

JOBS WITH PURPOSE

GEORGIA MUNICIPAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND PLAYBOOK 2022



 Carl Vinson
Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



JOB WITH PURPOSE

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CITY HALL

GMA MUNICIPAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Thank you to the members of the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) Municipal Workforce Development Advisory Council for providing leadership on the Jobs with Purpose initiative.

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Martha Venn, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University System of Georgia

Trevor Welcher, Recreation and Leisure Services Director, Thomson–McDuffie County

Cindy West, Director of Finance, Statesboro

GMA Board of Directors,

On behalf of the members of the GMA's Municipal Workforce Development Task Force and the Georgia City Solutions (GCS) Board of Directors, we're pleased to present this report to the GMA Board of Directors. Funded by GCS and overseen by the Advisory Council, the Jobs With Purpose: Municipal Workforce Development Initiative report provides a framework for GMA, GCS, cities and other partners to address the workforce needs of Georgia's cities and towns.

This report is the culmination of a yearlong effort that began with a needs assessment survey, followed by the development of specific strategies to address identified gaps, all to ensure that Georgia's cities have a sustainable and high-quality workforce.

This report contains strategies that GMA and GCS can undertake to assist cities as they address their workforce challenges. It also contains strategies that cities can implement in the areas of employee recruitment, employ retention, pay and benefits, and planning and partnerships.

In the six years since GMA began its municipal workforce journey, it has added two workforce-related courses to the association's training program and offered numerous sessions on workforce issues during the GMA Annual Convention. With Mopdog Creative + Strategy, the association developed the Starts With Me! job recruitment resources for member cities. GCS is now committed to supporting GMA and cities on this pressing issue as municipal workforce development is a primary area of focus.

We would like to thank Brian Wallace, Director of Strategic Issues, for his work as staff coordinator for the Advisory Council. He was supported by Bill Thornton, Deputy Executive Director; Kay Love, GCS Managing Director; Pam Helton, Director of Member Services; Terrell Jacobs, Member Services Consultant, and Stan Brown, Member Services Consultant. Our partner, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, provided outstanding research, project facilitation, and report development.

Sincerely,



Shelly Berryhill, Chair
Municipal Workforce Development
Advisory Council
Hawkinsville Commissioner



Kirby A. Thompson, Chair
Georgia City Solutions Board
Retired Senior Vice President,
Community and Government Affairs, Truist



INTRODUCTION

Georgia's 537 municipal governments perform numerous functions to enable and support a high quality-of-life and a healthy local economy. Cities are a vital part of the state's economic and social fabric as they contain 44% of the state's population and nearly 70% of all jobs. The services cities provide, such as police and fire protection, community development, sanitation, and water/sewer, electric, and gas utilities benefit both their residents and businesses. Delivering these municipal services requires a large number of trained professionals with a wide variety of skills, training, and educational preparation. Georgia's cities, like the economy as a whole, are currently facing several workforce challenges, including an aging workforce, record low unemployment, and a declining number of qualified applicants.

Over the past six years, GMA has focused on proactively addressing the current and future workforce development needs of its member cities. In 2016 and 2017, a Municipal Workforce Development Taskforce was formed to study the municipal workforce landscape, identify potential solutions, and provide an initial assessment of workforce challenges and needs facing Georgia's cities. Numerous strategies and investments came out of the initial taskforce, including a new workforce development training course and a succession-planning training course for elected officials, a workforce development toolbox on the GMA website, and the Starts with Me! marketing campaign developed for cities to promote career opportunities.

With the growing workforce challenges facing municipalities in Georgia and the need to continually invest in workforce development, GMA and its nonprofit, Georgia City Solutions (GCS), launched the Jobs with Purpose initiative in 2021. Along with the leadership of the Municipal Workforce Development Advisory Council, GMA and GCS partnered with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia to conduct a municipal government workforce needs assessment and to use the results to guide the development of a workforce strategy for GMA, GCS, and Georgia cities. This report both serves as a summary of the work to date and also provides a roadmap for GMA, GCS, and cities to proactively address their workforce needs through investment, planning, and strategy implementation.



