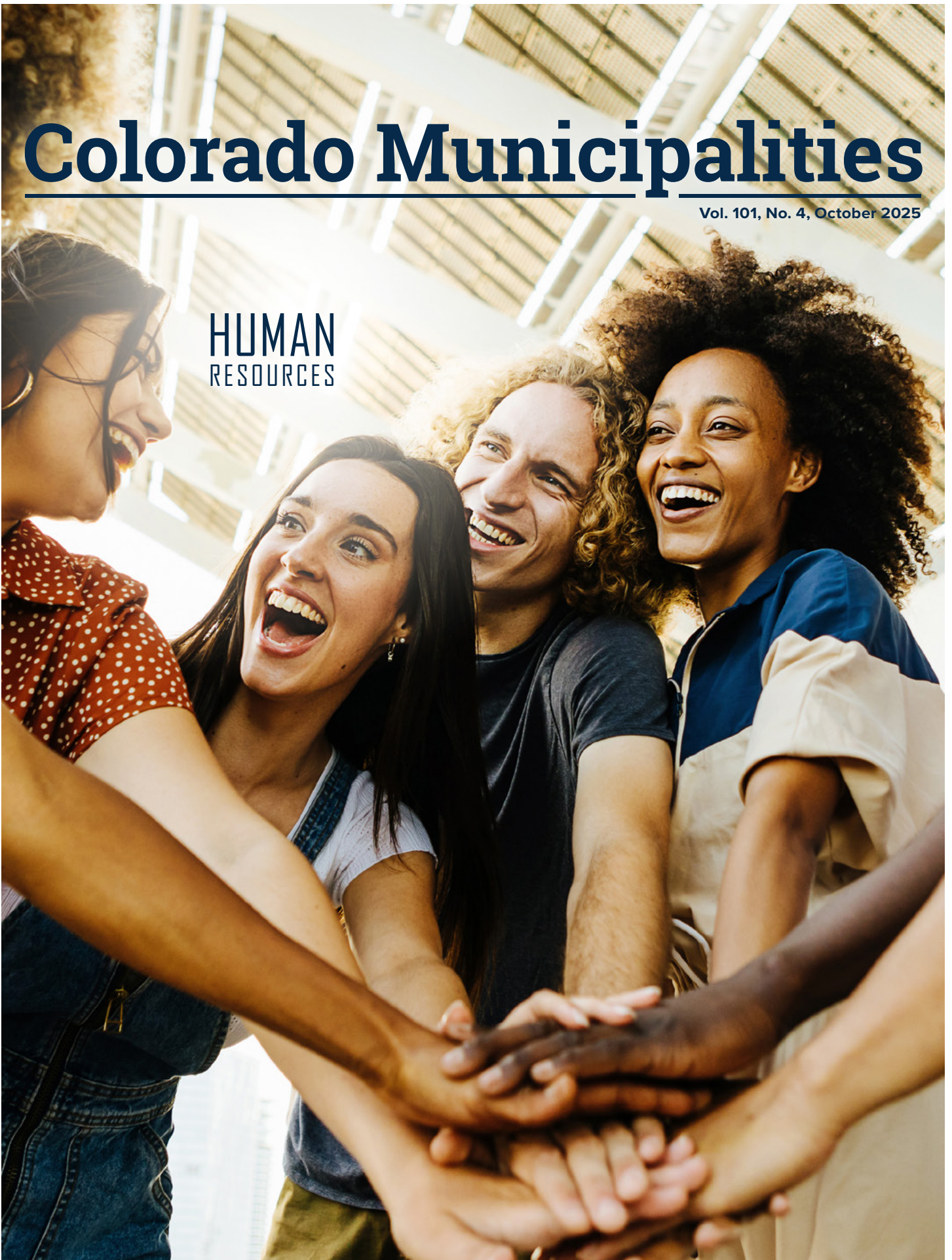


# Colorado Municipalities

Vol. 101, No. 4, October 2025

HUMAN  
RESOURCES







**“Set the stage  
for success, then step  
back and let  
the magic happen.”**

**— Amber Moreno,  
Town of Parker human  
resources director**



**COLORADO  
MUNICIPAL  
LEAGUE**

# ABOUT SOME OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**KEVIN BOMMER** IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE, WHERE HE HAS SERVED ON STAFF SINCE 1999. HE WAS APPOINTED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR IN APRIL 2019 AND REPORTS TO THE LEAGUE’S 21-MEMBER EXECUTIVE BOARD. OVER MORE THAN TWO DECADES WITH CML, KEVIN HAS HELD MULTIPLE LEADERSHIP ROLES, INCLUDING DEPUTY DIRECTOR, LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY MANAGER, AND LOBBYIST. FROM 2000-2019, HE PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN SHAPING AND LEADING THE LEAGUE’S STATE LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY PROGRAM AND HELPED GUIDE THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CML’S STRATEGIC PLAN. IN 2024, HE WAS HONORED WITH THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES’ JOHN G. STUTZ AWARD, RECOGNIZING 25 YEARS OF SERVICE TO MUNICIPALITIES THROUGH CML.



**MEGAN BURNS** IS A NORTHGLENN CITY COUNCILMEMBER AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIST WHO BRINGS A CREATIVE, COMMUNITY-FIRST APPROACH TO PUBLIC SERVICE. WITH A BACKGROUND IN DIGITAL MARKETING AND BRANDING, SHE’S SPENT OVER A DECADE HELPING BRANDS, NONPROFITS, AND INSTITUTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION BUILD CAMPAIGNS AND STRATEGIES THAT DRIVE ENGAGEMENT AND INSPIRE ACTION. ON COUNCIL, MEGAN CHAMPIONS COMMUNITY AND PEOPLE-FIRST POLICIES. SHE BELIEVES LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD REFLECT AND SERVE THE COMMUNITIES IT REPRESENTS. WHETHER IN A COUNCIL MEETING OR CREATIVE BRAINSTORM, MEGAN USES STORYTELLING TO BUILD TRUST, SHIFT NARRATIVES, AND FIGHT FOR A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE.



**TAMARA DIXON** IS THE HR DIRECTOR AND CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER FOR THE CITY OF NORTHGLENN. SHE HAS SPENT HER TWENTY-PLUS YEAR PUBLIC SERVICE CAREER WORKING FOR THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER, CITY OF LONE TREE, CITY OF WHEAT RIDGE, TOWN OF PARKER, AND AS AN ADJUNCT PROFESSOR FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT DENVER. TAMARA’S AREAS OF EXPERTISE INCLUDE CULTURE CHANGE INITIATIVES, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP TRAINING, STRATEGIC PLANNING, AND RETREAT FACILITATION. TAMARA IS A GALLUP CERTIFIED STRENGTHS COACH. SHE IS PAST-PRESIDENT OF THE WESTERN REGION OF PSHRA AND WILL CONCLUDE HER SECOND THREE-YEAR TERM ON THE PSHRA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IN DECEMBER.



**MAX DUCHOW** IS A LAW CLERK AT MONTGOMERY LITTLE & SORAN AND A THIRD-YEAR LAW STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER STURM COLLEGE OF LAW. ORIGINALLY FROM WISCONSIN, HE SERVES ON THE DENVER JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND POLICY AND FOCUSES HIS LEGAL INTERESTS ON CORPORATE, COMMERCIAL, AND REAL ESTATE LAW, INCLUDING THE INTERSECTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND WORKPLACE PRACTICES. HE ALSO HAS EXPERIENCE WORKING IN SPORTS LAW AND GENERAL CIVIL LITIGATION.



**BRITTANY DVORAK** SERVES AS DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE FOR THE TOWN OF FREDERICK, WHERE SHE LEADS HR STRATEGY WITH A BOLD, BUSINESS-MINDED APPROACH. WITH OVER 12 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN HUMAN RESOURCES, SHE’S KNOWN FOR HER “LIFT AND SHIFT” METHODOLOGY, TRANSFORMING UNDERDEVELOPED HR FUNCTIONS INTO HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIC PARTNERS THAT DRIVE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE, WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT, AND CULTURAL CREDIBILITY. HER FOCUS IS ON DOING HR DIFFERENTLY: FUTURE-FOCUSED, DATA-INFORMED, AND OPERATIONALLY INTEGRATED. RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF DENVER’S TOP THREE HR PROFESSIONALS IN 2023 BY MILE HIGH SHRM, BRITTANY IS PASSIONATE ABOUT BUILDING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY, RETHINKING TRADITIONAL HR MODELS, AND CREATING PEOPLE STRATEGIES THAT ACTUALLY MOVE THE NEEDLE.



**ELIZABETH HASKELL** IS A CML LEGISLATIVE & POLICY ADVOCATE. ELIZABETH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ADVOCATING MUNICIPAL INTERESTS BEFORE THE STATE LEGISLATURE. HER ISSUES INCLUDE BEER AND LIQUOR, EMPLOYMENT & LABOR, RETIREMENT/PENSIONS, TAXATION AND FISCAL POLICY, LOTTERY AND GAMING, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, MUNICIPAL DEBT AND FINANCE, AND PURCHASING. SHE ALSO ASSISTS IN TRAINING AND ANSWERING INQUIRIES FOR OTHER MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS ON VARIOUS TOPICS. ELIZABETH JOINED CML IN OCTOBER 2023.



**SETH HOFFMAN** IS PRESIDENT OF THE COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE EXECUTIVE BOARD. SETH IS CITY MANAGER OF THE CITY OF LONE TREE AND HAS SERVED IN VARIOUS ROLES AT THE CITY SINCE 2005, INCLUDING DEPUTY CITY MANAGER AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR. DURING THIS TIME, HE CONDUCTED SUCCESSFUL EXPANSION, RETENTION AND RELOCATION NEGOTIATIONS ON A LARGE NUMBER OF HIGH-PROFILE PROJECTS, AND HE FACILITATES THE WORK OF THE CITY COUNCIL BY IMPLEMENTING ALL ELEMENTS OF ITS GOALS AND POLICIES. PRIOR TO JOINING LONE TREE, HOFFMAN WORKED AT THE CITY OF GRAND JUNCTION.



**SAMANTHA LAUBHAN** IS HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER FOR THE CITY OF GOLDEN, WHERE SHE HAS SERVED FOR SIX YEARS. AFTER HER SIGNIFICANT TENURE IN PRIVATE SECTOR HR, SHE HAS VALUED HER TIME IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND ITS MEANINGFUL CONNECTION TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. SHE IS DUAL CERTIFIED AS A SENIOR PROFESSIONAL IN HUMAN RESOURCES THROUGH BOTH THE HUMAN RESOURCES CERTIFICATION INSTITUTE AND THE SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. PASSIONATE ABOUT ADVANCING ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS, SAMANTHA ADVOCATES FOR INNOVATIVE, PEOPLE-CENTERED PRACTICES THAT STRENGTHEN THE WORKPLACE AND CHALLENGE OUTDATED PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT. A COLORADO NATIVE, SAMANTHA BALANCES HER PASSION FOR HR WITH HER LOVE OF HORSES — SHE IS AN AVID EQUESTRIAN WHO LIVES IN ARVADA WITH HER HUSBAND AND HORSE.



