



Whitburn Center for  
Governance and Policy Research

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For more information contact:

Michael Ford, Director

414-803-2162 or [fordm@uwosh.edu](mailto:fordm@uwosh.edu)

## **New Report on Modernizing Wisconsin's Local Government Workforce**

The Whitburn Center for Governance and Policy Research at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh has released a new research report on the state of Wisconsin's local government workforce. The report, co-authored by Michael R. Ford and Lisa M. Lewis, utilizes survey and interview data collected from a cross-section of local government executives to answer three research questions:

- 1) How can municipalities build management skills and incentive structures in a post-collective bargaining public sector?
- 2) How can municipalities address staffing challenges in local government?
- 3) How can municipalities recruit and retain a diverse and talented workforce?

The results detail the many human capital challenges facing Wisconsin local governments, including high turnover and position vacancy rates, difficulty recruiting for licensed positions (like electricians and drivers), increased private sector competition for employees, and skepticism and political backlash around diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, local government leaders also showed a commitment to building cultures of belonging and community that attract diverse talent, as well as a willingness to embrace reforms such as performance pay and hybrid work options.

The report concludes that employee training and incentives, as well as organizational structures, need to catch up to Wisconsin's changing governing context. Researchers offer 13 specific action items designed to:

- Align public management education with public employer needs;
- Make proven reform policies free and accessible to municipal organizations of all sizes;
- Help public organizations build strong cultures of community and belonging; and
- Create new tools such as regional government cooperatives to assist public managers in meeting workforce needs.

The end goal is to create a more effective, efficient, and trusted local government workforce.

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