JOBS WITH PURPOSE PROJECT OVERVIEW

PHASE 1 NEEDS ASSESSMENT | JUNE 2021–DECEMBER 2021

- ✓ Survey of municipal government human resources professionals
- ✓ Review of prior research and national data
- ✓ Interviews and listening session with municipal government stakeholders

PHASE 2 STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT | JANUARY 2022–JUNE 2022

- ✓ Research best practices for municipal workforce strategies
- ✓ Municipal Workforce Development Advisory Council reviews needs assessment data to identify potential strategies and investment opportunities
- ✓ Develop the GMA and GCS strategy and playbook
- ✓ Presentation of final report to GMA Board of Directors

NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

To develop the most relevant and useful municipal workforce strategy possible, GMA and GCS first invested in an in-depth statewide needs assessment to collect relevant data. The needs assessment, in the form of an electronic survey, was sent to a human resources point of contact for every municipality in Georgia. Respondents were given several weeks during the summer of 2021 to provide information about their current and future workforce needs as well as their current efforts to recruit and retain employees. Out of the 528 surveys sent, 200 municipalities responded. These responses came from cities of various sizes and covered every region in the state. These data were then analyzed for trends and themes. Below are four key takeaways that informed the final workforce strategy.

To access the full needs assessment report and see more detailed data, please visit: <https://gacities.com/workforceneeds>

KEY TAKEAWAY 1

While municipality size and job function influence the difficulty of recruiting employees, over 85% of cities reported challenges attracting applicants. Despite these challenges, most cities have continued to use traditional recruitment efforts rather than investing in more intentional strategies.

TOP 3 MOST COMMON STRATEGIES



TOP 3 LEAST COMMON STRATEGIES

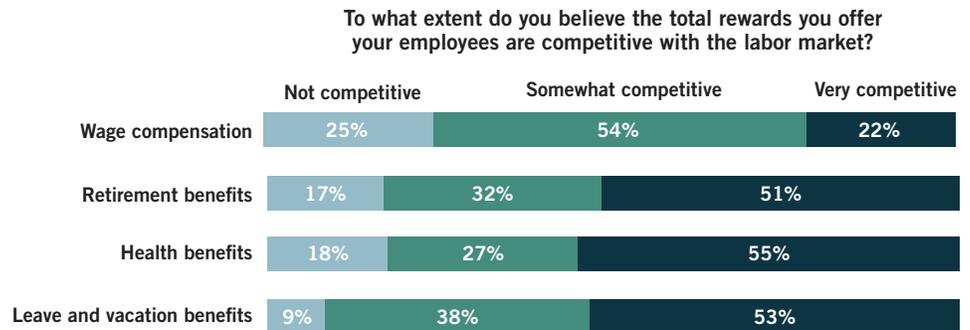


KEY TAKEAWAY 2

The 2020 turnover rate for Georgia's municipal workforce was significantly lower than the national average, but cities still need to support existing employees and consider ways to grow their own internal talent for promotion to retain them in the long run.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3

Georgia municipalities tend to offer better benefits than their private-sector counterparts, but they often struggle to compete on wages.



KEY TAKEAWAY 4

Few cities are undertaking intentional planning around workforce, succession, or diversity, equity, and inclusion. These strategic actions can be hard to make time for but are critical in advancing the organization and the long-term success of the city.

JOBS WITH PURPOSE STRATEGY

STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The needs assessment process identified several potential focal areas for addressing workforce challenges and leveraging opportunities for advancing workforce development efforts. Members of the Municipal Workforce Development Advisory Council analyzed the needs assessment data and prioritized the top items they felt would make substantive progress in workforce development.

Council members identified two tracks for addressing the needs assessment findings: (1) the development of statewide partnerships, resources, and pilot funding opportunities by GMA and GCS, and (2) potential action items for cities organized into four strategy areas.



