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How U.S. Municipalities Can Compete in the Future of Work

Examining the Best Practices for Recruiting Talent into the Municipal Workforce

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Executive Summary

In a post-pandemic economy, municipalities struggle with workforce challenges in the labor market (Khattar et al., 2022). Emerging theories around the "future of work" (FOW) add additional complications requiring new and innovative strategies for HR departments (De Smet et al., 2021). The absence of reliable best practices in literature handicaps municipalities' ability to compete for top talent, leaving many open positions within City Hall and affecting the ability of the government to provide public services (Semuels, 2022). With a commitment to support municipal innovation, the National League of Cities (NLC) is uniquely positioned to fill this gap.

The University of Southern California Price School of Public Policy (USC) research team in the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program conducted intensive research to examine the current challenges in recruiting and hiring for municipalities. The study utilized mixed methodologies for robust data collection, including a compilation of academic, industry, and practitioner best practices in recruitment strategies, analysis of available literature and open document to understand the barriers to hiring, and examination of municipalities' recruitment strategy through extracted data of online materials and job postings. The research was driven by advanced analytic techniques, including a literature review and content analysis, and included all 88 "large" U.S. municipalities – cities with over 250K population.

The research team collected and analyzed 350 publications in the academic and gray literature to determine the top best practices: 1) flexible work arrangements through work-from-home policy; 2) professional development and job training; 3) health and wellness programs and other benefits; 4) innovative recruitment tools such as social media strategies, and 5) comprehensive job descriptions. The researched articles also shed light on the challenges municipal leaders face when implementing modern best practices: resourcing, workforce planning, bureaucracy, and effective job descriptions.

To assess the implementation of FOW strategies, the research team analyzed job descriptions and other online recruitment materials from all 88 large U.S. municipalities, totaling over 1,000 documents. The researched best practices were translated into seven testable keywords. The analysis revealed that no city featured all best practices, with 14 municipalities mentioning 6 out of the 7, and the lowest-scoring municipality was Jersey City (1). Insurance, wellness, and paid time off are the most common best practices featured in online recruitment materials. The least common best practices are transportation subsidies, telework, and tuition reimbursements. The research team conducted a linear analysis to explore correlations between municipal characteristics and best practice adoption, finding that population and budget can affect a municipality's ability to implement FOW best practices.

Four recommendations emerged through the research for municipal leaders:1) promote data-driven evaluative tools such as research team-developed futureofwork.city;) modernize and standardize job descriptions; 3) recruit talent through modern social channels; and 4) highlight and share national FOW best practices, including the development of flexibility policies, investment in professional development and training, and expansion of employee wellness programs and benefits. Adoption of the recommendations will make local governments more competitive in the post-pandemic tightened labor market.

Issue Statement & Organizational Context

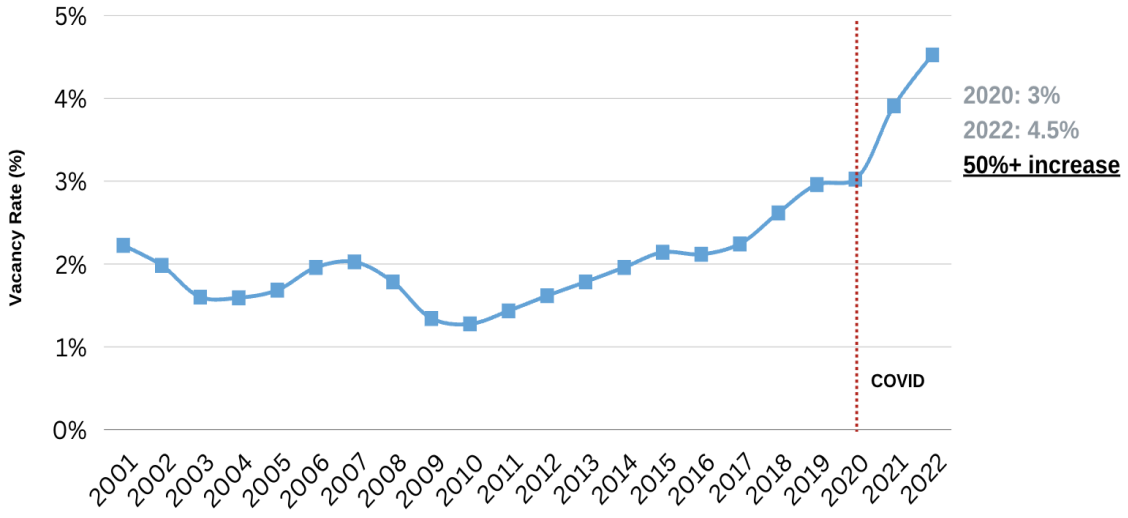
Issue Statement

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic left a devastating impact on the municipal workforce (Rosewicz & Maciag, 2020). Due to the emergency stay-at-home order, thousands of non-essential employees faced job loss or furloughs, leaving municipalities functioning at a limited capacity (Sheiner, 2022). Local governments have lost roughly 627,000 employees since February 2020 and are experiencing a slower recovery than the private sector (Khattar et al., 2022). As the U.S. economy recovered, local governments faced a decline in employment (Young, 2022). Currently, there are over one million government jobs to fill, which has increased to about 57% since before the pandemic (Risher, 2022). Moreover, governments face a pay disparity as the federal government lags 22.5% behind the private sector (Friedman, 2022). Local governments face similar disparities in pay as private sector wages increased by 5%, while local and state wages only increased by 2.7% (Maciag, 2022).

Municipalities are facing more prominent challenges in recruiting top talent post-pandemic due to the great resignation creating staffing shortages which have led to delays in service deliveries and burnout in remaining staff, generating a vicious "cycle" of resignation (Ramsey, 2020; Smith, 2021; De Smet et al., 2022b). If municipalities do not prioritize improving hiring processes, the workforce level will continue to dwindle, leaving the cities in crisis (Smith, 2022). Vacancies – unfilled positions – have grown to an unprecedented level (4.5%), as illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1:

State & local government vacancy rates have jumped since the pandemic (2020)



Note: Data compiled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Jobs & Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) (2022).
Vacancy is defined as unfilled, open positions.

Research has identified the following issues as the top reasons that municipalities face recruitment:

Staff Shortages & Capacity

Municipalities are massively understaffed and threaten the delivery of vital services to constituents. As local governments move towards recovery, the slow hiring leaves the government operating below the 2008 recession levels (Khattar et al., 2022). The staff shortages have led to employee burnout as current employees continue providing services with limited resources (Aflac, 2022).

Moreover, studies have found that the staff shortages have limited the capacity of the municipalities to spend vital federal funds, such as American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding (Whitehead et al., 2021).

Private Sector Competition

Even before the pandemic, municipalities have had severe attrition because of the inability to compete with private sector pay, benefits, and other considerations (Maciag, 2022). The pay gap is considerable. According to research, state and local government employers make 3-8% less than their private-sector counterparts (Asher, 2011; Schank & McGuinness, 2021). The private sector can offer competitive market-rate salaries compared to the public sector, while local governments act as a "monopoly" as the city manager or the department heads, not the market, creates the salary range (Ohanian, 2019; Schank & McGuinness, 2021).

As municipalities have long struggled to compete for top talent with the private sector, the constraints faced by hiring departments have been exacerbated by the pandemic (Dohrmann et al., 2008; Asher, 2021). While not a new issue, the post-pandemic realities of employees feeling overworked and underappreciated have led to more individuals leaving the public sector for positions with more pay, less workload, and better job flexibility (De Smet et al., 2021). Additionally, since the pandemic, the workforce has been hit with the "great resignation" phenomenon, where the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) observed the highest quit rate since its formation in 2000 (Figure 2) (Gittleman, 2022).

Private-sector tech company employees have more opportunities to earn annual raises and bonuses, such as year-end bonuses (Flynn, 2022). The rewards and raises are incentives that drive employees to work harder and provide better services, which in return helps the company perform better and increase its profits (Bachmann et al., 2022; Smith, 2022). While some local governments may offer raises, bonuses are rarely done (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022a).

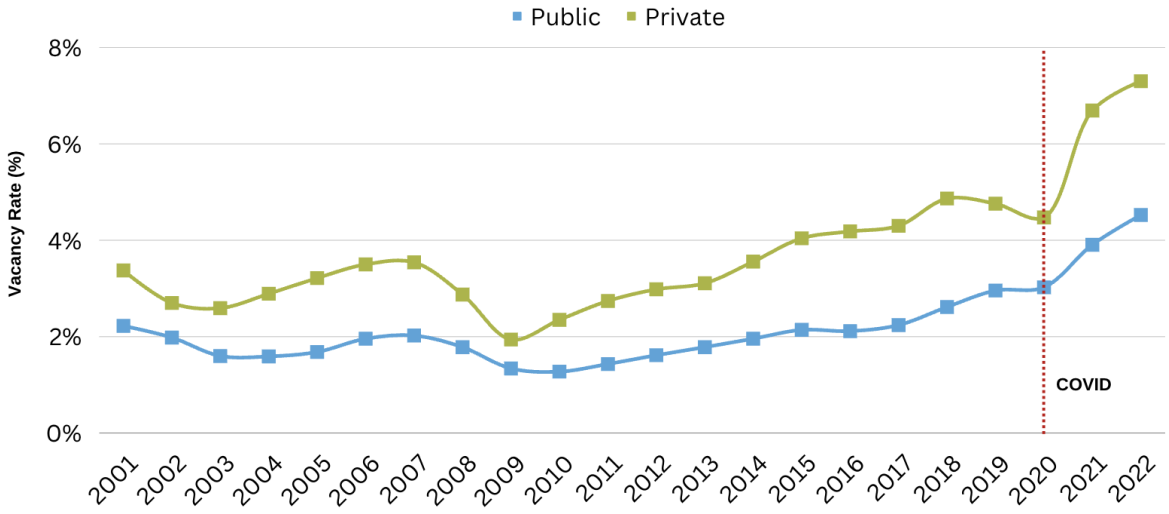
The job flexibility that the private sector offers, such as permanent remote or hybrid work options, is another feature that municipalities need to compete with (Asher, 2021). While the pandemic demonstrated the benefit of flexible work options, with 27% more local governments adopting telework policies, the private sector telework has rapidly grown, with 59% of employees teleworking in the 2010s (U.S. Census, 2013; Mission Square Research Institute, 2020). With limited human capital, the need to contend for talent against the private sector has never been more competitive.

"The Great Resignation"

The pandemic revealed that public and private employees are tired of feeling underappreciated, looking for a better work-life balance, or shifting careers or unds, leading to the highest resignation rates in modern times (Parker & Horowitz, 2022). The Great Resignation led to over 38 million employees quitting in 2020 for better opportunities (O'Brien, 2022). A survey completed by McKinsey shows that 40% of employees are considering quitting their position (De Smet et al., 2022a). With the potential of a recession due to the slow recovery of the economy, combined with the great resignation, municipalities will be challenged more than ever to staff operations and effectively deliver services to constituents (Bove, 2022; O'Brien, 2022). Vacancies in the private sector, as illustrated in Figure 2 with data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, make the competition for talent for municipalities more difficult (BLS, 2022):

Figure 2:

The Great Resignation has hit every sector, heightening demand in the labor market



Note: Data compiled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Jobs & Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) (2022).
Vacancy is defined as unfilled, open positions.

Statement of Problem

Municipalities continue to operate below pre-pandemic workforce levels while human resource recruitment is increasingly competitive, resulting in unfilled positions, insufficient staffing levels, and a loss of expertise to address public needs (Khatter et al., 2022; De Smet et al., 2022b).

Organizational Context

As one of the top lobbying groups for cities and municipalities, the NLC is a member-based federal advocacy group representing more than 2,472 cities across the United States (NLC, n.d.). Since 1942, the NLC has developed a robust organizational system that benefits the member cities, including federal advocacy actions, leadership training, grant funding, technical assistance, reports and publication, member education, and more. The National League Cities' strength as an organization is an ability to provide training, host events, provide reports and publications, and spearhead initiatives for municipalities, such as the "Future of Work" initiative. NLC's position presents both opportunities and challenges for promoting best practices for municipalities.

