



Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IDEA) Assessment Report



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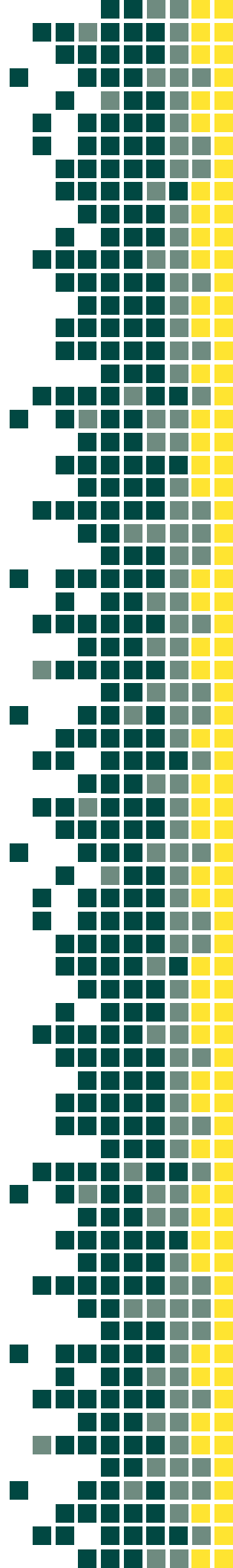


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Executive Summary

As an intentional strategy to affirm its commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (or IDEA), the City of Kentwood partnered with Inclusive Performance Strategies (IPS) to conduct an organizational assessment through an IDEA lens. The purpose of this assessment was to help the City understand its organizational capacity to support a diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive working environment and more effectively serve the culturally diverse population of Kentwood residents.

This point-in-time assessment captures a snapshot of the City, providing important information and data to inform meaningful and relevant recommendations that will lead to sustainable growth moving forward. This report summarizes the findings of assessment activities conducted between March and December 2021. The assessment was also designed to inform recommendations for the City to consider in order to enhance its structures and culture to meet its IDEA goals and grow as an employer of choice to a diverse workforce.

Key findings and recommendations have been organized into five Areas of Focus for the City to consider moving forward. These Areas of Focus can be utilized as a foundational framework through which the City can strategize its IDEA efforts moving forward. The following chart provides a high-level summary of the Areas of Focus.

Internal Communication

Relates to the internal communication practices that influence transparency, maintain employee engagement and awareness, and help to promote healthy workplace relationships across various spheres of influences (i.e., team, department, organization). Growth in this area will help the City ensure employee clarity and buy-in related to IDEA and promote effective collaboration among employees, staff leadership and elected leadership.

Equitable Employment Experience

Relates to the City's capacity to provide consistent resources and opportunities to all employees in an accessible and equitable manner. Growth in this area will help ensure all current and future employees feel valued and supported and increase the City's capacity to sustain a culture of fairness and organizational justice.

Equipping Staff

Relates to how the City sets employees up for success to fulfill job responsibilities, to cultivate the knowledge, skills and attitudes to support an IDEA-centered workplace. Growth in this area will help support departmental and organizational performance and prepare employees to adapt and collaborate within highly diverse and talented teams.

Pre-Employment Practices

Relates to the primary interactions between the City and prospective employees to build a diverse and talented workforce at the City. Growth in this area will help secure the best talent, prepare current employees to welcome and support new employees, and help ensure success with future recruitment strategies.

Organizational Values & Leadership

Relates to how leaders (across all levels of the City, both formal and informal) support a strong leadership culture centered around IDEA, reinforcing the values, behaviors and practices that promote inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the workplace. Growth in this area can help the City cultivate further transparency in its decision-making processes in an effective and appropriate manner, in addition to maintaining accountability to IDEA across all organizational levels.

