

Colorado Municipalities

Vol. 96, No.1, February 2020

AUTOMOTIVE

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Priced to sell! A 2001 Cadillac Deville in pristine condition. It features the highly sought after Northstar V8 and only 115,000 miles on the odometer; mainly highway miles. This car is fast and rides like a couch made of clouds. Heater and air conditioner works great. New tires and brakes. Interior is in good shape considering its age, no rips or tears in leather, car lighters in front and back work, stereo, speakers and all internal/external electronics and lights are in good working order.

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Jeep Wrangler

2006 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Rubicon for sale. The Jeep has rear hard rock bumper with gas can holders, a storage rack, five new Goodyear Wrangler Duratrax tires, and a Alpine radio with Bluetooth. For more information call today!

2010 Toyota Tundra

Asking for \$17,675. The truck is in excellent condition with 124,566 miles. It gets 13 miles per gallon in the city and 17 miles per gallon on highway. It has a 6-speed shifttable automatic transmission and an 8-cylinder engine. Both interior and exterior are gray. Call if interested.

2014 BMW 3 Series

It is a 335i xDrive Gran Turismo with 45,126 miles on the odometer. The car has a black exterior and black leather interior. Asking for \$20,789 or best offer.

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This has been a great truck for several years, but unfortunately it is time to sell my 1992 Toyota truck. The truck has 112k miles and it runs and drives great, asking \$9,200 or best offer. Please call or text Adam if you have any questions.

CAREERS

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Laura Leary, Human Resources Director at Douglas County Government



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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.

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COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE OBJECTIVES

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.

Colorado Municipalities

Volume 96, Number 1

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- District 11 – Lisa Piering, Rangeley manager
- District 12 – Torre, Aspen mayor
- District 13 – Jaylene Lee, Rockvale trustee

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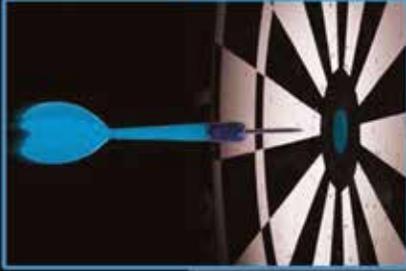
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[SPOTLIGHT]





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Have some 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 Design and Communications Specialist Christine Taniguchi at ctaniguchi@cml.org.

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Each issue of *Colorado Municipalities* reaches 5,000 municipal officials and decision makers. Reach those who lead Colorado cities and towns for as little as \$175 per insertion. Contact Courtney Forehand, CML training and marketing specialist, at 303-831-6411 or cforehand@cml.org.



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Robert Bishop serves as the human resources manager for the Town of Monument. After serving with the U.S. Army, he attended

college at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs and gravitated to Monument shortly after graduation. He is currently pursuing his Doctor of Business Administration in human resources. When not typing on his keyboard, you can find him debating the finer points of Harry Potter with his daughter, Bailey, or going hiking with his hound dog, Boone.



Greg Caton is a native Coloradan who joined the City of Grand Junction in June 2016. He came to Grand Junction from Oro

Valley, Arizona, where he had been serving as the town manager. Prior to joining the Town of Oro Valley, Caton served eight years as assistant city manager for the City of Durango. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Fort Lewis College and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Colorado Denver. Caton has received the Credentialed Manager designation from ICMA (International City/County Management Association), which is the premier

municipal government leadership and management organization.



Emma Dahlin is a business support senior assistant for Willis Towers Watson. She helps out with customer service, account

management, and marketing for CEBT. In her free time, she loves skiing, hiking, or any outdoor activities in the mountains.



Kirsten Decker serves as the Denver Public Library system strategy and evaluation manager. In this role, she is leading the organization through

a results-based strategic planning process that aligns funding with community priorities and empowers the library to tell its story of impact on the Denver community. Decker began her local government career in Baltimore City's Bureau of the Budget and Management Research, and in 2016, she took on the role of director of continuous improvement. Prior to her role with Denver Public Library, Decker served as the process improvement program manager for the City of Fort Collins. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Colorado State University and a Master of Public Administration from the Edwin O. Stene School of Public Affairs and Administration at the University of Kansas.



Jessica Frier is a senior health and welfare plan consultant with American Fidelity Administrative Services, Inc. and a licensed

attorney since 2009. A nationally recognized expert on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, she trains employers on employee benefits and human resources compliance topics. Her many years of experience assisting municipal and education employers uniquely equip her to help public sector clients find business-friendly solutions to tough workforce challenges.



Paula Gibson is the human resources director with the City of Centennial and a Gallup-Certified strengths coach. She has more

than 25 years of experience in the role of strategic business partner, program manager, and organizational development leader. She is a human resources professional who helps organizations and individuals discover their innate talents and capitalize on their capabilities and has spent her career in a variety of sectors, including financial services, not-for-profit, and municipal government. Her broad understanding of various areas of business has solidified the idea that focusing on talents brings excellence in all environments and allows employees to come to work every day to do what they do best.



Bethany Kelsey serves as the Pikes Peak YMCA corporate health and wellness health promotion director. Her unique exercise and

wellness background encompasses corporate health promotion, clinical research, concierge medicine, military nonprofit work, and personal training. Kelsey's diverse professional experiences strongly fed her existing passions for positively impacting lives and building purposeful relationships. She holds a B.S. in kinesiology from the University of Northwestern, St. Paul, Minnesota, and an M.S. in health promotion from the University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut.

Her certifications include American Council on Exercise (ACE) Certified Medical Exercise Specialist, ACE Personal Trainer, ACE Health Coach, and Level 1 Precision Nutrition.



Dee Martin is the human resources director for the City of Westminster. She began her employment with Westminster

in 1993 in Parks, Recreation, and Libraries running special events and youth/teen programs. Martin has held various roles in human resources with the city since 1998. Prior to working for Westminster, she held professional and management positions with Up With People, International; the White House; and World Youth Day. Martin graduated with honors from Arizona State University and holds various certifications in human resources, organizational development, and leadership.



Lauren Mueller has worked in the field of human resources in both the private and the public sectors for the past 21 years.

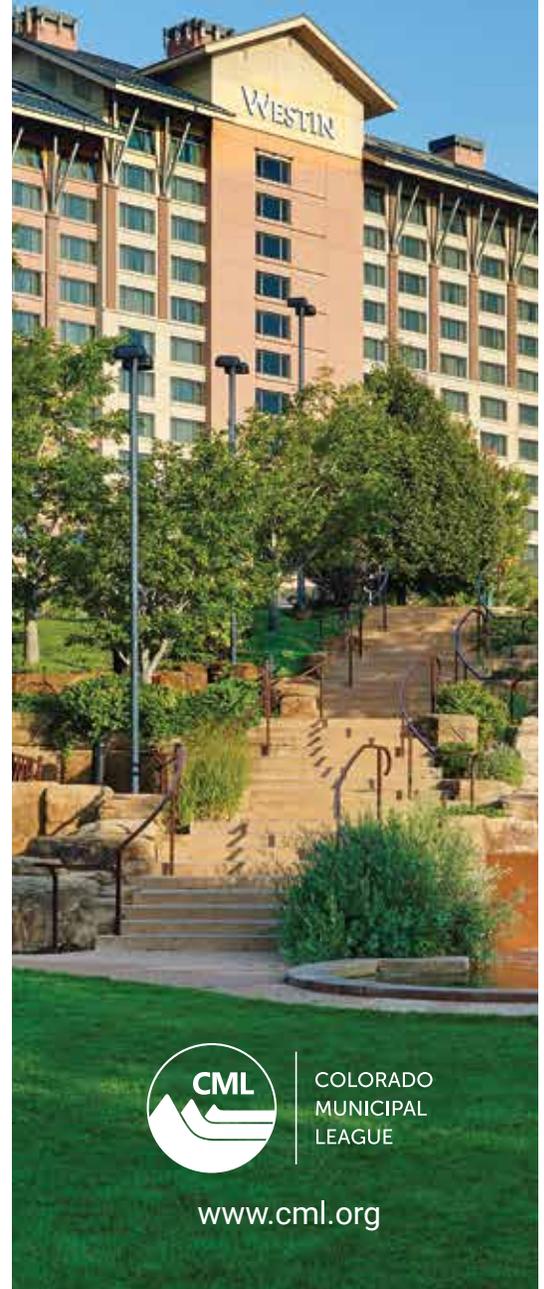
She holds a master's degree in organizational performance and change/human resources management from Colorado State University and earned her senior professional in human resources (SPHR) certification in 2018. Mueller currently serves as the director of human resources for the Town of Frederick.



Gerald Young is a senior research associate with the Center for State and Local Government Excellence, focused on workforce, retirement, and health and wellness research.

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Recruiting, developing, supporting, and retaining the best and the brightest to serve Colorado

By Melissa Mata, CML municipal research analyst

Illustrations by Christine Taniguchi, CML design and communications specialist



The Colorado Municipal League's (CML) *2020 State of Our Cities & Towns Report* examines the current state of municipal human resources and the challenges facing municipal employers in recruiting and retaining qualified employees, as well as the innovative solutions municipalities are trying in response. This report, based on data from a survey conducted in the fall of 2019 of cities and towns statewide, reveals several common themes in the 157 municipalities that responded.

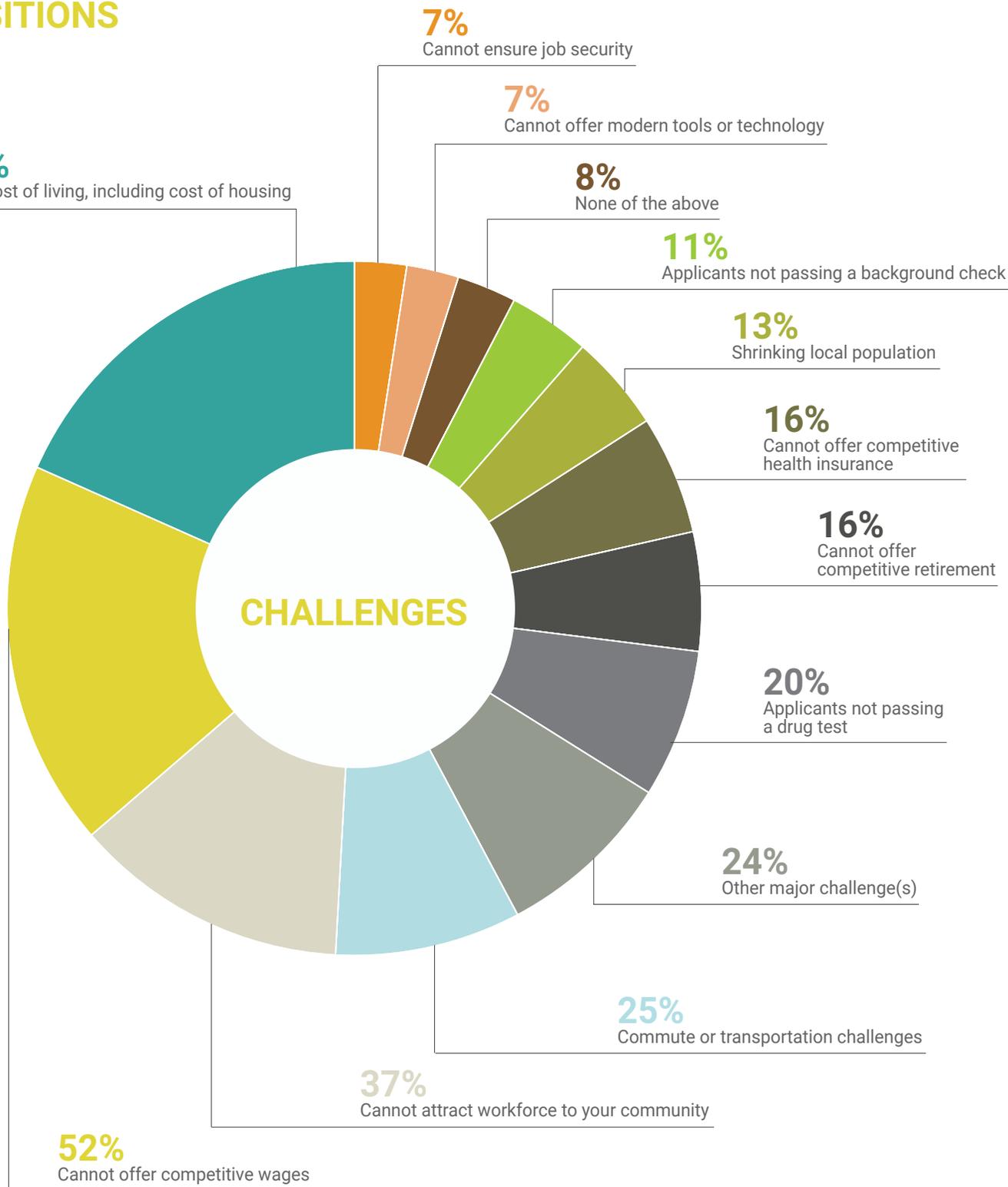
Recruitment challenges

Eighty-one percent of respondents answered that it was either "very difficult" or "somewhat difficult" to fill full-time positions. The biggest recruitment challenges are a side effect of the current economic boom happening in the state: 53% of respondents reported high cost of living, including cost of housing, as a major challenge to filling full-time

