

Stakeholders Meeting on Developing The Public Sector Workforce of the Future



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On October 29th, 2020, leadership from 18 organizations with an interest in the public sector workforce of the future gathered virtually for a stakeholders meeting with the following objectives:

- 1** Share information among state and local government organizations about what we are doing to help develop the public workforce of the future.
- 2** Identify areas of programmatic, policy, and/or research collaboration in helping to support states and localities as they aim to recruit and retain a talented future workforce.
- 3** Identify the challenges and opportunities COVID-19 has brought to state and local governments as employers.

Among the consensus areas for collaboration were the following:

Workforce Development

SLGE and several other stakeholders are focused on promoting state and local governments as employers of choice. For others, most of their attention goes to the private sector workforce. Regardless, areas of commonality include staff training, skill development, and intrinsic motivation as a means of fostering employee retention. Challenges exist at all organizational levels, from top administration to field workers, with retirements, layoffs, furloughs, turnover, and COVID-19 health issues being among the top concerns.

Some organizations are also working to update codes of ethics and job descriptions, or to share innovative practices – all of which may help reinforce the value of public service and the concrete results and personal satisfaction achievable through the job, rather than simply a bureaucratic enumeration of tasks. Stretch assignments, cross-training and job rotations may also help with both retention and succession planning.

Future Needs/Automation

Particularly as a wave of older workers is retiring, the workforce needs of the future are changing. This is in part due to gaps in succession planning or transfer of institutional knowledge, but also to the evolution of work brought on by automation and the sudden impacts of a COVID-19-induced shift to significant teleworking.

Key components in responding to these new circumstances will be understanding the shifting demographics of the workforce, educating for tomorrow's workforce skills, and making people aware of potential public service career tracks, whether in general or highly technical areas, from human resources to human services, public health to utilities. Multiple stakeholders have conducted surveys or drafted reports on these issues, with some collaboration already underway, such as [2019's Public Sector Workforce 2030 Summit](#).

New Career Pathways

Non-traditional pathways being promoted include entries into state/local government through apprenticeships, military veterans or their family members, student chapters of stakeholder organizations, older workers looking for encore careers, individuals with disabilities, first-generation Americans, purpose-driven individuals looking to contribute to their communities, and those without a college degree who can perform para-professional work. There is also outreach to people in smaller communities and to gig workers interested in limited-duration assignments.

To foster these pathways, outreach to K-12 schools is essential to make potential candidates and guidance counsellors aware of the opportunities available. Linkages can also include guest lectures or opportunities for high school students to tour area government offices, get one-on-one advice and mentoring from key staff, or participate on community boards and commissions.

Considering that not all job candidates will arise from schools of public administration, job descriptions may require added focus on the public service mission and less bureaucratic language.

Leadership/Soft Skills

Professional, clinical, or job-specific skills are not the sole requirements of a successful employee. Soft skills in areas such as critical thinking, adaptability, and written or interpersonal communication may be just as important. For public-facing positions, language skills or community connections may also facilitate success. All of these can be part not only of recruitment but also of employee development and succession planning.

Public vs. Private Sector

Those seeking employment can often find higher compensation within the private sector. For that reason, aside from promoting the satisfaction of a career in public service, public employers may be best able to attract qualified candidates through competitive benefit offerings. These include health and retirement benefits, as well as non-traditional offerings (e.g., paid family/medical leave and student loan repayment). Among those stakeholders who advocate around public policy, there was an expression of support for maintaining a public role in traditional governmental services, while keeping the door open to public-private partnerships.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Several stakeholders have partnered around a diversity dashboard to help demonstrate ways in which qualified candidates can join government agencies that reflect their diversity. Even once those candidates are identified and hired, onboarding must ensure that they find an organizational culture that welcomes their contributions, provides them with peer networks or affinity groups that support them, and training on topics such as implicit bias to ensure that policies, procedures, or past practices do not create roadblocks to retention and career development.

Equity officers can bring tools to bear - not only to provide staff a safe space in which to surface such issues, but also to consider equity in budgeting and community service delivery. The ideas and approaches they develop are being shared among peer organizations via webinars, conferences, or other best practices exchange. Considering the spillover effects of racism on education, housing, and other social determinants of health, some have also advocated a public health framework.

Every policy and cultural environment is different, and stakeholders need to be aware of the constraints or special considerations of pursuing equity initiatives in various neighborhoods, states, or even departments that might not have a long history of diverse staffing. For example, where technical fields may show demographic underrepresentation, some have supported targeted academic, training, or recruitment programs.