**LAWRENCE LEE** IS A 29-YEAR PRACTITIONER AS WELL AS PARTNER AND EMPLOYMENT LAW ATTORNEY FOR MONTGOMERY LITTLE SORAN IN GREENWOOD VILLAGE, COLORADO. LARRY’S CLIENTS INCLUDE BUSINESS OWNERS, BOARDS, EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT, AND PUBLIC ENTITIES. HE HAS SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED PUBLIC ENTITIES AND PRIVATE SECTOR CLIENTS IN FEDERAL AND STATE TRIALS AS WELL AS ARBITRATIONS, THE TENTH CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS, AND AS AN ADMITTED MEMBER OF THE U.S. SUPREME COURT BAR, ON A WIDE RANGE OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT AS WELL AS CIVIL RIGHTS LAW ISSUES.



**MAEVE MCHUGH** IS CML’S MUNICIPAL RESEARCH ANALYST. SHE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RESEARCHING AND CONDUCTING SURVEYS AND LEVERAGING THAT DATA TO SUPPORT COLORADO’S MUNICIPALITIES, HELPING TO SHAPE POLICIES THAT DRIVE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH. SHE HAS WORKED WITH THE CITY OF AUSTIN’S SMART MOBILITY OFFICE AND SERVED AS THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATE WITH THE COLORADO CHILDREN’S CAMPAIGN. SHE JOINED THE LEAGUE IN 2025.



**AMBER MORENO** IS THE HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR FOR THE TOWN OF PARKER. SHE HAS NEARLY TWENTY YEARS OF HUMAN RESOURCES EXPERIENCE IN PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NON-PROFIT SECTORS. SHE BRINGS A STRATEGIC YET PEOPLE-CENTERED APPROACH TO HER WORK, FOCUSING ON ALIGNING TALENT STRATEGIES WITH ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES AND FOSTERING EXCEPTIONAL EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES. AMBER HOLDS A BACHELOR’S DEGREE FROM OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY AND A MASTER’S DEGREE IN HUMAN RESOURCES FROM COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY — GLOBAL CAMPUS. HONORED TO SHARE HER INSIGHTS, SHE AIMS TO INSPIRE HR LEADERS AND PROFESSIONALS TO GROW INTO THE BEST VERSIONS OF THEMSELVES.



WITH A RESUME RANGING FROM TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL SPEECH AND FORENSICS TO MANAGING MARKETING FOR AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION, **SHARLA SMITH** IS A CREATIVE STRATEGIST AND VERSATILE LEADER WHO BROUGHT HER DYNAMIC MIX OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO THE CITY OF CRIPPLE CREEK’S HR TEAM IN FEBRUARY OF 2025. HER PASSION FOR CONNECTION SHINES THROUGH HER WORK IN TALENT ACQUISITION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND SHE IS A STRONG ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVING WORKPLACE CULTURE, INCLUDING SAFETY AND WELLNESS INITIATIVES. OUTSIDE OF WORK, SHARLA IS AN AVID DISSECTOLOGIST WHO CAN ALSO BE FOUND READING BOOKS WHILE SIPPING HER FAVORITE CREAMER WITH A SPLASH OF COFFEE, ENJOYING A SWEET VICTORY AROUND THE FAMILY GAME NIGHT TABLE, CRAFTING FOR FUN AND FAIRS, OR WEEKEND ROAD TRIPPING WITH HER HUBBY.



Community  
Heart & Soul®

A Path to Build Thriving  
Communities

Get a plan to engage your whole community  
and take action toward a brighter future.



Learn more about  
our \$10K seed grants.



"In Cortez, Community Heart & Soul was able to bring together various groups in the town including the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, the Latino community, and local youths to help shape the future of that wonderful place."

— Susan Kirkpatrick, Fort Collins, Colorado

Visit our website at [www.communityheartandsoul.org](http://www.communityheartandsoul.org)  
or call us at 802.495.0864 to learn more.

Executive Board

- PRESIDENT**  
Seth Hoffman, Lone Tree city manager
- VICE PRESIDENT**  
Laura Weinberg, Golden mayor
- SECRETARY/TREASURER**  
Carol Saade, Breckenridge council member
- IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT**  
Wynetta Massey, Colorado Springs Independent Ethics Commission alternate member
- Kim Boyd, Kiowa town administrator
- Sharon Davis, Arvada councilmember
- Dave Frank, Montrose mayor
- Jason Gray, Castle Rock mayor
- Duane Gurulé, Rocky Ford mayor
- Dale Hall, Greeley mayor pro tem
- Liz Hensley, Alamosa mayor pro tem
- Sarah Johnson, Colorado Springs city clerk
- Dan Kramer, Estes Park town attorney
- Angela Lawson, Aurora council member
- James Marsh-Holschen, Broomfield council member
- Rachel Medina, Cortez mayor
- Candy Meehan, Norwood mayor
- Joshua Rivero, Parker mayor
- Hollie Rogin, Lyons mayor
- Anna Stout, Grand Junction council member
- Scott Trainor, Fountain city manager
- CML STAFF**
- Kevin Bommer, executive director
- Rachel Bender, senior associate counsel
- Owen Brigner, legislative & policy advocate
- Emma Donahue, legislative & policy advocate
- Haley Doyme, receptionist & administrative assistant
- Elizabeth Haskell, legislative & policy advocate
- Kharyl Jackson, marketing & communications specialist
- Lara Larkin, executive assistant
- Molly McClure, law clerk
- Maeve McHugh, municipal research analyst
- Alex Miller, publication & design specialist
- Karen Rosen, meetings & events planner
- Robert Sheesley, general counsel
- Beverly Stables, legislative advocacy manager
- Mark Vanderbrook, database specialist
- Denise White, engagement & communications manager
- Allison Wright, finance & administration manager
- CML SECTION CHAIRS**
- ATTORNEYS**  
Chris Price, Widner Juran LLP, attorney/partner
- COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**  
Melissa Gallegos, Lone Tree communications director
- COURT ADMINISTRATORS**  
Lisa Coughlin, Pueblo court administrator
- FINANCE DIRECTORS**  
Bryan Archer, Arvada director of finance
- FIRE CHIEFS**  
Alec W. Oughton, Aurora fire chief
- HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTORS**  
Terri Wilcox, Montrose human resources director
- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**  
Vacant
- LIBRARIANS**  
Amy Phillips, Loveland library director
- MANAGERS**  
Jennifer Hoffman, Broomfield city & county manager
- MAYORS & COUNCIL MEMBERS**  
Colleen G. Whitlow, Mead mayor
- MUNICIPAL CLERKS**  
Jolene Nelson, Delta city clerk
- MUNICIPAL ENERGY UTILITIES**  
Dan Hodges, Colorado Association of Municipal Utilities executive director
- MUNICIPAL JUDGES**  
Katie Kurtz, Arvada presiding judge

- PLANNING OFFICIALS**  
Vacant
- POLICE CHIEFS**  
James Baird, Thornton chief of police
- PURCHASING**  
Pam Roeding, Longmont procurement specialist
- PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS**  
Todd Barnes, Thornton communications director
- PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTORS**  
John Burke, Westminster city engineer

- DISTRICT CHAIRS**
- DISTRICT 1**  
Tim McClung, Yuma mayor
- DISTRICT 2**  
Don Conyac, Firestone mayor
- DISTRICT 3**  
Storm Gloor, Glendale mayor pro tem
- DISTRICT 4**  
Sarah Johnson, Colorado Springs city clerk
- DISTRICT 5**  
Carleton Pelton, Cheyenne Wells mayor pro tem
- DISTRICT 6**  
Charles Shupe, Las Animas mayor
- DISTRICTS 7/14**  
Karen Griego, Trinidad mayor
- DISTRICT 8**  
Daniel Gallegos, Center mayor
- DISTRICT 9**  
Chris Holkestad, Dolores mayor
- DISTRICT 10**  
Ethan Funk, Ouray mayor
- DISTRICT 11**  
Keith Richel, Silt mayor
- DISTRICT 12**  
Ryan Banks, Hayden mayor
- DISTRICT 13**  
Libby Fay, Buena Vista mayor
- DISTRICT 15**  
Rick Ihnken, Frisco mayor



About CML

The Colorado Municipal League is a nonprofit association organized and operated by Colorado municipalities to provide support services to member cities and towns. The League has two main objectives: 1) to represent cities and towns collectively in matters before the state and federal government and 2) to provide a wide range of information services to help municipal officials manage their governments.

**MISSION**

Colorado Municipalities is published to inform, educate, and advise appointed and elected municipal officials about new programs, services, trends, and information to help them perform their jobs and better serve their citizens and communities.

Letters to the editor

Have thoughts about an article that you read in *Colorado Municipalities*? Want to share those thoughts with your colleagues across the state? CML welcomes thought-provoking letters to the editor! Send comments to CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White at [dwhite@cml.org](mailto:dwhite@cml.org).

Advertise

Each issue of *Colorado Municipalities* reaches 4,000 municipal officials and decision makers. To reach those who lead Colorado cities and towns, contact CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White, [dwhite@cml.org](mailto:dwhite@cml.org).



## ABOUT CEBT:

The Colorado Employer Benefit Trust (CEBT) is a self-insured health benefits trust offering medical, dental, vision, and life coverage to public employers and their employees across Colorado. **Established in 1980, it serves over 37,000 members from nearly 450 public entities**, with WTW as the Trust Administrator.



## WHY CHOOSE US:

**6.23%**  
Average  
Annual Rate  
Increase

CEBT delivers cost-effective, high-quality benefits through pooled risk and streamlined administration. With strong financial reserves, stop-loss protection, and rates **10–15% lower** than comparable plans, CEBT ensures long-term stability, lower costs, and dependable service for public employers.

Our medical insurance renewals have shown remarkable stability with single-digit increases in **19** of the past **21** years and an average increase of just **6.23%** during this time period.

## THE CEBT ADVANTAGE

Managing employee benefits shouldn't be complex. Traditional models involve multiple insurers, separate premium payments, and fragmented support, leading to confusion for administrators and members.

CEBT streamlines the entire process with personalized, local service and a centralized approach.

**Let CEBT handle the complexity, so you can focus on your people.**



- ✓ One point of contact
- ✓ One monthly bill
- ✓ One strategy for all communications



Terry Rook: 303-345-7730 or Bryce Burget: 720-505-7796

[www.cebt.org](http://www.cebt.org)

## Contents



### Features

- 12** Don't reply all! Bridging generational gaps in municipal leadership
- 18** Q&A on burnout
- 24** The art and considerations of preventing AI-generated employer liability
- 30** Crush the conflict conundrum: Five easy steps for resolving high-level conflict
- 36** Child care as a benefit for working parents
- 42** Tribute to Ken Bueche

### Spotlight

- 16** Honoring experience & preparing for change
- 23** HR for humans
- 34** Retirement benefits: Attracting & retaining municipal talent
- 39** 2025 CML Compensation Survey

### Columns

- 11** President's Corner: Give thanks to the people who keep cities & towns running
- 40** Rural Voices: Navigating the talent tightrope

### Go digital



An e-version of *Colorado Municipalities* is available on [cml.org](http://cml.org) once the issue is published. Between editions, keep up with CML via Facebook, X, or LinkedIn.

