

**ICMA**

**LEADING EDGE RESEARCH**

# Beyond Compliance:

*Recruitment and Retention of  
Underrepresented Populations  
to Achieve Higher Positions in  
Local Government*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research has shown both quantitatively and qualitatively that diverse groups outperform homogeneous groups in problem solving, accuracy, and creativity. However, a diverse workforce rarely happens organically. A 2013 study examined the racial and ethnic composition of local government employees in the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States over the past 50 years, and it found that high-wage local government jobs consistently have been disproportionately held by white employees. Furthermore, while racial minorities have been underrepresented in high-level jobs, they have been overrepresented in low wage-earning jobs. The trend is similar for women. The dearth of these populations in leadership roles plays a significant role in the provision of services and the future capacity of the local government workforce.

It has been nearly fifty-five years since the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a law that prohibits employment discrimination and applies to employers with fifteen employees or more, including local, state, and federal government. Other laws passed such as the Equal Pay Act (1963), Age Discrimination in Employment Act (1967), Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1972), Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), Civil Rights Act of 1991, Family and Medical Leave Act (1993), and Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act (2010) were all designed to prohibit specific forms of employment discrimination. These laws were translated into standards of behavior for employers, which birthed the age of compliance programs. Compliance programs are internal policies and procedures set by an organization to comply with laws. These programs were often the basis of efforts to recruit, hire, and retain diverse populations; however, these compliance programs were often reactive and designed to prohibit discriminatory behavior. Compliance rules did not speak to the fundamental issues facing underrepresented populations or the value of bringing them into the workforce.

Seeking to become more proactive and inclusive, many local jurisdictions are endeavoring to go “beyond compliance” and create substantive programs that recruit, hire, and retain underrepresented populations into their ranks. The purpose of this report is to describe research on local governments that excel in increasing diversity and fostering inclusiveness. This research is based on interviews with specialists, a detailed literature review, and qualitative case studies of three cities and one county: Hennepin County, Minnesota; Tacoma, Washington; Decatur, Georgia; and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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*Pictured above, left to right:*

*Shirley Baylis, downtown program manager, City of Decatur, Georgia; Kari Boe-Schmidt, talent acquisition manager, Hennepin County, Minnesota; Tonya Palmer, executive diversity officer, Hennepin County, Minnesota; Peggy Merriss, city manager, City of Decatur, Georgia; Christine Malone, diversity and inclusion specialist, City of Ottawa, Ontario; Toni Washington, fire chief, City of Decatur, Georgia*

This report highlights seven findings, as follows:

## FINDINGS



**Finding 1:** Going 'beyond compliance' begins with leadership—top-down and bottom-up



**Finding 2:** Recruitment and hiring processes are being reconfigured



**Finding 3:** Recruitment strategies are designed to be more purposeful and intentional



**Finding 4:** Undoubtedly, there is a pipeline problem



**Finding 5:** A culture change is happening



**Finding 6:** Metrics and accountability are lacking



**Finding 7:** The relationship between offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion and human resources needs maturing

The following recommendations serve as an interconnected strategy to build programs that go beyond compliance to create hiring and retention processes that are robust and equitable and that secure the best candidates possible.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 | Recommendation 1:** Organizational champions must be in place to drive this work
- 2 | Recommendation 2:** Adopt an asset-based perspective and create a solid strategy for recruitment and retention
- 3 | Recommendation 3:** Create job descriptions that attract, not deter
- 4 | Recommendation 4:** Validate minimum qualifications and exams immediately
- 5 | Recommendation 5:** Increasing diversity must be linked to succession planning
- 6 | Recommendation 6:** Metrics and accountability must be made a priority

Overall, jurisdictions lie on a continuum of passive and active engagement in the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations in higher positions in local government. Those actively engaged are creating innovative programs that are, indeed, increasing diversity and fostering equity and inclusiveness.



## INTRODUCTION

In 1987, the report *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* delivered startling predictions as it anticipated the inclusion of larger shares of women and underrepresented populations in the workforce of the new millennium.<sup>1</sup> These predictions were interpreted as a huge demographic change in the workforce, one that would require significant shifts in human resource practices. Thus began a slow progression from affirmative action and equal employment opportunity mandates to an era of “diversity management.”<sup>2</sup> The information in the report, however, was somewhat misinterpreted as it actually noted that changes in gender and ethnic diversity *in addition to* the retirement of baby boomers and increased immigration would have a moderate total impact on the workforce. In actuality, the report noted that the participation of women and underrepresented populations in the new millennium would be small in number relative to the total labor force.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, new attention was placed on going beyond traditional compliance mandates to accommodate the expected diverse future workforce.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to this shift, diversity management depended largely on affirmative action and equal employment opportunity programs to redress issues of discrimination. In light of the predictions of greater numbers of underrepresented populations entering into the workforce, diversity management focused more on assimilating newer populations into an organization’s culture.<sup>6</sup> This freestanding approach, in which employers viewed diversity as important but a side issue not incorporated into larger core business activities, was a hallmark of the era beginning in the 1980s and continuing into the 2000s.<sup>7</sup> As a result, data

### The Power of Diversity: Collective Accuracy

Scott E. Page, Leonid Hurwicz Collegiate Professor of Complex Systems, Political Science, and Economics at the University of Michigan, constructed mathematical models and case studies to understand how variations in staffing produce organizational strength. Similar to models that predict the performance of financial markets, Page’s model showed that diverse groups outperformed groups of “the best” individuals (mainly people considered smart or intelligent) in problem solving. He found that diverse groups were perplexed less than the groups of individuals thought to be the best, who tended to think similarly. Additionally, he found that errors depend in equal parts on group members’ ability and the quality of diversity within the group. In essence: *collective accuracy = average accuracy + diversity.*

Source: *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies*<sup>5</sup>

showed that while these populations were indeed entering the workforce, most reached career plateaus and few achieved higher-level positions in most sectors, including local government.<sup>8</sup>

Before the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1972 (EEOA), minorities, people with disabilities, and women were often blocked from local government jobs.<sup>9</sup> After the passage of EEOA, local government practices and patterns were looked at more closely.<sup>10</sup> Over the decades, some traditionally underrepresented

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While these populations were indeed entering the workforce, most reached career plateaus and few achieved higher-level positions in most sectors, including local government.

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populations have made employment gains in local government but remain underrepresented. As a result, greater attention to how underrepresented populations are recruited, hired, and retained in local government is the focus of this report. This report provides a brief review of past and present compliance and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; case studies of jurisdictions going beyond compliance; findings from this research; and recommendations.

### Creating Compliance: How Did We Get Here?

It has been nearly fifty-five years since the passing of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the section of the law that prohibits employment discrimination and applies to all employers with fifteen employees or more, including local, state, and federal government. Specifically, the law sought to protect workers on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin in all areas of employment, including the hiring process, pay and promotion, and employment termination. Title VII was subsequently amended to include the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of age, pregnancy, and disabilities; more recently, some court decisions have interpreted the ban on sex discrimination to include LGBT-related discrimination. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was founded in 1965 to enforce civil rights laws specifically against workplace discrimination and investigate abuses. In 1974, the EEOC's guidebook detailed its "results orientation" with respect to increasing diversity in the American workforce. The guidebook noted that employers' efforts to diversify their workforce would be measured in the hiring, training, and promotion of mainly minorities and women.<sup>11</sup>

Employers were required to amend their current practices but were not charged with correcting past inequalities. In fact, wording from the original bill noted that employers should not "...grant preferential treatment to any individuals or to any group because of the race, color, religion, sex, or national origin of such individual

or group on account of an imbalance which may exist with respect to the total number or percentage of persons of any race, color, religion, sex, or national origin employed by any employer."<sup>12</sup> As a result, employers operated in a space in which discrimination was illegal but policies and practices that perpetuated inequality among specific groups—effectively keeping diverse populations locked out of high-level positions despite skill or ability—were allowed to continue. These policies and practices included restrictions to high-level jobs and barriers in recruitment and hiring.

