Leading Maine's NEXTGEN IT Workforce

By
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Building a stronger workforce is a challenge for any state, but building and recruiting a workforce prepared to tackle a state’s information technology needs is a particularly complex challenge. In an effort to do just that, the Maine Office of Information Technology, or OIT, has developed a workforce development program—an effort to ensure that the state is equipped to provide the latest in information technology services not only today, but in the future as well.

The Maine Office of Information Technology’s Workforce Innovations program began in 2013 in response to an alarming statistic: More than 24 percent of the state’s IT workforce will be eligible to retire within the next two years. The program also addresses another emerging issue for the Maine OIT—the dissonance between millennials and other generations in the workplace. With all organizations in the IT industry competing for IT talent, both in the private and public sectors, the state recognized the challenge in remaining competitive in such a high-demand field. The Workforce Innovations program, the first of its kind in Maine, was designed to address both of these challenges in an effort to ensure a high skilled, sustainable workforce equipped to meet the ever evolving technology needs of the state.

Perfecting the Art of Recruitment

One of the primary challenges in recruiting a new generation of IT workers is the transformation of
communications. Simply put, recruitment efforts of the past simply don’t reach the IT workers of the future. While the Workforce Innovation program continues to use the traditional process of posting and advertising jobs and available positions, the program also actively recruits by means of internships and partnerships with universities, colleges, technical schools and veteran programs where IT talent is being developed. The program was designed to not only attract and retain the millennial traditional student from a two- or four-year school, but also adult learners looking to re-enter the workforce, individuals with disabilities and veterans returning from service with valuable skills in the IT field. A critical component of these recruitment efforts is building strong relationships with those who are able to identify talented individuals, such as coordinators or educators, and participating in career fairs throughout the state.

Other community outreach initiatives include the Maine Office of Information Technology’s annual TechNight, which not only introduces students to exciting career options in the field of technology, but also offers an opportunity for students to interact and have fun with hands-on activities similar to the work we do in IT on a daily basis, such as project management and teambuilding, performing forensics on systems and programming. In 2016, we hosted more than 70 high school students and 10 local schools as part of our TechNight event.

Skilled IT Professionals Will Not Wait

The Workforce Innovations program has also transformed the application process to better reach and meet the needs of today’s tech workers. In addition to creating and branding an online presence to market jobs, the program also has used social media to reach out to potential candidates and it is revamping its application process. Before, the process of applying to a state job was an intimidating and tedious one. Mailing in an 11-page application with private information was not ideal for most applicants, particularly those in the IT field, and the time to fill the position often took a few months to over a year due to delays and paperwork.

Just two months after simplifying the application process to an electronic submission of a cover letter and resume, state IT job applications have nearly quadrupled. The next step for recruitment, currently in the works, is a move toward cloud-based applications that will further simplify the process.

Developing Talent

Recruiting new talent is an important first step, but developing that talent is a critical, ongoing process in the IT field. Interns selected through recruitment efforts complete a three- to six-month internship, ranging from 20–40 hours weekly, during which they work on hands-on projects that output quality work for the citizens of Maine. Existing OIT staff members are assigned to interns as mentors, further personalizing the internship experience. This allows mentors to gain beneficial leadership skills while interns gain insightful career guidance. Currently 75 percent of all interns who have participated in the program have been recruited into a career with the state.

Driven by Passion and Meaningful Work

Change is on the horizon at the Maine Office of Information Technology, and a part of that change is the culture. Workforce Innovations has become the driving force—it is an integral part of OIT culture—and the OIT workforce is realizing the benefits of such a culture change. Maine’s IT workers enjoy being part of a forward thinking team that is leading the way to provide IT solutions to improve state governance. While many people could make more money in the private sector, our workforce appreciates the opportunity to do meaningful work for Maine’s citizens.
As someone whose job is to build the future IT workforce for the state of Maine, I come to work each day asking some important questions: How can we continually cultivate an environment built on passion for the people and the work, and how do we promote the state’s IT jobs so we are not the “best kept secret” in Maine? It is certainly an exciting time to work in the technology field. Our mission, as state leaders, is to ensure that the states are prepared to be drivers of innovation in the future, and that begins by finding and cultivating talent today.

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