

WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Strategies & Tactics You Can Employ to Get Results

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The public works workforce problem has four clocks

RETIREMENT

Knowledge is leaving faster than many agencies can replace it.

COMPETITION

Private-sector employers compete for the same technical talent.

EXPECTATIONS

Employees expect flexibility, growth, respect and purpose.

CAPACITY

Vacancies increase workload on the people who remain.

The question has changed.

Not: “How do I fill this vacancy?” → But: “How do I build a pipeline?”

Workforce is an operating system — not an HR transaction.

Learning objectives

What you expect to takeaway...

- Address workplace challenges in employee acquisition, recruitment, retention, and development.
- Employ strategies and tactics to better manage and plan for workplace challenges.
- Replicate innovations, ideas, and resources you will acquire and replicate in your agency to be fully staffed with great employees!

The test: What can you take home and try Monday morning?

About Jim Proce

Why this workforce conversation is grounded in operating experience



- Former city management professional with more than 45 years in local government in Florida and Texas.
- Served as city manager, assistant city manager, public works director, street superintendent and in other operational leadership roles.
- Led public works, utilities, engineering, planning, inspections and capital improvement functions in North Texas.
- MBA — University of Central Florida; BS — Rollins College; Harvard Senior Executives in State and Local Government program.
- ICMA Credentialed Manager; active in ICMA and APWA; speaker, teacher and municipal advisor.
- Principal & Founder, Proce Municipal Advisors LLC.

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The eight questions to ask...

These are the evaluation questions — and the next four slides answer them

1. What can we be doing differently in recruitment efforts?

2. What steps can we take to address the competitive environment in recruitment?

3. How can we address workplace culture?

4. How can we address work-life balance?

5. How can we address employee retention?

6. What scheduling challenges are we encountering and what innovations can we try?

7. How soon should we engage young people to educate them about public service?

8. How do you get HR on board to implement new ideas?

We will answer these through four practical “what I would do” discussions.

Recruitment: do something different

Proposal questions 1 — What can we be doing differently in recruitment efforts?

GO FAST. GO WHERE OTHERS ARE NOT. HIRE FOR ATTITUDE.

- Use billboards and other nontraditional marketing where the labor market actually sees the message.
- Use signing bonuses and referral bonuses where appropriate — and design them deliberately, not reactively.
- Do targeted recruitment for hard-to-fill classifications instead of waiting for applicants to find the posting.
- Look beyond the normal route: recruit from parallel professions with transferable skills.
- Hire for attitude, reliability, service orientation and willingness to learn — then teach the job.
- Make the process fast: qualified people have choices, and slow government processes lose them.

Compete for the person, not just the position

Proposal question 2 — What steps can we take to address the competitive environment?

BECOME A PREFERRED EMPLOYER — THEN ACT LIKE ONE.

- Pay and compensation matter. Know the market and know the cost of the vacancy, overtime and contractor premium.
- Market the organization: explain purpose, impact, career path and why this is a great place to work.
- Build an ambassador/mentor program and a buddy system for new employees.
- Create constant touchpoints during the first months — do not wait for the first performance review.
- Be visible: visit departments, plants, facilities and project sites often.
- Cover everything with purpose: “Why does this work matter, and why does this organization need you?”

A preferred employer is not a slogan. It is an employee experience.

Culture, work-life balance and retention are connected

Proposal questions 3–5 — attract, retain and grow people

CULTURE

Set expectations both ways — and live them. Employees should know what the organization expects and what they can expect from leadership.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Recognize that happy people are engaged people. Flexibility, predictable expectations, respect and recognition affect whether people can sustain the work.

RETENTION

More touchpoints. Be accessible. Listen. Empower employees to call a meeting when there is a problem. Incentivize innovation and create innovation teams.

People usually leave an experience before they leave a job.

Scheduling, young people and HR: change the system

Proposal questions 6–8

SCHEDULING

Ask the employee: “What would you do?” Set parameters and defined levels of service — they may surprise you.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Start K–12, college and beyond. Touch-a-truck events, career days, internships and meeting young people where they are.

HR PARTNERSHIP

Be relentless. Follow up. Bring the financial impact. Bring Legal in early. Explain the risk of doing nothing and the cost of broken policies.

Persistence + perseverance + commitment = policy change.

REALITY: Public works competes in three labor markets

1 PUBLIC-SERVICE OPERATIONS

City/county jobs: streets, water, wastewater, fleet, maintenance, inspections, refuse, operations.

2 PARALLEL PRIVATE MARKET

Same skills in construction, utilities, trucking, trades, maintenance and industrial operations.

