LEAGUE OF MINNESOTA CITIES

INFORMATION MEMO

Workforce Planning Toolkit

Learn how to plan for projected workforce shortages associated with the retirement of the Baby Boomers, including different ways to do jobs, updated recruitment efforts and employment policies, and coping with the loss of organizational knowledge. Red toolkit icons mark links to model forms, checklists, policies, surveys, and other planning aids.

This toolbox icon marks the link to a downloadable tool.

Take action with Information Memo toolkits. They contain the forms, samples, or models a city can use to take action on a process or project. Look for the toolkit icon so you can download that tool to use or modify it for your city.

RELEVANT LINKS:

I. Why workforce planning?

If your city has a high number of employees nearing retirement, you're not alone. According to data from the Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA), as of June 30, 2015, about 45 percent of city employees are over age 50 (excluding police and firefighters). This percentage will vary from city to city, but in many cities, close to half of its workforce is nearing retirement.

Given that the projected workforce shortage is just around the corner in terms of long-term planning, each city should begin working on the problems associated with workforce shortages and large-scale retirements now. Because of the shortage, there will be greater competition for skilled workers. Cities need to start taking immediate steps to review and possibly change employment practices in order to be seen as "preferred employers."

The projected workforce shortage associated with the retirement of the Baby Boomers poses two major problems for most cities. First, the city must decide how to cope with the loss of the city's workers (i.e., how to get the work done). Generally, cities are looking at solutions associated with figuring out different ways to do jobs, or increased and more broadly focused recruitment efforts, and at changing employment policies to attract and retain workers. Second, the city must decide how to cope with the loss of organizational knowledge and history that the city's workers take with them (i.e., the knowledge about how to get the work done efficiently and effectively). This means making sure that there are mechanisms in place for a "knowledge transfer."

This toolkit discusses the questions that cities should be asking in order to determine possible solutions to these problems.

RELEVANT LINKS:

However, it is not intended to provide all of the answers that your city will need in order to effectively deal with the upcoming workforce shortages. Instead, it should be viewed as a "starting point" for cities to begin the planning process.

II. Problem identification

The League strongly encourages city officials to analyze their city government workforce needs for the years ahead and to take actions that make their city an attractive employer. Competition will be intense for the workers who can fill workforce gaps left by retiring Baby Boomers—other local governments, state government, businesses, and nonprofits all face similar challenges. The first step in workforce planning is problem identification. Begin by determining which jobs in your city are likely to experience retirements in the next five years.

Addressing some key questions will help the city identify its own unique situation and the challenges associated with the changing demographics of the city and its workforce. While the questions may vary somewhat by city and by region of the state, there are a number of common questions that will apply in almost every city.

Getting the city's top leadership (e.g., city council, city administrator, department heads) together to talk about these issues is a good way to start answering some of these questions and thinking about possible solutions. Another approach is to assign the questions to each department manager to address within their respective departments and bring possible solutions to the city council and/or city administrator/manager for further consideration.

A. Retirements in next five years

Think about which of your employees are likely to retire in the next five years. You can further define your situation by asking the following:

- How many of these individuals are key leaders/managers?
- How many of these individuals have specialized technical knowledge?
- How many of these individuals are in the same job class and/or same department?
- What does our recent history say about our ability to recruit for these jobs?

B. Workforce differences in five years

Think about the composition of your workforce. Based on trends you see today, ask yourself how it might be different in five years compared to its current composition. Questions that may help you include the following:

RELEVANT LINKS:

- Which generations will still be working? Which will be retiring? Which will be coming into the workforce? What are the characteristics of each of these generations?
- How will the racial and ethnic backgrounds differ from today?
- How will the gender balance differ?
- How will educational backgrounds be different?
- How will work preferences be different (e.g., working from home, flexible hours, etc.)?

C. Human resources needs in five years

How will your human resources needs be different in five years? Think about things like the following:

- What role will technology play? Will it be able to replace some workers? Will we need a higher level of training in technology? Will we need to replace our technology in order to attract and retain new workers?
- How do the city's growth and development patterns play a role in human resources needs?
- How will the city's demographics play a role in human resources needs (e.g., older populations requiring different city services and housing)?

D. Preparing for change

Once you begin to have ideas about what your needs and workforce might look like in five years, focus on what you can be doing now to prepare for these changes. Think about things like the following:

- What strategies should we employ? What are some possible solutions to workforce shortages and changes? Do the solutions require outside assistance or legal authority?
- What are the constraints against implementing strategies? What are some possible solutions to those constraints?
- How can we match the skills of our current and future employees with our needs as an employer?

