

SOUTHSTRONG CITIES

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LOCAL WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

SouthStrong Cities Grab-N-Go Policies

Local Workforce Programs

JUNE 2021

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What's the issue?

In rural or marginalized communities, residents who attain higher qualifications or job skills often chose to leave their hometowns and states in pursuit of better economic opportunities. Unemployment and economic stagnation reinforce these trends and dilute critical sectors of the local workforce, including healthcare, education, and municipal services. As key local employers, cities face additional workforce challenges due to generational turnover and the need to fill some skilled positions with candidates holding specific training and credentials. This cycle of talent drain works against economic advancement for Southern states, so how do we help pivot these communities to be more resilient to changing demographics and more invested in local workforce capacity?

The data below is published by the [Louisiana Record: Pelican Institute: Reform needed to keep college graduates from leaving state.](#)

“ **From 2000-2017, Louisiana lost nearly 30,000 college-educated individuals to other states.** ”

Why does it matter?

Municipal governments can be a significant source of stable employment, offering well-paying jobs with benefits. Often, public sector organizations are one of the larger employers within a community. Cities' participation in apprenticeship and training programs can help to develop qualified candidates for local public sector jobs, thereby improving stability for future municipal services and returning economic value to residents through wages.

Alongside each city's own employee workforce, cities influence other employment opportunities through their procurement of contracted services for city projects. Cities' adoption of local hiring policies for these projects can encourage or require contractors to provide increased employment opportunities for community residents via apprenticeships or other mechanisms.

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Policy Options: What Cities Can Control

1. Investments in training/apprenticeship programs for City jobs.

Cities can develop in-house apprenticeship programs for some positions.

Many cities have established apprenticeship programs to help create a pipeline of qualified employees and help develop the local workforce's skills. Often, these programs are focused on public works/utility positions, where the generational turnover of credentialed employees is significant. However, some cities also offer apprenticeships for non-technical positions.

- This New America [website](#) describes several tools for cities to expand policies for apprenticeships as a mechanism to “build a pipeline” to public sector employment for their communities.

Excerpt: “Public sector apprenticeship programs are a form of direct job creation that open doors to opportunity for city residents. They are particularly promising for rural towns, where, unlike in metropolitan areas, the labor force participation rate for working-age adults has yet to bounce back to pre-recession levels.”

Many cities offer apprenticeship programs.

- Charlotte, NC has an example of a [program](#) offering apprenticeships for five occupations within the city’s workforce.
- Charlotte’s water utility separately provides both an [internship program](#) and an [apprenticeship program](#).
- In addition, Charlotte is partnering with a local workforce agency to provide a [13-week paid training program](#) and placement program for the electrical and HVAC trades.

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Policy Options: What Cities Can Control

Cont. 1. Investments in training/apprenticeship programs for City jobs.

Cities can develop partnerships with other agencies as an alternative model to providing their own in-house training.

Under this model, cities can consider partnerships with workforce agencies, community colleges, or high schools to provide training programs for apprentices. If needed, smaller or rural cities could coordinate on a regional basis.

Florida's Pinellas Technical College offers a public works-focused menu of training, including apprenticeships, and offers the ability to develop specific apprenticeships for a jurisdiction using state-level funding.

The NC Rural Water Association provides an apprenticeship program for water and wastewater systems operations jobs and seeks to connect apprentices with local municipal systems.

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Policy Options: What Cities Can Control

2. Ability to adopt local hiring guidelines for City positions.

Cities often have the ability to require or prefer that their employees reside locally, although some states have imposed limitations that apply. Rules that encourage City hiring of residents can position city employment as a local economic development tool. However, in smaller cities, strict residency rules can constrain city hiring capabilities. It is possible to craft policies that allow for flexibility when needed or to approach residency as a preference rather than a requirement.

City hiring policies related to residency can be controversial, and perspectives have shifted over time. In the current context, in which local municipalities are being challenged to emphasize diversity within their workforce, there will not be a one size fits all solution. Some communities may find that residency policies contribute to diversity in staffing and local economic development by helping to encourage that residents are represented within city staff. For other communities, residency rules may serve as a barrier to a more diverse municipal workforce, limiting broader access to the city's job opportunities.

As an example, the City of Sunrise, FL website includes a [statement](#) of hiring preference for residents and an explanation of proof of residency documentation.

More generally, see this [discussion](#) by the PEW on city employee residency requirements for several large US cities and recent changes to strengthen Philadelphia's residency requirements.

This 2013 [article](#), also by the PEW, on competing views about Milwaukee's residency requirement pre-dates their current policy. Still, it provides a good overview of the pros and cons of residency requirements.

Later in 2013, Milwaukee overturned its residency requirement for city employees. This 2019 Milwaukee Journal [article](#) examines how that change may have impacted city neighborhoods. While the residency requirement for employees no longer exists, Milwaukee's current local hiring program for city contracts is very prescriptive. It is a robust example of an additional policy tool discussed below (see section 3).

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Policy Options: What Cities Can Control

3. Ability to adopt local hiring guidelines for public projects.

Cities can influence local hiring by contractors who deliver City-funded capital projects via contracting agreements or other tools. Larger cities are increasingly using procurement on these projects to compel contractors to demonstrate their employment of residents. Contracting requirements can set targets for local hiring by trade and/or set targets for hiring residents of high poverty neighborhoods (often defined by zip codes). Frequently, cities identify targets for contractors' hiring of apprentices, citing the goal to improve training and employment opportunities within the broader community.

Typically, these requirements are set for projects above a certain threshold (for example, \$100,000 or \$500,000 in smaller cities). Two features to consider for successful implementation:

- have community resources ready to provide contractors with easy access to qualified employees and/or apprentices (via workforce agencies or other partners)
- develop a compliance mechanism (contractors can self-report, or the city or a designated partner can perform this role).

The City of Milwaukee, WI, has a detailed set of requirements related to local employment for public contract projects.

- Milwaukee's Residents Preference Program (RPP) requires contractors to use 40% of staffing from qualified under/unemployed city residents. Eligible residents self-identify and register via a local workforce partner.

Milwaukee's policy also specifies ratios for apprentice participation in public works projects by trade. The target is 25% of a project's labor hours performed by RPP apprentices for larger projects. Further, 40% of RPP hours will be by RPP residents of high-poverty zip codes.

Other programs use a more basic structure, setting an overall goal for apprentice hours across the whole project. For example, the St. Petersburg, FL program requires 15% hours from apprentices for projects over \$1 million.

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Additional Resources

- [National League of Cities](#) paper referring to workforce development initiatives in several cities. It highlights a Charlotte, NC program ([PIECE](#)) that provided training and job placement in several city departments.
- [All in Cities](#) website describing the benefits of public sector local hiring policies and provides some examples.
- [National Cooperative Highway Research Program](#) overview on legal issues related to local hiring preference programs.
- [Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population](#) paper detailing a state-level effort in Kentucky to expand apprenticeships with the public sector, including an example at the county level.
- [Knowledge Center](#) overview highlighting the benefits from public sector apprenticeship initiatives.
- [New America](#) paper advocating for the expansion of apprenticeships by public sector agencies and describes some considerations for successful implementation.
- [Partnership for Working Families](#) paper describing benefits from local hire programs for low-income communities, including examples.
- Two sites speaking on the concepts of local hiring and targeted hiring:
 - [Increasing Access to Sustainable Careers for Low-Income Residents and People of Color](#)
 - [Local and Targeted Hiring](#)