

**NEXTGEN
GUIDE
TO
BUILDING
YOUR
NETWORK**



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INTRODUCTION: Crashing into Change

The Next Generation of Government Training Summit is more than just an event that takes place once a year – it's a movement currently taking shape in government, and we're at the center of it. This movement and this moment are your chance to take the motivation, inspiration and education you've gained at the summit and unleash it within your organization.

Are you ready to make productive change in government? Work together with your peers and make an impact from within? Help retain excellent employees in the public sector? One way you can do that is by creating a NextGen group within your agency.

Did you know there are agency level, office level and even department level NextGen groups within our government today? Some are official, some are unofficial, but all are focused on improving the way government works. These groups help prove that through collaboration, change and innovation in government is possible.

In this guide, you'll learn how you can develop a similar group, or improve the one already in place at your agency/office/city/department. We'll walk you through helpful tips, case studies, common roadblocks and ideas to get you on your way to NextGen networking stardom.

“ EMMET:

Uh, guys? We're about to crash into the sun.

BATMAN:

Yeah, but it's gonna look really cool.

- *The LEGO Movie* ”

SECTION ONE: The Instructions

While there are many existing NextGen groups within government today, none of them started the same way, act in the same manner or do the same activities. Making change happen isn't a "one size fits all" effort, and we aren't meant to work off the same instruction manual. Below, we give you ways to think about what your specific NextGen group might need to focus on or do to effect change at your particular agency or department.

First things first: to make change you have to start with a clear mission. You and your peers need to clearly paint a picture of what your goals are and think through the strategic activities of the group. Answer the how, what, when, and the most important: WHY?

Think through your agency's mission and link the group's initiatives to that mission. Ask yourselves, 'How does our group help or improve the overall organization and business of our agency?' 'Do we know what the strategic goals of the agency are?' 'How can we help the organization reach those goals?'

For most interagency groups, it's also important to recruit a champion, executive



EMMET:

The instructions to fit in: have everybody like you, and always be happy!

- *The LEGO Movie*



sponsor, or "change agent" at a senior level that has direct access to senior executives to help promote your group's mission, facilitate communication and make the case on your behalf. Before identifying this person, be sure you know why your champion should sponsor you. Know the value added and the value proposition for your group, what they should be expected to do or what items should you be clearly supplying them. Make sure they can and will serve as a "consultant" and be able to take on extra work to benefit the group.

You're making progress, building the mission and getting your sponsor on board – now you need to determine value proposition or the "what's in it for me" (WIIFM) concept to grow your membership and stakeholders. Think through why you, the everyday government employee, should be a part of this group.

SECTION TWO: Market Your Group

Gaining people's trust and providing them a sense of belonging is no easy task, but it can be done with the right actions. Here are a few quick tips you can implement to build a stronger and more consistent brand and communication in your group that will help you attract and retain members.

1 If it is available to you, create a "brand" with a logo, tagline, color scheme, standardized "look and feel." Integrate this into all your messaging to keep it consistent and recognizable.

2 Keep internal collaboration open. Be sure to utilize tools you have available (i.e. Yammer, SharePoint, etc). Create a calendar of events available to all employees, post minutes, overviews, presentations, strategic plan, annual activities, etc.

3 Coordinate with the other committees, affinity groups, and offices on the promotion of events, activities, training, membership drives, etc. Incorporate these other communities to enhance your messaging, marketing materials and utilize the digital and non-digital distribution channels.

4 If possible, leverage the Diversity & Inclusion Office to access the workforce and internal communications avenues you need to reach employees and encourage engagement.

5 Promote your group and utilize all available communications tools and technologies within the agency/office/ city/department such as:

- Intranet announcements (digital banners, videos)
- Digital signage (TV monitors in hallways and lobbies)
- Internal newsletters - have members write articles about meaningful experiences and networking opportunities made possible by participating in the group.
- Announcements and calendars (Internal and accessible to all employees)
- Broadcast messages (email - or any other tool)
- Good old fashioned word-of-mouth. Directly approaching someone has more impact than just advertising to the masses. Reach out to people that you think might be interested. Make a case for why it is important and will benefit them in their professional development.
- Instant messaging, chats, blogs, collaboration forum.
- Flyers, poster boards, tent cards, etc.
- Reach out to your HR department.
- Talk to your supervisor(s) and mid-level managers.

“ VITRUVIUS:

My fellow Master Builders. Including but not limited to Robin Hood, Mermaid Lady, Gandalf, Swamp Creature, 1980s Something Space Guy...

