

Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Yukon Public Service Commission

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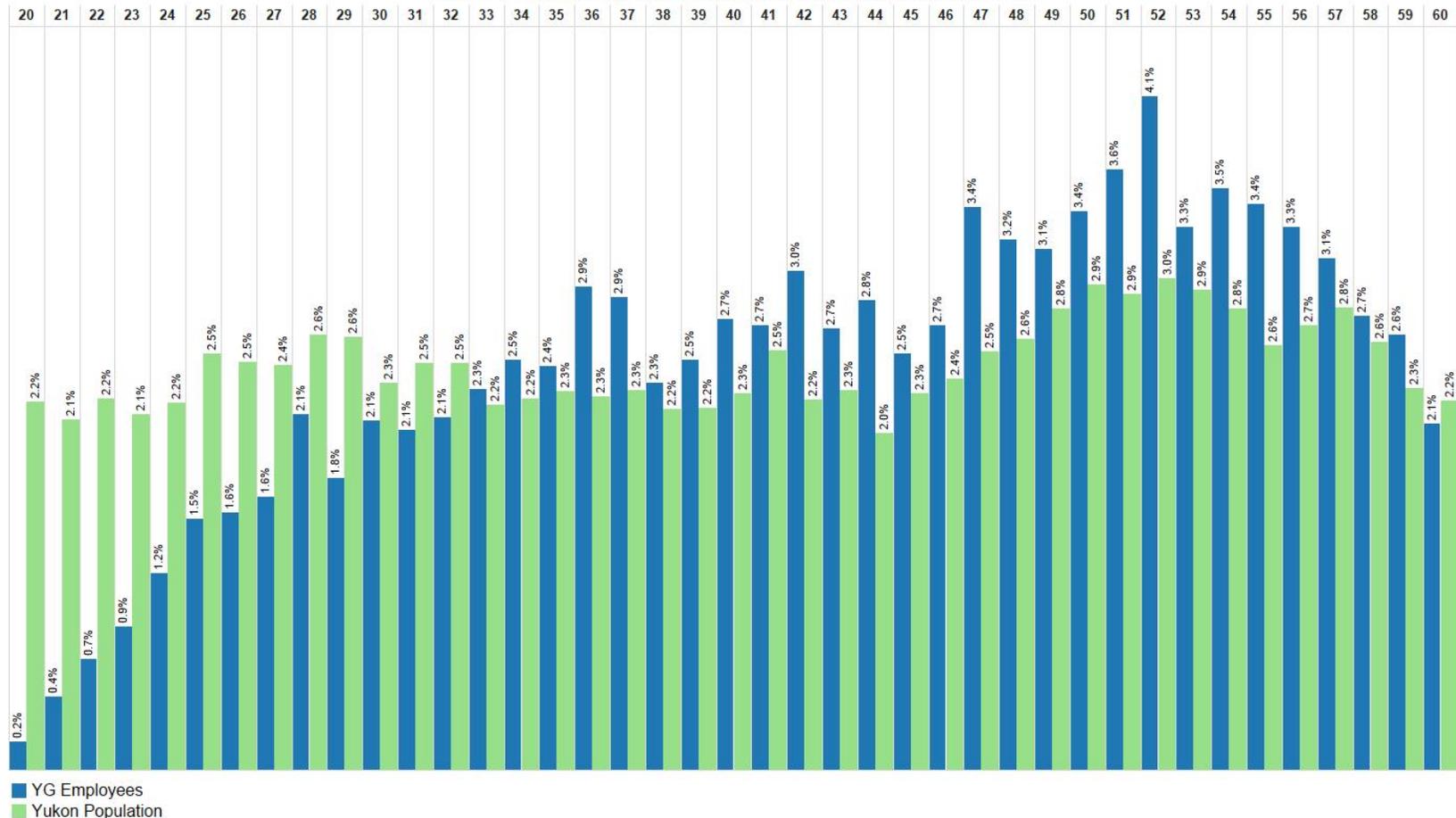
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Yukon Public Service Youth Employment Context

The level of representation of young workers in the Yukon Public Service (YPS) is currently very low. The chart below presents the age distribution of Yukon Public Service employees who are 20 to 60 years old compared to the same age cohort for the general Yukon population. As can be seen from the chart, young employees are underrepresented at all ages 32 years and younger relative to the overall Yukon population (the green bars are taller than the blue bars). For example, within the 20 to 60 year old cohort, 2.6% of the overall Yukon population was 29 years old but only 1.6% of YPS employees were 29 years old.