Employee
Recruitment



Employee
Retention



Pay and
Benefits



Planning and
Strategic
Partnerships



To access additional GMA Workforce Development resources, including the talent management library and toolbox, please visit <https://gacities.com/workforcedevelopment>

GMA AND GCS ACTIONS TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS OF CITIES

GMA and GCS will undertake a variety of statewide strategies and investments to help Georgia's municipalities achieve their goal of recruiting and retaining the workforce required to meet their current and future needs. While each Georgia municipality will have to develop and implement talent solutions that fit its own distinct needs, there are several cross-cutting workforce development strategies and investments that no single city could likely undertake on its own. These investments demonstrate the long-term commitment of GMA and GCS to municipal workforce development.

✓ **Develop tools and resources to promote public service careers.**

The strategy development process identified that enhanced marketing and outreach efforts will be critical to attracting more talented individuals to municipal government careers. In light of that finding, GMA and GCS will create marketing and outreach tools, templates, and resources that cities can use to promote public service career opportunities. This effort will build on the Starts With Me! campaign launched several years ago.

✓ **Coordinate with local government professional associations around workforce development.**

Workforce development requires many partners. Professional associations, such as the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police and the Georgia Association of Water Professionals, provide a variety of services and resources to their members, many of whom are local government employees. Each of these professional associations has unique expertise and programs to serve its constituency. GMA and GCS will coordinate with the various associations that serve municipal government employees to align strategies, facilitate information sharing, and identify opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships.

✓ **Offer grants to cities for consulting and other supportive services to assist with municipal workforce development efforts, as identified by the municipal workforce strategy.**

Georgia City Solutions (GCS), a GMA nonprofit, will create funding opportunities to support needed workforce assessment and consulting services to aid Georgia cities in implementing playbook strategy items. The hallmark of an effective municipal workforce development effort is the creation of a targeted municipal workforce strategy that serves as the roadmap for addressing talent issues in the city. These funding opportunities will be linked to the specific action items identified in the municipality's strategy document.

✓ **Develop and maintain statewide strategic workforce partnerships with external stakeholders.**

Georgia has a strong network of statewide partners dedicated to preparing the state's residents to enter a variety of in-demand occupations and industries. These statewide partners include the Georgia Department of Education, the Technical College System of Georgia, the University System of Georgia, and the Georgia College and Career Academy Network. GMA and GCS will develop and maintain effective partnerships with key workforce development organizations in the state to ensure that educational programs align to municipal workforce needs and that these organizations promote municipal careers.

✓ **Convene educational sessions for elected officials and city staff related to municipal workforce development.**

Workforce development will continue to be a top issue and focus area for both elected officials and city staff. To that end, GMA and GCS will convene regular education and training events to ensure that elected and appointed officials have the latest data, strategies, and tools to lead workforce development efforts. The topics discussed during these events will be informed by the needs assessment data and ongoing feedback from stakeholders.

✓ **Serve as the state's municipal workforce development convener by disseminating best practices, hosting events, and helping to share knowledge among partner organizations.**

The success of this municipal workforce development effort will require a lead organization to provide ongoing support, knowledge dissemination, and outreach activities. GMA and GCS will serve as the municipal workforce development convener for Georgia's cities. This role will involve convening a network of interested municipalities and partners committed to the shared goal of advancing municipal workforce development efforts.

✓ **Develop a talent management library and toolbox.**

To help implement the strategies identified in this playbook, GMA and GCS will develop a talent management resource library and toolbox that will be hosted on their website. The policies, forms, case studies, links, and other resources will be organized into strategy areas and updated as resources are developed or revised.



Employee Recruitment

Recruitment for municipal jobs is most effective when it is targeted and intentional. For municipalities to attract quality candidates, job seekers must be familiar with what government work looks like and the benefits that come along with it. Education on what working for a municipality is like is an important factor for future recruitment for these positions. If a student or individual looking to enter/re-enter the workforce is unaware of what skills and qualifications are required for a city clerk or water plant operator, for example, it is unlikely they will seek those jobs out. It is important to shape the narrative around local government positions so students and citizens have a better understanding of these jobs, the career ladder they offer, and the impact they can make on their community.