- *The LEGO Movie*



SECTION THREE: Getting Senior Executives Attention

Getting senior executive buy-in will not only strengthen the foundation of the group, but provide a voice that can help facilitate growth. Having someone more senior making the case on your behalf will allow for more ideas and actions to be implemented within your agency.

Below are four tips towards defining a relationship with senior executives and your NextGen group.

BE ACCESSIBLE - AND TRANSPARENT.

Even though “leadership is who shows up,” some people probably have input even if they weren’t able to make the meeting. Before moving forward, share ideas and invite others to participate on the intranet and listserv. Hold standing open leadership meetings for folks to break bread together, discuss projects, get updates, share the latest gossip, and more. After these meetings, we send meeting recap notes to everyone who attended. Being transparent also means that everyone is invited -- union, leadership, tenured employees, everyone.

TELL A STORY.

Use data on retention (www.fedscope.opm.gov) and morale (OPM’s Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey) to tell a story to leadership about retainment and why it’s important. Oftentimes, employees are leaving the agency for the wrong reasons. Tell their story -- quantitatively and qualitatively -- to raise awareness.

“ BATMAN:

If this relationship is going to work out between us I need to feel free to party with a bunch of strangers whenever I feel like it. I will text you.

- *The LEGO Movie*

”

BE FRIENDS WITH WHO YOU WORK WITH.

If you aren’t friends yet, try harder. They’re probably nice. Sometimes this means grabbing coffee, lunch, or drinks after work and not actually talking about work.

MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE.

This means physically and metaphysically. Schedule meetings later in the day to allow people on the West coast to attend. Show up at people’s offices (after their green light comes on Office Communicator). But also, know that people do the work they care about. Not every idea will get done, and that’s ok. Don’t ask people to do group work over their day jobs; just ask them to find time around their day job. They’re most likely going to do that if they care about the issue they’re working to fix and have some autonomy over their participation.

SECTION FOUR: Attract, Retain & Compliment

In some cases, the mission of a NextGen group is to attract, retain and compliment the individuals coming to the agency. It's important to remember that you need to maintain a consistent level of attracting, retaining and complimenting the people in your community, too.

In order to attract people to your group, you need to remember your value proposition and the "what's in it for me" (WIIFM)

concept. Based on that, you can bring in speakers to talk about things related to your mission. For example, the NextGen Network @Census has people come in to discuss innovative ideas, projects, and initiatives that will be implemented within the agency; they host app testing sessions, innovation fairs, diversity fairs, new employee orientation revamp as well as focus groups for other program areas that need a new "fresh" perspectives.

CASE STUDY: "An Outlet for Openness"

An interview with the NextGen Network leadership team at the Census Bureau.

Our network provides a forum for Census employees self-identified as "Millenials" (Generation Y) to serve as an outlet for transparency, professional collaboration, and openness. We facilitate professional networking and career development opportunities to shape our vision of leadership, which ultimately enhances the Census' business practices of recruiting, retaining and developing our generation's current and upcoming leaders. We strive to promote innovative forms of communication within and by the agency, utilizing the full spectrum of Web 2.0 technologies to maintain a high-quality workforce and guide our generation of employees today and in the future.

One event that NextGen Network @Census developed in order to take a proactive

approach to preventing resistance was developing the Census Leadership Mixer. This yearly event includes affinity group leaders, associate directors, and middle managers from across our bureau. Participants are seated at round tables that include a mix of affinity group leaders and senior and middle managers. We have preselected discussion topics that each table spends a few minutes discussing, brainstorming, and coming up with ideas on how we can work together as leaders to solve problems, improve processes, and foster collaboration.

This event has been highly successful and is well attended each year. It has helped managers learn about the various affinity groups and gain a better understanding of the value that our groups add to the enterprise.

Other events or ideas that you can implement to increase your membership are:

- Speed networking/mentoring.
- Career building sessions.
- Bring in experts on professional development programs, training programs, corporate hiring programs, job rotation programs, continuous development programs within the agency.
- Organize a book club, to read and discuss leadership and management books
- Leverage the use of other Affinity Groups or Employee Resource Groups (ERG) and partner up to host joint-events and activities.
- Conduct after hour “mixers” where members can network with each other. Invite NextGen groups from other agencies to foster networking and collaboration across organizations.
- Promote YGL and GovLoop events and arrange plans for your group to meet up and attend.

