

# NEW HIRE GUIDE

Everything to know for your career with Uncle Sam



Why feds love what they do?  
3 perspectives

How feds give back by  
donating dollars and time

4 cheat sheets for your health  
and life insurance options

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## Welcome to the federal government!

A new job is exciting, especially for employees embarking on careers in the U.S. government.

You are joining literally millions of other employees worldwide to help deliver missions and services in support of the nation and its citizens.

While admittedly exciting, a new job can also be daunting. Even with the requisite skills, every new employee has a lot to learn in the early days of their jobs. That’s why we created this **New Hire Guide** – to help share information that can smooth your transition to your new federal civil service job.

In the pages ahead, you will find information about health care and insurance options available to federal employees. We also share insights about what makes being a fed so distinct and worthwhile – from employees on the government’s frontlines.

There are also details about how you can give back as a civil servant; how the federal government tackles diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility; and how the government is embracing the future of work for its employees.

We hope this guide helps you settle in a little easier and that your new job is the start of a lasting and satisfying federal career.

**Vanessa Roberts**  
**Editor, Custom Content**  
**Federal News Network**



# Insider's perspective: Why a career in federal service matters

BY DREW FRIEDMAN

If you ask career federal employees why they joined public service in the first place, many will say it has something to do with mission.

But what mission actually means is a little different for everyone — maybe it's about contributing to a greater cause or giving back to a community. For Michael Camal, a career employee at the Homeland Security Department's anti-human trafficking Blue Campaign, it's about the clear line between the work he does every day and its impact.

"With human trafficking, you're dealing with people. Those are real people who are being helped and who are being impacted," Camal told Federal News Network in an interview. "I see cases every week come out from our agency, and that our center directly supported, that



are recovering victims — adult victims, minor victims, people as young as three or four, sometimes even younger. To be a part of a mission that contributes to that just means so much to me."

Camal's introduction to public service started early. During college, he completed four consecutive federal internships, culminating in a DHS position through the Pathways Program, which eventually launched him to his current position as senior engagement manager in the Blue Campaign. Camal's early start is somewhat unique, as agencies often struggle to hire young job candidates. He's part of the 7% of the federal workforce that's under age 30.

"Every federal job I've had, I was the youngest person there — still am now," Camal said. "But I don't think it has to be that way. I think it's just a matter of getting students to a point where they know how to apply, and they know what USA Jobs is. I know that the interest is out there. It's just a matter of making it a little bit easier for young people to get into government roles."

For his contributions to the DHS Blue Campaign, Camal earned a spot as a finalist in the Partnership for Public Service's 2023 Emerging Leaders category of the *Service to America Medals*, affectionately known as the Sammies. Many describe the awards program as akin to the Oscars of federal government work. (*Read and listen to more stories about Sammies winners featured on The Federal Drive.*)



**"Every federal job I've had, I was the youngest person there — still am now. But I don't think it has to be**

**that way. ... It's just a matter of making it a little bit easier for young people to get into government roles."**

— **Michael Camal, Senior Advisor, Blue Campaign, Homeland Security Department**



**“Most of my friends are also career-long federal employees,” Hinojosa said. “It’s that passion that you bring to the job — that energy that you bring to the job — that makes a difference.”**

**— Ana Hinojosa, Retired Senior Executive, Customs and Border Protection**

“It was really amazing to me, all of the different intricacies of the jobs and the stakeholders that you got to engage with — the kind of math you got to use. It was really exciting,” Hinojosa said.

The most defining time in Hinojosa’s federal career, she said, happened right around the time of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In 2001, she had just been reassigned as area port director at Los Angeles International Airport — a highly targeted location for terrorists, both at the time and today.

“It was very easy to get connected to the mission and really understand how any gaps in our operations could result in such tragedy,” she said. “It really resonated with me that it was important to not just train people on what they needed to do but why they needed to do it and really bringing home that message.”

Decades in public service inevitably bleeds into one’s personal life too. It’s not just the countless hours spent with coworkers over the course of a career but also a shared sense among colleagues of working toward a larger cause.

“Most of my friends are also career-long federal employees,” Hinojosa said. “It’s that passion that you bring to the job — that energy that you bring to the job — that makes a difference.”

For the 2021 Sammies, Hinojosa and her colleague Eric Choy won the Partnership’s People’s Choice Award for their work in human rights. As a team, they took action against imported goods produced with forced labor in China.