### Join CML

For associate membership information, contact CML Marketing & Communications Specialist Kharyl Jackson at [kjackson@cml.org](mailto:kjackson@cml.org).





# Hey Colorado — unlock the value in your people

We believe organizations thrive when people thrive. And we’ve spent the past two decades partnering with Colorado municipalities and other public sector organizations to make that possibility a reality through:

**Compensation Studies and Structures**

Design compensation structures that drive performance, retain talent, and keep you competitive

**Pay Equity Analysis**

Built under Colorado’s Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, our proven formula keeps you compliant and provides safe harbor protections

**Compression Analysis**

Compile your performance and experience data to keep all your employees progressing at the right rate

**Performance Management**

Enhance professional development and create the pathways to grow your employees — and retain them

**Leadership Evaluation, Coaching, and Development**

Empower high-performing teams through impactful feedback, skill development, and coaching

**Culture Assessment, Design, and Transformation**

Create a culture and employee experience you and your stakeholders can be proud of



**Partner with Graves**  
Visit [graveshrconsulting.com](https://graveshrconsulting.com)

President’s Corner

# Give thanks to the people who keep cities & towns running

BY SETH HOFFMAN, CML EXECUTIVE BOARD PRESIDENT

About ten years ago, my wife and I were visiting Vail, watching our two sons play on one of their really cool playgrounds. Right next to it, two town employees were elbow-deep in repairs to the splash pad fountain. It was a warm day, and they were working hard. I asked one of them about the repair. Instead of saying how difficult it was, he said, “These things take a lot of maintenance, but it’s worth it when we see kids running and laughing through it.”

That stuck with me. It was a simple comment, but it said a lot about pride, purpose, and why this work matters.

I’ve been thinking a lot lately about all the different jobs it takes to keep Colorado cities and towns running.

We’ve got planners mapping out neighborhoods, water operators making sure systems stay online through subzero mornings, rec staff coaching kids on ballfields, and public works crews patching potholes before they swallow a tire. We’ve got building inspectors, finance directors, librarians, court clerks, firefighters, and police officers. Soon, many of our crews will be working through the night to clear snow off our roads.

Working in local government can be rewarding, but it can also be difficult at times. Hiring is tough. Burnout is real. Employers are still figuring out how to adapt.



This issue is full of promising steps. Some communities are testing childcare help or new retirement benefits. Others are investing in wellness or conflict resolution. These aren’t silver bullets, but they’re serious attempts to support staff.

People stay when they feel trusted, respected, and feel like their work matters. City teams solve problems that affect real people — every day, in every part of the state. Clean water, safe streets, open parks — that’s them.

So, let’s show we value that. Say thank you more. Give people the tools they need — and the room to use them. Be flexible when you can. Small things add up.

I also want to acknowledge the legacy of Ken Bueche, whose decades of leadership at CML left a lasting impact on this organization and on Colorado municipal government. Ken believed deeply in the power of

public service and the value of strong, connected communities. As we navigate the workforce challenges of today, I think he’d remind us that our most important job is to invest in people — to support them, listen to them, and give them what they need to thrive.

CML will continue supporting you with training, advocacy, and connection. Because at the end of the day, local government works because of people. Let’s make sure they know we’ve got their backs.





From: Gen Z

To: Anyone who will listen

Message:

Don't  
reply  
all!



## Bridging generational gaps in municipal leadership

By **MEGAN BURNS**, Northglenn council member

One of the most fascinating things about local government is how many generations it brings together in one room. On any given night, you might have a Zoomer councilmember juggling school and civic duties, a Millennial parent juggling work and school drop-offs, and a Boomer colleague who's been serving longer than some of us have been alive, all debating the same zoning ordinance. That mix is both our greatest strength and one of our biggest challenges.

At this year's Colorado Municipal League Annual Conference, I had the privilege of moderating a fantastic panel at the Elected Officials' Breakfast, *Don't Reply All: Bridging Generational Gaps in Municipal Leadership*. The title of our session, *Don't Reply All*, was meant as a light-hearted warning about communication mishaps. But it also serves as a reminder: good governance often comes down to the conversations we have one-on-one, not just the ones we have in public. Building bridges across generations requires patience, persistence, and a willingness to learn from one another.

Joining me on this panel were Westminster Councilor Claire Carmelia, Broomfield Council Member and Commissioner Kenny Van Nguyen, Steamboat Springs Coun-

cilor Dakotah McGinlay, and her mentor and City Council President Gail Garey. Together, we compared stories, shared frustrations, and explored strategies for making multigenerational governance work for our communities.

### WHEN CULTURE MEETS GOVERNMENT

One of the first shocks for many younger officials is just how slowly the government moves compared to the rest of the world. Most of us are used to a culture of instant updates, 24-hour shipping, and constant digital feedback loops. But when you arrive at city hall, time slows down. Decisions are made once a week, and the rest wait. Board appointments can take two-to-three months; a single ordinance might take months to draft, revise, and debate; and sometimes it feels like actual change will take years to come.

And at first, this pace feels excruciating. But over time, many of us have come to see its value.

Deliberation creates durability. Seeking consensus leads to creative solutions that work for many. A policy that takes months to develop is often one that can withstand years of change. That doesn't make it less frustrating — but it does remind us that patience is part of the job description.



## AGE AS A BARRIER AND AN ASSET

Throughout our talk, each of us shared stories about how our lived experiences, especially our age, showed up — sometimes in uncomfortable ways. We discussed how younger candidates are often asked to prove their experience in ways older candidates are not. We were all elected by the public, so when someone called a fellow councilmember “kiddo” during a meeting, however well-intentioned, perhaps it was still dismissive. We shared the idea of “imposter syndrome” and how sitting on the dais should mean our thoughts, ideas, and words hold equal weight with our fellow members.

Those moments are real. They remind us that younger officials often have to work harder to be taken seriously. But age isn’t just a hurdle; it can also be a strength. Yes, our younger leaders bring urgency, creativity, and fluency with technology, but older leaders bring institutional knowledge, perspective, and long-standing relationships. When we recognize both sides as valuable, we get the best outcomes.

## WHY GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY MATTERS

Councils that span multiple generations better reflect the communities they serve. Representation matters, and our residents don’t come in one age group, and neither should their representatives. Seniors, students, working parents, and first-time homeowners should all see their experiences echoed more clearly when there’s a generational mix at the dais.

That mix also improves policymaking. Younger members feel the strain of the current housing market and can bring a different perspective to development. We have grown up with the impacts of climate change and want a community that can withstand change and provide a space for their kids, and for better or worse, we grew up with the internet and tech boom. When we can put each other in our residents’ shoes, whether they were here when the first homes were built in the community, or have just moved in, the dais should reflect the residents in any part of their journey in our cities and towns.

## COMMUNICATION AND RESPECT

Respect in local government isn’t handed out with a nameplate or title: it’s something that shows up in how we talk to and treat one another. Every member at the dais deserves the same space to be heard, no matter their age, background, or how many years they’ve been in the chair. Younger officials should feel comfortable leaning into the microphone, finishing their thoughts, and knowing their words carry just as much weight as anyone else’s.

But respect doesn’t arrive automatically on swearing-in day. It’s earned and reinforced through listening closely, following through on commitments, and keeping interactions grounded in fairness, even when debates get tense. The real sweet spot comes when newer members bring clarity and confidence to the table, and more seasoned members choose

openness over skepticism. That’s the kind of balance that turns a council from simply functioning into truly thriving, and it helps the community see a body worth trusting.

## TECHNOLOGY: BRIDGING, NOT DIVIDING

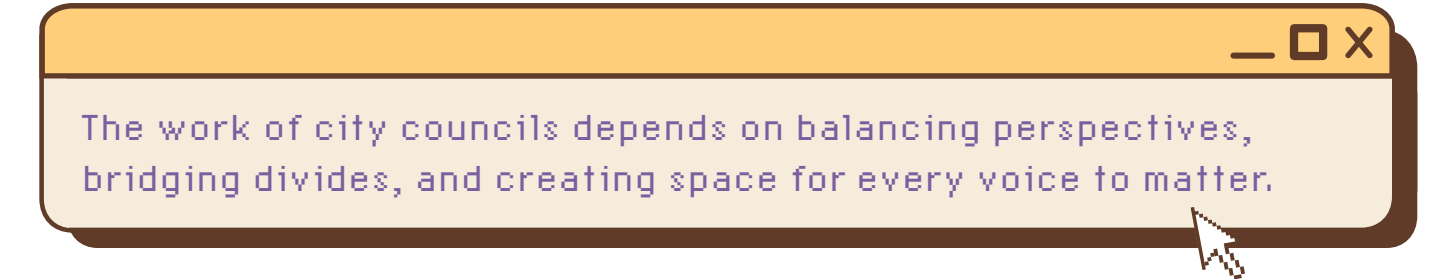
Technology is where the generational divide can feel the sharpest. A quick poll at our breakfast revealed stark differences: some colleagues were elected long before social media existed, while others can’t imagine a day without it. Now we’re layering in a new frontier — artificial intelligence — on top of the already shifting landscape of digital communications.

For younger officials social media, digital tools, and even early AI applications feel essential to transparency and engagement. They’re ways to reach people where they are, cut through noise, and make government feel more accessible. For older officials, the rapid pace of change can feel like an extra layer of complexity or a barrier to authentic connection. The reality is both perspectives are valid.

The key to all of this is of course balance — using technology and AI to expand access, streamline communication, and build trust, while also continuing traditional methods that ensure no one is left out. When councils embrace both approaches, they meet residents across generations and build a culture of governance that feels both modern and inclusive.

## CHALLENGES YOU CAN’T SEE

The one thing just about every councilmember, town trustee, and mayor



has in common is we’re all essentially volunteers. We care deeply about our communities and step up to serve because we want to make them better. But the reality is, we all still have lives outside city hall.

That means council meetings are sandwiched between work shifts, childcare pickups, homework help, or caring for aging parents. Some of us are retired and able to dedicate extra hours to boards and committees. Others are fitting in service around jobs, businesses, and family commitments. The demands don’t stop when you walk into chambers — they just get layered on top.

This challenge isn’t always visible to the public or even to colleagues. When someone says *yes* to a committee assignment or volunteers to attend an extra meeting, it often comes at the cost of personal time, missed family moments, or late nights catching up on the work that pays the bills.

That’s why grace and flexibility matter so much. Recognizing that different seasons of life shape what each of us can give allows councils to distribute responsibilities more equitably. It also opens space for younger members, parents of small children, or those building their careers to participate fully without burning out.

When we acknowledge these hidden challenges, we create councils that not

only work harder but smarter, with empathy for the people behind the titles.

## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: LEGACY PLANNING THROUGH MENTORSHIP

One of the most important responsibilities of seasoned councilmembers is to think beyond their own terms of service. Legacy planning isn’t only about the policies passed or projects completed while in office — it’s about shaping the next generation of leaders who will carry the work forward.

Too often, we assume new candidates will simply “step up” on their own. In reality, the leadership pipeline is built through encouragement, mentorship, and intentional investment. When experienced members take time to notice community members with potential, invite them into conversations, or suggest they apply for a board or commission, they’re planting seeds that can grow into strong leadership.