Opportunities

Best practice research is part of NLC's business model. NLC generates revenue through various mechanisms to support programs: membership due, sponsorships, paid consulting engagements, donations, grants, and more, with a third of the funds going to the "Center for City Solutions" research team: roughly $6M of the overall $31M budget (NLC, 2020; InfluenceWatch, 2022). NLC's municipal educational work utilizes various approaches to inform city practices, including in-person events, online events, whitepapers, interactive tools, and other digital resources (NLC, 2020). Since costs vary dramatically, low-cost online opportunities should be explored to drive adoption. NLC already hosts several events, so recruitment best practices have a potential of a slight marginal cost of inclusion. Finally, the alignment of the research with NLC's recent focus on infrastructure and workforce development might present an opportunity for additional contracts and grant funding, potentially increasing revenues (Alexandra, 2022; MacArthur Foundation, 2022).

NLC develops several reports throughout the year for municipalities to share all successful practices, providing a framework that can be specifically crafted for each department (Myers et al., 2004; Hill & Lynn, 2016). The best practice research can be implemented as part of NLC's "City Solutions" Program for municipalities to review and adapt to fit their specificities (NLC, n.d). With municipalities struggling to hire and recruit quality employees for the public sector, best practice research may help create strategies and opportunities that the cities may not have considered before (Smith, 2022).

NLC's structure and leadership can enhance the outcomes of the report. The leadership organization of NLC is similar to a council-manager dynamic with an executive director as the city manager and a board of directors from city elected officials as the council members (Ammon, 2008; NLC, 2022). The political expertise of the various city council members on the board helps with direction and understanding of what municipalities need at any given time, which is beneficial in determining what resources are needed (Ihrke et al., 2003). By understanding the current political arena, the board's political and legislative expertise can help create strategies that bring more resources to assist cities fo to implement best practices (Hill & Lynn, 2016).

Constraints

As an advocacy organization, NLC is limited in influencing substance change at the local level (NLC, 2022). For any research findings and recommendations that require federal policy attention, NLC is limited to only advocating for new policies or policy changes. With the constrained structures and hierarchy, cities face challenges in improving efficiency and changing culture through innovation and technology (Merton, 2012; Hill & Lynn, 2016). Subsequently, implementing best practices as new policies for cities requires adoption from critical internal stakeholders and a willingness to evolve local government organizational culture. Certain cities may be receptive to change, while others may not (Nurdin et al., 2010). Historically, the government has often been criticized for its resistance to innovation and lack of flexibility, underscoring the complexity of institutional change (Mena, 2022).

Due to the principal-agent structure, NLC can provide necessary resources and tools; however, NLC cannot impose but recommend policy, legislation, or resources unless mandated by the federal government (Merton, 2012). While the best practice research may be in the municipalities' best interest, the NLC can make the research available to leaders and not require implementation (Vesely, 2011). For example, a case study from North Carolina demonstrated that the state ignored best practices in the face of budget cuts, which pushed back infrastructural improvements (Afonso, 2021).

Additionally, with various dynamics and priorities of city councils, hiring practices may not be the primary focus as the municipalities recover from the pandemic and prepare for the upcoming recession (Antunes et al., 2021). Another political constraint includes cities not wanting to share their hiring practices publicly, as some cities may have better policies that have proven successful (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Many cities face challenges and competition in hiring the best talent (Smith, 2021). The competitive nature of hiring may lead to information asymmetry, with hiring directors keeping the municipalities' success to themselves to hire quality employees as the principal is not obligated to share best practices that have proven successful (Vitolla et al., 2020).

NLC's revenue mix includes membership fees, sponsorships, and grants (ProPublica, 2022). The proposed research might affect those revenue sources, a concern that might constrain the organization's ability to drive the adoption of the best practices. A report that puts the city in a negative light might disincline municipalities from joining and threaten membership fees and sponsorships.

Purpose & Methodology

The research team utilized a mixed-method approach to investigate the future of work best practices, challenges, and adoption for large U.S. municipalities. The approach described below was cumulative: the findings from the research on best practices and challenges – Research Questions 1 and 2 – informed the data-driven analysis of municipal hiring documents – Research Question 3. The research approach included best practice research, open data search, and data extraction, and the analysis relied on literature reviews and frequency content analysis.

Purpose

The purpose of the mixed methods study was to understand and identify modern hiring best practices, identify challenges for implementation and provide a framework evaluating the effectiveness of recruitment materials for cities with populations of 250,000 or more. Data was collected using quantitative and qualitative methods to increase information quality and generate a comprehensive research outcome (McNabb, 2017).

In the first qualitative phase of the study, the research team conducted best practice research from academic and grey literature for a literature review, identifying keywords and the current best practices and policies from the private and public sectors, as visualized in Figure 3, the research plan. Information collected was then synthesized to answer the second research question via an additional literature review. The study was completed using quantitative frequency content analysis on extracted data from 88 local government websites.

Figure 3: *Research Plan*

Research Questions

1. What are the hiring best practices and policies for large U.S. municipalities?
2. What are the recruitment and hiring challenges for municipalities in the future of work**?**
3. Do large U.S. municipalities' online recruitment documents follow the most effective practices and policies?

Scoping

With more than 20,000 local governments and millions of local government employees across dozens of functions and departments, scoping a workforce development research project is essentially better for understanding the various challenges municipalities face (MissionSquare Research Institute, 2022). The student research team will focus on municipalities with a population of 250,000, totaling 87 cases, since large cities have more publicly available data and information on hiring policies and practices (Feeney & Brown, 2017). The issue and case selection are visualized in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Issue & Case Scoping

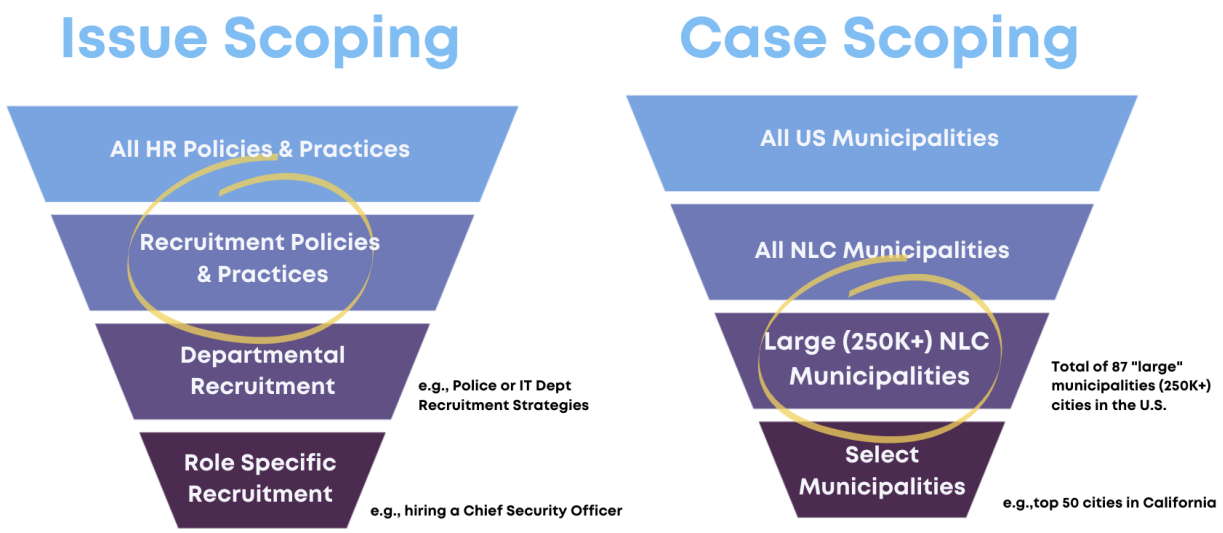


Table 1
Research Design Matrix

Research Questions	Research Approach	Scope	Data Collection	Analytic Strategy
RQ1. What are the hiring best practices and policies for large U.S. municipalities (250K+)?	Best Practices Research	Academic and grey literature on hiring best policies and practices from private and public sectors.	Identify 5-10 private and public sector organizations' effective hiring policies and practices Data Sources - Academic Literature: journals, articles, scholarly books, and published reports - Grey Literature: policy documents, some research reports, professional and regulatory body requirements, articles, internal printed reports, blogs, tweets, and social media postings - Non-academic industry or trade publications (e.g., Harvard Business Review, Forbes, ICMA, SHRM, Fortune, Human Resources Associations)	Literature Review
RQ2. What are the recruitment and hiring challenges for municipalities in the future of work?	Open Document Search	Published academic and gray literature on recruitment strategies for U.S. municipalities	The preceding data collection for RQ1 will be filtered for articles that focus on city government recruitment. These articles will serve as the qualitative dataset for a further literature review on *challenges*.	Literature Review
RQ3. Do large U.S. municipalities' online recruitment documents reflect the best practices and policies for hiring?	Data Extraction	Large municipalities per NLC's definition (over 250k population): 87 total cases	Data Sources - City Government HR websites - City Government Job Postings * Sources: governmentjobs.com, Linkedin, Indeed Selection Criteria / Keywords - Primary city HR website (determined through the highest-ranked Google search of "City of X Jobs" - Past three job descriptions (full-time, exempt positions) for each of the case municipalities Keywords for frequency analysis are to be determined in RQ1 regarding best practices	Frequency Content Analysis

Methods

Research Methodologies

The research team developed a mixed-method research design to help understand current hiring best practices and barriers municipalities face. The qualitative and quantitative approaches are explained in detail below to help understand the research team's decision to implement a mixed-method design.

Best Practice Research.

Description by Scholars. Literature defines Best Practice Research (BPR) as "the selective observation of a set of exemplars across different contexts (to) derive more generalizable principles and theories of management" (Overman & Boyd, 1994, p. 69). The research methodology is still relevant and applicable in finding hiring best practices and policies because the researchers intend to find standard variables in a process or system that yields successful results for broad replication. The common element or "best practice" is visible or tangible behavior that can be applied and used by independent parties to improve organizational performance and effectiveness (Bardach & Patashnik, 2019). An advantage of best practice research is the ability to utilize diverse analytic approaches instead of quasi-experiments, controlled environments, or other traditional research designs (Myers et al., 2006; Bardach & Patashnik, 2019). While quantitative research methodologies are preferred, BPR is the best approach to address and comprehend contemporary policy problems by employing past solutions to modern-day challenges (Bardach & Patashnik, 2019).

Evaluative Criteria. The data collection included qualitative data on hiring policies and practices from the public and private sectors. The qualitative BPR was appropriate for gathering broad information on public and private sector best policies and practices for hiring (Myers, 2004). The evaluative criteria for hiring policies and practices are best practices that increase organizational performance and efficiency.

Limitations of the Study. While flexible, without a methodological consensus, scholars continue to question the validity of BPR analysis (Myers et al., 2005; Pal & Clark, 2013). Similarly, critics argue that best practice research compares strategic approaches, "characterizing the linkage between the action and the outcome…which (in itself) is not sufficient" (Bretschneider et al., 2005, p.310).

Since BPR is not carried out by employing a traditional research design, the study's internal validity was affected. Factors affecting Best Practice Research's internal validity included bias from applying human judgment in forming decisions and determining best practices. Bias is "any trend or deviation from the truth in data collection, data analysis, interpretation and publication which can cause false conclusions" (Simundić, 2013).

Open Document Search

Description by Scholars. Open document searching systematically studies publicly available documents to identify themes or data relevant to the research question (Bardach & Patashnik, 2019). Document searches provided an objective and broad-based complement to

more subjective and individualized approaches, such as interviews (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2020). Arranging interviews is difficult because of access, timeline, or other issues – qualitative researchers are increasingly turning to "mixed method" approaches and relying on documents for more research breadth (Reeve et al., 2020). The research team used the literature collected in the Best Practice Research as the basis for an *open document search* to identify the barriers to best practice adoption for large U.S. municipalities (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2020).

Evaluative Criteria. The data collection and findings from RQ1 informed the queries for the document search on barriers to best practice adoption. Based on the policies and practices identified, the research team developed an initial list of relevant topics (e.g., budget, staffing, or politics) to guide the discovery process, scanning documents for potential barriers. Alternative approaches were necessary, which included searching with related words and phrases (e.g., "telework" and "work from home"), as well as filtering for a focus on the public sector. The research team continued iterating on search queries until "saturation" – when different searches render the same results (Alam, 2020). The resulting research informed the basis for an analytical *literature review* focused on barriers to adopting best practices.