Key Insights

- The City is deeply committed to IDEA and ensuring its workplace climate and employee experience center those values. This commitment is at the center of the City's strategic perspectives and is increasingly reflected within its strategic planning.
- Due to the complex scope of jobs and facilities across the City, there is significant variance in how each department supports IDEA. The decentralized structure of the City both encourages autonomy (which can foster a stronger sense of ownership of IDEA responsibilities at the departmental level) and can contribute to inconsistency across employee experiences.
- The City has the opportunity to establish or adapt standardized structures that would increase consistency of IDEA performance across departments.
- There is an opportunity to immediately clarify the meaning of IDEA, ensuring all staff members have a shared understanding of the value proposition for IDEA.
- The City's unions will serve an important and influential role in ensuring that IDEA goals are understood and that staff are equipped to support the work to meet them.
- Equipping staff members at all levels and across all departments is vital to sustaining the City's commitment.

Overall, IPS recommends that the City of Kentwood utilize assessment findings and recommendations to develop a strategic IDEA framework that clearly outlines specific goals and objectives that are embedded within the City's current strategic plans. Additionally, it is recommended that the City establish an internal cross-departmental IDEA committee to support framework development, including prioritization of IDEA goals and objectives and identification of performance metrics. Lastly, as implementation of recommendations will require strategic allocation of City resources, it is recommended that the City increase its human resources capacity to support the implementation of IDEA strategies (both short- and long-term).

Using the Report

This report was developed to be a reference document to help determine the City's strategic steps moving forward. After the introduction, the report is primarily composed of five sections that summarize the key findings and recommendations based on the five Areas of Focus. Appendices are also included to provide insight into assessment methodology and activities.

The assessment was designed to understand the City as a whole. However, each department at the City operates differently, with variations in autonomy, structures, and team culture and norms. This dynamic became very evident throughout the assessment process, particularly through documentation review. As such, it is recommended that each department review findings and recommendations through the lens of their own departmental context, considering to what extent a finding may reflect their own context and what steps, resources, support, etc. are necessary to implement a given recommendation.

Introduction

Background

Kentwood, Michigan is home to approximately 54,000 people (an 11.5 percent increase since 2010 according to the 2020 U.S. Census) and is considered one of the most rapidly growing metropolitan areas in the State of Michigan. Kentwood is often noted for the rich cultural diversity among its residents, with approximately 17.6 percent of the City's residents born outside of the U.S, and approximately 23.5 percent of its households speaking a language other than English at home (as of 2019).

Elected leadership consists of the mayor, city clerk, treasurer, and commissioners. In addition to the City Commission, several committees, boards and commissions support various aspects of city operations and functions. Membership of such bodies is cultivated through an application and appointment process open to residents of Kentwood.

A deputy city administrator supports the oversight of the City's approximately two dozen departments, which comprise of over 280 employees. Organizationally, departments function within a decentralized structure, with each department primarily responsible for overseeing its strategic and operational functions.

The departments of Police, Fire and Public Works are the largest departments, representing approximately 63% of the total City employees. Union employees are represented by the Kentwood General Employees Association, Kentwood Professional Fire Fighters Association, and the Police Officers Labor Council (Kentwood Supervisory Unit and Patrol Unit).

About This Project

As an intentional strategy to affirm its commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (or IDEA), the City of Kentwood partnered with Inclusive Performance Strategies (IPS) to conduct an IDEA assessment. The purpose of this assessment was to help the City understand its organizational capacity to support a diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive working environment and more effectively serve the culturally diverse population of Kentwood residents. The project overall was structured to inform strategic improvements related to the following components:

- The City's current hiring and employment continuum inclusive of but not limited to compensation practices, recruitment, hiring, mentoring, safety, onboarding, orientation, training, discipline, promotions, performance reviews, retention and associated City policies/procedures/programs/technology.
- The City's current workplace climate, competencies, and physical environment through an IDEA lens.
- The City's volunteer opportunity processes including applications, selections, and appointments (these findings are reported in a companion document).
- Provision of a draft organizational IDEA policy statement.

