

THE FUTURE OF CITIES

CITY HALL

Building a Municipal Workforce for the Future

MUNICIPAL ACTION GUIDE





CENTER FOR CITY SOLUTIONS

About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions.

NLC's Center for Municipal Practice provides technical assistance and resources on key topics and trends important to cities, creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues, and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches..

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cities, towns and villages rely on their talented workers to provide essential services and programs for all members of their communities. The pandemic has greatly affected the way people work across all sectors, and public sector employers, particularly municipalities, have struggled to recover from COVID-19-related job losses and attract new workers. This not only negatively impacts a local government's ability to deliver basic services like sanitation and public safety for its community, but also hurts its ability to innovate, provide new services and develop lasting relationships within its community. Investing in a skilled workforce can lead to greater efficiencies, lower costs, and greater value for taxpayers. Cities can lead by example as model employers to help other employers in their jurisdictions understand the value in providing support and benefits to workers.

Cities across the United States are facing similar challenges that impact their municipal workforces:

- **Competition** with private sector companies regarding wages and benefits
- **Hiring restrictions** including work experience, college degrees and demographic characteristics (e.g., formerly incarcerated) that limit local officials' ability to hire qualified candidates skilled through alternative routes
- **Inadequate training programs** that do not account for the skills municipal workers need
- **Lack of analysis** on an abundance of workforce data that could be used to inform workforce policies
- **Uninformed hiring practices** that do not account for the abundance of community-based knowledge and awareness of local conditions for service delivery



“We’re using our public sector workforce to model our broader equity and economic development goals for the environment and transportation.”

— ALEX LAWRENCE, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, CITY OF BOSTON, MA

Recommendations

To meet these challenges, local leaders are reimagining their public sector hiring practices, training programs and workforce strategies to attract and retain workers, build skills and pathways for advancement, and support employees outside of work. **This Action Guide provides the following recommendations, actionable strategies and real-world examples of steps municipal leaders can take to enhance their public sector workforces:**



“Grow your own” by investing in existing staff



Evaluate and update pay and benefits policies



Consider implementing flexible work arrangements



Develop employment pathways for youth, young adults and non-traditional workers



Leverage DEIA strategies to recruit and retain workers



Rethink certification and training requirements



Design skills-based curricula



Ensure policies are human-centered and responsive



Develop creative pilot projects for wraparound services and non-traditional benefits



Support employee mental health and well-being

Context for this Action Guide

This Action Guide is the latest installment of NLC's [Future of Cities initiative](#) and will deliver actionable implementation strategies municipal leaders can use to drive progress toward a more equitable, resilient public sector workforce. The Action Guide builds on three NLC briefs that:

1. [Review public sector workforce trends](#) and funding opportunities- primarily through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars
2. [Explore trends in the municipal public safety workforces](#) and funding initiatives
3. [Evaluate representative bureaucracy for equitable service delivery](#) and advancing DEIA in public sector workforces

To inform this Action Guide, NLC researchers interviewed mayors, city officials, local leaders, human resource directors, diversity, equity and inclusion officers, and technical cohort leaders from across the US. Interviewees explained the conditions affecting their ability to hire qualified, diverse and invested individuals who will contribute to their locality's workforce and long-term service delivery plans. NLC researchers also used US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data, American Community Survey (ACS) data and secondary research to analyze public sector labor market trends and conditions.




“Government no longer has a monopoly on making a difference. Now that companies recruit on the message of making a difference, governments need to shift their message to a place for ‘changing the system,’ which can attract more diverse applicants.”

—ELIZABETH LINOS, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

UNDERSTANDING CURRENT MUNICIPAL WORKFORCE TRENDS


Many municipal positions require daily, in-person interactions with residents, whether through direct service delivery or maintenance and operations on physical infrastructure systems. Yet the pandemic has greatly impacted the ways people work across all sectors. A significant increase in remote work opportunities has impacted the viability of many public sector positions, prompting many employees to leave their roles in search of greater wages, benefits, flexibility, or personal fulfillment. Many economists, researchers and experts call the current moment, “The Great Resignation,” while others prefer the term “The Great Renegotiation.”

Since 2020, public sector employers, particularly municipalities, have struggled to recover from COVID-19-related job losses and attract new workers. But they can now react to these new challenges by taking advantage of historic federal investments in local government operations. The pandemic highlighted the need for local leaders to reimagine their community engagement strategies, invest in digital service delivery, and implement diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA) strategies. Through these federal funding opportunities, municipal leaders today have an opportunity to recruit, attract, retain and support public sector employees who provide vital services to their communities.



“We must ask how we measure progress towards our goals. Be creative and experimental, but thoughtful when measuring and communicating success.”

— ALEX LAWRENCE, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, CITY OF BOSTON, MA



“Our 3,500 employees have education ranging from GED to PhD. Across all departments, we have 22 different ‘micro cultures’ and very different training needs.”

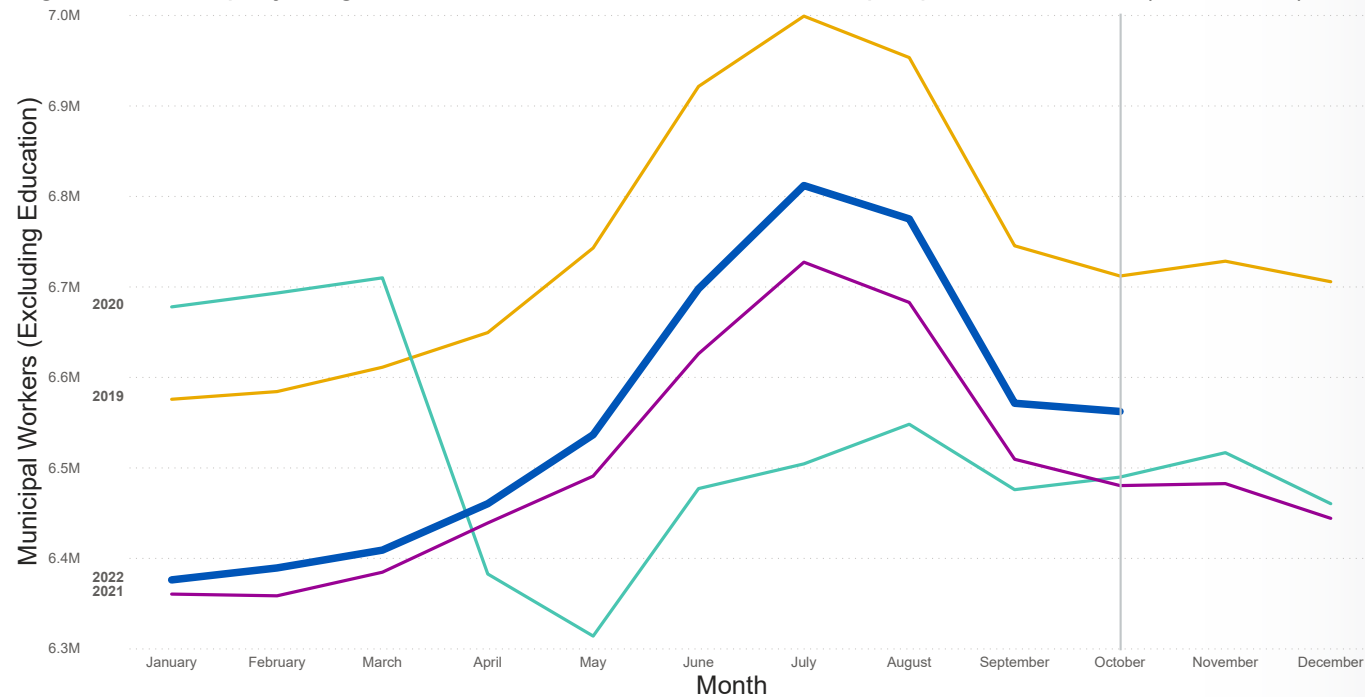
— KATIE CROFT, ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND DEVELOPMENT SUPERVISOR, CITY OF GREENSBORO, NC

Changing workforce trends

NLC researchers analyzed US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) employment data to provide insights on how the pandemic impacted the municipal workforce. Between March 2020 and March 2022, municipal employment fell by 300,300 jobs. BLS data show that municipal labor loss (-4.48%) outpaced overall government labor loss (-3.48%) and all nonfarm labor loss (-0.25%). This indicates that while the US economy overall has added jobs in its post-COVID recovery, municipal employers struggle to hire and retain workers. Since March 2022,

municipal staffing levels have improved, but as of October 2022 they are still down 147,700 jobs (-2.20%) compared with pre-pandemic statistics, taking into account the cyclical nature of annual employment trends. A year-over-year analysis of total municipal jobs counts 267,800 fewer jobs in October 2022 compared to October 2019 (before the pandemic). However, the number of municipal jobs in October 2022 was higher than in October 2020 or October 2021 indicating some employment recovery since the onset of the pandemic (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Municipal jobs grew in 2022 but have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels (2019-2022)