III. Gap analysis

In order to determine where the city will need to increase its efforts to meet future workforce needs, the first step is to identify what functions the city currently performs (both direct service to residents and the administrative functions that support those direct services); what resources (staff, technology, vendors, contractors, joint powers arrangements) will be available to perform those functions in the future; and whether there is likely to be a gap between the functions needed and the resources available.

Problem identification and gap analysis by city functions template.

RELEVANT LINKS:

The League has developed a template to assist cities with this first step.

IV. Identifying strategies and solutions

Once the city has identified the unique problems it will be facing with regard to the workforce shortage, the next step is to identify some possible strategies and solutions for addressing the problem as well as potential challenges and constraints.

A. Reinvention or retooling

This strategy explores whether the city should be thinking about alternative ways to get the work done—other than hiring new workers.

After identifying the job classes, departments, and key leadership positions that are likely to be vacant in the near future, the city can start analyzing how best to address the vacancies. Probably the first question to ask is this: Is it possible that the city could decide to discontinue this service?

For example, where the city is currently providing a fall leaf-removal service for residents, and the primary person in charge of it is getting ready to retire, the city may want to ask itself these questions: Is this a core service? Is this service of high importance to our residents? Are there other entities—public or private—that already provide this service? What would happen if we discontinued this service as far as liability, public relations, legal compliance, etc.?

If the service is determined to be essential, then the next question that the city may want to ask is: Are there any other ways to accomplish this service for our residents?

For example, say the city employs its own city assessor, and she is retiring in three years. Assessments can't be discontinued entirely; they are needed to determine property taxes. However, is there another way to accomplish this service for city residents? Will the county be willing to handle assessments for the city and, if so, how much would they charge? Could the city hire an outside consultant to do the assessments? Should the city consider a joint powers arrangement or consider sharing an employee with another city?

If contracting out doesn't seem to be a good option, another option might be to consider some nontraditional approaches such as these:

- Splitting up jobs. For example, the city engineer retires and is hired back on a part-time basis with no supervisory duties; all supervision is assigned to a different department director or to a lower level supervisor.

- Teamwork. Several different departments may join together to accomplish various aspects of a job; for example, the fire marshall retires and the various duties are re-assigned to the fire chief and the Building Inspection Department.
- Using volunteers. This strategy might be used where the city is unable to recruit a sufficient number of parks maintenance workers to maintain the city's parks. Instead, the city establishes a volunteer program in which the city's garden club takes over flower planting and other duties for all city parks.
- Working outside of job class. Consider a situation where the city is unable to recruit a utility billing clerk with an appropriate level of computer skills. However, there is a part-time public works employee who is very good with computers. The city hires and trains the public works employee to handle utility billing duties on a part-time basis and public works duties on a part-time basis.

B. Recruitment

For more information on recruitment see HR Reference Manual, Chapter 2 – Section III, Recruitment process.

Determine how effective your city's current recruitment practices are and whether they can be made more effective for the future, especially in those job classes that you are likely to have problems recruiting. This can result in increased and more broadly focused efforts to hire new workers.

For some job classes, the city will conclude that strengthening its recruitment efforts is the best approach. Assessing the city's current recruitment efforts and determining where they can be improved is the first step in this process.

1. Assessment of strengths and challenges

The city should ask itself what currently works well and not so well. Questions like these will help focus your efforts:

- Do we track where applicants come from (e.g., newspaper ads, the web, postings at city hall, job fairs, word-of-mouth, etc.)? What do these statistics tell us about where best to spend our efforts?
- Do we poll our recent hires to find out what they did and didn't like about the recruitment process? Do we survey candidates who did not get the job to see what they think?
- Does our recruitment process take a long time to complete?
- Do we lose candidates along the way? If so, how do we lose them (e.g., finding other jobs, insufficient starting pay, insufficient benefits, etc.)?
- Does anything about our process (application procedures, minimum requirements, interviews, testing procedures, etc.) discourage candidates from applying?

RELEVANT LINKS:

Next, try to understand what you need to change in order to recruit the next generation of workers. Depending on your assessment of your strengths and weaknesses you might consider the following:

- More technological approaches.
- Offering telecommuting and remote work options.
- More flexibility in scheduling.
- Reducing the emphasis on “face time.”
- Overcoming negative public perceptions of government work as boring and bureaucratic.
- Identifying what’s good about your salary and benefits.
- Identifying what’s missing from your salary and benefit package.
- Identifying what could be improved in your salary and benefit offerings.
- Improving your marketing efforts. (e.g., what does the city offer that we can “sell” to applicants?)