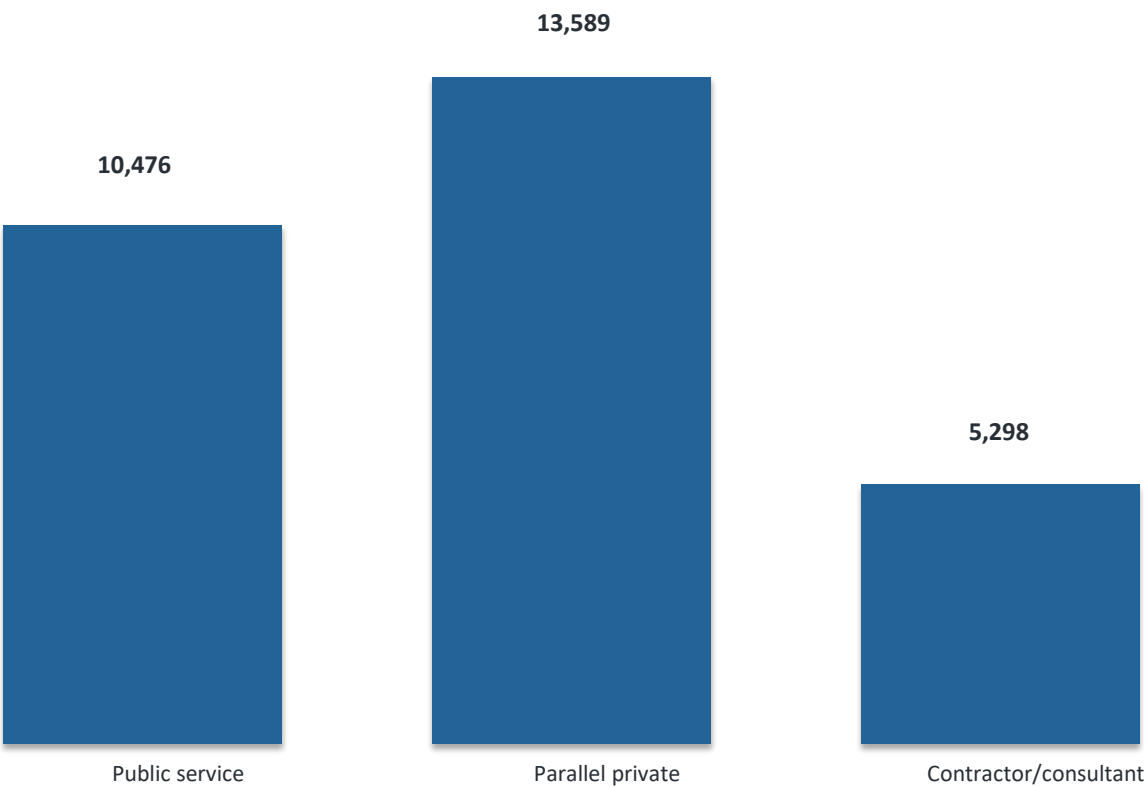
3 CONTRACTOR / CONSULTANT ECOSYSTEM

Engineers, PMs, surveyors, inspectors, environmental professionals and contractors who deliver public work.

These lenses overlap. That is the point: you are competing for the same people.

The North Texas demand list — viewed through a public works lens

Selected projected 2025–2035 employment change — talent pools



10,476

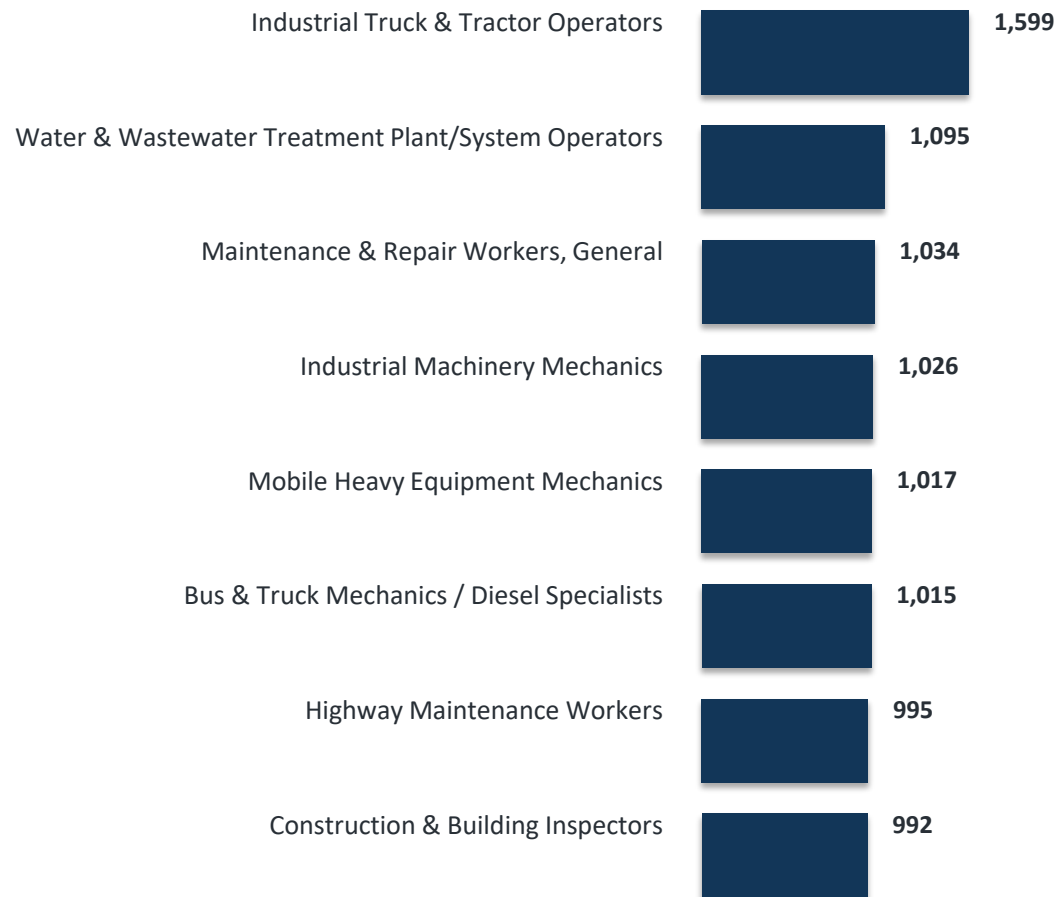
13,589

5,298

- These totals are selected occupations from the official list, grouped for presentation—not an official NCTCOG public works total.
- Projected change is not replacement demand. Retirement, turnover and service growth can require much more hiring.