Enhance recruitment efforts through a more formalized marketing and outreach program.

One employee recruitment strategy is to adopt a more formalized process to market open positions and build interest in local government positions. Formalizing a recruitment strategy means taking stock of how municipal job opportunities are being promoted and identifying opportunities to expand avenues of recruitment, such as in high schools, job training centers, and technical colleges. In addition, cities should ensure that their marketing efforts are on message and easily accessible.

Engage in intentional educational outreach to schools, colleges, and universities to promote careers and recruit candidates.

The state of Georgia is home to a strong network of K-12 and postsecondary institutions that prepare individuals to either enter or re-enter the workforce. These educational institutions are producing talented employees each year; however, the relationship between these institutions and municipal governments is often not fully formed. Developing a partnership between local governments and local schools, or strengthening an existing partnership, is a key opportunity for municipalities to create a pipeline to their open positions. These relationships will allow for better outreach and exposure of job openings and establish a clear path of how to get involved in government work. To start, municipalities should connect with points of contact at their secondary and postsecondary education partners to explore partnership opportunities. (A listing is available on the GMA talent management resource library and toolbox.)

Create opportunities for secondary and postsecondary teachers to complete externships in municipal government departments.

Exposure to potential careers and career paths is a significant factor when students decide what they want to do. If job seekers are not familiar with local government jobs, the variety of positions available within a municipality, or the benefits that come with the job, they are not likely to go into these careers. Creating an externship program for local secondary and postsecondary teachers will allow them to learn directly from municipal government departments and bring that knowledge back to their classrooms. With a deeper understanding of the skills needed, potential jobs available, and daily responsibilities, teachers can educate their students on the reality of these positions.

HIGHLIGHT: CITY OF STATESBORO HIGH SCHOOL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Statesboro Youth Connect (SYC) summer program is teaching students what careers in government can look like. In a five-week pre-professional program, high schoolers that live within Statesboro city limits, grades 10–12, begin with an orientation of the departments and an overview of what employees do. Participants are then able to choose a city department that they would like to continue learning more about over the course of the program. Students then report Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, earning a weekly stipend and getting an idea of career opportunities available. The goal of SYC is for students to become engaged, lifelong learners in the community. The program focuses on core concepts of education, employment, civic responsibility, leadership, and diversity.





Employee Retention

Turnover can cost municipalities significant time and money. Finding ways to retain employees in their current role or elsewhere in the city is an important part of municipal workforce development. Not only does retention save a municipality money through reduced recruitment and onboarding costs, but existing employees are likely to provide a higher level of service, be more effective in their role, and navigate the organization more efficiently. These additional benefits come from the fact that existing employees already understand the unique needs of the community and possess significant knowledge of city operations. They are also already steeped in the organization's culture and have ties to the community. For these and other reasons, cities should consider utilizing the following retention strategies to aid in their municipal workforce efforts.

Develop and implement an internal communication strategy.

Employee engagement is linked with employee retention. One way to engage employees is launching an internal communication strategy. Communication would likely vary throughout the year, covering topics such as employee recognition, organizational updates, upcoming events, and professional development opportunities. It can also serve as a way to share information about departments or roles across the organization and give insight into the depth and breadth of the municipal workforce. Internal communication formats include traditional options such as weekly emails and newsletters or more unique formats such as a podcast and video series. Consider asking employees what format they would prefer.

Create an employee cross-training program.

The workers that a municipal government is seeking to recruit to fill vacant positions are often already employed in the organization. One effective strategy to grow the city workforce is through an employee cross-training program, where current employees have opportunities to learn other responsibilities and roles throughout the municipal government. This helps to build employee skills, share knowledge, and aid in career growth. This program can also function as a leadership development and skill development opportunity for the trainers and mentors as this is a chance to prepare those employees for supervisory roles or to temporarily backfill critical positions.

Develop and support career pathways to aid employee growth.