Now, Camal sees his unique position as a young career fed as an opportunity to be a model for others. “When young people see other young people succeeding in government, it makes them want to do it too,” he said.

### **Bringing a mission’s message to scale**

Spending one’s entire career in public service is a call that many do take on — and again, it all comes back to mission. Ana Hinojosa, a former senior executive with Customs and Border Protection, found a strikingly direct connection between CBP’s mission and her efforts toward a greater cause. That connection was a big part of what propelled her to remain in public service for more than 34 years.

Prior to her recent retirement, Hinojosa’s career spanned many leadership roles at CBP, including port director, director of field operations and deputy assistant commissioner — just to name a few. She spent 17 years in the Senior Executive Service, but at the very start of her career, Hinojosa was a federal intern. During her first exposure to CBP, she learned much about the inner workings of public service and the meaning of mission.



## A fed who's dedicated his career to helping other feds

A career in government is certainly not easy. It can bring with it difficult decisions and forks in the road. Antonio Rios started his call to service in the Marine Corps, but his military career was cut short after he was investigated and eventually discharged for being gay during the era of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." The now overturned policy previously barred openly LGBTQ+ individuals from serving in the military.

"It was pretty traumatic. I was a teenager at that point, and I was essentially being rejected for the person that I was born," Rios told Federal News Network.

After his military career ended, Rios moved to the private sector and worked as an insurance adjuster at a law firm specializing in workers compensation cases. But rather than having left the government never to return, Rios eventually applied for a job in the civil service at the Department of Labor.

"It was one of many places where I applied, but it was one that really called to me because I had already been a public servant while I was in the

military," he said. "I had interacted with a lot of federal employees that work with the military and supported that. It was definitely something that I wanted to do."

Rios' mission at Labor is somewhat unique, since he works to directly help other federal employees who are carrying out their own agencies' missions. After joining Labor in an entry-level position, Rios helped feds injured on the job expedite their benefit payments and avoid financial hardship.

"It made me feel very fulfilled and proud of what I was doing," said Rios, who is division director of federal employees for longshore and harbor workers compensation. "Fast forward 30 years, I have the privilege of leading that agency that hired me 30 years ago as its top career official. For me, it's really a dream come true, both personally and professionally."

In 2022, Rios was a finalist for the Management Excellence Sammies award for creating a system that reduced opioid addiction among federal employees who receive workers' compensation benefits, while also streamlining and speeding up the process for filing claims.

The bottom line for Rios and why he has stayed in the civil service now for almost 30 years? Public service is a noble calling – it's not about self but about the people you serve, he said.

"The fulfillment that I get from being a public servant is knowing that I'm helping our citizenry. Regardless of what job you're doing in the federal government, you can directly tie it to helping someone out there." 🌟



**"Regardless of what job you're doing in the federal government, you can directly tie it to helping someone out there."**

— **Antonio Rios, Division Director of Federal Employees, Longshore and Harbor Workers Compensation, Labor Department**

# How federal employees create one of the largest charitable networks each year, bringing in millions of dollars

BY SCOTT MAUCIONE

Federal employees' yearly opportunity to give back with their time or money happens during the last four months of the year.

The Combined Federal Campaign has taken place for the past 60 years, reaching all the way back to the Kennedy administration. CFC starts yearly on Sept. 1 and lasts until mid-January. It is the world's largest charity campaign, bringing together 200 separate campaigns and nearly 6,000 charities to help people and causes all over the United States and around the world.

In 2022, more than 80,000 federal, postal and military employees pledged \$72.6 million to charitable causes.

"While the amount of money pledged is down, the 3.1% increase in the number of CFC donors is the first increase since before the pandemic," Kiran Ahuja, director of the Office of Personnel Management, noted in a May memo to feds.

CFC Director Keith Willingham called the annual drive an amazing feat comprised of thousands of people working together. "The whole notion is of a lot of people doing a little bit and the power of combining the efforts of the federal community and helping solve some of the world's biggest problems," he said.

"Recently when the pandemic hit, the federal community raised millions of dollars to help those organizations that were on the ground and doing work for food kitchens. When Texas was hit with an ice storm, the federal community was there. It helped with hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, which hit the Gulf Coast and Puerto Rico and Texas. The generosity and talent of the nation's largest employer is our sort of superpower."