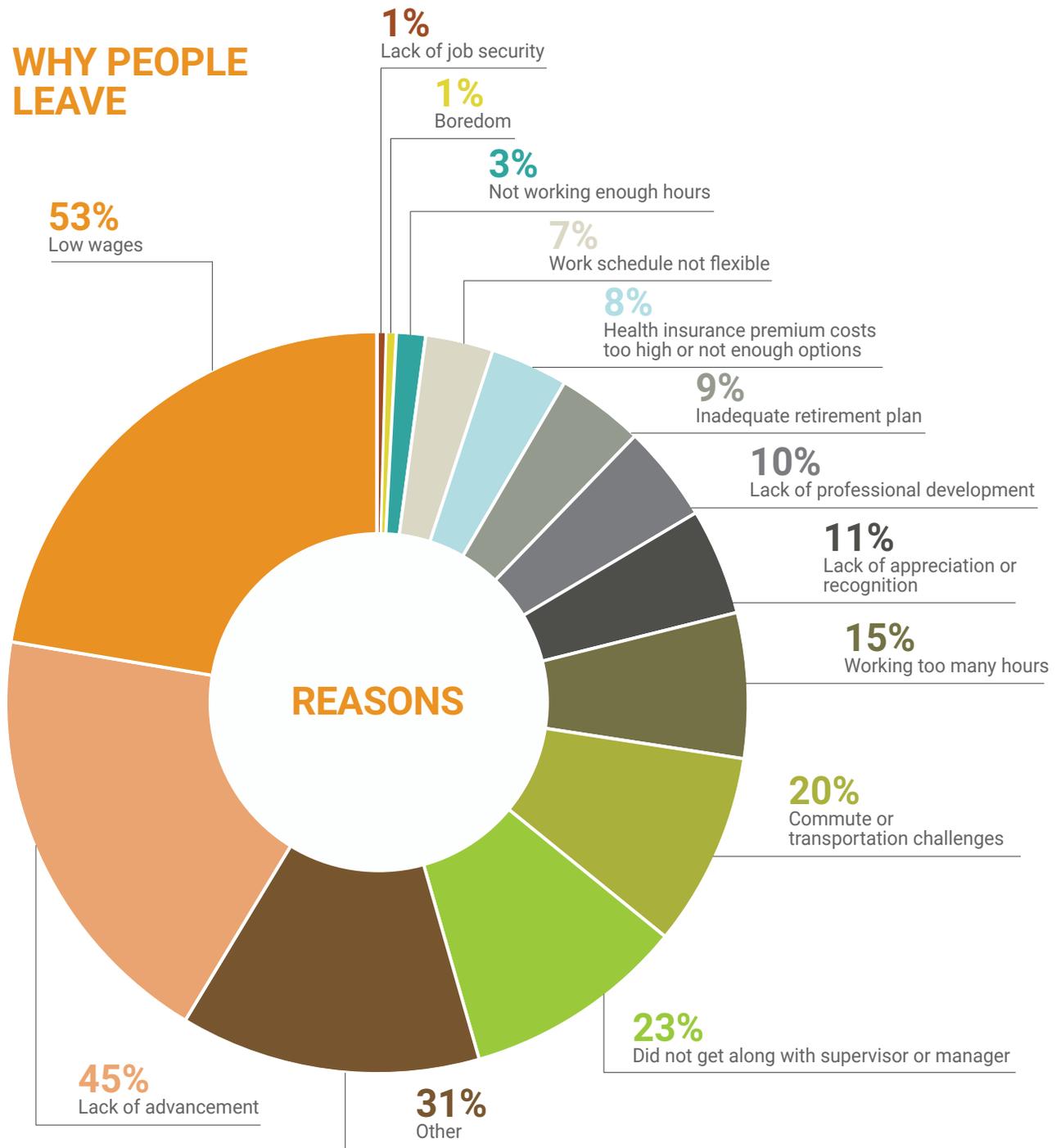
FILLING FULL-TIME POSITIONS

53%

High cost of living, including cost of housing



WHY PEOPLE LEAVE



ACTIONS TAKEN TO INCREASE COMPETITIVENESS FOR HIRING OR RETENTION



positions, and in larger municipalities, that number was 76%. Similarly, 52% of respondents reported difficulty offering competitive wages, with the competition coming from both the private sector and other government agencies.

An insufficient applicant pool is another hurdle. Almost half of smaller municipalities and almost half of municipalities in the Western Slope/ Mountains and the Eastern Plains regions also reported that attracting workforce to their communities was another major challenge. Even municipalities in seemingly popular areas note the difficulty in finding employees, as university towns see their population regularly shift and resort towns have a limited full-time population compared to tourists and second-home owners.

The most difficult departments in which to fill positions are police, fire, and public safety (41% stated very difficult, 25% somewhat difficult) and public works (29% very difficult, 50% somewhat difficult). Other difficult-to-fill departments include planning and development, finance and accounting, and the city or town clerk's office. Positions requiring 24/7 staffing, physical labor, or executive leadership experience were the most difficult to fill job types or functions.

Retention challenges

Staff retention is a challenge when it comes to both full-time staff (81%) and part-time staff (74%). The most common reasons cited when employees leave municipalities were low wages (reported by 53% of respondents), consistent statewide, and a lack of advancement (45%), especially in the Front Range. While

many respondents remarked that providing professional development to staff was important for retention, 75% of respondents reported that it was at least somewhat difficult to provide.

In addition, the noble calling of public service can be a double-edged sword: when morale is high, it can substitute for higher wages because the employees feel appreciated for their good work. On the other hand, discord among elected officials or residents can discourage municipal staff and lead to increased turnover.

How municipalities are responding

In addition to increasing wages, the common themes appearing in responses related to addressing these recruitment and retention challenges include a focus on work-life balance and positive organizational culture. Municipalities are increasingly offering flex schedules and telecommuting. Many municipalities are also providing free or discounted passes to recreation centers and/or ski passes, when available. To both save money on insurance costs and to boost morale among staff, respondents are starting or expanding wellness programs, which may include physical, mental, and financial planning support.

Municipal managers are also revamping employee evaluations and instead creating employee development processes that include providing paths for advancement within the municipality as well as providing tuition reimbursement. To be more competitive in a hot labor market, they are conducting compensation studies at regular intervals.

A balanced approach to recruitment and retention must include cost-savings measures as well as the increase in wages and other benefits. Respondents commented on their vigilance in understanding the benefits market to find the best value, comparing costs and providers each year. They are spending time and effort educating staff about the value of available benefits so that employees understand, appreciate, and make use of their full compensation package.

Colorado cities and towns are also finding efficiencies and other improvements in their hiring and onboarding processes. Municipal officials are using technology to streamline tracking and interviewing candidates, and using data and qualitative methods to understand attrition. They are also formalizing and reimagining onboarding processes, and using feedback to evolve the process, so that a sense of belonging is created for new employees from their very first day.

In addition, multiple municipalities are continuing to explore new ideas, including employee referral bonuses, options to cash in paid time off accrual, and offering benefits to part-time employees.

Astute readers will notice the topics above reflected throughout this magazine issue, as our contributors offer their experience in navigating the dual challenge of recruiting and retaining the highest-quality personnel while continuing to be a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars.

Complete survey results can be found at tinyurl.com/y4a4b47t.



Respect and understanding

By David Baxter, Arkansas Municipal League health/safety and operations manager

It was not too many years ago that people sat down with each other, talked about what was important to them, and discussed their differences. From those conversations, they developed a better understanding of each other and, ultimately, mutual respect. Whether or not people have lost their ability to connect with others because of the advent of the keyboard and social media is a debate for another day. But what is a timely topic is the importance of respect and understanding in the municipal workplace.

Municipal government is the very foundation of this great nation, no matter which state you call home. Our municipal officials and employees do the hard work that makes a real difference in people's lives every day, whether it's the city clerk assisting a citizen with a simple request or the firefighter rushing in to help a person trapped in a burning house. They are the leaders in our communities.

In fact, as a child my first recollection of municipal government was the trash man. The trash man would come by every week and my father told me that he worked for the government. Leadership is simply influence, and that trash man had influence on me as a child. It is important that municipal employees at all levels understand that they have influence in their positions of leadership.

At the Arkansas Municipal League, we believe that it is impossible to be an influential leader and an effective employee if you are intolerant and

disrespectful of others who look, think, or act differently from yourself. The concept for *Respect and Understanding* in the Arkansas Municipal Workplace began with the late Don Zimmerman, the Arkansas Municipal League's longtime executive director. Around 2016, Don became concerned with what seemed like the constant media barrage of police shootings and negative police interactions with citizens. With a desire to be proactive, we developed the informational publication and training program *Respect and Understanding* in the Arkansas Municipal Workplace. Our program is based on the concept that in order to respect someone, you have to understand them. That takes communication skills and suspending judgment that is based on emotional responses and first impressions.

This is no easy task, because at the base human level, everything we do is all about our survival. Our brains are hardwired to detect other people's intentions. Simply interacting with others who do not dress, talk, or behave like us triggers bias, or judgment at the subconscious cognitive level that is meant to help us survive.

Bias is simply our danger detector and, contrary to popular belief, is not something that only "bad" people have. It is default human nature to judge other races, people who have lifestyles different from our own, and people outside our group by their worst examples ("They might be dangerous!"), and yet we expect to be judged on our best intentions. We all experience bias. It is natural to the human condition. It

becomes a problem when we do not detect it or when we ignore it and it interferes with us personally and professionally. Bias then turns into something detrimental. Prejudice, hate, and even violence can result.

While our training program largely explores psychology and human survival to help our members better understand themselves, it also focuses on empathy as the key to promoting understanding.

Empathy is a difficult cognitive achievement. It takes communication and time to understand someone else's story. This can be difficult, because we live in a fast-paced world, and we tend to see the world through our own cultural lens. Listening to someone else's version of reality pushes us out of our comfort zone, which again activates our cognitive survival mechanisms. But when you take the time to consider where someone is coming from, especially when they are different from you, it is the pinnacle of understanding, and that is what elicits real respect.

We have received very positive feedback from both municipal officials and employees over the last four years. We have trained over 2,000 municipal officials and employees on how to better understand and respect those who are different from themselves. Equally important, our program stresses that no matter what city department you work for, respecting and understanding others is leadership at the highest level.

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What municipal employers can expect from Colorado's new Equal Pay for Equal Work Act

By Ellie LeBuhn, CML law clerk

With contribution from Lorrie Ray, Employers Council member engagement director

The Colorado Equal Pay for Equal Work Act (CEPEWA), effective Jan. 1, 2021, is an employment law that includes several important changes to expand the definition of wage discrimination, heighten compliance requirements for employers, and update the claims violation handling process.¹ Approved by Gov. Jared Polis this past May, the law will apply to violations that occur on or after the 2021 effective date and effectively replaces the Wage Equality Regardless of Sex Act. The Equal Pay Act has been an enacted federal law since 1963, but the gender and "gender plus" pay gaps have proliferated throughout the 21st century as women, especially minority women, continue to earn significantly less than men for the same work. While equal pay

¹ Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, S.B. 19-085, 72nd Gen. Assemb., 1st Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2019).



tends to spark partisan political discussion, data shows that the disparity can ultimately compound, with women losing from \$400,000 to \$1,000,000 over the course of their working lifetimes.²

Under the CEPEWA, Colorado aims to close this pay gap in the public and private sectors through several strategies encompassed within this new law. These avenues include prohibiting pay differentials on the basis of sex or sex and a supplementary protected status (the "sex plus" provision), regardless of the employer's intent; requiring any wage disparity to meet six specific job-related factors; requiring employers to keep job description and pay records; protecting against retaliation for pay discussions; requiring promotions and job opportunities to be posted internally; and banning employers' use of an employee or a prospective employee's pay history as justification for a wage disparity. Employers found in violation of this law will be liable for economic damages in the amount equal to the difference between the amount that the employer paid to the complaining employee and the amount that the employee would have received had there been no violation. This will amount to back pay for every time the employee was paid a discriminatory wage rate, for the entire time of the violation, or for up to three years. Additionally, the law creates a new category for damages in sex discrimination claims based on pay disparities, liquidated damages, which essentially doubles the economic damages available to a prevailing employee.

In the public sector, especially at the local government level, these changes will mean making adjustments in hiring and retention processes to safeguard obedience with the law. Now, with any job opening, employers must post the opportunity internally, ensuring that the salary range and benefits of the position are included in this posting for full compliance. Your municipality may already do this and should continue to do so, as this practice is now legally required. Employers should also take stock of job descriptions themselves and ensure that any salary increase or bonuses align with the relevant depiction of the role, with the fluidity that employees expect as they climb in their careers. Employers could find themselves liable under the new law for pay discrimination if any increase or bonus is not accurately reflected in the relevant job description. Additionally, the new law requires employers to demonstrate six specific identifying factors — education, experience, seniority, geographic location, travel, and merit — as evidence of the appropriateness of any pay differential between employees. These factors must be the only reasons for a pay difference, and employers may never ask for or use pay history of a current or potential employee to justify a disparity in wages or to determine an employee's pay.

Certain best practices, while not required by CEPEWA, could also assist your municipality moving forward. Detailed compensation plans should be used to ensure that any pay differentials are reflected in pay ranges

or bands and steps between promotions. This helps demonstrate consistency across positions, the equal opportunity for growth, and a commitment to uniformity. Public sector employers may also provide a standard cost of living adjustment across positions, depending on the location of the workplace. Finally, a valuable tool that employers can use to help mitigate the risk of liability for discriminatory pay practices is the use of regular pay audits as a mechanism to warrant compliance and demonstrate a proactive emphasis on lawful pay practices. Hiring outside consultants to conduct pay audits to analyze any inequities will allow employers to rectify these issues and to positively maintain lawful practices prior to the 2021 enactment date. Employers Council, for example, conducts pay audits on behalf of its members for an additional fee. Pay audits should be conducted routinely after CEPEWA becomes effective to maintain obedience to the new law. In addition to reducing the potential for sex-based discrimination claims, pay audits provide a "good faith" defense if an employee claims liquidated damages.³

By taking informed steps now, employers can prepare to have all of the mechanisms in place so that CEPEWA does not come as a surprise requirement, but rather as a well-informed addition to employers' existing dedication to equality for everyone in the workplace.

2 Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, S.B. 19-085(2)(1)(d), 72nd Gen. Assemb., 1st Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2019).

3 Equal Pay for Equal Work Act, S.B. 19-085(6), 72nd Gen. Assemb., 1st Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2019).