In addition to attracting more members, you have to keep current members involved and active. While the events are a great way to keep people engaged, you can also build specialized activities for current or soon to be serious members, such as:

- Plan a membership fair or open house where prospective members can learn about your group and opportunities to get involved.
- Recruit members for committees and special projects - if someone has an idea, support them and help them bring it to fruition.
- Highlight members in your newsletter.
- Keep an updated contact database for members.
- Provide opportunities for members to provide input on events and initiatives.
- Have your Executive Champion speak at management meetings to share the benefits of managers encouraging their employees to be active members of your organization.
- Have monthly brownbag lunches, coffee meet-ups and/or “social hours.”
- Reach out to new hires, interns and fellows.

“ EMMET:

You don't have to be the bad guy. You are the most talented, most interesting, and most extraordinary person in the universe. And you are capable of amazing things.

- *The LEGO Movie*

”

SECTION FIVE: Momentum is Structure

When you became a civil servant, you took an oath:

I, name, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God. 5 U.S.C. §3331

It's important to note that your oath is not to any particular administration, regulation, or business process. Your oath is to uphold the Constitution and our dream of a more perfect union. This is all the legal authority any civil servant needs to begin making positive change in their agency.

Now, even with the legal authority to start meddling in the workings of the bureaucracy, it's helpful to have a little organization around the way you work. What kind of bureaucrats would you be if you couldn't invent a structure and a process on demand?

“

EMMET:

So there are no signs on anything. How does anyone know what not to do?

UNIKITTY:

Here in Cloud Cuckoo Land, there are no rules: There's no government, no baby sitters, no bed times, no frowny faces, no bushy mustaches, and no negativity of any kind.

LUCY:

You just said the word "no" like a thousand times.

UNIKITTY:

And there's also no consistency.

- *The LEGO Movie*

”

The first principle is to remember, when creating, organizing and structuring your group that the things you want to change are the way they are because of the systems behind them. Copying those systems will produce the same results in your organization, and you will begin to function just like the things you meant to change. Whatever you do, don't set up a system that looks just like the one you already work in.

Here are some tips to create some new structure and organization around your group:

- 1 Try getting everyone together on the third Thursday of the month for a consensus-oriented lunch and learn on new employee issues.
- 2 If that doesn't work, elect a bunch of officers and have the Immediate Past President and the Parliamentarian make a recommendation on using the Original or Newly Revised version of Robert's Rules of Order at the next General Membership Meeting.
- 3 There are no right answers to how to organize a new employee group, but there are a few things to keep in mind.

The second principle to remember is that a new employee group needs to stay focused on empowering new employees -- and that means constant change. By the time you've got it set up, you're probably not as new as

CASE STUDY: “A Collaborative Team Spirit”

An interview with the Emerging Leaders Network leadership team at the Environmental Protection Agency.

At EPA ELN we made a conscious decision to use terms that are both professional and fun. We called our different groups “Crews” and the leads “Stewards” or “Coordinators.” We avoided using formal sounding terms like “committee” or “workgroup” and instead wanted to emphasize a collaborative, team spirit. Rather than appearing to centralize “leadership” within a small group of folks, we wanted to make sure that everyone felt a sense of ownership over the success of the organization and felt empowered to be a leader of ELN activities. The Crew Stewards played an important role in coordinating activities within a Crew and drawing in new Crew members.

Many of the ELN activities were geared towards meeting an agency or workforce need (like professional development or improving orientation) but we also focused on activities that help ELN members meet, network, get to know each other and create a sense of community. Activities varied from social activities like Happy Hours, Environmental Film Fest screenings, hikes, camping trips, an annual ski trip and monthly community service activities.

Our robust professional development activities-- notably our lunchtime Career Conversations or “brownbags” and the annual ELN Leadership Summits-- have garnered support from and as well as participation from dozens of senior leaders who recognize ELN’s value added to the organization.

you used to be. When you start talking to your even newer employees they’re going to have ideas about how things should work. Just as soon as you get those ideas worked in, there will be even newer employees on board. You’re going to need to stay flexible.

The third principle to remember is that your intentions matter. Sooner than you think, people in your agency will realize if your organization is a power grab, an attempt to make your name, or a genuine effort to find a new and better way to achieve your mission. Whenever you need to make decisions about your structure, make sure it helps you stay focused on the mission. If the intentions of your organization are clear and you’re able to show energy towards it, you’ll receive all the mentoring and coaching on your structure that you need.

