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# Building a Representative Workforce: How We Can Help Our Gateway Cities Recruit and Retrain Employees Reflective of Their Communities

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**Building a Representative Workforce: How we can help our Gateway Cities  
recruit and retain employees reflective of their communities.**

Jessica Feldman and Drew Russo

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## BUILDING A REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE

### **Abstract**

The authors make a proactive case that Massachusetts Gateway Cities would be well-served to adopt new policies and procedures to meet the needs of a rapidly diversifying twenty-first century workforce. Through their comprehensive research, they identify unnecessary barriers to employment, such as inflexible degree requirements, which pose an obstacle to building municipal workforces reflective of the populations they serve. They propose a critical re-thinking of recruitment and retention strategies, including revised hiring criteria, enhancing workplace culture, creating culturally competent programming, dynamic change management initiatives, and offering opportunities for continuous education in order to recruit and retain employees that represent the cultural and generational diversity of these communities.

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### I. Introduction

The last several years have tested the spirits, energy, and health of all in the global community. Our shared encounter with the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the way we live, work, play, and function as a multicultural society.

Long-standing inequities were amplified, be it through a lack of access to healthcare for those most in need, the considerable burden carried by those deemed essential in the retail and service industry who are largely persons of color struggling to meet day-to-day expenses without the benefit of working remotely, and the painful excess of systemic racism in our criminal justice system laid bare by the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

This is compounded by the high resignation rates experienced in the pandemic's midst, particularly by mid-career employees, many of whom classify as "Millennial," the generation born between 1981-2000, for which we both qualify (BLS, 2022). According to an insight piece published by Deloitte, the percentage of US adults who cited their career as a source of meaning in their lives has declined from 24% to 17% since 2017 (Datar et al., 2022). In a more recent study, 47% of respondents said they are more likely to put family and personal life over work than they were before the pandemic, sentiments which likely contributed to the high resignation rates (Datar et al., 2022).

Together, as members of the Millennial generation, we bring over two decades of work experience in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Having worked in the Human Resources (HR) and Marketing and Business Development sectors, we have both experienced firsthand the tremendous challenges posed by COVID-19 and its impacts on the health and well-being of the workforce, specifically amongst those who are in their middle or their careers. The pandemic changed the way that many millennials viewed their current jobs—it allowed them an opportunity

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to stop “grinding,” as our generation has been known to do, and reevaluate what is important to them and what they should be receiving from their jobs.

Originally, our individual project scopes were more limited and research-based, but through the process of combining our research and consolidating our efforts, the narrower paths were broadened and transformed into a blueprint that can help organizations and companies achieve multiple goals in service of creating a more representative employee pool.

It is important to reflect on how we got here and what leads us to this broader initiative. One author was challenged by the true necessity of a college degree for most public sector jobs and whether that was a deterrent for otherwise qualified citizens, especially persons of color, who sought access to municipal employment. As we will explore, this has been a theme encountered in their work as municipal Human Resources director.

The other focused on the growing need for nonprofit services but the lack of demand for and benefits of jobs in that sector by those who classify as Millennial and the emerging Generation Z (Gen Z), or those born after 2001 who will dominate our workforces over the next ten years. Both authors have experienced these challenges, with one bringing forth the added perspective of having transitioned from the nonprofit to public sectors.

Through our research process, it became clear to us that our public and nonprofit sector workforces need creative solutions to increase both cultural and generational diversity in their workforces and strategies to achieve retention in fields with often less than competitive pay and high rates of burnout.

Wade McKinney, a city manager in Indian Wells, California summed up the benefits of diversity in the municipal government workforce by stating,

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“Shared experiences and challenges faced by colleagues can increase empathy and inform future local government decisions. Moving forward, the team members can work together to address multiple aspects of a single issue to mitigate potential future municipal or community problems.” (McKinney, 2018).

Ultimately, we focused our efforts on how to increase that cultural and generational diversity to create a more representative, empathetic, community-minded workforce and offer strategies for diverse municipalities, such as Massachusetts Gateway Cities, to recruit and retain these employees. Established by Massachusetts law, Gateway Cities have populations greater than 35,000 and less than 250,000 with median incomes and higher education rates below the state average. These communities historically have higher poverty rates, lesser economic mobility, more racial and cultural diversity (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2022).

Following a comprehensive literature review and exploration of research methods, we offer these communities an outline for how they can utilize tools already at their disposal and explore cost effective methods for increasing the cultural and generational diversity of their workforces. Despite our narrow focus on municipalities within Massachusetts Gateway Cities, we believe these recommendations we have set forth based on our research apply to both the nonprofit sector in such critical need of new strategies in the recruitment and retention areas, and the private sector for companies looking to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) processes and procedures to recruit and retain a more representative workforce.

These recommendations include evaluation metrics that emphasize “soft skills,” partnerships with educational institutions, culturally competent programming opportunities, training initiatives aimed at overall cultural change for managers and new employees and

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bringing community voices into the hiring process to amplify the citizen's perspective in building a local government workforce that truly represents them.

We are confident that we are led by our research. It confirmed certain assumptions, challenged others, and sent us off in new directions than we had initially planned, as you will discover, but ultimately grounds us in the reality that the challenge of building a culturally and generationally representative workforce is a great one, but one that it is critical for our local governments to pursue with equity, transparency, openness, and accountability.

### **II. Literature Review**

Municipalities across the country aim to recruit and retain their workforce in an economic environment where people are increasingly seeking the services provided by municipalities, yet there is not enough supply to meet the demand from a staffing perspective. While many prospective employees, both young and diverse, are drawn to jobs within their respective communities, certain job requirements exist that create barriers to entry for otherwise qualified candidates who are representative of the cities' populations.

In an effort for Gateway cities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to continue to build and diversify their workforces so they are reflective of the community at-large, leaders and human resource professionals in these communities are being challenged to devise innovative approaches and better practices for achieving greater diversity within their respective municipal workforces. According to the 2020 US census, 66% of Lynn's population identifies as being persons of color but only 25% of Lynn employees working in City Hall identify similarly. Lowell, another Gateway City in Massachusetts, is similar with 59.4% of its population identifying as non-white according to the 2020 US census, but only 34% of City of Lowell employees identify as non-white (Zippia, 2023). This imbalance has been the source of

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considerable conversations within the local community, and across the commonwealth, especially amongst human resource professionals.

A large part of remedying the issue involves exploring ways to expand outreach to communities of color and in particular recruit for professional and leadership positions in the municipality, which are higher earning. Most of those positions have required or strongly preferred a person possessing a bachelor's degree or higher, and Lynn, for example, requires employee residency with very few exceptions and had less than 19% of the population achieving that level of educational attainment per the Census Bureau. The city of Lowell had 27% of the population having achieved a bachelor's degree or higher, according to the 2022 American Community Survey (Lowell Massachusetts Education Data, 2022). These statistics from Lynn and Lowell are concerning in the context of the current administration's effort to promote greater diversity in hiring.

If the failure to attract and retain diverse professionals for public sector positions persists, these cities will suffer tremendously, as hiring and training staff on a perpetual basis is costly, and consistent turnover negatively impacts the morale and productivity of remaining employees. For public sector leaders and hiring managers to successfully recruit and retain diverse talent, organizations must work to develop a strategic framework to entice excellent candidates who best represent the people in their communities to join the organizations and grow within them.

There is a need to explore through research various methods to increase both employer and employee recruitment and retention in the public sector. Through our research, we aim to study the impact and necessity of undergraduate degree requirements for similar professional positions that could help Gateway Cities in Massachusetts expand their applicant pools and create more opportunities for citizens who may feel as if there is a barrier, due to current job

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requirement standards, to enter the city's employment pipeline. We intend to examine methods that have been used and evaluate their success, while also exploring new methods to potentially increase recruitment of diverse candidates. Our ultimate set of recommendations to hiring managers will be based on investigating underlying issues and systemic problems within organizations that prevent diverse candidates from being hired and/or from thriving within an organization. We have relied on an initial review of current trends and initiatives in both the public and private sector broadly that will assist in the long-term examination of Massachusetts Gateway Cities who are also looking to build a workforce reflective of their community populations.

### **Literature Review Components**

This review begins with a baseline assumption that other sectors are grappling with these questions just as Drew's colleagues in the municipal HR realm are. To examine, and if necessary, challenge, those assumptions, an extensive search was undertaken of articles from the mainstream media, academic journals, and trade publications. The recent scholarship and commentary on these questions has been considerable, and not surprising in consideration of the renewed conversation on racial justice and equity sparked by the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis during the spring of 2020. In personal professional experience, Drew has been challenged by a recent hiring process where a compelling candidate with considerable transferable skill was eliminated from further consideration because they lacked the "credibility" that a degree confers.

In narrowing down to a collection of articles, the objective was to ensure proper perspective between the public and private sectors, a variety of approaches to addressing the subject question, and provided a solid academic foundation for ongoing research. In addition to

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traditional searches via Google, the Clark University Goddard Library portal was helpful in determining articles for this review.

Additionally, in an attempt to develop recommendations for increasing retention of employees once hired, existing employment data must be examined to assess the growth trajectory of the nonprofit and public sector workforce and to determine what impacted employee satisfaction and retention. This data was primarily found in surveys and reports conducted by state committees, nonprofit organizations, state-run universities, or research institutions evaluating trends within the workforce. These surveys and reports that were found ranged from 2003 to 2021, and featured employment and compensation statistics, while they discussed trends across sectors in various states, including Massachusetts, Nevada, and North Carolina, among others.

