GROW City Self-Assessment Tool

Introduction

Cities face complex challenges and opportunities related to recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining the skilled workforce they need to function effectively and provide high-quality services to their communities. The National League of Cities, in partnership with the American Institutes for Research, created a framework that encompasses a comprehensive approach to municipal workforce planning—the Growing and Retaining Our Workforce (GROW) Framework {link to framework page on toolkit}.

This self-assessment tool is organized around the four core areas of the GROW Framework: 1) Grow Community Awareness and Public Sector Employment; 2) Expand Pathways into Public Service; 3) Strengthen Recruiting and Hiring; 4) Improve Workers' Experience. Cities can use this self-assessment to build a better understanding of their current workforce policies, practices, and programs and reflect on their strengths and challenges. By completing the self-assessment with input from a cross-functional and cross-departmental team, cities can come to a shared understanding of the current state of their workforce efforts and provides a foundation for identifying solutions to address critical workforce challenges.

Self-Assessment Instructions

To complete the self-assessment, cities ideally should bring together a cross-functional and cross-departmental team that includes people who can provide different perspectives on the city's workforce practices, such as:

- Mayor's or City Manager's office leaders
- Human Resources managers and staff
- Department leaders, particularly from areas involved in recruitment, hiring, and/or management of staff
- Representatives of city employees, such as organized labor or employee resource groups
- Workforce development, training, or organizational development staff

Cities should consider including staff with different levels of seniority and tenure to further expand the variety of perspectives represented. Not every team member will have visibility into every area of the self-assessment. Participants should rate and discuss areas based on role and experience.

City teams should complete one self-assessment reflecting the group's discussions. When possible, team members should complete the assessment individually before meeting as a group. Then, as a group, compare responses, discuss differences, and review available evidence. However, if individual completion is not practical, the self-assessment can be completed by the team together during a working session.

Completing the Self-Assessment

The self-assessment is organized around four core areas related to municipal workforce development. Each area includes indicators that describe effective municipal workforce practices. For each indicator:

- Rate your city's current practice using the scale below.
- Add brief notes or evidence that explain the rating.
- Base the rating on what is happening now, not on planned or desired future practice.

Rating	Description
1 – Have not begun	The practice is not in place or only discussed informally.
2 – In initial stages	Early steps have been taken, but efforts are limited, informal, or inconsistent.
3 – Implementing but not yet seeing outcomes	The practice is actively being implemented. Some structures exist, but application is uneven or outcomes are not yet measurable.
4 – Making good strides	The practice is well established, applied across departments, and beginning to produce consistent results.
5 – Major strength	The practice is fully embedded, consistently applied, data-informed, and recognized as effective and sustainable.

Keep the following in mind as you complete the self-assessment:

- Focus on what is happening now, not what is planned or aspirational.
- Candid responses will give the clearest picture of what is working well and where you may want to focus efforts.
- This tool is designed to be used for reflection and discussion; it is not a compliance assessment or intended to cast judgment on what is or is not currently happening.
- Treat lower ratings as useful information about where additional discussion and attention may be needed.

You can use the Notes/Evidence section to explain what informed the rating for the indicator and include specific examples, documents, policies, programs, practices, systems, or data, when available. You can also use this space to note differences across departments, any uncertainties, limitations to implementing that specific practice, or differing perspectives among team members.

As described in the previous section, team members can complete the self-assessment individually or the team can complete the self-assessment as a group. Regardless of the approach taken to completing the self-assessment, the team will come together to discuss the results. For this discussion, focus on talking about

the reasons behind the ratings, rather than on trying to reach consensus on the rating for each indicator. If team members rate an indicator differently, document those perspectives in the Notes/Evidence section.

After Completing the Self-Assessment

As you review the self-assessment results as a team, you will likely identify more opportunities than your city can address at one time. You can use the results to:

- Identify strengths to sustain or build upon.
- Identify challenges that need additional attention.
- Select priority workforce areas for focused planning and action.

Cities can also keep the completed self-assessment as a baseline to return to when reviewing progress and reassessing priorities. City teams can also repeat this self-assessment periodically to track progress over the long-term.

CORE AREA ONE: Grow Community Awareness & Public Sector Engagement

This core area helps cities build the foundation for a strong municipal workforce by improving awareness of the value of public sector careers and increasing interest in these careers across the community.

MESSAGING AND STORYTELLING

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Ongoing and consistent public-facing messaging about municipal careers is taking place through mechanisms such as outreach materials/activities and digital platforms (e.g., careers website, job postings, social media).		
Public-facing recruitment and outreach materials are easy to find, understand, and use by all residents, including people with disabilities and different language needs, and clearly communicate the value of public service (such as job quality and stability, growth opportunities, and mission).		
Employee success stories that highlight diverse roles, career pathways, and community impact are regularly shared through public-facing channels (e.g. social media, city website, internal communications).		

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND EVENTS

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Partnerships are established with K–12 schools, postsecondary institutions, and/or workforce and community-based organizations to build awareness and basic understanding of municipal careers.		
Career-focused events are periodically held that create opportunities for community members to learn about municipal careers and interact directly with city staff across departments.		

DATA AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Career-focused outreach activities are documented and reviewed using stakeholder feedback and outcomes data (e.g., participation, enrollment, referrals) to inform and improve future outreach efforts.		
Communications reach and participation are periodically examined across target audiences to identify who is being reached, where gaps exist, and where future engagement efforts should be focused.		