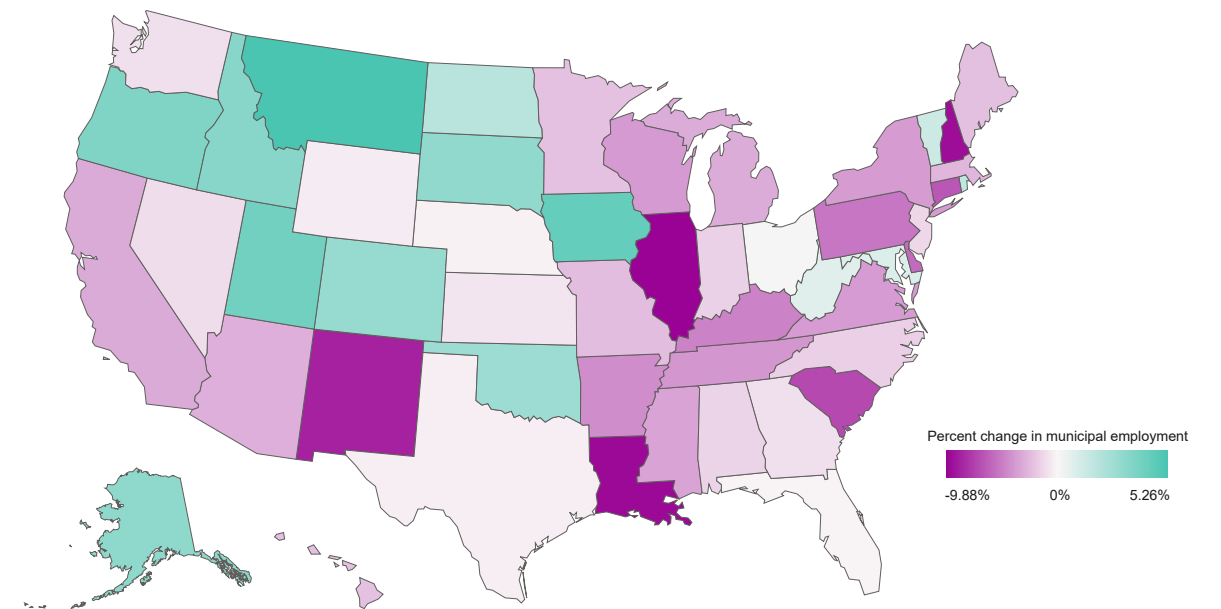
Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). State and Area Employment, Hours, and Earnings [Dataset]. Data.bls.gov/PDQWeb

Geographic employment context

These findings vary geographically, with some local governments and states experiencing net gains in municipal employment and others still struggling with net employment loss. As noted previously, the average state-level employment loss was -4.48 percent. However, from March 2020 to October 2022, **Montana,**

Iowa, Utah, Oregon and **Idaho** saw their municipal employment numbers increase more than any other states (though these increases remained under 5 percent). Meanwhile, **Illinois, Louisiana, New Hampshire, New Mexico** and **South Carolina** experienced employment declines of more than 5 percent (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Most states experienced large municipal labor loss through the pandemic, but a few experienced employment growth



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). State and Area Employment, Hours, and Earnings [Dataset]. Data.bls.gov/PDQWeb

Hard-to-fill municipal positions

The pandemic and current economic climate have fundamentally changed how we work, where we work and employee expectations for the workplace. Jobseekers increasingly look for positions with higher wages, more flexibility for remote work and additional benefits like mental health initiatives and childcare. This has left many municipalities with hard-to-fill positions across a range of roles. Local governments report they are struggling to

fill many positions including those in nursing, engineering, policing, dispatch, building permitting and inspections, corrections, skilled trades, mental health services and information technology.¹ Many of these roles compete directly with private sector employment. Cities with vacancies and high employee turnover in healthcare, public safety and the built environment run the risk of deteriorating key services residents rely on every day.



Many local government jobs do not enable the type of flexible work options that jobseekers want.

Funding opportunities

Municipalities have an opportunity to take advantage of historic allocations in federal funds through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed in March 2020, ARPA passed in March 2021 and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) passed in November 2021. These funds offer large-scale investments and include provisions that allow state and local governments to invest in workforce development and improve municipal service delivery. Additionally, the federal government annually allocates specific funds for investment in human capital

and the workforce pipeline. [NLC research highlights](#) how cities can augment these efforts through annual Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) funding to invest in human capital development and support the upward economic mobility of residents.² City leaders can use [NLC's Economic Mobility Toolkit](#) to identify policies, programmatic levers and short-term funding to address long-term inequities, improve residents' economic mobility and change the trajectory for underinvested communities.³

NLC's Economic Mobility Toolkit identifies roles, policy and programmatic levers for cities to help residents become more economically secure. The toolkit helps local leaders increase city revenues, public safety and local economies.





ATTRACTING AND RETAINING WORKERS

Local governments must create sustainable internal and external talent pipelines to support municipal staffing needs. In addition to the challenges discussed above, a projected increase in retirements among municipal employees will compound government staffing challenges. Local governments can combat staffing attraction and retention issues by investing in existing staff and updating pay and benefits to be more competitive with the private sector. Other strategies include considering more flexible work options and developing career pathways for youth, young adults and non-traditional workers. Additionally, as communities across the US become increasingly diverse, local governments must invest in DEIA workforce strategies to ensure policy and administration processes include all voices.



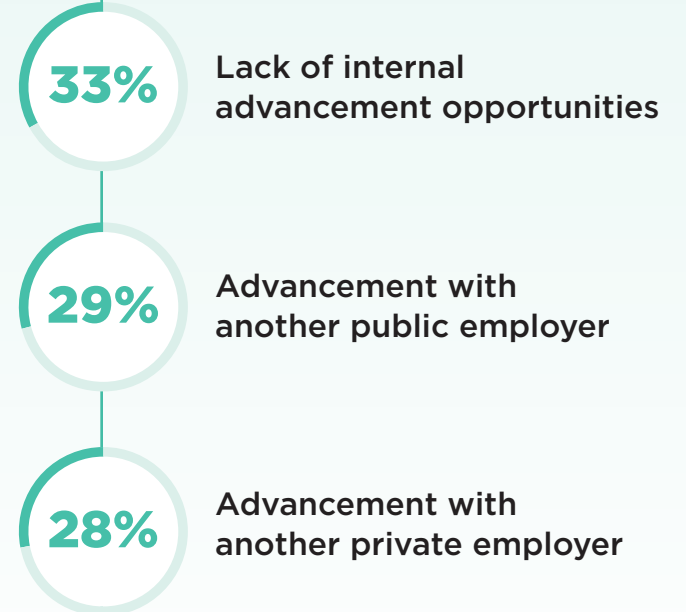
“Grow your own” by investing in existing staff

Local governments throughout the country share a common talent retention challenge. According to survey findings by MissionSquare Research Institute, the top reasons municipal employees leave their jobs include a lack of internal advancement opportunities (33%) and advancement with another public employer (29%) or advancement with private employer (28%).⁴ Retention challenges create gaps in institutional knowledge and leadership, so it is vital for local governments to invest in strategies aimed at keeping staff long-term.

Establishing a culture of coaching and investing in the local government workforce

can improve organizational culture and performance as well as support employee retention.⁵ Furthermore, cross-departmental workforce initiatives are a great way to reach current staff to fill internal employment needs and satisfy employees’ career development goals. For example, the City of Greensboro, NC, has taken a novel approach to this “grow your own” mentality, branding its coaching and retention strategies as “Project Sweet Potato,” a reference to one of North Carolina’s most productive home-grown crops. With federal funding opportunities available, there are many opportunities to invest in similar approaches.

Employees cite that municipal roles lack advancement opportunities to keep them





Employee retention strategies: Growing your own in Greensboro, NC

Greensboro, NC, takes a “grow your own” approach to municipal workforce development, according to Katie Croft, Organizational Effectiveness and Development Supervisor for the City of Greensboro. Faced with challenges like administrative succession planning and high new employee turnover, Greensboro has made several investments in a diverse range of municipal workforce development programs. These programs, like GSO Speaks and G-School, create skill building, career advancement and financial opportunities for participating staff while also improving local government service delivery.

- GSO Speaks:** The Greensboro Human Rights Department and Human Resources Department collaborated to create GSO Speaks about five years ago. Through participation in GSO Speaks, municipal employees can improve their foreign language skills and service delivery to Greensboro’s diverse non-English speaking population. More than 120 different languages are spoken within the Greensboro community with Spanish being the most widely spoken non-English language. Currently, GSO Speaks offers Spanish classes at four levels of proficiency, teaching city staff general language competencies and

job-specific phrases that help improve public service delivery. GSO Speaks also encourages participants to engage in local Spanish-speaking community activities such as visiting local storefronts and cultural events to improve language skills and cultural competency. Greensboro is exploring expanding the program to include American Sign Language and literacy training. Additionally, city staff that advance through all levels of GSO Speaks can receive financial benefits for being multilingual.

- G-School:** G-School is a hybrid career exploration course and employee retention tool that encourages municipal staff who may be looking for a career shift to explore opportunities in different departments

within the city rather than leave the city government altogether. G-School encourages networking opportunities between department managers and municipal staff across the city’s various functions, kicking off with a meet-and-greet event before a Q&A session with multiple department representatives. Following this event, G-School participants explore their career interests and learn about a wide range of career opportunities within the local government using an online learning management system. Participants will then have opportunities for shadowing at selected departments followed by an evaluation period that can result in advanced placement. G-School lasts one fiscal quarter and supports 30 participants.