Fellowships, Internships, Mentoring

Many graduate programs require internships, but governments have cut hiring or do not advertise positions widely. Encouraging such hiring – whether as a general goal or through scholarships – can boost entry into the profession generally or serve in a targeted manner to increase workforce diversity. Successful models include fellowships, mentorships, job shadowing, and STEM, public health, or other apprenticeships. Those placed may benefit from practical job-skills training (e.g., time management, data analysis), leadership development, networking, speed coaching, or resource groups (e.g., with racial/ethnic peers, women's networks). Stakeholders agree on the need to share best practices for these initiatives, including those for graduate and undergraduate students or those interested in public service options within their own home communities.

Training and Certification

Web-based training and conferences are common offerings, with additional focus lately around topics such as equity, ethics, and mental health and wellness. Credentialing programs offer a more structured format for obtaining required continuing education units (CEUs) or gaining a more holistic understanding of a given profession, with that certification either being specific to the individual or to an entire agency. Where such training is provided by one of the stakeholder associations, that may lessen the burden on the individual employers to develop and administer such training programs in-house.

Financial Challenges

A crisis is approaching due to state and local government revenue shortfalls. Participants noted various efforts to track layoffs, budget cuts and other actions taken so far, with any further federal action having a significant impact, either in the form of direct assistance or even in the extension of unemployment benefits, eviction moratoria, or aid to small business.

As financial pressures on governments have increased, many of the stakeholders have responded by providing reduced-price or free resources and webinars. Priorities include collecting data around financial cuts or COVID-related spending, supporting behavioral health and physical health of employees, helping governments navigate the crisis, and finding ways to meet workforce needs both now and as the pandemic passes.

Longer term, some are also looking at bigger picture discussions around the future revenue structure of state and local government, state vs. local authority to alter minimum wage or other employment conditions, and financing the changing infrastructure needs of the new normal.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Pre-pandemic, most flexible workplaces or flexible scheduling were limited. While written policies and civil service regulatory updates still lag, COVID-19 led to rapid adoption of work-from-home. Stakeholder organizations are currently focused on related issues of cybersecurity of dispersed operations, how employees' wages are taxed when working from a different location, how work-from-home is affecting productivity, and what the long-term impacts might be on service delivery and the need for office space. From a workforce standpoint, the continuation of flexible work arrangements may be a selling point in marketing a career in public employment.

COVID-19

Working in the public sector during COVID-19 is a source of pride for many workers, who are also feeling more recognized for the importance of their contributions. Still, governments need to acknowledge the stress, fatigue, and mental health concerns of their employees. These stressors may be multiplied when individuals are dealing with increased job duties or with students in their households learning from home.

Stakeholder groups have been active in surveying organizations and employees, making content available online, and cataloging policy development or procedural shifts to virtual service delivery or even virtual onboarding. While productivity has in many ways been maintained or increased, there is still significant potential for burnout, both among front-line staff and government leadership.

Federal Assistance

Stakeholders vary as to whether they advocate around policy or funding, but are working closely together to gather data to inform the discussions around how state and local governments have been impacted, as well as what this means for the ability to deliver key services. Where direct advocacy is undertaken, it is often being done collaboratively, with a focus on increasing the level of funding, the flexibility of expenditure rules, or both.

Where leading practices emerge in response to COVID or to workforce challenges more generally, all parties – including the federal government – can take an active role in sharing and promoting the adoption of those approaches.

Collaboration

Existing collaborations include internship programs, financial wellness grants, training and certification, and federal advocacy. All agreed that stakeholder convenings are valuable to exchange ideas, explore new partnerships, and avoid duplication of efforts.

Among the concrete suggestions for next steps were sharing ideas on effective speakers or best practices, prioritizing the gaps to be addressed, and developing coordinated messaging to market careers in public service. In addition to scheduling future meetings, SLGE will also explore the establishment of virtual private groups for idea exchange (e.g., via LinkedIn or Slack).

Resources and Links

During the course of the meeting, participants offered the following recommendations for relevant resources and links

Center for State and Local Government Excellence, National League of Cities, and ICMA-RC – **Public Workforce 2030 Summit Key Takeaways**, <https://www.slge.org/assets/uploads/2020/03/public-sector-workforce-2030-key-takeaways.pdf>

Center for State and Local Government Excellence, International Professional Management Association for Human Resources, and National Association of State Personnel Executives – **Survey Findings: State and Local Government Workforce, 2020 Survey**, <https://www.slge.org/assets/uploads/2020/04/workforcesurvey2020.pdf>

Center for State and Local Government Excellence, **Survey Results: Public Sector Employee Views on Finances and Employment Outlook Due to COVID-19**, <https://slge.org/assets/uploads/2020/06/2020-covid-report.pdf>

Center for State and Local Government Excellence, **Public Sector Employee Views on COVID-19 (Infographic)**, <https://slge.org/assets/uploads/2020/06/2020-covid-infographic.pdf>

Center for State and Local Government Excellence, **K-12 Education Employee Views on COVID-19 (Infographic)**, <https://slge.org/assets/uploads/2020/08/2020-covid-k12-infographic.pdf>