The fourth and most important principal to remember is the power of getting started. Momentum is a structure all its own. As Teddy Roosevelt, founder of the modern civil service, said, “In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing; the next best thing is the wrong thing; and the worst thing you can do is nothing.” Get some people in a room and start figuring out how to well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office you have entered.

SECTION SIX: Going the Distance, Even With Some Resistance

It's important to remember that any change effort will, at some point, be met by resistance. Much of the resistance is confusion, and some will be outright hostility.

There are a few things you can do ahead of time to be prepared for possible resistance to creating your group:

WORK WITH YOUR FRIENDS.

If you're not friends with the people you're working with, stop what you're doing and take the time to discover why they're awesome. Keep digging until you find it. Whenever someone new joins the team, make sure you take the time to become their friend as well. At some point in the next twelve months one of you will be caught off guard by a burst of hostility. These are the people you'll be counting on to pick you back up and remind you why this work is important. If you don't have a solid relationship with them before that day comes, everything else you're doing falls apart.

SEEK SENIOR LEVEL SPONSORSHIP EARLY ON.

Take the time to request a speaking slot on the next management meeting agenda and provide a briefing of your what your organization is, what your goals are, and how your goals align with the agency's goals and mission. If you already have an executive sponsor, allow them to serve as a senior level advocate for the work that you are doing and provide updates in management meetings.

MEMBERS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION SHOULD NOT OPERATE IN SECRET.

Rather they should speak with their direct supervisor as well as the next level of management to discuss their role in the organization and link competencies gained from their participation to their Individual Development Plan. It's important to have a conversation with your supervisor about the opportunities for growth and professional development a new employee group can provide. It's also important to make sure that you're meeting performance expectations. However, even when you are exceeding expectations and have tried to make the case for professional growth, some supervisors will not want their staff participating. Help those staff find new supervisors. There is a manager somewhere in your agency with an open FTE looking for motivated self-starting talent. Introduce them.

As you're building relationships inside your new employee community, there are a few other key groups to reach out to that will help you deal with blowback when it comes.

GET TO KNOW SOME OF YOUR UNION REPS.

Given new employee groups often discuss working conditions, they often work in the same areas as the union. They also often have a lot of common members with the union. It is important to find a way to let the Union know what you're up to so they're not surprised when ideas you've put forward are suddenly under discussion. In the best scenarios, they'll actually champion the ideas your group has developed.

GET TO KNOW SOME OF THE WELL TENURED EMPLOYEES.

Remember: all of them were new employees at one point, and if you can get them to tell you what their experience was like you'll get a great understanding of why things are the way they are now. You'll also develop a language and allies to help explain why your ideas are important now.

GET TO KNOW A FEW EXECUTIVES.

In every organization there are at least a few executives who are looking to drive change and connect directly to new employees. If you don't know where to start, look at their bios for people who mention teaching or mentoring. If your organization has an official mentoring program, participate in it. If it doesn't, what a great first project for your group!

With the right mission, focus and people you're going to drive change. It's not an easy task, but you're also not alone. Be prepared for all the possibilities, stay resilient and push forward to great things – it's worth it to make our government better.

“ VITRUVIUS:

One day, a talented lass or fellow, a special one with face of yellow, will make the Piece of Resistance found from it's hiding refuge underground, and with a noble army at the helm, this Master Builder will thwart the Kragle and save the realm, and be the greatest, most interesting, most important person of all times. All this is true because it rhymes.

- The LEGO Movie



CASE STUDY: “Happy People Make Organizations Better” UNDER 5

An interview with the Under 5 leadership team at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Under 5 at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is a grassroots organization focused on improving the agency for new employees, specifically those who have been at the Department for fewer than five years. It also serves as an opportunity for new employees to develop their leadership and project skills, share information about the Department’s programs and mission, and practice the culture that HUD should exemplify in the future.

Under 5 got started because there were some amazing and talented people who wanted to make the world better. They thought federal service was the way to do that, and so they got jobs at HUD. In their first few years they got a lot of frustration and not a lot of encouragement. They got burnt out and started heading for the exits.

Under 5 believes that HUD is great. We help hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens each year. But there’s more we can do, so we should get better. We also know that the Department only gets better when our employees are able to get better and do what it is that they do well. We want to help them do that, because it’s not easy. But, if saving the world was easy, it’d be done by now.