It is important to emphasize that inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) are interdependent yet distinct concepts. The acronym "IDEA" is repeatedly used throughout the report, mainly to be concise or to generally discuss how the City can generally imbue those concepts as values into its structures and operations.

While there are numerous definitions for each concept, and for the City of Kentwood, it is important to consider what these terms mean through a public service lens. For the purpose of this engagement, these terms were defined as follows:

- **Inclusion:** can be described as the behaviors and engagement that make people feel their voices are heard and valued and have ample opportunities to inform the decisions that will impact them.
- **Diversity:** can be described as the different characteristics or traits that individuals bring with them into a given setting or group and/or that ties their belonging to a particular group(s).
- **Equity:** can be described as the process to make policies, procedures, and resources available to all, especially those that have been historically or currently underrepresented or marginalized.
- **Accessibility:** can be described as any person or group who is able and is empowered to use resources, spaces, processes, or other key tasks with a similar amount of effort or time regardless of their ability status or identity.

At a conceptual level, IDEA can be extremely broad: there are several ways to understand each of those concepts, in addition to the strategies, practices and behaviors organizations can use to reinforce them. Organizations that try to implement IDEA strategies without having a clear vision and established strategic framework often fail to implement or sustain strategies that yield meaningful results, especially for those designed to serve growing communities. The City of Kentwood, as a way to harness the momentum from its efforts to date, is taking intentional, proactive steps to address its growth moving forward. The assessment findings, recommendations, and considerations included in this report will provide insight into how the City can continuously improve the effectiveness of its IDEA strategies.

In order to define the goals and objectives that will promote sustainable change and success, it is crucial to establish a clearer and shared understanding of the City's current state through an IDEA lens at a structural level. Understanding the structures (i.e., resources, infrastructure, policies, personnel, capacity, etc.) at this time can have a profound, positive impact for the future. While there are a number of processes and outcomes that the City has implemented and is monitoring related to IDEA, it is important to clarify what structures are (or are not) in place to support those processes and achieve those outcomes. While this can take more time in initial goal setting, planning, and initial implementation, this step will ultimately support the City's longer-term success in meeting IDEA goals while supporting the rapid and inclusive growth of Kentwood.

Broadly speaking, there is a tendency for organizations to focus their IDEA commitment on tactical, external facing or output-driven work that emphasizes diversity, such as the recruitment and hiring of underrepresented groups. Having a workforce representative of the populations or communities served is critical to providing excellent customer service. However, the lack of effective structures to support an inclusive, equitable and accessible workplace climate makes it more difficult for organizations to *retain* the diverse and talented workforce into which time and resources have been invested in recruiting. The lack of a comprehensive approach to IDEA can also perpetuate a pattern of starts and stops, rather than maintaining momentum.

The wide-ranging scope of this engagement overall presented several avenues for the City to pursue in order to demonstrate its commitment to IDEA. Yet, a lack of an established IDEA framework can make pursuit of those avenues appear as piecemeal, lacking intentionality and cohesion in how the many parts add to the whole. As a municipality, the City of Kentwood is a complex entity, but it is one that is committed to serving a vibrant, diverse and growing community and demonstrating leadership as an employer of choice for current and future

employees. The findings and recommendations included in this report represent the most relevant, feasible, and in some instances most urgent opportunities for the City to pursue moving forward. Building upon these opportunities now can increase the likelihood of the City's capacity to achieve success in the future.

The scope of this project examined the City itself as an employer, primarily concentrating on how city-wide structures can help to not only grow across the identified Areas of Focus, but to more effectively support the unique opportunities and challenges that each department faces. Recommendations were developed in that light, and some may be more relevant or timely for one department over another. Regardless, this report is meant to serve as a resource to inform City-wide strategy moving forward and provide a foundation of knowledge and reflection for departments to consider as well.

