

Weak Economy Hasn't Relieved Government IT Worker Shortage

Bill Keller

A new Gartner survey reveals that U.S. state and local governments still face a shortage of qualified IT workers, despite the weak economy. Governments should adopt more aggressive tactics to cope with this problem.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 29 November 2001, Gartner announced the results of a survey showing that most state and local governments in the United States continue to suffer severe shortages of IT staff, despite the weak economy. Conducted in mid and late 2001, the survey polled 28 states and 40 of the largest counties and cities.

Analysis

Many in government hoped that one "silver lining" of 2001's slowing economy would be greater availability of skilled IT workers for the U.S. public sector. Instead, a Gartner survey found that state and local governments still face serious shortages of qualified IT staff and will likely get worse. Some of the survey's most important findings are:

- Eighty-seven percent of state governments and 80 percent of local governments continue to suffer a critical shortage of qualified IT staff.
- Aging of the government workforce will aggravate the shortage through 2006. Fifty-four percent of state agencies have 11 percent to 20 percent of their staff eligible to retire within five years. Forty-eight percent of local agencies are in the same position.
- Skill shortages exist at all levels but are worst at the intermediate and advanced levels.
- Updating human-resource procedures or adopting outsourcing strategies would greatly contribute to keeping IT departments fully staffed, but many state and local governments have been unable or unwilling to do so.

Although many state and some local governments institute programs to deal with the upcoming retirement of IT staff, too many governments either have not yet taken steps or believe they can find no solution to the problem. Gartner recommends government CIOs and executive branch leaders develop marketing strategies to hire and retain qualified workers. CIOs must also better integrate internal and external employees and vendors, and implement tactical solutions designed to improve short-term recruitment and retention.

Analytical Source: Bill Keller, e-Government Strategies — State & Local

Need to Know: Reference Material and Recommended Reading

- "Getting and Keeping Government IT Staff: Tactical Advice" (TG-12-9530) Identifies practices that will have immediate, positive impact on government IT staff shortages. **By Bill Keller**
- "Workforce Planning: Cure for Government's Aging IT Staff" (COM-13-5693) Government agencies must take steps to ensure that they can meet their long-term IT staff needs as government worker retirements increase. **By Barbara Gomolski and Bill Keller**

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