Center for State and Local Government Excellence, **African American State and Local Employee Views on COVID-19**, <https://www.slge.org/assets/uploads/2020/09/covid-and-african-american-state-local-employees.pdf>

Center for State and Local Government Excellence, **Infographics Show Negative Trend in State and Local Job Sentiment Since COVID-19**, <https://slge.org/resources/infographics-show-negative-trend-in-state-and-local-job-sentiment-since-covid-19>

Center for State and Local Government Excellence, International Professional Management Association for Human Resources, and National Association of State Treasurers, **State and Local Financial Wellness Programs**, <https://nast.org/financialwellness/>

Council of State Governments, **The Future of Work: New Strategies for a New Economy**, <https://web.csg.org/2020/event/the-future-of-work-new-strategies-for-a-new-economy/>

de Beaumont Foundation – **Building Skills for a More Strategic Public Health Workforce: A Call to Action**, <https://www.debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Building-Skills-for-a-More-Strategic-Public-Health-Workforce.pdf>

Engaging Local Government Leaders – **Diversity Dashboard**, <https://elgl.org/2020-diversity-dashboard-survey/>

Engaging Local Government Leaders – **Meagle Award**, <https://elgl.org/meagle/>

Government Finance Officers Association – **Working Remotely: A Guide for the Public Sector**, <https://www.gfoa.org/materials/working-remotely-guide-public-sector>

Government Finance Officers Association – **Lead in the Renewed Age of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**, <https://www.gfoa.org/events/lead-in-the-renewed-age-of-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>

Government Finance Officers Association, **Realizing the Best of Both Worlds: An Engaged Workforce and More Satisfied Citizens**, <https://www.gfoa.org/materials/realizing-the-best-of-both-worlds-an-engaged-workforce>

International Professional Management Association for Human Resources – **Racial Equity Resource Page**, <https://www.ipma-hr.org/equity-and-diversity-resource-page>

International Professional Management Association for Human Resources, **HR20/20 Report**, <https://www.ipma-hr.org/stay-informed/research-and-reports/hr-2020-report/hr2020/hr2020-report>

International Professional Management Association for Human Resources – **Public Sector Telework Trends During the Coronavirus Pandemic**, <https://www.ipma-hr.org/stay-informed/hr-news-issues/hr-news-article/public-sector-telework-trends-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

Lead for America – **Locally-rooted, Nationwide**, https://www.canva.com/design/DAEKo_xzG3E/07VuMCw5Tfj_RXRbVlD5CA/view?utm_content=DAEKo_xzG3E&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishsharelink

National Association of Counties – **NACo High Performance Leadership Academy**, <https://www.naco.org/resources/education-and-training/naco-high-performance-leadership-academy>

National Association of Counties – **Measuring COVID-19's Impact on America's County Workforce** <https://www.naco.org/resources/measuring-covid-19s-impact-americas-county-workforce>

National Association of Counties – **Comprehensive Analysis of COVID-19's Impact On County Finances and Implications for the U.S. Economy**, <https://www.naco.org/resources/comprehensive-analysis-covid-19s-impact-county-finances>

National Association of Counties – **Local Governments Lose Jobs as Slowdown in Recovery Begins**, <https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/sep-jobs-report>

National Governors Association – **10 Transformational Pathways for States**, <https://www.nga.org/futureworkforce/pathways/become-a-model-employer/>

Accenture – **Public Service for a New Era**, https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-127/Accenture-Public-Service-New-Era.pdf#zoom=40

Wall Street Journal, **U.S. States Face Biggest Cash Crisis Since the Great Depression**, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-states-face-biggest-cash-crisis-since-the-great-depression-11603910750?mod=searchresults_pos17&page=1

Appendix: Stakeholder Groups

Those participating in this effort include:

[Center for State and Local Government Excellence \(SLGE\)](#)
[American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees \(AFSCME\)](#)
[American Public Works Association \(APWA\)](#)
[Association of State and Territorial Health Officials \(ASTHO\)](#)
[Council of State Governments \(CSG\)](#)
[de Beaumont Foundation](#)
[Engaging Local Government Leaders \(ELGL\)](#)
[Government Finance Officers Association \(GFOA\)](#)
[ICMA-RC](#)
[International City/County Management Association \(ICMA\)](#)
[International Public Management Association for Human Resources \(IPMA-HR\)](#)
[Lead for America](#)
[National Association of Counties \(NACo\)](#)
[National Association of State Personnel Executives \(NASPE\)](#)
[National Conference of State Legislatures \(NCSL\)](#)
[National Forum for Black Public Administrators \(NFBPA\)](#)
[National Governors Association \(NGA\)](#)
[National League of Cities \(NLC\)](#)