



OCTOBER 2024

Future of the IC Workforce: Technology and Talent Transformation

OVERVIEW

In FY24, the INSA Foundation, in collaboration with ClearanceJobs and GDIT, hosted a three-part webinar series, "The Future of the IC Workforce: Technology and Talent Transformation."

This programming brought together leaders from the private, public, and academic sectors to explore the evolving dynamics of recruiting, retaining, and developing a diverse and competitive intelligence and national security workforce. Emphasis was placed on increasing representation in STEM careers and ensuring the workforce is equipped to meet the challenges posed by emerging technologies.

TECHNOLOGY AND TALENT TRANSFORMATION

Moderated by Lindy Kyzer, *Director at ClearanceJobs*

SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

Speakers:

Jo-Ellen Adkins, *Acting Director,
Human Development Directorate, NGA*

Aaron Bedrowsky, *Senior VP,
Intelligence & Homeland Security, GDIT*

Lauren Bean Buitta,
Founder and CEO, Girl Security

SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

Speakers:

Kimberly King,
*Career Service Manager
for Analysis, DIA*

The Hon. John Sherman, *Dean,
The Bush School of Government
and Public Service,
Texas A&M University*

SEPTEMBER 30, 2024

Speakers:

Loren Schulman,
*Associate Director,
Performance and Personnel
Management, OMB*

Stephanie O'Neill,
Performance Manager, OMB

KEY FINDINGS

Skills-based Hiring for a Stronger, Diverse Workforce

With over 500,000 open cybersecurity positions across the U.S., the Office of the National Cyber Director is addressing this critical shortage by advancing skills-based hiring for technical roles.¹ During the IC Workforce webinar series, speakers highlighted the value of this approach. John Sherman emphasized that skills-based hiring “unlocks the full potential of the United States” without disadvantaging degree holders.² Loren Schulman underscored the benefits for employers, noting that a robust skills-based hiring system enables better identification of critical skills rather than focusing solely on educational qualifications.³ Stephanie O’Neill highlighted the role of community colleges and federally registered apprenticeships in reaching underrepresented communities, ensuring they gain the necessary training for federal careers.⁴ By implementing skills-based hiring, organizations can not only address urgent cybersecurity gaps but also attract a more diverse workforce that reflects the full talent pool of the nation. Speakers across the series also noted the importance of contract reform to the success of skills-based hiring initiative. Loren Schulman agreed with this need and emphasized that contract reform is an area ripe for innovation. She went on to note that OMB is looking at other areas of the federal market to assess best practices in this area.⁵

Early Engagement of the Next Generation STEM and National Security Workforce

The future of the intelligence community (IC) workforce depends on engaging the next generation early, sparking interest in STEM and national security careers. Creating a structured pathway for high school counselors to guide students in building relevant skills can enhance this pipeline.⁶ Federal agencies and industry should collaborate with schools to align academic programs with national security career opportunities.⁷ Expanding partnerships with academia will provide students with hands-on experiences that prepare them for workforce needs. As Lauren Bean Buitta noted, “Every generation is a new opportunity to engage.”

Creating Flexibility to Move Between Sectors

To attract top talent, the IC must embrace flexibility, allowing employees to move seamlessly between government and the private sector. Jo-Ellen Adkins stressed the importance of offering professionals opportunities to work across sectors, saying, “The message should not be you have to stay in government or stay in the private sector.”⁸ These cross-sector experiences foster innovation and collaboration, strengthening the national security mission.⁹ The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) is expanding the Intelligence Community Public-Private Talent Exchange to create more such opportunities, which will help grow the talent pipeline and boost retention.

Upskilling and Retraining the Workforce

The IC has made strides in equipping its current workforce to adapt to technological advancements. Kim King highlighted DIA’s commitment to continuous learning, offering technical training at universities and informal opportunities such as guest speaker visits and podcast interviews.¹⁰ John Sherman added that in addition to technical skills, soft skills like communication, writing, and briefing are essential. He emphasized the need for “crisp, clear communication”¹¹ when conveying complex data to decision-makers. Both Sherman and King underscored the importance of critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and teamwork as vital skills for the future workforce.¹²

Improving the Federal Hiring Process

Strengthening the IC workforce begins with a robust and transparent hiring process. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) have outlined a strategy to attract the best candidates, emphasizing the importance of reflecting the diversity of the country.¹³ Their Federal Hiring Experience Guide advocates for skills-based hiring, increased transparency, and better communication with candidates. As the guide points out, “The strength of any organization rests in its people.”¹⁴ Improvements are essential for building a workforce capable of tackling tomorrow’s challenges.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 Future of the IC Workforce series, hosted by the INSA Foundation, ClearanceJobs, and GDIT, provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in recruiting, retaining, and developing talent within the intelligence community. Key takeaways include the need for skills-based hiring to close the cyber skills gap, early outreach to diverse candidates, fostering cross-sector opportunities, upskilling the current workforce, and enhancing hiring processes. Partnerships with academia are essential for developing a pipeline of skilled professionals ready to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving technological landscape. While technical expertise is critical, soft skills like communication and critical thinking remain vital for success in the IC. Ultimately, human capital should not be seen as a support mission—it is a core mission critical to maintaining the IC’s competitiveness and effectiveness in safeguarding national security.

