

Cal-ICMA Talent Initiative Executive Summary

Purpose

The purpose of the Cal-ICMA Talent Initiative is to help managers in local government focus on the business imperative of attracting, retaining, and growing talent.

Assessment Activities

To assess the talent challenges facing local governments in California, the Cal-ICMA Talent Development Team completed a review of the available literature, a survey of 372 senior managers, interviews with private and non-profit sector thought leaders, and 11 focus groups throughout California involving 272 local government executives.

Key Findings About The Talent Challenge

While local governments did not adequately prepare for the Baby-Boomer retirement wave, we have a potential competitive advantage in attracting, developing, and retaining today's talent. This is because all employees – but especially Millennials – seek meaning and purpose in their work and local governments help people enhance the world around them.

Local governments can no longer rely on “stealing” talent from other agencies; more than ever, public agencies need to grow their own talent. Employees who are learning and growing are more likely to stay with an organization. Talent development cannot be a human resources function but must be integral to every manager's core duties.

Successfully attracting and retaining talent is more about culture than money. The traditionally stodgy governmental culture inhibits innovation, discourages experimentation, and turns away the best talent. Retooling organizational cultures to better attract and retain early-career talent will enhance our organizations for all employees and improve performance and productivity.

Challenges in Attracting, Retaining and Growing Talent

Senior managers who participated in the 11 focus groups perceived an array of challenges that need to be addressed for local government agencies to succeed in talent development. They also perceived the need to engage elected officials in the talent conversation. A few of the key challenges or obstacles include:

Key Recommendations

Attracting Talent

- ✓ Eliminate “minimum qualifications” for entry-level positions
- ✓ Refine job postings to focus on meaning, values, learning, skills development, and organizational culture
- ✓ Hire for potential and learning agility vs. technical skills and knowledge
- ✓ Expand the recruitment reach by using social media sites and new technologies
- ✓ Offer internships or fellowships to students, independently or through the ICMA Local Government Management Fellowship Program

Retaining and Developing Talent

- ✓ Assess your leadership pipeline and develop home-grown talent
- ✓ Provide staff with training and professional development opportunities annually, with specific learning outcomes
- ✓ Offer targeted mentoring and coaching for different groups of employees
- ✓ Use multi-department and cross-functional project action teams
- ✓ Use interim or acting assignments or provide job rotation opportunities to fill roles or “try out” staff
- ✓ Ensure that all supervisors are accountable for the development of their staff and follow up regularly

Talent Attraction/Recruitment

- Agencies are experiencing a larger number of vacancies in key positions; there are simply fewer seasoned Department Heads and other senior managers to recruit from other local government agencies.
- Internal candidates are often lacking management experience and leadership (“soft”) skills.
- Local government is not competitive with other sectors in respect to our lengthy recruitment processes, including testing requirements and minimum qualifications.
- Local government organizations often exhibit a lack of flexibility in respect to scheduling when and where work is done and the rigid nature of job duties and position classifications.
- Agencies do not provide budgets or allocate much effort to market or brand our local government agencies.

Talent Retention & Development

- Local governments have not made talent development a critical priority.
- Long commutes, high-cost housing, and lack of child care all work against talent retention.
- Traditional or even “stodgy” organization cultures are not inviting for early-career talent.
- The deep recession and restructuring of organizations have resulted in the elimination of mid-manager and other “step-up” positions.
- Political in-fighting and uncivil community discourse are driving out talent.
- Mid-career talent is reluctant to move up due to adversarial politics, added job responsibilities and risks, and less work-life balance.

Themes from Thought Leaders

In order to enhance our understanding of how to better compete for talent, especially millennial talent, the Talent Development Team conducted four interviews with recognized “Thought Leaders” from the technology and non-profit sectors. Themes included:

1. Early-Career professionals are asking about the big problems facing government and whether they will be allowed to help solve them.
2. Given these questions, local governments have both a branding and an organizational culture challenge.
3. Talent initiatives need the active encouragement and support of senior leadership.
4. Local governments must tell their story, especially regarding the opportunity to serve and make a difference.

Key Recommendations

Retooling Organizational Culture

- ✓ Use onboarding activities with new employees to engage them with top management and discuss organizational values and “what we care about”
- ✓ Incorporate more flexibility in scheduling, holiday closures, and other ways to do our work
- ✓ Ensure opportunities for face-to-face interactions with top management
- ✓ Create a “culture of appreciation” and recognition
- ✓ Promote more autonomy for employees and provide opportunities to work on the whole project
- ✓ Focus on employee engagement initiatives, including listening to employees, truly engaging them in problem-solving, and promoting a sense of community and belonging
- ✓ Ensure ongoing performance conversations with employees (not just annual performance evaluations)

Encouraging Employee Initiative

- ✓ Promote growth and development as a core element of each employee’s job responsibilities
- ✓ Encourage employees to identify their career development needs and suggest effective ways to fulfill them
- ✓ Invite each employee to include desired talent development plans in their regular reviews with a supervisor

Findings & Recommendations

The full Talent Initiative report identifies a variety of actions, both large and small, that local governments can take to increase their chances for successfully attracting, retaining, and growing talent. The “Key Recommendations” tables on the previous pages identify some of the lowest effort and highest impact steps leaders can take to begin to address the talent needs of their organizations and the profession as a whole. The most fundamental recommendation is to **ensure that every manager understands that the professional development of their employees is a primary job duty and that all employees take responsibility to grow and develop in their work.** If both leaders and employees embrace their roles, all other recommendations will progress naturally.

Assistance from Professional Organizations

Professional organizations play a role in championing local government as a noble, rewarding, engaging, and thriving job sector. Therefore, regional and professional organizations should be enlisted to assist advancing the Talent Initiative by:

- Developing sample branding materials including more enticing job announcements that all government agencies can customize and use in their efforts to attract talent (Cal-ICMA with ILG)
- Scheduling educational sessions dealing with Talent Initiative, including those with elected officials, to highlight the importance of attracting, retaining, engaging and developing talent (Cal-ICMA, League of California Cities, MMASC/NC, CSAC, and others)
- Promoting shared service models for delivering talent development programs on a regional basis (CPAAC)
- Expanding ICMA Student Chapters and outreach efforts to universities to engage early-career professionals (MMASC/NC)
- Focusing on leadership development (with emphasis on “soft skills”) for mid- managers and aspiring leaders (Cal-ICMA, MMASC/NC, ELGL)
- Conducting “Future County Department Heads” seminar (CACE, CSAC Institute)
- Drafting model language for employment agreements to provide flexibility for talent development efforts (CALPELRA)

Further Information

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Follow-Up Action Steps

In order to continue to advance the recommendations included in this report, the Cal-ICMA Talent Development Team (TDT) will take the following actions:

- Continue to solicit exemplary programs and examples of best practices that can be placed on the Cal-ICMA website for agencies to utilize.
- Conduct additional Private Sector Thought Leader interviews and disseminate through the Talent Initiative website, at conference sessions, and through online videos and podcasts.
- Engage professional organizations in discussing their roles in implementation of recommendations; develop implementation plan.
- Establish a “Great Places for Talent Award” to assess talent development efforts and acknowledge organizations that are implementing the best practices in this Report.
- Update the Cal-ICMA website to include tools, a knowledge base, and other resources for organizations to use in implementing the Talent Initiative locally.