Since Under 5’s mission is centered on improving the agency for new employees, we heavily focus on recruiting new employees to join us. We get some one-on-one time with every new employee that we hear

about to welcome them to the agency and let them know they’re not alone. This is particularly important right now as HUD experiences a hiring surge and offices -- headquarters and field -- are getting the much needed support to accomplish its mission. Even finding someone to have lunch with is a big deal to a new employee and we do our best to connect them to one another. But we also encourage them to make this agency their own from the beginning. New employees mean new perspectives and new ideas on how we can be better.

Under 5 helps develop a culture of excellence by providing a venue for employees to share their most interesting work with other HUD staff across office silos and locations. This has taken the form of “Take 5 with Under 5” (a 30-minute presentation by a different employee each week on a work-related topic, which is broadcast via Live Meeting to all offices), lightening slide presentations, brown bag lunch talks, and staff tours of best-practice HUD-funded activities in communities where HUD has a field office.

These events allow employees to “nerd out” about housing policy, to see HUD’s work as more than a sum of its parts, and to see the true, first-hand impact that HUD’s programs have in meeting the needs of local communities. While HUD’s formal performance management process strives to align individual employee performance plans with agency strategic goals, Under 5’s knowledge-sharing

efforts have the goal of making this alignment more visible and using it to generate additional energy and enthusiasm.

Employees who have dedicated their time and abilities to growing the Under 5 movement are recognized as opinion leaders at HUD, and use their voice to shorten organizational distance between management and individual employees or teams who are doing innovative work. This means always staying interested in what is happening within the agency and the federal ecosystem and sharing this information; nominating other deserving employees for awards as often as possible to celebrate great work; and connecting talent to opportunity when new projects are getting underway. Under 5 leadership tries to model a balance of inclusiveness and meritocracy in a diverse public sector environment and keep the good ideas flowing.

Under 5 purposefully has no official leadership. Leadership is who shows up. Meetings are led by those that come to the meeting (open to all employees) and bring agenda items. Events and projects happen because people believed they should happen and devoted some of their time to doing so. Over time, this has become a small group who can share Under 5's experience with other agencies or HUD leadership, write it down for handbooks, etc. It is important to us, however, that those opportunities incorporate as many people's viewpoints as are interested.

We do that by:

- Giving away as much power as possible as often as possible to increase the number of leadership opportunities.
- Encouraging field offices to form their own Under 5 chapters and creating a place for them to connect with one another.
- Not keeping a membership list.
- Staying transparent by sharing all of our work via email and intranet.
- Announcing meetings via newsletter and listserv (currently reaching one-third of the agency).
- Using a generic mailbox (Under5@hud.gov) which is checked by multiple people.
- Inviting new employees all the way up to senior leadership to present to the group about subjects related to HUD's mission.

As we grow as an organization, our hope is that new leaders will continue to pop up and share these roles. People have different reasons for joining Under 5, but we're all unified in our belief that HUD should be better. Employees want to get involved to work toward their particular flavor of "better" and, at another stage, because they see why it's important to help others do their "better."

ABOUT NEXTGEN

The Next Generation of Government Training Summit educates, inspires and promotes innovation for new and rising leaders in government. Since 2010, the two day summit has enhanced the working and personal lives of 2,000+ Generation X and Y government employees excited to learn new skills needed to innovate.

Gen X & Y leaders learn and implement new skills far different than traditional methods. With NextGen, the newer generations in government can grasp the message and skills that are delivered via workshops, interactive sessions, office hours with leaders, and immediately begin executing these traits in the office.

The two days of NextGen provide attendees with a breadth of knowledge, many immedi-

ately implementable tips, and motivation to be a diligent government colleague. To get similar training would require attending multiple courses that cost thousands of dollars and many days out of the office. NextGen is a fraction of the cost and is a jam-packed two days full of enjoyable education. Block off the last week in July, don't miss out!

For more information about this report, please reach out to NextGen at nextgen@govloop.com

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- Census Bureau, NextGen Network @Census
- Combined Federal Campaign of the National Capital Area, Emerging Leadership Council (ELC)
- GovLoop
- Department of Commerce, Leadership & Innovation Network at Commerce (LINC)
- Department of Commerce/International Trade Administration/Enforcement and Compliance, E&C NextGen
- Department of Defense, Rising Leaders in Defense
- Department of Homeland Security, DHS Emerging Leaders (DEL)
- Department of Housing and Urban Development, Under 5
- Environmental Protection Agency, Emerging Leaders Network (ELN)
- Young Government Leaders (YGL)

My NextGen Game Plan:

My NextGen Goals:

Key People to Talk to:

Ideas for My Organization:



NEXTGEN

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