were included as agency strengths in the SWOT analysis and diversity culture was one of the top areas that agencies felt most prepared to achieve their strategic objectives.

Number of Agencies that Included Elements in their Perspective of the Employee Experience

How do you want a *prospective employee* to imagine their work experience at your agency?

16
Agencies included Career Development

9
Agencies included a Supportive Environment

8
Agencies included Collaboration

7
Agencies included Inclusion

7
Agencies included a Meaningful Career

How do you want an *employee leaving* the agency to describe their work experience?

25
Agencies included Career Development

8
Agencies included a Meaningful Career

6
Agencies included a Supportive Environment

6
Agencies included a Constructive Career

6
Agencies included a Positive Experience

Responses to both questions represent the overall themes taken from the submitted annual workforce plans for fiscal year 2024, representing agency data and responses from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024, for the sample of 38 agencies. Responses were coded into the overall themes by DHRM's Senior Consultant for Workforce Planning and Analytics.

Percentage of Exit Survey Responses that responded favorably to
"I would recommend the agency or institution I worked at as a great place to work to a friend or family member."

0-5 Years of Service	6-10 Years of Service	10+ Years of Service
22%	**22%**	**48%**
would recommend working at their agency.	*would recommend working at their agency.*	*would recommend working at their agency.*

The Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey invites classified employees who have voluntarily left employment or transferred within the Commonwealth to participate. The sample of agencies for this publication included a total of 461 exit survey responses.

How Employees are Describing their Experience

The job experience section of the exit survey is broken down into six key areas:

• Rewards
• Growth Opportunities
• Person / Work Fit
• Meaningful work
• Management / Leadership
• Work Environment

Since we used a sample of agencies, we were able to cross reference separation transaction data by age and years of service with the exit survey for this analysis. This allowed us to weigh the exit survey responses of different age groups based on the percentage of separations transactions that occurred to provide insight into the employee experience for different years of service blocks; 0-5 Years, 6-10 Years, and 10+ Years.

Though this process has not been done before and does not provide the exact experience of employees within each year of service groups, the results of our analysis appeared to show consistency with the overall exit survey trends for the varying age groups.

We believe this information can provide initial insight into how an employee's perception of their job experience may change as they remain at an agency to then allow you to investigate further on your own.

The first data point of the exit survey was the net promoter score. This is often used as an overall measure of whether an experience is generally perceived to be positive or negative. But rather than just looking at the overall number, we dove deeper into how individual response to the statement "I would recommend the agency or institution I worked at as a great place to work to a friend or family member".

22% of Individuals in their first five years (typically 18-30 years old) and in the six to ten years of service (typically 31-50 years old) and 48% of individuals with ten or greater years of service (typically 55 or older) indicated they would recommend their agency as a great place to work.

The higher percentage of favorability for those with the greatest years of service is expected as most were approaching service retirement by that time.

Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey Job Experience Percent Favorable and Unfavorable by Category and Comments

Job Experience Areas	0-5 Years of Service		6-10 Years of Service		10+ Years of Service	
Rewards	49%	37%	47%	40%	62%	21%
Growth Opportunities	42%	38%	39%	44%	51%	29%
Person/Work Fit	33%	46%	30%	50%	50%	31%
Meaningful Work	58%	24%	54%	28%	60%	16%
Leadership/Management	59%	26%	56%	29%	66%	19%
Work Environment	46%	35%	42%	39%	61%	22%

■ *Percent Favorable* ■ *Percent Unfavorable*

The Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey invites classified employees who have voluntarily left employment or transferred within the Commonwealth to participate. The sample of agencies for this publication included a total of 461 exit survey responses. Neutral response ratings were omitted from this graphic but are included as a response option.

0-5 Years of Service Job Experience Comments

6-10 Years of Service Job Experience Comments

10+ Years of Service Job Experience Comments

But what could be influencing the low percentage of individuals who would recommend working at their agency the 0-5 and 6-10 years of service groups?

We also sought to answer that question by exploring the exit survey categories and comments about the job experience. See page 26 for the graphics related to the exit survey job experience analysis.

The percentages for each of the job experience categories fluctuate between the groups but the overall trends remain consistent. Rewards, Growth Opportunities, and Person / Work Fit had a higher unfavorable rating and were close together. Meaningful Work, Management / Leadership, and Work Environment had a lower unfavorable rating and were also close together.

This has been the same trend since the exit survey began receiving responses in March of 2018, potentially indicating the *perception of the employee experience hasn't changed much*.

However, there is one exception. Work Experience has been trending less favorable over the last several quarters and is noticeably less favorable than Meaningful Work and Management / Leadership.

The comments about the job experience add additional context to why work environment has been trending less favorable. Concerns with leadership behaviors, perceptions of a toxic work environment, inadequate pay in relation to the workload, and feelings of being not valued and favoritism were among the most common themes.

Across the three groups, having a good team and supportive colleagues was also present, but was more common for the 10+ years of service group.

What to Take Away from the Employee Experience Analysis

So how does the agency's perspective compare to an employee's perspective? From our analysis, we would highlight three main takeaways:

1. There is a difference between how agencies describe their ideal employee experience to how employees perceive their experience (according to the exit survey).

2. Growth Opportunities and Person/Work Fit were the two least favorable areas of the employee experience.

3. Perceptions of a toxic work environment and concerns with leadership behavior are contributing factors to the trend that work environment is becoming less favorable.

Since March of 2018, the perception of the employee experience hasn't changed much, with one exception.

The Road to a 20% Exit Survey Response Rate

The exit survey invites classified employees who recently left employment with the Commonwealth voluntarily, recent retirees, and transfers between state agencies to participate.

In FY24, the Commonwealth saw the greatest total responses of 1,160 in a single fiscal year. FY24 also had the highest response rate of 16%.

Through use of the Exit Survey HR Admin Tool, agencies can send a survey invitation via email or survey link when a resignation letter is received or launch the survey immediately during off boarding. This significantly reduces the amount of time for exiting employees to receive an invitation to participate. If you would like to learn more, please contact dhrm.wfp@dhrm.virginia.gov

But to reach our goal of a 20% response rate, we need to go further. We need to show employees their feedback matters and highlight how the exit survey has contributed to decisions at the agency. Doing so will hopefully encourage future employees to participate in the survey.

Be a part of our journey to 20%!

Diverging Perspectives - How is Career Development Defined?

Since career development was a significant portion of the ideal employee experience from the agency perspective and growth opportunities was the second least favorable category of the exit survey, the remainder of this article examines this further. However, the impact of work environment and leadership are also important and explored in the other articles.

So what could be contributing to the diverging perspectives about career development?

Using the agency SWOT analysis in the agency workforce plans, most references to career development were the use of career pathing, access to skill development (such as LinkedIn Learning), and the use of cross training.

We can examine the specific statements for the growth opportunities and person / work fit from the exit survey to learn more about employee's perception of career development. Our focus is on the 0-5 and 6-10 years of service groups, as the 10+ years of service group appears to not be as impacted by these two categories.
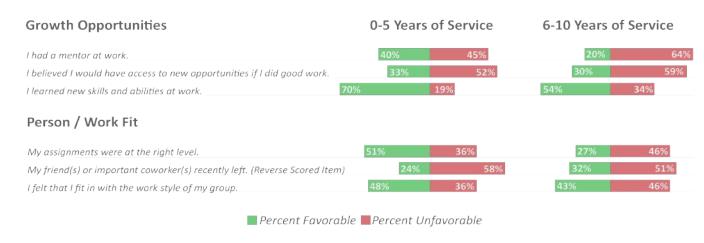
Responses from exit survey indicate that individuals felt they were able to learn new skills and abilities, with 70% of individuals in the 0-5 years responded favorably but that percentage dropped to 54% for the 6-10 years. Further, 51% of individuals in the 0-5 years of service group felt the work assignments were at the right level but only 27% felt the same for the 6-10 years group.

This difference may illustrate that employees are able to learn and apply those skills within the first five years but have limited opportunities to further apply and refine those skills as they continue at the agency. Or, on the other side, employees in the 6-10 years of service group are assigned additional responsibilities that could require new skills, where the additional workload may limit their availability to participate in career development to learn those new skills.