## DON’T REPLY ALL

At the end of the day, bridging these divides isn’t about tech or titles. It’s about respect and curiosity. About asking why a colleague thinks the way they do before assuming they’re just out of touch — or too green to know better.

Our communities are strongest when every generation at the dais has a voice, a role, and a seat at the table.

Sometimes that means teaching someone how to use Google Drive. Sometimes that means listening to a story about how things got done 30 years ago. Both are worth your time.

So here’s my takeaway: don’t reply all when a one-on-one conversation will do. Don’t assume your way is the only way. And don’t underestimate how much stronger we are when every generation is heard.

At the end of the session, what stood out most was this: generational diversity isn’t a challenge to overcome — it’s an advantage we should embrace. The work of city councils depends on balancing perspectives, bridging divides, and creating space for every voice to matter.

Our communities are better when every generation has a seat at the table — and when we choose to listen as much as we speak.

*This article was inspired by the panel discussion “Don’t Reply All: Bridging Generational Gaps in Municipal Leadership,” presented at the 2025 CML Annual Conference. Participants in the panel included Northglenn Council Member Megan Burns, Westminster Councilor Claire Carmelia, Broomfield Council Member and Commissioner Kenny Van Nguyen, Steamboat Springs Councilor Dakota McGinlay, and City Council President Gail Garey.*



# Honoring experience & preparing for change

## How HR departments can support older workers

By **SAMANTHA LAUBHAN**, Golden human resources manager

We live in a time when generational differences are more obvious than ever. In the news and on social media, generations are often stereotyped, and the differences between generations are highlighted in ways that pit them against each other. The workplace is no exception. A person who is nearing retirement age has been working for more than 40 years and started work in the 1980s — before cell phones and virtual assistants, and without the connectivity of email, Teams, or socials.

As a Xennial, I belong to a micro generation. We were born at the end of Generation X but before the Millennials. We grew up in an analogue age, but our teenage years were shaped by technology. This background helps me appreciate my organization's older employees, who are often driven to meaningfully connect in person with conversations padded with updates about family lives, bringing work experience thick with institutional knowledge and valuable backstory. Meanwhile, younger workers are energized by progress and efficiency, with

a commitment to personal well-being and healthy boundaries. Doesn't it sound like we have a lot to gain from learning from each other?

Older workers contribute greatly to our organizations. They bring experience and knowledge, and they can be valuable mentors who play a key role in developing the next generation in their professions. Older workers are a critical component of succession planning by ensuring knowledge transfer and organizational continuity. They can offer a steadying presence and inspire a sense of confidence and trust. Of course, we also realize retention savings with their tenure. These are all compounding benefits to the organization and its employees.

As human resources professionals, we directly impact older workers with the programming and processes we develop. We drive training programs to ensure they are supported in their roles, we design benefit and wellness plans to support their health, and we have a voice in our organizations' development and culture. As we look to improve our own internal processes

and efficiencies, we often add tech solutions — but these are not always embraced by older workers.

Our training programs should adequately prepare older workers to use the latest in workforce technology. Our benefit offerings should include plans that support their medical and financial priorities. And we should provide opportunities for them to mentor younger workers. These cross-generational relationships strengthen our organizations and develop future leaders. Our challenge is not only to harness the wisdom of older workers today but to help them transition well, ensuring their contributions live on in the organization even after they retire.

Local governments support a unique variety of professions, often with long-tenured employees. The reality is that length of service may be limited by physical ability or mental fatigue — certainly in emergency services such as police and fire, and also in physically demanding jobs in parks, streets, or utilities departments. These critical roles are often held by passionate employees devoted to their work,



Photo by Adobe Stock

highlighting the importance of creating transition paths to enable them to continue working, even if in a different role. We should ensure that our Americans with Disabilities Act compliance is strong and coupled with a clear process to provide accommodation options. Further, we must design our leave programs to meaningfully support the unique needs of older workers, whether for their own medical conditions or those of a loved one.

There is an abundance of educational resources available to ensure workers are preparing for retirement in a financial and legal sense, but mental and physical preparation is

just as important — although not always top of mind. Pre-retirees are often not prepared for the shift that will occur when the day comes that removes their long-established daily routine, or the accompanying relationships and social engagement. Many don't have a plan for how they intend to spend their days or stay active, and some workers aren't sure if they can disconnect from work at all. HR professionals can help workers retire successfully. We should ensure our programs include educational opportunities and resources for pre-retirees to help them prepare for this crucial transition. We truly have

a direct line to our employees and their satisfaction. What a privilege our work really is!

While we consider our generational differences, let's also consider that we live in a time when we celebrate our differences and diversity of thought more than ever. I invite you to approach your work with this in mind, so you can embrace the broad span of experiences and personal connections we hold across our organizations — and the power you hold as an HR professional to impact your employees' experiences and lives. What change can you bring to your organization to best support your older workers?



Q&A with  
**Brittany Dvorak,**  
 director of people &  
 culture for the  
 Town of Frederick

# BURNOUT



By **ALEX MILLER**, CML publication & design specialist, and **BRITTANY DVORAK**, Town of Frederick director of people & culture

## We've all been there.

That moment when the grind of workplace stress becomes too much, when we stare helplessly at our overflowing inbox and wonder why we bother showing up at the office at all. Burnout leaves workers feeling useless, and it robs workplaces of productivity. Recently I got in touch via email with Brittany Dvorak to talk about the problem of burnout.

**Alex Miller:** As a human resources professional, how do you define burnout, and what are some common causes?

**Brittany Dvorak:** People often call being tired, stressed, or stretched “burnout.” But those are normal phases of life. We all go through high-demand seasons with tight deadlines, personal challenges, major projects, health issues, family stress, etc. They create fatigue and pressure, but that is not the same as true burnout, though it is the term we like to use.

True burnout is prolonged misalignment of expectations. It is what happens when an employer’s needs and an employee’s wants no longer line up, but both keep pushing as if they can force it to work. Live in that space long enough and burnout is inevitable.

Employers often turn to perks and benefits to fix burnout, but more PTO, free snacks, flexible work options, and EAP programs will not be the

*Illustration by Adobe Stock*



solution to “true burnout.” I once worked for a company with low work expectations, rarely asked me to work more than 40 hours a week, and easy work with limited critical thinking, and I felt more burned out there than anywhere else. In contrast, I have never worked harder in my career than I do in Frederick, but I have never felt more energized. Why? Because I know the direction we are going, why the work matters, I see the value I am adding, and I am aligned with the people I am doing the work with.

That is the misconception with burnout. People are far more resilient than we give them credit for. We can carry heavy workloads, tackle complex problems, and step outside our comfort zones when we are aligned to purpose and value. But when employees cannot connect their work to what feels meaningful to them, or where they feel they truly add value, the spiral begins.

For leaders and HR departments, if you want to prevent burnout, stop asking “what perk can I add?” and start asking “are we aligned on where we are going, why this work matters, how it creates value, and who is the right fit to do it with us?”

Once you can confidently answer those questions, your responsibility is to protect the integrity of that alignment. Do not compromise your direction out of desperation. Do not hold onto people who pull the bus off course. Alignment does not mean shutting down creativity or innovation. New ideas are welcome and encouraged as long as they keep moving the bus forward in the direction set by your leadership, mayor, and board.

Keeping people aligned around a shared vision is critical to preventing burnout. When employees and organizations naturally grow apart, address it and then let that exit transition happen gracefully, not fearfully. If you allow too many competing visions to coexist for too long, you create conditions for what feels like widespread burnout. When in reality, it is misalignment left unaddressed.

**I have never worked harder in my career than I do in Frederick, but I have never felt more energized.**

Course correction after prolonged misalignment is possible, but usually it is disruptive and costly. That doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be done when necessary. The better strategy, however, is intentionality, upholding expectations, protecting direction, and staying disciplined about who is on the bus with you. That is how you build long-term engagement and resilience.

**Alex Miller: Burnout has been a workplace phenomenon for a long time, but I know the idea of burnout really surged in the public’s consciousness during the pandemic. How have discussions about burnout changed since the pandemic?**

**Brittany Dvorak:** The pandemic forced every organization to reassess how they operated. Leaner budgets, reduced staff, creative work arrangements and maximizing capacity all became survival tactics. At first, employees accepted that it was “temporary” and were grateful for continued employment. Then, organizations realized, “why did it take a crisis to make us work smarter?” Temporary became permanent when business pivoted toward more strategic operations.

The problem was that employees felt like the rules of the game changed without their consent. The job they signed up for before the pandemic was not the one they came back to. That disconnect with changing expectations is where the misalignment began.

At the same time, the pandemic trained us in avoidance. We separated physically, limited communication, and learned to steer clear of uncomfortable interactions. Coming back, we expected things to “go back to normal,” but the workplace, economy, and even people themselves had all shifted.

So the conversation on burnout now is less about hours worked and more about:

- Employees struggling to keep up with change
- Organizations reinventing themselves but not always clearly communicating their redefined expectations
- Leaders hesitant to have the hard conversations about fit, direction, and expectations

The lesson: organizations and employees need to normalize alignment

**The most important thing employers can do is be intentional with direction and then communicate it.**



Illustration by Adobe Stock

check-ins (even when the conversations are tough). Growth will not always happen in the same direction, and employees are no longer spending a lifetime with one employer. That is not failure, and it should not be taboo, it is just the reality. The real burnout risk comes when we refuse to acknowledge change, or when we cling to relationships that have already run their course.

It is okay for employers and employees to serve a season in each other’s growth cycle and then move on. What matters is recognizing when the season has shifted, and having the courage to talk about what comes next.

**Alex Miller: Can you give me some tips for employers to constructively engage with workers who say they feel burned out?**

**Brittany Dvorak:** The most important thing employers can do is be intentional with direction and then communicate it. Share your direction, purpose, and expectations, then offer resources to help people get there. This reduces anxiety and removes the mystery that fuels misalignment (aka burnout). Assumption will always be your biggest enemy: kill it with clarity. Employees want to know where are we going, why does it matter, and how do I fit in?

Once you have clarity, assess where your people are:

- Heck Yes: Aligned, engaged, ready to go
- Heck Maybe: Curious, cautious, could be on board if you provide resources and support
- Heck No: Not aligned, not interested, actively resisting

The trap many leaders and organizations fall into is spending too much time on the *Heck Noes* because they are generally the loudest and are considered the most “toxic” to culture. The reality, however, is the success rate of turning a *no* into a *yes* is usually 1-3% and it pulls time and energy away from the *maybes*, the very group that could become your strongest allies with the right coaching and clarity. Meanwhile, your *yeses* get burned out carrying the slack.

Instead, shift your focus:

- Double down on your *yes* group by giving them stretch opportunities and recognition
- Invest most in your *maybe* group by offering clarity, coaching, and direction to turn them into *yeses*

- Have candid exit conversations with the *no* group

Keep in mind that transitioning an employee out can be respectful, and it protects culture. Make it mutually beneficial by letting people know that if they come forward and say they aren't on the bus, they won't be instantaneously fired — you will discuss a transition plan over a determined period of time that helps you set up their team for continued success and allows them flexibility to find a new role without feeling like they have to play the “I am sick, but really I am interviewing” game.

**Alex Miller:** On the flip side of the previous question, what guidance can you give to an employee who feels burned out? What are some tips for approaching management constructively to discuss making changes to their working conditions?