Public sector hiring trends in Colorado and how to address the hiring gap

By Libby Bevin, NEOGOV content writer and editor

There are several factors at play that have had a significant impact on public sector hiring, including the erosion of traditional value propositions, an increase in retirement-age workers preparing to leave the workforce, and new workers being attracted to private sector roles instead of public. As a result, the public sector is struggling to maintain a complete and qualified workforce.

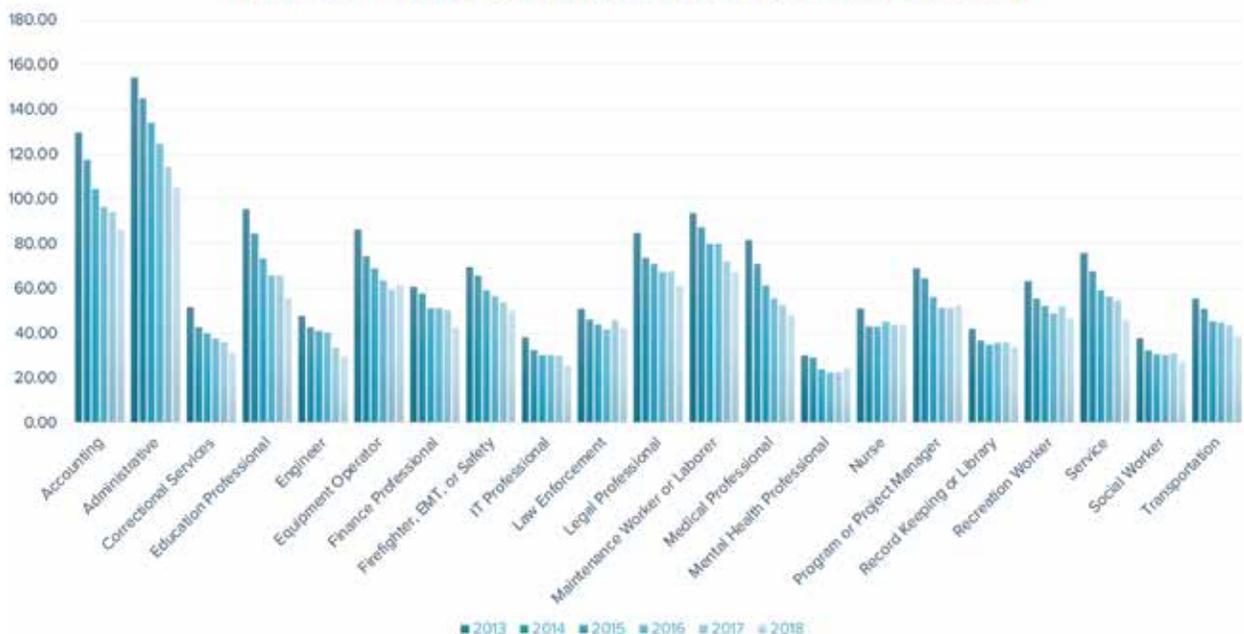
Specifically in Colorado, the hiring gap is even more alarming than the average across all public sector agencies. Colorado organizations will need to address the gap to maintain the quality of service provided to citizens. To address this, organizations need to understand the data that tells this story, and then identify and implement key strategies to narrow the hiring gap.

NEOGOVS's series of research reports have focused on understanding past, current, and projected public sector hiring data. The *2019 Job Seeker Report* (info.neogov.com/resources/white-papers/job-seeker-report) called attention to the increasing gap between applicants and open positions, while the *2019 Hiring Trends Report* dove further into the data and provided recommendations for how to approach the problem.

The public sector hiring crisis

Across all public sector organizations, there has been a 19% decline in applicants over the past five years (2013 to 2018). Coupled with a 30% increase in the number of job postings during the same time period, that leaves a 49% talent gap that must be filled. The decline has been seen across every job category in the public sector.

AVERAGE APPLICANTS PER PUBLIC SECTOR JOB BY JOB CATEGORY

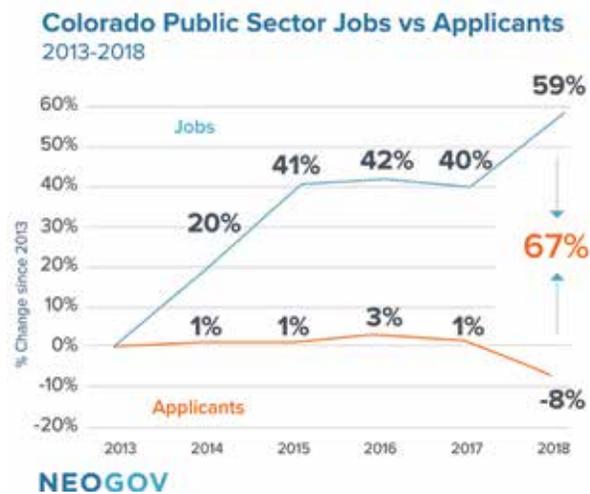


Not only have fewer applicants been applying, but they have also been applying for fewer roles. Across all job categories in 2013, there was an average of 77 applications per job posting. By 2018, that number had decreased by 28.5%, to only 55 applications. With fewer applications and an increase in jobs becoming available, organizations are struggling to support citizens to the same degree that they used to.

Colorado's talent gap

While the data is alarming across all public sector agencies, Colorado's numbers are even more concerning. Although Colorado has only seen an 8% decrease in the number of applicants over the past five years, the number of job openings has increased by a whopping 59%. From 2017 to 2018, Colorado's job postings rose by 19%. That means that in just one year, Colorado's job openings saw the same percentage increase that all agencies across the country saw in five years.

When combined, that is a 67% talent gap between job openings and applicants, nearly 20% worse than the national average. In addition to the talent gap, Colorado is seeing a larger percent change than average in the number of applications per job. With a sizable drop from 76 applications per job in 2013 to 44 applications in 2018, Colorado has experienced a 42% decrease in applicants per job over the past five years.



This brings into question whether the seemingly positive news that Colorado decreased its time to hire rate by 39% between 2013 and 2018 (from 140 days to 95) was the result of streamlining operations or because the state has had a smaller pool of candidates to sift through, which could shorten the recruiting cycle.

Reasons behind the talent gap

Clearly, there has never been a more urgent time for leaders to be hyperfocused on attracting job seekers, but what is responsible for causing the hiring crisis?

According to *The Washington Post*, 10,000 Baby Boomers are retiring per day, leaving many jobs empty as organizations struggle to fill the open roles at the rate they are being vacated.

To compound the issue, public sector organizations are not as attractive to applicants as they once were because retirement benefits are eroding. With 11% of the population retiring this year, the public sector is on the hook to fund the retirement benefits that have been promised to these workers. Pew Trusts reports that government agencies could only pay out \$2.8 trillion of \$4 trillion in promised benefits in 2016. As a result, 57% of pension funds have since been frozen to new employees. This has caused workers to avoid or flee the public sector in search of the private sector's higher salaries.

Another reason for the talent crisis is the erosion of the public sector's other main historical value proposition: job security. Following the Great Recession of 2008, state and local governments reduced their workforce by 162,000 employees, or 5.7%, damaging the perception of job security. Previously seen as reliable, lifelong positions, public sector roles are no longer considered the unshakable careers they once were. The perception of frailty as it relates to job security, combined with the eroding benefits, is causing job seekers to search elsewhere.

Tips for overcoming the gap

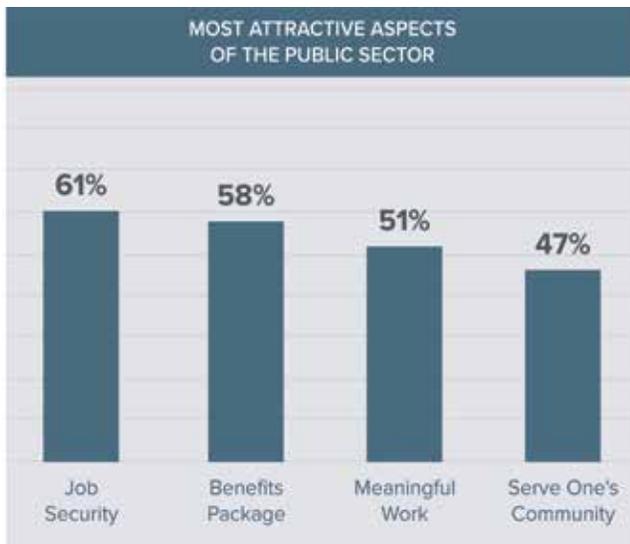
So, what does all of this data mean, and how can we use this knowledge to overcome the talent crisis? Here are five key tips from the *2019 Hiring Trends Report* that will help public sector organizations narrow the talent gap:

1. More targeted advertising

To attract top talent, organizations must first understand where job seekers are actively looking for roles. NEOGOV, the leading provider of public sector HR software (www.neogov.com), surveyed 2,000 job seekers and found that the top five sources were online, including job boards, state and local portals, company websites, and social media. Sixty-two percent of job seekers indicated that they use online job boards. When asked about specific job boards, the top two were Indeed and GovernmentJobs.com, cited by 79% and 68% of job seekers, respectively. Knowing where to find top talent is essential for narrowing the talent gap.

2. Grab job seeker attention with your postings

Candidates only apply to a small percentage of the job openings they see and only when they are interested. Sixty-nine percent of candidates will abandon the application if it takes more than 20 minutes. To attract job seekers, it is important for public sector organizations to promote the most appealing aspects of the public sector. According to NEOGOV's survey, job security, benefits packages, meaningful work, serving the community, and career advancement were considered the most appealing. However, as job security and benefits packages are becoming less reliable, promoting meaningful work, service to the community, and career mobility is essential.

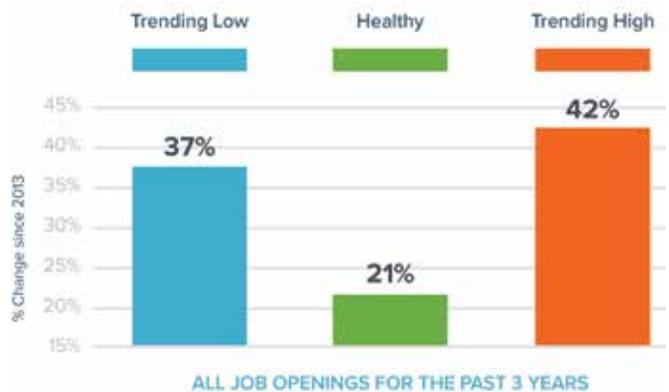


3. Keep top talent on the hook

With fewer applicants, it is important to keep the candidates you do have engaged. Communicating throughout the selection process will help to keep the candidates interested in your role. To effectively communicate with candidates, organizations can use an applicant tracking system to send applicant status updates via email or text message, allow candidates to self-schedule interviews, and answer candidate questions on social media. Keeping lines of communication with candidates open will keep applicants engaged throughout the hiring process.

4. Use data to make decisions

According to NEOGOV data, over a third of public sector agencies have low applicant volume, meaning they do not have enough applicants to be confident that a qualified candidate is in the pool. To correct this and ensure that someone hireable is in the candidate pool, organizations should use metrics to create a target number of candidates needed to fill a role and use real-time trending to monitor the status of the job posting. By using a tool that provides visibility around how an application is trending, agencies can then allocate advertising budget only to the jobs that are not performing well.



5. Reduce turnover with continuous performance management

In a market where it is tough to attract applicants, it becomes more important to retain the employees you have. Continuous performance management increases transparency between employees and managers, and enables issues to be quickly addressed and corrected. According to the Clear Company, employees are three times more engaged when managers regularly check in, and 43% of highly engaged employees receive feedback at least once a week. To effectively manage performance, managers should host more frequent, positive conversations centered on goals, objectives, accomplishments, and development opportunities with their employees. With scheduled check-ins and timely feedback, employee expectations and goals can be adjusted as needed to maintain an engaged workforce and reduce turnover.

[SPOTLIGHT]

Town of Superior referral program

By Nadine Smith, Superior administrative services manager



The Town of Superior began its seasonal referral bonus program in the spring of 2016. We found it increasingly difficult to attract qualified applicants to fill our seasonal positions. Each year, we need to hire approximately 40 lifeguards. Our typical seasonal employees are town residents in high school looking for a summer job close to home. For this reason and others, many of our seasonal employees are rehired and return for an average of four years. Some of our best hires in the past have been family or friends of current lifeguards. They had a clear expectation of the job responsibilities and work environment.

The design and implementation of the program is simple. If an applicant puts a returning employee's name down as a referral on their job application and we end up hiring them, the town issues the returning employee a \$50 referral bonus in the first paycheck of the season. During our recruitment process, we ask returning employees to help us spread the word to their friends.

Since starting the program, 47% (32 out of 68) of our new seasonal hires have been referrals. We have also seen a positive trend with staff completing the entire season, a reduction in the absentee rate, and a decline in disciplinary issues.

[SPOTLIGHT]

Grand Junction Police Department recruitment strategy

By Greg Caton, Grand Junction city manager; Greg LeBlanc, Grand Junction senior assistant to the city manager; and Doug Shoemaker, Grand Junction police chief



Municipalities are facing recruitment challenges across the country. Low unemployment contributes to a smaller applicant pool, and vacancies in police departments are challenging to fill. In Grand Junction, the passage of the First Responder Sales Tax (2B) in the spring of 2019 created a sustainable funding source for additional police personnel, and the department is now tasked with increasing the number of sworn officers from 124 to 142, as well as adding dispatch and civilian personnel.

To tackle this challenge in the current market conditions, the department has had to change the way it thinks about recruiting. To start, a recruitment team was created along with a social media initiative focused on recruiting lateral and currently certified police officer applicants. The department also produced a recruitment video (youtu.be/Csp5NFKq2KI) that captures the culture of

the Grand Junction Police Department (GJPD). These efforts have resulted in an increase in applicants and a need to keep the testing process open year-round instead of having two testing processes per year. Other efforts to streamline recruiting, including increased personal contact between potential recruits and the recruitment team, have also shown positive results.