**"The whole notion is of a lot of people doing a little bit and the power of combining the efforts of the federal community and helping solve some of the world's biggest problems."**

**— Keith Willingham, Director, Combined Federal Campaign**

**\$72.6M**  
**What federal employees donated through the Combined Federal Campaign in 2022**  
SOURCE: Office of Personnel Management

## Making it easy to make a difference — in person too

CFC has tried to stay up with the times to make it hassle-free for people to give in these situations.

"Giving through the CFC has never been easier with the Online Giving System ([cfcgiving.opm.gov](https://cfcgiving.opm.gov)), recently secured with multifactor authentication to better protect privacy and security," Ahuja noted. "For any employees who may not have access to or decide not to use the electronic giving system, we also will continue to accept PDF versions of the traditional paper forms."

Now, CFC has even more ways people can give back, rather than just pledging money. In 2017, the organization added a volunteer component to its giving but was still ramping it up in the succeeding years.

"Lo and behold, when we stood it up, the pandemic hit, so people were less likely to leave their homes to go volunteer, but it's really picked up here recently,"



Willingham said. “There are organizations that allow volunteers to come in and stuff backpacks for kids that may not have lunches during the summer. Or there may be organizations who are evergreen, that are looking for people to clean up parks and service communities and plant trees.”

OPM estimates that the volunteer work in 2022 was worth about \$2.1 million, an increase from 2021.

CFC also lets people who have specific skills use those talents for volunteer purposes. For example, if there is a group of burgeoning astronomers, NASA employees might want to spend their time at an afterschool program with them.

The campaign also lets federal employees create their own projects. If a group of workers have a great idea to give back to the community or want to start some kind of plan for their community, Willingham says they can register with CFC to get funding or ask for volunteers.

## Storied history of giving back

The idea of giving back as a federal community over one period started to gain steam back in the 1940s, according to OPM.

“As far back as 1948, the then existing Federal Personnel Council attempted to add uniformity and stability to the fundraising effort through the issuance of guidance to departments and agencies,” OPM’s history of CFC points out. “However, the council had no enforcement authority, and the departments and agencies continued generally to follow their own inclinations in the conduct of on-the-job solicitations.”

It wasn’t until 1961, that President John F. Kennedy’s administration put in the work to combine campaigns.

**“In the past five years, GSA has diverted more than 100,000 tons of waste from landfills.”**

**— Ann Stanley, Deputy Press Secretary, General Services Administration**

## More than 100 agencies use GSA for recycling

The General Services Administration helps agencies recycle.

“It is estimated that more than 50% of waste across GSA’s portfolio is diverted away from landfills through recycling, composting, reuse and other waste reduction actions,” said Ann Stanley, GSA’s deputy press secretary. “In the past five years, GSA has diverted more than 100,000 tons of waste from landfills.”

GSA lets agencies call contractors directly. The agency monitors all of the aspects of recycling for agencies, including weight and grade of recycling and containers as they are judged for the purity of what’s inside them.

“Agency representatives have joined GSA at the processing plants to determine for themselves if the containers are properly graded after leaving the agency’s loading dock,” GSA’s Federal Recycling Program’s website points out. “This quality control measure successfully eliminated most of the disputes that arose in the past when contractors downgraded loads.”

By 1964, the first combined campaign was underway, and by 1971, all campaigns were combined for a four-and-a-half-month period.

Today, the total efforts of CFC since the 1960s has brought in about \$9 billion in donations, making it a reliable and successful philanthropic effort.

Willingham says even though there are already thousands of organizations people can donate to through CFC, each year thousands more charities apply to be part of the campaign.

“It was always federal employees who actually vetted those applications, reviewed them for charity eligibility criteria, which are the guiding principles that we have in terms of what qualifies an organization to be admitted,” Willingham said. “We now have an online system so charitable organizations that are interested can actually go online and submit their applications. We have a process by which we can have federal employees around the country review those applications to make a determination.” 🔄

# Your FEHB, FEDVIP and FEGLI cheat sheets

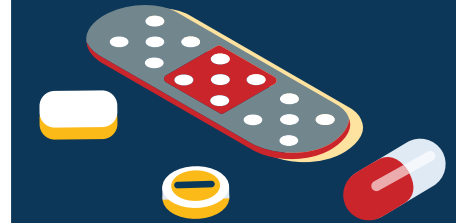
Over the next few pages, you will find information that introduces you to the government's Federal Employer Health Benefits Program, its Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, and the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance Program.