**Brittany Dvorak:** I wish I could say, “just be honest with your manager and everything will be fine,” but the truth is, not every organization is ready for that level of openness. Some managers do not yet know how to hold psychologically safe conversations, and employees can end up feeling worse after speaking up. So, my advice has to be more nuanced.

**Step 1: Do some self-diagnosis**

Ask yourself:

- Am I facing a temporary challenge (health, family, workload spike) that an accommodation could help me through?
- Or is this a bigger issue? Do I feel misaligned with the direction of

the organization, unclear on expectations, or disconnected from the organization's purpose?

If it is the first, what you are experiencing may be fatigue, not burnout. That can often be resolved with short-term support, training, time off, flexible arrangements, EAP, etc. If it is the second, no amount of time away or perks will fix it, it is a signal of misalignment. This doesn't immediately mean an exit is required! This means it is time to get better understanding if alignment can be achieved.

**Step 2: Talk with tact**

Schedule a meeting to discuss these thoughts with your supervisor. Managers are more likely to receive the information when the discussion is not framed as, “I don't like ...” and instead, “I want to keep delivering high-quality work, but I am struggling with ... . I

have some ideas for improvement, but I would like to have a discussion to also hear how you feel I can be more effective.” This approach is about partnership, not just problems.

**Step 3: Be realistic about outcomes**

Sometimes changes can be made. Sometimes they cannot. If you find that your needs and the organization's direction cannot be aligned, it may be time to think about whether you can thrive there long-term. That is not failure; it is growth.

Ultimately, burnout conversations are not just about adjusting working conditions. They are about assessing alignment. If you and the organization are moving in the same direction, accommodations can make a huge difference. If you are not, the best step may be finding a place where you can be a *Heck Yes* again.



Illustration by Adobe Stock

# HR for humans

## Empower organizations by focusing on people, communication, and culture

By **TAMARA DIXON**, Northglenn director of human resources & chief diversity officer

When I began my career in human resources, I saw the impact one could have when the *human* side of the field drives my work. When you focus not on what people can do for you but what you can do to serve them, ultimately, they will show up as their best selves in service to something bigger. That, to me, is the essence of human resources — the heartbeat of any organization.

I think of my work as far more than writing and policing policy for compliance. When I am working at my best, I consider how HR can enhance and protect workplace culture, ensuring the organization can meet its goals and objectives. My approach as an HR professional reflects this balance: protecting the organization through clear policies while prioritizing people, communication, and culture.

Empathy drives who I am as an HR director. If we want our employees to bring their whole and well selves to our organizations, HR must recognize how every policy and decision impacts its people. What I know for sure is that HR is rarely black and white. Whether I am ensuring compensation is fair, supporting a team after losing a colleague, or making sure our benefits options are inclusive, my role is to acknowledge people's experiences with compassion and dignity. When I operate with a human-centered approach to my work, I establish that policies are not just rules in a handbook but tools that support employees and enhance trust and well-being.

I am a firm believer in learning and development. While training does not solely rest in HR, we must be a partner in ensuring there are growth mindsets and opportunities across the organization. To do this, I must

make sure I am on a continuous learning journey. Getting my certifications in Crucial Conversations, Crucial Accountability, and becoming a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach allows me to provide training centered on organizational values, competencies, and building relationships that reinforce our collective goals.

Equally essential is communication. I approach communication by understanding that it is not one size fits all. How I communicate policy to the city manager looks different than how I communicate policy to line staff. Understanding that balance is key. I am an HR director firmly committed to open and transparent communication because I know it breaks down silos and ensures employees know what is expected of them. But what do I do when employees admit they don't read HR emails? HR must meet people where they are. Robust communication systems should reflect generational, cultural, and personal preferences — which doesn't always mean email.

Ultimately, in my role, I can't just focus on compliance and policy. While that is important, I must also focus on culture. Making sure we reduce risk in the organization and ensuring we have a culture that attracts, engages, and retains top talent go hand in hand. I have always approached HR this way: all policies should reflect our values, and every action HR takes to improve the culture should be tied to our systems.

I have spent 20-plus years leaning into HR with purpose and intention, focusing on people, communication, and culture. That is how HR becomes a strategic partner with the organization and how the heartbeat remains strong.





# The art & considerations of preventing AI-generated employer liability

By **LAWRENCE LEE**, partner at Montgomery Little Soran, PC  
and **MAX DUCHOW**, law clerk at Montgomery Little Soran, PC

**A**rtificial intelligence in employment decision-making is not a futuristic concept; it is quite present and already in our courts. Employers are increasingly exploring automated tools to assist in hiring, screening, performance evaluating, and reducing in force. These technologies promise efficiency and consistency to make the workdays simpler but also carry serious legal risks.

In hiring decisions, for example, the latest AI formulas are not developed to fully eliminate bias or prima facie discrimination. Rather, AI may replicate and even amplify existing disparities in a hiring practice, unbeknownst to the employer, and expose decision-makers to future claims of discrimination.

These legal risks are not abstract. In *Mobley v. Workday, Inc.*, (“*Mobley*”)<sup>1</sup>, a California federal district court allowed claims to proceed alleging an AI-based hiring system disproportionately excluded older, disabled, and minority applicants in violation of Title VII, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA). Colorado has moved swiftly to regulate this emerging field with the Colorado Artificial Intelligence Act, Senate Bill 24-205<sup>2</sup>, which becomes effective June 1, 2026. Alongside the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act (CADA)<sup>3</sup> and in light of recent Colorado Supreme Court rulings confirming that municipalities are not shielded by governmental immunity from CADA claims, the path forward for employers in public and private sectors is crystal clear: employers should fully strategize with their employment counsel on the potential use of AI in their employment hiring and firing decisions.

### **The *Mobley* case: Algorithmic screening under scrutiny**

The *Mobley* litigation is the first significant test of algorithmic hiring before a federal district court (the federal court). Derek Mobley (Mr. Mobley), a Black male over 40 with ac-

knowledge anxiety and depression, alleged that the applicant-screening platform of a prospective employer, Workday, Inc., consistently rejected him and others in protected classes, characteristics, or traits (protected classes). Workday, Inc. uses AI to sort, rank, and recommend candidates for potential or actual hire. Mr. Mobley claimed the algorithms had a disparate impact based on race, age, and disability. Although discrimination lawsuits are typically based on disparate treatment which requires proof of intentional harm, disparate impact claims occur when a neutral policy or practice causes disproportionate and unjustified negative harm to a group of applicants or employees, regardless of the employer’s intent.

In January 2024, the federal district court denied Workday’s motion to dismiss, finding that the company’s platform plausibly participated in hiring decisions rather than merely implementing employer criteria. By May 2025, the federal district court went further, granting preliminary certification of an ADEA collective action covering all applicants aged 40 and over who applied for jobs using Workday’s platform since 2020 and were denied employment recommendations.<sup>1</sup> The federal district court emphasized that the “critical issue” was whether Workday’s AI system had a disparate impact on older applicants, a question susceptible to common proof across the proposed class.

Workday argued that its AI features were optional and varied by employer, but the court concluded that such

variation did not defeat preliminary certification. The alleged unified policy, the use of Workday’s AI recommendation system, was sufficient to bind the claims together.

Employer lawyers, including this author, are monitoring this collective/class action lawsuit against Workday because private lawsuits like *Mobley* remain fully viable. The case also demonstrates why AI hiring litigation matters: Courts may treat the use of a common screening platform as a unified policy that supports class or collective claims, employers cannot avoid liability by relying on vendors, and the sheer size of a proposed class will not bar certification at an early stage.

The lessons for employers are straightforward. First, disparate impact has recently resurfaced and remains a viable theory of liability. Further, decision-makers cannot rely on vendors to shield them from exposure. Courts will scrutinize both the developer (of AI) and the deployer (employer). Finally, class wide claims mean that liability can quickly escalate and will result in significant settlement or litigation costs.

### **Colorado’s Artificial Intelligence Act (SB 24-205)**

Colorado has taken a pioneering role by enacting the Colorado Artificial Intelligence Act (CAIA), which will take effect on June 1, 2026. The statute applies to and regulates employers that develop or deploy “high-risk” AI systems, defined as systems that make or are a substantial factor in making consequential decisions, including employment-related decisions. As it

## **Employers must provide notice to applicants whenever an AI system is used to make or substantially influence an employment decision.**

presently reads, SB 24-205 applies to private business employers, however, it is unclear whether the future law (when it goes into effect) will apply to public entities. In the event the CAIA is found to apply to all employers, then the following information below should be considered for thought and execution in the near future.

### **Developer duties**

Developers of high-risk AI are required under CAIA to use reasonable care to avoid algorithmic discrimination. They must disclose known risks to the Colorado Attorney General’s Office (OAG) and deployers within 90 days and maintain technical documentation describing training data, limitations, and risk-mitigation measures.

### **Deployer duties**

Employers are required under CAIA to establish a risk management policy, perform impact assessments before deployment, notify the OAG of discriminatory outcomes within 90 days, and preserve compliance records for at least three years. Employers must also provide notice to appli-

cants whenever an AI system is used to make or substantially influence an employment decision.

### **Definition of algorithmic discrimination**

CAIA defines “algorithmic discrimination” as any unlawful differential treatment or impact that disfavors individuals based on protected classes recognized under state or federal law. This broad definition ensures that both intentional bias and disparate impact are both covered. CADA lists 16 different protected classes.<sup>3</sup>

### **Rulemaking**

The OAG is authorized to promulgate rules addressing documentation, risk management, and rebuttable presumptions of compliance. Once effective, it will impose affirmative obligations to test, document, and disclose. Employers relying on vendor platforms without demanding transparency and conducting their own audits will be at risk.

### **Governmental immunity**

CAIA builds on the existing foundation of CADA, which prohibits

employment discrimination based on protected classes. The Colorado Supreme Court has made clear that CADA applies to political subdivisions and that the Colorado Governmental Immunity Act does not shield them from liability.

In *Elder v. Williams*, the Court held that CADA claims for compensatory relief do not and cannot lie in tort and therefore are not barred by the CGIA.<sup>4</sup> It further concluded that “the state” in CADA includes political subdivisions, and that front pay is an equitable remedy. Likewise, in *Denver Health & Hospital Authority v. Houchin*, the Court held that both compensatory and equitable CADA claims against a public entity survive the CGIA and again confirmed that “the state” includes political subdivisions.<sup>5</sup> The implication is direct: municipalities are fully subject to CADA. If an AI system used in hiring or other employment decisions has a discriminatory impact, governmental immunity will not be a defense.



## Employers should be mindful when preparing for CAIA and any future developments to strive for best practices under the Act.

### The Tenth Circuit on subjective criteria

Although the U.S. Tenth Circuit of Colorado (Tenth Circuit) has not yet confronted AI directly, its precedent on subjective employment criteria provides a useful guide. In *Cortez v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, the Court reviewed Wal-Mart's argument that an employee was not promoted due to a written "coaching" policy. The Tenth Circuit held that while the existence of a "coaching" could be documented objectively, the decision to issue one was inherently subjective and therefore vulnerable to manipulation. The Court warned that subjective standards are "particularly easy for an employer to invent" and can mask discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

This reasoning applies squarely to AI. If an employer cannot explain how an algorithm ranks applicants, or if the system embeds subjective human preferences, the risk of liability mirrors that of relying on opaque subjective criteria. CAIA's requirements for transparency and risk management are designed precisely to address this problem.