“Our leadership training programs create pathways for existing employees into managerial roles with professional coaching and enables succession planning.”

— KATIE CROFT, ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND DEVELOPMENT SUPERVISOR, CITY OF GREENSBORO, NC



Evaluate and update pay and benefits policies

Local governments must evaluate and update their pay and benefits policies to ensure they are able to attract new talent and retain existing employees. While MissionSquare’s survey identified multiple reasons employees depart from their public sector roles, uncompetitive compensation (51%) topped the list. However, when comparing average salaries, local governments (\$60,370) currently outpace the private sector (\$57,210).^{6,7} These findings are likely skewed by large municipalities’ wage data because despite these findings, many smaller and mid-sized municipalities struggle to compete with the private sector on wages. Additionally, private sector wages grew faster than public sector wages for similar occupations even though the average wages for local government workers were greater than the private sector (Figure 3).⁸

Many cities have already implemented changes to compensation and benefits packages to attract employees, as research found that 38 percent of government employers issued broad-based pay increases for all employees. To address position-specific hiring difficulties, 21 percent of employers surveyed offered position-specific pay raises and 19 percent offered targeted hiring bonuses.⁹ The state municipal leagues in South Carolina, Colorado and Maryland conduct annual compensation studies to assess public sector employee salary, wages and benefits from across their states.^{10, 11, 12} Member cities can access this data to compare their wages and benefits to those offered by other municipal employers and ensure they remain competitive within their states. It is important to stay aware of compensation policies and trends in the private and nonprofit sectors to maintain competitiveness in the labor market.

Top reason employees depart their public sector roles

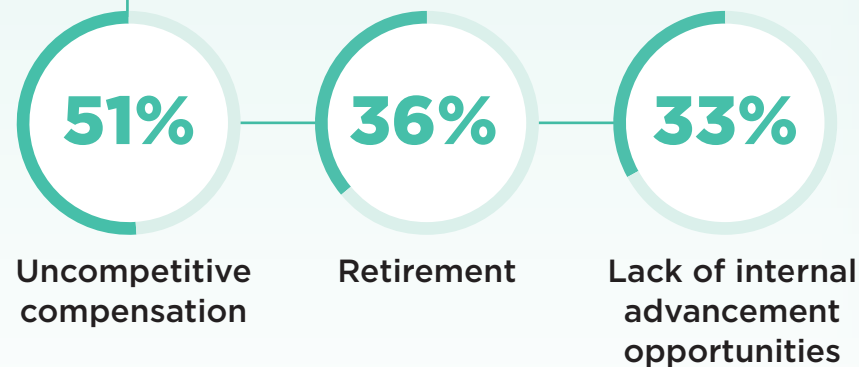
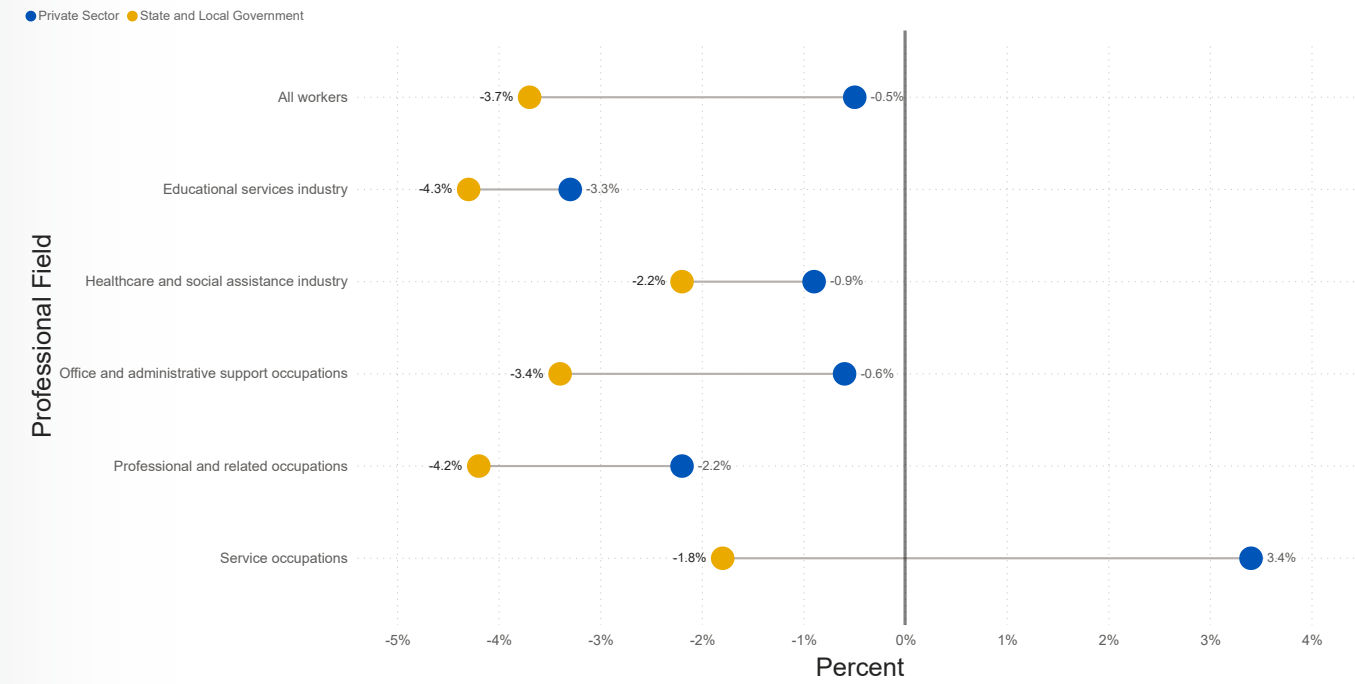


Figure 3: Private sector workers have fared better than public counterparts since pandemic’s start



Source: Maciag, M. (2022, February 7). Government Wage Growth Lags Private Sector by Largest Margin on Record. Pew. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2022/02/07/government-wage-growth-lags-private-sector-by-largest-margin-on-record>

In addition to revisiting wages, cities can compete for talent by offering other forms of compensation and benefits to stay competitive with private-sector employers and demonstrate their support of public-sector employees. Non-wage benefits typically offered by municipal governments include retirement savings/pensions and health insurance. They can be key features of employee satisfaction and job quality and can have a significant impact on employee retention. According to Gallup, workers in low-quality jobs are less likely to be satisfied and almost twice as likely to actively look for another job.¹³ Other innovative non-wage benefits that local governments should consider offering to attract and retain talent include:

- Student loan assistance (PSLF Program)
- Flexible work
- Childcare assistance and parental/guardian leave
- Dental/vision insurance
- Expanded or unlimited PTO
- Workforce development programming
- Retirement plan matching
- Life insurance
- Health and wellbeing incentives
- Transit benefits



Support municipal employees with PSLF

The **Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program** can help stabilize personal finances of municipal staff and strengthen staff recruitment and retention. The PSLF Program forgives the remaining balance on federal borrowers' Direct Loans after they've made 120 qualifying monthly payments through an income-based repayment plan while working full-time for a public or nonprofit employer.¹⁴

Local government employers can support employee utilization of the PSLF program by providing training that helps employees navigate PSLF applications. Additionally, local governments can support employee loan assistance by monitoring and communicating PSLF program updates as well as other federal student loan updates to employees. The PSLF Program has the potential to provide student loan debt relief for thousands of local government workers. A 2022 Limited PSLF Waiver that allowed all prior payments made by student borrowers to count toward PSLF, regardless of loan program, increased the number of borrowers who received forgiveness from 16,000 to 247,000.^{15,16} It is important for local governments, as employers and stewards of community and economic development, to elevate PSLF's successes and highlight the opportunity for financial relief.



Consider implementing flexible work arrangements

Another less traditional benefit that local governments can provide to municipal employees is flexible work options like hybrid and remote work. Local governments have increasingly sought to provide flexible work opportunities for their employees because of the surge in remote work sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift toward flexible work also came with the need to provide high-quality information and municipal services through enhanced digital service delivery for residents. However, full-time telework among local government workers declined from 53 percent in 2021 to 22 percent in 2022.¹⁷ LinkedIn research found that 87 percent of workers want to work remotely most of the time and that hybrid work models will become commonplace within the private sector by 2025.¹⁸ As the transition out of COVID-19 pandemic operations continues, local governments must be willing to adopt flexible work arrangements to maintain labor market competitiveness with private employers.