Public-service operations: the jobs residents notice when they fail

Projected employment change, 2025–2035

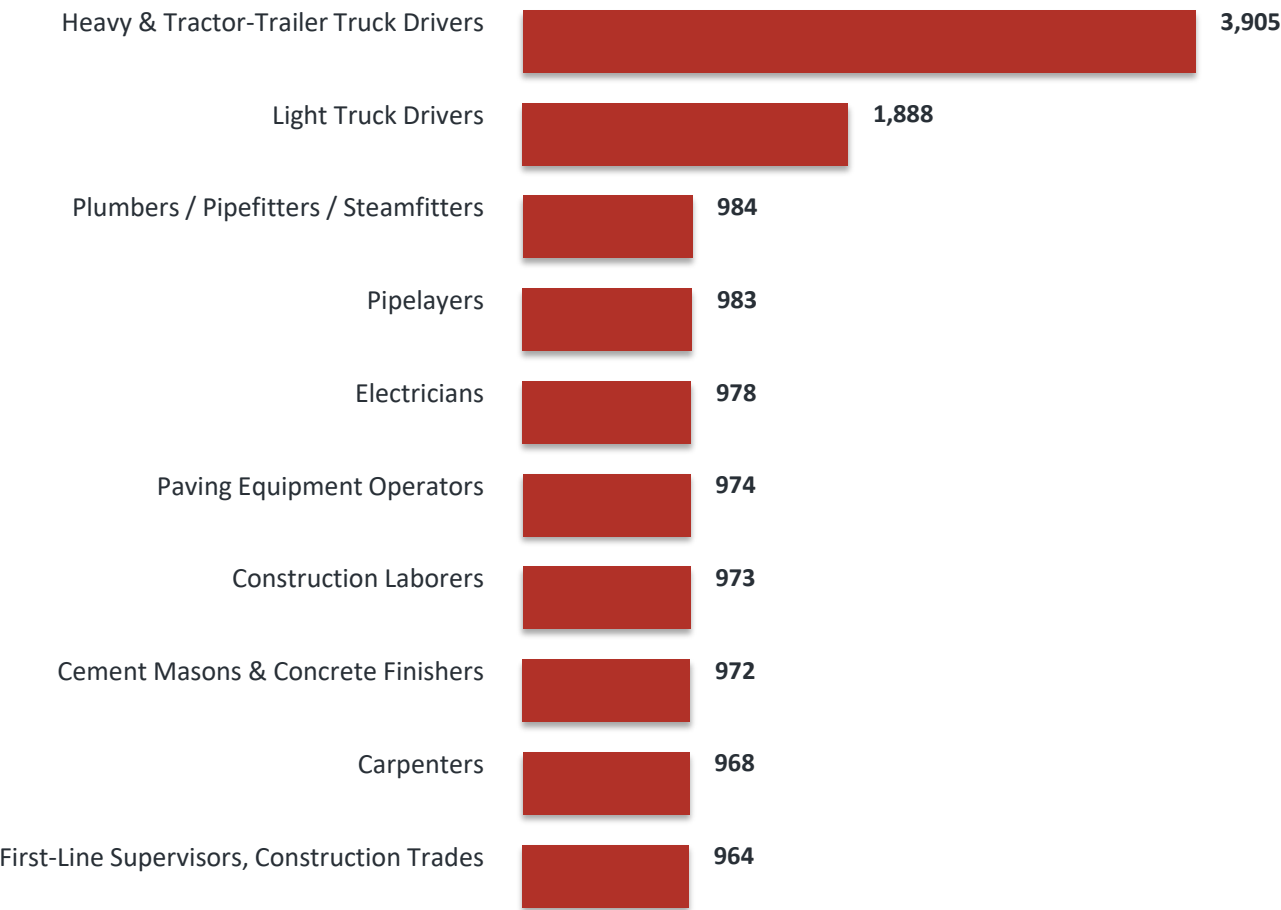


- Heavy/tractor-trailer drivers — 3,905
- Industrial truck & tractor operators — 1,599
- Transportation/storage/distribution managers — 559
- Industrial machinery mechanics — 1,026
- Mobile heavy equipment mechanics — 1,017
- Water/wastewater operators — 1,095

Mission-critical does not always mean “hardest to recruit.” Measure the operational consequence.