### Executive policy direction

Federal governmental policy has also shifted. On Jan. 23, 2025, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14179, "Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence." The executive order revoked prior directives on "safe and trustworthy" AI, directing agencies to review and rescind actions seen as obstacles to innovation. It requires revision of OMB memoranda and encourages agencies to reduce perceived regulatory burdens.<sup>7</sup>

For employers in Colorado, the federal policy signals reduced oversight, but it does not eliminate risk. As *Mobley* demonstrates, private plaintiffs can bring a cause of action under existing discrimination statutes, regardless of federal enforcement priorities. State law, particularly CAIA and CADA, remains the controlling framework for Colorado employers.

### Takeaways for Colorado employers

Colorado was one of the first states to pass into law standards for

employers to uphold when using AI in its employment decisions. Employers should be mindful when preparing for CAIA and any future developments to strive for best practices under the Act, regardless of whether public entity employers will be required to comply with the CAIA. Practical steps include:

- **Creating an inventory of AI systems.** Identify all AI or automated tools used for hiring, promotion, evaluation, or discipline. Document the scope and purpose.
- **Demanding vendor transparency.** Require vendors to disclose training data, risk assessments, and audit results. Build these obligations into procurement contracts.
- **Conducting impact assessments.** Before using or continuing to use an AI system, analyze whether it disproportionately impacts protected classes. Document methods and results.
- **Notifying applicants.** Provide clear disclosure when AI is used to make or influence hiring decisions. Transparency is not only required but also builds trust.
- **Maintaining records.** Preserve risk assessments, audit results, and notices for at least three years, as CAIA requires.
- **Engaging counsel and experts.** Retain employment counsel to review AI systems and, where necessary, technical experts to evaluate algorithms. This dual expertise is essential.
- **Training staff.** Educate HR professionals, managers, and supervisors on the limits of AI tools. Ensure that human decision-makers remain responsible for final employment decisions.



Illustration by Adobe Stock

- **Monitoring the AI system, continuously.** AI systems are dynamic. Maintain a practice of auditing and reviewing outcomes to ensure compliance as technology evolves.

### Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is reshaping employment practices, but it is also reshaping employment laws. Cases like *Mobley* demonstrate how AI can be challenged in court and morph

into a collection/class action lawsuit. Colorado has positioned itself at the forefront with CAIA, imposing proactive duties on both developers and deployers. CADA ensures that discrimination claims can reach all employers, and the Colorado Supreme Court has closed the door on governmental immunity defenses. The Tenth Circuit's warning against subjective criteria underscores the danger of opaque AI systems.

For Colorado municipalities and decision-makers, the message is clear. AI tools must be approached as high-risk employment practices that demand transparency, documentation, and oversight. Those that prepare now, by auditing systems, demanding vendor accountability, and training staff, will not only reduce liability but also set a model for fair and responsible use of technology in public employment.

## Endnotes

1. *Mobley v. Workday, Inc.*, No. 3:23-cv-00770, 2025 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 94475 (N.D. Cal. May 16, 2025).
2. Colo. Rev. Stat. §§ 6-1-1701 to -1707 (2024) (Colorado Artificial Intelligence Act).
3. Colo. Rev. Stat. § 24-34-402 (2024) (Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act); see C.R.S. 24-34-401 et seq.; <https://ccrd.colorado.gov/discrimination>.
4. *Elder v. Williams*, 2020 CO 88, 477 P.3d 694 (Colo. 2020).
5. *Denver Health & Hosp. Auth. v. Houchin*, 2020 CO 89, 477 P.3d 149 (Colo. 2020).
6. *Cortez v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 460 F.3d 1268 (10th Cir. 2006).
7. Exec. Order No. 14179, 90 Fed. Reg. 8741 (Jan. 23, 2025).



Illustration by Adobe Stock

## Five easy steps for resolving high-level conflict

By **AMBER MORENO**,  
Parker human resources director

Let's imagine for a moment that you, the consummate human resources leader, have just been tagged by your town/city manager and entrusted with a daunting assignment. Should you wish to accept the assignment (and you do, see consummate qualifier above) you must engage with, offer support to, and facilitate an amicable resolution from a *boiling up* between a pair of peers.

You're no novice to conflict resolution; mediation and effective communication are skills you've refined over the years. But these are your peers, the very executives you work with, members of your leadership team. You have a shared history of navigating organizational challenges together, but a clash between them may be new for the team, different, and it poses quite a conundrum.

Structurally, you have no authority over the dueling duo. You'll have no luck using your status to dictate a proper course to resolution here (P.S. does that ever work for you?). Professionally, you're mindful to preserve your relationship with them, and best case, support a repair or rebuilding of the relationship between them. Your goal, in part, is to land at a place on the other side of this trial that enables all parties to resume their pre-tiff partnering practices.



Five easy steps you already know that will crush this conflict conundrum

## STEP ONE

Bless the boil

Before you reach for your reliable and ready soft-skills toolbox, pause and be enamored with the boil. Celebrate, even if for just a moment, that this pair of your leadership peers are such experts in their respective fields, so impassioned by a fill-in-the-blank item, that they've lost all sense of their everyday way and have found themselves in a tizzy. How fortunate are you that you're able to work alongside professionals who care so deeply about the work they do and the community they serve. And while it might not always be pleasurable, getting into occasional (and productive) tizzies may be just what drives the team and this pair further toward excellence. In his article *Disagreeing Better: 8 Ways CHROs Can Build a Culture of Respect* SHRM's John Barrand reminds us, "... a lack of disagreement leads to stagnation and stifles the dynamism that we hired our talent to actively participate in." Create a safe place for the displeasure to be celebrated and invite them to recognize their excellence.

## STEP TWO

Say no to silos

Armed with the thankfulness Step 1 has brought you, lean next into togetherness. You've heard the old adage: you can't fix together by being apart. Avoid expending too much

effort discussing the boil between them, separately. Being in separate conversations about a shared issue compromises your ability to appear and remain the trusted, impartial resource your two peers need right now. You run the risk of inappropriately or disproportionately framing your understanding of the issue based on one or the other's position. Your understanding of the issue at hand may be critical in leading the pair to identify their best solution. You could be trucking along, guiding a solve-for-X equation when Y's been the problem all along. Don't fall victim to picking sides. They're both on the team. Be intentional about bringing them together and eliminate pitfalls that may aggravate division.

## STEP THREE

Opinions: Keep them to yourself

Now that the guests of honor are accounted for (and together), don't forget who wasn't invited to the party — your opinion. I know you've got one, and I know it's screaming to be shared, but fight doing so with the force of a planner defending a zoning code at a council meeting. As much as it pains you, and it will pain you, your opinion and sharing of the same is not part of your peers' productive exchange. Remember, your role in this daunting assignment is to facilitate a resolution, not fix the problem. It's theirs to own, not yours. Your heated peers are closest to the issue, thus closest to all probable solutions. Stay neutral; don't lead the witnesses. Stay curious and

ask questions to encourage dialogue. Stay in your lane and remember which part you're playing.

## STEP FOUR

HR encouraging boundaries? You don't say

You've been here before. You've done this. The rules are the same(ish), the players a bit different. Work with your peers to set some boundaries, some rules of engagement per se. Solicit their commitment to staying on a constructive course and being accountable to their own ground rules. The act of setting their own ground rules may even soften them a bit, de-escalating from their heightened, emotional position as they agree to conduct themselves respectfully and participate in this process in an amenable way. If necessary, throughout the dialogue, while being mindful not to validate one or the other, nudge them back to the objective at hand by reminding them of the end game. Allow the formality of this exercise to equip you with a process-feeling boundary to overcome any unease you may still be feeling about the assignment. Settle in. You are a bridge-builder for your peers. Ground rules provide a sturdy (and necessary) foundation for the work.

## STEP FIVE

Sparkle on

Here's where your sparkly soft skills finally get to shine. Model humility and vulnerability for your peers. Demonstrate emotional intelligence

# STAY CURIOUS AND ASK QUESTIONS TO ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE

and self-regulation. With your HR superpower, guide them to a desired state of deep listening so they may unveil the root cause of their conflict. Deep listening is like active listening's younger sister. She's wiser than active listening, she's been watching her get caught up in messes for years.

Robert C. Bordone, author of *Conflict Resilience*, drives this point home by explaining that deep listening is "... getting to a place of genuine curiosity about something the other person says or believes." When you facilitate a dialogue between your peers that reaches a point of genuine curiosity about each other's beliefs, they're more likely to resolve the conflict. It's through this type of human connection that will be most likely to arrive at a compromise of next, best steps. In fact, Bordone contends, "... in a conflict situation, the heart of what is causing the conflict is not mostly or

even primarily about the facts. It is about feelings." After all, it's their strong feelings about this matter that have gotten us into this pickle.

While maintaining the psychological safety you invited into this exercise when celebrating the conflict in Step 1, foster space and grace for all the feels.

Stay in the steps, revisit, resequence — choose your own framework but keep your eyes on the prize. You were made for this. Your peers need to be acknowledged for their passion and expertise; they need to find a new sense of togetherness between them; they need to hold themselves accountable to an affable discourse, and they need to deeply communicate toward an effective resolution. Set the

stage for success, then step back and let the magic happen.

Human resources leaders may have an indirect impact on the communities our agencies serve, but how remarkable for you and, for me, that human resources leaders have a strong impact on those who do the serving. Cherish your "customers," your passionate peers. Help shape their employee experience, and step fully into the assignment with the authority and confidence of being the partner they need.



# Retirement benefits: Attracting & retaining municipal talent

By **ELIZABETH HASKELL**, CML legislative & policy advocate

Everyone loves the idea of free money — and for municipal employees, retirement benefits can feel a lot like that. Across Colorado, cities and towns use retirement benefits as the foundation of their compensation packages, helping attract and retain a talented workforce alongside health insurance, paid leave, and other perks.

Whether it's a firefighter counting on a pension after decades of service or a new city planner setting up a 457(b) deferred compensation plan, retirement benefits remain a defining feature of public-sector employment. Across Colorado, municipalities offer a mix of statewide and local pension systems, along with flexible defined contribution options that reflect today's changing workforce.

## THE STATEWIDE SYSTEMS

For 10 percent of municipalities, the Local Government Division of the Colorado Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA) is the backbone of retirement planning. Serving as a substitute for Social Se-

curity, PERA provides both defined benefit (DB) and defined contribution (DC) options. The DB plan guarantees a predictable monthly pension, while the DC plan functions more like a 401(k), where balances depend on contributions and investment performance. PERA also offers additional perks — from disability and survivor benefits to a 401(k) and 457 plan (PERAPlus), health coverage through PERA-Care, and life insurance.

Public safety employees typically rely on the Fire and Police Pension Association (FPPA). With more than 260 participating departments, FPPA gives firefighters and police officers retirement portability

if they move between agencies. In addition to DB and DC-style benefits, FPPA administers the Statewide Death & Disability Plan, ensuring families are protected if tragedy strikes in the line of duty.