REFERENCES

¹ Press Release: National Cyber Director Encourages Adoption of Skills-Based Hiring to Connect Americans to Good-Paying Cyber Jobs

² John Sherman: “Getting back into tapping into the whole strength of the United States and all of our talent. How many folks do we have that have outstanding cyber programming data skills they may have learned on the civilian side through maybe an associate’s degree or through military experience, who already have more practical experience than somebody who may have gotten a degree. [Skills based hiring] is not at the detriment of the [college degrees]. This is where we unlock our full powers of the United States.”

³ Loren Schulman: “The work that we’re doing is meant to ensure that skills-based hiring is a robust feature at agency hiring initiatives. And what it’s meant to do is allow agencies to move away from using degree attainment as a proxy measure for skills... If we develop and make more robust our skills-based hiring, we would be able to much more easily screen applicants for the skills and experiences they bring to the table and not just what they have on their resume in terms of their degree.”

⁴ Stephanie O’Neill: “Community colleges are the pillar of our efforts to engage with our underrepresented communities and to enable them to get the training they need to have a successful federal career. They’re really just an amazing gateway and they’re especially attractive in this space because they’re accessible and more affordable than most four-year colleges and universities. And this increased access and affordability will really serve to widen the hiring pool so that everyone has the opportunity to engage in federal service and agencies really have access to top talent...finding those intersections and ways to pull from underrepresented communities as far and wide is really essential and we’re really excited about the impacts of that work.”

⁵ Loren Schulman “It is incredibly important as we talk about the hiring and personnel reforms that we think about how the work that we do in the federal space should or could intersect with the incredible contractor community as a part of the broader federal ecosystem and in particular part of the broader national security ecosystem.”

⁶ Lauren Bean Buitta: “I would start with high school career counselors. One of the projects we’re working on is providing high school counselors with a rubric of the competencies and capabilities that allows for them to feel confident in different career pathways that are stem center or pathways that intersect with national security and intelligence careers. In the national security workforce what I try to emphasize is that every generation is a new opportunity to engage.”

⁷ Aaron Bedrowsky: “We work in an area with thousands of people in this field. I’m certain students have a relationship with someone who understands the community and can give them mentorship and advice on aligning their academic pursuits to their interest...finding organizations, companies, or government agencies that will come to schools and career fairs to proactively engage with students.”

⁸ Jo-Ellen Adkins: “There are great ideas being worked on at ODN for moving in and out of government. I love this concept because we shouldn’t make people stay. The message shouldn’t be you have to stay in the government or be in the private sector.”

⁹ Lauren Bean Buitta: “Every sector is touched by national security. It’s in our best interest to communicate that they’re pathways in national security across sectors. We hope many would want to serve in government because it is meaningful, but if not, they’re still contributing to the national security mission.”

¹⁰ Kimberly King: “We’ll pay for technical training at universities. We have the National Intelligence University, which is the only classified intelligence graduate and undergraduate program in the nation. We send people to senior service schools... we do a lot of informal training and bring in great speakers through a series called MasterMinds to talk about a variety of topics. We have podcasts and a reading list, so it’s really about promoting continual learning.”

¹¹ John Sherman: “Communication, first foremost...To be able to write and brief clearly...the skill to communicate articulately...We see that as critical, but also the ability to synthesize complex data, make sense, and then convey it in actionable ways. That is something in the front end, at least in academia, I want to [internalize] with the students here is crisp, clear communication...and already getting them in a mindset you’re writing for a decision maker.”

¹² Kimberly King: “For soft skills, I’ll second everything that John said, and I think also just the attributes that we hire for are critical thinking skills, but also professional humility, intellectual curiosity, teamwork. The IC can kind of be a strange place for people to enter, I think that’s also where universities can also help us prepare students for...I think just working with students on...the fact that it’s how you represent yourself and what your core values are that are as important, in my view, if not more, than the skills that you bring in.”

¹³ Loren Schulman: “You have to have people with the right skills. You have to be able to bring them on at the right time and in the right way so that they start that public service career off with that fire in their heart from day one. And with that, we get a much better ability to deliver for the American people in a timely way and in a way that is going to bring about the best possible outcomes and experience. So, the first strategy that we identified with the PMA to do that president’s management agenda to do that was to attract and hire the most qualified employees who reflect the diversity of our country.”

¹⁴ Improving the Federal Hiring Experience Guide, pg 1.



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ABOUT INSF

The Intelligence and National Security Foundation (INSF) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing contemporary intelligence and national security challenges, facilitating public discourse on the role and value of intelligence for our nation's security, and advancing the intelligence field as a career choice.

UNDERWRITTEN BY

GDIT

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