This series of four cheat sheets offers you a snapshot of the health care and insurance benefits available to U.S. government civilian employees through the FEHB, FEDVIP and FEGLI programs.

## FEHB CHEAT SHEET

# Health Insurance

Comprehensive health insurance is available to all federal employees, their spouses and children under 26 years old.



## 60 days

Your enrollment window once you start your job

There is no waiting period; you can enroll on day one.

Then, every year during Open Season – from Monday on the second full work week of November through Monday of the second full work week of December – you have the chance to make new benefit elections. You can also make changes outside of Open Season if you have a qualifying life event.

## 270+

The number of health insurance plan available to civilian employees

[DOWNLOAD BROCHURES ABOUT INDIVIDUAL PLANS AND THEIR ASSOCIATED PROVIDER DIRECTORS BY STATE](#)

## 2

Types of plans: national and HMO

If you select a national plan, there are typically four varieties: consumer-driven health plans (CDHPs), fee-for-service (FFS) plans, high-deductible health plans (HDHPs) and preferred provider organization (PPO) plans.

[READ MORE ABOUT FEHB PLAN TYPES](#)

## 11 or more

The minimum number plans available to an employee no matter the ZIP code



## 30/70 split

The percentage of your premium you will pay (~30%) and the percentage your agency will pay (~70%)

The payments will be automatically withdrawn each pay period. The total amount depends on the plan that you choose and how many people it will cover.

*COMPARE PLANS, PREMIUMS AND FEES BASED ON AVAILABILITY IN YOUR ZIP CODE*

0

The cost of preventative care on all plans from preferred providers

## Can I have an FSA?

Yes, the government does provide options for flexible spending accounts through FSAFEDs, which lets you save money pre-tax for medical expenses and also save on prescription costs.

*LEARN MORE ABOUT FSAFEDS*

## What's that?

Is this your first time working or perhaps getting health or life insurance, or do you just want to brush up on your insurance terminology?

*TAKE A SPIN THROUGH OPM'S INSURANCE GLOSSARY*

## FEDVIP CHEAT SHEET 1

# Dental Insurance

New federal employees have the option to enroll in dental insurance plans.



**~12**

The number of dental plan providers available

In 2023, all but one of the dozen FEDVIP dental plan providers offered both a standard and a high option.

*DOWNLOAD THE BROCHURES FOR THE DENTAL PLANS AND FIND PROVIDER CONTACT INFORMATION*

**60 days**

Enrollment window after you start your job

FEDVIP follows the same enrollment practices as the FEHB Program. And just like FEHB, you will be able to change your selection each Open Season or if a qualifying event happens.

**100%**

Coverage for routine services (think exams and cleanings) from preferred providers

For other services, the plans vary on your out-of-pocket costs.

*COMPARE DENTAL PLAN PREMIUMS, FEES AND OPTIONS BY ZIP CODE*

**3**

Number of coverage options

Employees have a choice of self, self plus one, and self and family. The age limit on dependent children goes up to 23 years old for students.



## FEDVIP CHEAT SHEET 2

# Vision Insurance

New federal employees have the option to enroll in vision insurance plans.

**~5**

Number of vision plan providers

**60 days**

Enrollment window after you start your job

FEDVIP follows the same enrollment practices as the FEHB Program. And just like FEHB, you will be able to change your selection each Open Season or if a qualifying event happens.

**3**

Number of coverage options

Just as for dental, FEDVIP vision insurance provides employees a choice of self, self plus one, and self and family. The age limit on dependent children also goes up to 23 years old for students.

## What is covered?

Routine eye exams, contacts, frames and lens, and discounts on laser eye surgery are available from all providers, but not all offer free exams. The plans include coverage for multiple lens options, such as shatter-resistant polycarbonate; scratch-resistant, anti-reflective and UV coatings; and tinted and progressive lenses.

## What's the premium?

Your premium will depend on the plan selected and number of people covered. Some areas of the country have higher premiums than others.

**COMPARE VISION PLAN PREMIUMS, FEES AND OPTIONS  
BY ZIP CODE**



## FEGLI CHEAT SHEET:

# Life Insurance

As a new federal employee, you also have life insurance plans you can opt into.

