

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

Examining the Best Practices for Recruiting Talent into the Municipal Workforce

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) require new and innovative strategies for HR departments (De Smet et al., 2021).

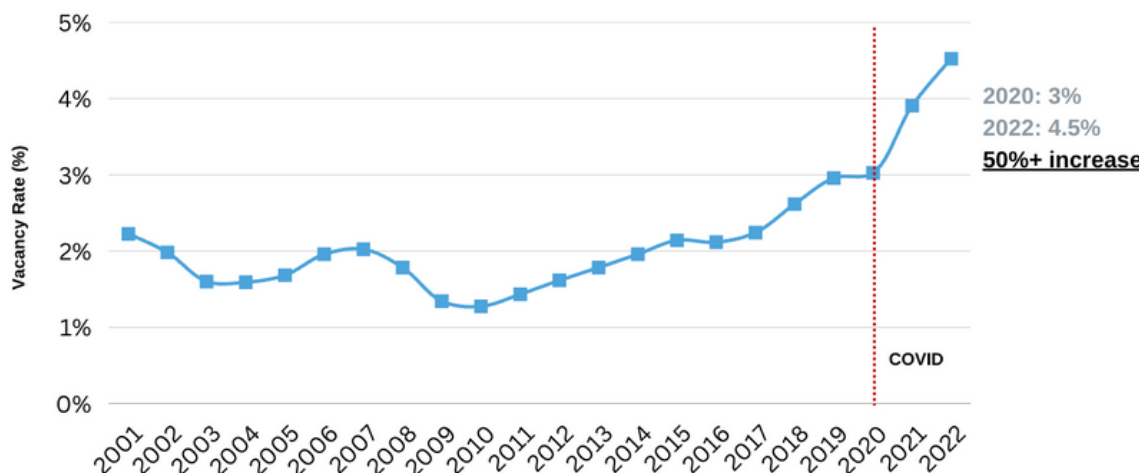
The research team collected and analyzed **350 publications** and over **1000 documents** to develop a theory of what the Future of Work means for a city and an assessment of how well each municipality is performing in 1) flexible work arrangements; 2) health and wellness programs and benefits; 3) professional development and job training; 4) social media recruitment, and 5) comprehensive job descriptions.

Four recommendations emerged through the research for municipal leaders: 1) promote data-driven recruiting tools such as research team-developed [futureofwork.city](#); 2) 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.

Current State of Municipality Hiring

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). Moreover, 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. If municipalities do not prioritize improving hiring processes, the workforce level will continue to dwindle, leaving the cities in crisis (Smith, 2022).

Figure 1. Local Government Vacancy Rates



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



Best Practices 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%

Finding 1: Telework, professional development better benefits are top best practices for “Future of Work”

Flexible work arrangements through work-from-home policy, professional development and job training, health and wellness programs and other benefits, innovative recruitment tools such as social media strategies, and better job descriptions comprise the top five best practices and policies. Moreover, remote or hybrid flexibility was overwhelmingly cited as the number one “future of work” policy as shown in the summary graphic above.

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. By adopting and implementing several best practices, municipalities will see an increase in the available talent pool.

Finding 2: The lack of resources is the top barrier for recruitment and hiring

Attracting high-quality candidates is critical for any organization's current and long-term success. As local governments endure economic turmoil from the pandemic, municipalities continue to face significant recruitment, retention, and workforce planning challenges to meet increasing demands within constrained budgets.

Resources

Budget constraints limit municipalities' opportunities to invest in strategies to address challenges while depleted staffing levels inhibit local government's ability to function effectively and deliver services (Siripurapu & Maters, 2021; NLC, 2022).

Workforce Planning

Research finds cities passive towards the initiative, belaboring fiscal, time, or organizational constraints (Ferguson, 2022).

Bureaucratic Constraints

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).

Job Descriptions

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).”

Findings



Finding 3: Large U.S. Municipalities Adopt Many but Not All Best Practices

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, and no city has failed to adopt any of the best practices. The municipality "scorecard" showcases the top 20 large U.S. municipalities with the greatest adoption of FoW principles for recruitment. More than a dozen cities feature 6 out of the 7 best practices, and no city has none of the best practices. The average of 4.1 means that large U.S. cities are tending towards the Future of Work, but work still remains.

The chart on the left visualizes the breakdown of best practices. Insurance, wellness, and PTO stand out, while telework and transportation or tuition subsidies are far less common.

Finding 4: The Need for New Tools & Resources for Municipal Leaders

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.

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.

Municipalities 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.

Municipal leaders can share a job posting from their cities, and the app presents the data visualizations generated by the application, including a scorecard, word frequency analysis, and comparative rankings.