2. Job descriptions

Sample *job description*.

Job descriptions play an important role in the recruitment process by defining the duties and requirements of the position. While not legally required, they can sometimes help defend the city’s employment decisions in legal actions. The job description is the road map for the rest of the recruitment process. It is used to generate the advertisement and job posting for the position, to develop interview questions or other tests, and to measure the job candidates against each other. In addition, job descriptions that provide clear expectations and responsibilities can give employees a vision of the opportunities available to help develop their careers.

a. Primary objective of position

In creating a job description, first determine the primary objective of the position. The job description should illustrate the main reason why the job exists. In determining the main objective of the position, you can ask yourself: What important purposes does the job serve? How does this position connect to the city’s mission and values?

b. Input from incumbents

The best way to write a job description is to get input from the employee who currently does the job. The current employee may be your most knowledgeable resource because they will have first-hand knowledge of the ins and outs of the position. If the author of the job description is not the position’s supervisor, it will be critical to have on-going discussions with the supervisor to ensure that the job description accurately reflects the current needs of the organization.

RELEVANT LINKS:

c. Job expectations

Focus on job expectations. Job descriptions should set clear expectations for what you expect from people. It is important that employee's clearly understand your expectations.

d. Keep current

Keep your job descriptions current. Job duties and functions may change from time to time. It is important to review job descriptions frequently for changes. To ensure job descriptions are maintained, one party should be designated (e.g., the supervisor or human resources department) as having the primary responsibility for keeping the job descriptions current. Job descriptions should always be reviewed prior to advertising an open position.

e. Behavioral components

Behavioral components are important. While skills and knowledge are important aspects, behavioral traits are just as important. Not only do you want an employee who can do the job, you also want an employee who is going to be a good fit with the culture of the city. For example, if the employee will be required to "prioritize and take direction from several individuals in a team environment," make sure you put that in the job description. If the employee will work with customers, he or she needs to "provide polite and helpful customer service" to all customers.

f. Flexibility

Make sure job descriptions have enough flexibility so individuals can "work outside the box." Job descriptions should be flexible enough so that employees are comfortable cross-training and helping another team member accomplish a task and are confident they can make appropriate decisions to serve their customers.

3. Orientation and training program

Sample *orientation and training plan checklist*.

An orientation program can be viewed as an extension of the recruitment and selection process. The goal is to help the employee prepare for his or her new role in an organized and efficient manner, resulting in a shorter learning curve, greater productivity, and increased job satisfaction and retention.

A good orientation program helps to set expectations for performance, provides employees with the tools and resources to do their jobs, and helps employees to learn the culture and "unwritten rules" of the organization.

RELEVANT LINKS:

A well-run orientation program can establish the foundation for open and effective communication between a city and its employees.

Basic elements of an orientation and training program include the following:

a. Update current employees

Notify your current employees of the new employee's name, background, job title, key responsibilities, start date, and where their office/work space will be located. Encourage employees to introduce themselves to the new employee.

b. Help new employee to feel welcome

Be sure the employee has a "home," a place to put their things. Provide the initial tools and supplies that the employee will need to do their job. Something as simple as having a nametag or nameplate in place on the employee's first day of work can send a very positive message to a new employee and make them feel welcome.

c. Assign a buddy

Designating a contact person or mentor to help the new recruit through the early stages of employment can be a good way to provide the individualized attention each employee needs. The ideal buddy is someone in the same department as the new employee who is familiar with the organizational structures, both formal and informal, and will be a reliable source of information. A buddy shows the new employee the ropes, introduces him or her to co-workers, gives personal assistance, and answers questions on an as-needed basis. Assigning a buddy provides a resource for questions the new employee may not need, or wish, to discuss with the supervisor such as, Where is the nearest restroom? or Do most employees eat in or go out?

d. Focus on basics

Give the new employee a tour of the facility and introduce them to staff members. Explain compensation and benefits plans, attendance procedures, work rules and policies, safety procedures, and who to contact with questions. Provide the employee with copies of any materials or policies that will be helpful, such as an employee handbook.

e. Set performance expectations

Expectations should be discussed in a detailed manner, especially when an employee is new. Outlined in the orientation process should be the tasks, goals, policies, operating procedures, and standards to be met.