## LOCAL PENSION SOLUTIONS

Some cities take a more independent path. State law allows municipalities to establish their own pension systems, often blending DB and DC features. Aurora, Denver, and Longmont all administer defined benefit pension plans that promise guaranteed lifetime income based on service years and salary. Employees vest after five years and can count on annual cost-of-living adjustments, though the formulas vary.

These local systems layer in additional options, including mandatory money purchase plans and voluntary 457 and Roth accounts. Retiree health savings, along with death, disability, and survivor benefits, round out the packages.

## FLEXIBLE SAVINGS OPTIONS

Beyond traditional pensions, many Colorado municipalities offer

401(a) plans, typically administered by groups such as the Colorado Retirement Association, Empower, or MissionSquare. These defined contribution plans may be mandatory or voluntary, with both employer and employee contributions. Vesting schedules are determined by the municipality, often five years, and help encourage retention. Investment performance determines final retirement balances. Munic-

ipalities may supplement 401(a) plans with 457 and Roth options, sometimes with employer matching contributions.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Colorado Municipal League recently asked employers about their experiences with pensions and retirement offerings. The feedback shows a shared goal: to keep benefits competitive and meaning-

ful. Municipalities are looking for ways to expand financial education, offer more Roth and DB plan options, and strengthen contribution matches.

The message is clear — retirement benefits are not just perks. They're a strategic investment in long-term workforce stability, helping cities and towns attract, retain, and support the people who serve their communities every day.

## A snapshot of retirement readiness

The 2025 *Empowering America's Financial Journey — Government* report offers a timely look at how public-sector workers are preparing for retirement.

### CONSISTENT SAVINGS

Despite economic headwinds, the average 2024 savings rate held at 6.4%.

### ENGAGEMENT PAYS OFF

Employees who actively engage with their retirement accounts save 79% more and hold balances 160% higher than unengaged peers.

### GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Boomers lead the pack with average balances around \$98,000 and savings rates near 8.8%. Gen Z lags, but shows dramatic improvement when engaged.

### TOOLS THAT HELP

About 60% of participants rely on target date funds or managed accounts. Those in managed accounts save 28% more and see balances 56% higher.

### DIGITAL GROWTH

Mobile app usage climbed 16%, and linking external accounts boosted savings rates to 9.2%.

Meanwhile, a recent *MissionSquare* survey found that confidence grows with tenure. Employees with more than 20 years of service are far less likely to worry about retiring on time (63%) compared with those with fewer than 10 years (77%).





# Child care as a benefit for working parents

By **MAEVE McHUGH**, CML municipal research analyst

**F**inding the right work-life balance can be difficult, especially when the life side of this equation involves child care. Cost and availability are the largest barriers to accessing high quality child care for most working parents, and the situation is worse in child care deserts, where demand for care far outpaces supply. Access to safe and dependable child care is good for Colorado's kids — and their parents.

According to a Healthier Colorado voter opinion survey, nearly half of Coloradans have taken the following measures due to lack of affordable child care: cut into savings, increased debt, cut work hours, not taken a job, taken unpaid leave, or left a job. The Center for American Progress' Child Care and Early Learning state data from 2023 shows that statewide, there were 250,885 children under age 6 with all available parents in the workforce — making up 70.3% of Colorado kids. A Common Sense Institute report calculated the potential unrealized wages statewide for mothers with children under age 6 who would work if not for child care issues at \$769,840,913.

As it is necessary for more parents to be in the workforce due to the rising cost of living, employers are considering how they might attract working parents and retain the parents among their employees. A growing number of employers are appealing to working parents with child care as a benefit.

A recent nationwide study by Boston Consulting Group examines how child care can be considered a benefit for working parents. The study shows positive outcomes for both hourly and salaried workers as well as the employer. Shipping company UPS recently launched a child care program of their own, where they offer emergency child care

services to avoid unplanned absences. The program was wildly successful, reducing turnover from 31% to just 4%, making it clear that a child care program can benefit both employer and employee. Women in the study saw the greatest gains in workforce participation, impacting pay and opportunities for advancement among working mothers.

A number of Colorado municipalities offer some form of child care benefit to attract and retain employees. Different approaches suit municipalities in different ways, from operating a center for municipal employees' kids to offering stipends and flexible work arrangements as needed.

## ON-SITE CHILD CARE FOR MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES

The State of Colorado Department of Early Childhood's highest priorities include access to and quality of child care. In their work to advance these priorities, the department offers a number of grants, including the employer-based child care program in partnership with Executives Partnering to Invest in Children. The grant program works with employers to construct, remodel, renovate, or retrofit child care centers on or near an employer's site.

Grantees of this state program include Grand Junction, which operates its own child care facility open to city employees'

## Cost of child care in Colorado

### \$15,992

Annual cost of of child care for a 4-year-old in Colorado. That's more than the average annual cost of in-state college tuition: **\$9,967**

### 27 hours

The number of hours a parent earning Colorado's minimum wage must work each week just to cover that week's child care costs.

### 37%

The share of Colorado parents who report withdrawing money from their savings or taking on debt to pay for child care.



children and grandchildren aged 6 weeks to 6 years. The facility offers discounted rates for city employees and aims to benefit workers with different schedules like police officers and public works employees.

Mountain Village in San Miguel County runs a similar program, where the town owns and operates the facility and offers priority enrollment and discounted tuition to year-round municipal employees. This facility is a partnership between Mountain Village and area nonprofits that make it possible for local employees to access subsidized care.

The combination of priority enrollment and subsidized tuition make these programs meaningful and effective. Municipalities can operate these centers because of their investments in the facilities as well as partnerships with local and state stakeholders. These facilities also benefit the community at large. Outside of Colorado, Pittsburgh offers child care to municipal employees during working hours and also to anyone attending community meetings who needs short-term child care.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL CENTERS

Vail partners with two child care centers. Each center is owned by the town, which offers discounted rent of \$1 to their provider partners, and employees children enjoy scholarships.

Montrose has a child care facility planned for 2026. The city owns and is upgrading the facility, and it plans to partner with an outside provider to run day-to-day operations. Like Grand Junction and Mountain Village, city employees will pay discounted tuition and enjoy priority enrollment, followed by other government agencies.

SUBSIDIES

When providing child care directly is not an option, other CML members are doing what they can to offer some assistance toward paying for the service. Greenwood Village and Elizabeth are among the municipalities offering subsidies to employees to be put toward child care. Greenwood Village offers a dependent day care FSA plan (without employer contribution), and Elizabeth provides a \$250 stipend per month per child. This allows parents to select care of their choosing, rather than depend on specific

providers. Subsidies are particularly helpful for families that prefer in-home facilities or a nanny.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Working parents benefit from flexible work arrangements, like being able to report to work from home or observe a hybrid schedule. Parents save money on child care by reducing the hours their children need to be cared for, or they may not need to arrange backup child care if they can step in, themselves. While flexible working arrangements can be helpful for many, this may not be the case for all, as this option isn't available for employees who must report physically to work.

WHAT ELSE CAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DO TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO CHILD CARE?

In addition to the examples included here, local governments can take broader action to make child care more accessible and affordable for employees and even community members. The Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) has compiled a list of best practices that range from establishing public funding for child care, tax incentives, and easing certain regulations to lower barriers and increase child care supply.

Through DOLA, the state directly funds the development of family and commercial child care facilities and offers technical and planning assistance, as authorized by House Bill 24-1237. One recommendation put forth by DOLA includes assessing your municipality's publicly owned buildings or land that would be suitable for child care. In prioritizing un- or under-utilized real estate for child care facilities, your municipality or a partner provider can run the facility at a fraction of the cost.

Whether your municipality is repurposing land to host a child care facility or matching dependent care FSA contributions, you're recognizing employees as people with families to care for. Providing child care benefits strengthens your organization by improving attendance, recruitment, retention, productivity, and morale. The positive effects extend beyond the workplace — investing in quality child care supports the wellbeing of your community's children, helping them grow, learn, and thrive while enriching your municipality's future.

2025 CML Compensation Survey

Participation & insights

By MAEVE MCHUGH, CML municipal research analyst

Each year, CML and our partner, TechNet, distribute a compensation survey to all of our municipal members to collect pay and benefit information for municipal jobs. The goal is to offer a comprehensive resource to help our members make informed decisions about compensation and benefits for current and prospective employees.

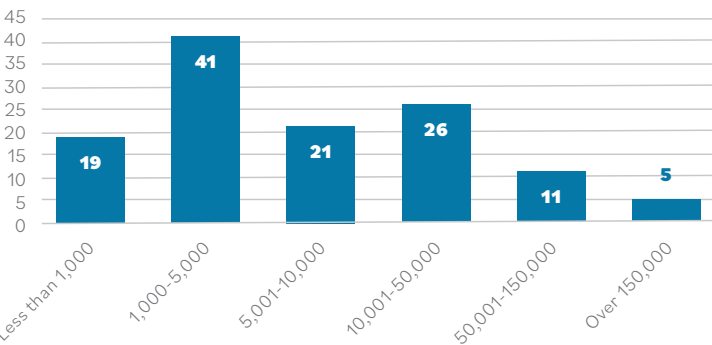
TechNet administers the survey system, which allows members to run custom reports to glean how their pay and benefits measure against comparable municipalities. CML is thankful for our municipal members who have submitted up-to-date data, offering a glimpse into their organization size, populations served, and information about compensation and benefits.

When the reporting system opens each year, we encourage all members to submit compensation and benefits data. The quality of the information in the system depends on what our members provide, and your input benefits your peer municipalities. The Compensation Survey System and report can only be accessed by municipal employees in the following roles: municipal clerk, deputy manager, finance director, and human resources director or manager.

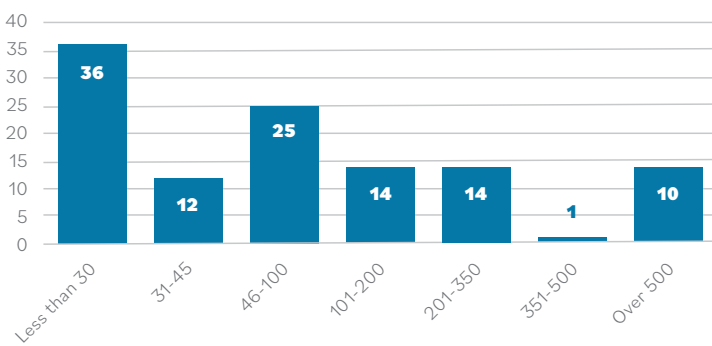
So far this year, about 126 municipalities — a mix of small, midsize, and large communities — have provided data. Agencies of all sizes benefit from the data sharing across the platform.