A comment from a roundtable discussion from DHRM's 2024 HR Conference asked how to address the perception that when employees perform well, they are just rewarded with more work. This idea may be due to a disconnect between how the agency defines career development and how an employee views it. The employee may see participating in cross training or new skill development as way for additional responsibilities to be added to their role or the career development that is available does not align with their professional goals.

Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey Job Experience Percent Favorable and Unfavorable for Growth Opportunities and Person/Work Fit Aspects by Survey Statement

Growth Opportunities	0-5 Years of Service		6-10 Years of Service	
I had a mentor at work.	40%	45%	20%	64%
I believed I would have access to new opportunities if I did good work.	33%	52%	30%	59%
I learned new skills and abilities at work.	70%	19%	54%	34%

Person / Work Fit				
My assignments were at the right level.	51%	36%	27%	46%
My friend(s) or important coworker(s) recently left. (Reverse Scored Item)	24%	58%	32%	51%
I felt that I fit in with the work style of my group.	48%	36%	43%	46%

■ Percent Favorable ■ Percent Unfavorable

The Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey invites classified employees who have voluntarily left employment or transferred within the Commonwealth to participate. The sample of agencies for this publication included a total of 461 exit survey responses. Neutral response ratings were omitted from this graphic but are included as a response option.

Strategies to Realize Your Ideal Employee Experience

Strategy #1: Conduct an Agency Level Analysis

Our analysis is just a starting point. It reflects overall Commonwealth information and does not capture the unique aspects between agencies.

It's important for you to see how this information relates to your agency by conducting your own analysis. It can be like our analysis or you can go beyond.

For example, this would be a great opportunity to learn from your current workforce about the employee experience and career development, such as conducting focus groups or an internal survey, rather than just looking at those who recently left your agency.

Strategy #2: Use Performance Management to Align Career Aspirations with Agency Priorities

You can leverage the new electronic performance management process to facilitate discussions about the employee's career aspirations and competencies with their supervisors.

These conversations can begin to align the perspectives of career development on an individual basis.

Having these types of discussions requires skilled leaders. Could this also be an opportunity to develop your agency's leadership capabilities? Absolutely.

DHRM has courses in the Virginia Learning Center to assist with developing the competencies to facilitate goal setting and performance management.

Strategy #3: Leverage Your Agency Workforce Plan

The workforce plan is not just a report submitted to DHRM. It is a tool. One that you can use to bring both strategy 1 and strategy 2 into alignment with the agency mission and strategic priorities.

Our Agency Strategy template provides a holistic approach to workforce planning and is a guide through the process of crafting a data-driven workforce strategy.

DHRM also offers consulting on strategic workforce planning if you are looking for more individualized tools or guidance. If you are interested, you can contact DHRM at dhrm.wfp@dhrm.virginia.gov.

"Workforce Planning is the underutilized heavy-weight in HR's corner. When invested in, it has the ability to drive success across all sectors of an organization."

- Christopher Kinney, Ph.D.
DHRM Senior Workforce Planning & Analytics Consultant

One Commonwealth

Inter-agency Career Development Partnerships

Applying a One Commonwealth perspective to the employee experience can take many forms but we will focus on career development.

Earlier we described two potential scenarios related to how only 27% individuals in the 6-10 years of service group felt their work was at the right level. On one side, if the work exceeded their current skills, you could address that internally at the agency through performance management and goal setting.

On the other side was the potential situation where the employee's skills exceeded the level of the work or that the work no longer offered opportunities to refine or develop further skill expertise.

This is where a One Commonwealth perspective comes into play. It is about creating and leveraging inter-agency partnerships to create unique, short-term, experiential development opportunities that align with the employee's career aspirations.

Opportunities for employees to master their skills through advisory groups or project teams are just two examples. Not only would this benefit the employee, but it would also support retention at your agency and increase the capabilities of the Commonwealth as a whole.

M E N

CMP
COMMONWEALTH MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The **Commonwealth Mentoring Program (CMP)** is a 12-month program designed to accelerate the professional growth of state employees. CMP offers one-on-one mentoring with seasoned professionals, focusing on career development, skill acquisition, and statewide networking.

This is a unique opportunity for employees to gain valuable insights and guidance in achieving their career aspirations. Furthermore, the CMP provides a platform for mentors to enhance their mentorship and leadership skills while making a significant contribution to the development of fellow state employees.

Commonwealth Mentorship Program Statistics

2024-2025 Cohort
9/3/24 - 8/24/25

15
Pairs Expected to Graduate

260 Years
Collective State Service of Mentors

2025-2026 Cohort
Application Period Closed 7/31/25

50+
Pairs Expected to Participate

56
Total Mentors (7 Returning)

154
Mentee Applications Submitted

The program focuses on career development. Participants of the program receive a program schedule, handbook, quarterly activities, and access to the Qooper mentorship app and CMP Support Team. Over the course of 11 months, the 2024-2025 cohort participated in 161 Program led quarterly events, to include 16 in-person meetings, 144 video call meetings, and 3 phone meetings.

The COVA Mentoring Program (CMP) serves as a cost-effective and impactful strategy for enhancing career development in the Commonwealth of Virginia's workforce. Robust evidence indicates that well-designed mentoring programs increase employee engagement, accelerate skill development, and strengthen leadership pipelines, without the expense of formal training initiatives (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Gartner, 2019).

Moreover, by pairing seasoned professionals with emerging talent, COVA facilitates knowledge transfer, mitigates costly turnover (estimated at 50–200% of annual salary per departure) (SHRM, 2022), and encourages inter-agency mobility through expanded professional networks. Crucially, the program also supports reverse mentoring, empowering veteran employees to gain new perspectives, technological fluency, and generational insights from their mentees (Murphy, 2012).

To maximize its value, the program actively addresses common weaknesses identified in mentoring initiatives, such as poor pairing and lack of structure, by aligning mentor-mentee matches with clearly defined developmental goals, offering meaningful training, and continuously monitoring outcomes (Lopata, Afia, & Gotian, 2024).

By doing so, CMP not only preserves institutional expertise and enhances retention, but also demonstrates how strategically applying a One Commonwealth perspective can strengthen the Commonwealth's reputation as an employer committed to inclusive growth, innovation, and long-term workforce resilience.

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Are Employees Navigating Commonwealth Career Paths on Their Own?

State of Internal Mobility and Retention
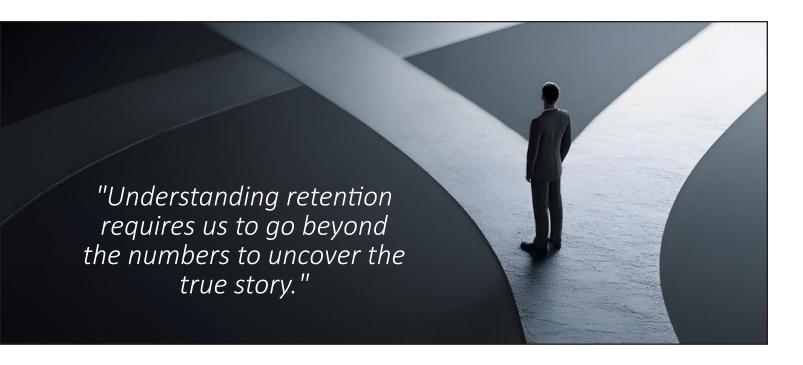
There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for employee retention. What one employee values, another may value differently or not at all. And their needs can fluctuate and change overtime.

Considering this, how can your agency retain talent?

Individualizing approaches is one route to take, but that can absorb a significant amount of time and resources. Having a strategy too broad could fail to make a meaningful impact or connect with employees. In light of this dilemma, what are we left to do?

We ran into this exact question with our analysis of retention, but then we quickly realized that may not be the right question to ask. Instead, we thought the solution might be hiding in plain sight, in how employees are already navigating the Commonwealth's workforce and the factors that determine whether they stay, transfer or leave.

