FROM GEN Z
FOR GEN Z
Marketing Insights for Government Employers

LEVELUP GOV

THE **BEHAVIORAL INSIGHTS TEAM**

THE VOLCKER ALLIANCE
Empowering and Inspiring Public Servants

INTRODUCTION

The US needs technological innovation to solve its most pressing problems—the climate crisis, health care costs, income inequality, and more. Unfortunately, too few people with cutting-edge technology skills are interested in working in the federal government. Only **4 percent of federal government technologists are under 30, while over half are approaching retirement.** In addition, many technology roles are outsourced, which prevents the government from building the long-term capacity needed to address complex challenges.[1]

To better understand the problem, the Volcker Alliance launched **LevelUp Gov: A Public Service Marketing Contest,** to generate new messaging to make government tech jobs attractive to people under 30. The contest gave entrants a chance to create their own recruitment campaigns: fresh, bold messages intended to get the next generation of technology professionals excited about government work. It was supported by generous funding from Schmidt Futures.

To select the winning LevelUp Gov campaigns, the Alliance engaged the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) to market test the top 10 submissions. BIT's trial generated valuable insights on what resonates best with Gen Z—people born between 1996 and 2010—and what would attract members of this group to federal technology jobs. This paper provides an overview of the contest design, results, and insights from the BIT trial.
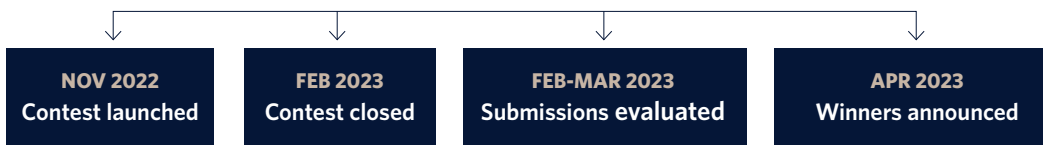
OVERVIEW OF LEVELUP GOV CONTEST

Contest design

The contest was open only to Gen Zers. The Volcker Alliance targeted people with a passion for public service and a flair for marketing, social media, or design to inspire those with tech skills to pursue career opportunities in the federal government.

To promote the competition, the Alliance worked closely with a communications firm to attract qualified Gen Z applicants via a targeted marketing campaign spanning Instagram, Twitter (a company now known as X), and LinkedIn. The Alliance also ran a campaign with the scholarship aggregator Scholarships.com that concentrated on Gen Z students with majors in public service, marketing, social media, design, or a related discipline.

CONTEST TIMELINE

NOV 2022 Contest launched	FEB 2023 Contest closed	FEB-MAR 2023 Submissions evaluated	APR 2023 Winners announced

The Volcker Alliance received seventy-four marketing campaigns. Over half the submissions were from people of color and the majority came from women. Most entrants were in college or graduate school, though some were still in high school, and a few had already entered the workforce.

LevelUp Gov Contest Requirements

1.
A core message with rationale: Develop a core message that would attract Gen Z students or workers with tech skills to take a job in government and explain why you think this message would resonate.

2.
One LinkedIn post to bring the message to life: Create collateral for LinkedIn, the world's largest online professional network.

3.
One post for another platform of applicant's choosing: Generate another post for a different platform (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat) and explain your choice.

Some Examples of Government Tech Jobs

DATA SCIENTIST (GS9-13)
Offers technical expertise in math and statistics, with planning and delivery responsibilities across a project's life cycle (e.g., estimating work, specifying methodology and procedure, reviewing computer systems specifications and project instructions).