Currently, more than half of state and local governments offer hybrid schedules for eligible roles.¹⁹ Other flexible work arrangements offered by local governments include flexible schedules (51%) and flexible work hours (38%), with 40 percent of respondents increasing the number of positions eligible for flexible work options. Certain government positions, like public safety roles, require in-person staff. Some local governments, like those in Ohio, cannot allow regular hybrid or remote work due to state and city income tax structures. Since the pandemic, states are revisiting an income tax provision

often referred to as “the employer convenience rule” that dictates whether a remote employee is taxed where they live, or where they work. Formalizing authority for taxation of remote workers will affect city budgets in places like New York, NY, that have seen a net loss of workers commuting into the city, and places like Denver, CO, that have attracted mobile remote workers.²⁰

Still, offering hybrid, remote and other flexible work options for eligible jobs is a critical strategy for attracting and retaining workers. As these opportunities are implemented, local governments will need to increasingly pair flexible work arrangements with formal policies to provide remote employees with engagement, mentorship and performance appraisal. While some may be hesitant to adopt flexible work arrangements due to concerns about the degradation of workplace culture and office connectivity, organizing staff social events and department retreats are reliable options to improve culture and connectivity in a hybrid work environment.²¹ Allowing flexibility can increase an employee's commitment to their organization and improve their perspective on their work.



87%
of workers want to work remotely most of the time.



Develop employment pathways for youth, young adults and non-traditional workers

Cities can draw upon an abundance of talent within their youth, young adult and non-traditional worker populations and develop their career advancement. Cities can begin to grow their own workforce by building partnerships with K-12 schools, two- and four-year colleges, and other training providers to expose both youth and adults to potential careers in local government as well as to directly train and develop the next generation of municipal workers.

Young people can bring fresh perspectives to a city's workforce. They are adaptable and willing to learn new skillsets to fill local government positions. Work-based learning strategies, including internships, on-the-job training, and Registered Apprenticeship programs can be

effective tools to provide career pathways for young people, upskill early-career individuals and meet the need for in-demand skills in cities. This can be particularly helpful for employers with aging workforces or those that require special skills that might not be learned through traditional classroom settings. Such engagements can even focus on career exposure for students as early as middle school, funded through federal career and technical education programs. Local leaders can build on-ramps for workers with limited career experiences by focusing on developing career readiness skills like networking, communication, professionalism and teamwork. Such skills can be best built through mentorship programs to help young employees learn on the job from experienced employees and develop lasting connections with their team members.



CITY SPOTLIGHT

Youth apprenticeships: Building communities of learners through skills training in Denver, CO

By partnering with high schools, local community colleges and non-traditional educational institutions, municipalities can help implement curricula, and training programs, providing opportunities for young people to engage with their city's municipal workforce early on. The City of Denver, CO, a member of [NLC's Equitable Economic Mobility Initiative \(EEMI\)](#), offers high school seniors a [three-year apprenticeship](#).^{22, 23} Participants split time between their high school classrooms and municipal agencies where they explore careers in local government and earn a living wage. Apprentice cohorts work together to develop professional skills and do community service projects. Participants are expected to take classes from local colleges to develop their individual skillsets and can work toward industry recognized credentials. Eight city agencies participate in the program, including the departments for Community Planning and Development, Transportation and Infrastructure, Finance as well as Parks and Recreation.



CITY SPOTLIGHT

Skilled trades and STEM apprenticeships: Pathways to permanent civil service roles in Philadelphia, PA

The City of Philadelphia, PA, runs an apprenticeship program in skilled trades like carpentry, masonry, roofing as well as in STEM fields like electrical engineering and water system maintenance.²⁶ The Apprenticeship Guidebook details the minimum hiring qualifications, hourly wages and recruitment contact information. Each role includes a "needs to succeed" section that describes desired applicant characteristics like "problem solver, interest in hands on work, ability to work outside, punctuality and team work." These descriptors provide applicants a clear sense of the work and create opportunities for applicants who have learned relevant skills outside traditional classrooms or workplace settings. Philadelphia's apprenticeships start with a six-month temporary employment after which apprentices become eligible for promotion to a permanent Civil Service title. This hiring structure allows both employers and employees time to evaluate if the role, program, people and team are the right fit.

Apprenticeship Advantage

Municipalities can partner with workforce development boards, high schools and community groups to amplify funding opportunities for apprenticeships and training programs. Resources like [Apprenticeship.Gov](#) can help job seekers identify relevant apprenticeship opportunities in their communities.²⁴

In November 2022, the US Department of Labor announced the YouthBuild Program, a \$90 million funding opportunity administered by the Employment and Training Administration to support pre-apprenticeships in high-demand industries.²⁵ Grants range from \$700,000 to \$1.5 million and prioritize quality jobs, green building and community violence intervention.

Additionally, investment and commitment to career and technical education in collaboration with community colleges provides great opportunities for local workforce development. Community colleges serve a primarily local population of students who are committed to their cities and traditionally serve populations that are structurally marginalized, including: older students, students of color, parenting students, students living in poverty or working students. Developing stronger connections between community colleges and municipalities brings a greater diversity of employees into the workforce.

Community colleges already offer many certificate and technical training programs which provide shorter-term on-ramps into technical careers needed in every city such as nursing, electrical services, heating and ventilation services and the like. With the additional federal funding provided for workforce development (see page 10) colleges and communities can work together to expand these training programs to serve community workforce needs.

Cities around the country are realizing the benefits of expanding their talent pipeline by broadening recruitment pools to include non-traditional applicants like parents returning to work who have gaps in employment, retired people looking for part-time work, justice-involved people or Dreamers.²⁷ For these individuals, traditional job applications that request information about legal status, incarceration history or gaps in employment history can prove daunting. Employers

often look unfavorably on applicants with employment gaps even though most people experience voluntary or involuntary career breaks at some point in their lives due to external factors or career and lifestyle choices.²⁸ Cities can support underrepresented populations in gaining entry into the workforce by removing job application questions that present barriers and by using inclusive language on job postings, like stating applications will be evaluated on an individual basis.



“In many organizations we can count heads, but we don’t understand the makeup of our workforce. We need to better understand the full spectrum of diversity, not just race and gender.”

— DAMITA BROWN, FORMER CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER, CITY OF COLUMBUS, OH



CITY SPOTLIGHT

Application processes and American citizenship questions in Monticello, IN

The Fire Department in Monticello, IN, is the only full-time Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) department in the county and provides services to several neighboring townships and counties. Monticello firefighters must be trained paramedics and complete niche specialty certificates, like wind turbine safety, water rescue and rappelling. When a trained volunteer EMS staff had interest in a full-time firefighter role but could not complete the application because of its citizenship question, Mayor Cathy Gross reevaluated Monticello’s hiring practices. The city’s citizenship question limited the opportunities for otherwise qualified and talented applicants with Dreamer status to apply. Through conversations with the fire chief, Mayor Gross learned of the applicant’s concerns and identified the citizenship question as the only logistical barrier to full-time city employment. Mayor Gross removed the citizenship question from all future applications, allowing the city to tap into more local talent that may have been historically underrepresented in the city’s workforce. Monticello not only used the opportunity to provide employment for one talented individual, but Mayor Gross worked with various NLC committees to advocate for federal changes to local public sector hiring practices related to citizenship. Other municipalities can mirror the mayor’s success by promoting their own flexible application processes and allowing more candidates from diverse backgrounds to apply for roles for which they have the necessary skills but could experience barriers due to unnecessary application requirements.

Additionally, partnering with nonprofit organizations allows municipalities a unique opportunity to improve their hiring pools. It is important to consider additional needs underrepresented populations have when securing and maintaining employment, and collaboration with local nonprofits is one way to address these needs. Around the country, local nonprofit organizations work with specific demographic groups to support their unique needs like transportation, childcare, legal advice or housing assistance.

Municipalities can support underrepresented populations and lead by example as diverse, inclusive employers by making their application and hiring processes better accommodate a variety of life experiences. Additionally, partnerships with local community-based organizations and nonprofits can help municipalities in supporting their workers' diverse needs to ensure a committed and engaged workforce.



CITY SPOTLIGHT

Building foundations for reentry into the workforce in Seattle, WA

Seattle, WA, is pioneering a training and apprenticeship program for formerly incarcerated residents and others from underserved communities in skilled construction trades. The Prison Policy Initiative estimates the unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated individuals is approximately five times higher than the unemployment rate of the US population.^{29,30} The Brookings Institution finds that when these individuals do secure jobs they are more likely to be employed in low-paying industries that offer less job security and fewer non-wage benefits.³¹ Seattle's Trades Related Apprenticeship Coaching course is run at the Department of Corrections' two women's prisons and provides hands-on training in carpentry, iron work, construction, cement masonry and craft labor. Since 2015, Seattle's Priority Hire Program has used city-funded and private-public partnerships to hire people from "economically depressed areas" for city construction projects. Priority Hire emphasizes outreach, training, placement and retention for local people of color, women and apprenticeship graduates like justice-involved individuals.³² Through skills-based training and apprenticeship programs and priority hiring metrics, Seattle aims to reduce the unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated individuals, provide pathways for living wage jobs, and fill in-demand positions in construction and related industries.



Leverage DEIA strategies to recruit and retain workers

Beyond adjusting recruitment and hiring strategies, the use of DEIA-based retention practices may enhance workplace environments in several ways. In a recent poll of local and state government workers, 44 percent of employees reported that their workplace used DEI training as a professional development strategy.³³ NLC found that these types of programs have the potential to improve interorganizational dynamics and efficiency in service delivery.³⁴ As local demographics continue to grow and change, public servants must be equipped to understand and respond to the communities in which they work. Cities are beginning to understand the benefits of a diverse, inclusive workforce, but opportunities for further improvement remain.