The private sector is hiring the same people

Parallel-market projected change



3,905

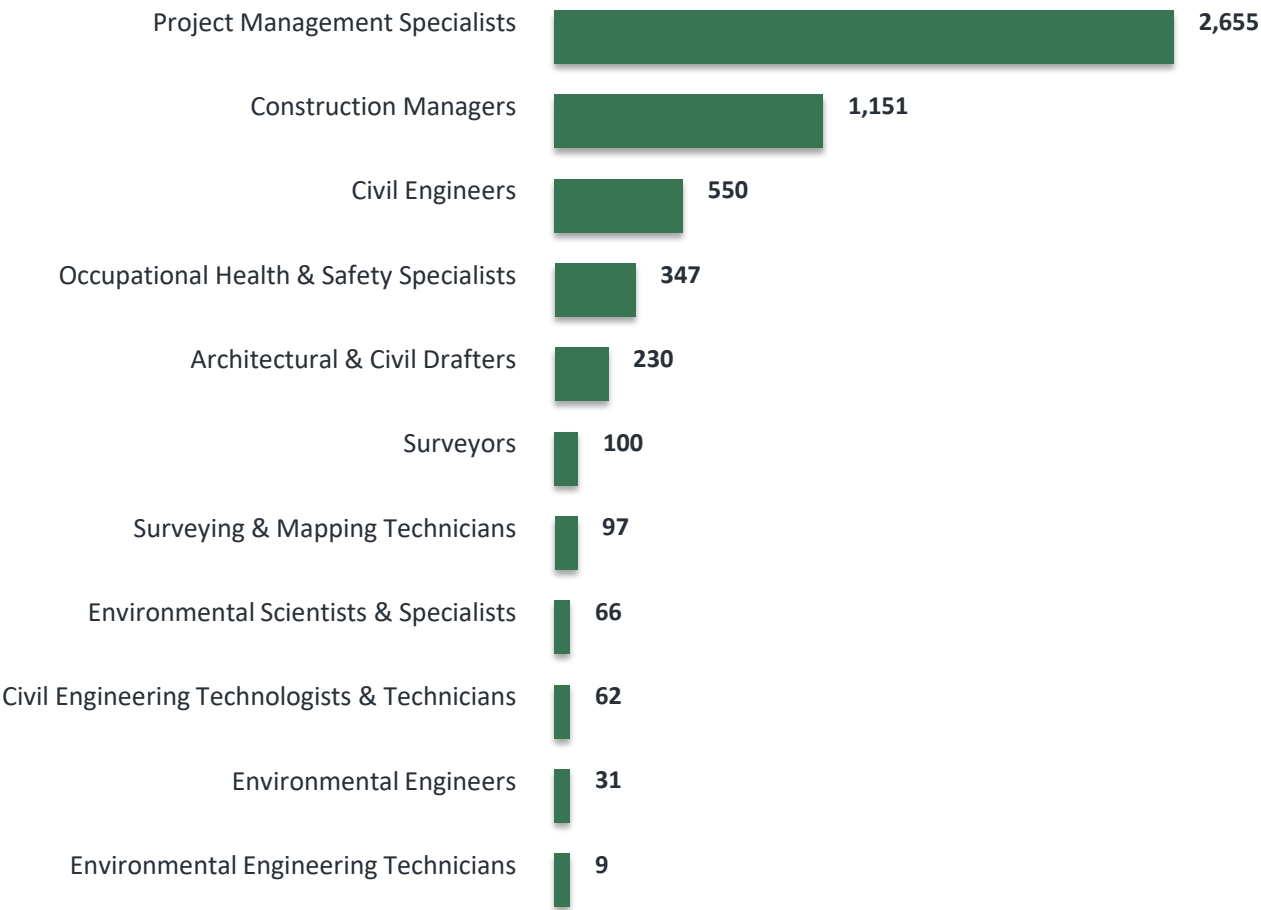
Heavy & tractor-trailer
truck drivers

1,888

Light truck drivers

The public works workforce extends beyond the city payroll

Professional / contractor / consultant talent pool



- Project management specialists — 2,655
- Construction managers — 1,151
- Civil engineers — 550
- Occupational health & safety specialists — 347
- Architectural/civil drafters — 230
- Surveyors — 100

Your consultant and contractor partners are part of the workforce ecosystem.

Engineering: compete for talent before graduation

Occupation	Change	%	Hourly
Civil Engineers	550	24%	\$35.10–\$59.10
Environmental Engineers	31	29%	\$43.40–\$63.28
Surveyors	100	23%	\$21.99–\$38.05
Civil Engineering Technologists/Technicians	62	21%	\$26.13–\$35.55
Surveying & Mapping Technicians	97	24%	\$19.37–\$30.21
Architectural & Civil Drafters	230	24%	\$23.60–\$36.42

“Career relationship” beats “job posting.”

The 15 tactics: a practical workforce playbook

All 15 are covered in the following section

1. Coach-to-career pipeline

2. Second-start pipeline

3. Military transition outreach

4. Start before candidate is a candidate

5. Summer help as an audition

6. Train to retain

7. Use TxLTAP as a workforce partner

8. Volunteer-to-employee pipeline

9. Overhire critical classifications

10. Vacancy savings as a workforce tool

11. Price the job against the real alternative

12. Manage the employee story

13. Faster hiring

14. Show the career ladder

15. Succession / reduce dependency

The tactics are deliberately practical — not “best practices” that only work in a textbook.