These laws were translated into standards of behavior for employers, which birthed the age of compliance programs. Compliance programs are internal policies and procedures set by an organization to comply with laws. These programs were often reactive and designed to prohibit discriminatory behavior. For some time, the compliance standards were the basis of efforts to recruit, hire, and retain diverse populations. This method was flawed because the approach was often short-term and geared largely toward what was legally required and nothing more.<sup>13</sup> Compliance rules did not speak to the fundamental issues facing underrepresented populations.

Some employers voluntarily sought to go beyond compliance and took more proactive approaches to recruitment, hiring, and retention. They perceived creating a more diverse workforce as the right thing to do and a means of achieving a competitive advantage and greater organizational success. Businesses such as IBM and Xerox, for example, have been leaders in this space, with early and continuous efforts to grow a diverse workforce. IBM has had an organizational history of leaders committed to promoting diversity and challenging institutional barriers that limit or deter diversity. In the 1980s they developed child and dependent care initiatives, executive taskforces in the 1990s to understand inclusion amongst underrepresented populations (Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and women), investment in sup-



plier diversity programs in the 1990s, addressing the digital divide in various communities, and several other initiatives over the years.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Xerox leaders have focused on diversity via various initiatives, corporate social responsibility, regular employment and executive review of diversity practices and organizational climate, and supplier diversity programs. Hervé Tessler, executive vice president and president of international operations at Xerox, noted “Diversity is the secret to our success and the key to our longevity.”<sup>15</sup>

Local governments have had opportunities to do the same, although their challenges are different. Local leaders are dealing with decades of laws, policies, and regulations that have destabilized many communities and often hurt and diminished trust within some populations. That past destabilization set the stage for some populations to expe-

rience disparities in health, wealth, education, and job attainment that are difficult to contend with. Despite this, some local governments are making strides toward becoming more proactive and equitable in their approaches to recruit, hire, and retain more underrepresented populations within their ranks, but they still have much more work to do.

### Getting Better But Still Much More to Do

Todd Gardner of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Center for Economic Studies studied the racial and ethnic composition of local government employees in the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States over a 50-year timeframe (1960-2010). He found that high-wage local government jobs have consistently and disproportionately been held by white employees.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, while racial minorities have been underrepresented in high-level jobs, they have been overrepresented in low wage-earning jobs. Over the past 50 years, African Americans have made slight increases while Latinos and Asian Americans are significantly underrepresented. Women have made slight gains in local government positions with employment in lower-level positions but remain underrepresented in specialized positions such as city managers or county supervisors.<sup>17</sup>

Attention to the makeup of a local government is extremely important because its agencies are key to service delivery and policy implementation.<sup>19</sup> For example, in 2015, researchers Corrado Giulietti, Mirco Tonin, and Michael Vlassopoulos conducted a U.S.-based study to determine if racial discrimination affected access to local public services, such as law enforcement, or to some public administration functions, such as those performed by county clerks and treasurers.<sup>20</sup> The researchers sent e-mail correspondence to 19,079 local public service

### Underrepresented?

The term “underrepresentation” is context- and field-specific. Generally, any group with insufficient or inadequate representation is considered underrepresented. In the context of this report, the term refers to individuals from racial and ethnic groups, such as African Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Latinos, and persons of Asian descent, who have historically been in the minority of the U.S. population in size. These groups are also considered underrepresented because they are often excluded from circles of influence in the workplace, which precludes them from being able to fully contribute to the organization or benefit from their involvement in the workplace.<sup>18</sup>

offices soliciting information specific to the offices' functions (e.g., documentation needed for school enrollment, office opening hours). The requests used distinctively white (e.g., Greg Walsh) or black (e.g., Tyrone Washington) names. The researchers found that e-mails with distinctively black names were less likely to receive a response despite sending identical e-mails to those with distinctively white-sounding names. Additionally, responses sent to the sender with distinctively black names had a less cordial tone. While the failure to provide information about a service is not the same as denial to service, this study supports growing evidence that even the provision of information has an impact on decisions and actual take-up rates.<sup>21</sup> This study is consistent with similar studies that found discrimination in other facets of public services such as voting requirements, employment, and housing.<sup>22</sup>

When the local government workforce does not reflect the makeup of the community, it affects how welcome some residents feel in participating in and trusting the governmental process; it can squelch civic involvement and maintain a status quo that does not work for the community. This can be witnessed in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. The subtle impacts of limited diversity in government agencies can be found in areas with low availability of translations for non-English speakers. If individuals' language differences are not accommodated, feelings of isolation, exclusion, and low participation in civic processes are likely.<sup>23</sup> The 2014 unrest in Ferguson, Missouri was attributed, in part, to the large disparity between the local government workforce, which was 95 percent white, and the population, which was two-thirds African American.<sup>24</sup> A U.S. Department of Justice report issued following the unrest found that the police department in Ferguson had been using several unlawful policing tactics that led to substantial disparities in the arrest, ticketing, and use-of-force incidents, with negative consequences for African Americans.<sup>25</sup> Among the corrections the report recommended were the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women and underrepresented populations such as African Americans and Latinos. Many communities are like Ferguson in the makeup of their local government workforce. The lack of diversity has a trickle-down effect that impacts the present and future workforce and community.

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A diverse workforce rarely happens organically. Special attention to recruitment, job postings, and the treatment of current employees is key to enhancing diversity and sparking an atmosphere of inclusion. As a result, some local governments are leading in building programs designed to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion. Masami Nishishiba, associate professor in the Department of Public Administration at Portland State University, offers three motivations for working to enhance diversity within an organization:

- **Demographic composition and change**—commitment to having a workforce that reflects the demographics of the community
- **Organizational effectiveness**—the tangible benefits an organization receives, such as more creativity, increased problem-solving and decision-making capability, and alternative points of view
- **Legal compliance**—legal compliance and standard training, systems, and processes, to create a work environment free from discrimination.<sup>26</sup>

Many localities endeavor to go “beyond compliance” and create substantive programs that begin before a person enters local government and continue throughout his or her career. Understanding the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges associated with this work is critical to fostering more meaningful diversity and inclusion efforts.

## Three motivations for working to enhance diversity within an organization:

- 1** *Legal compliance*—legal compliance and standard training, systems, and processes, to create a work environment free from discrimination.
- 2** *Organizational effectiveness*—the tangible benefits an organization receives, such as more creativity, increased problem-solving and decision-making capability, and alternative points of view.
- 3** *Demographic composition and change*—commitment to having a workforce that reflects the demographics of the community.

Source: Masami Nishishiba, “Local Government Diversity Initiatives in Oregon: An Exploratory Study.”

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a qualitative case study design whereby four cities or counties were identified by the researcher as organizations with exemplary diversity and inclusion programs. For each jurisdiction, three to four interviews were conducted to gain varying perspectives on the organization’s efforts. Interview questions were organized in the following topical areas: motivation for enhancing recruitment and retention efforts, recruitment efforts, retention efforts, and accountability. A total of fifteen interviews were conducted; among the interviewees were chief diversity officers, city managers, human resource managers, recruiters, and police and fire chiefs. Additionally, six key informant interviews with experts were conducted. Prior to beginning the case studies, an in-depth literature review was conducted. The literature review included relevant information on diversity and inclusion in local government drawn from sources such as journal articles, reports, program documentation, and policies. Interview data were coded using thematic analysis.

## CASE STUDIES



### HENNEPIN COUNTY, MINNESOTA:

### *Reducing Disparities through Pathways to Employment*

**Hennepin County** is the largest county in Minnesota’s Twin Cities region. The county has over 1.2 million residents, which include about 30 percent of the state’s residents of color. Within the county, disparities between races that range from income to education to housing have persisted. For example, home ownership in Hennepin County for whites is at 71 percent while at 18 percent for blacks.<sup>27</sup> The core of many of these disparities lies in employment opportunities. With an impending workforce shortage of 128,000 statewide by 2020 and racial employment gaps at record levels, officials estimated that eliminating the income and employment disparities would translate into \$4.6 billion in income growth and the equivalent of 17,666 new hires in Hennepin County.<sup>28</sup> As a result, leaders in the county identified reducing disparities in the community through pathways to employment as a strategy for diversity, equity, and inclusion, with implications for both Hennepin County’s workforce and the workforce of the broader region.