Limitations of the Study. The databases limit document search methods they rely upon for surfacing documents (Threlkeld, 2020). Relying on the information collected in the Best Practice Research should provide efficiencies but may also risk missing relevant documents. The research team mitigated missing relevant documents through "triangulation strategies" – confirming research findings through not just one method but multiple (Grant, 2018b; Dalglish et al., 2020).

Data Extraction

Description by Scholars. The use of public materials by researchers to understand organizational dynamics and performance is "well established" in the literature (Karakatsanis et al., 2017). Data extraction is a document-based research type akin to the open document search for RQ2 (Grant, 2018a). Similarly, the process involves systematically querying a data source or database for documents and capturing the information returned (Almaqbali et al., 2020). A 2021 survey found over 1,500 peer-reviewed articles that relied on online recruitment data extraction, which provides a real-time view of organizational vacancies, needs, and benefits (Mahjoub & Kruyen, 2021; Shuai et al., 2021). Looking at an organization from the outside, researchers leverage documents to both understand and critique internal operations.

Simple "scraping" data techniques enable researchers to extract text programmatically and develop self-generated databases for analysis (Lovaglio et al., 2020). Scraping refers to a technical process of capturing data from online pages and converting them into "machine-readable" – that is, searchable and organized – datasets. Much like with open document searching, the student research team that performed data extraction performed a service of queries on websites (e.g., city HR webpages or job board websites) to capture relevant information in a useful format for analysis (Wood et al., 2017). Recently, "scraping" organizational websites and job boards has been used to understand how other organizations, including hospitals and graduate schools, approach recruiting and reflect changing priorities within those organizations (Shuai et al., 2021).

Evaluative Criteria. The research team extracted Human Resources-related content from two primary sources for all 87 large U.S. municipalities (250K+ population): 1) city websites and 2) municipality-related job boards. Based on preliminary research, municipalities' HR-related communication exists in both places (often with job boards linking back to the websites), so a holistic approach is warranted.

Municipal Job Postings. The research team extracted information from the three most recent job descriptions from each case city's job board. Given the research's focus on broad-based recruitment, the team excluded "internal only" or civil service-only roles as well as part-time or temporary positions, which may not benefit from the full host of benefits recommended in RQ1.

Municipal Hiring Websites. To create consistency in the research methodology, the research team generally followed Aiello's approach (2020) for compiling recruitment content from over 400 police departments, expanded for research across all departments:

1. If the job posting mentions links (e.g., benefits or incentives), log for each case municipality.
2. Follow the links from the linked page to subpages (e.g., pages listed under the navigation or linked within the page's body content).
3. Extract the content from those URLs, including machine-readable text and screenshots for observational analysis, using the data scraping and analysis tool NVivo.

Limitations of the Study. The data extraction methodology provided internal validity by taking a specific and systematic approach to the information collected, as each case was treated consistently. The approach threatened external validity, however, because the relevant HR materials would be outside the scope of this study. For example, municipalities may publish key HR communications on social media, which this approach did not capture.

Analytic Methodologies

The student research team utilized qualitative and quantitative analytic tools to analyze the data collected through the research methods, including literature review and frequency content analysis. The literature review was applied to the data collected from best practice research and open-document search, while the frequency content analysis was applied to the data extracted from municipal job postings and hiring websites. The approaches are explained below to help understand the research team's decision to utilize mixed analytic tools.

Literature Review.

Description by Scholars. The team used narrative and systemic literature reviews to provide historical background for the project and act as a methodological approach. Traditionally, literature reviews summarize, evaluate and analyze "the most important and salient aspects" of the pertinent literature (Ridley, 2013). Narrative literature reviews draw "together conceptual and theoretical ideas from a range of literature," while systematic literature reviews focus on "practice-based contexts and issues" (Kiteley & Stogdon, 2014, pp. 6-7). Systemic reviews are especially beneficial for following a precise methodology as they help answer a

"predefined question," with the expectation that significant findings and recommendations will emerge (Carey, 2016).

Literature reviews were conducted to examine the research questions:

- RQ1: What are the hiring best practices and policies for large U.S. municipalities?
- RQ2: What are the recruitment and hiring challenges for municipalities in the future of work?

Evaluative Criteria. The team utilized grounded theory to identify the most effective hiring policies and best practices throughout the literature review. As a qualitative research method, grounded theory generates assumptions through data research rather than statistical analysis and "allows for an organic emergence of themes" (Haney & Lutters, 2019, p.111; Chun Tie et al., 2019). The grounded theory also demands that "data collection and analysis occur concurrently," which helps organize our best practice research findings and barriers to adopting hiring policies and practices for large U.S. municipalities (Dunne, 2011).

Limitations of the Study. Most academic and grey literature surrounding best hiring policies and practices exist pre-pandemic. The research team was limited to current relevant data from the last two years, and much of the sources came from 'grey" literature. Grey literature includes policy documents, research reports, professional and regulatory body requirements, internal printed reports, blogs, tweets, and social media postings (Kiteley & Stogdon, 2014). The use of grey literature can threaten our research findings' internal and external validity.

Frequency Content Analysis.

Description by Scholars. Content analysis of hiring communications requires sophisticated content analysis methodologies (Mahjoub & Kruyen, 2021). As datasets have become larger and technology more advanced, automation tools have emerged to support manual coding, such as frequency content analysis (Maher et al., 2018).

Frequency content analysis begins with a "thesis" or "theory" and uses the available data to test the validity of that hypothesis (LaiYee, 2021). Researchers generate a coding system – typically broader than a strict codebook – and then tag relevant text, eventually summarizing how closely the data reflects the theory (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Data generates inferences through various statistical techniques, such as clustering, which groups similar pieces of text together, and frequency analysis which counts the occurrences of a phrase throughout a document (Pujar & Mundada, 2021). For example, Wickam et al. (2020) generated key phrases or codes regarding a theory of entrepreneurial organizations and used frequency analysis to count how often those phrases existed in a large set of hiring materials.

Data Analysis Tool: NVivo. The research team used NVivo's qualitative analysis tool. NVivo allows for the management and analysis of large datasets, and in particular, the tool has been designed to support textual analysis (Maher et al., 2018). Various tools exist for coding, including WordStat and Leximancer, which have been used for job description analysis in the past (Wilk et al., 2019; Houghton et al., 2017). The research team used NVivo because it can support inductive and deductive analysis, with the latter being machine-generated, allowing for a larger set of data (Maher et al., 2018).

Evaluative Criteria. The best practices identified in RQ1 served as the theory (or framework) for testing through content analysis of municipal recruitment materials for all 87 large U.S. municipalities (250K+ population). Outcomes from RQ1 and RQ2 regarding best practices and barriers were established into a "theory" for municipal recruitment. Following the frequency analysis model, the research team built a broader library of similar phrases (or codes) to allow for divergence within language municipality-to-municipality (e.g., including both "telework" and "work from home" when counting flexible work arrangement policies and practices.)

Using NVivo, the research team ran frequency analyses for key phrases for each case municipality, resulting in counts for each city and, if and how often the theoretical best practices were mentioned in the public-facing materials.

The results tables revealed multiple ways to evaluate the adoption of best practices:

- What best practices are most commonly mentioned in municipal recruitment materials?
- Which municipalities feature the best practices in recruitment materials?
- For any given city, which best practices do they highlight most frequently? Which do they highlight least frequently?
- Are city job descriptions or municipal websites more reflective of recruitment best practices?

Limitations of the Study. The use of public-facing recruitment materials to understand internal operations may be established in the literature. However, the externally-focused analysis did not provide a complete picture of municipalities' internal policies and practices in their day-to-day operations (De Saulles, 2022). Websites and job posts may not constantly be updated or aligned with organizational strategy (Thielsch & Hirschfeld, 2019). The research provided an appraisal of municipalities' public-facing materials but not a definitive inventory of municipalities' adoption of all recruiting best practices (Feeney & Brown, 2017). The aims and potential outcomes of the research were clear and appropriately measured. Moreover, a complete policy inventory could be an opportunity to extend the research in the future, along with collecting hiring metrics (e.g., the number of applicants for jobs) to connect policies, recruitment materials, and HR department performance (Gyurák Babeľová et al., 2020).

Presentation of Research

The research team collected roughly 1,500 pieces of literature and online recruitment documents to answer the three research questions. Following a qualitative design, research for RQ1 and RQ2 focused on identifying emerging themes and challenges in the future of work. With support from a grounded theory framework, RQ1 established five best hiring practices and policies, while RQ2 observed four critical challenges cities face.

Subsequently, RQ3 engaged in quantitative analysis, utilizing NVivo, a content evaluation tool. Cities with populations equaling or greater than 250,000 were included, with the research team collecting a minimum of 10 job postings per city and at least one municipal webpage.

1. Best Practice Research

The student research team identified and examined 350 articles of literature collected on modern hiring best practices from the private and public sectors to develop a literature review (Figure 5) (Synder, 2019). The articles reviewed met the evaluative criteria of best practice research, including 69 academic articles and 281 grey literature articles on hiring best practices and policies focused on best practices implemented after the pandemic. The best hiring practice research process is summarized in Figure 5.

Figure 5:
Best Hiring Practice Research

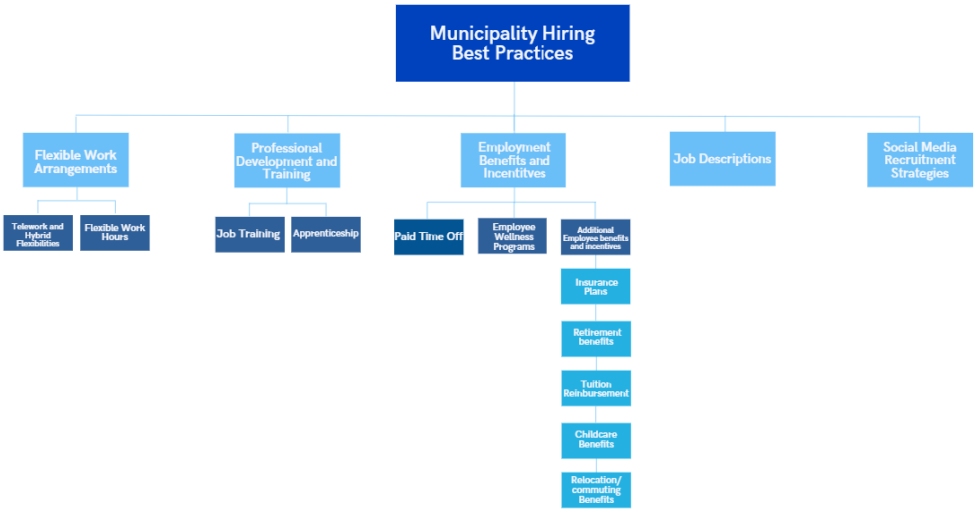
The hiring best practices and policies were ordered by the number of mentions in articles (Table 2). The team divided finding into Remote and Hybrid Work, Flexible Work Hours, Employee Wellness Programs, Career Development and Training, Employee Benefits, Social Media Recruitment, and Job Descriptions.

Table 2
Best Practice Research Summary

HIRING PRACTICES AND POLICIES	Number of mentions (n) of modern-day hiring best practices and policies in academic and grey literature from 350 articles	
	N	%
Remote and Hybrid Work	134	38%
Flexible Work Hours	44	12%
Career Development and Training	64	18%
Employee Wellness Programs	58	16%
Employee Benefits	43	12%
Social Media Recruiting	39	11%
Job Descriptions	38	11%

Using grounded theory, the student research team summarized the top five best hiring practices and policies based on emerging themes (Figure 6) (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

Figure 6
Municipal Hiring Best Practices Framework



Note: Data compiled through literature review conducted by research team (Hinojosa et al., 2022)

2. Open Document Search

To understand recruiting and hiring challenges local governments face in the future of work, the research team examined 94 pieces of academic and grey literature through an open document search to develop a literature review. Open document search is equal parts thematic and content analysis, requiring data to be examined and interpreted to gain empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The research team utilized best practice results from RQ1 to act as a foundation for RQ2's discovery process, identifying four discernible challenges. Emphasis was placed on literature generated since the start of the pandemic (March 2020) but was not limited to a timeframe.

3. Data Extraction

To assess the adoption of future work best practices, the research team collected **1,034 online recruitment documents across all 88 large U.S. Municipalities**. Recruitment materials can shed insight into an organization's adoption of best practices (Wickham et al., 2018). To quantitatively evaluate the adoption of best practices, the research team extracted content from municipal online recruitment materials, specifically job postings and benefits web pages (ELGL, 2022). Using frequency analysis, the qualitative content online can be coded and then analyzed statistically. For effective frequency analysis across cases, however, a *consistently structured* and *large* dataset is necessary (Halwani et al., 2022).

