



Workforce of Tomorrow

Executive Summary

Local governments will face significant challenges in attracting and retaining talent in the years ahead as retiring baby boomers are replaced by a workforce that is younger, more diverse, more mobile, and more reliant on information and communication technologies. The workforce of the future will have different expectations of employers and employment than their predecessors. The impact of baby boomer retirements will be widely felt in both the public and private sectors. There will be increased competition for talent and greater pressure on local governments to adapt to changing times, market themselves as employers of choice, anticipate workforce needs, and invest in and engage employees in meaningful ways.

These issues have not been on the radar screen for many elected and appointed officials. Budget challenges, legacy costs, and certain political environments will make it difficult for many local governments to compete with the private sector when it comes to wages. But leadership makes a difference. Public service is more than a paycheck and next generation workers are attracted to meaningful work and the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives. Local governments can market themselves as an

employer of choice by focusing on their assets: a sense of purpose, a mission that matters, being able to serve the public with integrity, interesting work, internal mobility, good benefits, and job variety.

While these assets may offset a less competitive salary, the traditions, practices, routines, and habits of government work will need to change. The next generation has a preference for flexibility, self-directed work, rapid upward mobility, and a highly collaborative environment.

Local government leaders need to have a sense of urgency about the challenges and changes ahead. Organizational transformation is needed and requires leadership.

MANAGING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

A multi-generational and increasingly diverse workforce offers both opportunities and challenges. Older workers bring experience and know-how to the job, essential to high performance. Younger workers bring energy, new ideas, and technology savvy, attributes that are equally important. With four to five

generations already coexisting in the workplace, local managers need to be cognizant of the similarities, differences, and nuances of each generation and find creative ways to accommodate them. Managers also need to build trust and communicate effectively to gain everyone's commitment to organizational goals.

Themes that emerged from interviews with local government managers, academics, and HR experts and from a literature review conducted for this project include:

- Transforming local government human resources policies and practices is at the heart of building the workforce of tomorrow and requires commitment from the top.
- Next generation workers are motivated by more than money. They want opportunities to do something worthwhile, so they will examine an organization's values and culture when considering a position.
- Flexible work practices can enhance retention for workers at all career stages. Younger workers expect the flexibility to work anytime from anywhere to get the job done—and older workers appreciate such flexibility as well.
- Technology will shape how work is organized, the nature of employment relationships, how employees communicate with each other and constituents, and the skills needed for many jobs. Younger employees are drawn to employers that provide the most up-to-date technology.
- Developing the next generation of leaders is vital to building and sustaining a talented workforce of tomorrow.

Graduate and undergraduate students responding to a survey administered by the Center for State and Local Government Excellence (SLGE) for this project offered similar themes:

- Most students have a favorable opinion of local government, are likely to pursue local government career options, and are attracted by the opportunity to make a difference in the community and people's lives.
- Students who said they aren't likely to pursue local government career options cited too much bureaucracy, constraints on what can be accomplished, not enough creative flexibility, slow hiring processes, and a greater interest in the non-profit sector.
- More than 50 percent of respondents said they expect to stay in a local government position for five years or less (compared with an average tenure of 7.1 years for local government employees between 2000 and 2014), and a majority said they plan to work in a variety of sectors throughout their careers.
- Internships provide important work experience to students seeking local government jobs. 50 percent of students are already in internships and 19 percent are seeking those opportunities.
- Professional development is a top priority for students, particularly employer-paid conferences service on committees and task forces, and external training opportunities.

ACTION STRATEGIES

The interviews conducted by SLGE for this project identified six strategies to guide local governments in building the workforce of tomorrow.

1. Reinvent human resources to become flexible, nimble, creative, can-do, strategic, and staffed by skilled employees who champion people management issues and set the workforce agenda. The local government manager should be a key advocate for this transformation.
2. Revamp antiquated policies and practices to meet the needs and expectations of a changing workforce and to compete successfully in the talent race.
3. Make government an employer of choice by building a brand that tells the great story of public service.
4. Focus on talent management, leadership development, and succession planning to prepare for workforce transitions, build needed bench strength, and grow future leaders.
5. Create a culture that values and engages employees in meaningful ways.
6. Leverage technology, data, and automation to improve government operations and provide employees with the tools they need to be highly productive and successful.