Strategies

The GJPD employs a number of recruitment strategies that aid in the recruitment process. These include:

Department-specific recruitment website

The GJPD has a department-specific recruitment website (www.applygjpd.com), which is designed to be a standout recruiting tool for the department that is separate from the city's other jobs page. The website is a helpful tool for navigating the application

process and for understanding the qualifications and benefits.

Personal contact

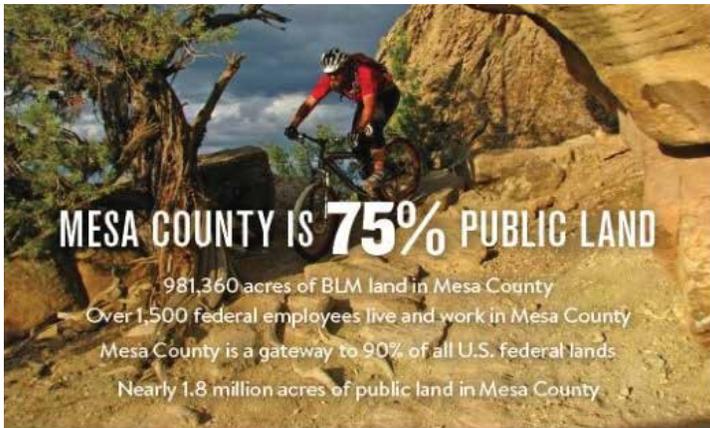
Instead of relying on traditional methods to process applicants, the GJPD has altered the hiring process to provide more input by existing employees while emphasizing the importance of each individual applicant. As one prime example, multiple members of the command staff and the chief of police make it a point to attend the physical fitness testing stage of the hiring process, where faces are put with names and applicants are encouraged by those members throughout the physical testing portion. The process creates a feeling of buy-in from the top down within the organization, and applicants who are ultimately hired mention that personal effort throughout the agency as a distinct factor in their choice to join GJPD. Additionally, throughout the application process, a police officer is assigned as a sort of applicant case manager, keeping constant contact with the applicant throughout each stage of the process to foster the feeling that GJPD is

committed to welcoming the applicant, as opposed to making them feel like a number.

Lifestyle and marketing

In addition to traditional recruiting talking points such as highlighting the importance of serving a community that values law enforcement, or inviting applicants to work with a department that offers personal and professional development through a wide variety of challenging and rewarding career opportunities, the GJPD sells the lifestyle that goes with living on the Western Slope of Colorado in Grand Junction. The department has partnered with another city department, Visit Grand Junction, to market to applicants who make lifestyle a part of their employer selection criteria.

This is part of a push to attract applicants while leveraging the area's natural assets and other aspects of tourism marketing that can be applied in other ways, such as recruitment. Other valuable services provided are links to realtors and the school district, and ways to connect with other Western Colorado law enforcement families.



How can cities prepare for the workforce of the future?

By Gerald Young, Center for State and Local Government Excellence senior research associate

The challenges that cities and towns face in recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce are substantial. And while local officials are already experimenting with strategies to meet those needs today, it is also important to consider what the next 10 years may bring.

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, many cities and counties placed limits on their staffing. The Center for State and Local Government Excellence (SLGE) conducted its first annual workforce survey¹ in 2009 and found that 65% of local governments were implementing pay or hiring freezes, while 43% were instituting layoffs. In addition, 18% were offering incentives for early retirement.

By contrast, in 2019, 79% indicated that they were hiring new staff, while layoffs and pay and hiring freezes were only being adopted by 6% or fewer of respondents.

As that pendulum has swung, total employment, which had topped out in 2008, has just returned to pre-recession levels (see Figure 1).

That is a huge swing in just a few years, and it would be tempting to think of this as "problem solved," but jumping to this conclusion would mask a significant new issue for employers — finding qualified candidates to fill available vacancies.

Among the other questions in the survey is what positions the jurisdiction has found hard to fill. As Figure 2 illustrates, in the beginning, fewer than 5% of jurisdictions indicated that many of these positions were hard to fill, but more than 25% are now indicating that that is the case.

The reasons for the difficulty in recruiting may vary, with positions that have private sector counterparts potentially suffering due to the availability of similar positions during a time of low unemployment. This may be compounded by the fact that just 64% feel their jurisdiction's salaries are competitive with the local labor market.

¹ This survey of human resources professionals is conducted in partnership with the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) and the National Association of State Personnel Executives (NASPE). The percentages in this article only reflect respondents from local government. The most recent report, which reflects both state and local data, is posted at: <https://www.slge.org/resources/state-and-local-workforce-survey-2019>.

Figure 1: Local government employment (excluding education)

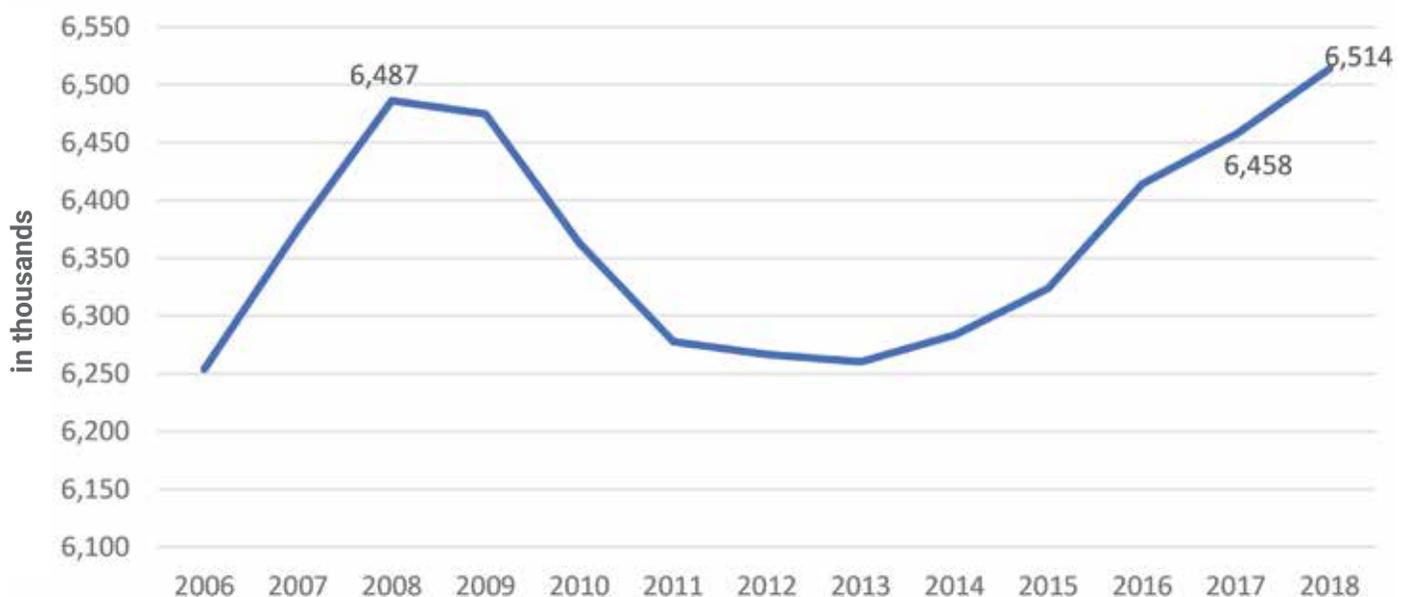
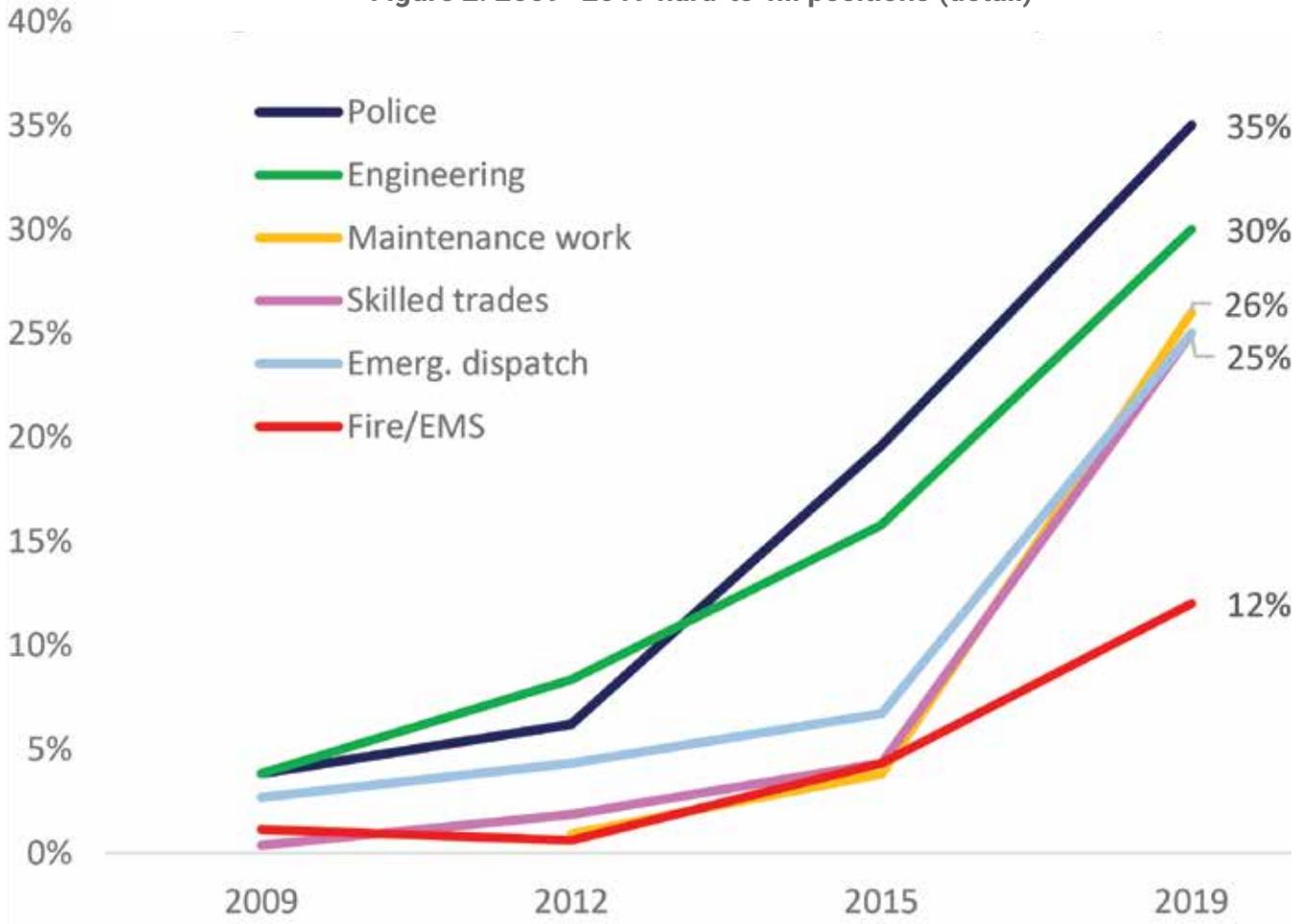


Figure 2: 2009–2019 hard-to-fill positions (detail)



For police and fire, that difficulty in hiring may also be related to changes in attitudes about public service or the desirability of those professions.

Historically, local governments may have simply been able to post a job notice in the local newspaper, but they are now finding that a range of recruitment strategies may need to be employed to reach their key pools of candidates.

Among those, 83% are conducting online advertising, but perhaps more tellingly, more than half find employee referrals and social media to be effective tools, and 20% are offering internships. Such "relationship recruiting" enables

candidates to come to the city already knowing something about its operations and workplace culture.

Even where a direct relationship with the candidates is not present, a branding campaign to tout the ability to make an impact within the community can help steer people toward considering a public service career track, such as through Denver's "Be a part of the city you love" campaign or similar efforts in Minneapolis and San Francisco.¹

Once those new employees join the staff, their desire to take advantage of new opportunities does not go away. Employee retention is a function not only

of salaries and benefits but also of the environment in which the employees will be serving. As SLGE's recent report on the health and human services workforce noted, new employees may acclimate better to their new jobs if their employer helps them to network with their peers. This may be particularly important in rural communities, where peers in more specialized fields may be few and spread across a range of outside agencies.²

Within the organization, employees may be more likely to find job satisfaction when there are opportunities for career development, such as skill-

¹ For additional detail and discussion of workforce programs in other jurisdictions, see *Workforce of the Future*, <https://www.slge.org/resources/workforce-of-the-future>, 2017.

² See *Innovations in the Health and Human Services Workforce*, <https://www.slge.org/resources/innovations-in-the-health-and-human-services-workforce>, 2019.

building courses, online instruction, tuition assistance, succession planning and mentoring, or cross-training in other departments.

The image that is often associated with the workplace of the future is that of a tech startup, with an informal culture, a high degree of employee independence, and an entrepreneurial atmosphere. Although most cities and towns cannot replicate Google's office environment or cash flow, they can adopt a few key practices to help them compete as the workplace continues to evolve.

One low-to-no-cost option worth exploring is flexible work arrangements. Half of cities and towns surveyed report offering flexible work hours, while 20% offer regular teleworking. Either approach comes with adjustments, both for the public and for supervisors. For the public, the adjustments may be positive, such as longer morning/evening hours at city hall. For supervisors, varying schedules or telecommuting arrangements may mean they need to adjust to managing by deadlines and deliverables rather than needing an employee to be visible at a desk in city hall 9 to 5.

These and other approaches to employee retention were explored in depth at a recent Public Sector Workforce 2030 Summit (www.slge.org/assets/uploads/2019/11/public-sector-workforce-2030-key-takeaways.pdf) cohosted by SLGE, the National League of Cities and ICMA-RC.