**Age Distribution of Yukon Public Service Employees (March 2012)
vs. Yukon Population (September 2012) - Percentage of Cohort Aged 20 to 60**
Sources: YG Human Resource Management System and Yukon Bureau of Statistics.



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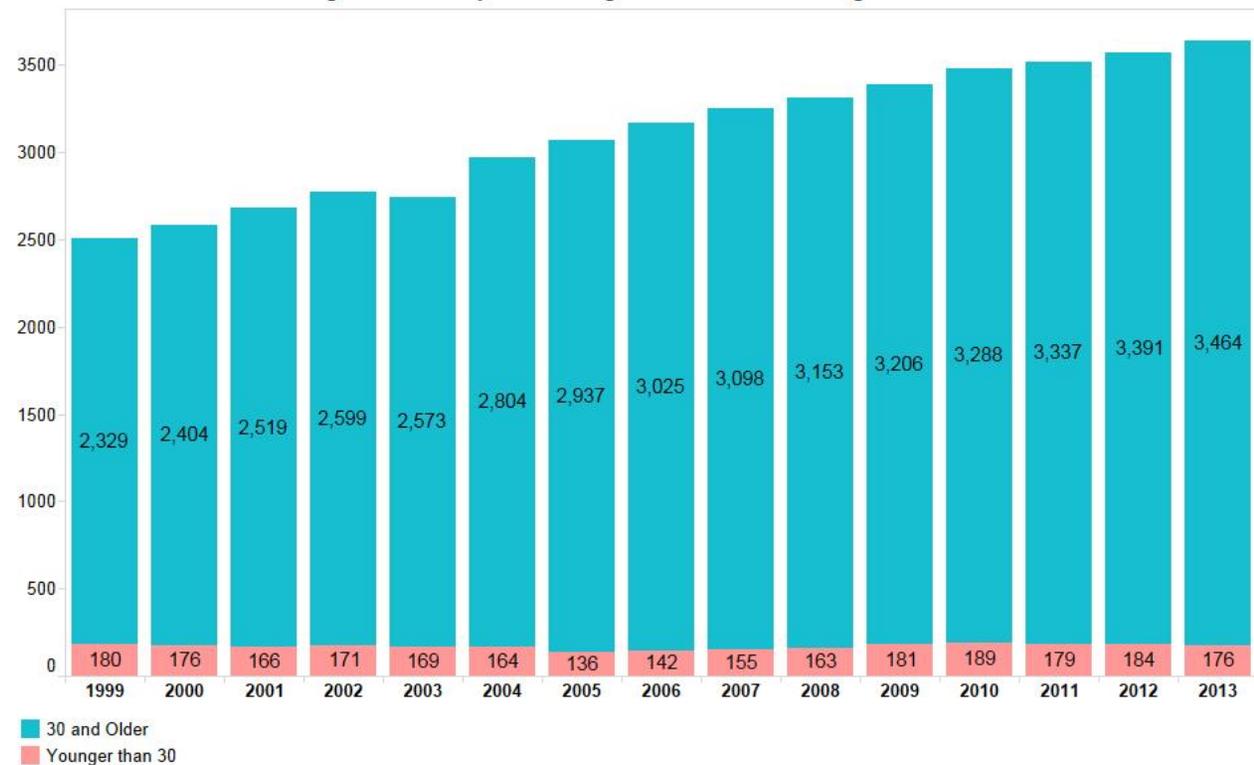
YPS Workforce at March 31, 2013

Age Cohort	Percentage of YPS Workforce
<30	12%
.	.
.	.
.	.
55+	25%
56+	22%
57+	19%
58+	16%
59+	11%
60+	9%

An examination of current demographic profile of the Yukon Public Service also confirms that young workers are underrepresented. As can be seen in the table to the left, workers under 30 years of age accounted for 12% of the total YPS workforce as of March 31, 2013. At that same point in time, workers aged 55 and older accounted for 25% of the total YPS workforce.

Young Yukon Public Service workers are also underrepresented in terms of permanent employment tenure. As of March 2013, while 12% of the YPS workforce was comprised of individuals younger than 30 years, only 25% of employees younger than 30 were employed on a permanent basis (compared to 66% of workers 30 years of age and older). To phrase it another way, 75% of the YPS “youth cavalry” are in short-term employment arrangements making them far less likely to make the kind of long-term employment commitments the Yukon Public Service needs to solve its current demographic dilemma.