IT SPECIALIST (GS13)
Provides technical advice, leadership, and direction on systems analysis, customer experience, and design-related issues for the betterment of the customer.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST (GS15)
Coordinates with technical and nontechnical experts to ensure that software systems are aligned with project goals and comply with enterprise architecture and standards. Develops detailed integration plans and strategies to ensure the integration of new software and technology into existing systems.
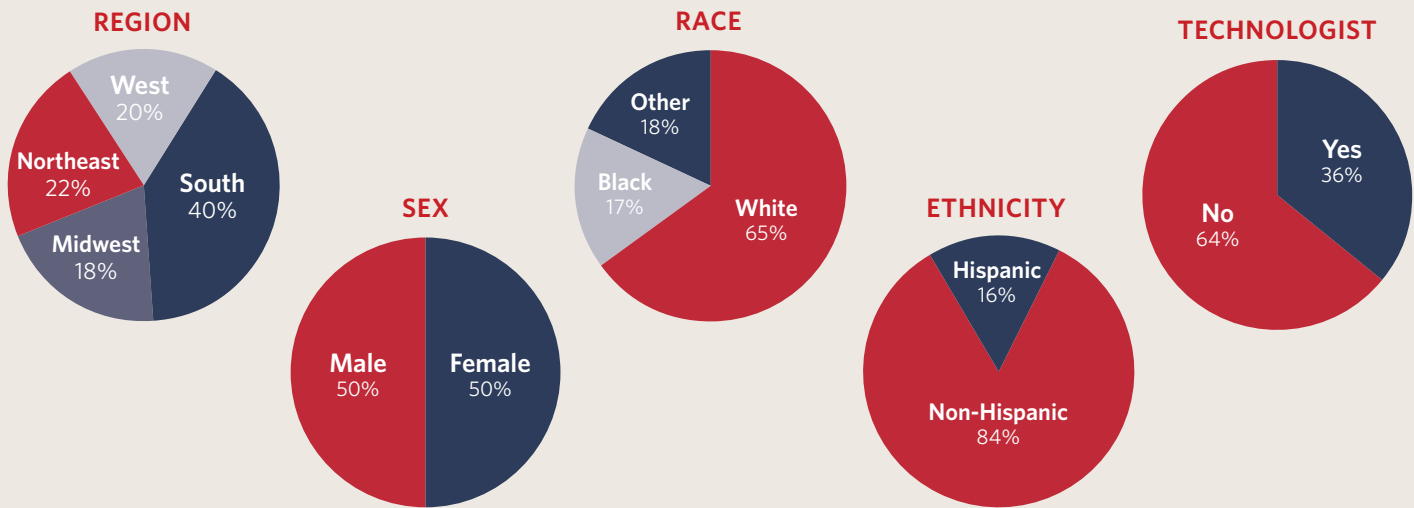
COMPUTER ENGINEER (FV-G-K)
Performs duties that require applying knowledge in the principles of engineering; in computer hardware, and systems software, architecture, and integration; and in mathematics.

Judging and market testing

The Alliance assembled a panel of judges who brought diverse perspectives from government, marketing, and tech to select the top ten of the seventy-four submissions through a rigorous evaluation process. The Alliance then engaged BIT to market test the semifinalists' campaigns. BIT designed and conducted an online study, recruiting a sample of 6,028 US adults aged 18–29, including 2,168 people with technology skills (36%). The firm created simulated versions of popular social media sites to test submissions in the environment they were intended for.