Tactics I have actually used — and would use again

But they did not happen because I wrote them on a list

PERSISTENCE • PERSEVERANCE • COMMITMENT

- Some of these ideas required persistent effort to change policies, procedures or long-standing practices.
- I had to illustrate the financial impact of NOT doing something — vacancy cost, overtime, contractor premium, lost capacity and burnout.
- I worked with HR and Legal to make some of the ideas workable and defensible.
- Not every idea was easy, and not every idea worked perfectly. The lesson is to keep testing, measuring and improving.
- Workforce innovation is often less about having a brilliant idea and more about staying with the idea long enough to make it operational.

If the answer is “we can’t,” ask: “What would have to be true for us to try?”

Tactic #1 — The Coach-to-Career Pipeline

DON'T WAIT FOR THE ATHLETE TO APPLY.

- Build relationships with high-school coaches and activity sponsors—not just guidance counselors.
- Ask for introductions to students who are not going to college but are bright, dependable and ready to work.
- Show them the career: equipment operator → lead → supervisor; technician → senior technician → fleet leader; intern → engineer → project manager.
- Do it across football, baseball, soccer, track, wrestling and other activities.
- Keep the relationship after graduation.

Grow your own — before the labor market ever sees them.

Tactic #2 — Build a “second start” pipeline

FOSTER YOUTH

Partner with the agency handling emancipation. Offer part-time entry work before emancipation; create a path to full-time work.

SECOND-CHANCE HIRING

Create a clear, job-related process for candidates with records. Set expectations, supports and consequences up front.

VETERANS / TRANSITIONING SERVICE MEMBERS

Connect directly to military transition channels instead of waiting for veterans to find your posting.

A pipeline is strongest when it reaches people who are not already in your applicant pool.

Tactic #3 — Recruit the military transition, not the veteran job board

- DoD SkillBridge connects transitioning service members to civilian employment training, internships and apprenticeships during the final 180 days of service.
- Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Employment Services provides employer/job-matching support, hiring events, job-posting assistance and veteran recruitment support.
- U.S. Chamber Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes connects employers with military-connected talent through hiring events, fellowships and employer resources.
- Translate military skills into your job classifications: equipment maintenance, logistics, fleet, utilities, construction, leadership, safety and emergency response.

Tactic: designate one employee as your military-transition relationship owner.

Tactic #4 — Start before the job candidate is a job candidate

ELEMENTARY

Career days: tell the public works story. Heavy equipment, water, engineering, parks, technology, emergency response.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Hands-on demonstrations. Make the work visible, physical and fun.

HIGH SCHOOL

Internships, summer jobs, coaches, CTE programs, trades, engineering and college-credit pathways.

COLLEGE

Department relationships, capstones, internships, faculty connections and professional associations.

If the first time a young person hears about public works is at age 24, you are already late.

Tactic #5 — Treat summer help as a 10-week audition

HIRE → TRAIN → OBSERVE → REWARD → CONVERT

- Don't treat every summer hire as temporary labor. Identify which positions are feeder jobs.
- Set clear attendance, safety, work-quality and teamwork expectations.
- Use the summer to observe behavior that interviews cannot reveal.
- Where legally and administratively appropriate, use a defined incentive or conversion mechanism tied to performance and completion.
- At the end: “Would I hire this person permanently?”

Summer help is not a staffing category. It is a talent-identification program.

Tactic #6 — Train people even if they might leave

“They may leave after we train them.”

“What if they stay because we didn't?”

- Increase training budgets for critical classifications.
- Use TxLTAP and other public works training resources aggressively.
- Build training matrices by classification—not just a list of courses.
- Pair technical training with supervision, communication, conflict management and leadership.
- Track certifications, cross-training and internal promotions as workforce-capacity measures.

The real risk is not training someone who leaves. It is failing to develop someone who stays.

Tactic #7 — Use TxLTAP as a workforce partner, not just a training catalog

ATTRACT → ONBOARD → TRAIN → ENGAGE → RETAIN

- TxLTAP's Workforce Development resources include a 5-Stage Model to Attract and Retain Employees.
- Resources include performance evaluation tools, job-description crosswalks and job descriptions for road & bridge classifications.
- Training plans/matrices cover construction inspectors, crew leaders/foremen, equipment operators, maintenance technicians and public works managers/supervisors.
- Management/workforce courses complement technical training.
- Turn the resources into a local competency-and-career system.

Tactic #8 — Build an aggressive volunteer-to-employee pipeline

- Interview volunteers instead of automatically accepting anyone.
- Match volunteers to real work and give them meaningful responsibility.
- Track hours and engagement—not just headcount.
- When participation drops, contact them immediately: What changed? What would make the experience better?
- Offer new challenges and exposure to other parts of the organization.
- Identify the people who already demonstrate reliability, initiative and service orientation.

Volunteers can become your longest “interview” process—and your best one.

Tactic #9 — Overhire critical classifications

VACANCY + ATTRITION + TIME-TO-PRODUCTIVITY

- Public safety uses overhire because training time and attrition make vacancy management predictable.
- Public works can use the same logic for classifications with long recruitment or training cycles.
- Calculate historical attrition, average time-to-fill and time-to-competency.
- Use vacancy savings and planned attrition—not emergency overtime—as part of the financial model.
- The goal is to keep the organization close to full productive strength, not to create excess staff.