### **Types of Published Documentation - Academic and Commercial**

The publications include mainstream media sources such as NPR (*“No College, No Problem. Some Employers Drop Degree Requirements to Diversify Staffs”* by Kirk Carapezza), Washington Post (*“The majority of Americans lack a college degree. Why do so many employers require one?”* by Byron Auguste), and the Wall Street Journal (*“Some CEOs Suggest Dropping Degree Requirements in Hiring”* by Chip Cutter); trade publications Government Executive (*“How Degree Discrimination Can Affect Feds’ Pay, by Lindy Kyzer*) Inside Higher Education (*“Skills over Degrees in Federal Hiring”* by Kery Murakami), The Nonprofit Quarterly (*“Nonprofit Employment Remains Below Pre-Pandemic Levels”* by S. Dubb), The NonProfit Times (*“Staff Retention a Major Problem for NPOs”*), and Route Fifty (*“Lack of Diversity in the Government Workforce Can Lead to Retention and Trust Issues”* by Andre Claudio); and the academic journal *Harvard Business Review* (*“The U.S. Education System Isn’t Giving Students*

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*What Employers Need” by Michael Hansen and “Nonprofits Need to Compete for Top Talent” by G. Chertavian).*

All included recent scholarship and reporting related to the ongoing debate over degree requirements, proposed methods of expanding hiring practices in order to emphasize an individual’s skills and make the evaluation process more holistic, and discussed the role that a broad range of educational institutions from undergraduate to vocational can play in preparing all workers for the challenges of a rapidly evolving global economy. The publications also featured interviews with industry experts and executives at high-performing nonprofits who share insights, trends, and strategies for success. Furthermore, the articles largely achieve consensus that American employers should look beyond the undergraduate degree requirement so often required for positions that could be filled with applicants that bring forth equivalent experience particularly in terms of life skills.

Scholarly publications, including dissertations examining the issues in the nonprofit workforce from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and Johns Hopkins University, a report produced by University of Massachusetts, Amherst in conjunction with the Massachusetts Council of Human Services Providers, Inc., a report conducted by New York University in conjunction with The Brookings Institution, and the findings of a HR survey conducted by Western Carolina University in partnership with the NC Center for Nonprofits were also sourced to comprise this Literature Review. These publications and reports span approximately 20 years, so they provide a historical view of employment issues and allow for a full analysis of any trends that have continued over the last two decades. The initial assumption was that all these publications would show similar trends with respect to employee satisfaction and retention, and therefore, come to similar conclusions.

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### **Investigation**

Byron Auguste, who served as Deputy Director of the National Economic Council under President Barack Obama, tells the story of how his father left a factory shipping clerk position in order to study computer programming for six months (Auguste, 2021). Emily Knowles followed a similar path. She was a school paraprofessional who attended a software boot camp because “her dream was to work in tech” (Carapezza, 2021). Auguste and Knowles’s stories are remarkably similar. Both lacked a college degree but had a desire to work in the technological sphere. Neither believed they would be able to achieve in that field, however, because they did not have the required educational attainment. What separates them is about fifty years. Mr. Auguste went on to a successful career as a computer programmer after taking that introductory course in 1971. Ms. Knowles, who is featured in Kirk Carapezza’s piece on an employer movement to drop degree requirements in order to diversify their staffs, now works for a Boston area digital operation whose CEO, Paris Wallace, felt that Ovia was “. . .missing out on a lot of talent by having what we saw as an arbitrary requirement for a lot of positions” (Carapezza, 2021).

Wallace was not alone in that assessment. Leaders across a broad spectrum, including Merck CEO Kenneth Frazier and former President Donald Trump, have begun to advocate for a loosening of degree requirements particularly for more entry-level positions. Frazier, who along with former IBM CEO Virginia Rometty, is the subject of Chip Cutter’s piece on CEOs embracing Wallace’s call to suspend degree requirements. Frazier and Rometty are taking the call a step further, launching a startup that looks to create one million new jobs for Black Americans over the next ten years (Cutter, 2021). The definition, however, of “entry-level positions” is interesting. Some include jobs for which a college degree always seemed to be a

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given, like in cloud programming, cybersecurity, and finance (Cutter, 2021). Frazier and Rometty are among those who believe that better training and workforce development practices can and should give opportunities to employees like Emily Knowles, who clearly demonstrate skills but lack the paper and “credibility” a degree provides. Especially in a country, where fewer than 40% percent meet that standard for “credibility” (Auguste, 2021).

Byron Auguste and Michael Hansen examine this further in their pieces for the Washington Post and Harvard Business Review, respectively. Auguste uses the example of his father as a launching point to examine inequities in hiring practices, particularly where degree attainment is concerned. Many hiring processes have become rote and the bachelor’s degree requirement inclusion is almost “habitually cut and pasted from one document to the next” (Auguste, 2021). He proposes that more emphasis be placed on empowering the 70 million American workers without bachelor’s degrees by focusing on STARs or those “skilled by alternative routes” such as service in the military or pursuing vocational education (Auguste, 2021). Interestingly, Hansen, the CEO of the educational technology firm Cengage, sounds an alarm on the challenges of rebuilding our workforce in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and specifically indicts the U.S. educational system for not properly preparing four-year degree recipients for actual skills in working in the real world. He goes on to criticize the country’s long standing “stigma” around vocational education, especially in light of skyrocketing educational costs that often price working families (and their students) out of higher education (Hansen, 2021). More often than not, the students’ excluded from higher education for financial reasons are from those communities so sorely underrepresented in our government workforces.

This is not to say, however, that educational degree requirements should be abandoned for all positions. As Mike Rigas, the interim director of the Office of Personnel Management

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during the Trump administration, pointed out when the former president signed an executive order loosening requirements on degrees for certain federal jobs there are some positions, like those in the healthcare or legal sector, for which credentials are clear (Murakami, 2020). A perspective echoed by Frazier, Rometty, and even Auguste, the strongest proponent for relaxing degree requirements. But Lindy Kyzer, in her examination on the compensation imbalance in the federal government due to degree attainment, does not necessarily propose to eliminate degree requirements but rather creating stronger pipelines for economically disadvantaged students, particularly those of color, to obtain the types of degrees they need in order to advance particularly in the national security sector (Kyzer, 2021). This is critical as the *2021 Clearance Jobs Compensation Report* shows a \$20,000 gap between the average compensation of a student with a high school diploma vs. one who received a bachelor's degree.

Another component to achieving greater diversity in the workforce is to enact strong diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Writing for *Route-Fifty*, Andre Claudio warns that underrepresentation can too often lead to employees of color and other projected classes including LGBTQ+ individuals leaving their workplace because they feel a greater sense of discrimination and lack of belonging (Claudio, 2021). This is reflected in lack of language access, appreciation of cultural traditions, and absence of representation in leadership positions. President Joe Biden's recent Executive Order of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility addresses these concerns through creating more equitable practices, more attention to representation throughout government agencies, and better training programs for employee cultural competence (Biden, 2021). Interestingly, the Biden executive order is silent on the degree requirement question but does call for a stronger pipeline between the Administration and historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic institutions etc. (Biden, 2021). But what it

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does not seem to do is to help more Americans like Emily Knowles who, because of a CEO's bold innovation, now holds a position that she "never thought would be possible."

In an effort to make the public sector workforce more representative of their respective communities, the ultimate goal of this research is to propose a set of recommendations for hiring managers to implement that reframes how they recruit, interview, and train their candidates. In order to formulate our proposed recommendations, we turned to the literature to look for trends and throughout the investigation, recurring themes appeared in the literature with respect to addressing employment issues. Whether mentioned by survey respondents, seasoned professionals, or scholars, consistent ideas for improvement to the hiring processes and procedures persisted in the literature. Common strategies that were repeatedly identified for attracting and retaining workers in the nonprofit and public sector were to increase salaries, hire individuals who have a connection to the community, cause, or have benefitted from the services directly; offer opportunities for professional development; offer flexible work schedule and other non-salary benefits to employees; and be creative with funding opportunities.

**Increase salaries.** There seems to be a debate in the literature as to whether increasing salaries alone attracts and retains employees, especially in the public and nonprofit sectors. For example, many millennials graduated college with a significant amount of student loan debt and need jobs that pay enough to alleviate that debt and still maintain cost of living expenses. It is frequently mentioned in industry articles and scholarly publications that the organization's mission is extremely important to young people seeking employment, but publications disagree when it comes to the idea that passion for the mission or for the community impacts the retention rate on its own. According to the Western Carolina University's nonprofit survey in 2014, among "29% of [survey] respondents, salary increases are believed to be the most useful strategy for

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retaining staff members...other useful strategies include: professional development opportunities (14%), opportunities for advancement within the organization (10%), an increase in the number of vacation days provided (6%), awards or public recognition (2%) (Western Carolina University, 2014).”

Furthermore, graduate students in the School of Public Policy at the University of Las Vegas, Nevada affirm that low wages are a significant factor in employee attrition because “the ability to rely on the mission of the organization to keep the employees is quickly eroding. Employees find themselves in a position of not only low wages but also high stress. This combination will lead to people fleeing the nonprofit human services sector for more lucrative positions” in the private sector (Armstrong et al., 2009). Additionally, a study conducted by New York University (NYU) in partnership with The Brookings Institution states that the analysis of their survey suggests “frustration grows with an increased perception of having too much work to do, working long hours, and receiving low pay (Light, 2003).”

Conversely, within the same NYU and Brookings Institution survey there were respondents that said they chose their jobs in the human services workforce “for the chance to accomplish something worthwhile for the people they serve and come to work each day for the same reason (Light, 2003).” A contingent of these respondents also noted that they have turned down higher paying jobs to make a bigger difference in an at-risk community, which leads to the next key strategy that was identified across multiple pieces of the literature—hire from those who have benefited from the services, have strong ties to the community, or hire those who are passionate about the mission.