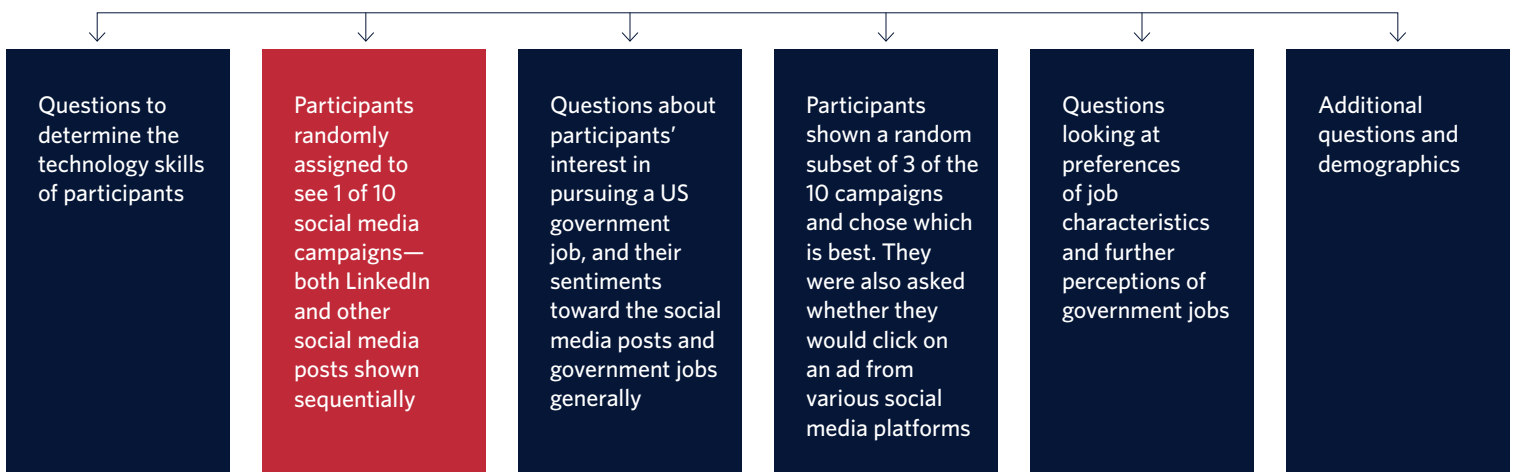### TABLE 1: MARKET TESTING PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS
Sample of 6,028 US Adults aged 18-29, including 2,168 people with technology skills

REGION
- West 20%
- Northeast 22%
- South 40%
- Midwest 18%

SEX
- Male 50%
- Female 50%

RACE
- Other 18%
- Black 17%
- White 65%

ETHNICITY
- Hispanic 16%
- Non-Hispanic 84%

TECHNOLOGIST
- Yes 36%
- No 64%

Participants were randomized to see one of the ten semifinalist social media campaigns. BIT asked participants questions to score their relative interest in federal government technology jobs, sentiment toward the social media campaigns, sentiment toward federal government tech jobs, and sentiment toward the video content. They also asked them which campaign was their favorite.

FIGURE 1: SURVEY FLOW
Sample of 6,028 US Adults aged 18–29, including 2,168 people with technology skills

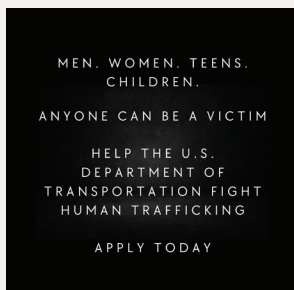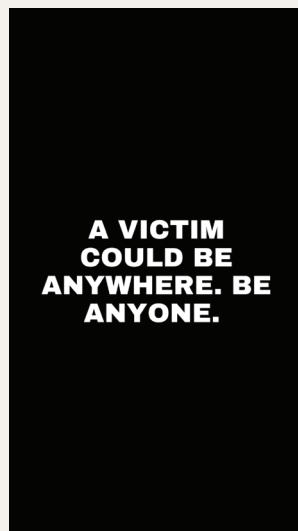| Questions to determine the technology skills of participants | Participants randomly assigned to see 1 of 10 social media campaigns—both LinkedIn and other social media posts shown sequentially | Questions about participants' interest in pursuing a US government job, and their sentiments toward the social media posts and government jobs generally | Participants shown a random subset of 3 of the 10 campaigns and chose which is best. They were also asked whether they would click on an ad from various social media platforms | Questions looking at preferences of job characteristics and further perceptions of government jobs | Additional questions and demographics |

SO, WHO WON?

The Alliance identified two winning submissions and two runners-up based on respondents' interest in pursuing a government job after seeing the campaigns and on their preferences and sentiments.

FIGURE 2: THE WINNING SUBMISSIONS

WINNER 1

Tech jobs in the Department of Transportation can help prevent human trafficking.

TONYA WAS 13, LIVING IN TEXAS.

JAMES WAS AT COLLEGE IN THE MIDWEST.

SAMANTHA WAS HOMELESS AT ONLY 12.

KEYANA WAS 15 IN ALASKA.