RELEVANT LINKS:

When discussing performance expectations, goals should be set. Goals direct attention, increase persistence, and motivate the employee to attain those goals.

f. Explain the "unwritten rules"

Share with your new employee the many "unwritten rules" of the workplace that are not necessarily outlined in your personnel policies, such as the culture of the city, your supervisory styles, and following the protocol of "how it's done here."

g. Check in periodically

It's important to check in with your new employee to see how things are going. You could do this by scheduling standing "touch base" meetings with the new hire 20–30 minutes each week for the critical first three months. Be sure to give and ask for feedback regularly.

C. Employee retention

Retention policies focus on ways to keep the workers that the city currently has or the new ones it hopes to attract in an increasingly competitive job market. Retaining good, well-trained, experienced employees goes hand-in-hand with ramping up the city's recruitment efforts. To start to address retention, brainstorm ways to make your city a more attractive work environment by asking, What are our current "problem" job classes? and What do we see as likely problems for the future?

To ensure that it is able to keep good employees longer, the city should examine similar questions to those addressed with regard to recruitment.

1. Assessment of strengths and challenges

Find out why long-tenured employees stay at the city, and what motivates those who leave to do so by thinking about the following types of questions:

- Does the city conduct employee surveys to find out what employees like and don't like about working for the city?
- Does the city conduct exit interviews to find out why people leave?
- Is the city's compensation competitive with the market? Does the city conduct periodic market studies? Can an employee be hired by a neighboring city or the private sector and immediately make more money?
  Is the city's insurance benefit structure competitive? How much do the city's employees pay for insurance vs. other employers? Has the city covered all of the bases—disability insurance, health, dental, life, and

long-term care?

- Is job stability something that the city could promote? Does the city have a record of few or no layoffs in the past 10 years?
- How is the city's work environment? Are supervisors well trained in getting the best performance from their employees? Does the city promote a respectful environment? How are council-staff relations? Does the city address problems up front or allow them to go unaddressed?
- Is the city's top leadership perceived to be strategic and insightful? Does the city spend time and effort thinking and planning for the future?
- Does the city spend time, effort, and money on professional development for its staff? Do employees believe that they will be supported if they try to grow professionally?
- Are employees and leaders dedicated to public service and to top-notch customer service?
- Does the city spend time and effort on employee communications? Do employees understand the city's mission and goals?

2. Preparing for change

Once you begin to have ideas about what your strengths and challenges might be, focus on what you need to change in order to retain the next generation of workers, to get those nearing retirement to think about staying, and to attract a more diverse workforce. Think about things like the following:

PERA Phased Retirement Option.

- Has the city thought about setting up a "phased retirement" option for employees nearing retirement? For example, one approach to phased retirement occurs when employees gradually reduce the number of hours they work over the last few years before retirement. The Public Employees Retirement Association offers this type of approach through their "Phased Retirement Option" in which employees can formally retire but keep working as a part-time employee on a year-to-year renewable basis.

PERA Separation Requirements

- Has the city considered using retired employees as volunteers or on a contractual basis? Or, could the city rehire retired employees in new jobs (being careful to abide by PERA rules regarding rehiring retirees)?

LMC website: *Engaging Younger Generations.*

- Has the city considered an outreach to culturally diverse populations (e.g., recruitment fairs, advertising in newsletters, postings at community centers, offering internships or cadet programs, etc.)?
- Does the city's salary plan move younger generation employees up fast enough? Should the city consider putting more dollars into the first few steps of the salary range? Should the city consider an alternative reward system, e.g., performance-based awards, etc.? Does the city give them significant job duties with room for expansion?

RELEVANT LINKS:

3. Work environment assessment

Workforce planning involves taking the necessary steps to ensure that you will have employees with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet future needs. An important part of workforce planning is retaining the employees you already have. Projected workforce shortages associated with the retirement of the Baby Boomer generation mean that employees can be more selective about where they work, and there will be more competition for good employees.

It is also important for cities to work to retain good employees because of the tremendous costs associated with employee turnover. Many of these costs are easily quantifiable such as advertising, staff time to recruit, and new employee training. Other costs are indirect, but just as important, such as loss of productivity, customer disruptions, lost knowledge, and impact on employee morale.

In assessing your work environment you can find out why employees leave, why they stay, and how engaged they are when they are at work. Here are some ideas for assessing your work environment.

a. Exit interviews

Sample *exit interview guide*.