In 2022, researchers found that 59 percent of state and local government employees reported workplace DEI is an important issue to their organizations. However, the majority reported no change in gender (71%) and race/ethnicity (60%) demographics since the start of the pandemic.³⁵ In 2021, researchers also found that 54 percent

of respondents reported their workforce was reflective of the community regarding gender, and 38 percent reported this was the case regarding race and ethnicity.³⁶ However, recent NLC research finds that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities are underrepresented by 7 percent in the local government workforce, with 61 percent of 828 counties in NLC's sample significantly underrepresenting BIPOC communities in the local government workforce.³⁷

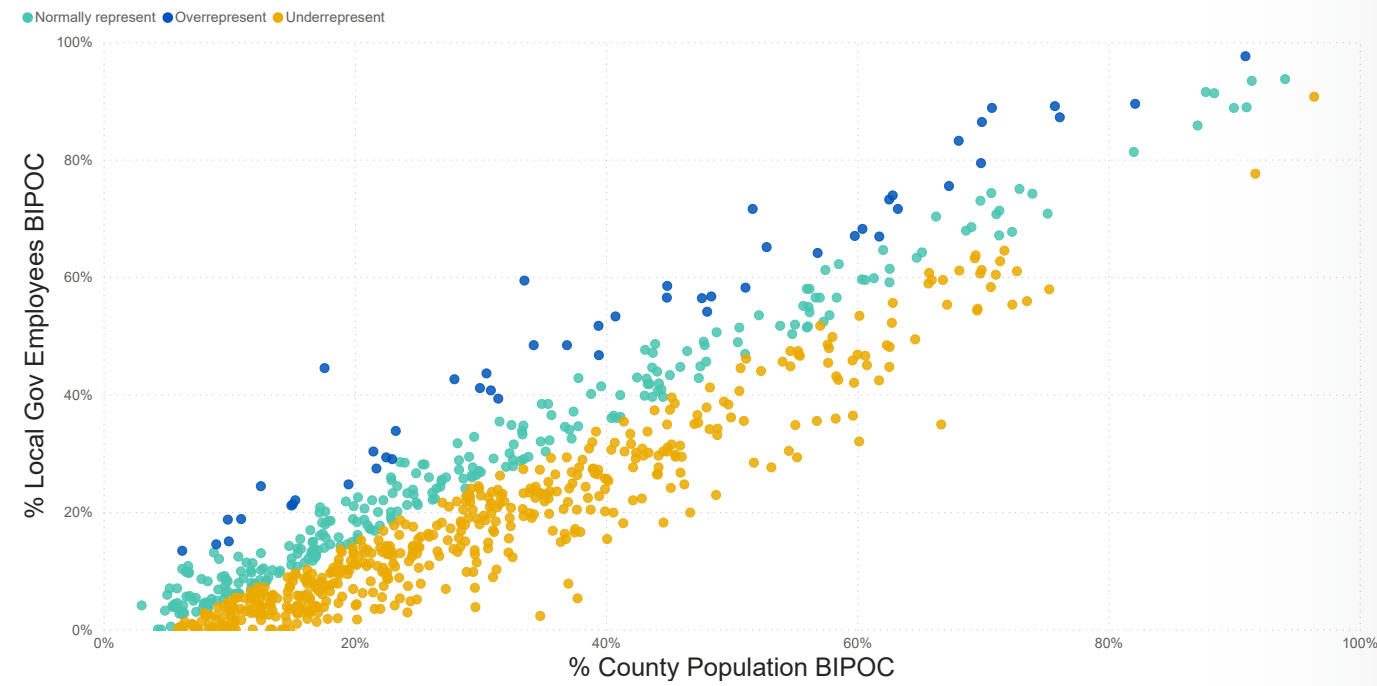
For city leaders, the first step in establishing successful DEIA strategies is to understand the diversity of their existing workforces. This requires nuanced understanding of the HR data available to city leaders and engagement with public sector employees who represent a variety of individual identities. Perceptions of DEIA's importance as a retention and recruitment strategy are essential, but city leaders need to do more to ensure their workplace reflects their organization's values, commitment to DEIA and the demographic characteristics of the residents they serve.



44%

of employees reported that their workplace used DEI training as a professional development strategy.

Figure 4: Most local governments underrepresent BIPOC people in their workforces



Source: Gottlieb, J., Bauer, J., & Anthony, N. (2022). Improving municipal service delivery through diverse and equitable hiring. National League of Cities. <https://www.nlc.org/resource/improving-municipal-service-delivery-through-diverse-and-equitable-hiring/>

Public sector workforces can benefit from initiatives that incorporate principles of DEIA throughout their employment processes. NLC identified recommendations in a previous report on the ways DEIA can improve the delivery of services by:³⁸

- Advancing DEIA through a designated department and staff
- Ensuring diverse candidates apply for local government positions
- Being transparent about workforce data and trends
- Considering DEIA in compensation and employee benefits
- Looking for insights from employees of color

Supporting employee affinity and resource groups is another strategy to retain personnel from underrepresented backgrounds. Employee affinity groups offer member employees support both professionally and socially by creating connections between individuals with similar backgrounds, a space to voice unique concerns and momentum to drive organization-wide change. While the private sector has demonstrated the benefits of employee affinity groups, public sector efficacy requires more study.³⁹ By building community within the workplace, employees may feel more confident raising identity-related concerns and creating mechanisms within the workplace rather than exiting the organization altogether. Despite these demonstrated benefits, currently only 9 percent of employees report having employee affinity groups available in their organization.⁴⁰



Collect and understand your workforce data

Former Chief Diversity Officer Damita R. Brown of Columbus, OH, led Mayor Andrew Ginther’s [Office of Diversity and Inclusion \(ODI\)](#).⁴¹ According to Brown, establishing diversity, equity and inclusion was a top priority and Ginther’s “first act as mayor.” Under Brown’s leadership, ODI developed objectives in favor of workforce and supplier diversity. Each of these objectives sought to help achieve the mayor’s vision of Columbus being “America’s Equal Opportunity City.”

The city started by launching a citywide workforce data collection project accompanied by a [dashboard](#) evaluating workforce demographics like sex, race and ethnicity.⁴² ODI also collects DEIA information from payroll data but shared plans to leverage a Human Resources Information System platform where employees can update their compensation details to improve data accuracy and help inform policy change and decision making.

Strategic recruitment and retention efforts have been central to ODI’s workforce diversity development plan. Columbus has worked with Ohio’s historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), local high schools and not-for-profits to be more intentional in its search for more diverse talent. Furthermore, in 2021 the city released a [comprehensive DEI plan](#) detailing its intent to build capacity for municipal workforce programs that better reflect trends among more understudied demographics including LGBTQ+ employees and employees with disabilities.⁴³



PATHWAYS FOR SKILLS AND ADVANCEMENT

Local governments, like all employers, have the opportunity to invest in their staffs to improve their skills, advance their specialized knowledge and increase organizational performance. By investing in staff early on, local governments can better equip themselves to fill future jobs that require further training and expertise. This saves departments time and money needed to recruit applicants, train new hires, enhance their productivity and build team morale. Gallup estimates the cost of replacing an individual employee ranges from one half to two times the employee’s annual salary.⁴⁴ Additionally, investing in staff can lead to increased interest in working for local government compared to other sectors and competing employers.



Rethink certification and training requirements

Many municipal positions require technical training and certification for public service delivery, but existing curricula fail to produce well-qualified candidates in a timely fashion to meet employment needs. According to BLS data, local government has a higher share of occupations (61.1%) typically requiring post-secondary education compared to private sector employment (34.1%).⁴⁵ These hiring requirements may hinder public sector employers’ ability to attract talented candidates who do not hold degree-level certifications. This is not only a hiring issue, but an equity issue as well. While degree attainment for Latino/a and Black students is increasing, a racial gap in degree attainment persists.⁴⁶ College degrees alone insufficiently account for public sector workforce qualifications during the hiring process.

Cities are implementing in-house training curricula and partnering with workforce development organizations to ensure their employees have the skills they need to effectively serve their communities. According to MissionSquare Research, in the last year 31 percent of public sector respondents reported they updated job specifications for minimum education and skills requirements. To ensure employees are well-trained, 72 percent of respondents report offering reimbursements for training (including college tuition coverage) and 62 percent of public sector employers offer in-house training. By assessing existing training programs and developing alternatives that meet local community needs, city officials can create tailored curricula that produce well-trained employees to fill their workforce needs.

Occupations typically requiring post-secondary education



Local government

61.1%



Private sector

34.1%




Design skills-based curricula

City leaders provide training courses for a variety of positions, including hard-to-fill roles like dispatch, police, information technology and building permitting and inspections. Many of these skills are best taught on the job through hands-on learning and mentorship opportunities. Cities already conduct training for positions like public safety officers, including police and firefighters, which provide career pathways for entry-level jobseekers and mid-career professionals alike. Modeling hiring practices on existing programs where candidates are hired based on interest and willingness to learn new skills paired with skills-based training curricula can ensure cities fill in-demand jobs with individuals well-equipped to carry out their roles.