NOAH WAS A CHILD, PLAYING VIDEO GAMES.

A VICTIM COULD BE ANYWHERE. BE ANYONE.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION NEEDS PEOPLE IN TECHNOLOGY TO HELP STOP HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

ENGINEERS, SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS, CYBERSECURITY SPECIALISTS--YOU CAN HELP.

APPLY TODAY

MEN. WOMEN. TEENS. CHILDREN.

ANYONE CAN BE A VICTIM

HELP THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

APPLY TODAY

Anna Connolly Lisle,
Alexandria, VA
Georgetown Visitation
Preparatory School

WINNER 2

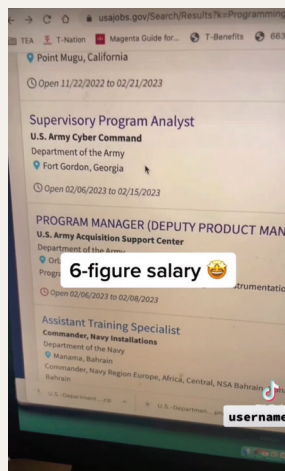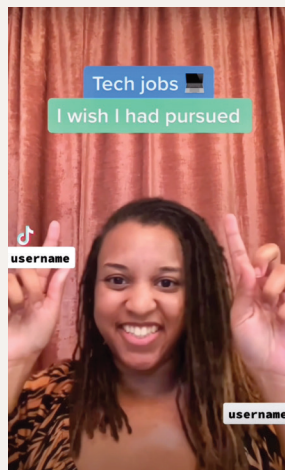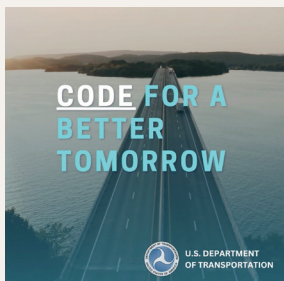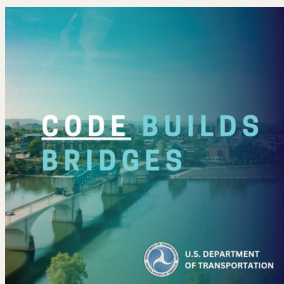Use your skills to supercharge the clean energy revolution and fight climate change.

We have some big problems

And we need your help

www.energy.gov/
CleanEnergyCorps
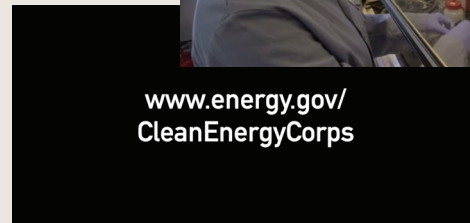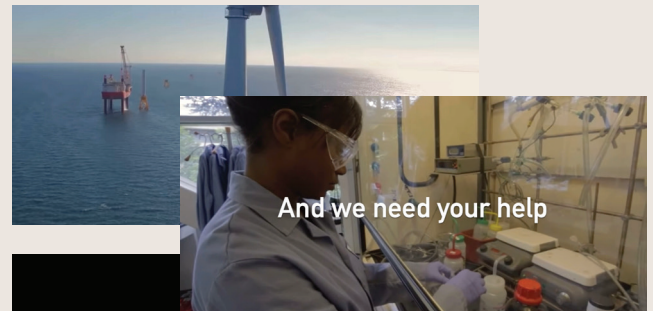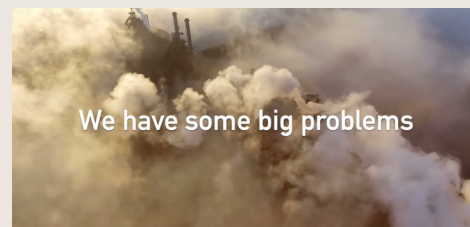
Emily Wagg, Portland, ME
Geology-Chemistry Major
Brown University
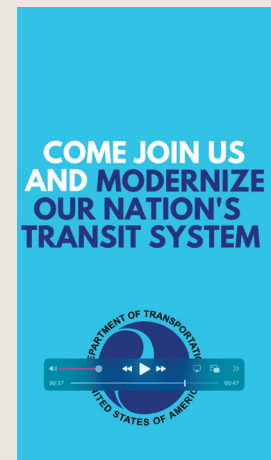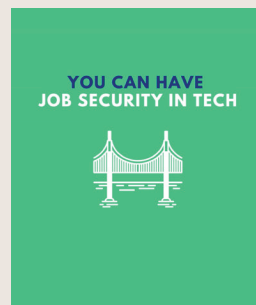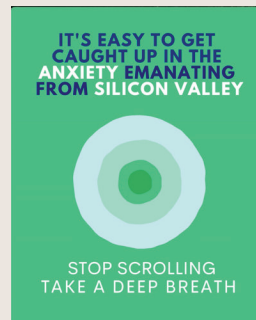
RUNNER UP 1