Dataset Consistency

The vast majority of municipalities use the same software vendor for posting job opportunities, governmentjobs.com, a service provided by the for-profit company, NEOGov, enabling consistent extraction for most documents. Notably, the governmentjobs.com interface provides municipalities with a standard, specific tab for "benefits." (An example screenshot is included in Appendix 1.) The consistent structure of postings on governmentjobs.com, and its high usage, offer high confidence in the extracted data consistency. The risk of inconsistency should also be mitigated by the scale of the data extraction.

Dataset Size

Even amongst similarly structured documents, however, wide divergences can emerge. For example, job postings from one case municipality ranged from 300 words to 2000. Effective data extraction for frequency analysis requires a large dataset to accommodate for the variations among the documents. Accordingly, the research team collected **ten job postings per municipality.**

The selection of postings was limited to those generally open to the public (i.e., not promotional or transfer opportunities) and full-time (not part-time or seasonal) roles. The number of relevant postings ranged from 7 (St. Petersburg) to 435 (New York City). For each case city, the last 7-10 job postings were extracted from the municipalities' online job boards, totaling **871 job descriptions across 88 cities**.

Municipal webpages were also included in the data extraction process because often, the benefits were not directly listed on the job description but instead posted on the municipal website and linked from the posting. Example job postings are included in Appendix 1. For each

case municipality, the research team collected at least one municipal webpage or multiple if the postings included multiple links, **totaling 172 webpages across the 88 cities.** A complete listing of the 1,034 collected documents is available in Appendix 5.

Data Extraction Summary

- Municipal Cases Studied: 88 (*all municipalities over 250K population*)
- Total Documents Extracted: 1,034
    - Job Postings Extracted: 871
    - Benefits Websites Extracted: 172

Preparation for Analysis

The extracted documents were stored as PDFs and loaded into the content analysis tool NVivo. Documents were grouped by case municipalities (e.g., Louisville) and by type (i.e., "job posting" or "website"). For deeper analysis, additional data were collected for each case city: population, budget, region, and structure of government (e.g., strong mayor, strong council, or hybrid). Accordingly, the data extraction methodology produced a machine-readable database of over 1000 online recruitment materials organized for analysis of municipal hiring best practice adoption across various relevant vectors based on the outcomes of the literature reviews.

Presentation of Analysis

The research team utilized best practice research, open-source document, and data extraction to collect data for analysis. Data was collected using academic, gray literature, and open-source documents to develop literature reviews. Using grounded theory, the research team developed the hiring best practices and policies to be implemented and identified barriers to adoption. Content analysis was used to analyze the adoption of hiring best practices and policies.

1. Literature Review: Hiring Best Practices

The pandemic has changed how organizations operate and how work gets done. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for modern hiring best practices and policies to address the significant staff shortages caused by the "Great Resignation" (Radovic, 2022). In addition to overcoming post-pandemic hiring challenges, organizations are faced with the complicated task of understanding the current labor workforce landscape to attract, engage, and hire top talent to fit their organization's needs.

Today's workforce comprises four distinct generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Gen Z (Purdue University, 2022). The Millennial generation is predicted to make up 75 percent of the workforce by 2025, followed by Gen Z, which will make up the second largest generation in the labor workforce (Timmes, 2022). Recruiting and retaining a younger workforce has become critical to organizations as baby boomer retirements have increased, and the millennial and Gen Z generations have become the largest generations in the workforce (Fry, 2020).

Successful organizations have implemented hiring best practices and policies that invest in their employees by offering unique employee benefits and training opportunities, widening their recruitment net through social media presence, and writing compelling job descriptions (BeMo, 2022). The following review of literature examines post-pandemic hiring best practices and policies.

Flexible Work Arrangements

While job flexibility policies have been used in all sectors pre-pandemic, the pandemic demonstrated how government organizations could implement policies while ensuring that services are available to constituents (Parker et al., 2020). According to available literature, the most popular employee benefit post-pandemic includes telework and flexible work schedules (Haas, 2022; Kelly, 2022; Mysak, 2022; Turner & Backer, 2022; Whalen, 2022). Moreover, many companies, including municipalities, have adopted hybrid options that can benefit both the employer and employee (Gratton, 2022). More work flexibility leads to better work satisfaction as more employees feel they have a better work-life balance and quality of life (Carucci & Hogan, 2022). A survey conducted by American City and County (2022) reported that 61% of local governments allowed remote work during the pandemic (More public and private sector organizations will transcend into the future of work by adopting flexible work hours, telework, or hybrid work models in the upcoming years (Kunsman, 2022).

Telework and Hybrid Flexibilities. Since 2016, local governments have seen an increase in telework, also known as remote work, by 27% (Mission Square Research Institute, 2020). As the labor workforce has begun to return to in-person, 55% of candidates prefer an organization that offers hybrid work models (Kirkham, 2022; ApolloTechnical, 2022). Employees who can work from home are largely anticipating a hybrid work environment in their organization (Wigert, 2022). Another study shows that 30% of workers consider quitting if remote work is removed as an option (McGovern, 2021). In response to increased demand and expectations by employees and job seekers alike, 77% of companies have adopted a hybrid working model in their organizations (Stein, 2022).

Runyon (2022) discusses a recent survey by the National Employee Survey stressing the importance of offering flexible benefits and schedules matching the stages of the employee's life. Not all employees must be at the office to complete the assigned work and have the option to work at their own pace during the day as long as the tasks are completed, providing a balance between home life and work (Dua et al., 2022). With increasing technology and tools, such as Zoom, Microsoft teams, Asana, and more, departments have the resources to communicate and keep staff members engaged and accountable (Reid, 2022).

Henderson (2022) states that with high resignation rates and demand for workers, municipalities must accommodate job flexibility by offering telework or flexible hours. In 1989, Los Angeles County developed the "Los Angeles Telework Program" (CTP), which currently has 5,000 employees participating (LAC Department of Human Services, n.d.). A review of the LAC program found that the telework program has benefited the county, as each department needed to design and implement a program that fits the department's needs to be successful (Ngo, 2020). Kellner (2020) lists seven examples of cities adopting a work-from-home policy, such as Meridian, Idaho, allowing certain employees to work remotely 50% of the time.

A key benefit to a municipality is lowering budget costs, as research shows that remote work "saved $11,000 per worker per year" (Lamb, 2021). With less expense on large office space and cubicles, municipalities can repurpose buildings for other usage or rent them out to other organizations creating public-private partnerships (Kidawi, 2022). The saved expenses can be used to increase the individuals' salary or benefits or to invest in other municipalities' projects (Silvermann, 2022). Moreover, the employee can save costs on transportation, childcare, food costs, and more (Beno, 2021).

Literature has shown that remote working has increased the talent pool as more individuals from different parts of the nation can apply for positions that can be conducted from home, such as programmers, development teams, and program management (Kier, 2020). Organizations have hired experienced individuals who may not live close to the service due to these policies, as the employer has more flexibility to hire (Martineau, 2022). On the worker side, the individual is widening their employment search as the individual is not bounded by boundaries (Ozimek & Stanton, 2022).

Flexible Work Hours. Job flexibility offers benefits to both employers and employees. Flexible work hours are an alternative schedule outside the "traditional 9 to 5, 40-hour work week" (Zucker, 2021; U.S. Department of Labor, 2022., para 1). Some common flexible work schedules advertised in job descriptions are job sharing, compressed time, flexitime, annualized hours, and staggered hours (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). The pandemic has forced

organizations to recognize the benefits of offering family-friendly work options that prioritize work-life balance for employees (Allen, 2021; Hartzell, 2022). Job flexibility increases the chances to attract and retain employees, improves employees' productivity, increases job satisfaction, and helps employees feel more in control of their personal lives (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2022).

Municipalities have seen an increase in offering alternative work hours as part of job flexibility to retain and recruit employees (SHMR, n.d.). Literature shows that several municipalities provide on a case-by-case basis to "fit 80-hour pay periods into eight days and take the other days off" (Dohrmann et al., 2022, p. 17). The flexible hours can benefit individuals who have to manage family, attend school, or have other commitments to continue such commitments without work interference (Datar et al., 2021). While local governments have set hours, usually between 8 am to 5 pm, a considerable number of individuals also work during that timeframe and do not have access to such services (Runyon, 2022).

Professional Development and Training

Professional development is a "consciously designed, systematic process that strengthens how staff obtain, retain, and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes," which includes workshops, technical assistance, presentations, and information sessions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). The literature identified two programs that are the "future of work": Job Training and Apprenticeship.

Job Training. Job training is vital to an individual's personal and career goals. Specific training is established to develop employee skills and provide continuous learning and growth opportunities. According to Sitel Group's "Future of Work and Employee Learning," 79% of employees believe formal training programs need to be offered by their employer (Schwarzberg, 2020). Training programs are perceived as essential as they are opportunities to learn a new skill, upward mobility, and motivation to be engaged at work (Rockwood, 2022). Additionally, the increase in technologies created the need for constant training to ensure that individuals have the knowledge to use these technologies (Beer, 2020). Stone (2020) discusses that a "lack of skill enhancement will undermine team longevity" (para 11). Previous research has shown that training programs increase performance and provide better services to constituents (Mpofu et al., 2015).

Apprenticeship. Another program that cities should consider is adopting apprenticeship or fellowship programs to recruit individuals to a career in government. The hands-on experience allows individuals to learn to grow hirable skills and help with upward mobility (C.A.D of IR, 2022.). Programs benefit municipalities as the hiring department can build a pipeline of top talent without going through the formal hiring process (Elliott et al., 2021). Leveraging apprenticeship programs cultivate leaders, helping the local economy by employing and retaining individuals in the same jurisdiction where they grew up (National Governors Association, 2021). Local governments have created successful apprenticeships by building partnerships with the workforce development board, colleges and universities, and local organizations by sharing and leveraging resources (Brachman & Xie, 2022).

Employee Benefits and Incentives

GovPilot states that the "top two reasons people apply for state and local government roles are job security (61%) and benefits packages (58%) across all age groups" (para 5). Employee benefits and incentives are various types of non-wage compensation provided to employees in addition to their regular salary and wages (Indeed Editorial Team, 2020). Most employers offer employee benefits packages that include medical insurance, dental and vision coverage, life insurance, and retirement planning (QuestionPro,2022). The financial and health effects of the pandemic on the workforce have forced organizational leaders to evaluate, expand and shift key benefits to not only support their current employees' needs but to attract potential candidates with compelling benefits packages (Allen, 2021).

Employee Wellness Programs. The pandemic has prioritized financial security and well-being for employment seekers, who are more cognizant of the benefits an organization offers or does not offer (Rupp, 2021). A top job attribute candidates are looking for is organizations that care about their well-being and offer better benefits and perks (Mearian, 2022). Young job seekers "prefer to exchange their energy, education, and expertise for modern benefits - including wellness programs" (Trivella, 2022, para 4). A wellness program is a program offered in the workplace intended to improve the health and wellness of an employee (HealthCare.gov, 2022). A wellness program can include financial education, fitness accommodations, supporting community involvement, and parent coaching support (DiNardi, 2022). Employers that invest in employee wellness increase a healthy workplace culture and improve an employee's productivity through improvement in health (Windham-Bradstock, 2021).

Paid Time Off. A paid time off (PTO) policy combines vacation, sick time, and personal time into a single bank of days for employees to use when they take paid time off from work (Heathfield, 2022, para 1). Organizational leaders and Human Resources professionals across the globe made adjustments to PTO policies a year after the pandemic to address employee burnout and mental health issues caused by the pandemic (MetLife, 2022). Many companies extended work-from-home policies, offered payouts for unused PTO, and implemented hybrid work models (Bergeron, 2021).

Additional Employee benefits and incentives. While municipalities may have a limited budget to provide above-market salaries, the hiring departments have sought innovative solutions to incentivize potential employees (GovPilot, 2022). According to available literature, organizations have incorporated several of the benefits and incentives listed below into job descriptions or organizational Human Resources websites to advertise employee benefits and incentives (Rupp, 2021; Bruce, 2021; Clark, 2022).

