



# Talent Development Strategies

Lisa Bergerson, Principal Attorney at EngageHR Law, Former HR Director, City of Pewaukee

Talent development is an important factor in addressing both economic growth and workforce recruitment. Lack of an adequately trained workforce in the community hinders economic growth and development. Employers must also address the problem of baby boomer retirements and the growing shortage of individuals pursuing public sector careers in professions such as firefighting, assessing, building inspection, civil engineering, and utilities operation. Municipalities can assist human capital development efforts to improve their community's economic position and their internal talent pool. This article explores some ideas.

## Invest in Training and Education on a Community-Wide Basis

Economic progress depends in part on the ability of the workforce to adapt to new work and new technologies as the production of goods and delivery of services evolve. As the quality of the workforce improves, so does the quality of the economy.<sup>1</sup> Training and educating the workforce is key to meeting these new and changing demands.<sup>2</sup>

Several ideas exist on ways municipalities can help upgrade the skill set of the existing community workforce. While a detailed examination of strategies is beyond this article, it is worth noting

here that existing models incorporate key elements that often include:

- education of stakeholders,
- public service announcements,
- training of economic development staff on the importance of talent advancement, and
- partnerships with local and regional businesses, educational institutions, chambers of commerce, and other municipalities.

These partnerships and tools can assist in the expansion of a local talent pool. Successful examples are provided in the list of resources.<sup>3</sup>

## Adopt New Methods to Grow and Attract Talent

With a diminished supply of existing talent to meet internal staffing needs, employers must rethink their recruitment methods. Some ideas include:

1. Student Engagement. Employers can develop programs with students at the high school and college levels to create enthusiasm for public sector careers and introduce students to their particular municipality (*see Lake Country Fire and Rescue case study*). High school and/or college interns are an excellent source of talent.

Internships can include a rotation throughout the organization for a summer to help students identify a career in public service. Using students who attend school in the area has the added advantage of continuing these internships into the school year.

2. Reorient Approaches to Hiring. An overreliance on seeking candidates with directly related public sector experience is a stumbling block to hiring during a labor shortage. Hiring criteria can be revised to seek candidates who are talented, teachable, and possess the required aptitude for the position, and who then develop through on-the-job training.
3. Shared Services. Sharing staff or services with surrounding communities is another solution to labor shortages. There are successful examples of shared services in many public sector professions such as police, fire, building inspection, public works, and recreation.<sup>4</sup>
4. Cross-Train Existing Staff. One of the most overlooked ways of meeting talent needs is to train staff in multiple functions within the same department or between departments. For example, laborers can be cross-trained to perform functions in parks, streets, and utilities. Career paths are developed

for qualified employees and incentives offered to attain certifications and schooling in fields where labor shortages exist.

5. Cultivate Your Brand. Develop a recruitment/marketing campaign around the meaningful and stable employment offered in public sector careers.<sup>5</sup>
6. Expand Recruitment Resources. Use of online platforms such as Indeed, LinkedIn, Glassdoor, ZipRecruiter, and Handshake are necessary components of recruitment today as these are the primary sources candidates use in their job searches.

### **Case Study: Lake Country Fire & Rescue**

Lake Country Fire & Rescue (LCFR) is developing talent in a profession that is short-staffed statewide, and their model addresses the advancement of both community and internal talent. When LCFR Chief Matt Fennig took his first firefighter hiring exam 23 years ago, he tested with almost 200 other candidates. Today, an entry level vacancy might average 15 applications.

LCFR realized that the future of the firefighting/emergency medical profession had to develop at the high school level. They began initially by teaching Intro to Firefighting workshops

to freshman and sophomore students at Kettle Moraine High School.

When Kettle Moraine started a charter school known as HS2 (High School of Health Sciences)<sup>6</sup> to equip students interested in medical professions, LCFR seized the opportunity to partner with the school. Deputy Chief Nick Heltemes and then Fire Chief Kevin Keith developed a pilot within HS2 where students trained in emergency medical responder (EMR) protocols. Chief Fennig states that the pilot was “wildly successful” in terms of participation rate and enthusiasm, so the department rolled out the next phase by teaching emergency medical technician (EMT) protocols to the students and the program “really took off from there.”

Today, LCFR partners with HS2 and Arrowhead High School to provide students a two-year training program. Year one for juniors teaches EMR and the next year seniors learn EMT. They run the programs at LCFR’s training center, which is managed by Division Chief and Training Coordinator Tanya Reynen. Students go onsite at the training center for different days of the week for a couple of hours each day. It is a part of their normal class schedule and they get credit for attending.

Has the program grown internal talent? “It absolutely has,” says Chief Fennig,

“we are finally seeing the fruits of that labor.” For example, the department recently made offers for full-time positions to two students who started in the Intro to Firefighting workshops as freshmen and sophomores, progressed through the EMR and EMT programs as juniors and seniors, and then entered the resident program at LCFR where they trained at the department and the department covered the cost of their technical college schooling, where they recently completed paramedic training.

LCFR also develops community-based talent through its summer EMT training program, which is offered as a 12-week full-time course to the community. Participants are primarily firefighters advancing their careers and college students majoring in medical fields who commit to the aggressive schedule to become an EMT during the summer break.

### **Conclusion**

The advancement of talent requires local governments to be creative and to explore avenues not previously needed. There are many effective talent strategies available to assist local government leaders to improve how they attract and develop talent, both internally and community-wide.

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1. *Talent-Driven Economic Development*, Joseph Parilla and Sifan Liu, Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings (October 2019) p. 7 (“[T]here is a significant upside to recalibrating the nation’s local and state economic development system to train its sights on talent development and deployment rather than its current overwhelming focus of business attraction and marketing....”); *Id.* at p. 8 (“Research has always shown that local economies develop only if their people do first....”).
2. *Id.* at p. 3 (“Educational attainment—the core, albeit imperfect, metric for gauging knowledge and skills—is one of the best predictors of economic success for an individual, organization, or community.”).
3. *Talent Drives Prosperity: Transitioning to a Talent Development System for the Metro Denver Region*, Thomas P. Miller and Associates (December 2009)(regional talent development system involving partnerships between local employers, educational and training institutions, and economic and workforce development stakeholders for “talent supply chain management”) *see also* Ratliff, Arnosti, & Berube, *How States Can Support Shared Prosperity by Promoting Human Capital Development*, Shared Prosperity Partnership (2020) ([sharedprosperitypartnership.org](http://sharedprosperitypartnership.org)).

4. *Municipal Shared Service and Consolidation Handbook: A Practical Guide to a Complex Challenge*, Edmund M. Henschel (2019).
5. Branding resources and ideas:
  - a. <https://www.westalliswi.gov/1538/Branding-FAQ>
  - b. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/employer-branding-public-sector-dave-griffin/>
  - c. <https://www.recruitingbrief.com/employer-branding/government/>
  - d. <https://icma.org/documents/branding-your-borough>
6. <https://www.kmsd.edu/hs2>