

# GOVERNMENT'S CRUCIAL EMPLOYER BRAND

This article originally appeared in the December 9, 2013 issue of *Governing.com*

By Patrick Ibarra



Many state and local governments are hiring again, working to rebuild workforces depleted by the recession's layoffs and hiring freezes and to prepare for the coming wave of public-sector retirements. As they do so, they need to pay close attention to their "employer brand."

Many government officials and managers still may feel uncomfortable with the idea of government as a brand, reasoning that this term from the competitive world of business shouldn't apply to the public sector. But it should, and it does. In the business of applying knowledge to achieve results, which the public sector is most certainly all about, the fundamental difference separating an extraordinary organization from an ordinary one is the collective ability of its workforce.

So the savviest leaders are increasingly considering the benefits of pursuing a more focused approach to strengthening their jurisdiction's or agency's employer brand as a magnet to entice and retain talent.

The city of Fort Collins, Colo., is one jurisdiction that has pursued an active and targeted approach to building a strong employer brand. Job listings include succinct descriptions with easy access to more-detailed listings for each position. The application process is exclusively online. The hiring process is spelled out clearly. And [the city's inviting human-resources website](#) includes testimonials from current city employees that emphasize the rewards of public service.

Here are some steps you can take to strengthen your government's or agency's employer brand:

- **Use social-media channels** -- Facebook and Twitter most prominently -- to promote your brand. More and more, agencies are utilizing images and well-produced videos to tell the agency's story and entice candidates. Images generate an emotional response and help job candidates make a stronger connection between their desires and an agency's purpose. All of these devices are best in the hands of creative types, not always found in abundance in the traditional IT department, so avoid adding this item to their never-ending project list.
- **Consider what your hiring process says about you.** A Web-based job-application process is the minimum threshold to be in the game today. Candidates from all walks of life want ease and convenience when applying for positions. And remember that timeliness is crucial when recruiting. While many public-sector agencies may require a series of written exams and performance tests; accelerating these often labor-intensive processes is vital for maintaining the interest of talented candidates.
- **Re-think your job announcements.** The world is teeming with smart, skilled, passionate people who are blue-chip prospects. These types of people won't be remotely interested in your organization if what you provide as a job announcement is the traditional boring list of qualifications and duties. Replace them with more of a social-marketing approach that sends this powerful message: Join our organization and be a part of something truly outstanding as you help make your mark.
- **Adopt a focused learning and development program.** Progressive organizations realize that in today's workplace, candidates and employees alike are seeking an employer who chooses to invest in developing their skills and capabilities as a strategy to elevate employee performance and improve organizational effectiveness. These organizations also understand that being recognized as an employer that invests in its workforce -- even during tough economic times -- is an important tool for attracting, retaining and developing talented people.

Governments that invest time, effort and energy toward building their employer brand are finding that the advantages are greater than they may have thought, giving them a "first-pick advantage." Moreover, by continually attracting the most promising people and then developing them, these organizations not only become higher-performing but also enhance their ability to continue to attract the best -- a self-renewal cycle.



**Patrick Ibarra** is an "entrepreneur of ideas" and architect of innovation who takes the headwinds governments are facing about the current climate of unprecedented changes and translates them into a tailwind with practical, tactical and impactful solutions that can be used immediately. A former city manager, Patrick owns and operates The Mejorando Group consulting practice ([www.gettingbetterallthetime.com](http://www.gettingbetterallthetime.com)). Mejorando is Spanish for "getting better all the time" and Patrick's firm partners with governments helping them increase employee performance and organizational effectiveness by providing consultation, facilitation, and training. Ibarra is an author, speaker, blogger and educator who brings fresh thinking, innovation, and new ideas to help public sector organizations succeed in the 21st century.

For those agencies interested in immediately improving your organization's performance, Mr. Ibarra can be reached at **925.518.0187** and/or **[patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com](mailto:patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com)** and follow the Mejorando Group on Facebook and Twitter.