If your goal is to increase employee retention, it is important to assess why employees choose to leave your organization. If utilized appropriately, exit interviews can provide valuable information regarding how your organization is viewed by employees. Some important topics to include in the interview are organizational culture, manager-employee relations, compensation and benefits, opportunities for growth, and general working conditions and suggestions for improvement. Look for trends and areas for improvement. The exit interview can also provide an opportunity to thank the employee for their service and leave on a positive note.

See Section IV-C-4, *Work-life balance policies*; and Section IV-C-3-b, *Employee engagement surveys*.

Engage with longer-term employees to learn the reasons employees stay. Compensation is important, but today’s employees want more than good pay and benefits. Low pay drives people away, but high pay doesn’t necessarily keep them around. What employees want may vary based on many things such as personality, family situation, age, and current stage in career. Common reasons employees stay in their job include flexibility, work/life balance, a good relationship with the supervisor, recognition, meaningful work, and the opportunity to learn new skills. Depending on the size of your workforce, you can obtain useful information through employee interviews, surveys, focus groups, or informal discussions.

RELEVANT LINKS:

(1) Choose a neutral party

You are more likely to get candid responses if someone other than the employee's supervisor conducts the interview. A city clerk or human resources staff person may be likely candidates.

(2) Explain how information will be used

The information collected will be more valuable if the employee can give honest feedback without fear that the information will be somehow used against him or her. In small cities it may be difficult to promise complete anonymity, but be sure to let the employee know how the information will be used. Explain that the purpose of the interview is for the city to learn how they can improve the workplace. Reassure the employee that the information will not be kept in his or her personnel file, and the employee will not be identified by name.

(3) Use open-ended questions

Often, employees will initially offer vague or general statements such as they are leaving for a "better opportunity." You may need to encourage the employee to reveal more information with questions such as, What led you to seek out that opportunity? or Was there anything we could have done to keep you here?

(4) Be prepared for strong emotions

Leaving a position is almost always an emotional process regardless of why the employee is leaving or how long the employee has worked for the city. Oftentimes, it is a difficult process to leave a position where an employee has developed relationships with co-workers and invested a lot of time and energy. Sometimes an employee may have pent-up frustrations and will use the exit interview as an opportunity to vent. In these cases, it is important to remember that an exit interview is an opportunity for the employer to gain information. Therefore, you should listen and make sure you understand what he or she is saying, whether or not you agree with the information. You can analyze the credibility of the information at a later time.

(5) Thank the employee

Be sure to thank the employee for his or her service and contributions. You want the employee to leave feeling good about the organization and the time he or she spent there. In addition, this can help your workforce planning efforts because former employees will tell friends, family, and new co-workers (all who are potential candidates) about their experiences with the city.

(6) Take action

If there are legal or significant concerns that arise during the interview, you will need to investigate immediately. In addition, look for trends among comments from employees. Do certain areas have high turnover? Are there similarities among responses? Periodically summarize exit interviews and give feedback to management regarding strengths and areas for improvement. Develop an action plan for improvement if necessary. Like any survey, the information collected will not help the organization if it just sits on a shelf.

b. Employee engagement surveys

It is important to differentiate between employee engagement and employee satisfaction. Employee engagement refers to the level of ownership an employee takes in his or her position and in the organization. Employee satisfaction typically refers to how content employees are in their current position, and how happy they are with their compensation benefits, work environment, etc. High levels of employee engagement have been shown to translate to greater productivity, customer service, and safety records.

If your employees are only staying for the pay, it's likely you have an employee engagement problem. Have you ever heard the term, "Quit on the Job"? This refers to employees who do "just enough" to avoid getting fired. On the other hand, employees who are engaged take ownership in their work and exert more effort. According to a Gallup study, work groups with high levels of employee engagement have lower turnover, higher customer satisfaction, better safety records, and greater productivity. Employees are generally more engaged if they recognize the following:

- Understand what is expected of them and how their work impacts the organization.
- Have the ability to make decisions regarding their work.
- Receive ongoing feedback, support, and recognition from their supervisors.
- Have the opportunity to develop new skills.

Sample *employee engagement survey*.

An employee engagement survey can help a city evaluate how engaging the work environment is for its employees. It can help identify the areas in which the city is contributing to engagement as well as areas where improvement may be needed. A survey can also help the city track its progress in employee engagement over time.

(1) Factors contributing to employee engagement

Focus on the factors that contribute to employee engagement.

RELEVANT LINKS:

Factors that are shown to increase employee engagement include the ability to make decisions regarding their work, understanding expectations, receiving feedback, recognition, and support from managers, and the opportunity to develop new skills.