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Core Area One: Grow Community Awareness & Public Sector Engagement

CORE AREA TWO: Expand Pathways Into Public Service

This core area helps cities develop and sustain strong talent pipelines by clearly defining and aligning community resources to municipal workforce needs and establishing equitable and accessible entry points into municipal jobs.

WORKFORCE NEEDS AND PRIORITY OCCUPATIONS

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Workforce needs are regularly assessed across departments. Priority job roles for talent recruitment and development efforts have been identified.		
Knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and credentials required for priority job roles are periodically reviewed, clearly defined, documented, and used consistently to inform outreach, workforce preparation, advancement pathways, and talent decisions.		

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Job descriptions and related role documentation for priority job roles are updated to reflect current KSAs and credential expectations, and are used as a shared reference across departments.		

EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM ALIGNMENT

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Gaps between city government workforce needs and local education and training programs are identified and documented (e.g., program availability, capacity, completion, or misalignment with required KSAs/credentials).		
Active relationships with education and training providers are maintained to improve alignment to KSAs/credentials for job roles and strengthen pathways into municipal jobs.		

MULTIPLE PATHWAYS AND ON-RAMPS

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Multiple on-ramps into municipal careers (e.g., internships, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, mid-career entry) are intentionally designed, coordinated, and promoted, with defined steps and clear transitions into permanent or long-term roles.		

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Earn-and-learn models (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, structured on-the-job learning) are intentionally used to develop talent for priority occupations, with a documented plan to sustain, scale, or expand these models over time.		
Barriers to accessing relevant education and training prospective employees are routinely assessed and addressed to support multiple entry pathways into municipal careers.		

DATA AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Participation and progression through municipal career pathways are analyzed across relevant demographic groups to identify gaps in access, participation, or transition into municipal employment.		
A regular process is in place to review the effectiveness of internships, apprenticeships, and other pathways into municipal employment and make improvements to pathway design, partnerships, and participant supports.		

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Core Area Two: Expand Pathways Into Public Service

CORE AREA THREE: Strengthen Recruiting & Hiring

This core area helps cities to consistently have qualified and diverse applicants for municipal jobs and ensure that recruitment and hiring processes are positive and effective for both applicants and city departments.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
A documented, citywide recruitment strategy is in place that provides guidance and shared principles for all departments.		
Active partnerships (e.g., with education/training providers, workforce and community organizations, unions, etc.) are in place to support recruitment for priority job roles, such as referrals, candidate pipelines, or hiring-focused outreach.		

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Specific efforts or practices are in place to recruit individuals from priority populations (e.g., people with disabilities, bilingual jobseekers, new professionals, veterans, individuals with varied education and career backgrounds, etc.) or neighborhoods within the city for municipal employment.		
Hiring practices are designed to emphasize skills and competencies over credentials where appropriate (e.g., skills-based job descriptions, alternative qualification pathways, or structured skills assessments).		

HIRING PROCESSES, POLICIES, AND TECHNOLOGY

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Processes and technology are configured to ensure the efficiency of internal operations and positive application and hiring experiences (e.g., mobile-friendly applications, clear application steps, timely communication with candidates, instructions for how to request accommodations as needed throughout the hiring process, etc.).		
Job classifications, education requirements, and, where applicable, Civil Service rules and tests are periodically reviewed and updated for efficacy in application and practice.		

DATA AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Recruitment and hiring data (e.g., time to hire, applicant pools, hiring outcomes) are routinely analyzed to determine bottlenecks, identify potential solutions, and improve hiring processes.		
A regular process is in place to review recruitment and hiring practices, identify what is working and where improvements are needed, and make adjustments over time..		

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Core Area Three: Strengthen Recruiting & Hiring

CORE AREA FOUR: Improve Workers' Experience

This core area helps cities improve the workplace experience of municipal employees, from onboarding to advancement, and advances professional development, retention, and succession planning for the municipal workforce.

EMPLOYEE SUPPORT, DEVELOPMENT, AND ENGAGEMENT

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Onboarding is intentionally designed, extends beyond the first day of employment (e.g., 30/60/90-day check-ins and supports), and provides clear expectations around role clarity and how the role helps to accomplish the City's overall vision.		
Mentoring, peer support, and/or cohort-based employee engagement opportunities are intentionally structured and available across departments and position types.		

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Professional development opportunities are aligned with defined skill needs and career pathways, and managers are expected and supported to enable employee participation.		

JOB QUALITY AND CAREER PLANNING

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Compensation, benefits, and work arrangements are periodically reviewed for parity, pay equity, and other factors through market studies, and are adjusted based on findings to support employee well-being.		
Municipal workforce planning reflects job quality principles, including safe working conditions, positive workplace culture, stable pay, predictable schedules, and family-sustaining benefits.		
Succession planning practices are in place to identify critical job roles, develop internal talent, and reduce risk associated with retirements or turnover.		

DATA AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Indicator	Rating (1–5)	Notes/Evidence *(e.g., documents, examples, etc. that informed your score)*
Employee and employee representative feedback is systematically collected, reviewed, and used to inform workforce policies and practices, with transparent communication to employees about how their feedback will be utilized and how progress will be shared.		
Demographic data on municipal employee career advancement is collected and disaggregated to identify trends and disparities.		

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Core Area Four: Improve Workers' Experience