Perhaps the most significant area of projected change in the workforce is in technology. That does not mean it is limited to IT staff. Indeed, while overall local government employment is projected to increase by 3.1% by 2028, it is expected to decline most significantly among secretaries (-13%) and other office support (-6.2%).³ Specific positions projected to decline include:

- Parking enforcement -36.7%
- Automotive mechanics -15.6%
- Computer programmers -15.6%
- Chief executives -10.3%
- Utility meter readers -10.3%
- Account and payroll clerks -5.0%
- Customer service representatives -5.0%

Efficiency gains will come from applications like 311/CRM, smart technology connecting the Internet of Things (IoT), team or project management applications enabling a wider span of control, or cloud-based software as a service (SaaS). In some areas, such as automotive maintenance, change may be driven from multiple directions, including ridesharing, telecommuting, shifts to electric vehicles, and outsourcing either maintenance work or the services themselves (e.g., franchised solid waste collection using vehicles owned and maintained by a third party).

As with any change coming to an organization, technology can bring opportunities, challenges, and a fear of the unknown.

Recruitment is one area where that scenario is already starting to play

out, with artificial intelligence applications assisting in the screening of job applicants. This can range from a very rudimentary keyword-driven analysis to a more robust video interviewing tool that assesses applicants on the basis of voice responses, facial expressions, or other cues. On the surface, both offer the promise of more efficient determination of those who meet the minimum qualifications for the position. Beyond that, they hold the potential either to introduce unintended bias into the screening process (such as if the keyword list is too narrow and overlooks relevant experience that might go by a different name) or to help eliminate the human biases that can result from a non-standardized approach.⁴ Thus, the true future with technology will not be in the replacement of jobs, but rather the refocusing of work – moving, for instance, from the more mundane task of reading and sorting through each application to determining how best to set the objective criteria for the software to find the candidates who are worthy of an in-person interview.

Preparing for the workforce of the future involves a healthy dose of planning for both services and technology. Beyond that, it also depends upon engagement with your current employees to help build the workplace environment and public service impact that will motivate them to serve as the next generation of leaders.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Employment Matrix, 2018-2028, local government, excluding education and hospitals.

⁴ For more on the use of AI in recruitment, see <https://www.slge.org/resources/public-sector-workforce-2030-summit-key-takeaways> or <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/10/22/ai-hiring-face-scanning-algorithm-increasingly-decides-whether-you-deserve-job/>.

Wheat Ridge implements Spark Hire

By Josh Neeble, Wheat Ridge human resources business partner



In today's hiring market, everyone seems to be looking for ways to improve their organization's recruitment efforts to attract and hire the best employees. We have all been in that awkward situation, sitting across from a candidate in an in-person interview and realizing almost immediately that they are not the best fit for your organization. Recently, our human resources team at the City of Wheat Ridge discovered an innovative and progressive recruitment tool that provides us with enhanced intelligence on our candidates before we waste anyone's time by bringing them in for an in-person interview.

Spark Hire's feature of an open one-way interview allows the city the option to record an introduction video, videos for each question being asked of the candidates, and an exit video. Candidates then record their responses to each question on their own time. The city can decide how long candidate responses to each question can be, how many retakes candidates get, and how much time they have to think about the question before they record it. We have found that asking about five questions with a three- to five-minute response limit for each question is about right for both the city and the candidate.

Once the candidate finishes their interview, the city is notified and the interview is ready to be viewed on demand.

One of Spark Hire's many nice features is that a link can be created for the recorded interviews to be sent to as many different evaluators as you would like to have involved in the process. Each evaluator can watch the interviews on their own time, or evaluators can watch them together and each evaluator can enter notes about the candidates directly into the Spark Hire system.

From the candidates' perspectives, while several expressed some trepidation when first trying out a one-way interview system, most expressed to us that their experience with Spark Hire was an important, valuable part of their interview experience. Candidates rated their experience an average of four out of five stars, with many of the comments mentioning how easy and enjoyable it is to use.

Implementing Spark Hire was seamless, smooth, and quick, and the company worked with the city to help us get the system implemented in a timely fashion. Within a week of evaluating and deciding to move forward with Spark Hire, the system was ready to use. The longest part of implementation was the training staff received on using the system. At a very affordable price, Spark Hire enhances the recruitment process, shortens screening time, and adds value to the overall recruitment process.



The City of Centennial's journey to employee engagement

By Paula Gibson, Centennial human resources director



In 2013, the City of Centennial embarked on a journey to change our workplace culture. While the city was already a good place to work, we wanted more. We wanted to be great. We wanted to be an employer of choice, to be able to attract and retain the best and brightest, to put people in roles that filled their souls, where they could come in every day and do their best work and, in return, elevate their own performance to achieve the level of excellence we expected. With only about 65 employees, an upward trajectory for promotional growth is difficult to provide for our employees; we had to ask how we could provide an environment that would offer growth and development opportunities as long as possible.

Our journey has not been easy, but we have followed a simple path. We believe that cultivating an environment where every employee can use his or her strengths will directly impact employee engagement to the positive. This in turn will lead to gains in productivity, more innovation, lower staff turnover, higher customer satisfaction, and positive brand reputation. Our starting point? Foster a strengths-based culture.

What does this mean? Step one was to introduce the Clifton Strengths Finder® to our employees. The Clifton Strengths Finder® is an online assessment that identifies an individual's innate talents. Gallup defines innate talents as "those naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be applied repeatedly in a consistent, near-perfect performance." Starting with our Executive Team, we began rolling out the assessment and supporting the efforts by teaching an Introduction to Strengths class for everyone. It took about a year to get everyone through, and it continues today as each new hire takes the full assessment that ranks each person's 34 talents, in order of most present talent to least present talent. They then participate in the introductory training to orient them to why this tool is important to our culture and how they can grow and develop by capitalizing on the innate gifts they already have rather than focusing on their weaknesses.



But reinforcing a culture has to go beyond just administering an assessment. In addition to the Introduction to Strengths class, we offer every employee a six- to 10-session series of one-on-one coaching to help them build an understanding of their own areas of talent and potential and to foster awareness of the unique traits in others. This purely voluntary activity on the part of the employee is facilitated by one of two staff members who are Gallup-Certified Strengths coaches. To date, about half the city staff have participated in these one-on-one sessions to gain a greater appreciation of themselves and their colleagues.

We also offer strength-based team building with both department and cross-functional teams to help cultivate work units in which each individual is deployed in a role that best fits their talents, thereby maximizing the productivity of the team. Our wellness team has been through this team-building, as have teams that often work together such as economic development, GIS, and communications.

New managers who are hired or promoted within the organization have an opportunity to receive additional one-on-one coaching around how they may best use their talents in their expanded roles. One of the many challenges for a new manager is the transition during which they let go of the responsibilities at which they excelled in previous roles as individual contributors and define how, in their new role, they must get their work done through others. This manager coaching track can be a great tool to assist new managers through the transition.

Other tools we have added to reinforce this effort are monthly lunch-and-learn sessions highlighting individual strengths, incorporation of strengths into our coaching and feedback with our employees, and posting the full city strengths matrix so every employee

can see the talents of every other employee on the city intranet. This can provide valuable insights into an individual's filters and perspectives, facilitating more productive conversations and interactions.

All the efforts around strengths seemed to be working, but we needed to evaluate our theory that a foundation of strengths would lead to increased employee engagement. We needed a measurement against which to gauge how we were doing. This was the important next step. While there are several tools available to measure employee engagement, the city opted for the Gallup Q12[®] tool. This is a simple, validated survey consisting of the following questions, scaled one to five, with five being "agree most":

- Q01 I know what is expected of me at work.[®]
- Q02 I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.[®]
- Q03 At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.[®]
- Q04 In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for good work.[®]
- Q05 My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.[®]
- Q06 There is someone at work who encourages my development.[®]
- Q07 At work, my opinions seem to count.[®]
- Q08 The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.[®]
- Q09 My fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.[®]
- Q10 I have a best friend at work.[®]
- Q11 In the last six months, someone at work has talked with me about my progress.[®]
- Q12 This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.[®]

This survey appealed to Centennial because of its brevity, the extensive

validation done by Gallup, and most importantly, that every single item is within the control of the managers and employees. This was important to us in order to facilitate effective action planning at the local level.

While participating in strengths had always been voluntary, engagement had to have the buy-in and participation of every manager in the city. After socializing with and gaining the acceptance of the executive team, our director of human resources met with each department head, reviewed the purpose and intent of the tool, and explained how again, just as with strengths, the real work was not administering the survey but the action planning done by the manager and team that would follow. We had to have 100% agreement that this was an effort we wanted to pursue, and we gained it.

In 2014, we administered our first engagement survey and returned a result of a 55% engagement rate. This did not mean that the rest were actively disengaged, but it did tell us that we probably did not have the ratio of engaged employees to offset the negative influence of actively disengaged staff needed to achieve the great workplace we wanted. It also told us that we were not nearly as awesome as we thought we were. However, the results gave us a baseline from which to measure going forward.

The first rollout of the survey involved the commitment of every manager as well as "engagement champions," staff who received the same Introduction to Engagement training as the managers and were asked help generate some excitement over the survey in their departments. For this first survey, we had 100% participation, a truly remarkable number that helped reinforce that we had made the right call and that our staff was also committed to this effort.

After the results were received and distributed, managers participated in a



Leading Engagement through Action Planning training. This educated them on several methods they could employ to conduct action planning in their own departments, including a Q12[®] gap analysis, several guided conversations about the state of the team, and connecting with our core service guidelines and applying them to the employee experience. Unlike many employee satisfaction surveys, where actions are dictated down to the managers and staff by the senior-most leaders, we have found that improvements in employee engagement are best effected at the local level. Each team has different dynamics and likely knows what needs to be done to improve the level of engagement. These actions can vary widely from team to team. Each manager has coaching and support from human resources and from their executive leader, resulting in a positive outcome in implementing customized initiatives to drive engagement.

Our year two engagement rate was 72%. We responded again with action planning department by department. One department that had a 75% employee turnover the prior year had no exits in year two.

Year three engagement was 86%, and we won our first Gallup Great Workplace Award, the first local government to ever be recognized this way. We saw improvement in performance metrics including increased NPS (Net Promoter Scores) in our city clerk's office,

decreased processing times for arraignments (municipal court), and decreased permit processing time (community development) and were awarded a \$1.5M Bloomberg Philanthropies Innovation Delivery Grant, among other performance benchmarks.

We have gone on to win a total of three consecutive Gallup Great Workplace Awards and have just been invited to apply for a fourth. Other recent accolades include:

- Recognized as the safest city in Colorado and number 43 in the nation by *24/7 Wall Street* (2019)
- No. 64 on *Money Magazine's* Best Places to Live in America (2019)
- No. 2 on *SmartAsset's* list of Most Livable Mid-Sized Cities in the U.S. (2019)
- No. 5 on *Military Times'* list of Best Places to Live for Veterans (2018)
- No. 3 on *WalletHub's* list of Best Cities for First-Time Homebuyers (2018)
- No. 10 on *Niche's* list of Best Suburbs to Live in the Denver Area (2018)

While these recognitions were not the goal of the effort, they do underscore that all the hard work has a broader impact. Most importantly, of course, is that we continue to do well against our performance metrics. We have incorporated innovation as a key guiding principle in the council's vision statement, and our employees do a phenomenal job. Even when we have a separation, it is not uncommon to hear

"I love it here; I wish I could take everyone with me" or "I will never say anything bad about the City of Centennial; it is the best."

Even our customers comment on the passion and commitment they witness in their interactions with our employees with comments such as "Appreciate the responsiveness to my request, and the thoroughness in getting it completed. So impressed. Thank you"; "It was so nice to have such wonderful and helpful people and also so pleasant to deal with. Congrats to all the staff"; and "Staff was very friendly on the phone and called back immediately with answers."

As with many governmental agencies, we continue to experience transitions, whether it be a city council election, a new city manager, a major technology overhaul, a building remodel, a new strategic plan, or some reorganization. Our engagement index has ticked down a bit, and we strive to continue to evolve. We knew from the beginning that this was an ongoing journey, one that does not end but develops over time. The cultural challenge we face now is how best to work with our managers to enable them to be effective coaches for their people. This will also take time, but it is an important next step that we are poised to take.

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The next generation of public servants

By Kirsten C. Decker, Denver Public Library system strategy and evaluation manager and CCCMA emerging manager board representative



As the workforce gets younger, local governments are challenged to think about attracting and retaining the next generation of public servants. The question on many leader's minds: If we get a ping-pong table, will they come?

All jokes aside, this may come as a surprise: Often pegged as elusive, egocentric, and flighty, more and more research shows that the young professionals of today are not all that different than Generation X and Baby Boomers were in their heyday. Across generations, the individuals who make up our organizations demonstrate a visceral commitment to making a positive impact on their communities; but when most people think of government, I would wager that potential to change people's lives is not the first thing that comes to mind.

How might we, as the leaders of today, ensure that our organizations are attracting the best and brightest to lead us tomorrow? I'm certainly not an authority on recruitment and retention, but I can share a few ideas based on how I came to municipal government and, perhaps more importantly, why I stay.

Get out of city or town hall

Attend any high school or university job fair and you will see a huge presence of private industry representation talking about internships that lead to jobs and jobs that lead to careers. In my experience, it is uncommon to see representation in classrooms or at career fairs from a municipality or county beyond the departments that hire for seasonal work. Students on the political science track may have teachers and professors who showcase local government management as a potential career, but that is not the norm. Municipal governments have a need for expertise in everything from watershed science to electrical engineering to financial management, and it is unlikely that students in these subject areas are ever exposed to public service as an opportunity.

Broadcasting the variety of functions your municipality manages in nonconventional places (i.e., not just a Master of Public Administration [MPA] breakfast) is an opportunity to harness the passion and intellect of emerging leaders who may never have seen local government as a career path where they can make a tangible difference in their community.

