

› IT Staff Retention & Recruitment

# County Agency's IT Talent Fix Focuses on Motivation, Compensation, and Improving Public Service Work Image

## CHALLENGE / GOAL

The significant challenge for Maricopa County's Office of Enterprise Technology (OET) is that it is not able to effectively recruit and retain the kind of top talent necessary to run a wide-scale enterprise. As the centralized information technology department for one of the largest counties in the U.S., OET struggled with many of the same challenges as private-sector companies: Limited budgets, keeping pace with technology advances, and growing and maintaining a top notch staff. Exacerbating these challenges was a freeze on employee compensation due to statewide austerity cuts, and limited incentives to attract and keep talented staff. As a result, the agency could not compete against private-sector employment opportunities.

## SOLUTION OVERVIEW

The first step was to establish a unified voice for the county by meeting with various elected officials, department heads, and appointed leaders to understand their challenges and align OET's capabilities to positively impact and meet their business demands – simply put, build trust, deliver results, and provide clearly understood value-add. An IT Leadership Roundtable was also formed to bring together IT leaders on a monthly basis to discuss challenges, seek synergies, and collectively voice the need for talented IT professionals. A subcommittee was then established to specifically deal with IT retention and recruitment issues.

The CIO also examined challenges and solutions faced by similar state agencies and counties nationwide and shared this insight with the subcommittee. The result was a white paper that outlined two principles that underscored the defined challenges: One focused on compensation inequities and talent retention. The second noted that current metrics for determining compensation were outdated and didn't consider educational reimbursement,

training, and experience with current technologies. An outside firm was also hired to evaluate worker/job ratios and hold independent discussions with employees, managers, and others.

## TECHNOLOGY & PROVIDERS

All initiatives took place since the CIO came on board in October 2012. Technology was not the problem per se, although efforts were made to make more use of cutting-edge technology as both an enticement and an enabler. For example, the agency implemented a BYOD initiative to ramp up smartphone and tablet usage, as well as increase its use of social networks and tools for internal and external communications and collaboration. The idea was to create an enticing job environment to compete with private sector opportunities. These efforts also provided opportunity for savings in OpEx and created new business value-add.

## INVESTMENT & TIMING

The Initial staffing assessment by an outside firm cost approximately \$80K. The agency also purchased updated market and staffing data from Mercer LLC for \$2K-\$5K. Most recently, the agency started implementing salary increases for positions determined by the IT Leadership Roundtable as the most critical. The research showed that these positions were well below the market average, in some cases up to 20% depending on the job classification.

## RESULTS/ROI

- The agency improved its internal and external image, getting people to buy into the concept that qualified people can improve the ability to create positive business results.

[continued >](#)



### COUNCIL MEMBER

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### COMPANY PROFILE

Maricopa County is the 4th largest county in the United States, serving 3.9 million citizens over 9,000 square miles.

### COMPANY FACTS

**Industry:** Local Government  
**HQ:** Phoenix, AZ  
**County Budget:** \$2.2B  
**Employees:** 14,000  
**IT Employees:** 205  
**IT Budget:** \$42M

- Staff retention improved, with the vacancy rate dropping from 35% to 23% over the last year (open positions dropped from 40 to about 20).
- Launched an education program, including college internships, to find talented young people and educate that public service IT is a good career move.
- Formed a leadership committee to get people involved in people-related initiatives, and conducted the first of many employee satisfaction surveys and follow-on focus groups to better understand areas of dissatisfaction.

**STAFFING REQUIREMENTS/CHALLENGES**

The biggest challenge for Maricopa County’s IT department is not just recruiting talented people, but retaining and motivating them so they stay on board. This is something the agency has been focused on for more than a year: How to communicate with and motivate people while developing a work environment that is all about quality, collaboration, partnership, and pride of delivery. The initiative is ongoing and will continue to improve over the years by fine-tuning the structure and adding staff appropriately in order to support that plan.

**CHIEF RISKS & MITIGATION ACTIONS**

The number one risk here was inaction. If the OET did not purposefully and specifically define a plan that was agreed

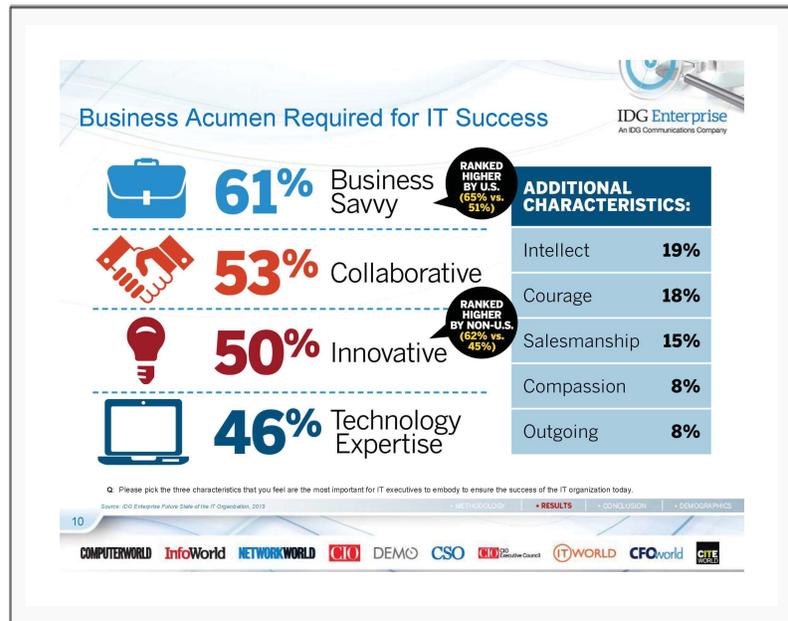
to by all stakeholders, we were going to continue to see significant turnover, delays in project development, and the inability to meet the growing demand to do more with less.

Additional risks include the risk of outside influences and dynamics, specifically the cutbacks and austerity moves that are a part of every state or local government agency, and the continuing risk resulting from the impact of private-sector jobs and recruitment, which may offer higher salaries and faster advancement.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

- CIOs, especially new CIOs, must focus first and foremost on their most important asset, which is their people.
- Don’t be afraid to make changes if changes are necessary, and be willing to take calculated risks.
- Get HR and legal involved early. Make sure they have compensation at the table and you are working collectively towards the same goals.
- Keep everyone well informed, be clear on the mission, don’t get bogged down on the details.
- Do not base compensation plans just on the number of years a person is in the position. Base it on their skill levels, experience, education, and certifications.

- David Stevens, CIO, Maricopa County - Nov. 2013



Source: IDG Future State IT Organization Study - 2013

\* Please respect members’ proprietary data; do not distribute this document outside your organization

**PEER INTELLIGENCE**

Current topics are BI, Cloud, Mobility, Organizational Structure & Performance, Social Business and Value Delivery.

**YOUR ACTION ITEMS**

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