**Hire individuals who benefited from services or have strong community ties.** The thesis authored by graduate students at the University of Las Vegas, Nevada made a

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recommendation for addressing the nonprofit employment crisis by hiring individuals who have benefited directly from an organization's services because they would have extensive knowledge of how to make the organization successful having been on the receiving end, and are likely to have a deep and powerful connection to the organization, which would make them a passionate employee (Armstrong et al., 2009). Other research reinforces this idea by providing examples of survey respondents' testimonials regarding why they choose to work in human services and the public sector. In the NYU and Brookings Institution survey, one respondent who was a nonprofit child-care center worker stated, "My mom raised four children on welfare, and we struggled. I said when I was very small that when I get older, I'm going to help people. And that's what I've done." (Light, 2003)."

This idea also plays into leveraging the organization's mission, which was discussed in the *Harvard Business Review* article. Author Gerald Chertavian stated, "nonprofits have an inherent asset in recruiting against their for-profit competitors: purpose. Many more young people today are looking to make an impact — in 2004, 5% of HBS's first-year class applied for summer internships with Year Up — and that desire for purpose does not go away as someone advances in their career (Chertavian, 2013)." While it can be argued that not all individuals who benefit from a service or have grown up in a community make stellar employees, but those that have been integrally involved with an organization for years may have a greater sense of purpose since they are close to the mission.

**Offer professional development opportunities.** A lack of professional development opportunities and career advancement was cited in an overwhelming majority of the studies and publications, which would point to the fact that it is and has been a critical issue that continues to impact the attraction and retention of employees and has since at least 2003. According to

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research by *NonProfitHR*, the younger generations are eager for growth opportunities in their roles and often ask about career advancement during interviews. Millennials, for instance, seek organizations that foster career development and provide opportunities for advancement within the organization (NonProfitHR, 2017). To retain talent, municipalities need to improve their path for advancement and provide more opportunities for promotion from within. The *Harvard Business Review* states that for-profit companies often hover around 40% for leadership roles and promotions internally, while it is much smaller in the public sector (Chertavian, 2013).

*The Harvard Business Review* highlights one strategy employed by nonprofit education organization Year Up, which is the implementation of a formal leadership development initiative and a \$2,000 per year allotment for every employee in professional development funds (Chertavian, 2013). Strategies like Year Up's show that the company is invested in developing its staff and allows employees the freedom to pursue conference attendance and speaking opportunities, which are often difficult to get approved at nonprofits due to lack of funds available but are necessary for career advancement. Another strategy outlined by *NonProfitHR* is the creation of mentor programs where younger employees are paired with a veteran employee from whom they can learn and receive performance feedback on a casual but consistent basis (NonProfitHR, 2017).

**Offer benefits outside of salary.** Higher pay is not always an available option for workers, as increasing salaries takes away from the organization's ability to provide services, so employers can make up for that by offering other benefits (Armstrong et al., 2009). If an organization cannot provide higher pay, there are options to match annual retirement contributions, subsidize or pay for commuting expenses and parking, and offer "perks," such as discounted services at businesses in the area.

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Strategies for retention, other than salary increases, specifically mentioned in the 2014 Western Carolina University nonprofit survey's open-ended response section included, "benefits, flexibility, happy work environment and pleasant working conditions, family friendly events...acknowledgement of hard work, and willingness to respond to the needs of employees (Western Carolina University, 2014)." This reinforces the idea that other benefits can impact employee satisfaction and discovering other ways to alleviate financial burdens and excess expenditures goes a long way to creating loyal employees.

**Be creative with funding opportunities.** Exploring public policy reform and federal grant opportunities to assist agencies in overcoming budgetary challenges seems to be a consistent theme pertaining to the health of the public and nonprofit sector as well, especially in Massachusetts. It was noted in the 2006 Massachusetts Council of Human Services Providers, Inc. study that meeting the ever-growing human services needs of the Massachusetts population "will require workers, employers and public and private funders to work together to find ways to obtain and effectively utilize the resources that will be required to recruit, retain and sustain the Massachusetts human services workforce of the future (The Massachusetts Council of Human Services Providers, Inc., 2006)."

Especially with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the consensus seems to be that organizations will have to continue to find ways to think outside of the box to maintain and increase funding. In the *NC State University News* article, author Matt Shipman says that due to the pandemic, "revenue streams suffered across the board, with organizations reporting declines in individual donations, fundraising events, service fees, membership dues, and grant funding (Shipman, 2021)."

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### Conclusions

There is a strong and clear consensus from the literature that employers' writ large will benefit from reassessing hiring practices and relax degree requirements where appropriate. Not only will it help to correct systemic inequities that have long prevented employees of color from career advancement, but it can also help broaden the hiring base to include a broader range of skills and experiences. As Hansen pointed out, there were 8.1 million jobs open across the United States in April, many of which were advertising a four-year degree requirement (Hansen, 2021). When Drew applied for his current position in 2019, he was somewhat deterred because the job posting implied that a master's degree would be strongly preferred if not required. Though he knew he had the technical skills and experiences to do the job, he came within hours of not applying because of a worry that his application would lack "credibility" (there is that word again). How many other Americans have asked themselves the same question? Or have found themselves on the receiving end of a phone call after a great interview to say that they were being passed over because another candidate "met" the degree requirement.

Tracy Burns, the CEO of the Northeast Human Resources Association, is active in encouraging employers to "really evaluate the true necessity of a four-year degree" (Carapezza, 2021). By doing so, we open up our hiring pools, have a higher likelihood of achieving our goals to diversify our workforces, and increase the likelihood of finding a candidate that best fits our needs, goals, and aspirations.

In addition to evaluating the degree requirements on certain municipal jobs, the literature review, along with the examination of various state-wide studies found a number of other factors that are viewed almost as important and could be leveraged to better support employees. For instance, augmenting salaries with other benefits, such as allowing employees the flexibility to

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work remotely, covering transportation and/or parking costs, matching employee retirement contributions, offering discounts on selected services, and providing competitive health and wellness benefits all showed, according to surveys, to enhance the employee experience and increase the likelihood of an employee to stay with an organization longer.

It is apparent that many individuals seeking public sector jobs were attracted to a mission with which they connected and because of an inherent desire to help people in their community, so doing more to engage the employees with the community directly, and leveraging the mission within each department's culture helps foster a deeper connection, making employees more likely to stay. By allowing individuals to connect with the mission directly and offer feedback about and input in the operations, community events, staffing needs, and opportunities for growth, employers create a transparent environment with trusting and dedicated employees who feel allied with the community that is benefiting from their service.

### **Methods for Investigating My Research Topic**

In addition to using online and academic search engines and libraries to find articles, conversation with other hiring managers and HR professionals have been abundantly helpful in evaluating this critical issue. The executive orders from Presidents Trump and Biden, both issued within the last eighteen months, also provided greater clarity of the importance of these interconnected issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and skills-based hiring, in our national conversation about workforce development. I also benefited from the weekly discussions in our Policy Analysis class, particularly the perspectives of my classmates who work in municipal government and encountered their own barriers in terms of access to higher education and employee retention in municipal jobs overall.

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### **Lessons Learned**

Understanding the complexity of the public sector, there is no one-size-fits-all recommendation or existing set of strategies to implement for blanket improvement. There is a lot more work to do before coming to definite conclusions on this topic. Much of the conversation on relaxing degree requirements in these articles focuses on “entry level jobs” which are still not terribly well defined and are limited in number. Drew’s initial problem statement focused on how to increase the number of diverse hires for leadership positions and an increase may come over time with relaxed degree requirements, as employees can now be hired more easily in an entry or mid-level capacity and advance accordingly. However, that timeline does not meet the current zeitgeist for bolder, swifter action. If the literature review achieves a baseline consensus on the desirability of relaxing degree requirements for most jobs, ongoing research should focus on how the overall question in the problem statement relates to retaining those employees so they can advance into leadership positions.

Despite no standardized method for recruitment and retention in the public sector, many of the recurring themes in the literature discuss strategies for employee retention and identify core values of public sector and human services employees. This information can likely be leveraged and applied to increase attraction and retention of staff for municipal jobs, and that is what we ultimately hope to present with further research—a basic set of recommendations for attracting, hiring, and retaining representative talent.

### **III. Utilization of Research Methods**

In combining our efforts, we have worked to determine the best possible methods for taking our two extremely specific questions and creating one set of narrative recommendations that will provide a roadmap for expanding pathways to long-term employment for critical

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segments of our communities. In our experiences, we have witnessed employers bypass qualified, capable candidates because they lacked the “credential” of a degree but had experience or skills that would allow them to be successful in the particular role they were seeking. Newer members of the workforce find themselves challenged by demanding work environments where there is a distinct imbalance between their long hours, substandard job training, and low pay rates. We have found that employers can remedy these issues without needing to choose between advancing strategies to increase cultural diversity or increasing generational retention but can forge similar pathways that achieve both ends.

Through our research, we have examined data to recommend practical solutions that will increase cultural and generational diversity among our public and not for profit sector employers in Massachusetts Gateway Cities. More specifically, we explore whether degree requirements are necessary for every job or if metrics that give weight to experience or “soft skills” can expand the hiring pipeline, and whether employers can engage new recruitment and retention strategies to satisfy the needs and desires of our diverse job seekers.

We primarily focus on two groups where there is distinct overlap: The Generation Z-Millennial cohort (workers born between 1981 and 2005) who may be viewed by employers as not having enough work experience, and those identifying as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) who lack a formal degree but have considerable work experience. Originally, we focused on the Millennial cohort exclusively but with growing numbers of Gen Z turning eighteen and expressing specific, yet similar needs related to employment, we have included them in our examination (Handshake, 2022).

Investigating barriers to employment such as degree requirements, systemic institutional bias, and a lack of supportive infrastructure for new employees, as well as the desire for pay

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equity, mental health and wellness programs, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging initiatives, and career advancement programs are critical in driving our research and overall recommendations (Handshake, 2022).

And while our research focuses primarily on those two groups, we suspect that our findings will be applicable to other groups facing workforce challenges. For example, CBS News recently reported on statistics showing that millions of white males mostly lacking a college degree, and age 25-54, are no longer participating in the workforce as part of the “great resignation” that has existed in our post-pandemic world (Dokoupil and Finn, 2023).