Benefits can range widely between municipalities. Overall, the research suggests employee benefits include, but are not limited to the following:

- Paid Holidays and Sick Time
- Health insurance
- Dental Insurance
- Vision Insurance

- Long-term disability insurance
- Short-term disability insurance
- Retirement benefits or accounts
- Healthcare spending or reimbursement accounts- HSAs, FSAs, and HRAs
- Tuition reimbursement
- Childcare benefits
- Gym memberships or discounts
- Employee recognition programs
- Employee Referral Programs
- Relocation assistance
- Commuting/travel assistance

With private sector competition and great resignation on the rise, having a substantial benefit and incentives package has benefited governments (Castillo, 2022). Employees are willing to take a lower salary if the employer offers a generous benefits package (O'Brien, 2022). According to a study by the MissionSquare Research Institute (2022), nearly all government employees have pensions, health benefits, and life insurance, and most of these employees have access to paid leave, childcare benefits, and more. Moreover, research has shown that having a robust benefits package can help job satisfaction, which retains the employee (SHMR, 2022).

Social Media Recruitment Strategies

Organizations have slowly shifted away from traditional recruitment strategies over the years. Social media recruiting is a trend that continues to grow each year to attract and recruit candidates. A survey by SHRM revealed that nearly 84% of organizations use social media to recruit, while 9% of organizations plan on using it (SHRM, 2017). Social media recruitment is defined as a "strategy that combines elements of employer branding and recruitment marketing to connect with and attract active and passive candidates" on social media platforms (Reiners, 2018). In June 2022, Statista reported that the number of social media users in the United States is approximately 302.25 million (Dixon, 2022). The largest social media users are Gen Z and Millennials, and the average social media user in the United States has 7.1 social media accounts (Dean, 2021; Ruby, 2022).

With a pool of potential candidates that are highly engaged in social media, increasing a social media presence is an effective way to reach a diverse and broader talent pool of candidates. Social media recruiting is a great way to reach passive candidates, get more referrals, target perfect candidates, showcase the organization's company culture, establish a personal connection with potential candidates, and save money (TalentLyft, 2022).

Job Descriptions

A job description helps candidates decide if they want to apply for an organization. An effective job description not only communicates information about the role but also communicates information about the company. Job descriptions in job announcements are essential because they will impact the quality of applicants you receive. Companies are incorporating the following best practices to improve job descriptions (BeMo, 2022):

- Have a specific and accurate title to attract interested candidates.
- Have a captivating summary of the role.
- Provide detailed information about the role's responsibilities, day-to-day activities, required soft skills, and how the position fits into the organization's mission.
- Show off the organization's culture by showcasing the organization's products, services, and history.
- List employee benefits, incentives, and perks. Listing employee benefits, incentives, and perks helps the candidate decide "why" to apply for an organization (Recruting.com, 2022).

In addition, organizations are moving from traditional skill-based job descriptions when posting job announcements to performance profiles. Performance profiles increase the chances of attracting quality candidates motivated to accomplish goals and set proper expectations for performance outcomes (Paetzold, 2022). Converting job descriptions into performance profiles requires goals and objectives to be clearly defined in terms of outcomes, expectations are clearly defined in quantitative and qualitative measures, and incorporate daily, monthly, quarterly or annual results that need to be achieved by the role (Wiersma, 2022).

2. Literature Review: Challenges

Attracting high-quality candidates is critical for any organization's current and long-term success. Municipal leadership must be well informed about how the future of work best practices previously listed can influence the workplace. However, as local governments endured economic turmoil from the pandemic, municipalities continue to face significant recruitment, retention, and workforce planning challenges to meet increasing demands within constrained budgets. The following literature review examines municipal recruitment and hiring challenges for municipalities in the future of work.

Resources

Budget. Financial management is a critical component of public administration. Developing a budget can simultaneously be influential and controversial (Newell, 2004). Modernizing recruitment policies may seem innocuous on the surface, but potential expenditures could cause alarm, depending on the implementation.

The majority of local government's revenue comes from intergovernmental transfers, as states account for roughly 33% of revenue (Delisle, 2010.) Municipalities experienced severe budget shortfalls after the pandemic and were forced to freeze hiring, make cuts, lay off workers, and make drawdowns to their rainy day funds (Siripurapu & Maters, 2021). Further, municipalities were significantly affected by the decline in revenue from sales tax as social distancing measures limited shopping and dining out activities (Sheiner, 2020). A survey by the National League of Cities revealed that municipal expenses increased by 70%; however, municipal revenue decreased by 21% (NLC, 2022). While the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is intended to increase employment at the local government level, more funds are needed to address long-term recruitment and hiring challenges in a post-pandemic world.

Staffing. A significant challenge for local governments in executing hiring best practices has simply been having enough employees to implement the policies. Jacobson (2010) notes

how municipal retirement numbers have gradually increased since the turn of the century, an issue only exacerbated by the pandemic (Asher, 2021). De Smet et al. (2021) highlight the growing trend of talent leaving the public sector altogether, as employees feel overworked, constrained, and underappreciated. Both issues culminated in the recent "great resignation" phenomenon, where the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) observed the highest resignation rate since 2000 (Gittleman, 2022). Farmer (2022) argues that the lack of talent is two-fold; younger employees switch jobs more frequently than earlier generations, and governmental wages and benefits have "fallen behind the private sector." The outcome is considerable and significant. A report from MissionSquare Research (2022) surveyed 319 state and local government hiring managers, claiming that 69% of respondents said more employees were quitting and 60% more were retiring than the previous year. The same report found local government job opening rate from December 2021 to February 2022 was the highest in over 20 years (MissionSquare, 2022).

Workforce Planning

Human resource management is one of the most critical and influential departments in any organization. For local governments, the HR department is responsible for decisions that can reverberate for years, including workforce planning (Shukor et al., 2019). Effective workforce planning helps cities "prepare for tomorrow," incorporating recruitment, retention, employee retirement, and training and development into long-term goals (Jacobson, 2010). As demands of the government increase and roles continue to become increasingly complex, workforce planning can help cities perform and act strategically (Neal et al., 2022).

However, Goodman et al. (2013) find that many local governments have yet to fully incorporate workforce planning, arguing that city leaders deprioritize the initiative, lack the time needed to prepare, or are engrossed in short-term activities as contributing factors. Even though employees are typically the most significant expenditure on a budget, Henderson (2008) finds cities rarely cultivate a "detailed written strategic plan" around personnel five to ten years in advance.

For local governments who participate in workforce planning, the probability of integrating the strategy is highly dependent on the city's governance structure. In a strong mayor-council government, the mayor acts as chief executive officer, overseeing the city's administrative staff and day-to-day operations, including budget preparation and personnel decisions (Fisk, 2022). Lang (2020) examines how support from city leadership, especially mayors, affects recruiting practices, policy implementation, and "substantive, long-term changes." Without leadership support, structures and the implementation of policies may be "hollowed out (Lang, 2020)."

Conversely, in strong council-manager cities, the city council establishes policy directions, sets citywide goals, and manages the budget (Carr & Feiock, 2004). While the mayor is included in the council, they cannot veto ordinances (Satterthwaite, 2009). Goodman et al. (2013) argue that a council-manager governance structure is more likely to have a thorough and progressive workforce plan, as city councils acknowledge the significance of the practice more so than mayors.

Bureaucratic Constraints

Since the inception of merit-based hiring practices, the perception is that employees are hired based on qualifications and experience, ensuring that the most capable individuals are offered a job (Alexander & Stivers, 2020). Lauletta et al. (2021) argue that merit-based recruitment is the "single most important component" of a Weberian bureaucracy, associated with increased employee performance and economic growth.

However, Portillo et al. (2019) contend that current merit-based municipal hiring practices lack logic and question the belief in "bureaucratic neutrality." As merit-based hiring began in the Progressive era, a time of deep racial and civil discontent, the authors argue the practice "reinforces racialized and gendered hierarchies within public organizations… institutionalizing inequality within public administration (Portillo et al., 2019)." Subsequently, Hickman (2021) finds limited evidence supporting merit-based requirements resulting in competent employees. As a result, quality candidates are missed, and governments are not sufficiently staffed with the best talent available.

Job Descriptions

When creating new job announcements, minimum qualifications are created by the hiring manager and human resource personnel (Dougherty & Van Gelder, 2015). Minimum qualifications for hiring establish the "needs of each department" and list the minimum amounts of experience, education, knowledge, and additional skills required to be considered for the role (Wooten & Prien, 2007). Academics have noted the importance of creating quality minimum qualifications, as the results can be quite influential (Lauletta et al., 2021). Colonnelli et al. (2020) also underscore the importance of hiring quality individuals, as they are a "crucial determinant of government performance." For many municipalities, minimum qualifications are sometimes the only criteria used to determine if an applicant continues in the hiring process (Dresang, 2017).

Ideally, successful job announcements effectively communicate the role and employer, incentivizing quality candidates and dissuading "those who are not suited to the position (Dresang, 2017, p.196)." Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, many municipalities fail to engage in effective workforce planning. Local governments often spend sparse time and effort advertising open positions, limiting job announcements to "little more than a posting on a website (Dresang, 2017, p.194)." Furthermore, roles in government are much more likely to "require postsecondary education than the private sector," adding an additional barrier to entry for candidates (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022b). Despite its influence, Tufts et al. (2015) find that most local governments are also not taking advantage of social media tools for recruitment and screening. Neal et al. (2022) believe a lack of capacity and staff is to blame. When hiring processes do not have or follow a human resource strategy, the chance of identifying and hiring improper candidates dramatically increases.

3. Frequency Content Analysis

Frequency content analysis enables researchers to test or evaluate defined frameworks against a corpus of documents, so the analytic method was used to explore whether the recommended best practices were expressed by municipalities in their online recruitment

documents. Research has shown that job postings can significantly build brand knowledge (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2018). Simply put, less is *not* more when it comes to job postings: municipalities should aim to be comprehensive and transparent about their benefits, other incentives, expectations, and growth opportunities (Okolie & Irabor, 2017). Accordingly, the research team translated the best practice recommendations into "countable" keywords in the document database by building a coding dictionary and running a frequency content analysis (Baum & Kabst, 2014).

Coding Dictionary Development

Coding dictionaries play an essential role in frequency content analysis as they allow for variations in language and context (Hai-Jew, 2017). The development of an effective coding dictionary is an iterative process. For example, a query of over 1,000 job descriptions shows only a handful of exact matches for "training opportunities." On the other hand, searching for its synonyms – "professional development" or "development opportunities – renders over 80 results. Overly broad keywords can be equally problematic: for instance – because of their use of governmentjobs.com – most municipalities necessarily will have the phrase "benefits" listed, so the frequency of "benefits" offers little insight. Coding dictionaries are both an art and a science (Dalglish et al., 2020).

Not all municipal hiring best practices can or could be evaluated through this methodology: for example, apprenticeships are a wholly different type of job for which the research team did not collect documents, nor would apprenticeship programs be mentioned on other job postings. Moreover, some concepts, such as relocation assistance and transportation or commuting subsidies, could reasonably be combined (i.e., "transportation subsidies") for a cleaner straightforward analysis. Through an iterative process of testing terms and frequencies, the research team assembled the following coding dictionary for the recommended Future of Work hiring best practices:

Table 3
Coding Dictionary

Topic	Keywords
Telework	telework OR teleworking OR "work from home" OR "hybrid work" OR “remote work” OR “telecommute” or “telecommuting”
Wellness	"wellness" OR "employee wellness program" OR "healthy" OR "fitness" OR "Employee assistance program" OR EAP
Transportation Subsidies	relocation OR "moving costs" OR relocate OR "Free Bus Transportation" OR "transit pass" OR "transit expense" OR “commute reimbursement”
Insurance	"health insurance" OR "medical coverage" OR "medical insurance" OR “dental insurance” OR “life insurance”
Tuition Reimbursement	tuition OR "tuition reimbursement" OR "education reimbursement" OR "student debt" OR "student loans"
Paid Time Off	"paid time off" OR "PTO" OR "paid holidays" OR "vacation" OR "time off accrual"
Professional Development	"professional development" OR "training opportunities" OR "skill development" OR “career development”

The content analysis tool NVivo was used to count the frequency of the best practice keywords and synonyms for all 1,043 documents across all 88 municipalities. Since the documents were coded by the municipality along with demographic and structural information, the student research team was able to compare best practice adoption nationally and regionally – as well as explore potential correlations between adoption and population, budget, and structure (Fink, 2014). (A summary table of the independent variables is included in *Appendix 3*.)