(2) Employee confidentiality

Protect the confidentiality of employees. In order to receive honest feedback, you need to ensure that individual responses will remain anonymous. Consider having an external source collect and report the data. Some web survey tools also have the ability to collect and assemble data without revealing the source. Communicate to employees why you are asking for this information and how the data will be used. Make sure that employees understand that individual responses will not be identified.

(3) Analyze results

Analyze the results and determine a course of action. Analyze strengths and weaknesses. In which areas is the city doing well? Where is there room for improvement? Do the survey results match what you observe on a daily basis? Are there differences among departments or work groups? Which areas, if improved, would have the greatest impact? Is further research in certain areas needed?

(4) Communicate results

Communicate the results to employees. How many times have you completed a survey, only to never hear a word about it again? Provide a summary of the results to employees. Communicate the next steps. What do the results indicate? What will or will not be done as a result of the survey?

(5) Follow-up

If you conduct an employee survey, you need to be prepared to do something with the results. Employees will quickly lose confidence if they are asked for feedback, and then nothing is done with the results. Even if the results are positive, the survey can be used as a tool to identify those things that management should continue doing. Repeat the survey periodically, and follow up on any changes to ensure they are having the desired effect.

4. Work-life balance policies

Sample *language for work-life balance policies*.

Work-life balance policies can help cities to become employers of choice by assisting employees in meeting both their work goals and personal or family needs. Work-life balance policies may help the city to recruit high-quality employees and improve retention, productivity, and morale.

RELEVANT LINKS:

Sample *Front Desk Results*.

Examples of work-life balance policies include flexible schedules, working from offsite (telecommuting), personal time off, and leaves of absence for family or educational reasons.

a. Focus on results

Work-life balance policies require a shift from the amount of time an employee spends at work to the quality and amount of work produced by the employee. In other words, the city looks less at “when and where” the work gets done, and instead focuses on whether or not the employee is meeting the needs of the organization. To be successful in this area, the organization has to clearly communicate what results it expects. To take this a step further and improve employee engagement, clarify how those results contribute to the organization’s mission.

b. Performance expectations

Clearly communicate employee performance expectations. This is very critical, especially for employees spending a larger part of their workweek away from their supervisor. Goals should be clear, specific, and stated in terms of desired results. The employee should know how much work is to be performed, how much time is allowed for its completion (e.g., deadlines), and what milestones will measure progress. Goals should be incorporated into the employee’s annual performance review. Make it clear in your policies that flexible schedules can be changed, with adequate notice, if the needs of the city are not being met.

c. Differential impact of policies

Acknowledge that not all employees will equally benefit from all policies. For example, not all positions are able to work flexible schedules. The front desk receptionist probably cannot work outside of regular business hours because he or she must answer the phones and greet visitors. However, that same receptionist might greatly appreciate the personal time-off policy. Be sure to carefully spell out the factors that go into identifying whether a position is eligible for flexible schedules and to explain these decisions to affected employees.

d. Follow-up and monitoring

You will want to identify when the program is and is not working. Establish and maintain procedures and practices for monitoring processes and results achieved. Use controls that are consistent with the city’s goals, simple to understand, timely, relevant, feasible, and limited in time and scope. Performance reviews and regular work progress meetings or reports can help monitor results.

RELEVANT LINKS:

e. Evaluate effectiveness

Make sure to evaluate the effectiveness of work-life balance policies. A work-life balance policy is effective if it is meeting the needs of the city and the employee. Periodically ask employees for feedback regarding the current work-life balance policies. Oftentimes, employees may not participate in an alternative work arrangement or a dependent care program, but still appreciate that the policy is available. Positive outcomes can emerge regardless of whether people actually use a work-life balance policy.

5. Hire the right people

Hire the right people in the first place. It is common sense that employees are more likely to stay in a position that is a good fit for both their interests and abilities. It may be tempting to gloss over some of the less desirable aspects of the job in order to get the candidate, but it pays to give candidates a realistic preview of the job so they know what to expect. Use multiple interviewers and ask questions that require proof of the candidate's abilities. Don't forget to ask for examples of situations where they have used "soft skills" that may be required for the job such as customer service, teamwork, or problem-solving abilities. Once the employee is on board, don't utilize a "sink or swim" philosophy. Instead, help the employee to learn about the organization and get up to speed quickly.