The development of career pathways and policies to support growth and development opportunities for employees within the city is another effective retention strategy. This helps the employee progress within their current job field (i.e., elevating a permitting and zoning technician to permitting and zoning coordinator) and also into similar roles across the organization (department head to assistant city manager). Developing career pathways requires intentional professional development, job shadowing, and mentoring opportunities. It also requires developing a career pathway structure with clear requirements, expectations, and policies outlined for employee growth and promotion.

Train and mentor supervisors.

An effective supervisor plays a critical role in the morale, productivity, and long-term retention of employees in a municipal government. Being a supervisor is a challenging job, and they often have received little formal leadership, management, or employee development training and coaching. To enhance employee retention and the development of all employees, supervisors in cities may need professional development, coaching, and ongoing mentorship to strengthen their supervisory and leadership skills. While the Certified Public Manager program provided by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government and other similar programs offer valuable training to individuals, they can be time-intensive and require quite a commitment from the city and the employee. There is a need for shorter term training to help new and existing supervisors with their day-to-day supervisory role.

HIGHLIGHT: DOUGLASVILLE PROMOTING WITHIN POLICY AND BEST PRACTICE TO GROW THEIR OWN

The City of Douglasville is prioritizing their existing employees with its Promoting Within Policy and best practice, which allows internal candidates the first shot at newly posted positions within the municipal government. When a position opens up in Douglasville, internal candidates are given a chance to apply and interview for the job before it is posted publicly. If there are no interested internal candidates or none of the existing employees are a good fit for the job, then the search process continues on as normal. This long-standing policy, written into the city's employee handbook, is used as a way to promote development and retention of the existing 300 city employees. In 2020, approximately 28 employees were promoted through this best practice. Another 8 and 16 were promoted in 2021 and the first half of 2022, respectively.





Pay and Benefits

Employers everywhere are facing the pressures of rising wages and additional benefits. While these pressures may have existed prior to COVID-19, the pandemic has exacerbated the issue. Pay in the public sector is often thought of as being lower than in the private sector, but the total value of pay and benefits in municipal positions is in fact highly competitive. Cities employ people with many different levels of experience and education, and it is important that they effectively communicate the compensation and full benefits package to potential employees.

Regularly assess pay and benefits.

Employee total compensation (pay + benefits) is a critical factor in both recruiting new employees and retaining existing employees. To promote open positions or public service careers, municipalities should regularly assess their pay and benefits offerings and policies. A wage and benefit assessment can take many forms, including conducting classification and compensation studies, analyzing turnover data to identify trends or high-turnover occupations, and implementing policies that promote city government as a top place to work. Currently, GMA is creating a talent management library and toolbox that could be valuable in such an assessment process.

Conduct a regional benchmarking study for high-turnover jobs.

Like other sectors, municipal governments have certain occupations that see higher levels of turnover than others. Competition from other governments or the private sector has helped to create this environment. To better understand and combat some of this turnover, cities could conduct a market analysis of high-turnover positions. A regional benchmarking study for these jobs would allow for better comparison to market wages for like positions in the region. Such a study could be conducted by current human resources or city manager's office employees.

Implement a financial literacy program for staff members.

Research shows that financial literacy programs benefit both the employee and the employing organization.¹ These programs focus on common personal finance topics, like budgeting, funding education for children, saving for retirement, and utilizing benefits fully. Many financial literacy programs and resources are available, some of which are no- or low-cost from community partners and local financial institutions. A financial literacy program could be added into an employee benefits program or included as a supplemental resource for cities.

Enhance communication of the total value of benefits.

The data from the Jobs with Purpose Needs Assessment showed that job benefits offered by municipal governments—especially retirement, paid time off, and health insurance—are highly competitive in today's job market. An effective strategy for cities to increase retention is to communicate the total value of benefits (pay + benefits) they are investing in their employees. Employees tend to undervalue benefits, especially when comparing them to private-sector opportunities that may pay a higher salary rate but include fewer added benefits. There are several ways to improve the communication of the true value of benefits, such as by providing total compensation + benefits statements, creating benefit valuation calculators for employees, working with employees to fully understand and utilize provided benefits, and ensuring this information is part of the recruitment and onboarding process.