Create low-risk opportunities to learn

I bet you have a list of projects that always take a back seat to more high-profile priorities; however, I have often heard colleagues say that working with students — particularly undergraduates — is more work than it is worth. Or, my personal favorite: "We just don't have time to get an intern up to speed." Let's change the narrative and realize that if we do not open the doors to the city, we will not attract the next generation of leaders. Look for opportunities to engage young adults on volunteer projects, teen councils, and internships. Some of the most fun I have had at work was when leveraging the raw talent of excited young people to think about a problem differently or innovate an age-old approach to something.

Make the up-front investment and create pathways for interested individuals to learn about local government — think tours of city services, shadowing opportunities, and financial modeling scenarios — while knocking something off your project wish list.

Make space at the table

Maybe it is just me, but my least favorite response to a question is "We've always done it this way." There is a critical value in honoring the past and respecting institutional knowledge, and there is a responsibility to our communities to be good stewards of their trust and resources. As our organizations continue to welcome new talent, we must also give them the space to ask questions and take on meaningful work; this can be a great coaching opportunity on how to exercise humble inquiry and navigate organizational minutiae.

In my first job out of graduate school, I had the opportunity to work for a budget director who believed in giving "green" analysts high-level, challenging work. Whether it was managing projects with politically charged complexities, reimagining the way the city engaged residents around the budget, or growing an innovation program that empowered frontline staff to revolutionize the way they did their work, he created space. I felt valued by and fiercely loyal to this manager; he gave me the cover to learn, stumble, and build expertise by entrusting me with meaningful work.

The next time you are thinking about who could lead an important project or initiative, entertain the idea of giving an emerging leader the reins; assume they can deliver until they prove to you otherwise. Remember, you started somewhere.

Invest in relationships

One of the most impactful relationships in my local government journey comes from a cold email to a northern Colorado city manager, introducing myself and asking if there were opportunities to learn from him in a for-credit internship. We all know it would be easy to let that email sink to the bottom of the inbox, but this manager forwarded my email to his executive staff and asked if anyone had a project.

I spent the last semester of my undergraduate degree interning for that organization, an experience that solidified my commitment to getting an MPA and working in municipal government. As I have grown professionally and worked in organizations across the country, that same manager has always remained a mentor — making time to help me think through problems, plan career next steps or just catch up. This is one of a handful of mentorship relationships I have cultivated — and, at the heart of each, is a mutual feeling of respect and shared values.

Relationships are work on both parts, they take time you may not have, but they make an intangible impact on the growth and development of young professionals.



Onboarding success

By Melissa Asher, PMP, SCP, CPS HR Consulting training and development and recruitment solutions director

Effective onboarding programs have been shown to improve retention rates, enhance productivity, and increase customer satisfaction. So, what are onboarding programs? Simply stated, onboarding is a systematic process of ensuring that a new hire successfully and effectively transitions into not only the job, but the organization. In today's tight labor market where job opportunities abound, it is more important than ever that employees feel a sense of belonging, contributing to the purpose and mission of the organization, and engaging with their work — from day one and throughout their tenure. After all, it is costly to fill a vacant position, from .5 to 1.5 times an employee's salary. Rather than recruiting, a better use of time and resources is to create an onboarding program that ensures that new employees stay and thrive.

Onboarding has become a science, and for good reason. It should be thought of as a process, not a one-time event. In fact, the best onboarding programs are designed around a year's worth of activities that include the necessary upfront transactional components and continue through ongoing strategic experiences. Gone is the one-day human resources (HR) orientation and week of reading documents and procedural manuals. Onboarding involves multiple people and departments, most notably the employee's supervisor. Onboarding encompasses opportunities to experience the culture, mission, and goals of the organization.

Does this sound time consuming? Well, it is worth it. One study found that organizations with best-in-class onboarding programs were almost four times more likely to achieve their first-year performance goals than those without comprehensive onboarding

programs. This is not only good for the organization, but good for the new employee, who feels valued and supported with the tools, knowledge, and resources to achieve performance goals.

To get started, the model we recommend has five guiding principles. A comprehensive and successful onboarding program:

- Aligns with your organization's mission, vision, strategies, and priorities
- Connects to your culture
- Integrates multiple offices, functions, and colleagues
- Applies to all employees
- Actively involves the new hire

The best person to kick off an exceptional onboarding experience is the leader of your organization. First and foremost, your organization's leader should communicate the job-to-mission connection. They are the most credible voice to describe why the organization exists and the important role the new employee will play in fulfilling its mission. The direct supervisor can then back this up and layer on progressively more details to reinforce the line of sight to the organization's mission, strategies, and priorities.

Next is the connection to culture. How are things done in the organization? What are the written and unwritten rules? Supervisors should share some history, discuss values, and explain standards of behavior and expectations — both for employees in general and the new employee specifically. Every organization has a unique culture. Be sure new employees are introduced to yours from day one in the way you want it presented. Do not let your new employee learn about your culture at the water cooler.

Give new employees the opportunity to experience the full breadth of the

organization. Human resources and/or the supervisor should coordinate introductions across departments, functions, and colleagues. This simple act will break down barriers from the beginning and set the tone for developing formal and informal networks to ultimately get things done.

This should go without saying, but onboarding should be done for all employees, at all levels within the organization. This sends a powerful message that you value everyone's contribution and provide the same support system for all positions.

Lastly, onboarding should not be about passive presentations. Design your program for active participation by the new employee. Get their feedback all along the way — first day, first week, first month, etc. Be sure to encourage questions and involvement in organizational activities.

Now let us break this down into a yearlong timeline with best practices for each phase.

Preboarding

Onboarding actually starts before the first day. You can call this preboarding. Just like getting ready for a trip, an organization can help a new employee by making sure they have the necessary paperwork completed for their first day, and an itinerary of their first week. Some best practices are:

- Send a welcome letter and packet with pertinent information and contacts (HR and supervisor). This usually includes forms that can be reviewed and completed early (or online links to the information).
- Have the supervisor make a personal call to express excitement and discuss logistics for the first day.
- Ensure back-office tasks like desk



space, computer, network, and building access are addressed and ready to go on day one.

- Create an itinerary for the first week and share it with the new hire before they begin, so they can mentally prepare.
- Identify an onboarding buddy and make an introduction.

These steps signal that you are excited and invested in ensuring a smooth transition for the new employee, which is both caring and practical.

Day one/week one

You only get one chance to make a first impression. Day one for a new hire will set the tone for their entire onboarding experience. Make this day count!

- Ensure that someone is there to greet the new hire and set them up at a dedicated space.
- Schedule time with HR to go over any questions from the onboarding information packet and discuss deadlines for any lingering new

hire paperwork.

- Schedule an office tour that includes stopping for brief staff introductions across the organization as you go along.
- Ensure that building and network access are working.
- Make arrangements for lunch the first day with their supervisor and/or a team member or two.
- Make arrangements for lunch with their onboarding buddy at least once during the first week.
- Schedule a meeting with the supervisor to discuss roles and expectations. This is a critical step often overlooked in the first week.
- Create and go over a plan for training and tasks for the first three months. This can be somewhat high level but should give the new hire a sense of how they are expected to learn and do their job.
- Arrange check-ins with the supervisor at the end of each day – ideally every day, but at minimum on the first day and the end of the week.

- Make sure the new hire is doing substantive work by the end of the first week, not still mired in orientation presentations and reading materials.

First month

- Host a leadership drop-in lunch. Bring in lunch and invite senior leaders, managers, and/or supervisors to meet the new hire. Have icebreaker questions available to start the conversation.
- Set up weekly check-ins with their onboarding buddy.
- Set up weekly check-ins with their supervisor.
- Provide thorough on-the-job training, both formal and informal. This might include job shadowing, one-on-one training, eLearning, coaching, giving them parts of a task and providing feedback, etc.
- Provide guidance on where to find resources, e.g., who to go to for what type of help. This might include an intranet orientation and/or personal introductions to key contacts for IT,



- payroll, and related business units.
- Set up an end-of-the-month check-in with the HR director/manager.

Months two through six

- Schedule monthly meetings with their supervisor to review/clarify goals and expectations.
- Provide regular performance feedback and solicit feedback from the employee on their experience. Ask what is going well and what could be going better.
- Schedule time with their onboarding buddy at least once a month.
- Conduct an evaluation of the onboarding process at the end of six months to get feedback from the new hire, the supervisor, and HR.

By now, you have reached a critical point. Ninety percent of employees decide whether to stay or go within the first six months.

End of the first year

- Conduct a performance review, providing and soliciting feedback, and

then fold the new hire into the regular performance management system.

- Discuss and create a development plan for the upcoming year. This should be a joint effort by the supervisor and employee.
- Have the new hire complete an onboarding evaluation.

Does this look a little daunting? Remember, onboarding does not rely on a single person or department. This should be a collaborative effort with HR, the supervisor, IT, facilities, senior leaders, onboarding buddies, etc. Typically, HR drives the process, but it can be others. The point is someone should own this process. And once you have a process defined, you can repeat it with each new hire. By evaluating the program at least annually, you can also make continual small adjustments to keep improving the experience for everyone involved.

This article lays out a robust program, but even if you only add some of these practices, you will improve your outcomes. Putting the time, effort, and planning into onboarding is worth it.

Outcomes like greater retention, performance, engagement, and productivity are powerful and important reasons to augment what you are currently doing.

Industry statistics indicate that new employees who went through a structured onboarding program were 58% more likely to be with the organization after three years. And organizations with structured onboarding experienced 50% greater new-hire productivity. Ultimately, creating an effective onboarding process sounds a lot easier than constantly recruiting and dealing with unproductive employees.

References

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Westminster's SPIRIT values inform hiring and city's culture

By Dee Martin, Westminster human resources director, and Jonathan Thornton, Westminster communication and outreach coordinator



The mission of the City of Westminster is to deliver exceptional value and quality of life through our SPIRIT values: service, pride, integrity, responsibility, innovation, and teamwork. Our organizational culture is built around a strong foundation of these values, which defines how our employees work together.

Westminster formally branded our SPIRIT values in 2003. In the years since the development of SPIRIT, the organization has been thoughtful in its integration of those values within all aspects of employment, including the selection and hiring process, talent development, compensation, and the work environment.

"I know of no other organization that places such a premium on organizational values," said Information Technology Director Emily Littlejohn. "As employees, SPIRIT is foundational to everything that we do."

When people seek employment with Westminster, the city is very clear about the fundamental importance of SPIRIT within our culture and our desire to attract and retain people who identify with those values.

The SPIRIT values also create a strong cultural identity that attracts and retains top talent. The city seeks people who are looking for a workplace that is a community; one that encourages employees to bring their passion to serve.

"Community is what makes the city's workforce so special," said Human Resources Director Dee Martin.

"Whether it is watching staff present to city council, celebrating length of service awards, spending time on interview panels or attending social gatherings, it is our employees that make our organization a thriving community."

With more than 1,000 employees, the city has job opportunities and positions to fill. Our best recruitment strategy is through existing employees promoting the work environment.

"I chose to work at Westminster because I had heard good things about the city as an employer," said City Attorney's Office Legal Assistant Jodie Ball, who was hired in November 2019. "Everyone I spoke to has had a positive opinion of working for the city."

Sometimes Westminster offers a new opportunity and a new organizational culture for an employee.

"Retiring from the Marines after 21 years of service is somewhat stressful to say the least, and at the age of 39, I was eager to start a second career," said Police Department Sergeant Ray Esslinger. "I wanted to find an organization that shared the same values that I had become so accustomed to and proud of. From day one, I realized that Westminster was that special place."

No matter the position and no matter the individual words used to describe it, Westminster employees point to our SPIRIT values and work environment as the reason they stay.

The value of professional development in the public sector

By Evan Abbott, Employers Council organizational development and learning director



In a 2016 *Harvard Business Review* article, the author called leadership development programs "the great train robbery." As a learning and development professional for going on 25 years, I find this assessment distressing and disappointing – and not surprising.

We leadership and development professionals do not always do a great job of quantifying the case for leadership and professional development.

Why? It is not easy. However, nothing worth doing ever is. And it is absolutely worth doing.

In both the public and private sectors, learning professionals and managers have always been tasked with building the talent required for the organization to run. In the public sector, there are additional pressures to develop a workforce that can meet the public demand and better serve the community. Now you are asked to do it with fewer resources and less money. Every taxpayer dollar must be fought for, and programs are put in jeopardy if value cannot be established.

Fortunately, there are those out there who have collected any number of compelling scientific metrics making a case for the value of leadership and professional development. One example comes from a

2015 joint study by the Conference Board and Development Dimensions International. Some results reported in post-training changes in employee behaviors include:

- 42% better operational efficiency
- 36% higher productivity
- 90% lower absenteeism
- 105% fewer filed employee grievances
- 90% less rework
- 77% lower turnover

All employers, including the public sector, need a well-developed workforce in order to accomplish goals and meet the demands of their customers – in this case, the public. Meeting the demands of the public can mean the difference between a struggling community and a successful one. The right professional development program returns much more than an intangible ideal: It reaps real monetary and community advantages.

Retention

Replacing an employee is costly. The average reported expense of replacing an entry-level worker is 30% to 50% of their annual salary. For midlevel employees or managers, it is about 150% of their annual salary. And for high-level individuals, you

are talking 400% in replacement costs. If employees feel more engaged in their work as a result of professional development opportunities, they are less likely to get bored with the position and leave. An investment in training also shows your people that you are invested in them as individuals – which makes them more inclined to stay. This is becoming increasingly important with both the Millennial generation and Generation Z. Employment settings that focus on continual development and acquisition of new skills are viewed as more appealing, leading to greater commitment from these employees to stay. When an employer fails to retain talent, it hurts your bottom line and financial stewardship. An investment in professional development helps you protect that bottom line.