6. Focus on managers

It is a common saying that employees "choose to work for an organization, but choose to leave a manager." The most important person in a retention plan is the front-line supervisor. Employees want supervisors to coach by providing lots of feedback and positive reinforcement. Supervisors need skills to effectively motivate and manage performance, communicate with all levels, resolve conflicts, seek out feedback from their employees, and learn from mistakes. Does this sound like the supervisors in your organization? In a small organization you probably know your supervisors. In a larger organization, you could look for trends in turnover, complaints, or absenteeism in a particular workgroup. Do your supervisors currently have the skills to effectively manage employees or can they obtain them through training or other methods?

7. Implementation strategies

Ok, so you've looked at your work environment, hired the best people, and determined what you need from your supervisors. Now what? Depending on your situation and the information you have gathered, there are many different strategies that could be implemented.

RELEVANT LINKS:

Some of the most common are listed here:

- Training or development programs
- Rotating job assignments
- Flexible scheduling or telecommuting
- Recognition programs
- Performance pay
- Phased retirement

Developing an employee retention plan may take some time and effort, but in the long run will save your city money and help you retain a happy and productive workforce.

D. Knowledge transfer

Even if the city is able to recruit new workers, it is bound to lose institutional "know how," history, and valuable working relationships as long-term employees retire and leave the city. Establish a knowledge-transfer strategy to make sure your city does not lose all of the knowledge about the best ways to accomplish the city's work when the workers retire.

The city should be thinking about the following kinds of things now in order to minimize the loss of knowledge with the loss of the employees:

1. Technical knowledge

Identify which of your job classes require extensive technical knowledge and consider the following approaches:

- Should the city consider implementing "work team" and "project partner" approaches to ensure that newer staff have opportunities to learn from more experienced staff?
- Should the city consider a "job shadowing" program—giving employees the opportunity to "shadow" someone in a key position to learn more about the job and help prepare them for promotional opportunities?
- Should the city consider a formal "mentoring" program?
- As part of a "phased retirement" approach, should the city consider overlapping positions and duties for a period of time?
- Has the city considered requiring key employees to write "desk manuals" about how to do their jobs in their absence?

2. Institutional history and relationships

Identify which job classes require extensive institutional history. Consider whether to make an effort to capture this institutional history in databases or by other means and make the information easily retrievable.

Likewise, some job classes may require extensive external relationships or excellent internal relationships to get the job done. Consider a formal program to get employees with key external or internal contacts to formalize that information in a database or “desk manual.”

3. Communicating with employees

Communicate with your employees about this knowledge transfer in a way that will not raise “territorial” or personality issues. The following are examples of ways you can do this:

- Educate key decision-makers and influential staff (city council, department heads, top management staff, union leadership, etc.).
- Address “generational” concerns (i.e., talk to staff about how different generations prefer that knowledge transfer occur and ensure that there are a variety of different ways to make it happen so that each person can find a comfort zone).
- Address strong personality issues (if there are staff that are known to be particularly resistant to knowledge transfer, work with them individually to smooth the path).

4. Responsibility for work completion

Consider how to ensure that spreading out the responsibility for various programs (through increased teamwork, shadowing, mentoring, project partners, etc.) does not result in a situation where no one is in charge and no one is taking responsibility for the work. You will want to establish:

- Clear “bottom line” responsibility and decision-making.
- Clear messages about what is expected of each employee and who will be held accountable.

5. Assistance from external sources

You should consider ways to use external sources to assist with knowledge transfer, such as:

- Use neighboring cities as resources (for example, if the city clerk retires and can’t be reached to ask a question, the city could call a neighboring city clerk for help).
- Encourage city staff to join professional associations for city clerks, finance officers, city engineers, human resources directors, etc.
- Invite newer city staff to join email listservs to ask and answer questions from employees with similar interests and backgrounds in other cities throughout the state (for example, city clerks, city attorneys, and city engineers all have listservs established through the League).

RELEVANT LINKS:

Sample *succession planning form and matrix*.

See Section III, *Gap analysis*.

Problem identification and gap analysis by city functions template.

Employee development plan template.

E. Succession planning

After the city has identified the positions it will need to fill in the future, a succession plan maps out a strategy to ensure employees with the knowledge, skills, and abilities are available to meet those needs. The basic considerations in developing a successful plan are outlined below.

1. Consider alternatives

Remember that the goal is to accomplish the work, which does not necessarily mean filling the open position. Before deciding to fill any potential vacancy, first look at alternative ways to accomplish the work. Make use of the Problem Identification and Gap Analysis by City Functions template to help with this process.

