



Massachusetts Municipal Association

MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

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

January 2020 • Volume 5 • Number 4

MMA Policy Committee on Personnel and Labor Relations Best Practice Recommendation: Pathways to Municipal Government

BEST PRACTICE: Develop a plan for recruiting, hiring and retaining employees in the municipal workplace.

Local governments are refreshing hiring practices to attract the next generation of public employees. In order to attract diverse and talented candidates, it is important for communities to shift from traditional advertising and hiring practices to modern methods of recruitment. All employees desire job security and good pay and benefits, but work-life balance, a desire for mission-driven work, and the ability to have a positive impact in people's lives and society at large are emerging as priorities among younger workers. These pair well with jobs that serve the public.

Adjusting expectations around retaining employees is equally important. Today's shorter-job-tenure trend among younger employees can be reframed as an opportunity to build employee skills and introduce more workers to local government. Today's employees want to learn new skills through continuous education that allows them to progress at their own pace. By implementing cross-training, mentorship programs, and flexible work policies, municipal employers can offset the knowledge gaps and high overtime costs vacancies can create.

The following are some ways that local governments can modernize their recruitment, hiring and retention workforce plans:

- Make projections on future employment needs, including a data analysis of retirements, and plan for future workload distribution and staffing levels.
- Improve your city or town's "brand" to attract employees, including those without public sector experience. This may include updating and standardizing recruitment materials, updating job titles and descriptions on the municipal website, reexamining minimum qualifications to make sure they are not out of date, providing recruiters with new toolkits, using advertising campaigns to improve messaging, and updating employer pages on social media sites such as LinkedIn.
- Integrate the municipal website and social media with the recruitment and hiring process, and consider posting short videos that showcase municipal employees talking about why they enjoy their positions and what they like about public service. (See information about the MMA's MassTown Careers initiative in Resources below.)

(continued, next page)

- Prioritize employee development and engage in succession planning. Opportunities for advancement can help with retention.
- Enhance benefits, particularly “soft benefits” such as flexible hours, job sharing, cross-training, summer hours, working from home, educational opportunities, performance rewards, paid time off to volunteer, and other non-monetary rewards.
- Consider student loan reimbursement programs, which may involve negotiating with employee organizations for unionized employees or implementing a personnel policy for non-union employees.
- Consider offering a sign-on bonus, a referral bonus or relocation expenses.
- Provide mentoring opportunities and consider programming that allows senior employees to transfer knowledge to others over a pre-retirement period.
- Consider loosening civil service requirements.
- Encourage employee health through wellness programs and robust employee assistance programs that include benefits like free counseling, health advice, legal advice and other services.
- Conduct employee surveys to update and improve retention strategies.
- Improve and update technology.

In addition to modernizing recruitment, hiring and retention programs, municipal employers can increase public engagement to attract employees. Citizen academies, youth councils and volunteer positions in local government departments are all excellent ways to increase public awareness about the rewards of a career in local government. Municipal employers can also use high school and college internship programs as training grounds for new employees as a way to attract and introduce individuals to local government. Assigning employee mentors to interns and providing interns with meaningful work may lead to future hires.

Support for high school civics education, college programming, and management fellowship programs may also benefit local government recruitment and hiring. Municipal employers can use high school classes and higher education to educate the next working generation about the impact, value and satisfaction that comes with working in the public sector. Partnering with entities outside government can be a good way to remain visible in the community, share resources and engage potential employees.

(continued, next page)

Resources:

- MassTown Careers (masstowncareers.org): A special MMA initiative (going live in January 2020) was created as a recruitment tool to help cities and towns showcase the varied and exciting roles available in Massachusetts communities. Videos feature interviews with municipal officials at various stages of their careers and in different municipal roles around the Commonwealth.
- MMA-Suffolk University Certificate in Local Government Leadership and Management (www.mma.org/certificate): This graduate-level program, taught on Fridays during the academic year, is the equivalent of five MPA-level courses covering a range of municipal topics, including strategic leadership, human resources, civic engagement and financial management. Participants earn a certificate and graduate credits.
- Municipal Finance Management Seminar (www.mma.org/about-mma/services): The MMA and Suffolk University created this program in response to feedback from local officials about the challenges in hiring finance professionals. Held over the course of five Fridays, the seminar covers budgeting, financial reporting, treasury functions, "costing out" contracts and more.
- Supervisory Leadership Development Program (www.mma.org/mmhr/sldp): The Massachusetts Municipal Human Resources association, a member group of the MMA, offers a three-day program designed for municipal employees interested in developing or enhancing their supervisory and management skills. The program includes content on communication, team building, performance management, delegation, and supervision in the unionized, public sector workplace.
- "New Rules for Attracting and Retaining Government Talent," e.Republic, 2019: tinyurl.com/RetainGovTalent
- "'Choose Purpose': Cities Launch Ad Campaigns to Attract More Job Applicants," Governing.com, February 2019: www.governing.com/topics/workforce/gov-state-local-government-cities-recruitment-hiring-employees.html
- "What Government Can Learn From 'Best Places' Employers," Governing.com, September 2017: www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/col-what-government-can-learn-best-places-employers.html
- "Can New Perks Make Up for Smaller Pensions?," Governing.com, September 2017: www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/gov-public-sector-benefits-pension.htm
- "Can Government Hiring Get Out of the Stone Age?," Governing.com, February 2016: www.governing.com/topics/mgmt/gov-government-hiring-best-practices.html
- City of Newton, High School Summer Internship Program: www.newtonma.gov/gov/health/youth/summer_youth_internships.asp
- City of Somerville, Mayor's Summer Jobs Program: www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/mayors-summer-jobs-program