Hennepin County leaders developed an innovative consortium of regional employers to increase pathways to employment. The Hennepin Workforce Leadership Council is made up of the region’s largest public- and private-sector employers, working collectively to set a common vision

## Hennepin Demographics

	Hennepin County	Minnesota
Population	1.2 million	5.3 million
White	73.8%	84.3%
Black	12.4%	5.7%
Hispanic	6.8%	5.1%
Asian	1.6%	4.5%
Multiracial	3.5%	2.7%
Native American	.7%	1%
Other	2.7%	1.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

on creating pathways to employment that include the following steps:

- Educators accelerating and customizing programs
- Community organizations providing a continuum of services to meet the needs of the population by providing training programs, with students accepting guided pathways with guaranteed internships
- Employers changing hiring practices.

Together, the consortium developed Hennepin Pathways. The key to Hennepin Pathways is aligning career pathways with employers' needs. The Hennepin County leaders promote partnerships among community organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions to train participants and place them in jobs once they complete the program. Seven institutions of higher education offer tuition-free courses in designated career pathways. For example, the program offers a free nine-month 911 telecommunicator evening program at Hennepin Technical College and a workforce development nonprofit called HIRED. Trained telecommunicators will have access to Hennepin County, City of Minneapolis, Anoka County, and Ramsey County positions. The human services pathway provides free, community college-credited

## Cracking the Code

The Hennepin Workforce Leadership Council worked to crack the code of opportunity gaps within the region by taking an all-inclusive approach to training and hiring practices. Since 2014, nearly 90 percent of pathways graduates have been hired for jobs they were unlikely to obtain if not for this program. The council continues to add more career pathways and partners to its current eighteen pathways in order to meet employment needs and reduce unemployment and income disparities. In addition to Hennepin County's work, pathways programs have become a state priority in Minnesota. In 2018, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development awarded \$17.8 million in grants to career pathways programs in Minnesota.<sup>29</sup> Cities like Baltimore, Chicago, New Orleans, and Seattle are doing similar work with variations in funding and collaboration models. For example, the Seattle Jobs Initiative, developed in 1995, connects low-income/low-skills adults with training and quality jobs and creates pathways to sub-baccalaureate certificates for living-wage careers.

training as well as internships at Hennepin County and other public sector employers.

Chief Diversity Officer Tonya Palmer has also led efforts to support diversity and inclusion within Hennepin County through extensive employee education, modifications in recruitment efforts, employee resource groups, career centers, a mentorship program, and a leadership academy. Also, Hennepin County is setting the expectation for Hennepin County departmental leaders to identify how they plan to reduce disparities in their areas of responsibility. Externally, Hennepin County leaders have led efforts to develop partnerships with community organizations that facilitate a career pathways program for potential county employees.

Hennepin Pathways has helped the county fill vacancies with local candidates who might not have considered public service and/or who may have been on public assistance. Between 2014 and 2017, Hennepin County hired 159 individuals through Hennepin Pathways.



**TACOMA, WASHINGTON:**  
*Reforming Hiring Practices from the Ground Up*

**The port city of Tacoma, Washington,** is one of the most diverse cities in the state. People of color make up approximately 35 percent of Tacoma’s population. A contributing factor to this diversity is that Tacoma is home to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, a U.S. Army-U.S. Air Force base. Many service members and their families end up staying in the area after their active duty ends. The growing gentrification of neighboring Seattle is another contributing factor to Tacoma’s diversity, as African Americans and Latinos have been priced out of Seattle and have moved into the southern section of Tacoma. City leaders also have recognized the inequities among populations with respect to unemployment, poverty, and poor health outcomes, and have been taking steps to address them.

A central theme of the city’s efforts was a commitment to developing a city workforce that better reflects the community served. In Tacoma, the white population is approximately 65 percent, yet white employees make up 80 percent of the city government workforce. Additionally, 51 percent of the population is female while female employees only make up 29 percent of the city government workforce.<sup>30</sup> Starting internally, city leaders’ attention was placed on recruiting, hiring, and retention practices.

In 2014, the city adopted the Equity and Empowerment policy, a framework centered on

**Tacoma Demographics**

	Tacoma	Washington
Population	205,602	7.07 million
White	65.3%	77.3%
Black	10.1%	3.6%
Hispanic	11.3%	12.1%
Asian	9.1%	7.8%
Multiracial	8.9%	5.3%
Native American	1.3%	1.3%
Other	4.2%	3.9%

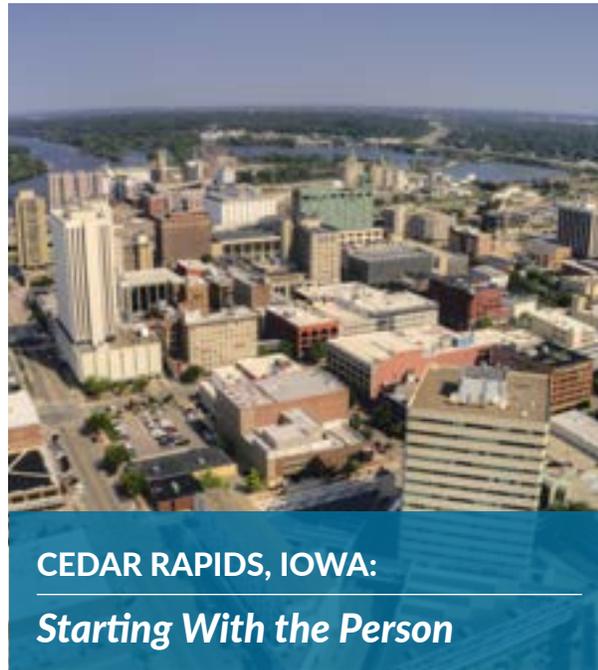
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

a vision for an inclusive and equitable city. The following year, the Office of Equity and Human Rights was created, with its director, Diane Powers, supported by ten full-time staff. Using similar offices in Seattle and Portland as their models, Powers and her staff addressed the policies and procedures that shaped the internal makeup of the City of Tacoma’s workforce. This process reviewed recruitment, hiring processes, employee education, and succession planning, and it revealed flaws in hiring processes that involved unneeded requirements (e.g., driver’s license requirement for an accountant position), early exclusion of qualified candidates, or unneeded measures of candidate fitness. Powers’ staff took steps to amend these and provide a broad range of support for better hiring practices. For instance, they developed a handbook called *Recruiting, Hiring, and Retention: Applying an Equity Lens to Recruiting, Interviewing, Hiring & Retaining Employees*. The handbook provides an overview of the city’s goal of achieving a workforce that reflects the community it serves through better employment practices that were focused on equity. The handbook also identified tangible ways to apply an equity lens to hiring, such as reviewing job descriptions, eliminating unneeded requirements, including statements about diversity, and the

development of appropriate supplemental questions about the candidate’s ability to work in an environment serving a diverse community.

Additionally, Powers ensures that Tacoma city staff become trained on how to recognize implicit bias. Interviewing practices have been modified to include diverse interview panels. Furthermore, managers have been encouraged to go through applications themselves to spot qualified candidates, a departure from the traditional practice of the human resources department doing initial screening to winnow the pool of candidates. To improve retention, new employees are assigned mentors who provide guidance and advice. The City of Tacoma is also home to Washington’s only chapter of the National Forum for Black Administrators, a national organization designed to support and develop the leadership skills of black public administrators.

Tacoma’s Office of Equity and Human Rights continues to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Future work will include a workforce disparity study, efforts to strengthen succession planning, steps to bolster recruitment efforts, and adoption of more accurate performance measures for positions.



**Cedar Rapids, Iowa**, is a city of approximately 129,000 and the second-largest city in the state. In 2014, the city scored a 68 out of 100 in the Human Rights Campaign’s Municipal Equality Index (MEI) scorecard. The MEI rates cities on the level of inclusiveness of municipal laws, municipal employment, policies, and services with specific attention on LGBT equality. Areas where Cedar Rapids fell short were in the categories of municipality as employer

### *Cedar Rapids Demographics*

	Cedar Rapids	Iowa
Population	129,537	3.1 million
White	86.7%	90.9%
Black	6.2%	3.3%
Hispanic	3.7%	5.6%
Asian	2.7%	2.1%
Multiracial	3.2%	2.0%
Native American	.3%	.3%
Other	.9%	1.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are terms commonly used in describing an employer's approach to fostering a workplace that is representative in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other factors.