"Understanding retention requires us to go beyond the numbers to uncover the true story."
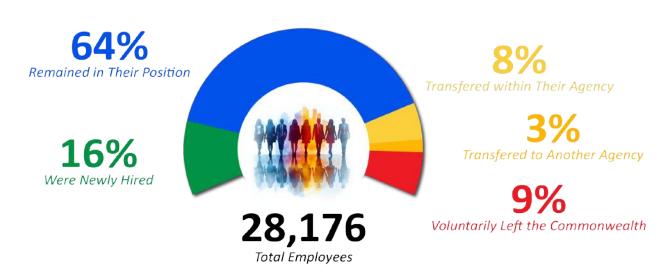
How did Employees Move Within the Workforce?

The sample of agencies used in our analysis included just over 28,000 employees as of March 31, 2025. Shown in the graphic below, of those employees, 16% were hired since July 1, 2025, 8% transferred to positions within their Agency, 3% transferred between different Agencies, 9% voluntarily left the Commonwealth, and 64% remained in their position. These numbers show most employees remained in their position with internal mobility and separations slightly outpacing new hires.

But understanding retention required us to go beyond the numbers to uncover the true story. And that story may surprise you.

Workforce Movement Among Sample Agencies
July 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025

64%
Remained in Their Position

16%
Were Newly Hired

8%
Transferred within Their Agency

3%
Transferred to Another Agency

9%
Voluntarily Left the Commonwealth

28,176
Total Employees

Workforce mobility reflects data analysis from both the Commonwealth's Cardinal HCM System and Recruitment Management System PageUp. Movement was identified by the transaction reason codes in Cardinal HCM for the period of July 1, 2025 through March 31, 2025 for the sample of agencies included in the analysis.

A Spike in Separations Among 30-50 year Olds with 6-10 Years of Service

We conducted a more detailed breakdown of voluntary separations for the sample agencies by exploring the number of separation transactions by age group and years of service. The chart below is a scatter plot of those transactions.

Within each year of service block, we identified the percentage of the transactions for that specific age block. For example, 90.8% of the separations transactions for those 25-30 years old occurred within the 0-5 years of service and 9.8% occurred within the 6-10 years of service range. The yellow highlighted boxes indicate the years of service group that had the highest percentage of separation transactions, which was the 0-5 years for all age groups.
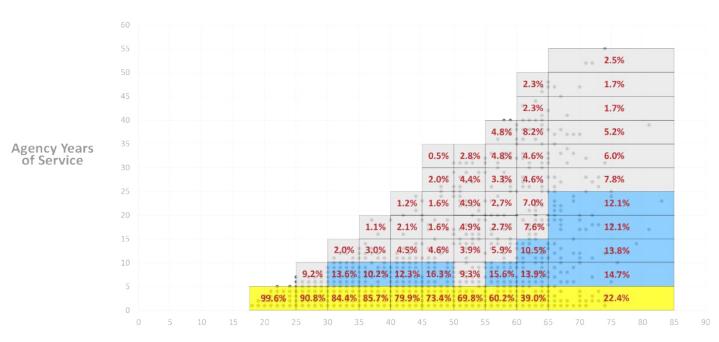
The blue highlighted boxes are any other groups that saw double digit separation transactions. As expected, as years of service increase for those 55 and holder, the percentages of separation transitions also increase. However, there is another block of double-digit separation transition, those between 30 and 50 years old with 6-10 years of service. In fact, within this group, 93.9% of the transactions were resignations, whereas only 52% were resignations for the 6-10 years of service group for those 55 and older.

The employees between 30-50 years old with 6-10 years of service play a crucial role in the workforce. Oftentimes, they have developed expertise in their roles and support the training of new employees, serve as mentors for others, and help answer questions from leadership and colleagues. This group of employees makes up a significant part of key talent pipelines for leadership and other critical roles.

Learning more about what may be fueling these higher separations transactions for this group was the next step in our analysis.

Separations by Age and Agency Years of Service for Sample Agencies
July 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025

Agency Years of Service	Age 18-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65	65-75
51-55										2.5%
46-50									2.3%	1.7%
41-45									2.3%	1.7%
36-40								4.8%	8.2%	5.2%
31-35						0.5%	2.8%	4.8%	4.6%	6.0%
26-30						2.0%	4.4%	3.3%	4.6%	7.8%
21-25					1.2%	1.6%	4.9%	2.7%	7.0%	12.1%
16-20				1.1%	2.1%	1.6%	4.9%	2.7%	7.6%	12.1%
11-15			2.0%	3.0%	4.5%	4.6%	3.9%	5.9%	10.5%	13.8%
6-10		9.2%	13.6%	10.2%	12.3%	16.3%	9.3%	15.6%	13.9%	14.7%
0-5	99.6%	90.8%	84.4%	85.7%	79.9%	73.4%	69.8%	60.2%	39.0%	22.4%

Employee Age

Percentages represent the amount of separation transaction that occurred with the specific age range and years of service range. Data is reflective of separation transactions from the Commonwealth's Cardinal HCM System for the sample of agencies for the July 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025 time period. Involuntary separations were excluded from the analysis and are not reflected in the percentages. Only voluntary separations (including retirements) were included.

A Lack of Career Advancement Opportunities among Factors Influencing Employees to Leave

The second portion of the Commonwealth's Exit Survey focuses on reasons for leaving. It includes the same categories as the job experience, except for meaningful work.

Management and Leadership, growth opportunities, and work environment have consistently been the driving factors for employees leaving the Commonwealth since the exit survey began in March 2018. When breaking down this information by years of service group, we see more pronounced differences in the highly influenced to leave percentages (red section), which were hidden among the aggregate data with the standard exit survey reporting.

With the increased spike of separations for the 30-50 years old and 6-10 years of service, as well as most separations taking place within the first 5 years of all age groups, we focused our analysis of internal mobility and retention on these groups.
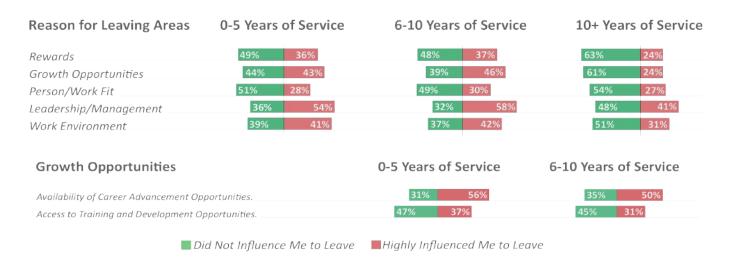
However, we examine leadership and the work environment in the Leadership and Engagement article.

In the graphic below, growth opportunities for the 0-5 and 6-10 years of service groups was the second most highly influenced individuals to leave factor. Looking at the specific statements for the category, there was a clear distinction between the two elements of availability of career advancement opportunities and access to training and development opportunities.
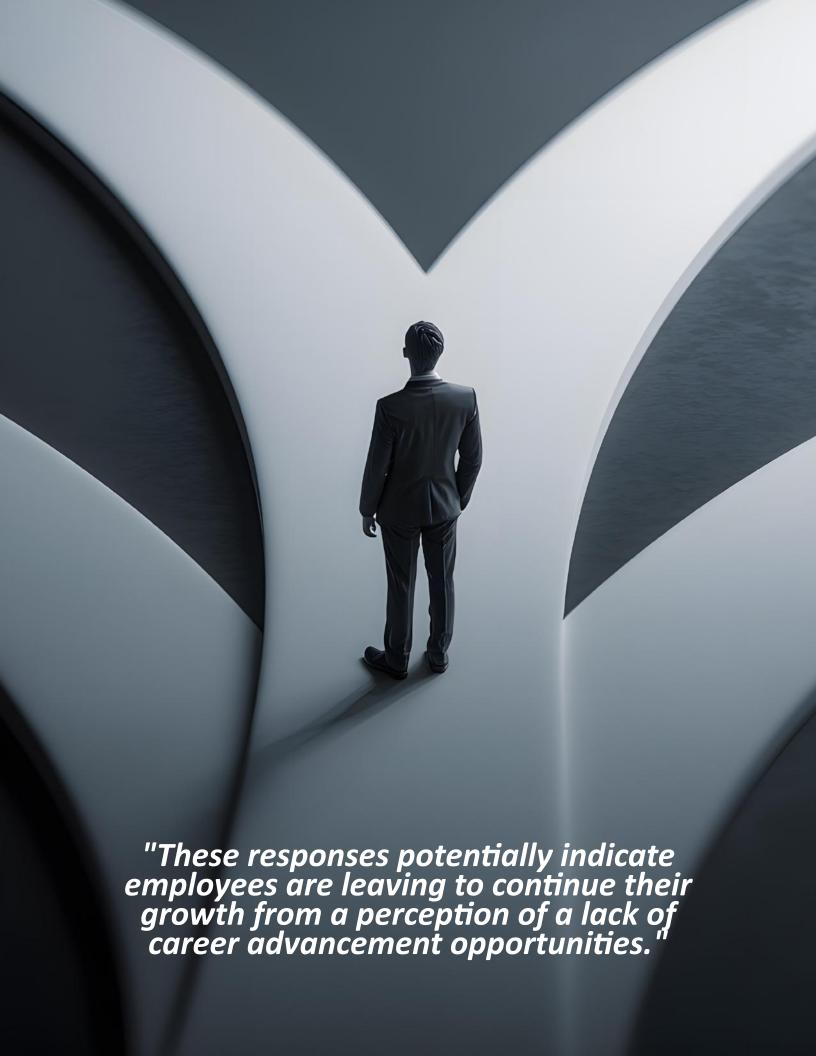
These responses potentially indicate employees are leaving to continue their growth from a perception of a lack of career advancement opportunities. "Continue their growth" may be a key aspect as the availability to participate in training and development opportunities was less of a factor than the career advancement.