NLC University (NLCU) is a collaborative executive education and leadership development initiative that provides municipal leaders with research-backed strategies to better govern, serve and advocate for their communities.

Redesigning skills-based training curricula begins by understanding what technical and “soft skills” municipal employees need and developing them through classroom lessons and practical exercises that mirror situations employees will face on the job. For instance, the City of Cincinnati’s Code Inspectors program will teach trainees the fundamentals of building construction and local laws and regulations in the classroom before meeting with local firefighters to understand the safety implications of their work and shadowing inspectors conducting building inspections. Beyond the technical skills inspectors need to assess building safety and permitting, trainees will learn effective communication strategies and conflict resolution skills they will need in their public-facing roles. The City of Greensboro’s GSO Speaks participants Zoom with a Spanish language instructor, practice job-specific phrases, then practice their language skills at local Latinx grocery stores and community events. Not only do employees see the impact of their skills in practice, but they also use their knowledge to develop deeper ties with local residents they will serve in their public sector roles.



Redesigning skills-based training begins with understanding what technical and soft skills are necessary for each position.



Developing technical roles: Skills-based curricula in Cincinnati, OH

In Ohio, the City of Cincinnati's Department of Buildings and Inspections faced a significant shortage of code inspectors, 50 percent annual turnover of existing roles and difficulty recruiting new candidates, particularly younger individuals. The city could not compete with the private construction industry, which offered a greater variety of assignments and entry-level positions. The department was especially constrained by state regulations requiring applicants to have a minimum of five years of work experience in the construction industry and meet minimum training criteria for building inspectors, which requires five years to achieve certification.

Cincinnati's Code Enforcement Workforce Development Program aims to attract new talent (particularly from the communities where Inspections officials work), provide technical and interpersonal training required for certification, and develop a career ladder for jobs in the public sector construction industry. To implement the program, Cincinnati's Department of Buildings and Inspections Director Art Dahlberg needed to:

- **Rethink certification and training requirements:** Cincinnati officials realized the existing state program was not delivering enough trained code inspectors as quickly as they needed. The Director appealed to

the State Board of Building Standards to reduce the hiring qualifications for program participants and the minimum training requirements to one year.

- **Secure funding for programmatic training materials:** Participants are hired as trainees with salaries funded by the city. A one percent permitting fee provides \$100,000-\$150,000 a year to fund training materials and curriculum development.
- **Design curriculum:** The program's 48-week curriculum combines 24 weeks of classroom learning with 24 weeks of on-site active group learning where participants shadow certified inspectors.
- **Form partnerships to create a talent pipeline:** By partnering with a local technical high school, nonprofits and the Urban League, the program hopes to attract students from various backgrounds. The program provides participants with the opportunity to earn as much as \$70,000 within five years of graduating high school. The "non-competitive career ladder" structure provides participants with skills needed for entry-level positions, after which incremental modules will allow career progression based on employee interest.

- **Evaluate efficacy:** Still in its early days, the Code Enforcement Workforce Development program hopes to begin hiring trainees soon with the aim of onboarding 7-15 new employees each year. The city will track job vacancy rates, annual employee turnover and number of inspections completed as primary metrics for evaluation. The primary "return on investment" will be a more diverse, well-trained workforce that better serves the Cincinnati community.

Cincinnati officials are confident the program will:

- **Increase workforce diversity** by attracting incoming talent through multiple and varied outreach efforts.
- **Improve resident trust** by increasing staff representation from neighborhoods the department regularly serves.
- **Enhance municipal service delivery** by improving workforce training through hands-on learning experiences as well as interpersonal communication skill-building.
- **Develop a greater sense of commitment** among public code inspectors to the communities they serve and the various career prospects the city offers.



SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES THROUGH INTENTIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Across all municipalities, public sector retention strategies must look beyond compensation and wages to intentionally consider their employees' needs in and outside of the workplace. Cities can support employees inside the workplace by implementing human-centered design principles and using inclusive, people-centric language to engage employees, ask for feedback and design workplace policies that support everyone. To support employees outside of work, municipalities can provide wraparound services like transit benefits

and childcare, non-wage benefits that make public sector roles more attractive and improve work-life balance. Cities can also partner with local non-profits to provide access to these supports. The pandemic elevated awareness of mental health services and the importance of supporting employee well-being both in the office and at home. Municipal employers have an opportunity to contribute to their employees' livelihoods and well-being by placing people at the center of intentional policies and programs while providing wraparound services.



Ensure policies are human-centered and responsive

Human-centered design (HCD) provides organizations with a framework for placing people first in their work and policies. From a program implementation perspective, an HCD framework can provide clear, people-centered language throughout a policy or program. From an HR perspective, an HCD framework can include updating roles and titles to more accurately aligned positions with the people to whom they provide services, resulting in people at the center of all work. Cities can demonstrate this core commitment by rethinking job titles or changing Human Resources Officer to Chief People Officer, for instance.⁴⁷

Beyond using people-centered language, incorporating HCD into policies allows local leaders to learn more about the individuals that could directly benefit or be impacted by a local government policy, program or service. By conducting interviews, focus groups or even testing a program prior to its implementation, local leaders can learn a lot about the individuals and communities receiving the services they provide. After receiving community input, local leaders should work to incorporate feedback and update the design to better support its selected audience. Receiving community feedback also allows opportunities for a program's implementation to incorporate data about how individuals interact with the program.⁴⁸

Building capacity for human-centered digital services

Kirsten Wyatt, Beeck Center Fellow at the [Digital Services Network](#) (DSN), finds that municipalities have a unique opportunity to consider their future residents' needs and current workforce gaps when developing new roles and attracting talent. DSN at the Beeck Center for Social Impact & Innovation is an evolving program providing municipal digital service (DS) teams with research and technical assistance to enhance these services at the local level. To support local leaders in their development of DS teams, DSN developed an "artifact library" where localities can search for relevant job descriptions, helping them identify the types of roles needed to establish a DS team while also accurately describing these newer roles to applicants. Joining DSN provides local leaders an opportunity to learn from peers and implement new strategies for successful DS implementation.

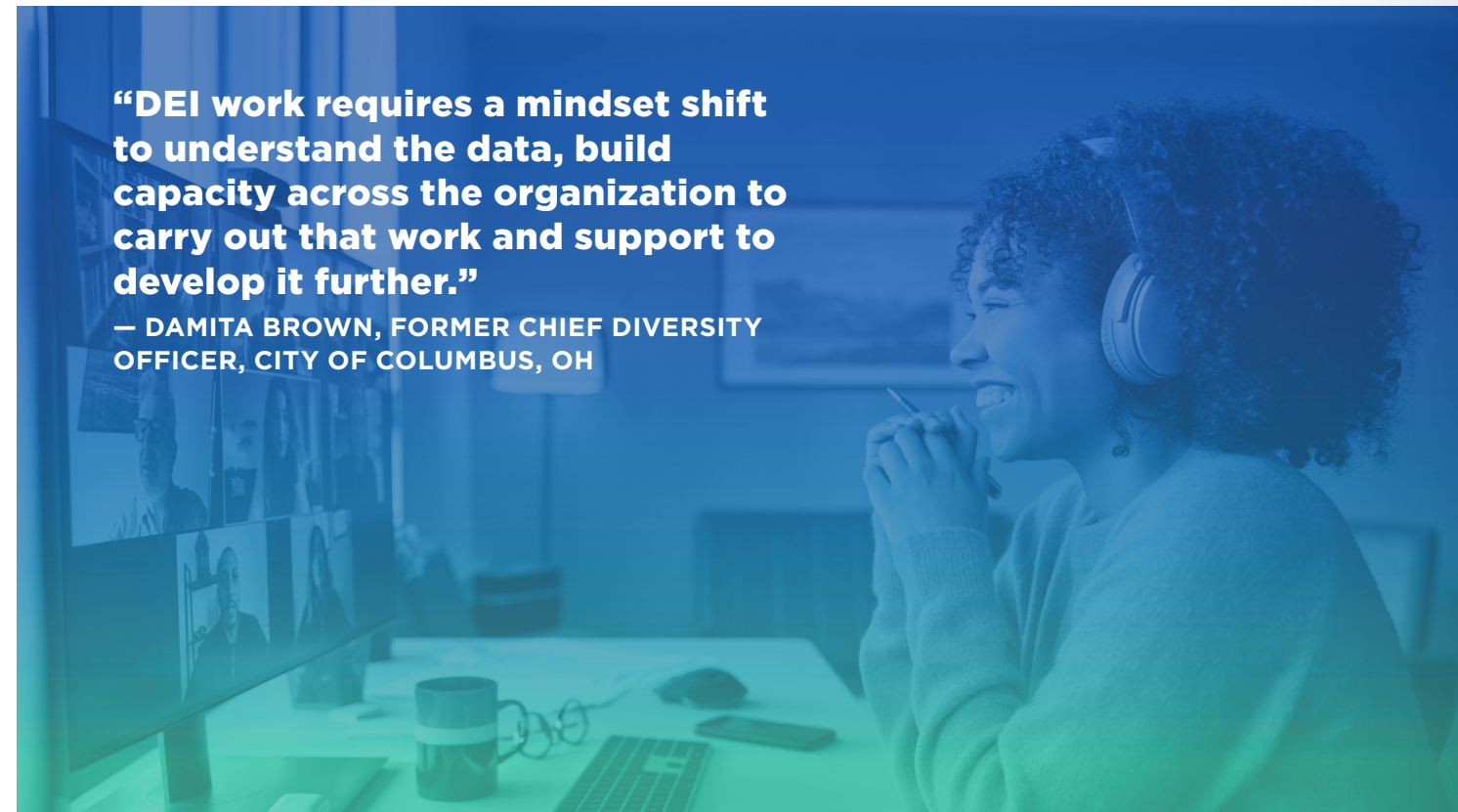
Steps to incorporate HCD into future policies, whether public facing or internal, can include:⁴⁹