If you have any questions about the Compensation Survey, please get in touch with CML Municipal Research Analyst Maeve McHugh at [mmchugh@cml.org](mailto:mmchugh@cml.org)

Municipalities participating in CML Compensation Survey by population



Municipalities participating in CML Compensation Survey by estimated employee count



Average vacation/PTO leave accrual among municipalities

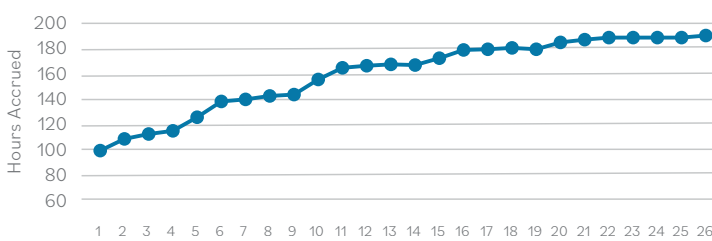






Photo by Adobe Stock

## Workforce challenges in small & rural communities

By **SHARLA SMITH**,  
Cripple Creek human resources & risk management technician

**T**he economic and social fabric of small and rural communities is woven with a unique set of advantages and challenges. For human resources professionals in these communities, attracting and retaining top talent can feel like walking a tightrope in gusty winds. With a population of just over 1,100 and an elevation of nearly 10,000 feet in the scenic Pikes Peak region, the City of Cripple Creek is no exception. While burgeoning metropolitan areas and larger mountain towns boast a deep labor pool and the financial muscle to offer competitive salaries, we're left to navigate that tightrope without a talent safety net.

### THE STAFFING STRUGGLE

While the tightrope represents the narrow, wobbly path to finding the perfect candidate for any organization, small and rural communities face an even greater challenge: finding enough qualified people to begin with. We're stepping into an unbalanced arena with a limited local labor force, which forces us to compete with neighboring businesses for the same small handful of candidates. This scarcity makes it difficult to fill critical roles, especially those requiring specialized skills, licenses, or certifications. While a single job posting in

other areas might attract dozens of qualified applicants, ours might only receive one or two — if any. This limited pool not only slows down the hiring process but also increases pressure on existing staff who must take on extra responsibilities. This can lead to burnout, causing a jarring snap in our retention rope.

### THE COMPENSATION CONUNDRUM

Even when a qualified candidate is found, the fray is far from over. Smaller cities often operate with smaller budgets, so we can't match the salaries offered by larger, nearby areas. Add to this the fact that the City of Cripple Creek's two major competing industries for local talent are casinos and mining, and we find ourselves traversing the constantly shifting surface of a slack rope.

Small and rural communities must get creative with their compensation and benefits packages to instill a sense of purpose beyond the paycheck. In Cripple Creek, our strategy includes building a strong, positive culture where employees feel valued. We offer semi-flexible work schedules, opportunities for professional growth, a robust benefits package, and a greater sense of community to help us regain some equilibrium.

### THE RETENTION RISK

Keeping employees can be just as challenging as hiring them, and for small and rural communities, losing a key team member can be especially devastating. While we celebrate that many of our municipal employees enjoy decades-long careers, we also know that our retention rope sways precariously without a replenishing talent pool and pipeline. This makes succession planning a top priority.

### THE DETERMINED DISMOUNT

So, what's the way forward?

It requires a multi-faceted approach. Small and rural communities can leverage technology to offer remote work opportunities, expanding their talent search beyond local borders. Highlighting the unique advantages of these communities — a shorter commute, a close-knit community, and a slower pace — can attract individuals looking for a different kind of lifestyle. In Cripple Creek, we're collaborating with our local high school to show students the rewards of a public sector career and to start developing a pipeline of future employees.

Ultimately, our success isn't about competing with larger communities on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Instead, it's about recognizing the inherent strengths of our community and building a value proposition that resonates with what people truly seek — a place to belong, a sense of purpose, and a life well-lived. And this is the real gold found in Cripple Creek.



# Tribute to Ken Bueche

Colorado Municipal League executive director, 1974-2005

BY KEVIN BOMMER, CML EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*This article is adapted from the tribute read at the funeral vigil for Kenneth Gregory Bueche, who was born April 14, 1938, and passed away July 16, 2025. Ken was CML's ninth executive director and is credited with leading the organization through significant growth and change and for being a champion of home rule and local control. This edition of Colorado Municipalities is dedicated to his memory and contribution to CML and municipal governance.*

I currently hold the same position Ken held for 31 years after nearly 40 years in total with the League. Let me first express my heartfelt condolences to Ken's wonderful family and so many friends, and also to his extended family of former CML staff, board members, municipal elected officials and staff, and many others whose lives he touched.

I have to say that when Ken's family asked me if I "had five minutes" to make some remarks here today, I was a little concerned. Anyone who knew Ken understands when he asked you if you "had five minutes," you might be lucky enough to emerge from the meeting, assignment, or task anywhere between two hours to three days later. For today, I was assured that five minutes really means five minutes.

I was fortunate to be hired by Ken almost 26 years ago back in 1999 and he promoted to be a lobbyist very shortly thereafter. I knew right away he was a man of faith because it is the only explanation of how a Fort Collins born-and-raised CSU Ram would ever hire a born and bred Wyoming Cowboy!

Those early years were so impactful on my career, and I would not be standing here today if it were not for Ken. While the other, more seasoned lobbyists worked very independently, Ken spent a lot of time with me. He was patient as I learned new issues, and he both challenged me and provided constructive criticism.

The only real challenge was trying to read performance evaluations, memos, and instructions scrawled

with what was once a nub of a golf pencil and in handwriting that was pure hieroglyphics to my 28-year-old eyes. Things really clicked once I learned how to read it and even more when he embraced email!

Ken was a great historian of state and municipal issues and mentor to everyone. And boy, oh boy, was he committed to his staff and would stick up for us no matter what.

Although I was told by others at the time that, when it was a part of his role, Ken was a tenacious lobbyist and no one wanted to tangle with him, I never saw it. I saw a humble leader — soft-spoken but always clear on the right direction to go and the best strategy to get there.

Ken gave nearly 40 years to the Colorado Municipal League — 31 of those years as the executive director. To truly explain Ken's legacy, I would need his version of "5 minutes" — but since I don't, let me try the shorthand version.

Former U.S. Sen. Alan K. Simpson of Wyoming, who recently passed away, and is another former boss of mine I loved and admired, said this when speaking at the funeral of his dear friend, President George H.W. Bush, "Those who travel the high road of humility are not bothered with heavy traffic."

That was Ken. Humble to the core, which was certainly a road less traveled then, and even more so now. Ken was always ready to credit staff with the wins and take responsibility for any losses — not that there were many.



Three generations of CML directors: Ken Bueche, center, 1974-2005; Sam Mamet, left, 2005-2019; and Kevin Bommer, right, 2019-present.

But others who knew Ken even better were on to him. Gov. Dick Lamm said in 2005 when Ken retired that "Ken Bueche is a steel rod masquerading as a cupcake. Ken knows and has always known exactly what he wanted, where his bend points were, and has a mind that can out think and outfox most legislators I ever knew."

Ken's successor and my predecessor, retired CML Executive Director Sam Mamet (another short timer who only gave 40 years to CML) said, "I have never met anybody with more integrity, with a higher level of professionalism, and a commitment to public service than Ken. He is precise. Everything he does has a purpose. His analysis is on point, always."

And the great Cathy Reynolds, former Denver City Council Member, CML president (twice), and National League of Cities president said Ken's "brilliance was in his amazing talent of finding, hiring, and retaining the best staff in the state." And I promise I didn't just throw that in because Ken hired me!

But Ken's humility would never allow him to acknowledge all the well-deserved respect and admiration, but you know it made him smile and certainly still does.

And in addition to the enormous legacy he leaves in the world of municipal governance, there is also the literal foundation of CML — the Ken Bueche Municipal League Building at 1144 Sherman Street in Denver that would not exist without his vision and commitment. One of the highlights of CML's 100th anniversary celebration in 2023 was having Ken and Bernice at the



Ken Bueche places a time capsule in 1998 during the dedication of the CML building that now bears his name.

Annual Conference, plus he, Bernice, and a whole lot of the family at the 25th anniversary of the building's opening, so we could all celebrate the "House that Ken built" with them there.

I cannot say enough how amazing the outpouring of love over these past days from those that knew and worked with Ken in his professional life has been. He touched so many and continues to be a guiding light for many, including me.

Yet, despite all of that, it is indisputable that Ken's greatest legacy and his greatest pride is his loving family. Ken taught us all by way of example that no matter what else was going on, family and faith came first — and it is something he imbued into Sam and me and is therefore inextricably woven into the fabric of the Colorado Municipal League's culture. To all of you — his loving family — thank you for sharing Ken with us, and I hope you know how much he changed the world we live in.

I think about Ken every day — both professionally and personally. Great leaders have that effect. What they share and teach sticks with you.

I am grateful to Ken for giving me a shot, and I am more grateful that he was both a mentor and a friend to myself and so many others and that he and Bernice have remained friends with Gabriella and me.

His stoicism and faith, and his commitment to family, good governance, and his unwavering support of those who choose to serve remains our guiding light.

Thank you, Ken. We will miss you terribly.





# SAVE MONEY AND TIME WITH COOPERATIVE PURCHASING

**NATIONALLY BID, LOCALLY AWARDED  
CONTRACTS THROUGH CBA & AEPA**

- Available to all Colorado government entities and non-profits
- No BOCES membership or fees required—Just work directly with the vendor(s) by requesting the CBA/AEPA Contract Pricing.

**FROM CITY OFFICES  
TO COMMUNITY CENTERS,  
PLAYGROUNDS TO PICKLEBALL  
COURTS — THINK CBA/AEPA  
FOR IT ALL!**

**SCAN QR CODE TO ACCESS CONTRACTS &  
UNLOCK DISCOUNTED PRICING!**



**AEPA**  
Association of Educational  
Purchasing Agencies

**COLORADO BOCES ASSOCIATION**


Joining Forces to Enrich Educational Opportunities for Students

# WE SEE YOU

Advertising in *Colorado Municipalities* will get your organization noticed by thousands of municipal officials and decision makers. Want to be seen by the people who lead Colorado cities and towns? Contact CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White at 303-831-6411 or [dwhite@cml.org](mailto:dwhite@cml.org)



**CML**  
COLORADO  
MUNICIPAL  
LEAGUE



# EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Unlock the keys to responsible municipal leadership at CML's Effective Governance Workshop. This in-person training event focuses on practical governance skills such as staff/council relationships, ethics, liability, open meetings, leadership, and grass roots advocacy.

**October 22-23**  
**1144 Sherman Street in Denver**  
**Register at [cml.org](http://cml.org)**



COLORADO  
MUNICIPAL  
LEAGUE

USPS 123-140

Periodical postage  
**PAID**  
at Denver, Colorado

1144 Sherman St., Denver, CO 80203



**COLORADO EMPLOYER BENEFIT TRUST**

**Why  
Choose Us**



**92**

School Districts



**100**

Municipalities



**10**

Counties



**250+**

Special Districts

The Colorado Employer Benefit Trust (CEBT) delivers superior and cost-effective benefit solutions. Since its founding in 1980, CEBT has grown to serve nearly 37,000 members across more than 450 public employers. Known for its comprehensive benefits, outstanding customer service, and flexible, client-focused approach, CEBT continues to set the standard in employee benefit programs.

### WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT



By joining CEBT's self-insured pool you can enjoy:

- Reduced administrative costs
- Shared risk & long-term stability
- Customized strategic solutions
- Positive overall claims experience

**MEDICAL - DENTAL - VISION - LIFE**



For more information contact:  
or visit:  [cebt.org](http://cebt.org)

 **Terry Rook** +303-345-7730 or  
 **Bryce Burget** +720-505-7796