Count of Permanent Yukon Public Service Employees - 1999 to 2013
Younger than 30 years of Age vs. 30 Years of Age and Older



And as illustrated in the chart to the right, the underrepresentation of young employees in permanent positions within the Yukon Public Service is a chronic problem. While the number of permanent employees 30 years of age and older increased by 49% between 1999 and 2013 rising from 2,329 to 3,464, the number of youth in permanent positions was essentially constant over the same time period, with 186 individuals younger than 30 employed in permanent positions in 1999 and 176 individuals younger than 30 employed in permanent positions in 2013 (a decrease of 2%). In summary, the human

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resources problem faced by the Yukon Public Service goes beyond an issue of underrepresentation of youth and extends to the more serious matter of organizational sustainability.

Yukon Public Service Corporate Context

The need to address the underrepresentation of youth in the Yukon Public Service through the development of a *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy* is supported by two objectives in the Yukon Public Service Commission's Strategic Plan:

Identify tools and opportunities to increase diversity of representation within the Yukon government workforce.

Develop a platform of best practices in recruitment and retention with an emphasis on active recruitment of youth and under-represented groups in Yukon.

The Yukon Government's Corporate Human Resource Strategy also provides an impetus for the development of a *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy* with its call to:

Build a representative public service with a specific focus on aboriginal people, people with disabilities, women, youth and visible minorities.

Note that Yukon is not alone in its demographic pickle – governments in all Canadian jurisdictions will soon be confronted with labour shortages as the wave of baby-boomer retirements begins to crest. Yukon is different from southern jurisdictions, however, because of its remote location and small population base from which to draw skilled labour. As the demand for skilled labour, including young skilled labour, begins to spiral upward in the next few years, the Yukon Government needs to recognize that it will be at a competitive disadvantage from the outset.

The *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy* also needs to acknowledge that the Yukon Public Service operates in a collective bargaining environment. Effective implementation of a *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy* will require collaboration with the Public Service Alliance of Canada (Yukon Employees Union).

Lastly, the *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy* must be a corporate strategy. As noted by Dr. Linda Duxbury, Yukon Government employees tend to see their "employer" as the department they happen to be working for, rather than the Yukon Public Service. Youth recruitment is a government-wide issue and will require a corporate solution fostered, applied and monitored across all Yukon Government departments by the Yukon Public Service Commission.

Goal of the *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy*

The goal of the *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy* is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Yukon Public Service by correcting the chronic underrepresentation of youth in the Yukon Public Service through strategic interventions in current recruitment and retention practices. How the goal will be achieved is outlined in the pages that follow after an exploration of the barriers faced by potential youth recruits and current young Yukon Public Service employees.

Barriers to Youth Recruitment and Retention

A variety of research and input gathering activities were undertaken to inform the development of the *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy* including:

- a “Streeter Survey” on youth attitudes about working for the Yukon Government was completed by the Yukon Bureau of Statistics;
- a Young Employee Survey (n=240) sought insights from young Yukon Government employees on their experiences and perceptions about working for the Yukon Government;
- a Supervisors Survey (n=200) sought insights from supervisors working with young employees; and,
- two full day World Café workshops – one for young employees (under 30 years of age) and one for supervisors.

In terms of recruitment into permanent positions, two main barriers to the recruitment of young Yukon Public Service staff were identified, the “experience Catch-22” and the “cycle of impermanent job status”.

Experience Catch-22

The “experience Catch-22” is described as the situation where young people do not have the requisite work experience to successfully apply for public sector jobs. The lack of experience often means youth cannot get a job and not getting a job means that youth cannot acquire the experience they need to get the job in the first place. Young people with little or no work experience who find themselves competing with older candidates with some experience often do not get screened in for job interviews.

The experience Catch-22 follows directly from the application of the public sector merit principle in a manner that can favour experienced candidates over inexperienced candidates. The merit principle seeks to ensure that the most meritorious candidate is hired and was conceived as an antidote to cronyism, nepotism and gender bias. As required by the *Public Service Act*, the Yukon Government’s approach to merit-based hiring involves the application of three factors to each job candidate: knowledge, abilities and

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suitability. Yukon Public Service practice has evolved, however, such that the three factors are translated into two criteria, “essential qualifications” and “personal suitability”. The “essential qualifications” for a position are deemed to be comprised of:

- a combination of relevant education and training, OR
- experience equivalent to the essential qualifications.

