



Massachusetts Municipal Association

MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

Recommendations for Effective Local Government Administration and Management from MMA Policy Committees

January 2019 • Volume 4 • Number 9

MMA Policy Committee on Personnel and Labor Relations

Best Practice Recommendation: Wellness Programs for Municipal Employees

BEST PRACTICE: Implement wellness programs with the goal of encouraging healthier lifestyles, improving productivity and engagement, lowering absenteeism, and improving morale. While certain wellness programs thrive by meeting goals and objectives, others languish or fail altogether. An effective wellness program creates a culture of health in the workplace that integrates the employer's mission with the individual health needs of employees. The strongest wellness programs are supported by senior leadership and use strategic communications to drive greater participation.

Here are some steps that cities and towns can take to develop an effective wellness program:

- Managers commit resources and set the example by participating in the wellness program, practice healthy behaviors, and incorporate healthy activities into their workdays. They approve policies and practices that support the well-being of employees. For example, a town manager might serve on the wellness committee, attend wellness programming, and actively encourage employees to participate in the program. Policies support health and wellness goals and contribute to a culture of health, becoming a part of how the workplace operates.
- Municipalities create wellness teams to design and administer the program, often with support and guidance from wellness coordinators from the group's health plan. Teams include members from the school department, all municipal departments and municipal leadership. The teams create annual operating plans that include mission statements and specific, measurable short- and long-term goals.
- Address all aspects of wellness, including career, financial and social and emotional well-being, especially resilience, mindfulness and stress reduction. Employees should have access to an employee assistance program. Having a comprehensive program increases overall employee participation. Operating plans should include online, onsite and phone options.
- Wellness programs that have a strong health literacy component are more likely to see cost savings, as the goal of

(continued, next page)

health literacy is to provide employees and their family members with the information and motivation needed to make significant changes in how they use the health care system. The goals are to reduce unnecessary, potentially harmful, and high-cost health care. Health literacy strategies may include onsite and online campaigns, focus groups and quiz games.

- Municipal wellness programs should be easy to join and access and should bring people together in fun ways. Variety is key. Basketball courts, gyms and fitness rooms, outdoor fitness circuits at schools, nature walking trails, and public rooms in libraries or police stations may provide space for a variety of activities and workshops. Local spin or dance studios may partner to provide additional wellness programming. Maximizing convenience for program participants should be a high priority. Offering programs that bring different skill levels together for fun and fitness – like line dancing, yoga and boot camp – tend to be more successful. Employees can help to build the wellness program so that it meets their needs, and program facilitators can encourage personalization of programming through employee activity trackers and smartphone apps.
- Employers that recognize and acknowledge employees' efforts and successes will see greater engagement. Rewarding employees by recognizing their efforts in their jobs contributes to improved morale and employee satisfaction.
- Include a strategic and multi-channeled communications component. Communications through email, newsletters, posters or flyers, direct mail, telephone, social media and word-of-mouth are important tools to enlist employee participation and to ensure that participants are aware of programming. Weekly wellness tips emailed to employees and an interactive online presence offer consistent engagement with participants. Employee orientations should include general marketing of municipal wellness programs.
- Follow legal and regulatory requirements to protect the personal information of wellness program participants and to ensure that the program complies with federal and state laws.

Resources:

- "Best Practice Design Principles of Worksite Health and Wellness Programs," by Nico Pronk, Ph.D., Health & Fitness Journal: <https://dev-journals2013.lww.com/acsm-healthfitness/Pages/articleviewer.aspx?year=2014&issue=01000&article=00012&type=Fulltext>
- Town of Chelmsford Well Power program, in partnership with Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association: www.townofchelmsford.us/669/Wellness-Programs
- Society for Human Resource Management Foundation Executive Briefing – "Wellness Strategies to Improve Employee Health, Performance and the Bottom Line," by David Chenoweth, Ph.D.: www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/resources-from-past-initiatives/Documents/Wellness%20Strategies%20to%20Improve%20Employee%20Health.pdf
- Fusion 2.0 Conference: <http://fusion2conference.com/about-us>