This also aligns with the job experience responses to learning new skills at work and work being at the right level. This led us to the final piece of our analysis on internal mobility, focusing on upward movement. In other words, what is a promotion?

Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey Reason for Leaving Percent Highly Influenced and Not Influenced Me to Leave by Category & Growth Opportunities

Reason for Leaving Areas	0-5 Years of Service		6-10 Years of Service		10+ Years of Service	
Rewards	49%	36%	48%	37%	63%	24%
Growth Opportunities	44%	43%	39%	46%	61%	24%
Person/Work Fit	51%	28%	49%	30%	54%	27%
Leadership/Management	36%	54%	32%	58%	48%	41%
Work Environment	39%	41%	37%	42%	51%	31%

Growth Opportunities	0-5 Years of Service		6-10 Years of Service	
Availability of Career Advancement Opportunities.	31%	56%	35%	50%
Access to Training and Development Opportunities.	47%	37%	45%	31%

■ Did Not Influence Me to Leave   ■ Highly Influenced Me to Leave

The Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey invites classified employees who have voluntarily left employment or transferred within the Commonwealth to participate. The sample of agencies for this publication included a total of 461 exit survey responses. Reason for Leaving questions included 70 responses from the 0-5 Years of Service group, 174 from the 6-10 Years of Service group, and 170 from the 10+ Years of Service group. Neutral response ratings were omitted from this graphic but are included as a response option. Meaningful Work is not a category included in the Reasons for Leaving section of the Exit Survey.

"These responses potentially indicate employees are leaving to continue their growth from a perception of a lack of career advancement opportunities."

What is considered a Promotion?

A simple analysis of the transaction from Cardinal HCM would show that promotion was the second most common type of transaction. The only transaction code that exceeded promotions was resignations.
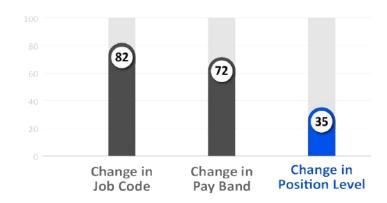
But this is contrary to how employees responded in the exit survey, which warranted examining the promotion transactions from a different perspective.

We examined the promotion transactions on whether there was a change in job code, a change in pay band, or a change in level. These groups were not mutually exclusive to one another, meaning a promotion could be in multiple groups.

We found that the majority of what was considered a promotion in Cardinal was a change in the job code, 82.2%, or a change in pay band, 71.8%. A change in level, noted as a change to a higher level in the position level field in Cardinal, was significantly less at 35.3%.

This was mirrored in the external transfers between state agencies, where most of the trans-fers were to positions at the same level (either employee, supervisor, or manager) shown below.
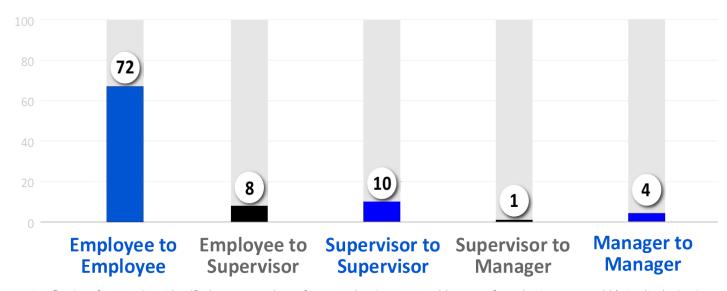
Percent of Promotions which included a Change to Job Code, Pay Band, or Position Level

Data is reflective of transactions identified as a promotion from the Commonwealth's Cardinal HCM System for the sample of agencies for the July 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025 time period.

The limited upward movement could be a contributing factor of the exit survey responses and why availability of career advancement opportunities was a highly influencing factor. More importantly, without the upward mobility, employees may be transferring between agencies to seek out opportunities that would still further career progression.

Percent of External Transfers To and From Each Position Level

Data is reflective of transactions identified as a external transfer to another Commonwealth Agency from the Commonwealth's Cardinal HCM System for the sample of agencies for the July 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025 time period.

> *"...external transfers between state agencies, where most of the transfers were to positions at the same level..."*

Developing Leaders Across the Commonwealth

With the key role that leadership quality plays in employee satisfaction and retention, DHRM has a growing set of opportunities for leaders to maximize their skills and positively influence their organization.

Broadly named LeadVA, the centerpiece is a nomination-based program for senior state leaders called the Commonwealth Leadership Academy (CLA). This program begins its fourth cohort in Fall 2025 and builds skills in the key content areas of strategy, shaping agency culture, innovation and change leadership.

An excellent opportunity to support agency workforce plans, each cohort brings leaders from varied roles across the Commonwealth creating a unique opportunity for leaders to engage with the content and with each other to create a strong workforce culture and to advance the services and mission of state government.

Other components of LeadVA slated to launch in 2025 include a leadership-focused mentoring program and a leadership speaker series open to Commonwealth managers at all levels. Other leadership learning opportunities continue to be provided through e-learning courses, workshops, and formal coaching engagements.

- In the Commonwealth of Virginia Learning Center (COVLC), leaders can access the Managing Virginia Program (MVP) curriculum that includes fundamental leadership training supporting manager success.

- Various workshops (included in the DHRM Learning Opportunities Catalog) have been provided to agency managers to expand and enhance leadership knowledge and skill growth. Fifty-six hours of leadership workshops have been provided in 2025 to various and their leaders across the Commonwealth.

- DHRM's Workforce Development Team provides leadership and team coaching through the CoachVA program to support leadership goal achievement and competency development.

Piecing It Together (Part 1)

Growth opportunities are only a part of the retention puzzle but do have the ability to impact the other elements such as pay and person / work fit (from the exit survey). When aligned with the other piece of retention, leadership and engagement, you can create a self-reinforcing system that sustains an environment employees can see themselves remaining and growing in. Here are our top four strategies for this piece of the puzzle:

Strategies to Support Retention Through Career Progression

Strategy #1: Aligning Performance Management with Career Aspirations

We touched on this strategy in the article related to the employee experience. There, we discussed aligning performance management discussions with employee career aspirations can help to better define what each view as career development.

But that was just the first step. The next step is then to identify specific development opportunities or goals that can enhance the employee's ability to perform well in their current role and that would support their desired career progression. Once identified, the development plan can be created to outline the progression, timeline, and milestones to follow.

This would then set up an opportunity to hold periodic development discussions between the employee and supervisor, a key aspect of leadership and engagement.

Strategy #2: Follow Through on Development Opportunities

What happens after an employee learns a new skill or enhances their current skill set? Do they return to their existing responsibilities, done the same way as before, without the opportunity to practice their new abilities?

But what if we were able to follow through and help them apply their new abilities? Building on the first strategy would be to work with employees after they have completed their development plan to identify opportunities of how they can apply those learnings. It could be in the form of becoming more efficient in their current role, completing stretch assignments, or having new responsibilities.