Manage the workforce like a pipeline, not a row of empty boxes.

Tactic #10 — Turn vacancy savings into a workforce tool

VACANCY SAVINGS = TEMPORARY CAPACITY

- Know the actual salary-and-benefit savings generated by vacancies.
- Separate recurring structural savings from temporary vacancy savings.
- Use the data to support training, overhire, temporary help, recruiting incentives or other capacity strategies where policy permits.
- Don't let the workforce strategy be disconnected from the budget strategy.
- Build the conversation with the finance director before the crisis—not after overtime has exploded.

If you don't know your vacancy savings, you don't know the financial capacity of your workforce plan.

Tactic #11 — Price the job against the real alternative

- Ask: What does it cost us when a critical position stays vacant for six months?
- Compare salary + benefits + overtime + lost productivity + service impacts + contractor premium.
- Sometimes paying a job class modestly above market is cheaper than repeatedly buying the service at a premium.
- Use compensable factors to maintain internal equity: skill/knowledge, responsibility/impact, effort/complexity, working conditions and risk.
- Create a compensation strategy: target market, competitors, priority classifications, timeline and approval path.

“Cheap” payroll can be an expensive service-delivery strategy.

Reference: 15 compensable factors

Use these to test internal equity and explain why one job should be valued differently from another

SKILL & KNOWLEDGE

- Education and Training
- Prior Experience
- Specialized Knowledge
- Complex Problem Solving

RESPONSIBILITY & IMPACT

- Decision-Making Authority
- Financial Impact
- Supervisory Responsibility
- Strategic Influence

EFFORT & COMPLEXITY

- Mental Demands
- Physical Demands
- Communication Skills
- Coping with Stress

WORKING CONDITIONS & RISK

- Work Environment
- Physical Safety Risk
- Health and Hazard Exposure

15 factors = a framework for fair, explainable job valuation — not a shortcut to a pay decision.

Tactic #12 — Manage the employee story

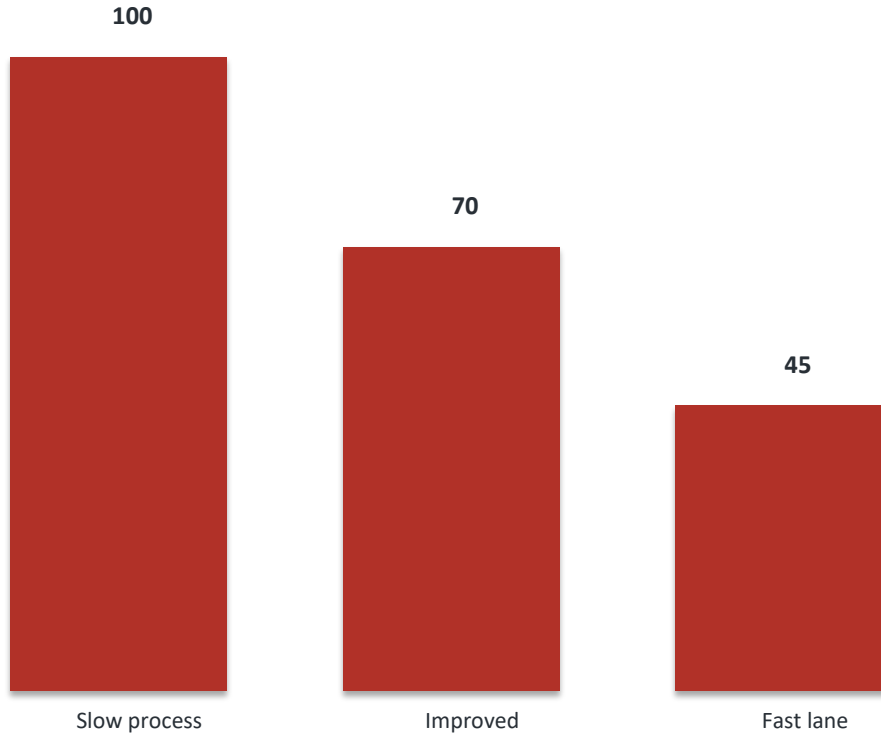
WHAT WILL YOUR EMPLOYEE SAY ABOUT YOU?

- Keep employees informed—especially when decisions affect them.
- Ask frontline employees what is getting in the way of good work.
- Close the loop when they give an idea: use it, explain it or explain why not.
- Recognize the people who solve problems before the problems become emergencies.
- Do not let your best ideas walk out the door because employees were never asked.

Culture is not what management writes on the wall. It is what employees tell the next applicant.

Tactic #13 — Faster catches the fish

Illustrative time-to-hire index (do this with your own data)



- Measure time from vacancy approval → posting → first qualified applicant → interview → offer → start.
- Create a fast lane for pre-approved hard-to-fill classifications.
- Use promotional/vacancy preferences where legally and administratively appropriate.
- Don't make every classification follow the same process when the labor market is not the same.
- Track where candidates drop out. Try to find out why?

You can't recruit at market speed with government-process speed.

Tactic #14 — Show the ladder



Employees don't need a promise of promotion. They need to see a credible path to growth.

- Define competencies for each step.
- Connect training to progression.
- Use acting assignments and rotations to test readiness.

Tactic #15 — “What if Employee X disappears tomorrow?”