City Scorecard

Each municipality’s online documents were “scored” against the hiring best practices defined in the coding dictionary. If any of the terms were mentioned in the municipality’s corpus of documents, then it was determined that the municipality does reflect that best practice – which underscores the importance of a large dataset to maximize accuracy. Once evaluated against each practice, a municipality’s count can be summed to determine a score: X out of 7. For example, Austin includes all best practices except for transportation subsidies, so Austin scores 6 out of 7,

making it one of the top municipalities. A summary "scorecard" for large U.S. municipalities is presented in Figure 7:

Figure 7: City Scorecard

Hiring Best Practice Adoption in Municipal Online Recruitment Documents

Frequency of keywords associated with best practices within municipalities' digital HR content.

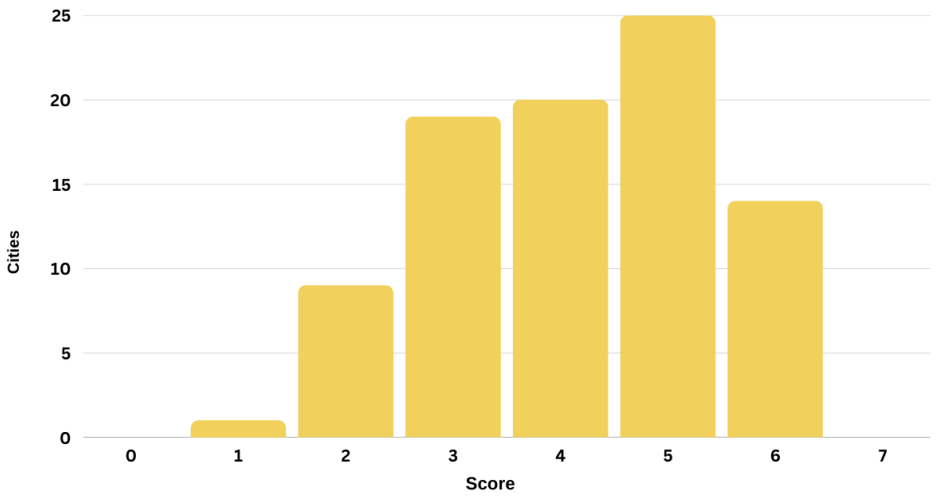
	City	Transportation	Telework	Tuition	Paid Time Off	Wellness	Professional Development	Insurance	Score
1	**Austin**		X	X	X	X	X	X	6
2	**Colorado Springs**	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
3	**Gilbert**		X	X	X	X	X	X	6
4	**Honolulu**	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
5	**Las Vegas**	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
6	**Long Beach**	X	X	X		X	X	X	6
7	**Oakland**	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
8	**Plano**		X	X	X	X	X	X	6
9	**San Antonio**	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
10	**Santa Ana**	X		X	X	X	X	X	6
11	**St. Petersburg**		X	X	X	X	X	X	6
12	**Tulsa**		X	X	X	X	X	X	6
13	**Virginia Beach**	X	X	X		X	X	X	6
14	**Washington**	X	X		X	X	X	X	6
15	**Arlington**			X	X	X	X	X	5
16	**Aurora**		X	X		X	X	X	5
17	**Baltimore**		X		X	X	X	X	5
18	**Columbus**	X		X	X		X	X	5
19	**Denver**		X		X	X	X	X	5
20	**Durham**		X		X	X	X	X	5
21	**El Paso**		X	X		X	X	X	5
22	**Henderson**	X			X	X	X	X	5
23	**Jacksonville**			X	X	X	X	X	5
24	**Louisville**			X	X	X	X	X	5
25	**Madison**		X		X	X	X	X	5
26	**Mesa**			X	X	X	X	X	5
27	**Minneapolis**	X	X			X	X	X	5
28	**Nashville**		X		X	X	X	X	5
29	**North Las Vegas**	X			X	X	X	X	5
30	**Philadelphia**		X	X		X	X	X	5
31	**Raleigh**			X	X	X	X	X	5
32	**Reno**	X			X	X	X	X	5
33	**Riverside**		X		X	X	X	X	5
34	**San Diego**	X	X			X	X	X	5
35	**San Francisco**		X	X	X	X		X	5
36	**San Jose**	X	X			X	X	X	5
37	**Seattle**	X			X	X	X	X	5
38	**St Paul**			X	X	X	X	X	5
39	**Tucson**		X	X	X	X	X		5
40	**Anchorage**			X		X	X	X	4
41	**Buffalo**				X	X	X	X	4
42	**Charlotte**				X	X	X	X	4
43	**Corpus Christi**			X		X	X	X	4
44	**Detroit**				X	X	X	X	4
45	Fort Worth		X	X		X	X		4
46	Houston				X	X	X	X	4
47	Lincoln	X				X	X	X	4
48	Los Angeles		X			X	X	X	4
49	Memphis			X	X	X	X		4
50	Milwaukee			X		X	X	X	4
51	New Orleans	X	X			X		X	4
52	New York				X	X	X	X	4
53	Oklahoma City			X		X	X	X	4
54	Phoenix			X		X	X	X	4
55	Pittsburgh	X	X		X		X		4
56	Portland				X	X	X	X	4
57	Tampa			X		X	X	X	4
58	Toledo			X		X	X	X	4
59	Wichita	X				X	X	X	4
60	Albuquerque				X		X	X	3
61	Anahiem	X					X	X	3
62	Bakersfield					X	X	X	3
63	Boston			X		X		X	3
64	Chandler		X			X	X		3
65	Cincinnati					X	X	X	3
66	Cleveland					X	X	X	3
67	Dallas				X		X	X	3
68	Greensboro				X	X	X		3
69	Indianapolis					X	X	X	3
70	Irvine		X		X			X	3
71	Kansas City			X		X		X	3
72	Lubbock					X	X	X	3
73	Miami					X	X	X	3
74	Omaha					X	X	X	3
75	Orlando		X			X		X	3
76	Sacramento		X		X		X		3
77	St. Louis					X	X	X	3
78	Stockton				X		X	X	3
79	Atlanta						X	X	2
80	Chicago				X	X			2
81	Chula Vista						X	X	2
82	Fort Wayne						X	X	2
83	Fresno					X		X	2
84	Irving						X	X	2
85	Laredo						X	X	2
86	Lexington						X	X	2
87	Newark						X	X	2
88	Jersey City							X	1

Notes: Data compiled by research team from online recruitment documents from municipalities online documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022).

The tables in Figure 7 generally illustrate best practice adoption being mixed across large U.S. municipalities. No city has all seven best practices, but no city features none (0) either. The lowest score is 1 (Jersey City), and the highest is 6 – which is shared amongst the top 14 municipalities. The distribution of scores is visualized in Figure 13 below:

Figure 8:

Best Practice "Score" Distribution for Large U.S. Municipalities (Max = 7)



Note: Data compiled through extraction of online job description and recruitment websites by research team (Hinojosa et al., 2022)

As Figure 8 illustrates, the distribution is slightly rightward skewed, with scores of 4 and 5 standing out, further confirmed by descriptive statistics. The average score for municipalities is 4.1, with a standard deviation of 1.3, and the mode – the most common score – is 5. The range of possible scores is 0 to 7, meaning a normal distribution dataset would have an average of 3.5 and a mode of 3 and 4. Since the average (4.1) and mode (5) are higher than the normal distribution, the data suggests that the overall tendency for large U.S. municipalities is towards more best practices rather than fewer.

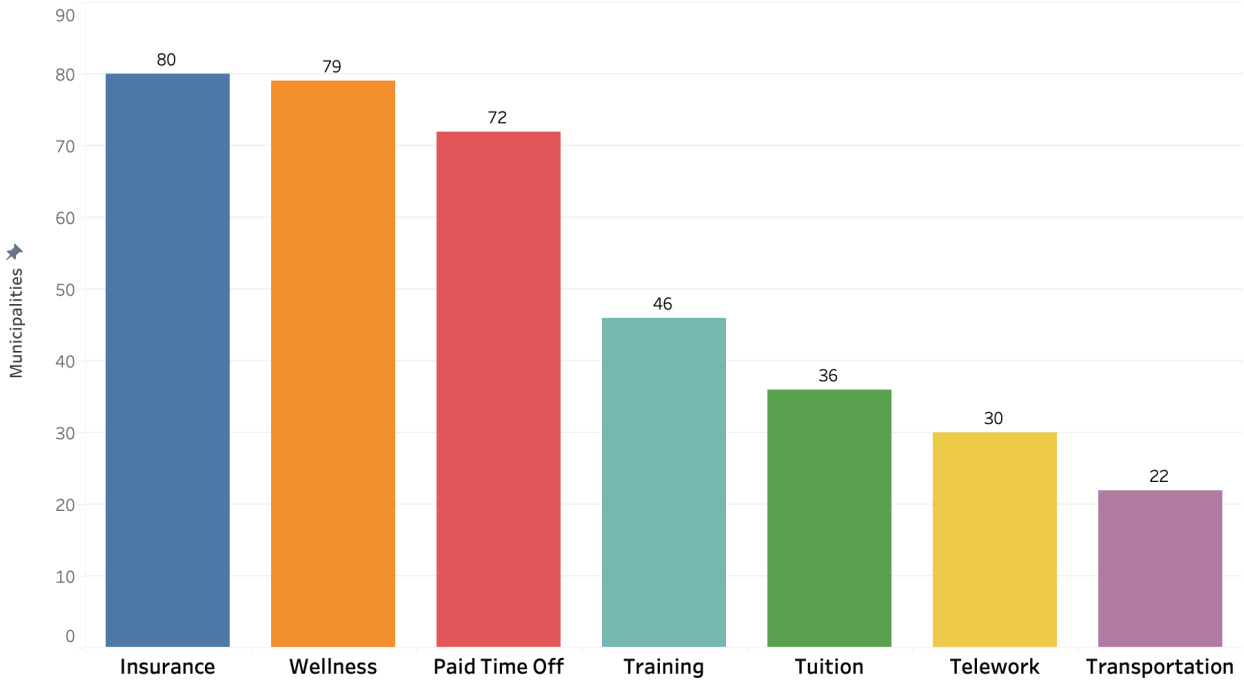
Best Practice Analysis

The city-level analysis can be furthered and augmented by practice-based analysis: that is, instead of comparing municipalities' adoption of best practices on a case-by-case basis, the dataset can be reviewed nationally against the specific best practices. Table 4 and Figure 9 summarize and visualize the count of cities that have adopted each of the seven best practices:

Table 4
Future of Work Adoption Summary Table

	Transportation	Telework	Tuition	Professional Development	Paid Time Off	Wellness	Insurance
Cities	22	30	36	46	72	79	80

Figure 9
Frequency of Best Practices in Large U.S. Cities (n=88)

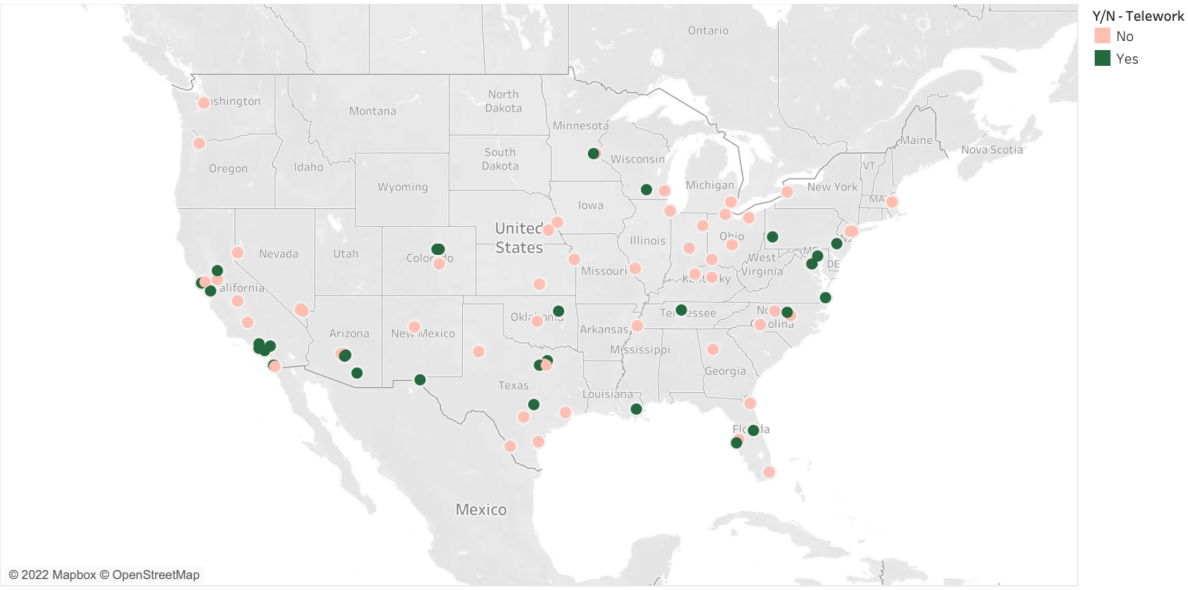


Notes: Data compiled by research team from government official documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022).