Yes, that could fuel the perception that good work is rewarded with more work. But when it is aligned with the employee's career aspirations and they are involved in the process, it could have the opposite effect, promoting career growth and driving engagement.

Strategy #3: Leveraging Existing Resources

The cost of employee development has been a consistent obstacle agency have identified within the workforce plans.

But did you know, DHRM offers coaching for leaders and teams and facilitates the Commonwealth Mentorship Program? (see page 32 for details). You can leverage these resources, and many more, to minimize the cost of supporting employee development at your agency.

One Commonwealth

Mission Driven Career Paths

If there is a perception of limited advancement opportunities, are employees taking it upon themselves to navigate the Commonwealth's workforce?

The evidence suggests that it is possible. An often-overlooked aspect of the Commonwealth is that we are a collection of agencies which empower employees to move between different agencies without having to change some aspects of their employment.

So, the question is, how can we turn this into a unique aspect that attracts new talent and retains current talent within the Commonwealth? Enter inter-agency mission driven career paths.

Meaningful work has consistently been the most favorable job experience category of the exit survey.

Coupled with the fact that the number of employees that go to the federal, local, or non-profit sectors after leaving employment exceeds the private sector, highlighting the importance an organization's mission and impact are to employees.

You can capitalize on this strength of the Commonwealth by building collaborative inter-agency partnerships to outline different career paths. These could transcend traditional agency boundaries, be focused on a core mission, and enable you to capture the intrinsic motivation of mission driven employees.

"Meaningful Work has consistently been the most favorable job experience category of the exit survey."

Creating the Rig
for Employe

State of Leadership

ght Environment
es to Thrive

p and Engagement

One of the most challenging aspects of the Commonwealth's workforce is the constant change employees are subject to. Some changes cannot be avoided, such as a new Administration that occurs every four years.

But other types of changes can be addressed. How? Through effective leadership practices. Not just from Agency leadership, but also from direct supervisors. But before we explore the role of leadership, let's first set explore the impact of the current working environment.

Perceptions of a Toxic Work Environment

There can be countless changes a Commonwealth employee is likely to experience during their employment.

These can range from new policies, revisions to existing policies or procedures, new technology, and new leaders. But one that may be overlooked, that occurs more frequently, is the changing team dynamics as employees join and leave agencies.

From internal mobility analysis, combining new hires and internal mobility would show that over 25% of the workforce would have been new to their roles, with the impact to team dynamics impacting a much larger portion of the workforce.

What happens if we do not address this change? Does it go away or evolve into something else? It's hard to say. But what we

A change that may be overlooked, which occurs frequently, is the changing team dynamics as employees join or leave agencies.

can say is that the work environment was the third most highly influencing factor of employees leaving from exit survey responses.
But even that doesn't really tell us much.

Looking further into the statements for the work environment section shown on page 47, we can see the breakdown between policies, resources, and the environment itself. Notably, work policies and resources tend to be consistent across all three years of service groups.

However, the work environment was significantly more influential in an employee's decision to leave for the 0-5- and 6-10-year group than for the 10+ years of service.

The comments about an employee's reason for leaving mirror that of the job experience, with concerns about leadership behavior and a toxic work environment being the most common themes.

Other common themes include little communication, staffing, a perception of favoritism, and a perception of being not valued. An environment riddled with frequent change, if not managed effectively, could lead to these perceptions or heighten their impact.

However, it is important to note there is greater variability in the themes describing reasons for leaving than the themes describing the job experience.

This underscores that deciding to leave employment is still heavily dependent on individual factors, reinforcing the fact there is no one-size-fits all strategy to retention.

Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey Reason for Leaving Percent Highly Influenced and Not Influenced Me to Leave by Category & Work Environment

Reason for Leaving Areas	0-5 Years of Service		6-10 Years of Service		10+ Years of Service	
Rewards	49%	36%	48%	37%	63%	24%
Growth Opportunities	44%	43%	39%	46%	61%	24%
Person/Work Fit	51%	28%	49%	30%	54%	27%
Leadership/Management	36%	54%	32%	58%	48%	41%
Work Environment	39%	41%	37%	42%	51%	31%

Work Environment	0-5 Years of Service		6-10 Years of Service		10+ Years of Service	
Work Policies and Procedures.	47%	30%	46%	39%	51%	29%
Work Environment.	30%	53%	28%	55%	50%	34%
Work Resources (equipment, technology, etc.)	49%	37%	59%	28%	62%	20%

■ Did Not Influence Me to Leave   ■ Highly Influenced Me to Leave

The Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey invites classified employees who have voluntarily left employment or transferred within the Commonwealth to participate. The sample of agencies for this publication included a total of 461 exit survey responses. Reason for Leaving questions included 70 responses from the 0-5 Years of Service group, 174 from the 6-10 Years of Service group, and 170 from the 10+ Years of Service group. Neutral response ratings were omitted from this graphic but are included as a response option. Meaningful Work is not a category included in the Reasons for Leaving section of the Exit Survey.

0-5 Years of Service Reason for Leaving Comments

6-10 Years of Service Reason for Leaving Comments

10+ Years of Service Reason for Leaving Comments

Leadership's Role in Retention and Engagement

The relationship between leadership and their employees and its impact on employee engagement and work environment is well researched. The old saying, "employees don't leave job, they leave managers" just underscores how influential leadership can be on employee retention. We even see this influence in the Commonwealth Exit Survey, with Leadership and Management being the most influential factor in an employee's decision to leave.

What about leadership and management makes it highly influenced to leave? Looking at the specific aspects of management and leadership, Organization Leadership Style (Agency Leadership) and Manager/supervisor Style (Direct Supervisor) were the two highest driving factors for all years of service groups. But there were some key differences displayed on page 49.

For employees in their first five years, the manager/supervisor style was more influential than organization leadership style. For the other two-year service groups, organization leadership style was the most influential factor. This is important

as employees within their first five years have always been the most vulnerable employee population regarding retention.
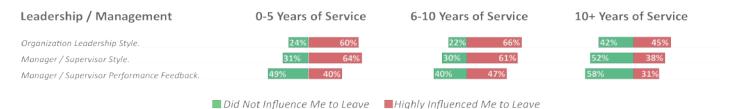
Even with the sample agencies, we saw that the highest separation rates occurred among employees within their first year or 2-5 five years. Focusing on the interaction of front-line leadership with employees, especially those within their first five years, could address separations from our largest employee population.

There are many definitions of employee engagement.

For this analysis, we viewed engagement through the lens of a mindset - one that significantly contributes to an employee's performance, wellness, and sense of belonging.

The second key difference is how employees with 10+ years of service, which typically represented

Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey Reason for Leaving Percent Highly Influenced and Not Influenced Me to Leave for Leadership / Management

Leadership / Management	0-5 Years of Service	6-10 Years of Service	10+ Years of Service
Organization Leadership Style.	24% / 60%	22% / 66%	42% / 45%
Manager / Supervisor Style.	31% / 64%	30% / 61%	52% / 38%
Manager / Supervisor Performance Feedback.	49% / 40%	40% / 47%	58% / 31%

■ Did Not Influence Me to Leave ■ Highly Influenced Me to Leave

The Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey invites classified employees who have voluntarily left employment or transferred within the Commonwealth to participate. The sample of agencies for this publication included a total of 461 exit survey responses. Reason for Leaving questions included 70 responses from the 0-5 Years of Service group, 174 from the 6-10 Years of Service group, and 170 from the 10+ Years of Service group. Neutral response ratings were omitted from this graphic but are included as a response option. Meaningful Work is not a category included in the Reasons for Leaving section of the Exit Survey.
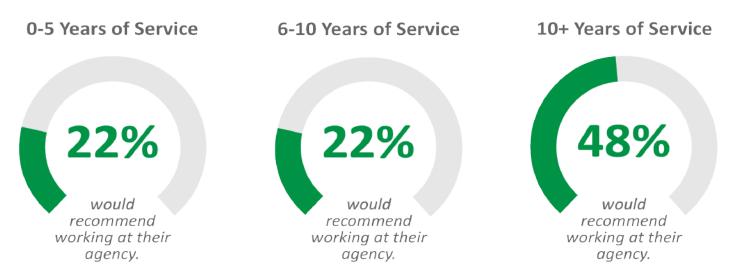
those who were 55 years old and older, have a significantly lower rating for highly influenced to leave for all three categories of leadership and management. Specifically, the highly influenced to leave was the lower for Manager/Supervisor performance feedback.