Candidates with job experience can substitute that job experience for relevant education by demonstrating experience equivalent to the essential qualifications. However, candidates without job experience do not seem to be able to substitute education for experience as readily as candidates who can substitute experience for education. In consequence, young candidates with little or no job experience who are competing for work against candidates with some amount of job experience often get screened out right at the beginning of the hiring process. Indeed, a number of supervisors surveyed as part of the research identified lack of experience as the number one reason why they might be reluctant to hire someone under 30 years of age.

This phenomenon can be described as the “two pile” conundrum. At the end of the initial screening of job applicants, there are often two piles of applications left sitting on the table. The first pile is comprised of applications from candidates with job experience and generally, but not necessarily, relevant education and/or training. The second pile is comprised of applications from candidates with relevant education and/or training but no job experience. Candidates in the second pile, which tend to be overrepresented by youth, proceed no further in the process. In consequence, the potential ability and personal suitability of young candidates is not always considered in the current Yukon Public Service hiring process as fully as it might be.

Indeed, youth participants in the World Café exercise noted that there should be *more weight on education and qualities other than experience in the hiring process* and *less emphasis on experience during screening*. Youth Recruitment Strategy researchers reported hearing that the recruitment process is seen as so daunting that some youth are so discouraged they have stopped applying for jobs with the Yukon Public Service.

Youth who were successful in being hired by the Yukon Public Service noted some dissatisfaction with the process. In a 2012 youth survey, when asked what makes it hard for them to get a permanent job with the Yukon Government, respondents noted the “difficult or slow application, interview, or hiring process”. Even among youth successful in obtaining a Yukon Public Service job, many expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with parts of the recruitment process, including the screening, interview, and even the job offer stages. The slowness of the process was a common complaint. The interview phase is characterized as difficult, onerous, stressful and intimidating. Poor communications with the candidate (whether successful or not) was identified as a concern in the job offer phase as well as throughout the recruitment phase.

Cycle of impermanent job status

The second barrier to youth recruitment and retention can be termed the “cycle of impermanent job status”. As noted earlier, as of March 31, 2013, 12% of the Yukon Public Service workforce was comprised of individuals younger than 30 years of age and within that age cohort, only 25% were employed on a permanent basis. The remaining 75% are employed as an auxiliary, part-time, term, casual or contract basis contract. According to the research undertaken, some of those employed in a non-permanent capacity appreciate the freedom and flexibility this job status provides. Many others, however, are seeking permanence and feel trapped in a cycle of impermanence and complained of being stuck working as auxiliaries or term employees for years, trying to achieve permanence in the same position or by applying for other jobs and not succeeding. The respondents noted the lack of job security and inferior compensation (pay and benefits) and work conditions compared to the permanent jobs, especially for the auxiliary-on-call and casual positions.

With 66% of Yukon Public Service workers 30 years of age and older being employed on a permanent basis, workers under the age of 30 expressed feeling exploited and treated as being less valued than their permanent status co-workers. When applying for permanent positions, young non-permanent staff tend to face the same experience Catch-22 problem noted earlier since their experience is not sufficient or applicable to the job applied for. Retention becomes an issue for employees in this situation as there is little desire to continue working for the Yukon Public Service over the long term if employees are not provided with a reasonable level of job security in the short term.

Welcoming and healthy work environment

In terms of retention within the Yukon Public Service, research participants noted that a healthy and welcoming work environment is necessary for them to consider remaining with the Yukon Public Service over the long term. A healthy and welcoming work environment was described in terms of employee orientation, feedback, mentoring, training, and career development a positive work environment which features good relationships.

Meaningful orientation is a very important step in the staffing process. Failure to orient new employees can have significant impacts on productivity and retention. Yet, inadequate orientation for Yukon Public Service positions was noted as a significant issue, particularly for young employees. Over 82% of respondents to the Young Employees Survey rated the job orientation phase of the hiring process negatively. Young employees complained of having inadequate orientation or no orientation at all for their new job. Some respondents reported having taken the formal corporate *Orientation to the Government of Yukon* workshop but not receiving any job-specific orientation other than the obligatory new employee office walkabout.

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Young employees, as well as supervisors, identified improved feedback, mentoring, training, and career development as a prevailing need and a high priority. “Career development and training opportunities” was the third-most frequently cited reason why youth chose to work for the Yukon Government (after “good pay” and “opportunity to gain work experience”). However, survey results indicate that only half of respondents feel their current job was “always” or “almost always” providing them with career development and training opportunities. Most young employees and supervisors agreed that insufficient levels of training, career development, and mentoring are currently supported within the Yukon Government.

