

5 Strategies to Increase Training Resources for Your City

A White Paper by National Seminars Training





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It's easy to take for granted how much more challenging public service has become over the last 10 years. Four main factors are behind this:

- 1. Increased Complexity** – Public/private partnerships. Increase in non-native English-speaking citizens. Unfunded federal mandates.
- 2. Increased Public Scrutiny** – Lower regard for public service by the general population. High-profile scandals. Expectation for higher service levels.
- 3. Generational Succession** – Large number of vacancies left by retiring baby boomers. Fewer Gen Xers and Millennials entering public service.
- 4. Money Issues** – Diminished tax revenue. Lower federal and state support. Tighter municipal bond markets. Increased cost with pensions, health care, and decaying infrastructure.

The net impact of these factors is cities are called on to do more with less, and that requires skilled employees. In other words: engaged, creative public servants who can find better ways to do things; communicate well; and work in a safe, ethical, and customer service-oriented manner.

These necessary skills are not acquired by accident – they require a commitment to training by civic leaders.

Yet, across the public sector, training budgets have been slashed and in some cases fully eliminated. While training investment has recovered in the private sector, in the public sector it remains depressed.

By taking some simple steps, you can uncover hidden resources and make sure your staff has the training and development support they need to meet the challenges of the job.

Municipalities continue to be looked at to provide more with less resources. The demands of increased complexity, higher expectations, generational turnover, and fewer economic resources can only be dealt with by a well-trained work force.

Yet, almost without exception, training resources remain tight just at the time they are needed most.

Fortunately, there are some actions you can take to better use existing training resources and secure additional resources.

This white paper will show you how.

1 TAKE A GLOBAL APPROACH TO TRAINING

1. Coordinate Training and Think Beyond the Immediate Training Need

Cities often approach training needs on an ad hoc basis. The planning department may arrange customer service training, unaware that the transportation authority is looking for similar training. If departments work together, they can get higher value and more cost-effective training than they can separately. Not coordinating efforts across departments leaves money on the table.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Combine purchasing power across agencies
- Bundle training needs for price discounts

Secondly, it's worthwhile to look past the current training need and consider future needs. If employees will need two or more training sessions over the course of the year, then it pays to look into a package or a subscription solution. Subscription solutions in particular are becoming more common and can cost as little as one or two individual training enrollments. They also can provide a wide range of content if unexpected needs arise.

2 BE SMART ABOUT BUDGET REQUESTS

2. Don't Make it Easy to Say No

To the right is an excerpt from a budget for a real 40,000-person city. Notice how training is nicely included on the same line as travel, one of the most scrutinized and quick-to-eliminate line items in a budget. This paints a bull's-eye on the training budget. Budgeting decision makers will have difficulty seeing past the word "travel," and very likely the training budget will suffer.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Don't group training with travel, dues, etc.
- Put training with personnel expenses in the budget
- Show training as a percent of payroll between 3% and 4%

Instead of lumping training with travel, dues, publication, and other uncategorized expenses, group it as a separate line item under personnel expenses. It also makes sense to show it as a percent of payroll. A good rule of thumb is 3%-4% of total payroll costs.¹ Local government expert Jerry Newfarmer has noted success with his government clients in preserving training investment,² and it can work for you, too.

Personnel
Salaries
Health Insurance
Other Benefits
Library Materials
Library Supplies
Buildings & Grounds
Computer & Equipment
Maintenance
Professional Services
Travel & Training
Capital Outlay
Other Expenses

PERSONAL SERVICES

Wages/Salaries/Overtime
Health Care/Other Insurance Coverage
Social Security/Pension

Total Personal Services

CONTRACT SERVICES

Utilities/Communications
Insurance
Elections
Special Assessments
Printing
Fees for Contract Services
Training/Dues/Publications
Vehicular & Equipment Maint.

¹ According to the 2013 State of the Industry Report published by the American Society for Training & Development, average training expenses as a percent of payroll were 3.6%.

² Jerry Newfarmer. "PM Budget Tip". *Public Management*. May 2009.

3. SHOW THE VALUE OF TRAINING TO BUDGETING AUTHORITIES

Use Metrics and Scorecards to Show Training's Impact on the Agency

If you can show budgeting authorities the value training creates, they are more likely to support it. There are a number of ways to do this, including using scorecards to track direct ROI, tracking inputs and outputs, and quantifying and categorizing the training taking place. Yet formal training scorecards in the public sector are still rare, particularly for smaller cities.