This could indicate that supervisors and leaders may interact with this group of employees differently than those with less than 10 years of service. On the other side, it could also stem from leaders themselves, who may have had access to their leadership and information to a higher degree, reducing these factors as highly influencing them to leave.

From our analysis of the work environment, employees with 10+ years of service were less influenced to leave due to the work environment than the other two groups. Further, comments about their reason for leaving, such as having a good experience, were present in the 10+ years of service group but not the others.

In fact, when tracking the Net Promoter Score of the exit survey across increasing age groups, 55 years old is the point when the overall net promoter score flips from a negative to a positive. Though not the only way to measure employee engagement, the net promoter score is often used as an overall indicator of engagement.

Percentage of Exit Survey Responses that responded favorably to "I would recommend the agency or institution I worked at as a great place to work to a friend or family member."

0-5 Years of Service	6-10 Years of Service	10+ Years of Service
22% would recommend working at their agency.	22% would recommend working at their agency.	48% would recommend working at their agency.

The Commonwealth of Virginia Exit Survey invites classified employees who have voluntarily left employment or transferred within the Commonwealth to participate. The sample of agencies for this publication included a total of 461 exit survey responses.

Growing Employee Engagement

Engagement could be described as dynamic, fluctuating over time and varying from person to person. To grow engagement, it takes a holistic approach consisting of a variety of elements. Though each element may influence individual engagement differently, the elements can support overall engagement collectively.

Beyond the role of leadership and career development, supporting aspects of employee wellness can continue to grow employee engagement:

Employee Safety

Does the physical environment have any potential hazards? Are they clearly labeled or are employees trained to avoid them or use the appropriate personal protective equipment?

Proactively ensuring a safe work environment doesn't just promote engagement, but can also reduce injuries and risk.

Financial Wellness

Do you know about the Commonwealth's Employee Financial Wellness Program?

The program provides employees with resources and strategies to thrive, including information about discounts, retirements, and assistance programs.

Physical Wellness

Dos your agency have a Commonhealth Coordinator? Each coordinator receives important information about key campaigns and has access to more resources.

CommonHealth goes beyond physical wellness, and focuses on other aspects like financial, mental, and nutritional wellness.

Piecing It Together (Part 2)

So, if the interaction with leadership is perceived as more positive, does that create other cascading effects for a more positive work environment? Would that lead to a higher net promoter score and potentially higher employee engagement? The evidence in our analysis suggest that might be the case, but we must first lay the groundwork for our leadership bench strength across the commonwealth. Here are our top four strategies for this piece of the puzzle:

Strategies for Equipping Leaders to Drive Retention and Engagement

Strategy #1: Focus on Conflict and Change Management Skills

Constant change is just a part of working in the public sector. But that doesn't mean it has to be accompanied by confusion, conflicts, or miscommunications.

Leaders and supervisors can overcome this obstacle by not shying away or ignoring it. Those who are able to embrace change not as an obstacle, but as an element of public sector employment, can utilize it to seize unique opportunities and promote positive outcomes.

But it takes a certain skill set to do that. Navigating change in a way that provides a sense of stability and hope takes practice. Focusing on both conflict and change management skills collectively can enhance the speed and depth leaders and supervisors are able to develop them.

Strategy #2: Leverage Existing Procedures to Facilitate Dialogue between Leaders and Employees

There may be a perception of extra work associated with elements that support employee engagement and retention. However, these aspects don't have to be separated from the procedures we already implement.

For example, you can use the performance management process to have a check-in conversation with an employee. Allow them to ask questions, share important updates for projects or within the agency, or learn about an concerns they may have; all of which promote employee engagement.

What opportunities at your agency can you weave in some practices to promote a employee supervisor relationship?
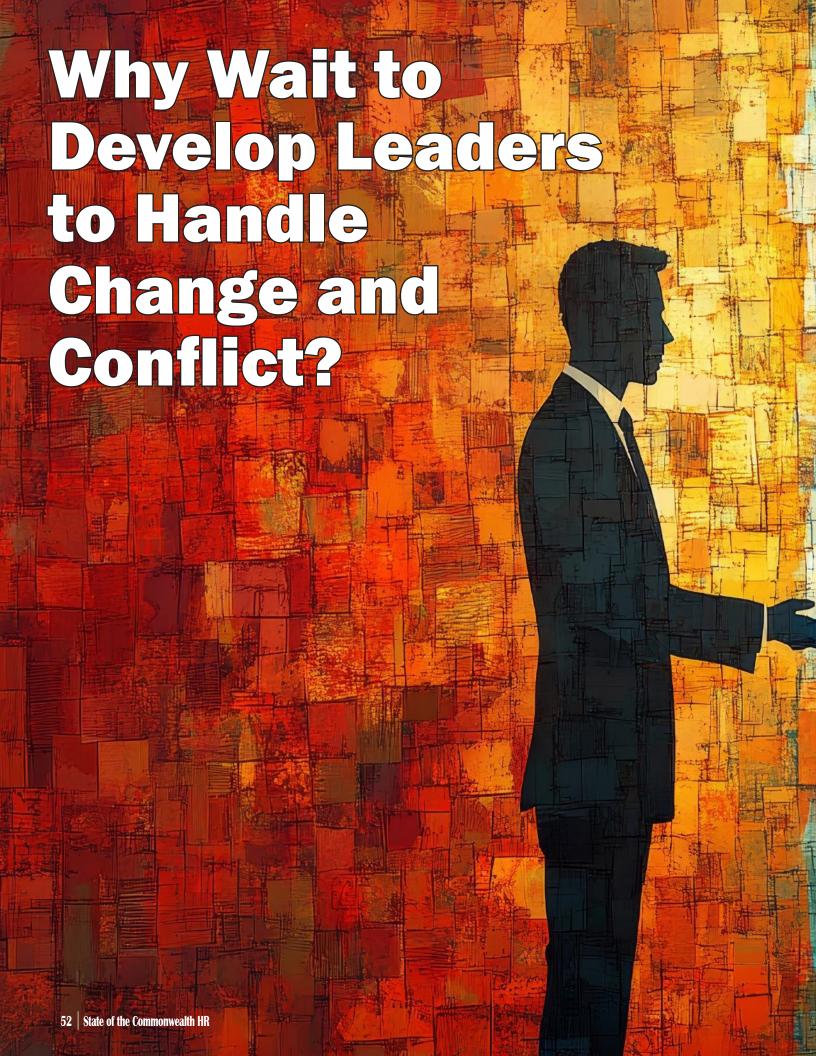
Strategy #3: Proactively Monitor and Respond to Changes in the Work Environment
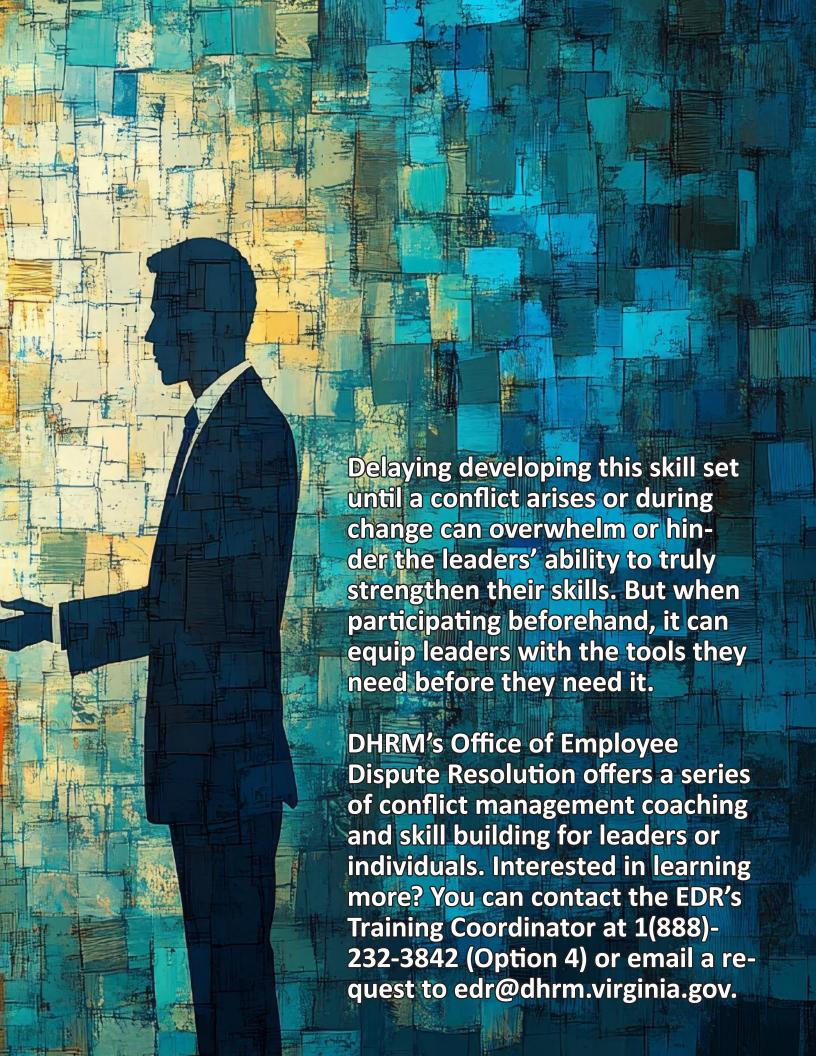
There are countless ways to gather feedback from employees. They can span from formal surveys, the Commonwealth's Exit Survey, or focus groups to informal conversations.