Table 4 and Figure 9 illustrate a dramatic difference in adoption between the 7 best practices. Insurance benefits, wellness programs, and paid time off (PTO) are provided by nearly all 88 cities, whereas, for example, only 25% feature transportation subsidies. Transportation support – which includes commuter benefits and relocation assistance – is featured in only 22 cities, with telework (36) and tuition reimbursement (30) also falling below the 50% mark. Professional development – training and growth opportunities – is featured by a little over half (46) of large U.S. municipalities.

Notably, the prevalence of future of work best practices in the literature and online recruitment are divergent. For example, telework – encouraging remote work, hybrid work environments, or telecommuting – was one of the most popular subjects in the literature. The map in Figure 10, however, shows limited mention of telework for large U.S. cities:

Figure 10
Telework Adoption Map (Continental U.S.)



Notes: Data compiled by research team from government official documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022). Two large U.S. discontiguous municipalities (Honolulu and Anchorage) do not mention telework in online recruitment materials.

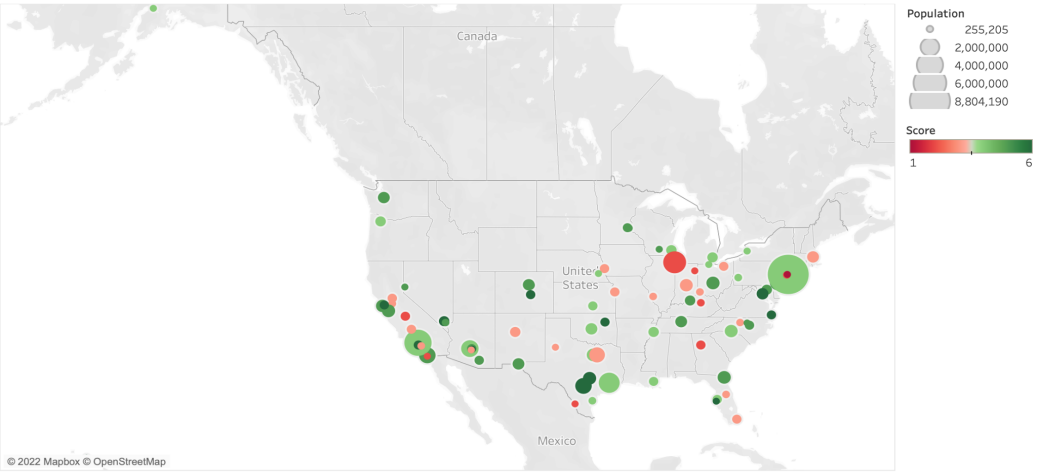
The relatively limited adoption of telework – and other popular concepts, such as tuition reimbursement – clearly illustrates a discontent between best practice and municipal HR strategies.

In sum, municipalities are moving towards greater adoption of future of work best practices, but for the more innovative approaches, most municipalities are still lagging behind the industry standards.

Testing Correlations

Figure 11 presents a geographic view of the entire municipal scorecard:

Figure 11
Large U.S. Municipalities Adoption of FoW Hiring Best Practices

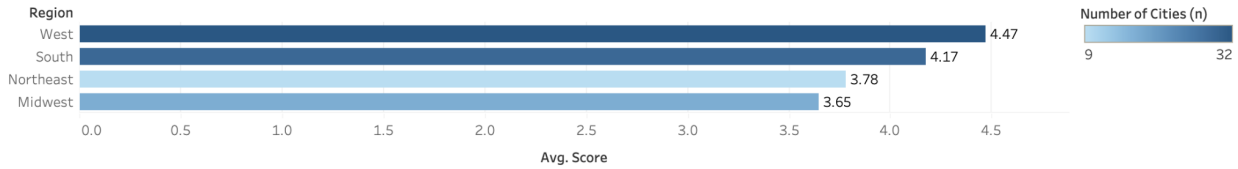


Notes: Data compiled by research team from government official documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022).

Geographic representations such as Figure 11 lend themselves to considerations of regional trends and possible correlations. Since each municipal case was coded population, region, governmental structure, and budget, the research team explored possible correlations or relationships between those independent variables and the municipality's score, the dependent variable.

Regions. The map (Figure 11) illustrates a weaker concentration of best practice adoption (red) in the midwest and generally higher scores (green) on the West Coast. Figure 12 breaks down the regional trends:

Figure 12
Regional Breakdown (Average Scores)

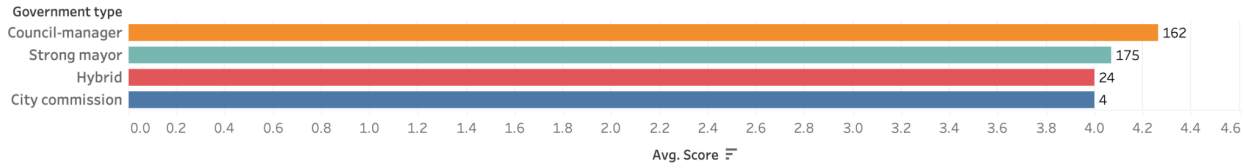


Notes: Data compiled by research team from government official documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022).

As seen in the Figure 12 bar chart, the Midwest was the lowest-scoring region. The range, however, between regions was slight (0.82). Notably, the regions with the most municipalities – West and South – were also the regions with the highest average scores. The correlation between the number of large municipalities in a region and the region's average score suggests the possibility that the density of urban areas within a region may influence overall trends in adoption.

Governmental Structure. Bureaucratic constraints were also identified as a potential challenge for best practice adoption. The case municipalities were classified into four types of governmental structures: strong mayor, council-manager (or weak mayor), hybrid, and city commission. The types of government are graphed below in Figure 13 by average score:

Figure 13
Government Structure Breakdown (Average Scores)



Notes: Data compiled by research team from government official documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022).

Figure 13 suggests that there may be little difference in a municipality's score and its governmental structure. Council-manager systems have a slight edge over strong mayor systems in terms of average scores (0.19). The prevalence of council-manager systems in the West compared to the Midwest or East might help explain the high concentration of high-scoring cities in the western region (see map in Appendix 2),

For deeper analysis, the data set can be filtered only to include strong and weak mayor systems since only 7 cities were structured as hybrids or city commissions. The matrix in Figure

14 below presents the comparative distribution of scores for the two top types of municipalities, council-manager, and strong mayor:

Figure 14
Governmental Type Score Matrix

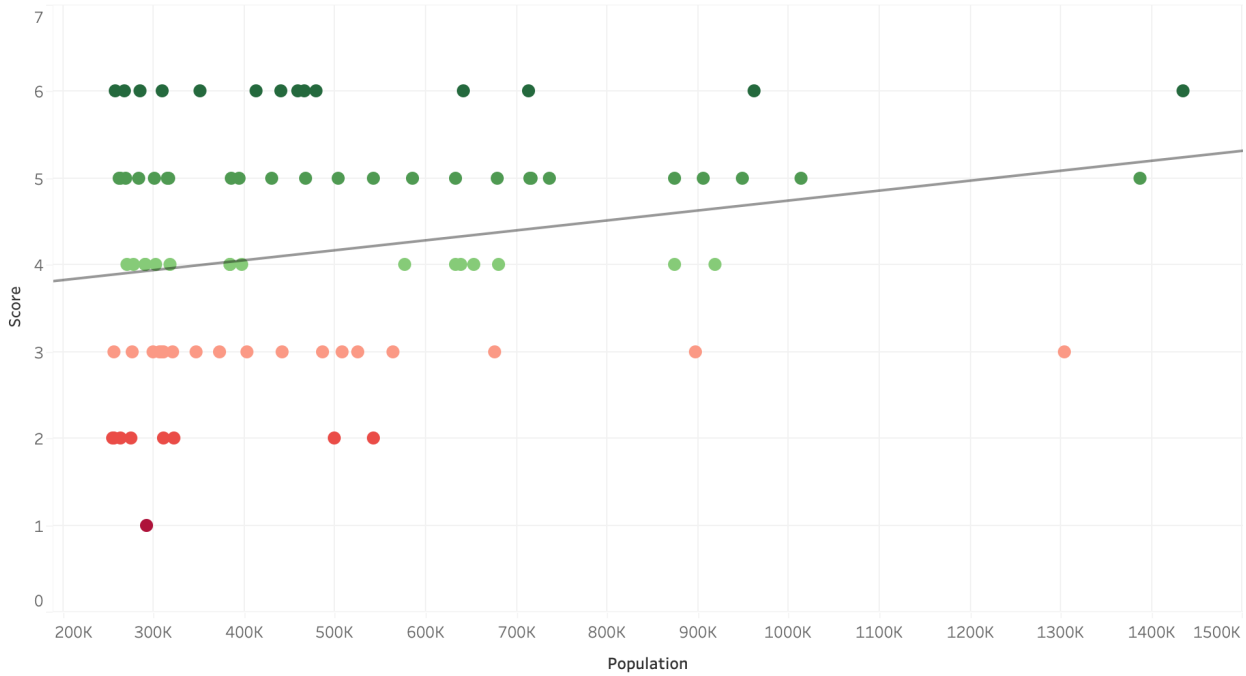
	Government type	
Score	Council-manager	Strong mayor
1		1
2	3	5
3	10	7
4	6	12
5	12	13
6	7	5

Notes: Data compiled by research team from government official documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022).

The distributions in Figure 14 show an uneven distribution for council-manager municipalities but a more step-wise progression for strong mayor cities, with both peaking at a score of 5 and dropping off from 6 to 7.

Population. Figure 15 plots municipal budgets against the municipal scorecard for cities under 1.5M residents:

Figure 15
Municipal Population versus Best Practices Score (Under 1.5M)



Notes: Data compiled by research team from government official documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022).

Figure 15 suggests a possible direct relationship between population and score for cities under 1.5M population. Simple regression analysis reveals a weak linear connection between population and score. The low p-value of 0.033 is under the 0.05 threshold, making the

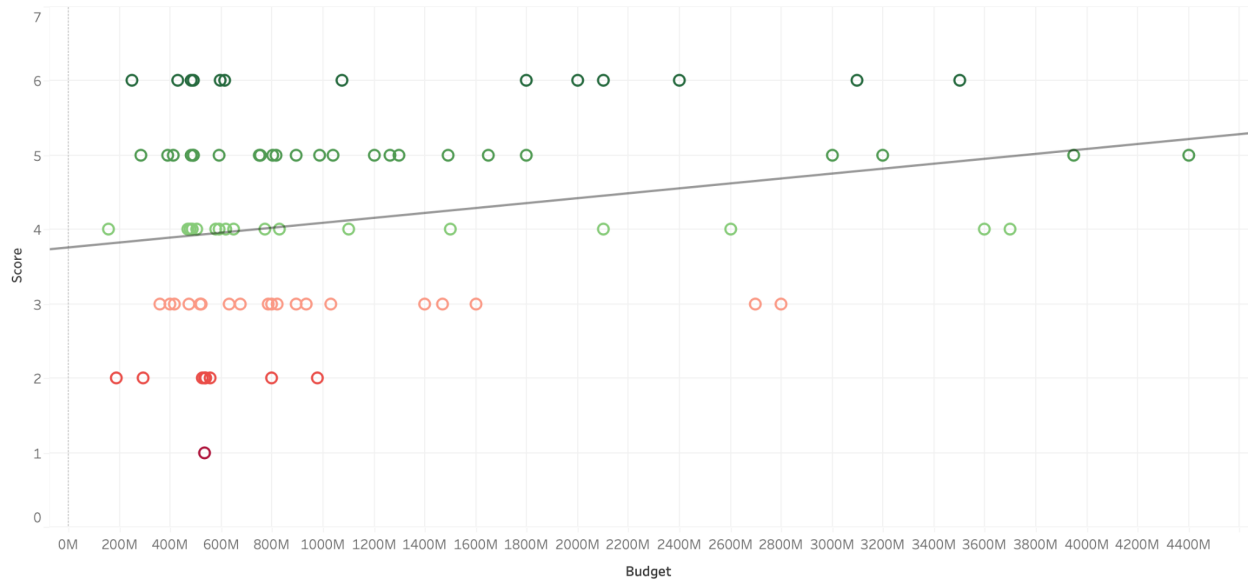
relationship significant, but the low R-squared value (0.055) indicates that the linear trendline does not effectively describe the relationship. Put another way, the data would *reject* a null hypothesis that there is no relationship between population and best practice adoption – however weak.