Methodology

In many instances, organizational commitments to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility are exclusive to values statements, staff education, or marketing efforts designed to increase positive public perception. The City of Kentwood's goal runs much deeper than that. The City has articulated that through its commitment to IDEA, it can improve its capacity to be an employer of choice to current and future employees and better serve the constituents of Kentwood. The City recognizes that to have true value and sustainable impact, IDEA must be fully integrated throughout the organization. With that goal in mind, assessment activities were primarily based on three key focuses:

- **IDEA Workplace Climate:** understanding how employees perceive their workplace environment across different levels (interpersonal, team/department, organizational) and in turn how the environment influences or impacts employees through an IDEA lens.
- **Continuum of Employment Experience:** understanding the effectiveness of the City's employment practices from initial recruitment to retirement or resignation and the opportunities for growth.
- **Board and Volunteer Cultivation:** how the City cultivates members for its numerous boards, committees and commissions to support or supplement City operations.

These focuses aligned with the City's expressed desire to better understand its opportunities for growth and how to sustain that growth moving forward. As such, IPS focused its inquiry to understand the City's structures to assess overall effectiveness of efforts regarding the workplace climate, employee experience, and board/committee cultivation practices. Through this approach, we identified the most relevant and prevalent factors that promote or inhibit a healthy, IDEA-centered workplace culture for the City at this point in time.

As assessment activities were conducted, there were clear themes that consistently emerged across all activities (for example, key themes that emerged from workplace climate focus groups were also prevalent in the employee continuum focus groups, despite the difference in inquiry). Once the synthesis of assessment activities was completed, analysis was conducted across them all. As such, findings and recommendations within this report are presented thematically rather than for each assessment activity to mitigate redundancy.

IDEA Areas of Focus

Several themes emerged through analysis of collected data from various assessment activities. Through further synthesis of these themes, IPS identified five primary Areas of Focus. Rather than to discuss the findings of each assessment component separately, discussion of main findings and recommendations are organized around each Area of Focus to help clarify the relevance of each theme discussed, and to aid further discussion of findings and recommendations (i.e., prioritizing, implementation, etc.):

- **Internal Communication:** relates to the internal communication practices that influence transparency, maintain employee engagement and awareness, and help to promote healthy workplace relationships across various spheres of influences (i.e., team, department, organization). Growth in this area will help the City ensure employee clarity and buy-in related to IDEA and promote effective collaboration among employees, staff leadership and elected leadership.
- **Equitable Employment Experience:** relates to the City's capacity to provide consistent resources and opportunities to all employees in an accessible and equitable manner. Growth in this area will help ensure all current and future employees feel valued and supported and increase the City's capacity to sustain a culture of fairness and organizational justice.
- **Equipping Staff:** relates to how the City sets employees up for success to fulfill job responsibilities, to cultivate the knowledge, skills and attitudes to support an IDEA-centered workplace. Growth in this area will help support departmental and organizational performance and prepare employees to adapt and collaborate within highly diverse and talented teams.
- **Pre-Employment Practices:** relates to key interactions between the City and prospective employees to build a diverse and talented workforce at the City. Growth in this area will help secure the best talent, prepare current employees to welcome and support new employees, and help ensure success with future recruitment strategies.
- **Organizational Values & Leadership:** relates to how leaders (across all levels of the City, both formal and informal) support a strong leadership culture centered around IDEA, reinforcing the values, behaviors and practices that promote inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the workplace. Growth in this area can help the City cultivate further transparency in its decision-making processes in an effective and appropriate manner, in addition to maintaining accountability to IDEA across all organizational levels.

These Areas of Focus are not exhaustive; they do not represent all of the strategic opportunities that an organization could potentially address. These are intentionally presented based on the data presented and considering what is in the City's current capacity to address and to support the City in refining and specifying its IDEA strategic priorities and to promote truly progressive improvement.

Inquiry Development

The base inquiry for each method and activity was predetermined utilizing several key questions to inform initial assessment activities:

- **Accessibility:** is the given practice or element accessible to all intended stakeholders?
- **Adaptability:** is the given practice or element adaptable to accommodate evolving stakeholder needs and strategic goals?