- Determining the people impacted and the plan for receiving their feedback
- Defining program success
- Scoping the tools available for the program's design and implementation
- Incorporating feedback into the policy and its delivery

Overall, HCD frameworks in local governments can lead to improved organizational and community cultures as it encourages staff to consider problems from the viewpoints of their community members, or the people receiving the government's services.⁵⁰ From an internal perspective, HCD implementation can allow HR departments to better understand the policies impacting their workforces and update them based on what current employees want or need to better perform in their roles.

“DEI work requires a mindset shift to understand the data, build capacity across the organization to carry out that work and support to develop it further.”

— DAMITA BROWN, FORMER CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER, CITY OF COLUMBUS, OH



CITY SPOTLIGHT

HCD in practice: Communication and workforce strategy in Boston, MA

The City of Boston, MA, seeks to “be the organization they want other people to build” by leading through example as a people-centered organization and revising the city’s approach to workforce development policy. The city recently appointed its first-ever Chief People Officer, Alex Lawrence, whose work falls under three primary categories:

- **Documenting and communicating the current state of workforce diversity through accurate data collection and transparency**
- **Devising workforce strategies, especially those that are creative and experimental but include thoughtful considerations of how success is measured**
- **Ensuring work is human-centered and responsive by using plain-language to communicate policies and conducting user research on barriers to accessing public services and employment**

Revising workforce strategy

To accomplish this work, the City of Boston is clarifying the roles and responsibilities of staff. By hiring the first Chief People Officer, Boston hopes to shift the focus of workforce development issues from a finance-driven budgeting role to one that emphasizes clear communication, iterative learning and people-centered design. The city will soon hire a Director of Diversity who will work to increase representation in the workforce. These titles are intentional for each role and the city hopes that they will help define each role’s scope of work accurately. The city plans to use these improved role descriptions to fill positions in its Equity Cabinet to oversee policies on equity, inclusion and accessibility. The Director of Workforce Strategy role will be to use city data and its diversity dashboard to assess the representativeness of the city’s public workforce. Lastly, Boston is hiring two internal project managers to ensure projects and workforce development initiatives are successfully carried out and monitored from early design phase through to their eventual impacts.

Placing people at the center of policy communication

To implement HCD into its HR practices, the City of Boston, MA, distilled jargon-heavy language in policies and rewrote them in clear, direct language for all employees to understand. Through cross-team collaboration and feedback, the city carefully and thoughtfully redesigned content in the policies to increase readability and help readers understand the new policies through updated design and infographics. For Chief People Officer Alex Lawrence, the challenge was “taking all the incredible benefits and wealth-building opportunities of well-paying jobs that matter to people and are pathways to economic success and making sure they were clearly communicated in their job descriptions.”



Develop creative pilot projects for wraparound services and nontraditional benefits

As local governments continue to experience recruitment and retention issues, offering additional benefits through wraparound services can provide an additional draw for many candidates, especially those transferring from the private or nonprofit sectors. Wraparound services acknowledge the human demands of employees, including their needs and life outside of work, such as family obligations and personal interests. Recent research found that roughly half of people who quit their jobs in 2021 cited access to benefits like childcare as a reason for quitting.⁵¹ By putting workers at the forefront, municipalities are in a unique position to potentially provide additional benefits and attract new workers.⁵²

In 2017 the City of Pittsburgh, PA, began providing free childcare to city workers when the city's public schools are closed but the city offices are still open, which occurs 15 days out of the year. Additionally, during certain community meetings, the city will provide childcare for residents and meeting attendees.⁵³ These types of services can allow certain individuals who typically might not be able

to attend a meeting the opportunity to be civically engaged, including people who are single parents, low-income, working and more.

Other benefits that may interest local workers include access to subsidized public transportation, pathways to citizenship and more. The City of Boston, MA, is working to provide public transit benefits to city employees to connect their workforce development strategies with broader equity and environmental goals. An employee resource group launched a pilot project making Boston Blue Bikes free for all public employees and provided the data to city leadership. The pilot's success prompted the city to design a pilot study with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to test the efficacy of free public transit options for employees. The city will evaluate the program's success using pre- and post-survey responses from participants to determine if this is a feasible long-term benefit for its employees. Test piloting new benefit programs is a good way to determine what employees want from their employers based on their current needs.



CITY SPOTLIGHT

Wraparound services: Supporting workers with children in Monticello, IN

Mayor Cathy Gross of Monticello, IN, emphasized the unique circumstances facing its rural community, including limited access to childcare, mental health services, emergency services, affordable workforce housing and more. Mayor Gross continues to make strides in advancing Monticello's public sector workforce policies to increase employee retention and attract unique talent through enhanced childcare benefits.

Since 2021, Monticello, IN, and other neighboring communities have worked to address growing regional concerns about increased childcare costs and limited access to childcare providers. Through funding from Indiana's Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) grant, Monticello and its surrounding counties formed a partnership to address these growing childcare needs. This initiative will focus on adding 70 "seats" in White County through licensure and training opportunities. Local childcare providers also expressed that the greatest barrier to childcare is the onerous costs of buildings, especially rent and utilities. Providers facing these high costs had to charge high service rates and could not pay employees a living wage.

To address this issue, the city hopes to partner with local entities to identify potential vacant buildings that could house childcare providers and develop business plans that could cover costs for the first few years of operations. In an era where downtown buildings in many cities sit empty due to increased remote work, cities like Monticello have unique opportunities to address this issue. With this funding plan, childcare providers will be able to decrease the rates they charge participating families while increasing their workers' pay. To specifically address the needs of their local public sector workforce, the partners are considering a membership payment option for municipal employees. This will allow the city's employees to know their childcare costs a year in advance while benefitting from reduced bundled rates. Once the childcare providers have stable participation and an established business model, the city expects they will be completely financially sufficient while maintaining their more affordable rates and membership opportunities. By providing these opportunities, the mayor hopes to attract more workers to the city and its childcare facilities, including veterans, low-income individuals, women and more.



Support employee mental health and well-being

An employee's mental health and well-being should be a top priority for public sector employers, especially as they work to recruit and retain talent. Mental health is a major issue as 52 percent of US workers reported experiencing stressful feelings during the majority of the day.⁵⁴ Although the reasons for stress may vary, research found that 84 percent of employees are anxious about their personal financial security because of current economic conditions and market volatility.⁵⁵ This anxiety leads to concerns about an employee's ability to live comfortably in retirement (81%), retire when they plan to (72%) or cover current emergency expenses (70%).⁵⁶ Although these issues concern the majority of public sector employees, only 41 percent of state and local human resource directors find that their employees are financially prepared for retirement.⁵⁷ Overall, poor mental health can negatively impact an individual's:⁵⁸

- Job performance and productivity
- Work engagement
- Communication with coworkers