Tech jobs can make a difference. #codeforacause

Amani Seay
Dallas, TX

RUNNER UP 2

You can have a job that is both secure AND high-impact, with flexibility and remote work.

Marisol Vives
New York, NY

INSIGHTS

What type of campaign resonated best with Gen Zers?

The winning campaigns tended to have:

Emotive messages focused on social impact: The two winning LevelUp Gov campaigns showed participants the real-world impact their work could have—in ending human trafficking and preventing climate change—if they pursued the advertised careers.

> *"The social media posts...do a great job of communicating the importance of stopping human trafficking."*
> — *Technologist, age 25*

> *"The visual and audio worked together to portray a dark message about awareness of human trafficking."* —*Technologist, age 27*

High-quality visual content: Videos were generally well received by participants—the top four campaigns had video content. Participants felt that videos were more engaging and that they would be less likely to scroll past these on social media.

> *Fifty-eight percent of participants said they would watch a 60-second video advertising a federal government job.*

Official-looking content, appropriate to the platform: While still a departure from traditional government job postings, the winning campaigns had more serious messages compared to the playful approach demonstrated in other contest entries. People may prefer federal government messaging to be more serious, as this is consistent with its image.

> *"They are very informative and well made."*
> — *Technologist, age 28*

> *"These are great posts that are the perfect blend of clear and good length information, and a great hook that gets you interested right off the bat!"*   — *Non-technologist, age 26*

The winning campaigns performed consistently well for all demographic groups. However, only the two winners and the second runner-up were in technologists' top four. The first runner-up was less favored by technologists, who preferred a campaign with the key message, the "Department of Energy has two clear visions: protecting Earth's climate and securing America's future." Technologists were most interested in working for the Department of Energy.

What social media platforms did Gen Zers prefer?

Respondents were supportive of seeing these advertisements on most social media platforms. Interestingly, while participants said they are most likely to click on an ad they see on LinkedIn (63%), only 28% said they would like to see these ads there. This discrepancy is likely driven by the 9% of participants who use LinkedIn daily (although 24% use it weekly), whereas substantially more use other social media daily (YouTube, 59%; Instagram, 54%; TikTok, 48%; Facebook, 45%). Those who use LinkedIn are likely to use it to look for jobs and are therefore more likely to click on advertisements on this platform.

To raise awareness about available opportunities and to maximize engagement with job postings, government recruiters may want to consider leveraging a variety of social media platforms.

Who is most interested in government tech jobs?

While many participants showed some interest in government technology jobs, interest was highest among men, Black and Hispanic respondents, people who are already technologists, and people who live outside the Northeast.

FIGURE 5: Breakdown of interest in government technology jobs among different demographic groups

Yes, I would be interested in pursuing a technology job in the federal government.