**Diversity** – the presence of difference within a given setting; variety; multiformity.

In this context, diversity is not about an individual but a collective. Diversity is in relation to others. There is diversity within a group when there are differences within a group.

**Equity** – the quality of being fair or impartial; fairness; impartiality.

In this context, equity is about attention to advantages and disadvantages that exist and correction of inequities in order to eliminate practices or impacts that adversely affect one group more than another.

**Inclusion** – the act of including; the state of being included.

In this context, inclusion is about ensuring that individuals feeling welcomed and valued.

**Belonging** – something that belongs.

In this context, belonging is critical to human happiness and well-being. Belonging to a work culture helps remove feelings of isolation and inspires physical, mental, and emotional well-being and performance.

Together, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging signal a paradigm shift among organizations that want to maximize opportunities for everyone within their organizations in order for them to flourish.<sup>31</sup>

(offering equivalent benefits and protections), law enforcement (lack of LGBT task force), and relationship with the LGBT community (inclusion of community). Despite the scorecard's core focus on LGBT, it served as motivation for city leaders who were already committed to furthering their work on growing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

To begin this work, the city manager appointed LaSheila Yates to serve as chief diversity officer.

In this role, Yates is responsible for developing greater diversity efforts in the areas of education, employment, civil rights, and public accommodations. Yates notes that "We wanted to go above and beyond diversity and work on inclusion." A key feature of the work on inclusion has been targeted towards the city's workforce.

Yates took a multilayered approach to this work, with particular focus on recruitment and cross-functional development. In a city heavily populated by white residents, efforts to attract diverse talent into the city's workforce was a challenge. City administrators understood that recruitment in Cedar Rapids was much more than recruiting for jobs: it involved connections and a sense of belonging within city government and the community at large. For instance, the city hosted a cultural celebration expo through a partnership with the Cedar Rapids Public Library and Human Rights Commission that 1,200 to 1,600 people attended. The rationale behind this type of engagement is, as one city administrator put it, "finding ways to make the whole person feel like they have a place." She went on to say, "It's a different approach to recruitment." Additionally, she encourages a presence at a variety of other community events that target underrepresented populations.

Yates also took a cross-functional approach to diversity and inclusion through the development of the Cedar Rapids Employee Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team. The team includes high-level administrators who provide thought leadership and action about how to continuously promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Perhaps one of the more valuable aspects of the team is the opportunity for reflection. Captain Brent Long of the Cedar Rapids Police Department, who is a member of the team, reflected on how hiring practices that reduce the number of people from underrepresented populations in applicant pools can affect diversity and inclusion. He noted that, "[For] a lot of years, different agencies focused on a lot of ideals for the single best candidate, but you don't realize how they can affect the city as a whole or certain group." Another member of the team, Battalion Chief Andrew Olesen of the Cedar Rapids Fire Service, found that when work environments are supportive for everyone, employees become unofficial recruiters. He remarked, "We build relationships and female officers told other women that this is a good place

to work. They let their friends know that you can be successful here and have a family.”

The City of Cedar Rapids continues to build on its work. Its efforts have yielded success, and its officials are committed to do more to enhance inclusion within its workforce. The city can point to measurable progress: in 2015, Cedar Rapids received a score of 99 percent on the MEI and in 2016 reached 100 percent.



PHOTO: Lincoln, Wikimedia Commons

## DECATUR, GEORGIA:

### *Bottom-up Leadership: Employee Retention Designed for Employees by Employees*

**The City of Decatur, Georgia**, is a small but densely populated city with a population of approximately 23,000. Goals centered on diversity have been stated in Decatur’s strategic plans as early as 2000. Today, the city is driving the recruitment of underrepresented populations within the city government workforce, in addition to facilitating their upward mobility into management positions. Key to their efforts is employee development designed and implemented by employees.

In Decatur, the retention of city employees has not been a problem; however, career advancement has been a challenge. As one employee remarked, “Everybody doesn’t know how to get to their dream job.” As a result, several programs and resources have been provided to support the career advancement of employees, such as employee resource groups, professional development, and mentorship programs. One such program is the leadership development program

## Decatur Demographics

	Decatur	Georgia
Population	23,210	10.09 million
White	69.1%	59.8%
Black	21.1%	31.2%
Hispanic	3.8%	9.2%
Asian	4.5%	3.7%
Multiracial	4.1%	2.2%
Native American	.2%	.3%
Other	.9%	3.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

called Decatur E5 (Engaged, Effective, Excellent, and Evolved Employees) Academy. Participation in the academy is open to any employee who has more than two years of service and is less than five years away from retirement. The academy is a nine-month program that blends leadership, cross-training, teamwork, mentorship, hands-on experience, and an opportunity to attend the Alliance for Innovation’s annual Transforming Local Government conference. There is a selection process for the academy and chosen employees attend a session once per month.

The academy was developed from a capstone project from the Alliance for Innovation’s (AFI) 2014 Innovation Academy. AFI is an organization that aims to inspire innovation within local government through programs, conferences, and programs such as the Innovation Academy. Participation in the Innovation Academy is an experience provided to a team of select employees. Shirley Baylis, special events & community outreach coordinator, was selected as a member of the Decatur team. She recalled that, prior to the Innovation Academy, ideas swirled around an internal program that provided employees a look at the organization in order to create a better understanding of what they were a part of. An internal survey, Baylis recalled, led to the idea

of a program “to develop employees’ leadership skills and to generate employee engagement.” The Innovation Academy created an opportunity to bring the idea into fruition and Baylis notes that, “what developed was the E5 Academy, a program for employees, by employees.”

Also underscoring Decatur’s commitment to diversity in city government and ensuring career advancement for employees is the citywide equity, inclusion, and engagement plan, known as Better Together. Approximately 800 citizens in Decatur devoted a total of more than 1,300 hours to provide critical input into the plan. One of Better Together’s six focus areas addresses facilitating community support and engagement among all of the citizens of Decatur, an important means for creating a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive city government and workforce.

City Manager Peggy Merriss also plays a key role in driving and supporting efforts to enhance diversity. Decatur has the distinction of being one of only a handful of U.S. cities to have a female African American fire chief, Chief Toni Washington. Additionally, the fire department’s top three positions are held by women.

## FINDINGS



### **FINDING 1:** **Going “Beyond Compliance” Begins with Leadership—Top-down to Bottom-up**

All participants identified the importance of leadership in expanding their local governments’ efforts to recruit, hire, and retain persons from underrepresented populations as well as overall increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Each participant mentioned traditional top-down leadership through which city managers, departmental leaders, and other senior staff have largely committed to growing their efforts. These leaders are driving forces behind elevating diversity in local government and making sure their agencies are

proactive and continuously address inequality and exclusion. Several participants identified bottom-up leadership by regular rank-and-file employees.

Based on participants identification of how they or top leaders in their organization approach diversity, equity, and inclusion, top-down leadership consists of five key actions: understanding, acknowledgement, commitment, allocation, and action. By and large, organizational leaders understand that there are fundamental imbalances in the makeup of their jurisdiction’s workforce and the opportunity to enhance. They acknowledge internally and externally that there are disparities and that there is more work to be done. Internally, they drive conversations with other leaders to build consensus and prioritize. Externally, they deliver messages to the public that indicate a commitment to enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Following this, they make commitments to act. Key in the commitment to act is the allocation of resources to support the efforts. In essence, leaders “put their money where their mouth is.” This includes the establishment of chief diversity officer positions, offices dedicated to human rights and equity, diversity advisory boards, workforce development programs, dedicated staff, and constant expectations that their agencies take on this work. As Decatur City Manager Peggy Merriss states, “It’s one of those things you have to ‘walk the walk and talk the talk.” She adds, “Letting people know that the city manager has their back is not easy work. It means speaking up and not [just] doing what is popular.”