As we learned in Curt Frye’s LinkedIn course, “Learning Public Data Sets,” we benefit from a significant amount of public information to help us “evaluate the world around (us) and make good decisions” (Frye, 2019). In attempting to develop our strategies for recruiting and retaining BIPOC, millennial, and Gen Z employees in the public and nonprofit sector Gateway City workforce, we have examined the comprehensive data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and comprehensive data sets from entities such as the Pew Research Center.

We specifically look at recent public data sets related to employment, as well as demographic data provided by the six Gateway Cities and nonprofit institutions we have examined, to assess how representative they are of actual demographics in their communities related to race and generation. How can they be more representative of the cultural and generational diversity in the communities they serve, and are they creating artificial barriers to employment through unnecessary degree requirements and poor retention strategies?

In making our argument for change to recruitment and retention policies, we examine quantitative data like the Western Carolina University’s nonprofit survey with the North Carolina

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Center for Nonprofits, as well as recent changes within our own professional settings that inform our recommendations. The data points from the Western Carolina survey were easily accessible and pertinent to reinforce our recommendations on recruitment strategies. For instance, among “29% of [survey] respondents, salary increases are believed to be the most useful strategy for retaining staff members...other useful strategies include professional development opportunities (14%), opportunities for advancement within the organization (10%), an increase in the number of vacation days provided (6%), awards or public recognition (2%) (Western Carolina University, 2014).”

In the City of Lynn, Massachusetts, where Drew serves as Human Resources Director, the Mayor and City Council successfully advanced a home-rule petition that amended the city’s longtime residency requirement to a preference. The requirement, which did not include the police officers, firefighters, and teachers who make up more than 70% of the city’s workforce, had been championed by some as a commitment to ensuring that good jobs would be available for city residents and viewed by others as an archaic provision that fostered politically connected hiring and questionable competence. Furthermore, most leadership positions in Lynn traditionally require a Bachelors’ degree or higher. This creates an additional barrier considering the low percentage of Lynn residents who possess a bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census, 2021).

This industry-specific data is just one example of what we can leverage when we search additional databases for public data sets. We are seeking to bring a different perspective to the dialogue, with data collection centered around recruitment and retention historically, which adds another layer for researchers to analyze within the principal dialogue about employee recruitment and retention issues in the public and nonprofit sectors.

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We are limited, however. This examination does not include any direct input from Gateway City communities and hiring managers, except for Drew's personal experiences as the City of Lynn's Human Resources Director and Jess's personal experiences with challenges related to generational hiring and retention in her for-profit legal sector work with Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP and previous experience as a nonprofit professional in museum education and community outreach program at the Museum of Science in Boston. Furthermore, we do not have direct input from job seekers or professionals struggling to find employment commensurate with their work experience. Despite the lack of direct feedback from the community, we hope our research and personal experience will produce findings that positively impact job seekers, especially within Gateway City municipal offices, and offer solutions to address the recruitment, retention, and representation challenges faced by our Gateway Cities. All survey data has been obtained from public sources, and properly cited in our foregoing recommendations.

Fortunately, there is a strong body of literature on these topics that have reasonably informed our assumptions as well as the substantial data collection amassed in recent years. With confidence in this information, we move forward in providing a blueprint that will achieve greater cultural and generational diversity in our Gateway City public and nonprofit workforces.

### **IV. Strategies for Gateway Cities to Improve Recruitment and Retention**

#### **Create Evaluation Metrics that Value Experience and Recognize Soft Skills**

Consider this hypothetical scenario. Jon has worked in a municipal government setting since 2019, one of the few Black employees on staff. Lacking the funds to attend college immediately after his high school graduation, Jon was able to get a summer job as an intern in the city's Information Technology department. Though he did not have any formal training in IT functions, aside from a computer science class in High School, he proved to be a quick study and

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hard worker. When an entry level administrative position opened in the department later that year, Jon applied and was hired for the position.

Though his technical title was “Head Clerk,” answering phones, helping to pay the department’s bills, and providing administrative support to the department’s technicians, he desired to learn more about how the department operates. Fortunately, his supervisor recognized Jon’s drive to enhance himself, and gave him considerable practical training off hours. She also encouraged Jon to take courses in coding and web development at the local community college. While he was semesters away from an associate’s degree, he was able to obtain a certificate in Computer Networking (NSCC, 2023).

Three years into his head clerk job, Jon was informed that one of the technicians was moving to another community and their position would be open. The posted salary range started at three times his current head clerk salary and Jon felt his formal training and additional work within the office set himself up to be a successful candidate for the job.

When Jon went to HR to view the posting for this Network Support Specialist, his heart sank when he viewed the Qualifications section: *“Bachelor’s Degree in Information Technology or related field required, Master’s preferred.”* He asked the HR manager if his certificate program and experience would be enough for consideration. The short answer? No. The “credential” was non-negotiable and maybe this was an opportunity for Jon to go back and complete his degree. This was a hard answer to contemplate, especially considering that Jon was making around \$50,000, paying off minor debt from the certificate class, and assisting his family with household expenses.

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Jon knew he could do the job and feared he would end up partially training a total newcomer to the IT department just because they had a degree, and he did not. Doesn't his experience and training count for anything?

Earlier on, we discussed a situation where an otherwise compelling candidate was not advanced in a hiring process because they lacked a formal degree. Like Jon, there was drive, a record of relevant experience, and solid soft skills, or those interpersonal characteristics like problem solving, proactive communication, and flexibility, which can help a person achieve in the workplace (Herrity, 2018).

A report issued by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that nearly sixteen million Americans with only a high school diploma possess the skills for "high wage work." This, coupled with the disparity between White and Black Americans possessing a bachelor's degree (40% vs. 26%), compels a serious reassessment of our evaluation practices (Miller, S., 2020).

We obviously recognize that this cannot be equally applicable to all jobs. Highly skilled professionals such as physicians, nurses, and lawyers require formal education that enables them to pass the rigorous and demanding examinations allowing them to achieve licensure. But we have both worked with Information Technology professionals that can more than make up for the lack of a degree through on-the-job training, affordable certificate programs, and real-time experience.

So how can we assist our hypothetical friend Jon, a Gen Z, highly skilled Black worker with a high school diploma with respect to career advancement?

Montgomery County, Maryland has created guidelines that allow hiring managers to consider substituting education for experience. While the overall Montgomery County

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population is about 21% Black or African American (U.S. Census, 2022), Black/African American workers make up about 28% of the County's workforce and 23% of those employees making in excess of \$60,000 annually (Montgomery County, 2022).

Under their rubric, a candidate may be able to substitute one year of experience for each year in a degree program. If you have four years of practical experience, that is enough to satisfy an equivalent for the bachelors' degree requirement. Add an additional fifth year and that can satisfy a Masters' requirement. The County also allows for the consideration of specialized training, which would be helpful in Jon's case (Montgomery County, n.d.).

If Jon's municipality adopts the Montgomery County guidelines, his four years on staff coupled with his community college certificate course immediately make him a contender for a position he was excluded from under his municipality's own restrictive degree requirements. Furthermore, he will benefit from additional hands-on experience that will make him eligible for even higher-level positions in the future.

But what about those times where you just cannot find that person with experience, but you have a position that needs filling and no seemingly qualified candidates stepping forward? This has been a challenge for hiring managers, especially amid the global pandemic. Workplace anxiety is high, and morale is waning, with growing numbers of employees finding their bosses lacking in empathy and emotional intelligence. This is a key component of the "Great Resignation" that we have been discussing since 2020 (Ramamunni, 2022).

There has been a growing discussion about "soft skills," defined as "non-technical skills that describe how you work and interact with others" (Kaplan, 2023). HR professionals, like Drew, have started paying more attention to the presence of these attributes during the candidate

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review process (Ramanunni, 2022). Job descriptions tend to be all-inclusive, almost wish list style exercises attempting to find a perfect candidate that does not exist in an imperfect world.

Just as Jon should not be disadvantaged by a lack of degree, degree holding job seekers coming out of our colleges and universities should not be held back in our pursuit to find a “unicorn.”

Soft skills should be emphasized and prioritized as part of the hiring process. So much attention has been rightly paid to initiatives focused on enhancing workplace culture and expanding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. In this more anxious age, we argue that it is crucial to prioritize hiring candidates that can both do the job and positively contribute to improving morale, approach situations empathetically, and take a problem-solving approach to the work.

When Drew first reviewed the job description for his current position as Lynn’s Personnel Director, he had serious doubts as to whether he fit the bill for what the city was looking for. Though he had experience in government, personnel management, and policy implementation, he was not a traditional HR professional. The fear of “imposter syndrome” was real and almost kept him from applying for the job. As he researched the position further and participated in the interview process, he emphasized his own soft skills and ability to learn quickly. Perhaps he was not the best fit on paper, but he convinced the hiring committee that he had the necessary skills and ability to do the job.

We recommend that our municipal hiring managers pay close attention to soft skills in reviewing all candidates, particularly in the context of the cultural environment in which the employee is entering. It is difficult to determine the best candidate for the job without considering whether the candidate is a good “cultural fit” for the department and vice versa. It is

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also important to consider if a candidate can positively contribute to a desired shift in the culture, if that is the desired outcome, as is often the case with diverse hires.

By offering credible alternatives to increasingly unnecessary degree requirements and emphasizing those interpersonal skills so crucial to workforce harmony in the twenty-first century, we can create opportunities that expand access for our communities of color and environments which uphold the values of empathy and inclusivity, which are vital to our emerging generation of workers (Kelly, 2022).