### 4M

The number of people – employees and retirees and their families – covered by the government's group life insurance program

### 4

The number of insurance options

FEGLI includes basic, plus options A, B and C, which offer increased amounts of coverage based on the premium paid. Only Option C provides coverage for other members of your family.

*DISCOVER LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM DETAILS  
IN OPM'S FEGLI HANDBOOK*

### 2/3

What you pay toward total cost for the basic FEGLI plan

The government pays one-third. For the other options, employees pay the full cost, which varies depending on age.

*USE THE FEGLI CALCULATOR TO COMPARE  
PREMIUMS FOR COMBINATIONS OF COVERAGE*

### Anytime

When you can cancel your FEGLI policy or add beneficiaries

### 60 days

Enrollment window after you start your job

FEGLI has its own open seasons, but these are distinct from the FEHB program and not annual. You can also enroll whenever you have a qualifying life event or pass a physical exam (for basic coverage and options A and B).



# Taking DEIA from conversation to action, governmentwide and at NASA

BY DREW FRIEDMAN

More than two years after agencies got marching orders from the Biden administration to improve diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in the federal workforce, the government's emphasis on DEIA is taking its first steps out of infancy and into action.

It's a major emphasis not just across government by the administration and the Office of Personnel Management but also within agencies like NASA.

Janice Underwood, the first-ever governmentwide chief diversity officer, sees her position – within the OPM – as a way to model federal DEIA priorities, which stem from the administration's **2021 executive order**.

To manage such a broad initiative, Underwood and her team take on everything from convening the Chief Diversity Officer Executive Council (CDOEC) and sharing promising practices to even hosting agency office hours to answer questions on the order's implementation.

"We are excited to continue working with agencies as they find even more ways to integrate DEIA principles and practices into the culture of their organizations," Underwood told Federal News Network in an email. "We aim to support agencies in implementing and sustaining their DEIA plans."

After OPM released its inaugural governmentwide **DEIA report** in February 2023, the agency's diversity shop is starting to see more traction from agencies following their initial DEIA strategic plans. And in the months since the report, OPM has pressed on the gas



pedal a little harder to help agencies along, Underwood said.

For one, OPM released **guidance** on supporting gender identity and inclusion in the federal workplace. The guidance details how agencies can support transitioning employees, including by installing gender-neutral bathrooms and setting a standard for using employees' preferred names and pronouns in communications with staff members.

OPM also conducted human capital reviews with agencies, which helped Underwood and her team learn more about the DEIA work agencies are doing – and the challenges they are facing. She said limited budget and staffing, lack of clarity around scope and scaling promising practices are some of the toughest areas that agencies have to work through.

"DEIA programs require dedicated resources, both funding and leadership, and benefit from clear objectives across all agency groups," Underwood said.



**"DEIA programs require dedicated resources, both funding and leadership, and benefit from clear objectives across all agency groups."**

**– Janice Underwood, Federal Chief Diversity Officer, Office of Personnel Management**



**“I’m a big believer that structure drives behavior. What we’re trying to do is take those strategies and move them to implementation.”**

**— Elaine Ho, Chief Diversity Officer, NASA**

## **NASA focuses on DEIA ‘structure’ to drive culture changes**

Agencies are all at different phases of the process on improving DEIA – and seeing plans come to fruition can take years. Elaine Ho, NASA’s chief diversity officer, has only held her role since March 2023, but she’s keen to get the ball rolling. To start, she’s asking herself, how can NASA convert good intentions and conversations into real action?

“I’m a big believer that structure drives behavior,” Ho said in an interview with Federal News Network. “What we’re trying to do is take those strategies and move them to implementation.”

To reach implementation, Ho and her team asked every center in NASA’s six mission directorates to create an implementation plan that they’ll own, be responsible for and be held accountable for.

“It’s the first round that we’ve done it,” Ho said. “They’ve taken pen to paper, but we’ve taken those ambitious goals and have leadership across NASA craft these plans that are meaningful, impactful and doable.”

## **An opportunity to grow: Years of low diversity at NASA**

Ho came in at a challenging crossroads for NASA’s diversity. She began her role just about a month after the agency’s Office of Inspector General released a **report** that found NASA had made little progress in the last decade increasing the representation of

women and minorities in both its civilian workforce and leadership ranks.