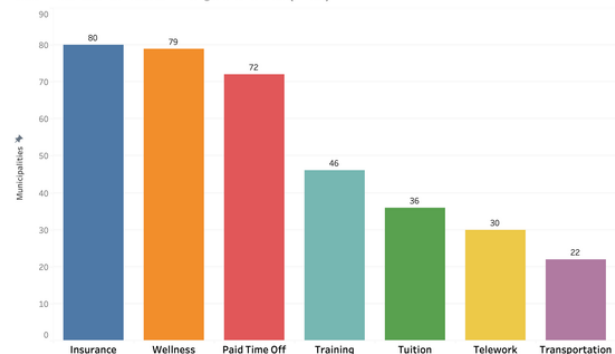
City Scorecard: Top 20 Municipalities

Top 20	Transit	Telework	Tuition	Paid Time Off	Wellness	Training	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

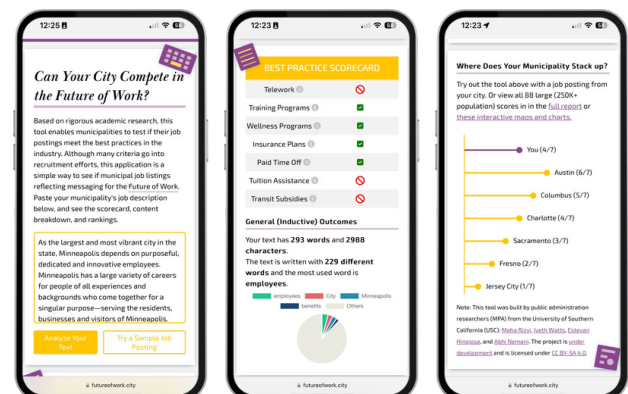
See the full rankings: futureofwork.city/rankings

Most Common Future of Work Hiring Best Practices (n=88)

Best Practices Reflected in Large U.S. Cities (n=88)



FutureofWork.City Screenshots



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 address hiring challenges, making local governments more competitive in the post-pandemic tightened labor market.

Future of Work Tool for Municipalities



Municipal leaders can use the tool developed from the research to assess the fit between postings and best practices: futureofwork.city



Modern and Standard Job Descriptions

Modernize and standardize job postings to feature all FOW benefits to comprehensively inform potential candidates.



Social Media Recruitment

Leverage social media platforms to promote employer brand, target niche personas, and connect with and attract a larger pool of active and passive candidates.



Highlight national FOW Best Practices

Raise the bar for municipal recruitment nationally by promoting the adoption of Future of Work best practices, specifically:



Job Flexibility

Develop and implement a job flexibility policy, focusing on remote and hybrid telework options for positions that can be conducted outside the office.



Professional Development and Training

Invest in employee professional development and training to enable job growth for employees during and after the municipal appointment.



Employee Benefits

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.

Partial References

- De Smet, A., Dowling, B., & Mugayar-Baldocchi, M. (2022, March 9). Competition for talent after the Great Resignation | McKinsey. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/gone-for-now-or-gone-for-good-how-to-play-the-new-talent-game-and-win-back-workers>
- Deloitte. (2022). Understanding Generation Z in the Workplace. Deloitte United States. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/consumer-business/articles/understanding-generation-z-in-the-workplace.html>
- Dresang, D. L. (2017). Personnel management in government agencies and nonprofit organizations (Sixth edition.). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Retrieved from <https://doi-org.libproxy2.usc.edu/10.4324/9781315545387>
- Ferguson, K. (2022). Workforce planning. <https://lgju.org/newsletter/archive/global-local-workforce-planning/>
- Glickman, J. (2022). AMERICA WORKS: How Entrepreneurial Leaders Are Preparing for the Future of Work. National League of Cities. <https://www.nlc.org/article/2022/10/07/america-works-how-entrepreneurial-leaders-are-preparing-for-the-future-of-work/>
- Hickman, E. (2021). The problems with appointing on merit. A human capital analysis. Journal of Corporate Law Studies, 21(1), 109–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14735970.2020.1844536>
- Khattar, R., Zhavoronkova, M., & Neal, A. (2022, March 25). Investments in the State and Local Government Workforce Will Deliver Crucial Services and Create Economic Security. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/investments-in-the-state-and-local-government-workforce-will-deliver-crucial-services-and-create-economic-security/>
- Lang, C. (2020). Workforce diversity policies in practice: Drivers and barriers in local administrations. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 43(11), 1961–1980. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1754444>
- NLC. (2022). NLC Resources & Training. National League of Cities. <https://www.nlc.org/resources-training/>
- Ramsey, M. (2020, February 15). Hiring Challenges Confront Public-Sector Employers. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/all-things-work/pages/hiring-challenges-confront-public-sector-employers.aspx>
- Rosewicz, B., & Maciag, M. (2021, September 14). State and Local Government Job Growth Lags as Economy Recovers. <https://pew.org/3t5qZRT>
- Siripurapu, A., & Masters, J. (n.d.). How COVID-19 Is Harming State and City Budgets. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved November 13, 2022, from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/how-covid-19-harming-state-and-city-budgets>
- Smith, C. (2021, June 1). Government Is Hiring, But Faces Tough Competition for Workers. Governing. <https://www.governing.com/now/government-is-hiring-but-faces-tough-competition-for-workers>
- Smith, C. (2022, May 12). Local Governments Search for Answers to Hiring Challenges. Governing. <https://www.governing.com/work/local-governments-search-for-answers-to-hiring-challenges>