### **Create Opportunities and Incentives for Educational Advancement**

A recurring theme in our research has been to assess the necessity of a four, or even two, year degree for most job opportunities. You recall that our IT employee Jon risked being shut out of a promotion because he lacked the education required by the job description, even though he developed skills and experience through legitimate means like a college certificate course in computer programming. In a city like Worcester, Massachusetts, where nearly two-thirds of the population is of standard working age (defined here as 19-64), almost half claim a racial or ethnic identity that is not exclusively white, and less than one-third possess a bachelor's degree or higher, it is reasonable to surmise that there are numerous employees who may share a similar struggle to Jon (U.S. Census, 2022).

Though employers have begun to abandon traditional degree requirements in order to attract a more diverse and multigenerational workforce, that should not remove the incentive to encourage educational advancement (Hansen, 2021). Studies have shown the benefits of a well-educated workforce and its impact on a local government's economic health, vitality, and ability to expand its tax base, thereby strengthening its ability to provide services (Berger and Fisher, 2013). Although municipalities struggle with the fiscal realities of revenue dependent on state

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funding, the nature of their residential and commercial tax base, and how to balance the demands for quality local services with the state mandated responsibility to properly fund elementary and secondary education (MDESE, 2021), there are relatively cost-effective ways that cities and towns can create opportunities and incentives for educational advancement.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately thirty-three percent of public sector employees belonged to a labor union in 2022 (BLS, 2023). In the City of Lynn, where one of the authors serves as Human Resources Director, that number is closer to eighty-five percent. To assist their members in furthering their education, Local Unions IUE-CWA 261 and AFSCME 3147 negotiated reasonable tuition reimbursement into the compensation packages (City of Lynn, 2020). In fiscal year 2022, Lynn allocated \$12,000 for tuition reimbursement for course work as long as a grade of “C” or better was achieved (City of Lynn, 2022). Eight employees applied for, and received, this benefit, which allowed them to reduce their education expenses by \$1,500 per person.

Despite the modest award amount, the reimbursement potential has been a motivating factor for numerous employees to advance their education. After all, why negotiate a benefit if you do not use it? It is important to note that not all of Lynn’s Unions have negotiated this tuition reimbursement and due to the City’s fiscal struggles in recent years, it would be difficult to expand it without causing greater stress on the overall budget. That said, it is not uncommon for local governments to offer such an incentive in order to retain a workforce whose earning potential struggles to match their private sector counterparts (Kyzer; 2021; Maciag, 2022). The Commonwealth of Massachusetts takes tuition reimbursement a step further, offering both employees and their spouses tuition reimbursement if attending one of the Commonwealth’s public colleges or universities (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2022).

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While the Commonwealth has a great advantage in running institutes of higher education, there is benefit for cities and towns to partner with institutes of higher education in order to provide scholarships and discounted tuition for degree and certificate programs to their municipal employees. The collaboration between Clark University and the City of Worcester is a solid example of this type of public-private collaboration. Worcester employees who meet the university's admissions requirements for the master's degree in Public Administration, Senior Leadership Program receive an automatic forty-percent scholarship, and then an additional forty-percent scholarship from the city for the remaining balance (Clark, 2023).

This creative partnership takes a daunting \$36,000+ tuition bill and reduces it by almost two-thirds (Clark, 2023), thereby making it much more accessible in a workforce where more than sixty percent of the employees made less than \$70,000 per year in 2021 (Tiernan, 2022). Furthermore, the annual cost to Worcester (approximately \$4,400 per student, per year) is reasonable when you consider that forty-nine million dollars of their fiscal year 2023 budget is from unrestricted general government aid not impacted by Massachusetts Chapter 70, the Commonwealth's education funding law, and the Student Opportunity Act. Even offering this program to ten students (currently, there are five enrolled in the program) would represent less than one-tenth of one percent from that local aid commitment (WRBB, 2022).

Thanks to the flexibility provided through city and state partnerships under Chapter 30B, the Massachusetts General Law covering procurement, cities and towns can pursue similar partnerships with Commonwealth-funded institutions like Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield and the University of Massachusetts Lowell (Town of Merrimac, n.d.). Trade associations like the Massachusetts Municipal Association offer highly popular certificate

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programs in Leadership, Management, and Finance at reasonable costs to communities and their employees (MMA, 2022).

But what about the employee who does not necessarily want to advance their education but desire to enhance their overall skill set? Or what if an employee wants to do all of these things, but juggling the multiple challenges of work, home, and family make it difficult to commit to an after-hours program? Cities and towns should consider bringing learning opportunities on-site to help their respective workforces with skill-building. The City of Lynn recently partnered with North Shore Community College to provide a conversational Spanish course at no-cost to employees. Over fifteen weeks, employees enrolled in the program spend an hour of their Friday afternoon learning tenses, conjugating verbs, and practicing their new language skills. This course, now entering its second offering, has helped a primarily English-speaking workforce more effectively communicate with the city's growing majority Spanish-speaking population. At a cost of \$6,000 per course, the relationship between Lynn and North Shore Community College is a common-sense investment that improves public services, boosts employee morale, and advances the city's commitment to pursuing practices reflective of a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As our communities become more diverse, we always want to consider pathways creating opportunities for non-English speakers to enter the workforce. According to a 2019 demographic profile of limited English speakers in Massachusetts, the Boston Planning and Development Agency estimates that over 14,000 residents of Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, and Worcester, all communities defined as "Gateway Cities" by the Commonwealth, are of limited English-speaking capacity (BPDA, 2019; Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2022). Through similar partnerships, communities should consider investing in conversational English courses to help

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our newest residents become more competitive in interview processes for jobs where bilingual fluency is highly desired.

Skill-building need not be limited to programs that provide tangible degrees and certificates. Communities will do well by investing in continuing education that promotes skills such as active listening, conflict management, and approaching difficult situations with empathy and concern, especially in our very anxious post COVID-19 workspaces (Watson et al., 2019). Still, everything comes with a cost, and our communities must make tough decisions as they steward taxpayer resources, but these recommendations are cost-effective ways to invest in employee advancement for the benefit of our workers and the community as a whole. As Matt Konrad observed for Scholarship America, employer sponsored educational programs are a great incentive for employee retention and ensuring higher levels of satisfaction in the workforce (Konrad, 2019). Perhaps our friend Jon did not get the promotion he wanted at the time, but by seeking out opportunities to invest in him and his success, his organization can build his affinity, loyalty, and strengthen his advancement prospects, as a person with potential to play an integral role in the ongoing development of his city's IT department.

### **Develop Comprehensive, Accessible Training Programs for Employees**

Similarly, if Jon's city invested in a comprehensive training and continuing education program for its IT employees, he could build additional skills within the organization to make him a valuable employee. Organizations with comprehensive and successful training programs typically see a significant increase in employee retention. Organizations with poor onboarding processes are twice as likely to experience increased employee turnover, especially as it pertains to diverse employees (Richards, 2022). Therefore, organizations need not only attract

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experienced and talented employees, but ideally, they must keep them for a significant duration of time.

Instituting a set of specific, targeted training programs for new employees and existing employees, which are both culturally and generationally accessible, is pivotal to developing a more representative, empathetic workforce within municipalities across Massachusetts. Strategies that enhance employee retention such as comprehensive training methods and understanding the impact of training and education on employee retention will help to determine the most suitable approach to deploy in order to achieve the best employee retention rate and in turn, the required knowledge needed for an employee to enhance performance and productivity within an organization (Berger and Fisher, 2013; Elsafty and Oraby, 2022).

Training is an extremely crucial factor in enhancing organizational performance and is considered the main strategy by many organizations used to influence employee retention (Elsafty and Oraby, 2022; Watson et al., 2019). All employees need training in order to cultivate hard and soft skills, as well as knowledge to meet job requirements (Koteswari et al., 2020). There is a significant relationship between training and employee retention; however, within municipalities across the Commonwealth, there is not sufficient investment in training practices. Municipalities have limited budgets; therefore, some managers within the respective departments view additional training as an expensive risk because it takes time away from employees completing their daily duties, many of whom are overloaded with job-related tasks already. Additionally, there is always the concern that an employee will take advantage of training in one department or within one municipality (or company) and then leave, taking the valuable skills gleaned somewhere else (Watson et al., 2019).

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Job growth and opportunity for advancement within an organization depend on opportunities available to employees to experience personal growth and subsequent promotion through developing new skills, professional and industry-specific knowledge, and having access to comprehensive training programs (Alshmemri et al., 2017). “Specific and well-organized training programs” should be implemented according to each employee's needs, which can be different, both culturally and generationally, within an organization (Alshmemri et al., 2017). For municipal employees this can be particularly challenging because skills and training required to be successful in municipal governments are dissimilar to skills needed to operate in the private sector (Stafford, 2022). There are nuances that are important to be successful in a municipal job versus a job in the private sector, and training and retraining candidates can prove to be difficult due to ever increasing generational and cultural gaps between current municipal employees preparing for retirement and those who seek to inherit their roles in the future (Stafford, 2022). If a town or city decides to hire a candidate who does not have specific soft skills or pertinent training, it must be prepared to provide job-specific training and additional staff support during the ramp-up period (Stafford, 2022).

One example of a Gateway City in the Commonwealth that administers a municipal employee online training program is the City of Fall River. Fall River states on their website that because of Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2009, the ethics reform law, there is a requirement for mandatory education and training programs for public employers and employees (City of Fall River, 2023). According to the law, municipal employees are required to complete training every two years. Consequently, all current Fall River municipal employees are messaged that they must complete an online training program and submit their certificate of completion to the city. Although the program is administered online, in their FAQs section, it acknowledges that not all

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employees may be computer literate and there are opportunities for individuals who are not tech savvy to have the training conducted with another individual serving as proctor (City of Fall River, 2023). While this training is state mandated and is focused on ethics, it shows that the City of Fall River does value its municipal employees by making it clear training is required and making that training accessible. It is also heartening because the ethics training could be expanded upon to include other job-specific training related to municipal positions and administered through the same online platform, since the capabilities to do so already exist.