Succession planning

We have all heard the statistic – 10,000 people a day are turning 55. With an aging workforce and the brain drain of institutional knowledge, planning for your next tier of civic leaders is paramount. With a robust professional development program in place and a commitment to cultivating essential leadership skills, you are in a much better position to make

leadership transitions seamless. Developing skills in collaboration, influence, emotional intelligence, conflict management, and communication are essential skills of leaders. These skills, introduced and prepared in a training setting, are then best refined in the real world. By focusing on the developmental aspects of your succession planning strategy now, before the leaders are needed, you will introduce practiced and skilled leaders into their roles when the moment finally arrives. With leaders who have been trained to lead, your succession planning will be truly successful.

Efficiency

It is common sense: When your employees are properly trained to do their jobs, they work much more effectively and efficiently. We know this as it relates to technical skills (Who puts someone in a city vehicle before they have been licensed?); however, we do not always apply the same level of rigor with foundational relational skills. Through professional development opportunities, your employees learn crucial skills to help them across a variety of situations. You have witnessed it: The inability to effectively navigate conflict quickly slows a team down. If you invest in conflict training to hone this essential professional skill, you equip employees with the tools they need to improve communication and problem solving, leading to greater efficiencies.

Retention, succession planning, and efficiency are all commonly acknowledged outcomes of impactful professional development programs. And sometimes, the expense still needs to be justified. If learning professionals, managers, and human resources do not stand up and make a case for investing in professional development, no one else will. Making this case means understanding ROI.

What is ROI, and why do you care?

The term ROI is used a fair amount, but what are people really intending to say

when they use it? In the strictest sense, proving the financial value over cost is the essence of return on investment (ROI). Most people generally understand that learning programs bring value to the organization, but that is not the issue. The issue is how much value, and what gets priority? Not every worthwhile professional development endeavor gets funded. When dollars are limited, understanding ROI can be your best weapon.

ROI is more than a calculation; it is a way of thinking. We frequently focus on the quality of the developmental experience ("Did you like the training?") rather than the impact of the training ("How has the training improved your performance, and how has it contributed to the bottom line?"). The end result of ROI is a financial expression of how much money we saved (or earned) based on how much was spent. In the world of public service, being financial stewards of taxpayer dollars is critical and means having the ability to not only document how funds have been spent, but the impact those dollars had.

However, sometimes individuals use the term ROI, when what they really mean is ROE – return on expectation. Not all behaviors can be quantified into dollars and cents. Even measurement experts like Jack and Patti Phillips advise using caution when trying to monetize intangibles like teamwork, inclusion, engagement, and other behaviors leading to success. What we can do in these cases is define ROE. What behavioral/performance expectations do we hope to see come out of the professional development endeavors, and how are those being captured, evaluated, and applied?

Regardless, if the discussion is ROI, ROE, or somewhere in between, leadership and development professionals, managers, and stakeholders all need to be clear on three key sets of measurements and outcomes for any professional development initiative:

- **Learning effectiveness measures.** What knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes are you looking to create

through professional development? Why are they important in your community? How will you determine whether these have been learned? Mapping out the differentiators in this area for your employees will determine efficiencies that are measurable and relatable to citizens of your municipality.

- **Job impact measures.** How will you establish whether these new skills and insights are being applied on the job and impacting performance? 360s, performance evaluations, and direct observation can all be impactful methodologies for capturing both ROI and ROE data.
- **Organizational impact measures.** What quantitative data exists that you can use to measure end impact on clients, the public, or organizational functioning? This is perhaps one of the most important questions to consider. To measure something at the end of the professional development experience, there needs to be measurements in place at the start of the process. Picking a measurement with data that is quantifiable or describes a quality of a municipal service and plotting how that improves with professional development can help stakeholders understand the actual value of this advancement.

Professional development is an investment like any other. We all want to see returns on the time and money spent. And like other investments, those returns rarely happen overnight or without a specific plan. Mapping out where your organization is currently and where you want to see improvements is the first step. Next is determining what will help reach your goals. Well-calculated professional development training and interventions can create the cohesion you need to deliver the best services possible to generate success in your community.

Work–life balance

By Lauren Mueller, Frederick human resources director

Work–life balance. It is a term we have all heard and are probably familiar with. As employers, we know that it is important for our employees to have a healthy work–life balance for a number of reasons. The chief among them is that employees who are happy at home tend to be more positive and more productive at work. A healthy work-life balance also reduces stress and employee burnout, both of which negatively impact the physical and emotional health of our employees. Poor physical and emotional health tend to decrease productivity, lower morale, increase turnover, and increase costs related to health care spending from employees who are seeking medical treatment for issues like hypertension, digestive issues, and heart problems resulting from stress at work. By creating an environment that prioritizes work-life balance, we as employers can save money and maintain a healthier, more productive workforce.

But what exactly does work–life balance look like? This is a bit of a complicated question, because work–life balance means something different to everyone, and there is no perfect, one-size-fits-all solution. However, one common denominator that exists among employees who feel they have a good work–life balance is this: *workplace flexibility*. Offering employees flexible work schedules, the option to work from home on occasion, and/or additional paid time off options, including paid time off to volunteer, are all ways to help your employees achieve a good work–life balance.

Municipalities around the state are getting more and more creative in providing opportunities for their employees to create a healthy work-life balance. Many offer free or discounted memberships to local gyms or recreation centers for employees and their families. Some have started wellness programs or fitness challenges to provide incentive for employees to improve their physical and emotional health, and some offer prizes such as a gift card or an extra vacation day. Some allow pets in the workplace.



Many have instituted flexible work schedules, allowing employees to work longer during the day in order to have an extra day off during the week. Some offer telecommuting options. Several municipalities give employees paid time off to volunteer in the community. Summer picnics and holiday parties where employees are encouraged to bring their families also promote a good work-life balance. Again, the key word is flexibility. And a little goes a long way.

In addition to promoting flexibility, employers should strive to improve the overall workplace experience for their employees. Prioritizing a healthy culture and actively cultivating a happy, positive work environment also promotes work-life balance. How can we as employers make the work environment more comfortable for our employees? It goes beyond getting them a stand-up desk or allowing them to bring their dog to work, although those might be worth considering to make the physical environment more comfortable. But more important than the physical environment is the emotional environment – the atmosphere, the culture, the feel of the place. It is hard to pinpoint, but it is immediately felt. And when it is bad, it is downright toxic. Cultures that promote candid, honest communication among employees, that discourage gossip and back-biting, that encourage teamwork and collaboration between departments, are positive, healthy cultures that allow employees to thrive.

Two key words come to mind when I think about positive workplace culture: appreciation and gratitude. If we are not showing genuine appreciation and gratitude to our team for the work they do every day, we are failing them. Studies have shown that employees who are shown gratitude and appreciation at work actually receive a "brain boost" from the extra dopamine that is released by the hypothalamus in the brain. These

brain boosts can have significant positive effects on an employee's physical and emotional health, which we already know is extremely important if we want to have a healthy and productive workplace. Gratitude in the workplace has been linked to less stress, fewer health complaints, fewer sick days taken, and higher job satisfaction. Gratitude creates good feelings, cheerful memories, better self-esteem, more optimism, and a sense of unity. All of these emotions create a pay it forward and "we are in this together" mentality in the workplace. When you implement genuine gratitude into your organizational culture by taking the time to let your employees know that you appreciate them, they are more likely to show their appreciation for others, and soon the impact is felt organization-wide. Keep in mind though, the expression of appreciation must be both honest and specific. Vague or insincere compliments do not mean much, and they may end up doing more harm than good when trying to build a culture of gratitude and kindness.

Let's face it, it is not unusual to have weeks where more time is spent at the office than at home. When employees are happy in their roles and comfortable in their work environment, the time spent at work seems less like a drain or a burden on their lives. Actively working to make your work environment a positive, happy, and friendly place where employees actually enjoy spending most of their time is key in creating a sense of work-life balance. Because they spend so much time at work, it helps to make it feel a little more like home.

Another key element in helping employees maintain a healthy balance between their work and home lives is allowing them to truly disconnect from the office when they are not working. Employers need to remember to respect their employees' time away from the office. If we want to avoid burnout and

reduce stress levels, we need to remember that time away from work is just that – time away from work. Employees should not be expected to check emails while they are on vacation or to return voicemails when they are home sick for the day. Just because you can count on someone to answer your phone call at 9 p.m. on a Sunday does not mean you should. Allowing employees to fully disconnect from their work environment, even for just a short time, provides them with time to unwind and recharge, so that they are positive and fully engaged when they return. Encourage employees to use their paid time off – that is what it is there for. Also, managers need to model the work-life balance they would like to encourage their employees to exhibit. When a manager answers emails while on vacation or works until 8 p.m. every night, it sends a powerful message to employees about what is expected of them, despite what that manager may say about the importance of work-life balance. Actions speak louder than words, so make sure your actions are sending the right message and not contradicting it.

Promoting a healthy work-life balance for employees is vital for the health of our employees as well as the health of our organizations. Our employees are our most valuable asset. But they can quickly become our biggest liability if we do not help them find a healthy balance between their work lives and their home lives. The financial toll that excess sick days, uncontrolled health care costs, low productivity, and poor morale can take on an organization can be very serious. The employer/employee relationship is symbiotic – one cannot exist without the other. The employee's success is the organization's success. The employee's health directly affects the organization's health, and vice versa. Encouraging a healthy work-life balance is a win-win for all involved.

[SPOTLIGHT]



When the YMCA comes to town

By Robert Bishop, Monument human resources manager

Wellness programs have become increasingly commonplace for many municipalities looking to help their employees stay healthy and happy. These programs come in all different shapes and sizes, from health screenings to gym memberships and a variety of options in between.

In May of 2019, the Town of Monument wanted to leverage these programs to aid in increasing employee wellness while forming a valuable community partnership. Enter the team of Jordan Ciambrone and Bethany Kelsey of the Pike's Peak YMCA (PPYMCA).

Both Ciambrone and Kelsey immediately brought a new focus and energy to our employees. They established a Corporate Wellness Program that not only focused on fitness, but also designed new teambuilding events that bring

different departments together. In the span of a few months, they have gone from newcomers to part of the Town of Monument family.

Since May, I have seen this duo bring smiles to the faces of our employees during their bimonthly on-site visits. From discussing how important our roles are to the community to participating in a hilarious pumpkin carving contest, our employees have found new knowledge, new pride in their jobs, and new friendships through help from the PPYMCA.

While cohesion and morale are on the rise, Jordan and Bethany did not want the focus on health and fitness to disappear. Each event has a particular health/fitness portion or benefit programmed in. Recently, they worked to measure employee blood pressure and ways to improve this number through nutrition and fitness. Prior to this, they brought a

healthy cooking competition to Town Hall. This program always seems to find the perfect ways to combine health and fitness with a large dose of fun.

As the HR manager for the Town of Monument, increasing teamwork and cooperation is always an important focus for me. This goal is never easy given the different locations and working hours of our employees. Partnering with the PPYMCA and working alongside their dedicated wellness team has taken a spark of eagerness and turned it into a roaring flame of excitement.

Looking forward to 2020, we are excited to continue our partnership and friendship with the PPYMCA to help our employees reach their potential and have some fun along the way.



By Bethany Kelsey, Pike's Peak YMCA health promotion director

Traditionally, the phrase "corporate wellness programming" brings to mind images of on-site fitness centers. The partnership between the Town of Monument and the YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region (PPYMCA) challenged those images and created a whole new vision — one of strengthening corporate culture.

Out of that vision was born a unique program. The PPYMCA Corporate Wellness Team comes on-site and delivers programming created specifically for the Town of Monument employees. I share with you a glimpse of the program's impact on not only the Town of Monument's corporate culture but also on individuals' lives.

The first on-site event was held in May 2019. We arrived with arms full of supplies and energy high. We were acutely aware that the first event was critical, as how it unfolded would set the tone for every event thereafter. We were welcomed with kindness but with

wariness. The employees did not know us, and we did not know them. They observed us, and we observed them. We challenged their spirits, minds, and bodies, and what we learned that day affected our team in powerful ways. We saw employees who were unabashedly proud of and deeply dedicated to the Town of Monument.

We also saw, though, weary employees and employees who only interacted with others in their own departments. The mission was clear — how would we help decrease weariness and encourage cross-departmental relationships? A challenge lay in front of us.

We dove into the town's history, we read current news articles, but the greatest information came (and continues to come) from intentional conversations we held with employees. We find ourselves regularly asking, "How can we best serve you?" The answers received teach us the incredibly unique needs and wants of not only each department but of individuals. The conversations also serve to build

trust between the Town of Monument employees and the PPYMCA Corporate Wellness Team.

The team is privileged to learn, listen, serve, and tailor programming to individual department needs.

As the months pass, the Town of Monument culture is changing in visible ways. A short seven months later, we now see less weariness, greater amounts of laughter, cross-departmental interactions, and an overall atmosphere of happiness. In fact, the employees now meet us in the parking lot to help haul supplies into the event space!

On the individual level, the Town of Monument employees are also getting to know and trust us. They now approach us with personal concerns, health questions, event activity requests, and the like. We are honored by their trust and hold it with great regard.

The journey is only beginning. 2020 will launch a new set of events, and we are excited to be a part of the Town of Monument culture becoming stronger.

Big money: Managing the way health care costs impact your bottom line

By Jessica R. Frier, JD, American Fidelity Administrative Services Inc. senior health and welfare plan consultant



Finding the best value in health insurance is no easy task for any organization, but as a municipal employer, you face special challenges. You are entrusted with public funds and charged with recruiting and retaining skilled staff capable of carrying out your mission of public service. In this environment, finding the best value for your benefit dollars requires knowledge, insight, and a willingness to think outside the box.