The problem is not unique to NASA either. **Data** from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission shows that women and minorities are underrepresented in the higher ranks of government, while lower levels of the General Schedule have higher workforce diversity – on average.

The path to improving diversity will be a long one. NASA was open to all of the IG’s recommendations, and for Ho, the report is an opportunity to find the barriers and gaps in diversity and start taking actions to achieve workforce diversity.

Ho began, in part, by collecting more data from employees, digging deeper than the **top-level data on DEIA** that OPM started collecting in the latest version of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. NASA has additionally created a DEIA organizational climate survey and pulled from other data sources to get a clearer picture of where exactly it can focus efforts to create a more inclusive workforce.

“We’re taking this data from multiple sources and analyzing them to identify where those barriers might be, to see how best to address them,” Ho said. “Barriers may be anything from institutional, from a policy perspective – they may be attitudinal, or they may be physical – but either way, these sources of data are helping us to hear directly from the employees so that we’re focusing our efforts and attention in the right places.”

## **More diverse leadership should pay dividends**

Beyond the IG report’s data on NASA, which stretches from 2012 to 2021, there has already been an increase in diversity in the upper echelons of the agency’s workforce. Currently, NASA’s deputy administrator, associate administrator for the Science Mission Directorate, center director for the Goddard Space Flight Center, chief of staff, chief financial officer, chief





technology officer and chief of procurement are all women.

“It is not just a laundry list. DEIA is a tone that starts at the top,” Ho said. “When you place these leaders in these key roles, they’re providing that critical diversity of perspective and experiences that are really essential for NASA success. Simply by being in the position and doing what they’re doing, they’re demonstrating that there are smart, talented, seasoned women and people of color who can get this job done. Then someone in any position can look and say, ‘You know what, I too can be the head of science. I can be a center director. I can be a chief diversity officer.’ ”

### **Still on the DEIA horizon**

So, what’s next for federal DEIA? For the remainder of 2023, OPM’s Underwood said she and her team will be developing a DEIA dashboard that collects workforce data, gathering progress reports on agency strategic plans and providing support to agencies as they identify barriers.

“DEIA was introduced to the federal sector to ensure we are using the talents of all segments of society and enhancing the government’s ability to recruit, hire, promote and retain a more diverse workforce and create a culture to enable individuals to participate to their full potential.” 🚀

# GSA helps agencies plot workplace of the future

BY JORY HECKMAN

Much of the federal workforce is preparing to return to the office more often – a change from the last three years when the COVID-19 pandemic required agencies to maximize telework flexibility.

Agencies are putting return-to-office plans into focus for employees in the Washington, D.C., metro area following an Office of Management and Budget memo that called for an increase in “meaningful” in-office work at headquarters offices.

Among its goals, the memo seeks to better utilize federal office space concentrated in downtown D.C. The Government Accountability Office, in a **recent report**, found that all 24 agency headquarters offices it surveyed had excess office space – and 17 of them were at or below a 25% occupancy rate.

Most agencies are targeting the fall of 2023 for employees to begin returning to the office more often.

But the **Future of Work vision** for the federal government also will require agency leaders to effectively manage a hybrid workforce of employees working in-person and remotely, and ensure they have the necessary office space to accommodate the changing needs of the federal workforce.



The General Services Administration, as the government’s landlord, is rethinking the office space needs of its tenant agencies.

## What’s next for federal work? Still in flux

GSA Chief Architect Chuck Hardy said agencies are still figuring out the future of work for federal employees, but office space remains valuable to the business of government.

“The intent of the office has not changed, and that is to create and provide a purpose-driven space that fosters value in helping workers deliver for their organization’s mission,” Hardy said in a recent interview with Federal News Network.



**“By designing spaces that offer a variety of solutions – from heads-down work to large-team**

**collaboration – we create spaces that empower a broad spectrum of the workforce.”**

**– Chuck Hardy, Chief Architect, General Services Administration**

Hardy said federal office space needs vary, but GSA is working with each of its tenant agencies to provide the right mix of individual workstations and meeting spaces.

“By designing spaces that offer a variety of solutions – from heads-down work to large-team collaboration – we create spaces that empower a broad spectrum of the workforce,” he said.

GSA is also moving away from the traditional “design, build and come back in 10 years” approach to federal space, Hardy said. Instead, it’s focusing more on ongoing improvements.