Effective leaders have instituted new policies and created an expectation for the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion to be implemented at all levels of the government workplace. One manager reported that her city manager had supervisors build strategic plans indicating how they would recruit more people from underrepresented populations; this made it clear to supervisors that noncompliance was not an option, so increasing diversity became a part of the culture. Another manager noted that this work is less about leadership and more about “doer-ship.” In this context, doer-ship means providing resources and support to do the work, publicly rewarding and celebrating success, and intervening when efforts fall short.

Most participants highlighted their respect and admiration for the chief executive who has made this work a priority. Having a champion in a top leadership position allowed these organizations to test strategies, adjust when needed, and gain buy-in from other employees. As an example, Hennepin County Workforce Development and Staffing Manager Kari Boe-Schmidtz stated, “He [county administrator] has been very clear about the direction for the organization and has provided us the support to carry it out.” Diane Powers, director of the City of Tacoma’s Office of Equity and Human Rights, reported a similar experience. “My city manager said ‘Let’s make this happen. You lead it and I will set the tone for the organization. It won’t be easy but we have to start.’”

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“Having leadership’s endorsement is critical but staff have moved the needle also.”

—Dwayne Marsh, Co-Director of Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) at Race Forward and Vice President of Institutional and Sectoral Change, The Center for Social Inclusion

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While top leadership creates the expectations and sets the tone, participants frequently mentioned the necessity of bottom-up leadership. Several midlevel employees mentioned their roles in expanding conversations and initiating action to address diversity. This experience resonates with Brian Corpening, associate vice president and chief diversity officer at California State University, Monterey Bay, who finds that, “Leaders at the top are essentially starting the race and passing the baton to the employees to move the organization closer to victory.” From his perspective, employees are “providing leadership when they buy in, use the tools provided to the organization, and become agents of change in the internal movement to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

## Creating Economic Growth and Inclusive Communities: A Top Priority for Mayors

A National League of Cities analysis of “State of the City” addresses given by mayors from 120 cities across the United States indicated that demographics was one of their ten top priorities in 2017.<sup>32</sup> Several mayors specifically focused on progress in economic growth and inclusion. Many have identified redirecting economic development funds toward workforce development initiatives aimed at reducing skills and opportunity gaps among women, low-income earners, and people of color.



### FINDING 2: Recruitment and Hiring Processes are Being Reconfigured

**Hiring processes are being evaluated to eliminate outdated language, unnecessary minimum qualifications, and exclusionary measures.**

City and county administrators and human resource managers understand that there have been long-standing obstacles for job seekers from underrepresented populations. Civil service processes in some jurisdictions require applicants to take a test, and only those candidates with the highest scores are presented to the hiring manager. One interviewee noted that the civil service process can “eliminate people with small problems” that can be addressed on the job or have no bearing on the job to be performed. Internships can create opportunities for young adults, but unpaid internships often preclude individuals from lower-income families as they often need to work for money. Administrators who create paid internships can expect better results in recruiting people from underrepresented populations.

The process of refining recruitment and hiring is ongoing. Human resource managers and leaders are constantly auditing their job postings, interview questions, and applicant pool, and they are trying

to discern the impact of language in inadvertently deterring specific populations from applying. Several interviewees indicated that their communities participate in “Ban the Box,” a fair hiring practice that enables qualified candidates to advance further in the application process by delaying the disclosure of a criminal background and giving the hiring manager greater discretion in determining if a past conviction will affect employment [see sidebar]. Diane Powers, director of Tacoma’s Office of Human Rights, spoke to this point. “We found out that we were eliminating people with infractions...that had no bearing on the job [for] which they were applying.” She added, “If we want true equity and inclusion, this means discarding practices meant to keep people out.” Additionally, managers have begun educating supervisors as to whether preferred qualifications are necessary requirements, as including them in job postings can potentially preclude qualified candidates from applying or moving forward in the search process.

Job exams or assessments are used widely in all levels of government to assess fitness for a job, but interviewees indicated the job exam system is broken. They find that exams are outdated, have not been validated for accuracy, and can be discriminatory. Making changes, however, is not risk-free, as Nelson Lim, executive director of the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania, points out. “If [you] change criteria, you are asked if you are lowering standards. The problem is that the standards have not been scientifically validated.” Neil Reichenberg, who serves as executive director of the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) echoes those sentiments. “All tests should be validated. You should be validating to make sure they are job-related. It takes time to do, and from a legal perspective you can open yourself to liabilities. Requirements need to be reflective of job requirements.”

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“‘Qualified’ – it is used as code.  
We need to challenge what  
we mean by qualified.”

—Mary Morrison, Organization Development  
Manager, City of Tacoma

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## Fair-Chance Hiring: Ban the Box

Having a felony conviction can have lifelong ramifications, and chief among them is chronic unemployment or underemployment. About one in thirty-seven individuals in the United States has spent some time in prison, making the implications for employment a broad-based societal problem.<sup>33</sup> Research shows 60 to 75 percent of former inmates cannot find work their first year out of prison,<sup>34</sup> and that 30 percent of white applicants with a criminal record experience a penalty in job seeking compared with 60 percent of black applicants with criminal records.<sup>35</sup> A new initiative known as “Ban the Box” encourages employers to delay queries into criminal histories until later in the hiring process. The rationale is that a candidate is more likely to be hired if the disclosure of a criminal record happens later in the job application process. Research shows that checking a box to disclose a criminal record on an initial application often eliminates a candidate before qualifications are fully considered. The chances of being offered a job increase if hiring officials have the opportunity to meet the candidate and assess whether or not the past conviction presents a true barrier to employment. Thirty-one states, the District of Columbia, and over 150 cities and counties have adopted “Ban the Box” practices.<sup>36</sup>

One interviewee recounted a conversation with a transit supervisor who remarked that he was receiving a diverse pool of applicants for jobs, but many were dropped from the applicant pool after they performed poorly on an assessment. The assessment asked applicants to memorize streets and intersections in the city. At a time when GPS is used regularly, an assessment of this nature was unnecessary and removed otherwise qualified candidates from consideration. Ultimately, that part the assessment was removed. “Look at services needed for the community, look at who is not being served,” this interviewee advised. “We need to look for who can work with this population. When we define qualified—you have to ask, qualified to do what? How do you build into your process the points that you might give someone that meets those qualifications? Throw out testing about cardinal directions because it doesn’t matter.”

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“We looked at our overall processes and now we have an updated checklist for hiring managers with a diversity lens. We encourage them to have diverse hiring panels as a best practice, giving all candidates fifteen minutes with the questions because it alleviates anxiety (which helps people with disabilities). Additional interview questions pertaining to diversity [are] included in a rating guide pertaining to diversity—such as ‘What does diversity mean to you?’ and ‘Is diversity important for people in managerial roles?’ This helps us make sure that we are bringing people in that understand where we are trying to go as an organization.

—Christine Malone, Diversity Specialist,  
City of Ottawa

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### **Removing implicit bias from hiring practices via several practices**

Participants note that implicit or unconscious bias is an issue that influences how job candidates are assessed and often causes candidates from underrepresented populations to be removed from the recruitment and/or hiring process. Dwayne Marsh, vice president of institutional and sectoral change at the Center for Social Inclusion notes that “HR

### **About Bias**

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Implicit bias is not the only threat to the hiring process. Other forms of bias can subtly drive hiring practices that preclude certain groups.

**Confirmation bias** – The tendency to seek out information that conforms to and/or confirms pre-existing views and ignores information that goes against one’s views

Example: “I don’t think Bob is good candidate for this position. I don’t think he’ll fit in with our team. Our team is made up of outgoing people and he said that he preferred to work autonomously.”

**In-group bias**– The tendency to favor members of your own group

Example: “All of the job applicants were qualified. I think we should go with Bob; he went to my alma mater and is a veteran like me.”

**Projection bias** – The tendency to find that others have the same attitudes or beliefs as you

Example: “Bob is similar to me. I think we should go with him. I think he would be a good fit with our team.”

**Status quo bias** – The tendency to maintain the current state of affairs

Example: “If we hire Bob, I think he can help me fight this new accounting system the higher-ups are considering.”

practices historically had pretty significant biases built in. That has hampered opportunities for people from underrepresented populations to get in.” Steps taken to reduce bias have happened largely through education. All participants pointed to regular training of government employees in their respective jurisdictions. The frequency of training varies among the jurisdictions, with training held annually in some jurisdictions, every three months in others, and in still others as one-off experiences featuring a special guest speaker to discuss a particular topic.