IDENTIFY → CROSS-TRAIN → DOCUMENT → TEST → REDUCE DEPENDENCY

- Identify single points of failure: systems, assets, processes, relationships and institutional knowledge.
- Name at least one backup for each critical responsibility.
- Use job shadowing, rotations and temporary assignments.
- Document the things that live only in someone's head.
- Test the plan: “If this person is gone for 90 days, what breaks?”

Succession planning is not choosing a replacement. It is reducing organizational dependency on one person.

Build a workforce dashboard — not a vacancy report

PIPELINE

Applicants / qualified applicants / source

SPEED

Time-to-contact / interview / offer / fill

QUALITY

90-day / 1-year retention

DEVELOPMENT

Certifications / cross-training / promotions

RETENTION

Turnover by supervisor/classification

CAPACITY

Vacancies / overtime / backlog / service impact

What gets measured gets managed.

A 90-day workforce sprint

DAYS 1–30

Map the risk

Top 10 hard-to-fill jobs • retirement exposure • overtime • single points of failure

DAYS 31–60

Build the pipeline

Coaches • schools • veterans • colleges • TxLTAP • Workforce Solutions • contractor/consultant partners

DAYS 61–90

Fix the experience

Fast hiring • onboarding • career ladders • stay interviews • training matrix • compensation review

One workforce plan. One dashboard. One year of disciplined execution.

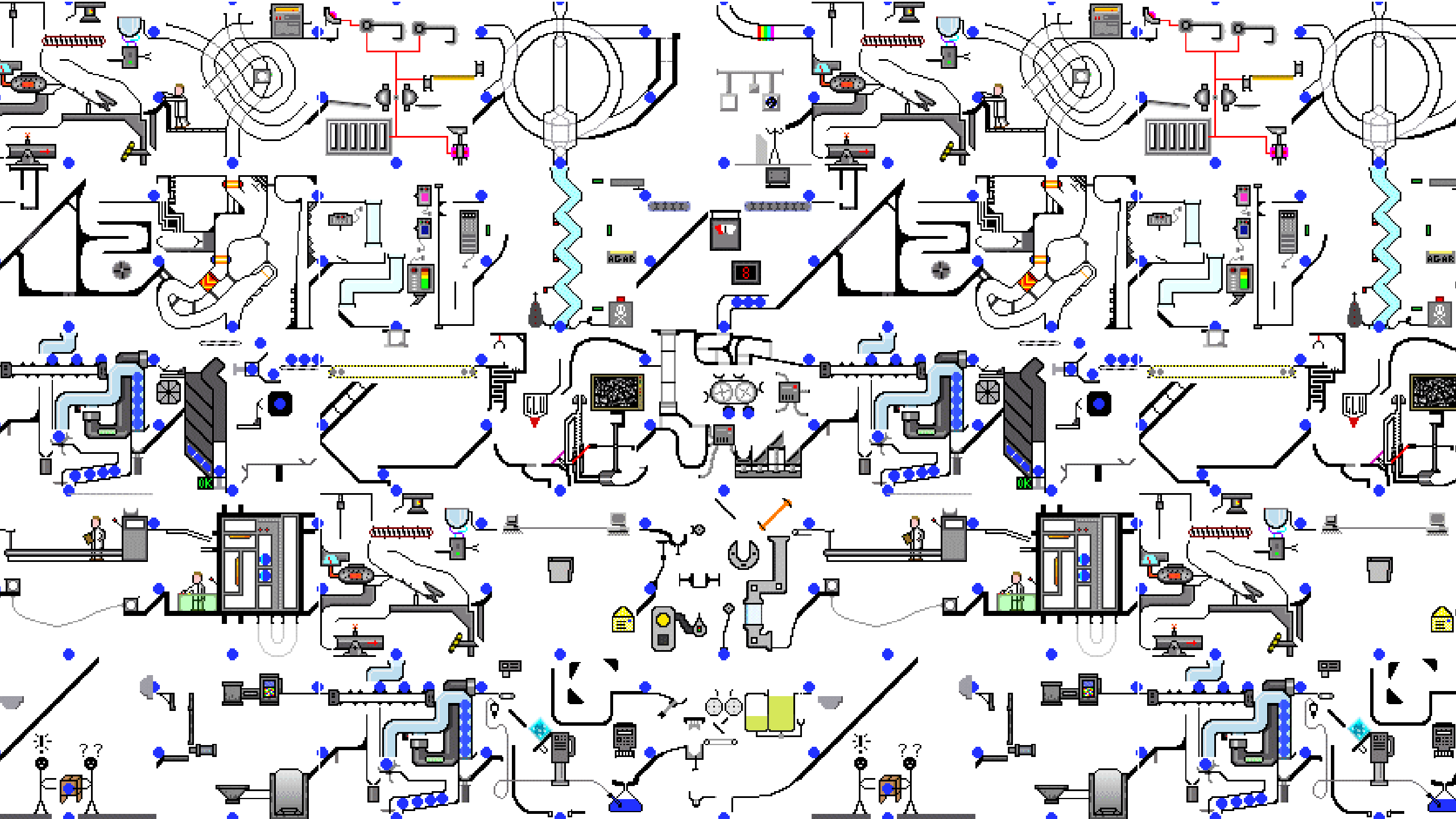
Three questions to take home

1. Which public works job would hurt us most if we could not fill it for 12 months?

2. What are we doing today that makes a great employee want to stay?

3. Which workforce pipeline will we build before we need the next employee?

Public works does not have a workforce problem we solve once. We have a workforce system we must manage continuously.