Municipalities should audit their existing training modules, especially those that are state-mandated and consider adding supplemental training for employees targeted to their municipality and the nuances an employee would experience working for the city or town. Studies have shown if employees are required to complete training or other career development opportunities due to legal requirements, these are not motivating factors for employees and may impact engagement in future training, despite how job-specific it is (Hur, 2018). Legal training is necessary to stay in compliance with state and federal laws, as we see with Fall River, but training programs should also be developed based on employees' needs in order to contribute to their growth, improve their skills, and keep them motivated (Hur, 2018).

Massachusetts recognizes the challenge cities and towns face in filling vacancies and is working to connect candidates and newer municipal employees to training opportunities outside of their direct department. The Department of Local Services recently launched the Municipal Training and Resource Center, where potential candidates and those just starting their municipal careers can improve their knowledge on how towns and cities are run, through videos and other interactive resources (Mass.gov, 2023). The page is organized so visitors can search by topic, position, or by process and find job descriptions for targeted roles, procedures, and best

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practices. While this is a vital resource that should be promoted within municipalities, it should not become a crutch that municipalities depend on without developing and implementing their own training programs specific to the needs of their own town or city.

### **Develop Change Management Training Program for Hiring Managers**

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, people of color comprise approximately 14% of the population and in urban areas of Massachusetts, anywhere from 20% to 50% of those urban populations identify as people of color (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2022). So, where do organizations and companies begin when they want to create new hiring practices and change the overall culture to be more representative of the community? When organizations set a goal to attain a more diverse workplace, the support and education of hiring managers is critical to achieving that goal. Hiring managers need training specifically on how to cultivate diversity within an applicant pool, as well as how to draft and review job descriptions to ensure that they are using inclusive language (Kiner, 2021; Richards, 2022). It is imperative for hiring managers to understand how to source diverse talent and hire qualified candidates. Through research, it has become apparent that to effectively implement changes to the hiring process at an institutional level, a change management training program should be developed to set the standard for new hiring practices and provide guidance to current HR professionals for interviewing diverse candidates under the newly identified hiring criteria.

For many longtime HR professionals, DEI training was missing from their curriculum and from their toolkit (Kiner, 2021). Until very recently, DEI was not considered by many organizations within the list of HR specialties, leaving hiring managers with little formal knowledge, training, or experience in DEI initiatives or how to implement DEI procedures (Kiner, 2021). In order for employees involved in the hiring processes to learn new strategies and

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employ them in the hiring process, change management training is necessary. Ongoing DEI education for managers and all those involved in the hiring process is critical because increased awareness and an established set of policies and procedures supports current employees in equitable decision making and inclusive culture-building (Kiner, 2021). Change management training can combat implicit bias, as stated by an anonymous HR manager in the Wall Street Journal managers should be wary of implicit bias, and how it affects their organization (Richards, 2022). The need for well-thought-out and documented plans to recruit, develop and retain diverse employees is critical to ensure equity and growth within an organization and to serve as a representation of the community that the organization serves.

Hiring practices exist that can be implemented in order to be more inclusive. First, in looking to recruit diverse candidates, job descriptions must be scrutinized and revamped to remove language that is suggestive of pertaining to any particular group (O'Donnell, 2021). The job description must be about the role itself and describe the responsibilities associated with the position, rather than about the ideal candidate. Positions should not explicitly say or allude to a gender, they should be neutral and generalized (O'Donnell, 2021). It is also important for hiring managers and HR professionals to consider what is necessary in terms of skills, years of experience, education, licenses, and certifications and consider removing those that are not critical to perform the job.

For example, and as mentioned throughout, to hire the most qualified candidates, job descriptions requiring a college degree should be reevaluated and it should be considered whether years of experience can be substituted for a degree, or whether an associate's degree would suffice where there was previously a bachelor's degree required (Buss, 2022). Julie Kae, Vice President of Sustainability and DEI at Qlik, a software company based in Pennsylvania that

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creates business analytics tools, contributed an article to the Society for Human Resource Management's website (SHRM) discussing how their company created a more diverse employee base (Kae, 2022). Qlik took the time to rewrite and reevaluate job descriptions that had previously required a college degree and five years of experience to now require a two-year degree and more work experience in order to "bring the diversity we need as a growing business" (Kae, 2022). Overhauling the existing job descriptions and agreeing on necessary credentials is the first step in implementing the change management process.

During interviews, consistently implement bias-free interviewing practices (Kiner, 2021; O'Donnell, 2021). Current employees should ask questions to ascertain technical skills, in addition to behavioral skills such as relationship-building ability, communication, organization, enthusiasm, and job-related expectations, rather than anything subjective (O'Donnell, 2021). When taking notes during the interview, do not write down anything having to do with any protected classes or any information that could indicate bias. Notes taken during the interview should be factual and directly applicable to the job description and the questions asked for later reference.

Making these recommended changes within an organization can be adaptive, "small, gradual, and iterative" (Miller, K., 2020). During the initial stages of implementation and training, consistent communication is key because it will prevent the organization from reverting to prior policies and outdated hiring criteria (Miller, K., 2020). A change management program is meant to evolve over time, not be an instant change (Kotter, 2007). Therefore, designated change managers must empower employees to take necessary steps to achieve the long-term goals of the initiative, in this case, the development and implementation of hiring practices that are accessible for diverse candidates.

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The processes, workflows, and strategies of the organization are meant to change over time, gradually gaining buy-in from employees who will be involved in implementation and future training (Kotter, 2007). An example of an adaptive change in the workplace to encourage DEI recruitment is to evaluate all incoming applications under a new set of criteria where applicants are considered for interviews without possessing all traditional requirements of the position but having some combination of the criteria deemed necessary to perform the duties of the job. To make adaptive change successful in an organization, change managers must deploy repeated communication of the ultimate goal to remind team members why the change is happening and what the desired outcome is for the organization and for the existing employees when the new procedures and policies are followed (Kotter, 2007; Miller, K., 2020).

Once the change in hiring criteria and potential employee evaluation has been completed, it is crucial to enforce the new criteria by developing and distributing standard operating procedures and written guidelines, so there is no reversion to the prior hiring standards (Miller, K., 2020). By embedding the aforementioned changes within the company's culture and practices, and by having these new policies and procedures in writing and accessible to all employees, it becomes more difficult for backsliding to occur. While the change is still new to employees, change managers can also develop a reward system for those who are adopting the new policies (Kotter, 2007; Miller, K., 2020). Providing recognition to those who are championing the change encourages others to jump on board and feel a sense of pride for adhering to the new hiring guidelines. New organizational structures, operating procedures, and reward systems should all be considered as tools organizations can use to help change stick, with the ultimate goal of hiring and retaining a more diverse workforce representative of the municipality.

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### **Create and Offer Culturally Competent Programming for Both Hiring Managers and Employees, Inclusive of Employee Resources and Affinity Groups to Enhance the Feeling of Community**

Moving the needle on DEI takes purposeful effort, consistency, and communication. DEI influences how municipalities serve their respective communities, collaborate with colleagues, and recruit, retain, and promote the most talented employees.

Diverse applicants often find themselves in situations where they may be the only individual of their race, ethnicity, gender, or background in the room. In speaking with a Hispanic female colleague, she shared that she feels as if she “owes it to the younger generation to try to change that. Representation matters. Not being the first one matters,” she said (Liebler & Feldman, 2023). She wants “to do what I can to ensure that others behind me are not the first one, or at least not the only ones (Liebler & Feldman, 2023).”

Many leaders within organizations, like my colleague, have been mindful of their own experiences and want to seek out and even create opportunities to support and mentor others. This is why establishing a plan for recruiting diverse individuals and then retaining them with the creation of affinity networks, working groups, and resource groups for employees is vital to creating a work culture that fosters and values DEI (Buss, 2022).

Efforts that could be implemented by a municipality to augment existing working in recruiting diverse talent include hiring a full-time Diversity Recruiting Manager or seeking training and support from an outside DEI consultant to train your current recruiting managers on how to recruit diverse entry-level and lateral candidates. These recruiting/hiring managers would work with leadership to understand developmental and career challenges facing diverse candidates and identify whether certain challenges can be improved with coaching and

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mentorship during the onboarding process (Kelly et al., 2022; Richards, 2022). Additionally, hosting Diversity Workshops for the entire HR team annually will help to support and develop professionals, so they will be more adept at navigating the interview process and collaborating with diverse candidates and hires.

Further, seeking out partnerships and involvement with local prominent diversity groups or nonprofits in your municipality could introduce hiring managers to a new pool of candidates that was previously overlooked. Attending job fairs in your community and connecting with these groups and their leadership can help create a pipeline of candidates for the future. If there are colleges and universities in your area, reach out to their affinity groups, plan networking events, and make connections. Creating an internship or co-op program with these groups or institutions could also create a pipeline for young, talented candidates who will already be familiar with operations because of their time as an intern (Claudio, 2021). This opportunity would allow for younger individuals to break into municipal government more easily.

While the aforementioned recommendations are focused on the recruitment process, which will also be discussed in further detail later in the recommendations, specifically with regard to change management plans for existing hiring managers and employees, recruitment is not the only key to solving problems with inequity within municipality jobs. In order to build and sustain an inclusive and equitable workforce, in addition to recruiting diverse individuals, there must be strategies in place to retain individuals once they have been hired.

In order to focus efforts on retaining diverse talent, several resources and cultural foundations can be implemented to promote inclusion and fellowship to empower everyone in the organization to thrive. To retain and advance diverse hires, leaders and influential employees should serve as mentors to diverse candidates and these mentors should meet regularly to assess

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the progress and prospects of their mentees (Kelly et al., 2022; Richards, 2022). These meetings are meant to address work assignments, access and exposure to senior team members and the community, and career trajectories.