“By continuing to observe how they’re used, we can then modify spaces to maximize their effectiveness.”

## Understanding each agency’s workforce perspective

To support the future of work in the government, at a time when agencies are still figuring out the right mix of in-person and virtual work, Hardy said that GSA is “listening and then acting.”

“We’ve already learned that the change in this space is rapid and constant, and one-size-fits-all solutions rarely work. That’s why we’re working to put in place agile and flexible solutions that address today’s needs while also establishing the right foundation for future change and adjustments to effectively meet tomorrow’s needs in a low or no-cost way,” Hardy said.

“GSA continues to engage with our customers and industry partners to explore and address the challenges of today’s ever-evolving workspace. We want to make sure when we design spaces, they will meet the needs and advance the mission of our agency partners in the most effective way.”

To help agencies make informed decisions about their office space needs, GSA gathers feedback through its workplace engagement studies. These studies include a mix of interviews and focus groups at the leadership, supervisor and employee levels.

GSA also conducts surveys and site walkthroughs to better understand how an agency office functions and how it can be improved.

“We ask questions like: What are you doing now that you want to keep and not lose in a new solution? What are you doing now that you want to stop since it is ineffective or unnecessary? And what aren’t you doing that you would like to create in this new solution? I never know exactly where the conversation will head, but it always gets us to a proper outcome,” Hardy said. “While the solutions differ from project to project, the workplace engagement process is repeatable and scalable to meet customer demands effectively.”

**2,200  
+2,400**  
**Number of meeting room  
and desk reservations,  
respectively, that agencies  
made at the GSA Workplace  
Innovation Lab between  
February and July 2023**

SOURCE: General  
Services Administration

## Trying different workplace scenarios on for size

GSA also relies on a Workplace Investment and Feasibility Modeling (WIFM) tool to help to compare hybrid scenarios and space-saving implications of things like telework.

**“We’ve already learned that the change in this space is rapid and constant, and one-size-fits-all solutions rarely work. That’s why we’re working to put in place agile and flexible solutions that address today’s needs.”**

**— GSA’s Chuck Hardy**

Hardy said GSA developed the WIFM tool to easily adjust to specific agency needs.

“With that tool, we can explore the feasibility of various workplace scenarios, which allows us to jump-start space requirements development and identify the need for change management services,” Hardy said. “The tool is particularly helpful when an agency’s hybrid posture changes, their mission shifts, capacity or headcount changes, or there is a major move to a new location.”

Also, through its **Workplace Innovation Lab** that opened in January 2023, GSA lets agency leaders and their employees test new furniture and technology meant to support hybrid work. Between February and July 2023, agencies made more than 2,200 meeting room reservations and 2,400 individual desk reservations at the lab.

“We are currently looking at options to ensure the continual learning that a space like the Workplace Innovation Lab provides is always at the forefront of our solution development and helps further our strong partnership with industry,” Hardy said.

## **Creating more alternative workspace options**

Agencies are also getting new ways to support a hybrid workforce. To increase workspace options for federal employees, GSA last year **awarded contracts** to five coworking providers.

In July 2023, GSA launched six pilot coworking spaces – in Chicago, Denver, Kansas City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Tacoma, Washington.

All locations were converted from space GSA previously occupied, with little to no upfront cost.

GSA is calling on agencies to come to work, meet, test and offer feedback.

“We hope to get good feedback during this time period to inform future developments to the pilot. We are still in the early stages of testing these sites. However, the feedback we received so far is positive,” Hardy said. “Federal workers appreciate alternative locations to meet, the professional environment, seeing their teammates in person and the service they receive from GSA while working within the spaces.”

GSA, in some respects, is helping the rest of the federal workforce stay productive in a hybrid workforce environment that the agency itself has operated under since many years prior to the pandemic.

GSA employees work in regional offices across the country, maintaining public buildings or supporting customer agencies, but often need to participate virtually in headquarters meetings.

## GSA seeks congressional funding to address federal building needs

More than policy is needed to help agencies support their workforces, pointed out the General Services Administration's Chuck Hardy. It's why GSA is calling on Congress to fund long-deferred maintenance projects across the government's building portfolio.

GSA, in its fiscal 2024 budget request, is looking to regain full access to the Federal Buildings Fund. The agency hasn't had such access to the fund, which contains rent payments from tenant agencies, for more than a decade.