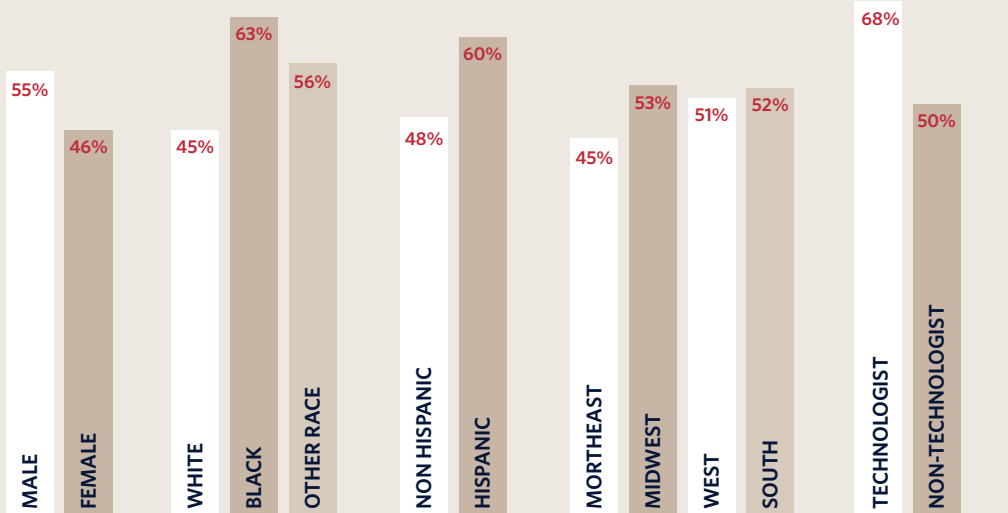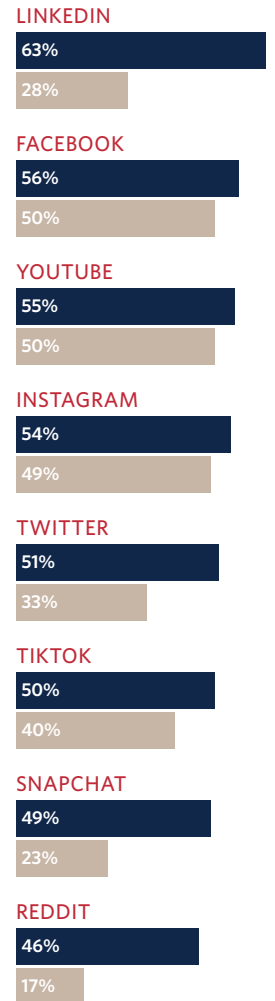| MALE	FEMALE	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER RACE	NON HISPANIC	HISPANIC	MORTHEAST	MIDWEST	WEST	SOUTH	TECHNOLOGIST	NON-TECHNOLOGIST
55%	46%	45%	63%	56%	48%	60%	45%	53%	51%	52%	68%	50%

FIGURE 4: Participants' likelihood of clicking on an advertisement for more information and interest in seeing advertisements on different social platforms

LINKEDIN
63%
28%

FACEBOOK
56%
50%

YOUTUBE
55%
50%

INSTAGRAM
54%
49%

TWITTER
51%
33%

TIKTOK
50%
40%

SNAPCHAT
49%
23%

REDDIT
46%
17%

Percentage who would click on an advertisement for more information on this platform (participants were randomized to see 1 of eight social media platforms)

Percentage who would like to see these types of advertisements on this platform (participants asked what platforms they would like to see ads on)

What appeals to young people about working for the government?

BIT showed participants a list of job characteristics and asked them 1) how important each characteristic is to them and 2) whether they think it is a characteristic of a government job.

Perceptions of government jobs generally aligned with what was important to the participants: real-world impact, promotion opportunities, job security, the chance to do fulfilling work, and a good salary. Two characteristics were rated as highly important to participants but were not perceived as characteristics of government jobs: a good fit for their skills and the ability to work from home.