Over two thirds of supervisors surveyed believe that employees under 30 years of age have different needs and expectations of them as supervisors and of employment in general compared to employees 30 years of age and older. The most frequently cited item for the supervisor-employee relationship was a stronger need and expectation for direction, feedback, training and mentoring / coaching. Young workers also need and demand improved lines of two-way communications with their supervisors including clear instructions and expectations around performance, frequent and timely feedback and recognition / rewards for good performance.

According to the research findings, positive work environments and good relationships with supervisors and between co-workers are the two workplace attributes most highly-valued by young employees, ranking even higher than good pay and benefits. However, not all Yukon Government workplaces feature positive work environments. While a majority of survey respondents indicated having a good relationship with their supervisor and co-workers in their current job, the approval rating was considerably lower when it came to characterizing their work environment as positive. This finding is particularly important for retention. If young employees feel stuck in a workplace which does not reflect their values, they are unlikely to stay, especially if they are skilled and can find work in more rewarding environments. When asked what they would do if they were to end their employment with the Yukon Government, almost half of survey respondents stated they would look for work outside the Yukon.

Recommended Actions

This next section of the *Youth Recruitment and Retention Strategy* outlines a series of recommended actions designed to overcome the chronic and systemic underrepresentation of young employees and help ensure the long-term sustainability of the Yukon Public Service. The strategies and actions are grouped according to the three barriers identified in the previous section.

Experience Catch-22

- RA1. Through all efforts to solve the issue of underrepresentation of young employees, make it clear that the Yukon Government is looking for candidates “to build a career in the Yukon Public Service” rather than individuals “hoping for a government job in whatever department will have them”.
- RA2. Return to the original intent of the merit principle by allowing the three merit factors – knowledge, abilities and suitability – to be considered independently of one another. Consider amending the meaning of the second factor – abilities – to allow for an assessment of a candidate’s *potential* abilities over the span of time from the current age of the candidate to normal retirement age (60 years).
- RA3. Investigate the extent to which there has been “classification and grade creep” since 1999 (the earliest that human resource data is available). If evidence of inflated classification and grade levels is found, reset classification and grade levels over time as employees retire such that the 1999 ratio of entry-level, mid-level and senior-level positions is achieved. Put in place a tracking system that allows tracking of the classification-level ratio to ensure the ratio is held constant over time.
- RA4. Recognize that many young people have been disaffected by Yukon Government hiring processes over the last 15 years. Reach out to the more recently disaffected (including youth who have made good on a promise to leave the territory) and try to reengage their interest in building long-term careers in the Yukon Public Service.
- RA5. Signal the Yukon Public Service Commission’s strong commitment to solving the issue of youth underrepresentation by holding a certain number of “youth-only” competitions each fiscal year. The number of such competitions could be based on some fraction of the number of “retirement exits” from the Yukon Public Service in the previous year.

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Cycle of impermanent job status

- RA6. Increase the number of permanent positions potentially achievable by youth candidates by splitting every fifth (or even tenth) senior level position vacated by a retired employee into two entry-level positions. At the same time, maintain the number of non-permanent positions potentially available to youth as such positions provide opportunities for youth to gain on-the-job experience which is valuable in competing for permanent positions.
- RA7. Introduce an automatic conversion rule such that a youth employee with 36 months of cumulative service in 60 consecutive months must be made an offer of permanent employment by the Yukon Public Service.
- RA8. Design and implement a centralized tracking system to monitor the career progressions of youth employees in the Yukon Public Service in real time and identify where implementing “bridges” to permanent designations is warranted for youth employees who have demonstrated significant potential to advance in the Yukon Public Service.
- RA9. Engage the Yukon Employees Union in addressing the issue of chronic and systemic underrepresentation of youth in the Yukon Public Service.

Welcoming and healthy work environment

- RA10. Undertake psychometric testing of current managers and supervisors in the Yukon Public Service to identify a cadre of mentors who are capable of creating and championing opportunities for people of all working ages to thrive in the Yukon Public Service.
- RA11. Use existing and new mechanisms to ensure all new employees are properly oriented at the corporate and departmental level promptly upon commencing each new stint of employment. Incorporate a measure to monitor whether employee orientation is actually taking place as part of the tracking mechanism described in Recommended Action No. 8.
- RA12. Continue efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of performance management practices, with a view to addressing the unique needs of young workers.
- RA13. Implement compulsory exit surveys for all permanent *and* non-permanent staff who depart from the Yukon Public Service.
- RA14. Regularly trumpet the success of the 13 Recommended Actions described above to help create a more appealing and welcoming work environment for young workers.