The problem

1. Medical costs trend upward

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers' (PwC) annual medical cost trend study (pwc.to/2T7s07V), the annual percentage increase in the cost of treating patients is projected to rise in 2020, reaching 6% for the first time since 2016. The study notes that "[p]rices continue to be the primary driver of healthcare spending, growing at a faster rate than utilization," and predicts that cost pressures will require employers

to take a more active role in managing health care costs, a trend PwC calls "employer activism." At a fundamental level, this is because health care does not work like other markets. Health care in America is unique in that the entity paying the medical provider is an insurer, employer (in the case of self-insured plans, pools, or trusts), or a government entity such as Medicare. This third-party payer is not in the room when providers choose what to charge or when patients make purchasing decisions.

2. Employees struggle with surprise billing

So-called "surprise" medical bills often hit when an emergency treatment that the patient believes to be in-network results in out-of-network charges. A common scenario might involve seeking treatment at an in-network hospital for chest pains, followed by treatment for a cardiac event such as a heart attack. Upon returning home, the patient discovers that several treatment providers, perhaps the anesthesiologist or the lab, were out of

network. These out-of-network providers have not agreed to accept the same rates as in-network providers, and patients are often subject to higher cost sharing and increased out-of-pocket limits when they go out of network. These out-of-network costs could also generate higher costs for the plan, which could impact future rates. Legislation aimed at preventing surprise bills faces an uncertain fate in Congress, as insurers, employer groups, and providers disagree over key provisions, such as the use of arbitration to settle payment disputes.

3. Consumers, insurers, and providers battle over price transparency

Recently enacted federal rules and executive orders seek to improve price transparency. Requirements for hospitals to disclose their standard charges, including negotiated rates with third-party payers, and an executive order to give researchers access to claims data were recently finalized. In addition, proposed regulations would require plans and

insurers to provide extensive price and cost-sharing disclosures. These efforts to make price and cost-sharing information more available face legal challenges from care providers such as hospitals, as well as the insurance industry.

4. Prescription drug hikes continue

Prescription drug costs continue to pressure employers and consumers alike. 2019 brought rules that would have required wholesale drug prices to be disclosed in advertisements. That rule was overturned in court. Current pilot projects are exploring potential pathways to safely import prescription drugs from overseas.

The potential solutions

1. Virtual care and tech solutions

Increasingly, telemedicine allows treatment of various medical conditions without seeing a patient in person. Live video, audio, and mobile apps, and messaging will play an increasing role in care delivery. Virtual care includes all the ways patients and providers can communicate digitally to monitor ongoing conditions and implement treatment plans. Telemedicine and virtual care solutions can be cheaper for both patient and provider when used effectively.

2. Narrow networks

A narrow network plan directs a higher volume of patients toward a smaller number of doctors, hospitals, and treatment centers (a "narrow network") in exchange for better pricing for care and a corresponding reduction in premiums and cost sharing for plans and consumers. Limiting provider choice could create tension in some communities, and employers should have a clear message to ensure that the stakeholders understand the objectives.

3. Direct contracting

Employers, especially large employers, have the ability to sidestep the current payment and care delivery models completely. One way is by directly contracting with providers. Depending on the health care market conditions in the

community, public sector employers may find a provider willing to explore these arrangements. Types of direct relationships between employers and providers include:

- Accountable care organizations (ACOs) that can coordinate care for an entire employee population
- A bundled payment, carve-out, or Centers of Excellence (COE) financial arrangement for a defined condition
- Employers assuming an advocacy role, such as meeting with hospital leaders to advocate for quality initiatives and payment reforms to improve long term cost and quality metrics.

4. Reference-based pricing

Reference-based pricing is a method of reimbursement based on the Medicare reimbursement rates. Medicare bases provider reimbursement on actual cost plus a moderate profit margin for the provider. Reference-based pricing offers group health plans the ability to place limits on what will be paid by the health plan by tying reimbursements to a defined amount, such as 150% of the prevailing Medicare rate. There are concerns about the availability of providers that would accept this payment and the potential impact to members, so organizations should consider broader implications of this type of arrangement.

The path forward

1. Evaluate alternate funding options

Some of the strategies outlined above may not be available to employers in traditionally funded insurer agreements. As a result, some employers have begun to explore alternative funding arrangements, including self-insuring. Self-insuring means taking on the risk of paying individual claims out of the employer's own fund. Employers under a self-funding arrangement often purchase stop-loss insurance to insure against the volatility of large or unpredictable losses. They are willing to accept some additional risk in exchange for greater control of the plan, its design, and provider negotiations.

2. Expanded role for health savings accounts (HSAs)

Health savings accounts (HSAs) paired with a qualified high deductible health plan (HDHP) continue to represent one way to change plan designs by lowering actuarial value and shifting a greater share of costs toward insured employees. Employees will have a way to fund current and future health and retirement expenses by contributing to an HSA. Recent IRS guidance allows plans to expand coverage of treatment for certain chronic conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, and asthma, for participants in this type of plan. This reflects increased recognition of the important role managing chronic disease plays in keeping people healthy.

3. New health reimbursement arrangement (HRA) options

The year 2020 brings access to two new types of HRAs, the Individual Coverage HRA (ICHRA) and the Excepted Benefit HRA (EBHRA). The ICHRA will reimburse employees for purchasing individual insurance coverage and could represent an alternative to traditional medical plan offering. The EBHRA is an employer-funded reimbursement arrangement of up to \$1,800 in an allowance that can be used to give employees extra help for out-of-pocket medical expenses and certain excepted benefit premiums. The ICHRA benefits employees who may not be eligible for the employer's traditional group health plan, while the EBHRA is designed to help employees who are eligible for employer-sponsored coverage. If structured correctly, employers can use these vehicles to fund health care expenses while meeting ACA Employer Mandate requirements.

The bottom line

The current environment of rising medical costs presents unique challenges and opportunities for employers. Stay informed about this and other benefits topics by subscribing to AFAS' Compliance Insights email newsletter at bit.ly/AFASVIP.



Educating your employees on medical benefits

By Emma Dahlin, CEBT employee benefits trust benefit advocate and Willis Towers Watson business support senior assistant

As municipal leaders, you act as the voice for the cities and towns that you represent. You have an extremely important job of seeking solutions for issues that affect your communities, with a main goal of trying to meet everyone's most basic needs. One thing that is of utmost importance to every human being is their individual health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of their loved ones. Health is a significant concept in the sense that without good health, it is very difficult to carry on with everyday activities, let alone tackling the bigger issues in life. No matter what size a company is, people act as

the backbone of the business. Keeping employees healthy and happy is absolutely vital to keep the business running. An essential part of employees managing their health is being educated about their health benefits and understanding them.

The goal of this article is to explain the importance of educating employees year-round about their benefits and to provide an understanding of what topics to highlight when doing this. We will also share examples of how the Colorado Employers Benefit Trust (CEBT) helps their employer groups educate their employees on health benefits.

Importance of year-round education on benefits

Not educating employees about the benefits they have available to them can be like not offering benefits at all. As municipal leaders, it is important to have a communication strategy in place for how to educate your employees so that they can feel informed and prepared to make decisions about their health needs.

Although open enrollment is a key time to educate people, they can sometimes feel overwhelmed by loads of information and therefore not be able to fully grasp the concept. By doing education year-round, it allows for reminders and gives people time to absorb the information when they may have more capacity to do so.

Another factor to keep in mind is the unpredictability of when people might get sick or injured and have to utilize their health insurance. Employees have a tendency to focus more on information that directly applies to them. By taking an incremental approach that allows for regular sharing of benefits, there is more of a chance of helping individuals when they need it.

With this type of year-round communication, employers can also continually emphasize the most important benefits for employees to take advantage of. This includes their preventative care or wellness benefits that are covered at 100% throughout the year. Preventative care can include things such as yearly physicals, flu vaccinations, mammograms, colonoscopies, prostate specific antigen exams, and more.

By using these benefits, employees can stay healthy and get early treatment when necessary, avoiding potential complications and more costly medical treatment in the future. Overall, education on the preventative benefits available to employees is crucial not only to help employees get more effective treatment and proactively manage their health, but also to make them better health consumers through reminding them to utilize benefits that will ultimately save on out-of-pocket expenses.

Topics to highlight

Health insurance can be a daunting and complicated topic to understand, especially with the uncertain state and high costs of today's health care industry. People who are normally healthy and do not often use their health insurance may have limited knowledge on how their plan works. This can be detrimental in an already stressful situation where they may end up needing a surgery or emergency care and do not understand the bills they are receiving or how these services are being covered.

Having a basic understanding of how their health coverage works is very important. Having a good grasp on the common health insurance terminology will allow them to navigate the system much more easily. Such terms include copays, deductible, coinsurance, and out-of-pocket maximum. They also must know how to read an Explanation of Benefits to determine their cost share on a medical procedure.

A common mistake people can make is mixing up the deductible and the out of pocket maximum. Many think coverage is 100% after the deductible is met, when in reality the deductible is a lump sum of money that must be paid by the individual before the insurance coverage kicks in at a cost share.

As mentioned above, educating employees on the preventative benefits and encouraging them to use those is essential. Some employers offer incentives or rewards to take advantage of preventative and/or wellness programs. In terms of premiums being paid, it is also helpful to explain the employer versus employee contributions. This can help the employees understand the value that the employer is providing.

Finally, reminding employees of ways that they can save on medical costs is becoming an increasingly important topic. Encouraging employees to choose lower-cost facilities, utilize telehealth services such as Teladoc or Doc on Demand, and research costs before committing to treatments are all ways to help employees become smarter and more empowered consumers of health care.

How CEBT educates employer groups on benefits

The Colorado Employers Benefit Trust (CEBT) is a large self-funded trust that provides medical, dental, vision, and life coverage for public entities within the state of Colorado. The employees who work for Colorado Municipal League also have coverage under CEBT.

CEBT strives to provide tools and resources to their employer groups to help educate employees on health benefits. A widely used resource is the use of external representatives from the plan administrator (Willis Towers Watson). These representatives visit various employer groups to give presentations on benefits as well as meet with the employees one on one to discuss individual cases.

During these presentations, the representative goes over plan differences (if more than one plan is being offered), basic insurance terms, preventative benefits, cost savings programs, and how to navigate the plan by using all resources available to employees. Most meetings take place during open enrollment or new employee orientations; however, requests for benefit fairs and/or employee meetings happen year round.

Another way that CEBT communicates to employer groups/employees is through a quarterly newsletter. This newsletter contains a plethora of information on benefit changes, cost saving techniques, health legislation updates, and more. It is a great way for employees to stay informed about their health plan and stay in the loop on updates and changes.

Finally, CEBT sends email reminders, flyers, and other pamphlets to act as resources to employers that they can distribute, print out, and share with their employees. By using all of these methods and implementing them frequently and throughout the year, CEBT provides for a good understanding and awareness of health benefits for all participants.

[SPOTLIGHT]

Excellent health care with low costs

By Mark Deven, Arvada city manager



In 2011, after another year of a health insurance renewal increase that was more than 10%, Arvada challenged itself and its health insurance partners to get creative. Arvada's broker of record was HUB International, which had worked to help ease some of the city's recurring renewal pain through cost cutting solutions, including a high deductible health plan and health savings accounts (HSA).

For the 2013 renewal, HUB took a different approach with the city and created two specific proposals to address short-

and long-term health care costs as well as the employee conditions and the behaviors that were influencing them.

The proposals centered on two paired initiatives. First, HUB proposed that Arvada move away from the more traditional, fully insured health model to become self-funded, or operating and funding its own health plan. The second recommendation was that the city open an on-site health clinic as one of its health plan options. This solution was just becoming available to midsized clients and was ideal for a

contained group of employees like Arvada's. It would facilitate access to care and foster a wellness environment.

By itself, the clinic would result in healthier employees and definitely save in benefit costs, too; however, the whole purpose of this change would be defeated if those savings just went back into the insurer's pocket. By moving to a self-funded plan, Arvada would directly receive the benefits of the reduced costs associated with healthier employees.

The Arvada team was enthusiastic about the concept proposed by HUB and started the process for selecting an on-site clinic. A proposal submitted by Paladina Health was selected through a competitive process.

Paladina managed on-site health clinics for other local employers, and Arvada toured a site in Denver.

Paladina's innovative model and philosophy of care tie in with Arvada's values. Paladina is relationship focused. This has led to a structure under which staff physicians are salaried, not paid on a fee-for-service basis. That gives them the luxury of time to really delve into individual patients' concerns and issues — and develop relationships.

Today, the main Arvada clinic is conveniently located five minutes from city hall. Arvada team members find this arrangement much better than a traditional doctor relationship. There is almost no wait time, and the doctors take time to visit with patients and learn more about each patient's whole lifestyle.

The clinic has proven to be an ideal solution for Arvada. The city did not have to increase co-pays or deductibles, and money for the HSAs stayed the same.

Employees and the city share the premium costs, typically with an 80/20 split. The city did a lot of employee education on the clinic and its innovative model, which has generated very high engagement.

Five years after implementation, approximately 75% of employees and their dependents are engaged through annual physicals and treatment of chronic health conditions.

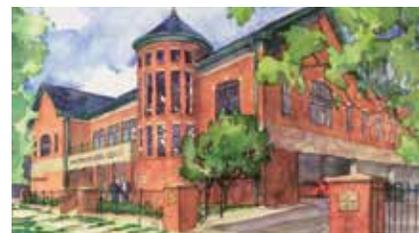
Compared to the former model, the city has saved approximately \$1,000,000 in health costs over the last five years.

In addition to the monetary savings, Arvada is pleased with the level of buy-in from the employees and the improved health outcomes. Performance measures that review employee and dependent engagement through annual physicals, treatment of chronic health conditions, and employee satisfaction show significant improvement compared to the former model. In summary, Arvada's health risk scores are on the decline and chronic conditions are much better managed.

And Arvada, not an insurer, is benefiting financially, thanks to its self-insured status. Two years after implementation, in 2015, increases came in at 5.5%, and in 2016, the annual health insurance premiums did not grow at all. The zero percent increase was repeated for the 2020 renewal.

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