



Future-Proof Your Workforce with Cross-Skilling



Government agencies often struggle to hire and retain employees with the digital fluency required to address today's challenges.

"In recent years, new technologies like AI have changed rapidly," says Curt Wood, senior fellow for the Center for Digital Government. "This makes it difficult for government to hire people with the most up-to-date skill sets."

With cross-skilling, employees develop adjacent skills that complement existing expertise. They're better positioned to collaborate across teams, address emerging challenges and support agency mission priorities.

Integrating Teams and Technologies

Emerging technologies — including AI, data management, cloud computing and quantum computing systems — are increasingly interdependent. To fully leverage one technology, you must understand how it connects to others.

For example, effectively deploying an AI solution requires not just familiarity with the tool itself, but also a working understanding of the data sets that train it, the governance structures that manage those data sets and the infrastructure that supports them.

Meanwhile, this convergence of technologies mirrors the intersection of modern government challenges.

"Business and technology are increasingly interconnected," Wood says. "This requires teams to collaborate, and it requires everyone to have core competencies around different technologies."

Consider a city that wants to reduce vehicle accidents at a high-risk intersection. Finding a solution will likely require collaboration among transportation departments, emergency services, law enforcement, urban planners, budget officials and city leaders. Teams may analyze data from cameras, sensors and radar devices to identify patterns and determine next steps.

"Not everyone on the team needs to know how to code," Wood says, "but they need to know how to interpret data and use it to be successful in their mission."

Training strategies such as job shadowing, rotational assignments and structured cross-team collaboration create opportunities to build this literacy. These experiences allow employees to understand intersecting priorities, develop adjacent competencies and solve shared challenges together.

"When team members understand multiple domains, they see how their work fits into larger systems and can pivot as priorities shift," says Tony Holmes, practice lead for public sector solutions architects at Pluralsight, a leading skill-development solutions provider. "Cross-skilling isn't about becoming an expert in everything. It's about having enough literacy to contribute meaningfully across disciplines."

Building a More Agile Workforce

Cross-skilling strengthens workforce agility — helping agencies respond to evolving technologies, changing priorities and unexpected disruptions.

Understanding Cross-skilling

- ▶ **Upskilling:** Deepen expertise in a specific field
- ▶ **Reskilling:** Develop entirely new capabilities for employees in unrelated areas
- ▶ **Cross-skilling:** Build adjacent, complementary skills that enhance an individual's abilities



It also represents meaningful development for employees themselves. “Many technology skills are interchangeable across departments and industries,” Wood says. “Having a wider skill set can help a government employee grow professionally, wherever they want to go next.”

Younger public sector employees in particular are seeking career advancement opportunities.¹ Agencies that invest in cross-skilling can strengthen recruitment by demonstrating a commitment to individuals’ long-term growth. Cross-skilling can also be a more effective retention strategy than mere upskilling or reskilling, because it may lead to new opportunities for employees within an agency.

To be effective, however, skills development must be intentional. One-size-fits-all training programs rarely deliver sustained impact.

Agencies should begin with skills assessments that help employees understand their current competencies and identify growth areas. From there, leaders can create personalized learning pathways aligned with both individual roles and agency mission priorities.

Equally important is measurement. Progress-tracking tools allow agencies to quantify workforce development gains and give employees visibility into their own growth.

Best Practices for Sustainable Cross-Skilling

Create a culture of continuous learning. Workforce transformation starts with culture. Leaders must clearly signal that continuous learning is not optional — it is core to the job. Integrating skills development into performance reviews, goal setting and recognition programs reinforces this expectation and demonstrates organizational commitment.

Make learning practical and accessible. Time constraints are a reality for public sector employees. Skills development programs should be flexible and manageable. Micro-learning modules, project-based

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training and on-demand sessions allow staff to integrate learning into their daily work.

Hands-on workshops and sandbox environments further reinforce skills by allowing employees to practice in a low-risk setting tied to real-world scenarios.

Tailor programs to mission needs. Effective cross-skilling aligns directly with agency objectives. Training programs should be dynamic and adaptable, evolving alongside technology shifts and organizational priorities.

“It’s not just about buying a product and walking out the door,” Wood says. “Agencies should implement a sustainable program that is specific to their mission, tailored to their workforce and adaptable to meet the needs of the future.”

Finding the Right Partner

Effective cross-skilling requires intentional planning, cultural reinforcement and measurable progress. Agencies must align learning pathways to real operational needs, provide employees with practical opportunities to apply new skills and track growth. Most importantly, cross-skilling initiatives must evolve alongside technology and mission priorities rather than remaining static programs.

That is why choosing the right partner matters. A strategic partner helps transform skills development from a series of disconnected trainings into a sustainable, mission-aligned workforce strategy — one that prepares agencies not just for today’s demands but for the unknown challenges ahead.

1. <https://research.missionsq.org/content/media/document/2023/8/FINAL%20WorkforceSurveyReport35andYounger.pdf>

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