

Non-Traditional Staffing Roundtable Notes

At the ICMA Annual Conference in Baltimore, a roundtable on “Non-Traditional Staffing” generated the following thoughts on flexible or creative approaches to meeting workforce needs:

Strategies to increase staffing flexibility or enhance recruitment efforts

- Many have implemented 4-day workweeks, 9/80 schedules, and telecommuting
- In building a new fire station, one jurisdiction included a gym facility, with a separate entrance that gives all jurisdiction employees 24-hour access.
- 12-hour shifts in the police departments
- A reduced work-week may be attractive to older employees as well, possibly toward a phased-in retirement

Management flexibility

- Some indicated arrangements for 9/80 schedules or 1-2days/week from home
- Making time for family is a huge retention issue
- This is something that should be negotiated as part of a manager’s employment agreement
- Where managers or department heads work from home, they may be less able to operational tasks during those times, but this could be used effectively for strategic planning and administrative tasks.
- It is key that any managers engaging in such flexible options be fully transparent about their schedule and availability

Perceptions

- Councils tend to be more traditional in their outlook and experience and may perceive younger workers who are looking for such arrangements to be lazy. It may help to show them the data on expectations of career switching during the course of one’s working life or on retention rates.
- Celebrating the accomplishments of staff who have taken advantage of flexible staffing programs and been significant contributors to the organization can also help them to understand the mutual benefits such programs provide.
- When hiring, discuss what will make that individual feel fulfilled in their work. Is it an opportunity to learn or develop their skills, mentor others? If so, that should be fostered as part of a larger succession planning effort.

Job-sharing

- Some attendees share staff between departments, or with non-governmental entities, such as the chamber of commerce (economic development), the YMCA or other 3rd party firms (sports complex management). Another person indicated sharing staff between the building division and public works.
- In any such arrangement, be clear on the interests of the other entity. For example, if the chamber is focused on existing businesses, they may not be as effective an advocate for new development but could assist in general marketing and special events.
- Where two agencies supervise, that might either require: 1) cooperation on the employee evaluation or 2) structuring as two distinct part-time jobs with separate evaluation processes.
- There may be some challenges from unions if such sharing involves exceptions to established job duties.
- The Admin Services Department in Menlo Park, CA asks, “Do you want to learn about our operations?” For those that do, they have the option of a few days transfer to learn about budgeting, human resources, or other operations. They can build on those skills via a job transfer or advance within their own department.
- Job-sharing flexibility gives employees exposure to new options within the same employment setting, can help them develop new skills, and assist the jurisdiction in retaining qualified staff.

Shared vs. contractual services

- Most commonly if an employee is supervised by someone outside the jurisdiction staff, it will be on a contractual basis. Making this a “shared staffing” arrangement may serve as a bridge to eventually bring such a position in-house.
- One jurisdiction noted that their contractual plan reviewers do not have a budgetary cost, as they are paid from a percentage of the permit fees paid.
- In the St. Louis area, MO, staffing for court administrative services and development inspections are shared among the county and several cities.

Military

- Local government veterans fellowships – As Army staff at Fort Leavenworth are preparing to leave the service, they perform work for the city (in police, HR or other areas), even while still paid by the military and living on or near the base.
- Another attendee highly encouraged hiring veterans, noting that the soft skills and leadership experience they bring are often under-recognized by automated keyword review of applications.

Education/experience requirements

- What exists in job descriptions may be more education than is truly required to perform the jobs. Simplifying those job descriptions could open up recruitments to more applicants.
- The same may apply to professional certifications or degrees. If an individual is not an engineer but has relevant experience (e.g., in utility operations), they may still be a viable candidate.

Organizational Culture

- The reputation of the jurisdiction as an employer of choice and one that is committed to its employee's professional development is a key factor in attracting and retaining new employees.
- Sacramento makes clear in its recruitment materials the city's commitment to flexible work hours and discusses that in part of the interview panels as well

Retirees

- One jurisdiction reported bringing back retired police officers to perform background checks
- Another has retired staff perform bridge inspections to keep up on infrastructure planning
- Norfolk has its own retirement system, and sometimes that is attractive to state retirees looking for a second career without losing their pension benefits.

Gig economy/flexibility

- Some marketing staff are shared between local governments and school districts (e.g., for less-than-full-time needs for design and advertisement)
- Retired private-sector engineers can be a great resource for short-term projects, particularly since they already have good connections within the local construction sector.

Compensation and Benefits

- If positions are shared among agencies, it is typically within the same retirement system.
- For the most part, payroll and benefits are administered by a single jurisdiction/department, with other parties providing reimbursement or a flat-fee contractual payment

Intangible benefits

- If there is a small community near a larger one, sharing staff can assist the smaller one in its long-term goals, image, or growth.
- Where staff has seasonal specializations, shared staffing arrangements add flexibility, options for

cross-training, and more predictable scheduling (e.g., mowing, leaf pickup, snow plowing, or even development permitting). Dubuque, IA, is sharing some staff between Public Works and Parks.

Home-sourcing

- Some cited utility billing and information technology among positions authorized to work from home.
- Others noted that conversations would be appropriate with risk management or legal staff about liability or workers compensation issues, possibly similar to those that arise when an employee uses a personally-owned vehicle for official business.
- It may be helpful to have an employee sign an agreement absolving the jurisdiction of risks incurred working within their own home.
- A similar waiver may be appropriate to acknowledge that non-exempt employees are not required to check e-mail after hours and that doing so is not grounds for an expectation of overtime pay.
- Menlo Park, California, staff noted they have had a telecommuting policy since 1991 and have not had any workers compensation issues.
- IT staff should also stay closely involved to address cybersecurity issues.
- Where employees choose to use personal devices to check e-mail, they should also be made aware of how that might expose them to freedom of information requests.
- The language in those agreements should be reviewed since the technology of laptops, and smartphones mean that employees need not be tied to a home office, and discussions about inspecting such home office locations may be antiquated.

Informal poll (of 37 attendees):

- Internship/apprentice programs: 9 jurisdictions
- Job sharing: 2
- Paid family leave: None, but some are considering it

In addition to the notes shared here, the Center for State and Local Government Excellence has resources available on:

- [Workforce issues](#)
- [Compensation](#)
- [Staff sharing](#)