

# The Office of the National Cyber Director Listening Sessions

## Background

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The National Cybersecurity Strategy tasks the Office of the National Cyber Director (ONCD) to “lead the development and oversee implementation of the National Cyber Workforce and Education Strategy” (NCWES). The NCWES is designed to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to expanding, improving, and diversifying the national (including the federal) cyber workforce; increasing opportunities to learn foundational cyber skills; and easing access to cyber education and training pathways. Successful implementation of the strategy requires collaboration among all key stakeholders, within the federal government as well as the private and broader public sectors (both domestic and international). ONCD recognizes the need to understand what mechanisms and pathways are or should be used to best engage with and inform the wide variety of stakeholders that are involved in cyber workforce and education development.

## Project Description

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To assist with identifying the best approaches to stakeholder engagement, as well as to gain insights on stakeholder challenges and successes, ONCD contracted with the National Academy of Public Administration (Academy) to design, plan, and facilitate three listening sessions, each with representatives of different stakeholder groups: education and academia; industry; state and local governments (territorial and tribal government representatives were invited but did not attend). Each of the three sessions had the same two areas of focus:

1. Workforce development barriers and solutions faced by members of the sector
  - What barriers do organizations in this sector face in obtaining the cyber workforce needed?
  - What innovative solutions have participants used to develop the cyber workforce groups/audiences you target?
2. Best approaches for ONCD’s communication and coordination with members of the sector
  - How can these organization types and ONCD best engage to identify, document, and share effective approaches?
  - What metrics of success can be developed and used to monitor progress in meeting cyber workforce and cyber education goals?

The listening sessions were a combination of breakout and plenary components. The bulk of the discussion and brainstorming occurred in the breakout groups, which identified their top 3–5 ideas related to innovative solutions and methods of engagement to share with the full group. Plenary participants then voted for up to three ideas they believed would be most impactful.

The Academy synthesized the input from the stakeholders into a set of common themes that were used to inform the development of recommendations provided to ONCD in an internal white paper.

## About The National Academy of Public Administration

Chartered by Congress to provide nonpartisan expert advice, the Academy is an independent, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization established in 1967 to assist government leaders in building more effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent organizations. Learn more at [www.napawash.org](http://www.napawash.org)

# Common Themes from the Listening Sessions

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## Barriers and Challenges

The stakeholders identified the main barriers to developing the workforce to be hiring enough people with the skills and hands-on experience needed and requiring a college degree, even when it is not needed to successfully do the job. Specifically for state and local governments, academia, and smaller organizations, attracting and retaining cyber employees can be difficult because they are not able to compete with industry salaries and benefits. Employers are also hesitant to invest in training for employees because these employees often leave organizations after improving their skills. Some educational challenges include offering basic K-12 cyber education that includes realistic, practical (hands-on) applications and experiential learning opportunities. Employers also provided feedback on implementing the Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship program, which is often viewed as overly regulated and too inflexible. Overall, stakeholders struggle to get information about successful practices and innovative programs to help with cyber workforce and education development.

## What Works and Impactful Solutions

Some current successful practices identified by stakeholders include upskilling and reskilling current employees, encouraging programs that use experiential approaches, and recruiting and developing faculty. An innovative solution that is being increasingly explored and implemented by stakeholders is cross-sector partnerships. State, and local governments and educational institutions are partnering with industry to understand its needs from a workforce perspective and expand access to experiential learning opportunities. Educational institutions at all levels are exploring establishing partnerships with industry and other sectors to infuse cyber into "everything." Stakeholders also mentioned their reliance on professional, nonprofit, and regional organizations and networks to inform them about cyber opportunities, resources, and best practices.

## Enhancing ONCD's Engagement Strategies

Many stakeholders value ONCD's existing engagement strategies and mechanisms—including requests for information, working groups, and listening sessions—and encourage the office to expand its breadth, scope, and frequency of these activities. Additionally, stakeholders believe ONCD should work internally to coordinate federal action groups and subcommittees aligned with the NCWES pillars. To publicize the results of successful (and unsuccessful) initiatives and to disseminate metrics on progress, ONCD should supplement its existing communication tools by using programs, networks, and organizations that stakeholders already trust. Other activities stakeholders are hopeful that ONCD will pursue include encouraging public-private partnerships and expanding and simplifying access to information and ideas, possibly through clearinghouses or information exchanges.

The Academy's synthesis of these common themes informed recommendations that focus on supporting current activities, improving communication and information dissemination, and utilizing and improving existing federal resources and stakeholder input mechanisms.



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