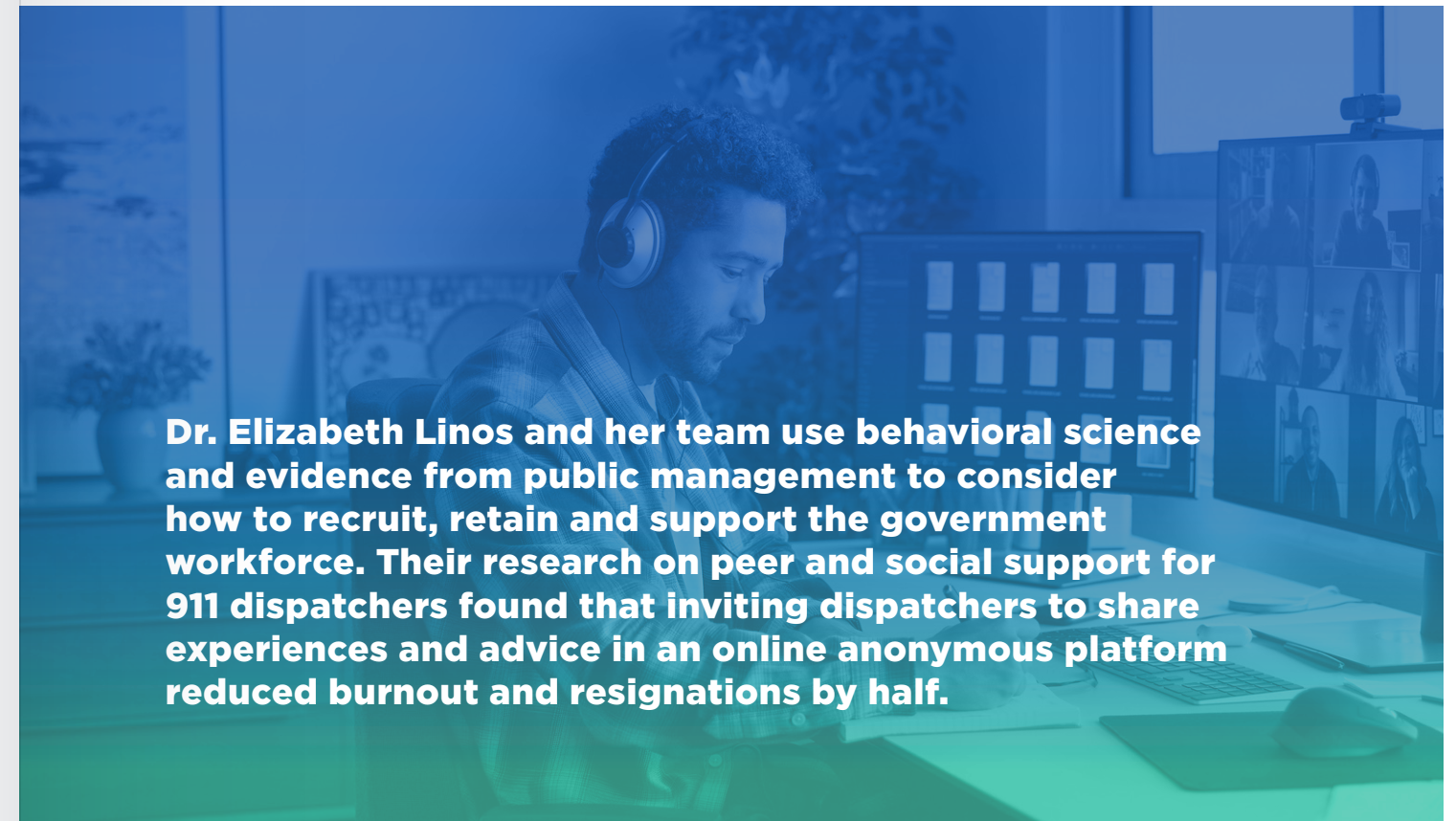
Providing services to prevent and limit these stressors in the workplace can make local governments a more attractive place to work. Local governments can assist employees with access to mental health services by providing them as a benefit, whether that be through stipends for seeking professional mental health

services, covering the costs through insurance, providing on-site mental health professionals, incorporating it into an anonymous onboarding process, or through other measures. These services can even be provided to individuals working in highly stressful fields like those in public safety or social work roles. To support those experiencing physical and physiological trauma, the City of Springfield, OR, started an Employee Assistance Program in its police department to support the mental health and well-being of its officers.⁵⁹ These types of programs can help ensure individuals are getting the help they need, especially those in distressing roles, going through difficult personal situations, or needing help managing the day-to-day stressors.

For Monticello, IN, access to mental health services is limited because of its rural location. High costs and stigma have historically reduced the number of individuals seeking treatment in the area. Like many municipal leaders, Mayor Gross wanted to find additional ways to support city employees in roles that tend to experience trauma on a regular basis, like those in public safety. To further support these employees, the city partnered with a neighboring mental health organization to provide them with trauma-informed care. Through this partnership, the city plans to have public safety employees meet with their assigned mental health provider as

part of their onboarding process. The city and mental health organization hope to decrease the stigma around seeking support by developing these relationships before a traumatic event occurs. Even though the city has not yet implemented this onboarding initiative, the mental health organization has successfully reached over 60 percent of the city's public safety personnel via call or text within the past two years. The mayor hopes

that continued access to and promotion of these services will reduce work-related stress and trauma for all municipal employees. For employees not in roles regularly experiencing trauma, Monticello partnered with Accelerate Indiana Municipalities (AIM) — the state's municipal league — to provide insurance to city employees, which has reduced their mental health service rates and made seeking professional support more affordable.



Dr. Elizabeth Linos and her team use behavioral science and evidence from public management to consider how to recruit, retain and support the government workforce. Their research on peer and social support for 911 dispatchers found that inviting dispatchers to share experiences and advice in an online anonymous platform reduced burnout and resignations by half.

CONCLUSION

Many cities face similar constraints on their ability to hire and retain qualified public sector employees including competition for wages and advancement opportunities in the private sector, an aging workforce and increased employee desire for workplace flexibility. Despite the nuanced challenges facing local workforce employment, and geographic and demographic differences between cities, several key themes emerged.

City leaders stressed the importance of **centering values and aligning policy** behind shared goals for inclusion, diversity and a commitment to “growing their own” talented workforce from within. For cities, clearly articulating their shared values and organizational priorities provides clarity for employees and jobseekers, and allows “bottom up” innovation and programs to emerge in alignment with those values. People are local governments’ most important resources. Establishing a culture of coaching and investing in your local government workforce can improve organizational culture and performance as well as support employee retention. Greensboro, NC, committed to “growing their own” through their GSO Speaks and G-School initiatives designed to connect municipal employees to opportunities within other departments and programs for advancement.

In addition to workforce challenges and the need to attract and retain talent, cities today are increasingly tasked with managing interconnected, complex challenges like mitigating climate change, promoting social inclusion and ensuring public safety. By **considering the dual impact of equitable, inclusive hiring practices, cities can lead by example** and contribute innovative solutions to multiple goals. For instance, Boston’s Urban Forest Plan aims to build the city’s tree workforce.⁶⁰ Seattle’s apprenticeships for formerly incarcerated individuals provide employment pathways, reduce recidivism and unemployment, and make the city safer for all. Cincinnati’s code inspectors program aims to train inspectors in building code enforcement and enhance community engagement strategies. The public sector workforce not only provides employment for jobseekers but is also a functional tool leaders can utilize to advance wide-ranging policy initiatives.

Complex strategies for workforce development are best managed by **assigning leaders** to their own initiatives, projects, monitoring and evaluation. Sometimes this leadership comes “from the top” such as in Boston, where Chief People Officer Alex Lawrence is involved in coordinating policy and hiring targets, or in Columbus, where former Chief Diversity Officer Damita Brown oversaw the Office

of Diversity and Inclusion’s data dashboard and diversity audit. In other cases, such as Cincinnati, innovative officials with on-the-ground experience like Director of Buildings and Inspections Art Dahlberg took the lead coordinating with state officials to re-energize the city’s building inspector curriculum.

Advancing workforce development initiatives must always begin with **in-depth understanding of existing skills and assessing what roles are needed** to accomplish citywide goals. Columbus’ DEIA strategy began with an audit of existing employees and surveys to understand how the city could better support its employees. The Beeck Center’s Digital Service Network seeks to support cities’ ability to deliver accurate, detailed job postings to fill roles they need.

Placing interdepartmental coordination and collaboration at the center of hiring and retention initiatives ensures the skills and roles needed match the needs of all of the city’s workforce. In Greensboro, NC, Organizational Effectiveness and Development Supervisor Katie Croft highlighted how her team’s structure helped with outreach to a wide range of city offices, and how the G-School program increased visibility of the work other departments were doing that could be tailored to other workstreams. Through cross-

departmental collaboration, local governments will be more likely to create workforce development opportunities like GSO Speaks that connect to improved service delivery.

In today’s economic climate, workers are looking for jobs that provide livable wages, in-demand skills training and career advancement. City leaders who invest in workforce training should **clearly connect workforce development to advancement opportunities** within current roles and the municipal workforce at large. Attaching promotional opportunities or financial benefits to internal workforce development initiatives will increase program participation and post-program employee retention. It is important to clearly communicate these opportunities to staff. For instance, the Cincinnati Code Inspector’s Training program builds relationships with local high schools and community colleges to demonstrate the long-term career opportunities for program participants. Greensboro takes account of GSO Speaks language training in employee compensation reviews. When employees dedicate their time and energy to gaining skills, they need to know that their efforts will be recognized. By building clearly articulated pathways for advancement, cities can attract interested individuals and demonstrate their commitment to their employees.

This Action Guide details many strategies available to local leaders as they compete for talented workers, provide better services to their communities and enhance the workplace for all municipal workers. By transforming workforce development from a supplementary objective to a core principle of their organizations, cities can better articulate the value of the public sector profession, support their employees and better meet the needs of all residents.

INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

To understand the current nature of municipal workforce practices, NLC researchers conducted interviews with local leaders and workforce development practitioners. Researchers conducted nine interviews in total, five with local leaders and four with workforce development practitioners, between October 13, 2022, and December 12, 2022. Interviewees represent a range of technical and thematic backgrounds in the public sector, including Chief People Officers, Human Resources Directors, DEIA hiring representatives, digital service providers and building inspectors.

The authors would like to acknowledge and thank the following interviewees for their contributions to this research:

Municipal leaders:

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Damita Brown

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Kirsten Wyatt

*Digital Services Center Fellow
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