Putting in the effort to seek out feedback on the employee's experience gives you real-time information to respond to. Pivoting quickly or readjusting priorities based on that feedback is one way to separate yourself when competing for talent.

But it's not just about monitoring or collecting feedback. The most important aspect is doing something about it. If you are embarking on a journey to gather feedback, be prepared to take action and to clearly communicate the what, why, and how of said action.

DHRM's Workforce Development Team provides leadership and team coaching through the CoachVA program to support leadership goal achievement and competency development.

Why Wait to Develop Leaders to Handle Change and Conflict?

Delaying developing this skill set until a conflict arises or during change can overwhelm or hinder the leaders' ability to truly strengthen their skills. But when participating beforehand, it can equip leaders with the tools they need before they need it.

DHRM's Office of Employee Dispute Resolution offers a series of conflict management coaching and skill building for leaders or individuals. Interested in learning more? You can contact the EDR's Training Coordinator at 1(888)-232-3842 (Option 4) or email a request to edr@dhrm.virginia.gov.

One Commonwealth

Defining a "Commonwealth Leader"

The One Commonwealth mentality and a focus on the role of leaders in retention is a culture shift that won't happen overnight. But one thing that can move these elements forward towards that culture change is a consistent definition of the behaviors and skills of a commonwealth leader across all agencies.

It would set common expectations of how leaders should interact with employees, the skills they possess and employ, and how to leverage our existing tools and resources to maximize their benefit.

Above all, outlining what it means to be a Commonwealth Leader across agencies creates an opportunity for a more consistent employee experience.

That experience is what would become our Commonwealth Brand, a feature that would allow us to strengthen our internal talent and compete with other public and private sector organizations in a whole new game.

It will be a challenge, but we are up for it. Are you?

Human Resources Skill Profile
A Commonwealth HR Leader

State of HR Development

Commonwealth Human Resources is in a prime position to lead this culture shift to a One Commonwealth mentality. But we also have an opportunity to develop ourselves and our capabilities to ensure a long-term, sustainable, change.

We can do that through DHRM's COMPASS Human Resources Academy, the development component of the HR Capabilities Center and Innovation Lab. What skills are essential to success in HR for the Commonwealth?

That is the question we began building an answer to earlier this year. That answer will become a foundational aspect of the COMPASS Human Resources Academy.

We've been gathering information through a survey about HR skills for the different HR and adjacent areas.

If you haven't had a chance to you can complete the survey using this link or by scanning the QR code to the right.

To truly create a skills profile for each HR area, we will need more individuals to participate. So, if you can spare a minute or two, please consider completing the survey.

HR CAPABILITIES CENTER AND INNOVATION LAB

Project Update

We've been working diligently on our HR Capabilities Center and Innovation Lab initiative since DHRM's 2024 Annual Conference. Though our timeline has slightly adjusted to accommodate needs and limited resources, we've achieved several key milestones this past year.

Be sure to check out updates in the Virginia Learning Center, with more information about our progress on the initiative as we continue to move forward.

Milestone #1: Gathering Your Input on Skills & Content for Development Programs

We asked for your input on what to include in the development programs and what skills are important to HR over the last year to build the foundation of the COMPASS HR Academy's development ecosystem.

Milestone #2: Launching the Concept to Results Podcast

We launched and produced two episodes of the Concept to Results Podcast, available now in the Virginia Learning Center. Listen to learn how agencies across the commonwealth have taken ideas and turned them into successes!

Milestone #3: Publishing the inaugural State of the Commonwealth HR Annual Publication

This publication is a huge milestone, not just for DHRM, but also for the Commonwealth. This publication provides new insights and strategies to elevate the Commonwealth HR to the "Elite" level for a best in class state workforce.

We will also have a presence at the 2025 DHRM Annual Conference to support the development of your HR capabilities. We don't want to spoil anything so we can't provide more details yet. We hope to see you there!

Skills Profile for an HR Leader within the Commonwealth
(submitted by attendees at DHRM's Innovation Summit in April 2025)

HR Leader Skill Breakdown

	30% Identified as Absolutely Essential	48% Identified as Part of the Core Skill Set	8% Identified as Important But not a Core Skill	15% Identified as Nice to Have Skills
Communication	Interpersonal Communication	Persuasion, Negotiation, & Consulting Facilitation & Presentation Managing Up	Digital Communication	Narrative & Storytelling
Organization	Organizational Support Prioritization, Delegation & Following Up	Internal Consulting Focus & Attention to Detail Organizational Behavior Organizational Development & Effectiveness		
Management		Performance Management Talent Management Change Management Project Management		Budget and Fiscal Management IT / Risk Management
People Leadership	Trust & Influence Ethics & Accountability Servant & Inclusive Leadership Empathy & Respect	Employee Engagement, Motivation & Development Diversity, Cultural Competence & Collaboration Leading Teams		
Acumen & Knowledge	HR, Law & State Government		Learning & Unlearning	Technology Risk & Safety Business & Marketing
Strategic & Critical Thinking	Critical Thinking & Analytical Skills Adaptability & Flexibility	Solutions & Results Oriented Strategic Planning, Vision & Alignment	Innovation & Creativity	
Social & Emotional Intelligence	Interpersonal Skills Teamwork & Relationship Management	Self-Awareness Conflict Resolution Self-Management		

Percentages represented the weighted scores based on the total number of responses for each skill ranking category (essential, score skill set, important, or nice to have) from skill survey responses received at the DHRM Innovation Summit in April 2025. The list of skills for each category is based on the overall weighted ranking score on a scale of 0 to 1. Weighted scores greater than .9 were classified as essential, between .75 and .89 were classified as core skill set, between .6 and .74 were classified as important, and .59 or less were classified as nice to have.

Skills Profile for an HR Leader (Director or Manager)

The survey asks participates to categorize a series of competencies into four categories: absolutely essential, part of the core skill set, important but not a core skill set, and nice to have skills.

From the responses, we have enough to create an initial skill profile for a Commonwealth HR Leader, constructed from the responses submitted by HR Directors and Managers and shown on page 58.

An initial breakdown shows that over half of the skill sets (53%) included in the survey were identified as absolutely essential and just over a third (36%) were also a part of the core skill set for an HR Leader. Only 11% were included in the Important but not a core skill set and nice to have skills.

The large amount of skills group as essential or part of skill set just underscores the variety of roles and responsibilities HR leaders are involved in and how an HR leader is a truly dynamic role.

When breaking down the skill sets in the survey by the HR COMPASS Academy Areas, we seethe majority of the skills belong to the People Leadership capability. The next two highest capability areas were organization (an agency wide perspective) and social & emotional intelligence. But the essential and core skill set incorporated items from each capability area.