Additionally, creating and promoting affinity groups within the organization for employees who identify with the following populations, including, but not limited to:

- Asian American/Asian Network
- Black Network
- Disability Awareness Network
- First Generation College Graduate Network
- Hispanic/Latino Network
- LGBTQ+ Network
- Middle Eastern North African Network
- Working Parent Network
- Women's Network
- Veterans Network

The affinity groups highlighted above provide employees at all levels with formal and informal support, mentoring, and fellowship focused on creating community and bringing enhanced opportunities to everyone (Buss, 2022; Kelly et al., 2022). Within the affinity groups, pairing new employees with a leader or someone in a higher position who has been with the organization for more than three years, provides newer employees with someone to turn to for guidance and someone who can help strengthen skills, while understanding the environment and the obstacles that the individual may be facing. One focus for an affinity group mentor for example, would be to work with their mentee on a career development plan, outlining specific

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skills to develop, such as leading a project or working on a particular type of project. These mentorships are meant to help the new employee cultivate skills that will help advance their careers, while having a positive mentor with whom they can directly identify (Kelly et al., 2022).

Affinity groups are also meant to educate and engage the greater workforce through learning experiences such as heritage month celebrations that highlight the unique history, achievements, and contributions of diverse employees. Affinity groups can be called to host bimonthly business development sessions designed to help their members develop a systematic and sustainable foundation for effective business, soft skills, and career development. Many existing affinity groups within organizations offer seminars, luncheons, and events focused on professional development, which can either be exclusive to its members or open to all employees as a learning opportunity. Organizations with thriving affinity groups have a measurably positive impact on elevating and supporting diverse employees, and in hosting and partnering with organizations in the broader profession.

Through implementing these systematic changes in the recruitment and retention practices of a respective municipality, a cultural shift will begin to take place. Diverse employees will feel more supported, and thus empowered, and non-diverse employees will be educated through impactful programming (Claudio, 2021). The result of the programming is the creation of more empathetic colleagues and a positive, inclusive culture in the workplace, which is something that the Millennial generation has grown to desire since the COVID-19 pandemic, and that Gen Z has already made clear is a priority for them when considering where to build their careers (Datar et al., 2022; Kelly, 2022).

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### **Integrate Community Involvement into Candidate Selection Process**

The process of hiring local government employees is a fairly standard one. In Massachusetts cities, those seeking to serve as a police officer or firefighter go through the Civil Service exam process and get ranked on an eligibility list. The appointing authority, usually a community's chief executive or governing body, can appoint one of the top three candidates in any eligible requisition. They must meet strict standards adopted by Massachusetts General Laws if a higher ranked candidate is to be bypassed. This is to ensure that merit principles and not arbitrary personal considerations (political connections, family relationships) guide the decision-making process. (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, n.d.).

For non-Civil Service, or civilian, jobs the process is a more familiar one. Applicants are screened for qualifications, hiring managers review applications, interview invitations are made, and an internal committee is convened (Mendelsohn, n.d.). Usually that committee contains the manager and potential co-workers who have the best grasp on the needs and requirements for the position. Sounds fairly straightforward, right?

Local government, by definition, is driven by the everyday needs and concerns of our people. Cities and towns care for public safety, ensure that trash is picked up, roads are paved, emergency medical services are provided, that taxes are collected with fairness and equity, and students are educated, among many other things (The White House, 2022). Our local citizens are our government's consumers and our elected officials, their boss. At least for those of voting age.

We have primarily been focused on recruitment and retention processes that will ensure greater representation for communities of color and our emerging generations in the hiring processes, but we have not yet discussed how we can better integrate those voices in making change possible.

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By integrating community involvement in the hiring process, we bring the voices of our most important consumers, critics, and collaborators to the table.

Consider this new scenario. A municipality is creating a new community center to meet a need left unfilled when they parted ways with the private sector partner who was contracted to provide social services, including programs for senior citizens. Instead of outsourcing that work, the community is going to build its own program, including the hiring of a director and eventually a member of staff.

The mayor delegates their Community Services Department to oversee this program and charges them with the hiring process. There is a caveat, however. They want participants of the previous program to participate in the hiring process for the new director.

A search committee is formed that includes the appropriate city personnel: the director of Human Resources, the director of Community Services, and a member of the mayor's personal staff. They are joined by three members appointed by the Center's Advisory Board to evaluate the director candidates. The participation of the community members highlights issues of concern and candidate qualities that were not readily apparent to the city staff involved.

For example, the previous center had a badly underfunded program budget. The citizens on the panel wanted to emphasize the importance of grant writing experience, which had not been as high of a priority to the initial committee. The citizens also assessed certain personal characteristics. Was the candidate warm and engaging? Did they have the energy required to build a program from the ground up? Could they sense a genuine commitment to their issues of concern?

The participation of citizens was key in creating a conversation that found not only the person best suited for the job on paper, but an individual who had the right combination of hard

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and soft skills to do the job effectively. In fact, when it came time to hire the rest of the staff, citizens were engaged and worked collaboratively with the new Director to hire the rest of the team. Not only did they help the Director create a cohesive unit, but it was also one remarkably reflective of the community's diversity. Two spoke fluent Spanish, and three were millennials under the age of 40. Both groups that are currently underrepresented in local government.

Outside voices, particularly those which are representative of the community's demographic, can add valuable perspective that opens up new possibilities. A candidate that might not make the grade "on paper" can rise to the top when you assess certain qualities and attributes that the consumer considers important for public service work.

We encourage hiring managers and appointing authorities to seek resident input on the customer service needs in addition to skills and competencies. It is not uncommon for communities to ask for public input when searching for key government positions. The City of Somerville, Massachusetts recently embarked upon listening sessions to hear from residents on their police chief hiring process (Laidler, 2023). New Haven, Connecticut held three community meetings to inform the search for the next school superintendent (Chen, 2023). But what about those front-line to mid-management positions that interact with the public the most?

We are not arguing that there should be community involvement in every single hiring process, but we suggest that there is an opportunity to integrate the community's voice in assessing what is most needed, especially in our public-facing customer service positions. Instead of an online survey that asks, "What qualities are important for a new police chief?" or "What should the new superintendent's priorities be?" The community could run a more general survey that asks how certain city departments can serve the public better. For example, "What attributes are most important when hiring support staff for the tax collector? Or the Department

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of Public Works?” Conducting these surveys for a plethora of city positions might give our hiring managers a better sense of the hard and soft skills constituents value when seeking local services.

It also allows cities to rethink how and why they fill municipal positions. Qualifications are always paramount, but one can often miss the whole picture of an applicant when making these decisions. Engaging community members more thoughtfully in the process, through active participation in interviews or soliciting their input on needed attributes for candidates, can make the process more representative and hopefully achieve the overall goal of making local governments more representative especially in terms of a community’s cultural and generational diversity. It is a good new standard to set.

### **IV. Conclusion**

Our focused efforts studying how to increase cultural and generational diversity within municipal workforces had the intended outcome to provide a set of recommendations to help create representative, empathetic, community-minded workforces and offer strategies for diverse municipalities, such as Massachusetts Gateway Cities, to recruit and retain diverse employees. These communities historically have higher poverty rates, lesser economic mobility, less opportunity for higher education, and more racial and cultural diversity, which is not reflected in their municipal government employees (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2022).

We have offered these Gateway Cities, as well as companies and organizations outside of municipalities, a blueprint to utilize tools already at their disposal, while exploring cost effective methods for increasing the cultural and generational diversity of their workforces. We believe the recommendations presented herein are applicable to municipalities, but also to the nonprofit and private sectors, as many organizations have a renewed and prioritized focus on DEI since 2020.

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The use of evaluation metrics to emphasize “soft skills,” while de-emphasizing the need for a specific degree requirement expands the pool of candidates that are eligible for open positions. Designing and implementing new hiring criteria is critical to creating change in mindset within a municipality’s HR department. Additionally, with regard to expanding the candidate pool, seeking out partnerships with local educational institutions or community-based affinity groups creates new opportunities for candidates who may otherwise be overlooked but can add a particular perspective that represents the larger community. Partnerships with local institutes of higher education can create a pipeline for employees to receive additional training and education to advance their careers, which can positively impact an municipalities employee retention rate. Bringing community voices into the hiring process will help to build a local government workforce representative of the demographic and the core values of the municipality, which is something that does not currently hold true in many cities in Massachusetts, especially the Gateway Cities.

With a significant focus on cultivating and embracing diversity in the workforce, it is imperative that organizations provide culturally competent programming opportunities and implement accessible training initiatives aimed at overall cultural change for managers and employees, both new and tenured. These recommendations will amplify employees’ perspectives on building a local government workforce that truly represents and values them.

Our research confirmed numerous assumptions we made at the outset of this project, and our anecdotal work experience contributed to the confirmation of many of our initial thoughts, as it pertained to the recommendations that are most critical to deploy as soon as possible to achieve the desired outcome. Ultimately, we understand the reality that building a culturally and generationally representative workforce is a monumental task that will take transformative

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organizational change within municipalities across the Commonwealth, but it is a task that is critical for our local governments to thrive. In order to build a better future for our communities, it is pertinent that local governments pursue recruiting and retaining candidates with equity, transparency, openness, and accountability.

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BUILDING A REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE

**Appendix A**



# Clark University

## School of Professional Studies

### Project Charter

## **Building a Representative Workforce**

*How we can help our Gateway Cities recruit and retain employees reflective of their communities.*

Jessica Feldman  
Drew Russo

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## BUILDING A REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE

### 1. Project Overview

**1.1 Introduction** *(The introduction provides a brief summary of what the project is designed to achieve, along with some background information on why the project is being done – the business drivers, the opportunity to be exploited, costs to be reduced etc.)*

The Legislature defines 26 Gateway Cities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which are Attleboro, Barnstable, Brockton, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Leominster, Lowell, Lynn, Malden, Methuen, New Bedford, Peabody, Pittsfield, Quincy, Revere, Salem, Springfield, Taunton, Westfield, and Worcester.