Efforts to remove bias from the hiring process include taking names off applications and employing diverse interview panels. Participants discussed hearing how individuals with ethnic sounding names don’t get callbacks despite their



qualifications and removing names from applications is a step many are considering to redress this. Diverse interview panels represent a concerted effort to expand perspectives and reduce biases in the hiring process. A diverse panel of interviewers can include a range of genders, races, organizational positions (lower and upper level), and departmental representation. As one participant noted, a diverse set of interviewers “helps the candidate understand that this is a welcoming place where there are people like you.” Another approach is to have an individual trained by the organization in reducing implicit bias such as a human resource analyst participate on the panel. A key feature of the panels is that the invited panel members must have a voice in the hiring process.



### **FINDING 3:** **Recruitment Strategies Are Designed to Be More Purposeful and Intentional**

Participants noted that recruitment processes are much more intentional than years before. All of the jurisdictions featured in these case studies have cast a wider net to recruit candidates from underrepresented populations. Hiring managers go beyond the traditional “post it and they will come” model and conduct outreach in the community. One participant remarked that, in the past, “HR usually posted the positions online

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“Unless you can reach directly into the group you want to reach, the overall demographics won’t change.”

—Neil Reichenberg, Executive Director,  
International Public Management Association  
for Human Resources (IPMA-HR)

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and might have sent [postings] out to a few trade groups. However, we built a list of community groups to send it to *and* we send HR analysts to community events to explain how to apply and to say to community members, “We really want you to apply.” One participant heard a public works supervisor say that people were always asking his crew members how they got hired with the city, and so crew members were given a business card that explained how to apply for a city job that could be given easily to people in the community interested in jobs with the city. Recruiters are also making more targeted visits and focusing on where they are posting their job announcements. They are also attending job fairs, community events such as food festivals, disability awareness events, gay pride events, women’s month celebrations, and Martin Luther King, Jr. parades, and they are visiting historically black colleges and other minority-serving institutions. Participants noted the desire to build

relationships with people in the community, so they will view the city as somewhere they would want to work.

City administrators also are starting the process early by providing young people with information and access to different career fields. For example, the City of Houston, Texas, provides paid opportunities to youth between the ages of 16 and 21 to work for the city over the summer in a variety of departments. City administrators are taking this same approach to public safety occupations. Several interviewees noted that individuals often become interested in law enforcement or the fire service because a family member works in one of these fields and provides knowledge about the job and access. Administrators are trying to create a similar dynamic by providing access and information about jobs via summer programs, after-school programs, academies, and mentorship opportunities.

City of Cedar Rapids Fire Department Battalion Chief of Training Andrew Olesen noted that his colleagues in the Cedar Rapids Police Department are doing this. He stated that, “Similar to having a father or uncle that is a police officer, they are providing those brother, dad, or uncle relationships so that interest is not lost.” The Cedar Rapids Fire Department hosts a Women’s Fire Academy for young women between the ages of 14 and 21 that educates participants on how firefighting works. If a young participant shows interest, she is connected with a female firefighter to

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“I look back to years ago when it was HR and county leadership pushing this message and encouraging people. It is a culture shift. It is what we all stand for and how we do business.”

—Hennepin County Workforce Development  
Manager Kari Boe-Schmidt

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learn more about her experience. The Fairfax County Police Department (Virginia) facilitates the Teen Police Academy and Future Women Leaders of Law Enforcement program for high school girls to interest them in policing.



#### **FINDING 4:** **Undoubtedly, There is a Pipeline Problem**

Participants described a multifaceted challenge in increasing opportunities for people from underrepresented communities to attain higher-level positions in local government. The pipeline is a critical factor: in some cases, pipelines to higher-level positions are ineffective and in other cases they are nonexistent. As Nelson Lim of the Fels Institute of Government indicates, “Historically, [people of color] felt government was where they could get a fair shake. With the civil rights movement and post-civil rights, they could get social mobility. Historically, there is good representation of people of color, [but] over time, the question is whether they rise to the top. There are fewer at the top.”

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“We have to be more intentional about looking at the pipeline for both gender and race. There are jobs so deeply designed for men and we don’t even think to challenge or change them.”

—Mary Morrison, Organization Development  
Manager, City of Tacoma

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Pipelines are networks of employees that are trained, groomed, and retained to move into new positions when available. Developing the talent pipeline within an organization needs to be continuous and involves forethought and training. However, many local governments lack these critical pieces. As one interviewee noted, “They’re [employees] not leaving because they’re retiring.

They're leaving way before retirement." This person went on to note, "We don't have a mentoring program. We don't have an internship program that contributes to the pipeline."

Participants had mixed opinions on the root of the pipeline problem: recruitment, training, or retention. However, several concluded that an inadequate pipeline results in fewer opportunities for underrepresented populations. Fewer opportunities can be a result of general hiring practices that employ the external candidates instead of utilizing internal pipelines to identify viable candidates. One participant stated, "People are not given enough opportunity to rise to the top." Dwayne Marsh noted issues around seniority, which leave underrepresented populations out of the pipeline. "If there are no people of color in the pipeline to even achieve seniority, we continue the same problem." One interviewee said that more transparency is needed so that prospective candidates can know how to get a specific job.

Programs and professional development opportunities such as leadership academies, mentoring programs, and employee resource groups have been put in place to help increase knowledge and access to opportunities. Examples of these are the City of Decatur's E-5 program and Hennepin County's assortment of employee opportunities such as a mentoring for people of color, employee resource groups, and regular learning and development opportunities.



### **FINDING 5:** **A Culture Change Is Happening**

When asked about the overall atmosphere or culture within their organizations, all participants described a culture change through which members of the community feel that they belong and have "a seat at the table." However, most found it difficult to describe the culture change other than to note that they could feel the difference. For example, one participant noted a change in gender-neutral language (e.g., manpower=staff, foreman=crew chief, fireman=firefighter) among their organization's personnel.

Each participant noted this culture change has had impacts on their diversity efforts. In Tacoma, the culture change has sparked new initiatives that wouldn't have taken place ten or fifteen years prior. For example, in December 2017, the City of Tacoma passed a resolution to support the creation of the Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs in order to better engage immigrant and refugee populations and stimulate positive outcomes for them. Additionally, the city translates city documents into more languages than before; provides more training around race, unconscious bias, and equity; and supports police department activities in the community that aid in building community trust.

### ***Recruitment changes when people say this is a good place to work***

Creating an inclusive environment in which employees understand how they contribute to the success of their organization is essential to the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations. In such an environment, employees are empowered to make suggestions; to reach out to human resources or their office of diversity, equity, and inclusion when needed; and to participate in activities that are outside of their job duties.

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**"Our employees are our ambassadors. Our top source of hires comes from employee referrals. People are happy to work here and are telling others about it."**

*—Kari Boe-Schmidt, Workforce Development Manager and Staffing Manager, Hennepin County*

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When employees enjoy where they work, they are more likely to attract others. Learning opportunities, social events, professional development, and acknowledgement are key to developing employees who will serve as ambassadors for the organization.



## FINDING 6: Metrics and Accountability Are Lacking

All participants mentioned the use of some metrics to capture the outcomes and the impact of their work, such as participation in training and hiring statistics, but lacked more substantive metrics. Most acknowledged a need for improvement in this area and suggested that one reason why more detailed metrics have not been established is that their diversity efforts are relatively new.



## FINDING 7: The Relationship between Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Human Resources Needs Maturing

Enhancing the diversity within the workforce is an organizational imperative that falls largely between two departments: newly created offices of diversity and longstanding human resources departments. The two often work together due to an overlap in their domains, such as the creation of hiring practices and policies, training, recruitment, and workforce management. The two *need* to work together to facilitate greater diversity initiatives, but there can be clashes in their relationship.

Participants identified, at times, challenging moments with HR departments due to differences in philosophy of the scope of diversity efforts and other issues related to authority. One participant noted, “Our HR department was most difficult to work with because anything done around hiring is in their purview.” Furthermore, they noted, “HR is very transactional, and DE&I is transformational.” While human resources departments seek to be in compliance, diversity, equity, and inclusion officers seek to identify inequities and opportunities for growth.