*Good fit to skills: The main reason participants said that they would not be interested in pursuing a federal government technology job was that they did not think they would be a good fit or had the skills required. This trend was even more pronounced among women. Responses from technologists showed some, though not a dramatic, increase in confidence around qualifications.
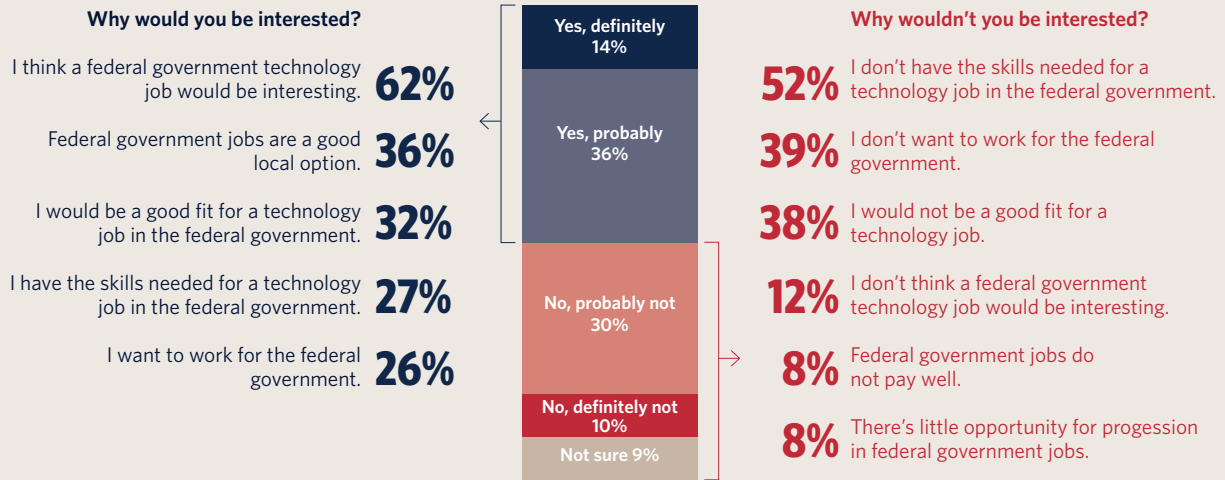
When designing advertisements or job postings, differentiating between "nice to have" and necessary skills—or concentrating only on the latter—can help combat misconceptions around "fit" that might discourage talented people from applying to government jobs. For example, a posting for an IT specialist could indicate essential technical qualifications, versus things that an otherwise qualified applicant could learn on the job.

*Ability to work from home: Flexible arrangements, such as the ability to work remotely or in a hybrid arrangement, have become an expectation for younger generations of workers. Many of them have experienced only remote or hybrid work because they entered the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their expectation to have these options postpandemic highlights the need for government job postings to clearly describe any available flexible work arrangements.