As positions within municipalities and nonprofits become increasingly difficult to fill, we aim to assess whether the proposed job requirements of certain positions actually necessitate an Associate's, Bachelor's, and/or Master's degree. When does experience matter in the case of an applicant and is the degree requirement a barrier, not only to providing opportunities for potential employees, but also to help struggling communities find the help required to effectively deliver services to the community? And when these positions are filled, how can we build retention strategies that allow new employees long term success in an ever-changing municipal workforce?

The opportunity: Determining those jobs where the degree requirement can be aspirational, but ultimately not required if the goals of the position can be achieved through other factors such as experience, well-developed skill set, etc., and give our Gateway Cities a roadmap for recruiting and retaining a workforce reflective of the cultural and generational diversity in these communities.

The ultimate goal: Providing recommendations to municipalities and nonprofit organizations for revising job descriptions, qualifications, and classifications so that they can recruit the employees that the municipalities truly need and do so in an inclusive fashion that attracts candidates who reflect the cultural and generational diversity of our Gateway Cities. Build retention strategies that enable these newly hired employees to flourish and contribute to the overall goal of building a workforce representative of the communities they serve.

**1.2 Major Stakeholders** *(List all the key stakeholders/decision makers and anyone who will be impacted by the project outcomes).*

- Human resources directors and hiring managers in Gateway Cities.
- Human resources directors and hiring managers throughout the Commonwealth.
- Job seekers who have felt limited or excluded by restrictive job postings.
- Young job seekers without extensive experience or specific degrees.
- Mid- to late career job seekers who may have lost jobs they held for many years, where they built up a significant knowledge base but may lack education at the college level.

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- All job seekers looking to benefit from a positive, affirming workplace culture that promotes work-life balance, offers opportunities for advancement, and cultivate long-term employee success.
- Those who receive services from the community that might be curtailed by the employer's inability to fill positions.
- Capstone Advisor/Clark SLP Senior Advisor.

## 2. Project Goal and Scope

### 2.1 Project Goal *(Define the high level goals of the project).*

- Evaluate gaps in Gateway Cities employment and determine where a more inclusive hiring process can fill openings and create opportunities for job seekers.
- Recommendations for how to increase opportunities for people who bring a wealth of experience if not the degree.
- Recommendations for retaining employees from culturally and generationally diverse backgrounds who have not traditionally had easy entry into our municipal workforces.
- Give employers a roadmap for building and retaining a more diverse workforce in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, education, and economic status.

### 2.2 Project Scope *(The project scope details the work to be taken in order to achieve the project goal. It is just as important to explicitly state what is not included in scope as it is to state what the project will deliver).*

#### In Scope:

- Massachusetts Gateway Cities: Attleboro, Barnstable, Brockton, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Leominster, Malden, Methuen, Peabody, Quincy, Revere, Salem, Springfield, Taunton, and Westfield.
- Recommendations on job descriptions and hiring processes.
- Statistical analysis of census data related to degree attainment, language of origin, race, ethnicity, and median income (Include time frame, 2010 v. 2020 Census).

#### Out of Scope:

- Non-governmental service organizations (nonprofits) in Gateway Cities.
- Municipalities in other New England states which may be similar to our Gateway Cities.

## 3. Assumptions *(An assumption is anything the project team or client considered to be true, real, or certain often without any proof or demonstration. List in bullet format).*

## BUILDING A REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE

- That we'll work well together.
- That the data will bear out our hypothesis (i.e., that not every job requires a degree, job advertisements should be posted more flexibly etc.).
- That we will have access to the data we need.
- We will produce a roadmap that is useful for these Gateway Cities.
- We will complete the capstone on time.

### 4. **Constraints** *(Anything that restricts or dictates the actions of the project team.*

*These can include the so-called 'Triple Constraint'- the 'triangle' of time, cost, and scope - and every project as project drivers has one or two, if not all three project constraints).*

- Our work schedules and the ability to balance the research with other demands, including our Spring semester class (Organizational Behavior).
- Potential that data we need will come with a cost.
- Not being able to conduct an actual survey due to time constraints on approvals.

### 5. **Risks** *(Risk is any unexpected event that might affect the people, processes, technology, and resources negatively or positively by the project)*

- That we will NOT work well together.
- That the data will contradict our thesis.
- Produce a roadmap with recommendations that is utilized by Gateway Cities.
- We complete the capstone and leverage for career opportunities.

### 6. **Communication Plan** *(Describe how the project team will communicate effectively with team members, the client, and the capstone advisor).*

N/A

### 7. **Project Team** *(List the project team members involved in the project including the client and capstone advisor).*

- Jess Feldman, Team Member
- Drew Russo, Team Member
- Mary Piecewicz, Capstone Advisor

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### 8. High Level Roles & Responsibilities of Project Team

*(For capstone thesis/case study students this section is not required)*

	<b>Team Members</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	Jess	Drew			
Project Lead	X	X			
Responsible for the project charter	X	X			
Responsible for the ensuring effective communication	X	X			
Responsible for the quality of the final paper	X	X			
Responsible for the quality of the final presentation	X	X			
Responsible for submitting peer reviews	X	X			
Problem identification and analysis	X	X			
Problem resolution	X	X			

## BUILDING A REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE

## 9. Measures of Success *(Detailed measurements that will indicate that the project is a success)*

Project Outcomes	Measure of Success
Paper	Passing grade ("A")
List of recommendations	Utilized by Gateway City and/or nonprofit organization(s).
Class presentation	Passing grade ("A")

## 10. Stakeholder Sign-off

*(For capstone thesis/case study students only capstone advisor signature is required)*

This project charter has been signed off by the client, capstone advisor and project team members.

_____	_____	_____
Name	Title	Date
_____	_____	_____

BUILDING A REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE

**Appendix B**

## BUILDING A REPRESENTATIVE WORKFORCE



### Lessons Learned

Developed by *Jessica Feldman and Drew Russo* on April 23, 2023

**Capstone Project Name: “Building a Representative Workforce: How we can help our Gateway Cities recruit and retain employees reflective of their communities”**

#### *What did we do well?*

These are things that we did well, or went well on “Building a Representative Workforce: How we can help our Gateway Cities recruit and retain employees reflective of their communities”

- Equal division of the work.
- Mostly adhered to deadlines we set to keep us on track.
- Complemented each other’s work styles.
- Merging our ideas into one practical, useful concept.
- Figuring out where to course correct when necessary.
- Ability to pivot if the research and data required it.
- We learned how to best communicate with each other and avoided major conflict as a result.

#### *What can we do better?*

These are things that in retrospective could have been done better.

- We could have started earlier (i.e., during the summer when the advisor offered).
- Set more realistic expectations from the outset.
  - Our topics were overly narrow, and we held firm to them for too long, before realizing that a more generalized approach would yield more functional recommendations.
- Avoided “over thinking” earlier in the process.
  - We had already developed a strong body of research through our literature review and methods but spent too much time looking for additional sources that did not end up being necessary for satisfying our thesis.
- Had a stronger grasp of each other’s time management needs and capacity.

#### *What still puzzles us?*

These are things that we still do not quite understand. There was uncertainty and ambiguity concerning certain aspects of the capstone.

- Every community is different, though our Gateway Cities share similar circumstances. Will our approach and recommendations be broadly applicable?
- We believe we’ve provided a useful framework, but how will they implement the framework and how will success be measured?
- Will anyone ever read this?

#### *What would we do again?*

These are activities and tasks that we considered essential. On this type of project, or a similar one we would want to repeat these activities.

- Work together.
- Similar method of dividing tasks, ensuring an even distribution of the workload.
  - Example: Splitting up the writing for the six recommendations.

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- Regular meetings, including occasional in-person get togethers. There is no substitute for personal contact in a collaboration like this.
- Same strategy in terms of creating timelines and to-do lists ensuring the final deliverable would be prepared ahead of schedule.

### ***What would we not do again?***

These are activities and tasks that we considered detrimental. We want to make certain that these are things that we do not repeat, so we can avoid replicating the project mistakes.

- Over thinking the process. We delayed our start by several weeks doing work that proved superfluous and unnecessary for the final deliverable.
  - We're both overachieving personalities who mapped up overly ambitious plans that were not required of the Capstone Practicum.
- Wait until the end of the project to consolidate our citations.
  - We had tracked them all along, but the process of combining and formatting the final bibliography proved more time-consuming than either of us thought that it would.

### ***What would we do differently?***

These are activities and tasks that did not quite work out as you expected. To make them succeed, what would we have changed?

- Choose strategies for nonprofit organizations as the primary focus instead of municipalities.
  - We both had experience in this area and are passionate about it, but ultimately found that diversifying municipal workforces had a strong connection to building the community itself.
- We had discussed interviewing a host of stakeholders in the municipal and nonprofit spheres but did not have time to complete the Independent Review Board process when we originally conceived this plan of action.
- Again, we should have started working on this during the summer as our advisor originally proposed.
  - For example, we felt strongly about a training component as part of our recommendations but did not accurately assess the availability of examples or source materials. As a result, it took us longer to complete this part of the deliverable. Utilizing more of the time available to us would have helped us feel less pressed for time in the end.

### ***What have we learned?***

What lessons have been learned that can be applied to future projects to support successful delivery of the goal and project objectives? These may be changes that need to be made, or an emphasis on the success factors that this project illustrates.

- We worked well together, and genuinely enjoyed the experience.
- We can overcome our natural tendency to procrastinate.
- We have real enthusiasm for this topic.
- Deadlines and to-do lists are great motivators and not frightening.
- There is a body of research bolstered by excellent examples that allows us to create a useful framework for communities striving to achieve representative workforces.
  - We can even use these recommendations within our own workplaces.
- The Capstone process was not as scary or intimidating as we believed it would be.
- Trust the process and go where the research takes you.