At times, diversity, equity, and inclusion officers sensed that their suggestions or modifications to processes were viewed by their counterparts in human resources as unneeded, more work, or whimsy. Participants cited this challenge as an ongoing frustra-

tion and impediment to their work. One participant stated, “It is a collaborative effort. HR has to be on board. If not, our work suffers and hurts [the organization] because we’re not doing as much as we can.” Another noted that the challenge is doubled when pushback is received from employees and when HR is unsupportive because it feels as though its efforts are being undermined.

## DISCUSSION

According to the Center for State and Local Government Excellence’s 2017 workforce trends survey, 91 percent of human resource managers indicated that recruiting and retaining qualified personnel was a top priority.<sup>37</sup> However, making progress toward that priority is not as straightforward as it might seem, or as it used to be.

The case studies profiled in this report illustrate some of the ways in which cities and counties are creating approaches that welcome greater numbers of underrepresented populations into local government employment. The City of Beaverton, Oregon, provides another example. Beaverton instituted a Diversity Advisory Board and issued a *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan 2015-2017 Report* that highlights accomplishments in the area. Such accomplishments include increases in the hiring of underrepresented populations in the Beaverton Police Department; studies to identify public transit service gaps for underserved areas; and changes in city practices aimed to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A holistic approach to creating a more inclusive workforce marks an understanding that activities on multiple levels, directly and indirectly related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, are needed to create change. In Cedar Rapids, Chief Diversity Officer LaSheila Yates focuses on community-level inclusion as much as supporting pipeline activities. The case studies also illustrate the abundance of partnerships and cross-departmental collaboration needed to make these efforts work.

Leaders cite the challenges of doing this work. Among them are the careful balancing acts they must strike between meeting their colleagues



where they are, in terms of understanding the value of diversity and inclusiveness in the workforce, and the imperative for stimulating organizational change. Organizational structure, more specifically the relationship between human resources departments and offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion, should be evaluated and, if needed, recast to set a foundation for success in increasing diversity. In the early days of diversity initiatives, human resources departments assumed responsibilities for these efforts. Today, chief diversity officers or directors of diversity lead their own departments and build working relationships with their HR colleagues rather than reporting to them. As local governments progress in developing their philosophies about diversity, they need to establish an organizational structure to achieve their goals, with roles, responsibilities, and relationships clearly defined.

Participants from each case study recognized that much more work is still needed, despite the initial success their local governments have already achieved. As one expert explained, “This work doesn’t end. It shifts as we make progress but it doesn’t end.” Cities and counties will need more metrics to fully understand the changes and impacts that their work in increasing diversity is helping to bring about in their jurisdictions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations offered in this section should be viewed as an interconnected strategy to build a recruiting, hiring, and retention program that is robust, free of bias, and desired to secure the best candidates possible.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1:** **Organizational Champions Must Be in Place to Drive This Work**

Implementing new projects in an organization is difficult. Even more difficult is seeking to change organizational culture. Having a leader—a mayor or city or county manager—who sets the vision, creates expectations, and removes barriers for the team to achieve its goals is essential to the process of driving change and is key to the success of any efforts. In organizational theory, “champions” are poised to lead organizational change because they serve as the entrepreneur of the organization, have the capacity to withstand disapproval, and have many mechanisms by which to make their vision a reality.<sup>38</sup>

Organizational champions establish a sense of urgency around an issue and take the necessary steps to stimulate movement. These champions create a coalition of individuals ready to act

on the mission. In the case of the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations in local governments, champions have created coalitions among their chief diversity officers, HR leaders, workforce development managers, and high-level executives to develop and implement effective policies and practices.

Traditional rank-and-file employees also can serve as important champions of the cause. They are instrumental in persuading colleagues to buy into new ideas and stimulating a culture shift. Employees can champion diversity through a variety of activities: referrals, providing feedback, serving on committees, encouraging others to engage, and joining employee resource groups. Most importantly, employees engaged in this work spark a culture shift that keeps diversity, equity, and inclusion at the forefront of operations by thinking critically about their approaches to hiring, retention, and succession planning.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**  
**Adopt an Asset-Based Perspective and Create a Solid Strategy for Recruitment and Retention**

The recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations should be seen as an organization-wide strategy that will enhance the overall workforce, improve service provision to the community, and increase equity and inclusiveness. Perspective and strategy are keys to this work. Perspective speaks to how one perceives and assesses creating a more

**Comparison of Asset- and Deficit-based Approaches**

Asset-based	Deficit-based
Strengths-driven	Needs-driven
Opportunity-focused	Problem-focused
Internally focused	Externally focused
Looks for what is present and can be built upon	Looks for what is missing and must be found

Source: G.P. Green and A.L. Haines, *Asset Building & Community Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011).

**Jumping the Hurdles of Organizational Change**

Sparkling organizational change—always a significant challenge—is needed to institute diversity, equity, and inclusion practices that go beyond simple compliance. In *Blue Ocean Strategy*, W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne note the following four hurdles facing leaders seeking to drive organizational change:

- **Cognitive**—members of the organization’s understanding of why the change in culture or strategy is happening and needed
- **Limited Resources**—the inevitable shifts in resource allocation
- **Motivation**—the desire by employees to make a change
- **Institutional Politics**—the organizational “sludge” groups must contend with to create changes.<sup>39</sup>

Engaging employees in meaningful ways is key in overcoming the hurdles to organizational change. This engagement can be a blend of activities that are timely and ongoing, such as newsletters; training; professional development opportunities; employee chat sessions with upper leadership; and acknowledgement of quality performance in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

diverse and inclusive workforce. This work can be approached from an asset-based perspective, which looks at the strengths and opportunities within an organization, or a deficit-based perspective, which focuses on problems that need to be solved.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article, “Diversity as Strategy,” David Thomas described IBM’s efforts beginning in the mid-1990s to build a diversity strategy. IBM’s efforts, he said, went beyond simply training employees on issues of bias or highlighting differences. Instead, the organizational strategy was to expand the company’s talent pool as a means to better understand its market. Then-CEO Lou Gerstner understood that IBM’s executive team did not resemble the diverse markets in which it operated, so enhancing diversity was not only the right thing to do but also a deliberate effort to reach a broader range of customers. As a result, the company succeeded in expanding its market reach.

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“Individuals have felt isolated but now they feel there is an effort to bring individuals together that have similar cultures or that are having the same issues. From isolation to inclusion. You just feel it. It’s hard to describe.”

—City of Cedar Rapids  
Chief Diversity Officer LaSheila Yates

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Each jurisdiction highlighted in the case studies took an asset-based approach in developing their strategies. For instance, the City of Tacoma makes employee education a key component in its strategy. In Cedar Rapids, leaders including the chief diversity officer are taking strengths-based approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion by forming internal cross-functional teams that work together to design workforce recruitment and retention strategies for underrepresented populations and planning how the city can help build inclusive communities. Hennepin County developed a strategy that leveraged its regional leadership and brought employers, community organizations, and higher education institutions into the process of training candidates and placing them in jobs. The City of Decatur developed a strategy that provides employees with hands-on experience, mentorship, and access to information and created an academy to create opportunities for professional development.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3:** **Create Job Descriptions that Attract, not Deter**

A well-written description clearly identifies the responsibilities of the job, details the skills required to meet those responsibilities, and sets expectations for performance. Ideally, it also communicates the direction of the organization and how the employee fits into the picture. In contrast, poorly conceptualized and written job descriptions can be exclusionary, unclearly state the nature of the position, spur

## **Coded Language: Masculine and Feminine Words That Perpetuate Inequality**

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Research shows that common words in job descriptions often have male or female associations that serve to maintain gender inequality in the workplace.<sup>40</sup> While the job description does not explicitly state a male or female is sought for a position, the choice of certain words can signal an invitation to one group to apply and a deterrence to another. For instance, in male-dominated positions, words such as *competitive*, *enforcement*, *fearless*, and *leader* may be used while words such as *understand*, *transparent*, *catalyst*, *supportive*, and *interpersonal* may be used in female-dominated areas. In experiments in which highly masculine words were used, it was perceived that mostly men held these positions and these positions were less appealing to women. Additionally, the wording of the position descriptions was found to reinforce traditional gender divisions. Of course, men can be transparent and understanding and women can be fearless enforcers, but the research shows that the adjectives used in job descriptions matter.

unqualified applicants to apply, and deter qualified applicants from applying.