FIGURE 6: The importance of job characteristics when looking for jobs plotted against the perceived characteristic of government jobs
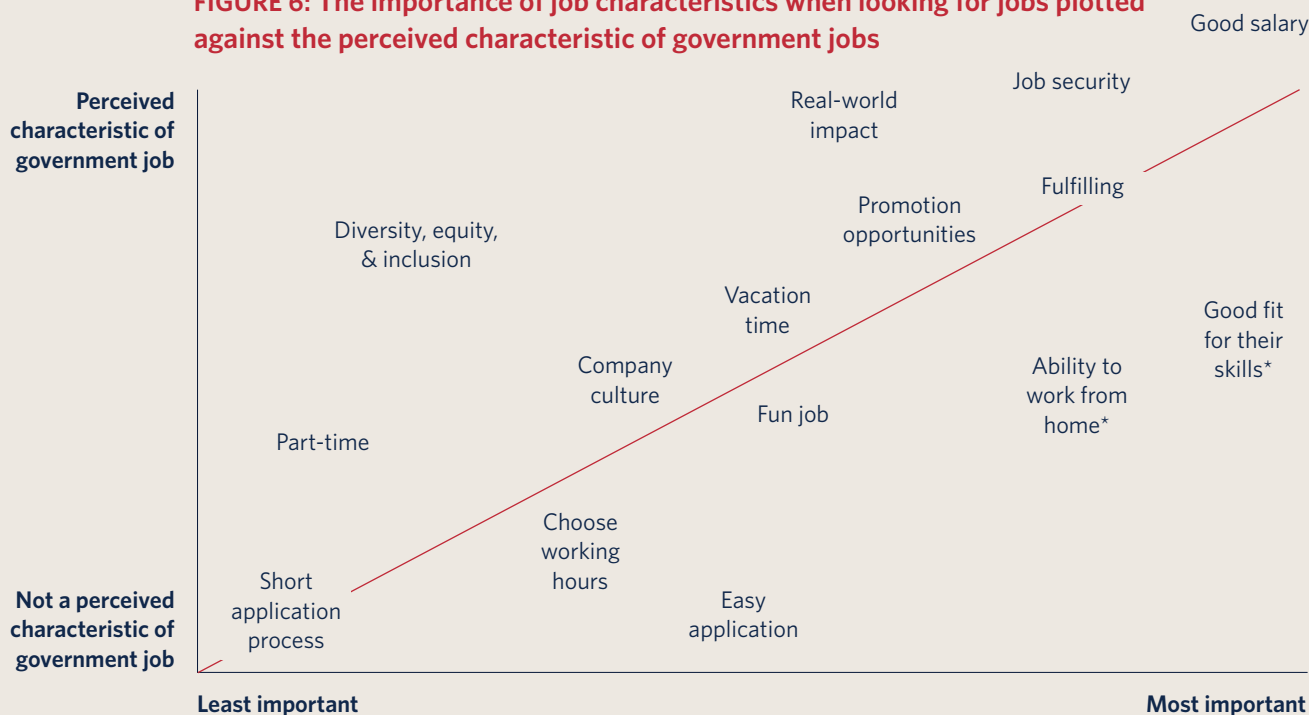
Would you be interested in pursuing a technology job in the federal government?
(N=6,028)

Why would you be interested?

I think a federal government technology job would be interesting. **62%**

Federal government jobs are a good local option. **36%**

I would be a good fit for a technology job in the federal government. **32%**

I have the skills needed for a technology job in the federal government. **27%**

I want to work for the federal government. **26%**

Yes, definitely 14%

Yes, probably 36%

No, probably not 30%

No, definitely not 10%

Not sure 9%

Why wouldn't you be interested?

52% I don't have the skills needed for a technology job in the federal government.

39% I don't want to work for the federal government.

38% I would not be a good fit for a technology job.

12% I don't think a federal government technology job would be interesting.

8% Federal government jobs do not pay well.

8% There's little opportunity for progression in federal government jobs.

Data collected by BIT Feb. 22–March 5, 2023.

CONCLUSION

The results of LevelUp Gov: A Public Service Marketing Contest demonstrate that the federal government has much to offer young technologists. Human resource professionals can leverage insights from the contest to attract them.

Hiring managers can consider the following strategies when developing recruitment campaigns aimed at Gen Z candidates:

- Use emotive messages that emphasize the positive social impact employees can achieve in the role.

- Create high-quality visual content (especially videos) that appeals to social media users but maintains the more serious tone of the federal government.

- Advertise jobs across social media platforms, especially LinkedIn.

- Make it easy for young talent to understand the benefits of the job, emphasizing flexible work arrangements when applicable.

- Appeal to a broader skill set (e.g., by differentiating between "need to have" and "nice to have" skills) to address confidence gaps among applicants.

Implementing these strategies would help showcase the challenging and meaningful work available in government and encourage the next generation of tech professionals to pursue it. Having more young technologists can help ensure that the federal government remains innovative and forward thinking as it responds to the country's most urgent challenges.

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[1] US Government Accountability Office, A Snapshot of Government-Wide Contracting for FY 2020, June 22, 2021, https://www.gao.gov/blog/snapshot-government-wide-contracting-fy-2020-infographic.

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THE VOLCKER ALLIANCE is a nonprofit founded by former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul A. Volcker to empower the public sector workforce to solve the challenges facing our nation. We build partnerships with government and universities, promote innovation in public service education, drive research on effective government, and inspire others with the story of Mr. Volcker's commitment to public service. We envision a public sector workforce with the experience, preparation, and commitment to ensure government is accountable and delivers with excellence.

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