The 5 cities above 1.5M skewed the data (as seen in the example in Appendix 2) and were removed from this portion of the analysis. With those larger cities included, the calculated trendline is entirely flat, the R-squared value is very low (0.00002), and the p-value is high (0.68), indicating a lack of relationship and significance.

Budget. Population and budget are strongly correlated for municipalities (Appendix 2). Budgets, however, were identified as a central barrier to municipal adoption of hiring best practices. Figure 16 plots municipal budgets as the independent variable and scores as the dependent for cities with a budget under $5 Billion:

Figure 16

Budget and Score Comparison Scatterplot (Under $5B Budget)



Notes: Data compiled by research team from government official documents (Hinojosa et al., 2022).

The budget scatterplot – with the largest cities removed – resembles the population graph in Figure 15. The linear relationship between budget and score has a low p-value of 0.02 and a low R-squared value of 0.065, indicating a significant relationship but a poorly fitting linear model.

Findings

The goal of the research conducted was to answer three questions centered on 1) finding the best hiring practices post-pandemic, 2) understanding the challenges that municipalities face in adopting the hiring best practices, and 3) evaluating municipalities' recruitment documents to see if the organizations are reflective of the hiring best practices. The student research team finds that the top five best practices include flexible work arrangements through work-from-home policy, professional development and job training, health and wellness programs, innovative recruitment tools such as social media strategies, and better job descriptions. The challenges that municipalities face are budgetary constraints, lack of workforce planning, and biased hiring principles, such as merit-based principles, which have caused the gap in hiring skilled employees. Moreover, most large municipalities fail to reflect all the best hiring practices; the average score for municipalities includes 4.1 out of 7 best practices in hiring documents. The following summaries provide detailed findings for each research question.

Telework, professional development, and better benefits are the top best practices

As the public sector works to reduce high vacancy rates, the literature shows several strategic, innovative recruitment tools it can utilize to recover, expand, and grow. Through current research, the most common top five best hiring practices and policies include flexible work arrangements through work-from-home policy, professional development and job training, health and wellness programs and other benefits, social media recruitment strategies, and modernizing job descriptions. Moreover, remote or hybrid flexibility was overwhelmingly cited as the number one "future of work" policy. The pandemic has altered employees' priorities for work-life balance and job satisfaction and provided opportunities to seek careers that meet these priorities. Additionally, the pandemic demonstrated how hybrid options can be successfully implemented for the employer and the employee.

The post-pandemic world has demonstrated the need for modern hiring practices and policies to help cities develop a strong plan that makes them competitive with the private sector. The literature indicates that more employees are now seeking careers that offer flexibility and benefits. The private sector has been able to reduce its staff shortages from the Great Resignation by implementing modern hiring practices and policies in the workplace that attract Millennials and Gen Z, which are now the largest pool of candidates (Deloitte, 2022). By adopting and implementing several best practices, municipalities will see an increase in the available talent pool.

The lack of resources is the top barrier to recruitment and hiring

A thorough, open document search elucidated modern recruiting and hiring challenges local governments face in the future of work. Unsurprisingly, the most significant barriers are a lack of resources and fiscal and human capital. Budget constraints limit municipalities' opportunities to invest in strategies to address challenges, including compensating for increasing retirement numbers and sector switching from younger employees, issues only exacerbated by the pandemic (Siripurapu & Maters, 2021; NLC, 2022). Depleting staffing levels limits the local government's ability to function effectively and deliver services (Lang, 2020).

The literature also identified the importance of workforce planning, as the practice ensures municipalities have the capacity and capabilities to deliver services to their constituents alongside an evolving workplace (Ferguson, 2022). However, research finds cities passive towards the initiative, belaboring fiscal, time, or organizational constraints. Likewise, an absence of concise hiring strategies has created subpar modern recruitment strategies. The literature suggests merit-based principles intended to attract qualified individuals via a fair and open competition often enable biases, inadvertently promoting inequality and a lack of diversity (Hickman, 2021). Municipalities also need more efficient social media search strategies to connect with talented candidates (Wiersma, 2022).

Large municipalities' recruitment documents *do not* reflect all of the hiring best practices

The frequency content analysis evaluated whether municipalities reflect the best practices around benefits, incentives, and other "future of work" strategies in their online recruitment materials, specifically job postings and official HR websites (Glickman, 2022). The data suggests that large U.S. cities *do not* reflect all the hiring best practices and policies in their online recruitment documents – yet. Many cities come close (39 of the 88 feature 5 or 6 of the 7 best practices), and no city has failed to adopt any of the best practices. The weak but significant relationship between a municipality's hiring "score" and budget (and population) may indicate the need for additional resourcing for municipal leaders to overcome the other barriers to implementation.

Municipalities need modern tools to compete in the current talent economy

The research revealed dramatic discrepancies between the future of work policies not only across cities but within cities as well. For example, Los Angeles has a telework policy but only one of its ten recent job postings mentions the program. The limited incorporation of FoW policies in job postings reflects a broader issue in the municipal recruitment arena: a lack of industry-leading standards and tools to implement them. Municipal leaders have lacked modern, technology-driven approaches to boosting recruitment efforts. There has been no concerted effort to build a test for municipalities to determine how their recruiting practices measure up.

The student research team leveraged the content from the leading academic and trade publications to develop a dynamic scoring application for municipalities, translating the best practices recommendations into data-driven analytics: futureofwork.city. The app enables municipal leaders to assess how the municipality reflects the identified FoW best practices and delimits the steps needed to compete in the current talent economy. The screenshot in Figure 17 illustrates how municipal leaders can share a job posting from their cities, and the screenshot in Figure 18 presents the data visualizations generated by the application, including a scorecard, word frequency analysis, and comparative rankings.

Figure 17:
FutureofWork.City Analysis App Initial Screenshot

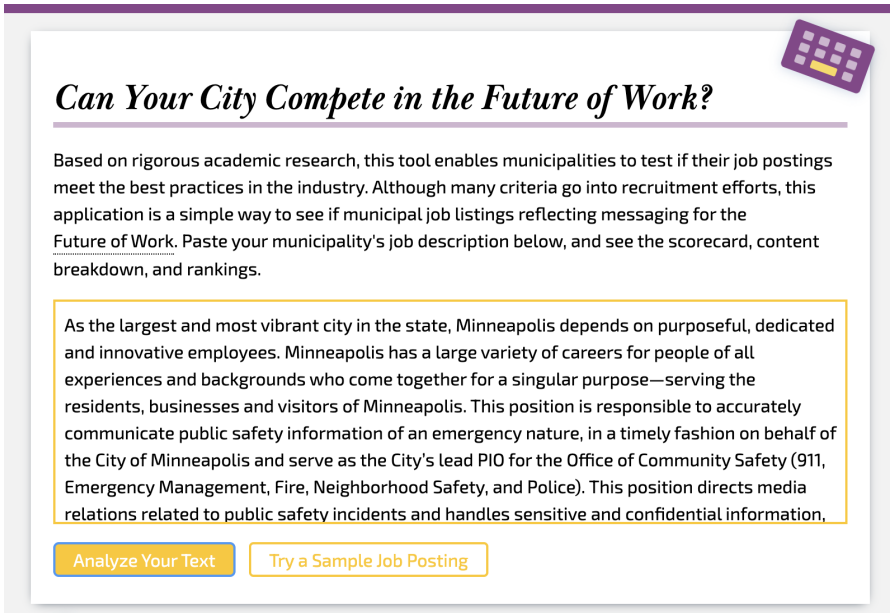
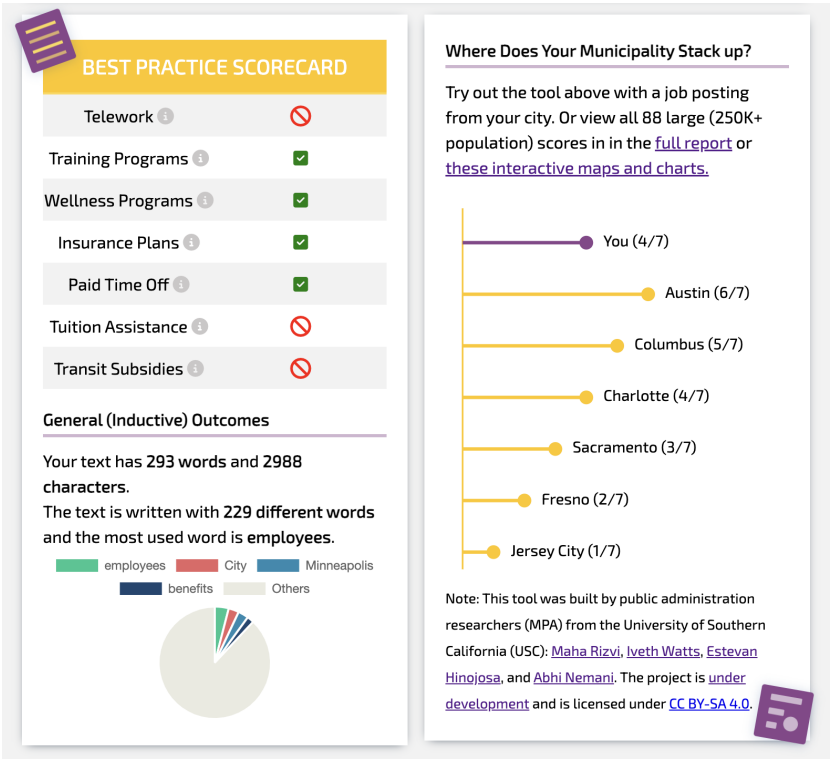


Figure 18:
FutureofWork.City Analysis App Results Screenshot



The scorecard visualization (Figure 18) scores the municipality's job posting in the same way the research team conducted the content analysis for the 88 large U.S. municipalities: dynamically searching through the text for best practice keywords defined by the data-driven coding dictionary (Table 3). The overall score is summed and then presented against other scores from large U.S. municipalities, providing comparative context. Each practice includes a definition (also included in the glossary of this report) for both clarity and education, and the application supports desktop or mobile browsers. Municipal leaders can leverage the FoW Analysis App to understand what elements are missing from their municipality's job postings – and, more importantly, understand what specific steps they can take to help their city compete in the future of work.

Recommendations

The "future of work" is now, and municipalities must adapt and adopt policies to attract the current workforce. As municipalities struggle to attract talent, the following recommendations should assist NLC address hiring challenges within the member organizations, making local governments more competitive in the post-pandemic tightened labor market.

- **Promote the use of data-driven evaluative tools** that demonstrate the evolving needs and expectations from candidates with measurement tools such as futureofwork.city, developed from the research to help municipal leaders understand ways to modernize job posting language**.**
- **Modernize and standardize job descriptions** to support municipalities' recruiting efforts to address the growing gap between the private sector hiring tools and resources and the public sector by including templatized job benefits packages, progress tracking dashboards, and modern, inclusive outreach channels.
- **Recruit talent through modern social channels** to promote employer brands, target niche personas, and connect with and attract a larger pool of active and passive candidates.
- **Highlight and share national FOW best practices** for municipalities, publicly tracking progress against the following key municipal strategies identified in the best practice research:
    - *Develop and implement a job flexibility policy*, focusing on remote and hybrid telework options for positions that can be conducted outside the office.
    - *Invest in employee professional development and training* to enable job growth for employees during and after the municipal appointment.
    - *Expand and revise employee benefits* to address the aftereffects of the pandemic with an emphasis on mental and emotional health, work-life balance, and financial health.

NLC's role as an advocate, convener, and educator uniquely positions the organization to drive the recommended reforms within municipalities.