Appendix — my workforce innovation checklist

1. Coach-to-career pipeline
2. Foster-youth pre-emancipation pathway
3. Elementary/middle-school career outreach
4. Internships/apprenticeships
5. Train-to-retain budget
6. Aggressive volunteer pipeline
7. Military transition outreach
8. Second-chance hiring
9. College/department relationships
10. Summer-help audition
11. Vacancy-savings management
12. Pre-arranged temporary workforce
13. Hiring/referral/retention incentives
14. Overhire critical classifications
15. Professional development planning
16. Succession planning
17. Market-based compensation
18. Compensable-factor review
19. Compensation strategy/philosophy
20. Culture and employee feedback loop

Pick three. Test them. Measure them. Keep what works.

Appendix — public works talent pools in the demand list

Lens	SOC	Occupation	Change	%	P25–P75 hourly
Public service	47-4051	Highway Maintenance Workers	995	19%	\$18.48–\$23.34
Public service	51-8031	Water & Wastewater Treatment Plant/System Operators	1,095	10%	\$20.67–\$27.34
Public service	53-7081	Refuse & Recyclable Material Collectors	157	18%	\$13.81–\$26.73
Public service	49-3042	Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics	1,017	22%	\$22.66–\$34.97
Public service	49-3031	Bus & Truck Mechanics / Diesel Specialists	1,015	18%	\$23.17–\$33.32
Public service	49-9071	Maintenance & Repair Workers, General	1,034	21%	\$17.16–\$26.29
Public service	49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	1,026	28%	\$23.79–\$36.65
Public service	47-2073	Operating Engineers / Construction Equipment Operators	976	19%	\$21.14–\$27.31
Public service	53-7051	Industrial Truck & Tractor Operators	1,599	21%	\$16.93–\$28.11
Public service	53-6041	Traffic Technicians	11	16%	\$20.81–\$33.27
Public service	47-4011	Construction & Building Inspectors	992	16%	\$23.38–\$39.01
Public service	11-3071	Transportation, Storage & Distribution Managers	559	22%	\$37.02–\$63.50
Parallel private	53-3032	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	3,905	20%	\$16.64–\$43.00
Parallel private	53-3033	Light Truck Drivers	1,888	32%	\$11.86–\$39.28
Parallel private	47-2111	Electricians	978	23%	\$21.29–\$31.74
Parallel private	47-2151	Pipelayers	983	5%	\$17.40–\$22.09
Parallel private	47-2152	Plumbers / Pipefitters / Steamfitters	984	22%	\$21.40–\$33.77
Parallel private	47-2031	Carpenters	968	29%	\$19.45–\$26.09
Parallel private	47-2051	Cement Masons & Concrete Finishers	972	26%	\$20.78–\$26.07
Parallel private	47-2061	Construction Laborers	973	25%	\$16.67–\$21.45
Parallel private	47-2071	Paving Equipment Operators	974	17%	\$20.71–\$25.93
Parallel private	47-1011	First-Line Supervisors, Construction Trades	964	22%	\$27.35–\$41.57
Contractor/consultant	11-9021	Construction Managers	1,151	25%	\$36.49–\$59.81
Contractor/consultant	13-1082	Project Management Specialists	2,655	25%	\$32.60–\$58.47
Contractor/consultant	17-2051	Civil Engineers	550	24%	\$35.10–\$59.10
Contractor/consultant	17-2081	Environmental Engineers	31	29%	\$43.40–\$63.28
Contractor/consultant	17-1022	Surveyors	100	23%	\$21.99–\$38.05
Contractor/consultant	17-3022	Civil Engineering Technologists & Technicians	62	21%	\$26.13–\$35.55
Contractor/consultant	17-3031	Surveying & Mapping Technicians	97	24%	\$19.37–\$30.21
Contractor/consultant	17-3011	Architectural & Civil Drafters	230	24%	\$23.60–\$36.42
Contractor/consultant	19-2041	Environmental Scientists & Specialists	66	24%	\$28.36–\$46.63
Contractor/consultant	19-5011	Occupational Health & Safety Specialists	347	30%	\$26.98–\$45.73
Contractor/consultant	17-3025	Environmental Engineering Technicians	9	31%	\$21.86–\$33.28

Source: Draft 2026–2027 Target Occupations List. Grouping is analytical for presentation and is not an official source classification.

Sources & resources

North Central Texas demand data	Draft 2026–2027 Target Occupations List — Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas
User-provided tactics	Workforce Innovations and Practices List — Jim Proce
TxLTAP	Texas Local Technical Assistance Program — Workforce Development Library / Training Catalog
APWA	Workforce Development Committee — Susan Hann, PE; strategy, tools and partnerships
Veteran pipeline	DoD SkillBridge / VA; Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Employment Services
Military hiring	U.S. Chamber Foundation — Hiring Our Heroes
Regional workforce	Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas — employer services, recruiting, talent development

Web resources reviewed August 2026; presentation uses source-derived data plus Jim Proce’s experience/tactics.