1. Bannon, Shele, Kelly Ford, and Linda Meltzer. "Financial literacy programs in the workplace." *The CPA Journal* 84, no. 9 (2014): 67.



Earnings Statement

Earnings		Rate	Hours	This Period	Year-to
Reg Salary					

Deductions		This Period	Total
Taxes		127.07	2,237





Planning and Strategic Partnerships

Successful workforce development initiatives require many partners and a long-term plan to guide strategy implementation. The workforce needs, available resources, and top challenges are unique to each city. It is critical that each city create its own municipal workforce strategy that serves as a roadmap for solving its distinct challenges. The locally developed roadmap can adopt items found in this playbook and other strategies that link to the specific identified needs.

Develop a municipal workforce needs assessment and action plan.

The cornerstone of a municipal government's workforce development strategy is a needs assessment and action plan. This data- and stakeholder-driven process is designed to understand the workforce and skill needs required today and over the next five years for the city. The results of the needs assessment will serve as a roadmap to inform an action plan that will detail training, recruitment, succession planning, and partnership needs in the coming years. The needs assessment and action plan should be regularly assessed and updated based on changing needs and as identified tasks are completed.

Regularly engage with local workforce partners.

Effective workforce development efforts require the work and contributions of many partners, including school systems, college and career academies, and local postsecondary institutions. It is important to regularly engage and work with workforce development partners so they understand current workforce needs, can help co-design solutions for top workforce challenges, and foster a long-term productive partnership. Such efforts will likely include both formal partner meetings and informal engagement opportunities, such as site visits, guest speakers in classrooms, and tours of government operations for teachers, students, and leaders.

Develop a succession plan.

Leadership transitions are always challenging for any organization. One best practice for navigating this ongoing need is by advance planning and strategically preparing for transitions through succession planning. The needs identified in the succession planning process should be linked to professional development and municipal workforce action plans. Municipal governments should consider adopting GMA resources for succession planning, including a course offered in the Harold F. Holtz Municipal Training Institute training program and consulting services provided by GMA member services consultants.

HIGHLIGHT: WHAT IS A MUNICIPAL WORKFORCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN?

Workforce development is a large undertaking for Georgia's cities. Before launching new programs, investments, and policies, it critical that city leaders have a clear understanding of the needs and potential strategies that will best address those needs. The planning process is broken down into two pieces. The municipal workforce needs assessment uses human resources data and stakeholder expertise to understand the current and future occupational and skill needs for the organization. City leaders will then use the results of the needs assessment to design strategies and investments to close current and projected gaps. The action plan serves as the roadmap and policy document for proactively addressing the workforce needs of the city over several years.



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Jobs with Purpose Municipal Workforce Needs Assessment and Strategy project continues the Georgia Municipal Association's long-term focus on and investment in helping Georgia cities proactively address their workforce development needs. The Jobs with Purpose Initiative needs assessment captured a snapshot of current workforce needs, including challenges, opportunities, and areas requiring further attention. Based on this needs assessment, the Municipal Workforce Development Advisory Council identified areas for GMA and GCS to invest in workforce development and also created a playbook of top strategies for addressing municipal workforce needs.

Workforce development is ultimately the responsibility of a city's elected officials and professional staff. While progress requires much work at the city level, GMA and GCS stand ready to partner with local leaders to provide resources, best practices, tools, and strategic guidance to bolster efforts. GCS is working with private-sector and philanthropic partners to secure funding to help seed the implementation of action items detailed in the playbook. Effective workforce development initiatives do not happen overnight and require a long-term commitment by local government leaders and partner organizations.

NEXT STEPS FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERS

- ✓ Convene a group of leaders to develop a workforce needs assessment.
- ✓ Use the results of the needs assessment to develop action items, drawing from both action items in the playbook and those uniquely suited to identified needs.
- ✓ Form or strengthen partnerships with educational partners such as K-12 school districts and nearby Technical College System of Georgia and University System of Georgia institutions.
- ✓ Begin implementation of the action items based on the needs assessment results. Continue to monitor the municipality's workforce trends and adjust the strategy as needed.



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