A bit of digging can uncover valuable examples of reports that municipalities are using to show the impact of training on a variety of variables, including sick days, employee engagement scores, and customer service.

As an illustration, here is a snapshot from an annual report that shows the trend in workers' compensation claims as a percent of payroll – a direct output of safety training efforts.

Key Performance Measures				
	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011
Objective: % of workers' compensation claims as a % of total payroll is less than 2.22%.	1.36%	1.15%	1.25%	1.25%

A Learning Management System (LMS) that tracks training and development by user, department, and agency is a great place to start in creating your own scorecards. An LMS helps your training program become more transparent so you can track your employees' training. While LMSs have historically been unaffordable for smaller counties, with the advent of cloud-based LMS systems, a quality LMS can be available to municipalities of any size at a very reasonable cost.

4. LOOK FOR TRAINING RESOURCES BEYOND THE BUDGET

Get Resourceful in the Search for More Training Dollars

Grants

- Online Tools for Grant Applicants
- Applying for ETA Grants: A Guide to the Competitive Grants Process
- Find ETA Grant Opportunities
- Find Grants Awarded
- National Emergency Grants
- Find and Apply for All Federal Grants

Did you know that the DOL, HHS, and HUD grant hundreds of millions of training dollars each year? Depending on the size and location of your city and specific training need, you might qualify for some of this funding, so it pays to be aware of what support there might be for your city.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Investigate state and federal training grants
- Work with unions to provide training
- Coordinate with nearby counties for training

If employees are union members, it's worthwhile discussing pooling resources with the union for joint training. For example, the AFSCME invests heavily in workplace safety training. As workplace safety is in the common interest of both the city and the union, it may be productive to discuss a joint training program with your local chapter.

This idea can also extend to working with nearby municipalities, counties and other local government authorities to share resources in addressing common training needs. For instance, if your city and the county share a common training need, they can coordinate to deliver that training.

5. HELP EMPLOYEES LEARN FROM EACH OTHER **Don't Overlook the Learning Resources You Already Have**

In a recent survey, 55.6% of our training participants told us a fellow coworker is the first place they go for support and guidance to do their jobs better. This is a reminder that the most valuable employee training and development resources are available to you right now. The challenge is how to harness and distribute the knowledge and skills employees already possess.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Use a knowledge-sharing system to help employees learn from each other
- Use mentors and coaches to accelerate development
- Use job swap and talent exchange programs

Some cities already use knowledge-sharing systems that let employees post their own content, including success stories, best practices, and links to external information sources. This type of system can be a great tool to help your city employees more efficiently learn from each other as well as teach each other.

Mentoring and coaching programs help employees learn and grow with very little cost. A mentoring program can also help transfer essential knowledge from retiring baby boomers to the next generation of public servants.

Another low-cost option is a job swap or talent exchange program targeted at emerging leaders. Exposing younger public servants to various departments and leaders within the city can give them a big-picture view of the city, their role in it, and how they can expand that role in the future. These talent exchange programs can also uncover ideas for improving business practices and sharing best practices between departments.³

No one can deny that the current public sector climate creates big hurdles when it comes to employee training and development. But by following the simple strategies outlined above, you can do your part to make sure your city has the training resources it needs.

³ Patricia Martel, Shawna Maltbie, and Joanne Bond. "What Will Help the Next Generation of Leader's Advance?" *Public Management*. May 2011.

About Us

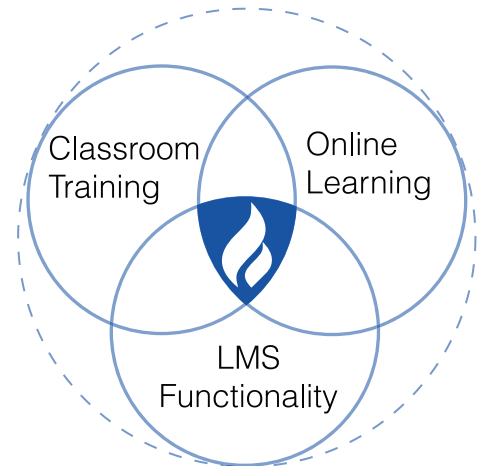
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- Manufacturing
- Federal, state, and local government
- Insurance
- Construction
- Financial services and banking
- Higher education
- Health care
- Retail
- Not-for-profit

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