Common job description problems include the following:

- Biased language
- Does not express commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Does not connect position responsibilities to organization objectives
- Contains information that is out of date
- Over-emphasizes the minutia that comes with any job
- Is not position-specific.

Organizations no longer have to guess about whether they are placing biased language in their job descriptions. Technology solutions are now available to analyze job descriptions for bias and gendered language and can predict the performance of job postings. Johnson & Johnson has made a significant investment in its workforce people analytics to enhance performance. When

human resource professionals realized their job descriptions were very male-centric, they adjusted the language to make the job descriptions more straightforward and gender-neutral. As a result, Johnson & Johnson experienced a 9-percent increase in the number of female applicants, which translates to about 90,000 women added to their science and technology pipeline globally.<sup>41</sup>

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4:** **Validate Minimum Qualifications and Exams Immediately**

According to the Society for Human Resource Management, organizations should conduct an audit of their job descriptions every few years to ensure that they accurately reflect the work to be done.<sup>42</sup> In many cases, traditional requirements have not been scientifically validated, or if they have, they have not been validated recently. Validity refers to the quality of the inferences or decisions from the scores of an instrument.<sup>43</sup>

According to the *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures*, the following five sources of evidence are recommended to support the validity of decisions made for personnel:

- Content-related evidence (the degree of match between the content of a selection procedure and work content such as work requirements or outcomes)
- Evidence based on the relationship between scores on predictors and other variables (the association between two or more personnel selection procedures measuring the same thing)
- Evidence based on the internal structure of the instrument (the degree to which items or tasks relate to each other, which supports the degree to which the items and tasks represent the construct of interest)
- Evidence based on response processes (how and why people respond the way they do)
- Evidence based on consequences of personnel decisions (intended use and misuse of instrument).<sup>44</sup>

An industrial psychologist can help with this work. Among other things, industrial psychologists are trained to assess critical competencies needed for jobs, design unbiased screening tools

### **Does Increasing Diversity Mean Reducing Standards?**

In short, no. A common concern is that lowering standards and qualifications is necessary to increase diversity. In this view, top talent resides largely in a single group (which is predominantly white males) and the only way to acquire diversity is to lower qualifications. However, this narrative excludes information on whether current standards of quality and excellence are grounded in measures that have been rigorously validated and if people who currently meet those standards perform better than others who do not. Robust recruitment and hiring processes, such as well-written job descriptions, validated exams or assessments, and diverse panels, are likely to weed out unqualified candidates. Through those steps, hiring practices are improved, standards are grounded in fact, and qualified candidates are hired.

based on the actual needs of the job, and audit organizational hiring processes to identify potential legal risks. If hiring an industrial psychologist is not possible, a feasible next step is assembling an interorganizational task force made up of people with expertise in HR; law; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and leadership.

Tests rarely provide a whole picture of a candidate's traits. A critical eye can determine whether tests are needed or if they are merely testing individuals for skills they will learn on the job. Testing also should be examined to ensure that there aren't discriminatory measures in place that can keep people out. There have been several instances of discrimination where individuals sued and won because of pre-employment tests. For example, in 2012, 253 African American and Latino job applicants won \$550,000 from Leprino Foods for systemic hiring discrimination based on a pre-employment exam.<sup>45</sup> The exam tested applicants' skills in mathematics, locating information, and observation—skills not necessary for the entry-level tasks performed by on-call laborers with responsibilities such as product inspection and sanitation. Another case awarded 52 female job applicants \$3.3 million from the Dial Corporation's

Armour Star sausage-making plant for intentional discrimination. Armour Star required a 7-minute test for applicants to carry 35-pound weights back and forth. Only 40 percent of women passed the test. Prior to the implementation of the test in 2000, approximately half of newly hired staff were women. The court found that the weight test was, in fact, more difficult than the job itself and the test had not been shown to meet its stated purpose of reducing injuries.<sup>46</sup>

### **RECOMMENDATION 5:** **Increasing Diversity Must Be Linked to Succession Planning**

Succession planning that is linked to diversity can contribute to a robust strategy for workforce development. This is particularly true in an era of baby boomers leaving the workforce in droves. According to the Pew Research Center, nearly 10,000 baby boomers will turn retirement age every day for the next 11 years, and local governments must contend with this reality when making plans for the future of its workforce.<sup>47</sup> Traditionally, succession planning entails anticipating future vacancies and identifying candidates who can fill those vacancies as they arise. However, this strategy is incomplete if it doesn't take diversity into account.

Succession planning should start with an organizational stance on promotional policies and practices with a clear understanding of how the organization wants to develop. Ideally, this philosophy would include a focus on providing internal candidates with the training and knowledge transfer to allow them to advance into positions of leadership when they become available. However, even if it does not, the philosophy should include some details on how the organization will identify and groom future potential leaders. The philosophy should also be coupled with integrated efforts designed to increase diversity and foster inclusion. Such efforts should include recruitment that aims to get underrepresented populations into the workforce via targeted recruitment strategies that can increase access and knowledge of career paths (e.g., youth internships, visiting community events, academies). They should be clearly identified and transparent. Employees should know whether higher-level positions are attainable to

them. They might already have an indication of this based on current hiring practices.

Hiring externally for higher-level positions presents another challenge. Even when underrepresented populations are recruited or retained they may lack opportunities to move up to another position. In studies from 1981, 1993, and 1996, researchers found that it was much more likely for a city or county manager to be hired from outside the jurisdiction.<sup>48</sup> Research findings published in 1988 found that 55 percent of city managers came to their positions from another city manager position;<sup>49</sup> subsequent research published in 2004 put the figure at 49.4 percent.<sup>50</sup> The common experience of individuals experiencing a faster promotional track outside of their organization might explain this trend.

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“Don't keep saying it. If you're really serious about it, do it. It's pretty straightforward. Start with staff; when you appoint people, [ask] who are you appointing? Every department needs to be transparent. You need accountability. Do people explicitly say it and put metrics behind this?”

—Nelson Lim, Executive Director, Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania

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### **RECOMMENDATION 6:** **Metrics and Accountability Must Be Made a Priority**

As the legendary Peter Drucker said, “You can't manage what you can't measure.” When it comes to enhancing diversity and inclusion efforts, metrics must be put in place to measure the quality and effectiveness of the work being done. Yet developing metrics can be challenging, so most

local governments stop at output-focused metrics such as employee headcounts, cost of programming, and event attendance. These are reasonable starting points, but they do not answer the critical questions about a local government's progress is enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Making progress means digging deeper.

The following steps can help local governments take a critical look at progress toward their objectives:

1. Local government leaders should determine what they want to achieve. If the goal is to go beyond basic compliance, metrics should go beyond basic demographic metrics.
2. Specific areas for improvement and corresponding actions should be identified. After taking a critical look at recruitment, hiring, and retention practices, areas that need work are likely to emerge.
3. Metrics should be set, and accountability measures should be put in place to ensure supervisors and directors are responsible for playing a role in these efforts.

Accountability is the commitment to acting on metrics. This commitment includes taking and accepting responsibility for outcomes, being guided by the metrics (e.g., asking questions, re-evaluating, making changes, instituting new policies, creating new programs), reporting metric outcomes, and taking action. Essentially, accountability measures are the teeth in the metrics.

## CONCLUSION

Representation in local government is important not only from a diversity perspective, it also makes a statement about democracy. The underrepresentation of certain populations in the ranks of local government staff undermines the assertion that everyone's voice is important in a democracy and in governing. Creating opportunities for underrepresented populations is important for the future of citizen participation in our democracy. Fortunately, there are many local governments beyond those featured in this report that are undertaking this work. Local governments can promote even greater progress in this work by sharing their success stories as models for wider adoption.

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# ABOUT ICMA

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