2. Inclusive planning

Involve all levels of the organization in your planning. To develop a succession plan, you need to have a solid understanding of the work that needs to be accomplished by the city. There may be aspects of the work that only one person in the city currently fully understands. In addition, individuals currently in the position can probably provide valuable information regarding alternative ways to accomplish the work.

3. Employee development

Focus on employee development. In order to be successful, a succession plan needs to be combined with employee development plans. The city needs a process to measure the current performance of employees and assess future potential. Establishing clear goals and conducting performance reviews can help the city to measure current performance. Then, employees can work with managers to create plans for future development opportunities.

Employee development plans play an important role in workforce planning by helping to ensure the city has a structured plan to gain the skills, knowledge, and ability its workforce will need in the future. Creation of employee development plans should consist of the steps outlined below.

a. Clear goals linked to future needs

Develop clear goals that are linked to future needs of the organization by doing the following:

RELEVANT LINKS:

See Section III, *Gap analysis*.

See Section IV-E, *Succession Planning*.

- First, identify the skills, knowledge, and abilities the workforce will need in the future due to retirements, changes in position, and changes in community needs. The Problem Identification and Gap Analysis by City Functions template can help you in this area.
- Next, determine which positions the city is likely to develop from within. You can use the Succession Planning template to help you with this.
- Finally, any skills that need to be developed internally should then be transferred to individual employee development plans, in addition to other goals that may be relevant for each employee.

b. Partnership approach

Use a partnership approach. An effective employee development plan requires a partnership between the employee and supervisor. In addition, city leadership may need to be involved in higher level employee development plans. The supervisor and leadership team should take into consideration the future needs of the city, the future potential of the employee, and what knowledge, skills, or abilities the employee will need in the future. The employee will likely be considering his or her own career goals and areas of interest in addition to the needs of the city.

c. Break long-term goals into stages

Break long-term goals into short-term goals. Because the needs of the organization and the individual are always changing, it is usually best to create a development plan for a one-year period. The development plan should include a long-term objective and no more than three to five goals that can reasonably be accomplished in the coming year.

A long-term objective of "Develop the necessary skills to manage the waste-water operations" might include the short-term goals of 1) assist the operations manager in developing the annual budget; 2) partner with a senior manager (who has been identified as an effective manager) to mentor the employee, including job-shadowing; and 3) attend a classroom session on managing performance.

d. Use a variety of learning methods

Chart of sample *learning methods for succession planning*.

Classroom training can be very effective for developing certain skills, but it is important to understand that the majority of development occurs as a result of other activities. When creating a development plan, incorporate activities that make sense for the knowledge, skill, or ability that is needed. Some examples of development activities are provided in the chart of sample learning methods linked in the sidebar.

RELEVANT LINKS:

e. Evaluate your progress

Evaluate your progress on a regular basis. Employee development is a process, not a one-time event. It is important for the employee and supervisor to meet on a regular basis to ensure success.

4. Flexibility

Keep your succession planning flexible. Remember that the succession plan is a guide that must periodically be revised because work conditions will change. An employee you were grooming for a position may leave, new developments may change the work that needs to be done, or budget changes may make part of the plan impractical. The succession plan is a guide to help make decisions, not a rigid policy that must be followed.

V. Other considerations

The city will also want to assess any proposed solutions with regard to workforce planning as they relate to legal requirements and liability issues such as the following:

- Union contracts, e.g., out-of-class pay and seniority issues.
- Workers' compensation, e.g., telecommuting or job-sharing issues.
- Equal Pay Act and Pay Equity, i.e., the more jobs and duties are shared, the more complicated it can be to address these issues.
- Liability issues, e.g., experimenting with new job duties or hiring less experienced workers can mean increased training requirements and safety issues.
- Unemployment insurance, i.e., whenever jobs are eliminated or hours reduced, this can come into play.
- Age Discrimination in Employment Act, i.e., the more the city is using older workers, the more likely that these issues could arise.
- Rehiring retirees must be done in accordance with the Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) guidelines which currently require at least a 30-day break in service and no prior agreement to rehire.

VI. Further assistance

800.925.1122
651.281.1200
HRbenefts@lmc.org

Read about and sign up for League member forums.

With all that's on your plate, it can be easy to put off tasks related to workforce planning. League Human Resources and Benefits staff is here to help you take those first steps to get moving and to answer more complex questions around what cities can and cannot do to attract and retain new workers. The League also maintains a member forum (listserv) for Minnesota city officials with human resources responsibility.

RELEVANT LINKS:

Learn tips, exchange ideas, and connect with your colleagues on workforce planning and other human resources issues.