- **Intercultural Competence:** does the given practice or element acknowledge and consider the diverse attributes and cultural perspectives of the involved stakeholders?
- **Resources:** are there adequate resources (budget, personnel, infrastructure, time) for the given practice or element to be implemented feasibly and successfully?
- **Equipping:** are the stakeholders responsible for implementation equipped to do so and/or does the given practice or element successfully support the equipping of stakeholders as designed?

IPS engaged the principles of Grounded Theory throughout the engagement. The Grounded Theory approach to qualitative data collection allows early research results to inform ongoing discovery methods. Essentially, grounded theory recognizes that the focus of qualitative research can and should adjust according to early findings. Our commitment to this approach means that as IPS learns more about the organization through early assessment activities, we revisit and finalize our inquiry and assessment approaches. This process ensures that our assessment is designed to be as relevant to the current state of the client as possible.

It also helps to ensure that the assessment process is grounded in organizational reality and makes efficient use of participant time. As an example, early learnings in the document audit, discussions with City staff members, and initial focus groups informed survey inquiry and additional continuum focus groups. Focus group discussions directly informed further review of documentation and the inquiry for the Board/Committee online survey.

Data Analysis

Multiple IPS team members collected and reviewed data in support of this project. As a mixed-method approach was utilized for data collection (both qualitative and quantitative), the following steps were implemented for analysis:

- Initial activities focused on collection of key documentation (i.e., policies, procedures, etc.). Documentation was coded according to various phases of employment experience and aspects of the workplace climate.
- Initial documentation synthesis helped inform inquiry for workplace climate focus groups and the online workplace climate survey.
- A second review of documentation and initial themes and findings from workplace climate assessment activities informed further refinement of the employment experience continuum and the inquiry for continuum focus groups.
- As synthesis was conducted, additional requests for documentation or data were made to further understand key themes and further clarify the current state.
- Initial analysis of both workplace climate and employment experience assessment activities informed the initial inquiry of the Board & Committee Membership survey (the initial focus of the survey broadly focused on volunteership across the City; after further discussion and clarification, the focus was narrowed to understanding current state regarding board and committee membership and how that platform supports/influences IDEA. This led to the survey being launched after key analysis began for the other assessment activities).
- All data collected, reviewed and synthesized was then reviewed to identify initial themes. An iterative process was utilized to compare and contrast themes across all data to determine the most prevalent themes that provided insight into the current state through an IDEA lens at a structural level.
- Themes were then organized into broader categories, which are referred to as Areas of Focus throughout the report.

Departmental Considerations

This assessment and each component were designed to examine the City of Kentwood as a whole entity in regard to the workplace climate and employee experience through an IDEA lens. However, each department at the City operates differently, with variations in autonomy, structures, and team culture and norms. This dynamic became very evident throughout the assessment process, particularly through documentation review. All departments participated in document discovery. Larger departments had more substantial documentation to provide due to their size and complexity. All information that was submitted to IPS for review, in addition to other methods used in this assessment, were utilized to inform the recommendations within this report.

Departments are strongly encouraged to review the report through the lens and context of their own department and consider what potential strengths and opportunities for growth are most prevalent. As the report is designed to provide insight into the City as a whole while protecting confidentiality of all assessment participants, recommendations can be viewed as potential practices that will need some level of adaptation to each department's operations.

To support this necessary reflection, IPS has provided reflection questions for departments to utilize while reviewing and discussing the report. Departmental heads and other leaders can use these questions to better understand the experiences and perspectives of their employees, and to foster discussion and ideation around how results can enhance future work and their role in supporting the City's commitment to IDEA. Departments that take intentional steps and time to understand how assessment findings provide insight into their own departments will be better equipped to create, inform and support IDEA strategies applied at the City-wide level and align them with the operations and goals at the department level.