Hardy said that a majority of the 34 major repair projects GSA requested funding for in the past two years were re-submissions from previous years when those projects received no funding. By deferring these repairs, project costs have escalated by hundreds of millions of dollars, he said.

"When we don't make needed repairs, those repair needs don't go away, they just get worse and cost more," Hardy said.

Full access to the Federal Buildings Fund would let GSA make strategic investments in buildings and right-size the government's real estate portfolio, he said.

"We are at an important moment, where agencies are rethinking their long-term space needs," Hardy said. "That presents an opportunity to optimize the federal real estate portfolio. We can consolidate agencies into efficient federally owned space and reduce reliance on costly leases, saving taxpayers a ton of money while improving the ability of agencies to deliver on their missions."

Hardy said a hybrid model is key to meeting GSA's mission.

"At the end of the day, what always leads in terms of our workforce model is how to best meet our mission. What we have seen is that, as we have leaned into flexibility, we have enhanced the delivery of our mission while creating savings for taxpayers," Hardy said. 🏡

Learn more about how GSA plans to help agencies thrive in a hybrid world when Federal News Network's Jory Heckman chats with Hardy as well as GSA's Public Buildings Service Commissioner Nina Albert and Ryan Doerfler, senior workplace strategist for the agency's Center for Workplace Strategy. **Watch their full discussion now.**

# 3 reasons to consider adding vision insurance

When you make benefits decisions during open enrollment, it's important to think about all the options, including ones that go beyond medical coverage. A sometimes-overlooked example is vision insurance – an important benefit that may help with more than eye health.

“You might think of vision benefits only for an annual eye exam or a discount on prescription lenses, but modern plans offer far more,” said Dr. Scott Edmonds, chief eye care officer at UnitedHealthcare. “They are designed to help protect your health, provide resources for being safer in a screen-filled world and offer help for seeing clearly while we learn, work and play.”

## Why a vision plan matters



**“You might think of vision benefits only for an annual eye exam or a discount on prescription lenses, but modern plans offer far more.”**

— Dr. Scott Edmonds, chief eye care officer, UnitedHealthcare

**Here are three reasons to consider adding a vision plan when you sign up for next year's health benefits:**

### **REASON NO. 1:** **Help detect diseases earlier**

Vision plans often include coverage for an annual comprehensive exam, which can be a powerful way to measure health – and not just for your eyes. An eye exam can reveal signs of at least 20 different health conditions, including:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Some cancers

For people with chronic conditions like diabetes, who may be required to get routine eye exams as part of a recommended treatment plan, vision benefits that include a comprehensive eye exam can be especially valuable.

**“Time spent looking into vision resources can pay you back in several ways. It certainly helps you stay on top of your eye health and promote your overall well-being – and it may make it more affordable to get the eyewear you need to see clearly.”**

– UnitedHealthcare’s  
Dr. Scott Edmonds

### **REASON NO. 2:** **Protect against blue light proactively**

In our increasingly connected world, many people spend significant time in front of blue-light-emitting digital devices, which may lead to a condition called digital eye strain. Your vision plan may provide resources designed to help lower exposure to blue light. Features may include coverage for glasses with anti-reflective coating or discounts on blue-light screen protectors and laptops with embedded blue-light-filtering technology.

### **REASON NO. 3:** **Save on prescription eyewear and LASIK surgery**

Many employer-sponsored vision plans offer savings on prescription eyewear, including sunglasses, reading glasses and blue-light-filtering glasses. Some plans also include coverage or a member discount for laser eye surgery.

UnitedHealthcare Vision members have access to savings on prescription eyewear through a wide variety of providers and locations. Top national and regional retailers, specialty online retailers and private practices are all part of the network – which helps create more access, choice and flexibility for members.

If you’re a UnitedHealthcare Vision member, you may be eligible for discounts of up to 35% on laser vision correction at QualSight Lasik locations.

“There’s a lot to cover during open enrollment, but time spent looking into vision resources can pay you back in several ways,” Edmonds said. “It certainly helps you stay on top of your eye health and promote your overall well-being – and it may make it more affordable to get the eyewear you need to see clearly.” 🦋

For more information on vision insurance and eye health, visit [myuhcvision.com](https://myuhcvision.com) or [uhcfeds.com](https://uhcfeds.com).

