

# Untapped Source of Talent Provides Critical Skills, Helping to Alleviate the Workforce Crisis

Governments can fill many technical and analytical roles with help from neurodivergent individuals.

Government agencies are facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining employees, especially for technical roles. Organizations have difficulty hiring staff for agile software development; device and software testing; cybersecurity; robotic process automation; and data analytics, preventing many agencies from moving forward with much-needed modernization efforts.

The public sector faces especially tough competition for filling cybersecurity related roles. As of mid-2022, the CyberSeek project reported nearly 715,000 cybersecurity job openings across all sectors in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Government agencies are struggling to compete against large private companies for cybersecurity employees, leaving them with unfilled positions and talent gaps that put agencies and constituents at risk.

There are also many government functions that require employees who can tackle highly analytical and structured tasks. Accounting, audit and risk management initiatives, for example, often involve complex processing tasks and data analysis. Public benefits programs require detail-oriented focus to handle data entry and claims administration.

These areas are also being impacted by the workforce crisis, opening government agencies to risk and delays in services.

Governments can find help by looking to an underutilized talent pool: Neurodivergent individuals who work in a team that's fully managed to support their success and deliver better outcomes.

States and localities also face challenges in meeting their goal of hiring a diverse workforce. Many agencies rely on vendors to help meet goals for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) contracting and employment. As one example, these vendors may manage networks to simplify contracting with businesses owned by veterans, women and minority individuals.

This model is also available for neurodiversity employment and offers an alternative to maintaining an internal program. Partnering with a vendor that offers a fully managed service can help attract talent, identify the right job match, develop training and provide support for ongoing job success.

## Considering neurodiverse talent

When matched with the right job, neurodivergent individuals offer the specialized skills and focus needed for government operations. Neurodivergent employees bring new perspectives on how to overcome obstacles through attention to detail and innovative, creative thinking.

CAI Neurodiverse Solutions offers a unique and proven model for neurodiversity employment, which includes a complete team and a range of supporting services. An embedded, neurodiversity-certified leader oversees the team's work and handles functions such as:

- Being the first point of contact for the agency and employee, available to provide guidance that directly resolves any needs and concerns
- Providing ongoing supervision, support, mentoring and coaching for team members, including identifying additional training needs and determining when a team member is ready for advancement
- Developing team member productivity metrics, reviewing work product for accuracy and driving operational efficiencies
- Delivering weekly and quarterly status reports and conducting status meetings to update everyone on team activities, tasks and issues
- Supporting reinforcement of neurodiversity training concepts

This robust management approach fosters a successful experience and outcome for the agency, the team and the employees. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when remote work was forced for many agencies across the country, programs utilizing neurodivergent

## What is neurodiversity?



**Neurodiversity** refers to the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population. The term encompasses conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia (which affects reading and writing), dyscalculia (which affects working with numbers) and dyspraxia (which affects physical coordination and movement).

Neurodivergent individuals often have strong capabilities for attention to detail, concentration, pattern recognition and problem-solving. Yet this population experiences a high unemployment rate, estimated at 30% to 40%.<sup>2</sup>

individuals were able to adapt to these new stipulations with the same success as an on-site program. As more agencies embrace hybrid work models, neurodivergent employees can continue to be a vital part of the team.

## How a neurodiverse team benefits IT

The IT department at the University of Pittsburgh needed a team of software developers that could work in an agile environment on projects to automate system testing. Department leaders also wanted to expand the diversity of their teams while hiring employees with a high attention to detail.

The university filled its needs by contracting with CAI Neurodiverse Solutions for a neurodiverse development team. The department worked with CAI to clearly define goals, assign work tasks and structure the project schedule. The team of developers also had the ongoing support needed to fulfill the goals and objectives set out during the initial client meeting.

The CAI Neurodiverse Solutions team automated a test suite for one application that previously required up to four hours to test manually. Given the lengthy testing time, the manual test suite was previously run only for major new software releases. The automated suite now runs daily and requires only 15 minutes for an employee to review the logs.

As the team takes on new tasks, employees have readily adapted to the work. The outcomes have been better than expected.

“Getting this team was a win-win,” says James Craig, the university’s associate director of enterprise applications. “The employees are extremely eager to learn and contribute in any way they can, and we now understand how much we can really accomplish with this team.”

## How supported work benefits the employee

In a traditional workplace, neurodivergent people often struggle to find and keep long-term employment that makes full use of their talents. But these individuals can flourish when they’re matched with the right work and the right support structure. The employees become valued contributors to their teams and organizations. They also gain the skills and confidence to take on new responsibilities and grow their career.

“We have seen on many occasions where providing a career opportunity has led to so much more than just the career,” says CAI Neurodiverse Solutions Vice President Anthony Pacilio. “It has led to greater confidence, independence, individuals living on their own for the first time, getting an apartment, applying for a driver’s license. It is about helping build a person’s journey, not just a career.”

## How to get started

A full partner-managed neurodiversity employment program does not require agencies to make major changes to their internal processes. However, subtle adjustments in HR and procurement can make a difference for a successful neurodiversity program. An experienced partner can assist agencies with these adjustments.

Leveraging its proven program model, CAI aligns the best talent with the right engagement. The model is summarized into three phases:

**Solution definition.** CAI experts partner with agency stakeholders to define a strategic solution aligned with exceeding business objectives. They follow a proven process that builds the roadmap for successful execution.

**Talent selection and acquisition.** CAI has honed the process of finding and aligning the best talent. The company’s neurodiversity-certified recruiters utilize CAI’s global partner network and talent acquisition team to identify neurodivergent candidates. Candidates complete a one-on-one introductory call and five-day talent discovery session to ensure the best placement for both the agency and individual.

**Program execution.** CAI experts utilize an organizational readiness process that ensures program adoption and success. Workplace assessments, awareness training, ongoing program governance, oversight and support are critical success factors.

## The contributions of neurodiversity

In the right roles and with the right support, neurodivergent employees can make significant and meaningful contributions to any government agency. By considering a neurodiversity program, an agency can reduce workforce challenges, lower the underemployment and unemployment rate, make progress toward DEI goals, provide rewarding and meaningful careers, and achieve its mission of service to all.

*This piece was written and produced by the Government Technology Content Studio, with information and input from CAI.*

1 <https://www.cyberseek.org/heatmap.html>

2 The Center for Neurodiversity & Employment Innovation, University of Connecticut, <https://entrepreneurship.uconn.edu/neurodiversitycenter/#>

**If your agency is interested in working with CAI Neurodiverse Solutions, please [CLICK HERE](#) to arrange a meeting and learn how to get started today. Or you can reach us at [inquiries@cai.io](mailto:inquiries@cai.io).**

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Learn how CAI powers the possible at: <https://www.cai.io>