So, what exactly does this look like? If we break down the skills by each capability area based on how they were rated, it starts to paint a picture about what it takes to be successful as an HR Leader in the Commonwealth. Which then provides you with a starting point for your own development, should you be interested in an HR leadership particular career path.

The skills graphic represents the percentages of the survey responses that rated the specific skill as either essential or part of the core skillset for an HR Leader.
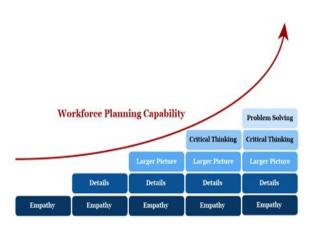
The Art of Skill Stacking - A Core Aspect of the COMPASS HR Academy

Why does this matter? This information is an essential piece to one of the core pillars of the COMPASS HR Academy, the concept of skill stacking. Skill stacking is the philosophy of strategically layering specific skills together to develop and apply them more effectively.

This enhances both the individual skill development and their collective application to specific aspects of human resources in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Beyond that, skill staking enables you to customize your own development to align with your career goals, create your own skill stacks, and master skills in new ways. Almost like an art form.

For example, for workforce planning, stacking these skills creates a compounding effect to grow the agency's workforce planning capabilities.

With a foundation in empathy, you can maintain that human perspective through your analysis, increasing your understanding from both a detailed and larger picture perspective.
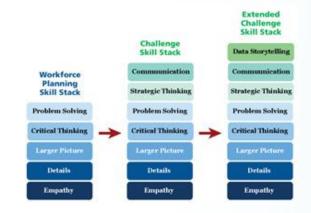
This can then increase your ability to think critically about potential futures and ask the right questions, leading to more creative solutions. But the greatest value of applying a skill-staking approach is the endless possibilities for continued growth. An example of this is shown, which adds additional skill sets to the initial workforce planning skill stack.

"Skill Stacking is the philosophy of strategically layering specific skills to develop and apply them more effectively."

What's Next?

DHRM is actively developing this aspect of the HR Capabilities Center and Innovation Lab and will have more information to share later this Fall. But in the meantime, you can help us outline initial skill profiles for all HR and adjacent areas by completing the survey.

And of course, stay up to date on all information related to the HR Capabilities Center and Innovation Lab initiative through the DHRM HR Highlights and Virginia Learning Center.
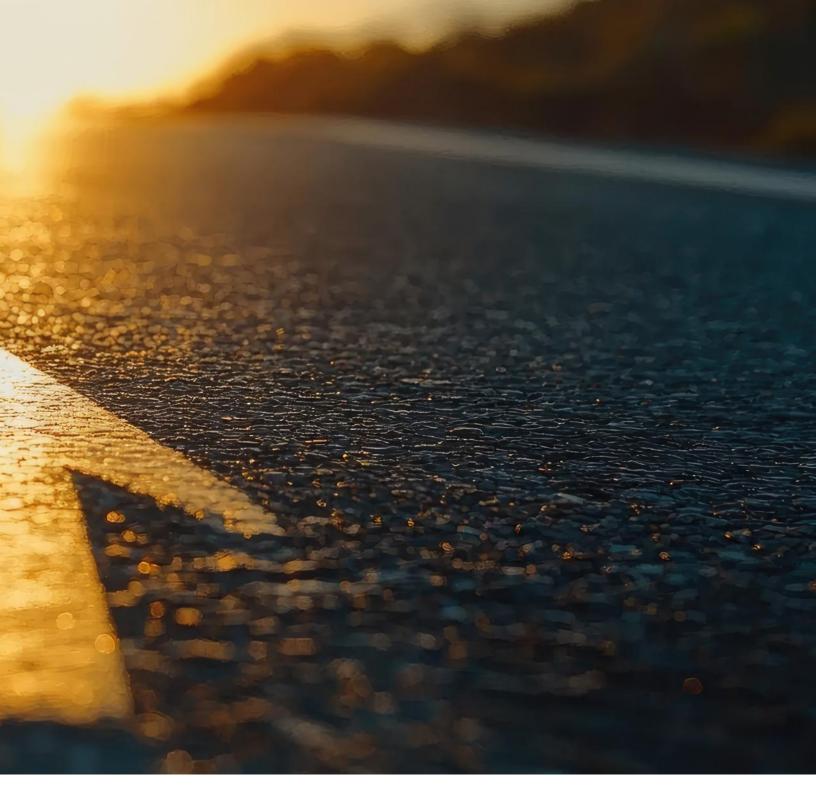
Stepping Into the Role of a Strategic Partner

State of Strategic HR

This *One Commonwealth* idea we described may seem like an ideal that is unrealistic, but intentional culture shifts often are when they first start. One thing that makes a difference in these types of changes, however, is those who lead them.

And in this case, we believe the Commonwealth's HR teams can be those leaders by stepping into the role of a strategic partner.

As HR we wear many hats. We typically hear generalist, coordinator, analyst, specialist, manager, or director. But one less common is that "strategic partner". Sometimes that name gets associated with a leadership role or title, but that doesn't have to be the case.

Being a strategic partner is something that all of us can embrace. And to realize this One Commonwealth approach...we all have to.

The Role of an HR Strategic Partner

What is the role of an HR Strategic Partner? If you ask five different individuals, you would probably get five different definitions. So instead of defining it in the traditional sense, we can explore it through behaviors associated with how this type of role would support our One Commonwealth approach.

Behavior #1: Ensure Alignment, and then Highlight it. One of the most common aspects of strategic HR is to align HR activities with agency mission and objectives. That is nothing new. But to support this One Commonwealth approach, HR must not only ensure alignment, but to then highlight it for others to see.

Even more important is to highlight it in a way that matches others' priorities so they can make the connection between HR activities and the

agency's mission and objectives themselves.

Behavior #2: Role Model One Commonwealth. One Commonwealth is more than just a philosophy. It really is a culture shift that is grounded in inter-agency collaboration. We can lead this effort by role modeling this collaboration. How can you do this? There are countless ways, but a few that come to mind are:

- Sharing how you've overcome challenges, key lessons you've learned, or new ideas you've implemented. Pro Tip: Check out our *Concept to Results Podcast* for some of those ideas!

- Leveraging existing connections and resources to learn from, brainstorm, identify solutions, or form partnerships between different agencies. Not sure how? DHRM's networks are a great place to start!

- Encouraging inter-agency career exploration and growth. Remember, if an individual moves from one agency to another, it is still a win for the Commonwealth. In fact, there is a chance they could develop greater expertise and new skills and then return to your agency.

Behavior #3: A Commitment to One Commonwealth. In all honesty, One Commonwealth is not a new idea. Those words have been uttered for quite a while now. Our hope is that seeing how this approach can address the challenges outlined in the previous articles that we are all facing will lead to a renewed commitment to it.

But commitment isn't just a one-time event. It must be persistent throughout all the ups and downs, redirections, pivots, or any of the unforeseen challenges that are certain to occur. It's in those moments when commitment to a One Commonwealth idea is absolutely essential.

This is just the first step in a long and challenging journey. But we are up for it. Are you?

When we use these behaviors collectively, regardless of whether we are in a formal leadership role or not, we can turn this One Commonwealth approach from just words into something real. Yes, this is just the first step in a long and challenging journey. But we are up for it. Are you?

Join a DHRM Network

Did you know, DHRM facilitates various HR networks to bring together agency professionals from HR disciplines to collaborate, share best practices, and stay up to date on the latest trends. Some of the networks currently meeting include:

- Compensation Network
- Recruitment Network
- Training & Development Network

Why join a network? These networks are a great opportunity to expand your expertise and build connections with your colleagues across the Commonwealth. Contact DHRM to learn more and how to join a network.

![dhrm CONCEPT to RESULTS PODCAST — THINK • DECIDE • ACT • LEARN • ACHIEVE, with microphone and headphones in a recording booth]

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Help us improve future issues! Complete this brief survey to share feedback on this issue of the State of the Commonwealth HR.

For questions regarding this State of the Commonwealth HR publication, please contact DHRM's Workforce Planning team at dhrm.wfp@dhrm.virginia.gov.