Notes on Methodology & Scope

- **Every effort has been made to both protect the confidentiality of participants and share insights that can meaningfully impact the City’s IDEA work.** For this purpose, feedback directly collected from employees was not cross-tabulated or referenced (for example, responses are not disaggregated by two or more demographics, such as “Male Black respondents”). Such disaggregation could further endanger the confidentiality of populations with already small response rates or participation. As such, **feedback from focus groups is also discussed in a general, synthesized manner** (i.e., overall themes and discussion points across groups). Any specific comments or quotes are de-identified and anonymized. At times, focus groups discussions are delineated by the activity (climate assessment or employment continuum) if relevant to findings.
- **The activities and collected data were conducted as a point-in-time assessment.** Overall findings and recommendations are structured to represent the most relevant and prevalent feedback and insight, but the assessment is not guaranteed to reflect the current state of the organization after December 2021. That said, it is helpful to frame findings as a captured “reflection” of the City that can provide insight into IDEA-related behaviors and structures that can support the City’s future state.
- **Data collected for this assessment was self-reported.** IPS analyzed the information and perspectives that City of Kentwood employees and other stakeholders provided. Main findings and recommendations are reflective of all information made available to IPS through assessment activities and direct discussions with employees.
- **Any analysis of disaggregated groups within survey data points to correlation, not causation.** For example, if a certain respondent group is much more likely to disagree on a given survey question than the general population, it cannot be concretely said that respondents disagree *because* of that particular demographic marker (i.e., 40–49-year-old individuals are not more or less likely to disagree with a specific question due to of their age). The correlation is simply an indication of a pattern that is worth exploring further when developing implementation strategies of recommendations.

How to Read This Report

The bulk of this report is organized into five sections, one for each of the Areas of Focus. Each section begins with a brief summary describing the Area of Focus and highlights related to key points and observations. The prevalent themes (referred to as “Key Themes”) related to the Area of Focus are then discussed.

Each “*Key Theme*” section has a brief descriptor (i.e., what the theme relates to). Main findings are organized into two subsections: 1) “*Current State & Potential Strengths*” (which describes the status of key structures related to the theme and any efforts that appeared to work productively for the City and/or could potentially support forward IDEA progress) and 2) “*Potential Opportunities for Growth*” (which describes the status of key structures that could be improved or re-examined to ensure future, including any efforts or factors that can make forward progress more challenging).

“**How Does This Impact IDEA?**” is a subsection that includes research, best or emerging practices, and other relevant information to help illustrate how that theme directly relates to IDEA. **This content is meant to be educational and general**, so as to help increase IDEA knowledge for the City and help internal stakeholders in particular better understand how various aspects of workplace climate and employment directly influence the City’s commitment and progress regarding IDEA. This content does not necessarily reflect the City’s current state.

Finally, the *Key Theme* discussion concludes with Recommendations for the City to consider related to the main findings. It is important to keep in mind that, in general, recommendations **are structural in nature**. Many organizations tend to focus on outputs and activities without giving enough consideration to the structures that are essential to sustaining that work. Therefore, IPS is focusing on recommendations that will help build a stronger structural foundation for the City to build on moving forward (also note *Departmental Considerations* on page 10).

Supplemental report materials summarize additional assessment activities and data, including Board & Committee Membership, the City Website, and Site Visits. These separate documents provide a methodology overview, main findings and recommendations.

Global Recommendations & Observations

Global Recommendations

The findings and recommendations made throughout this report outline numerous opportunities for the City to capitalize on current strengths and continuously improve upon its commitment to IDEA. As analysis was conducted and recommendations formulated, it was clear that key capacity-building was necessary in order to put the City in a position to be successful in implementing IDEA strategies moving forward and could have an immediate positive impact. These global recommendations could be considered as initial priorities for the City to pursue regardless of what recommendations or strategies it decides to implement.

- 1. Develop an IDEA strategic framework that clearly outlines specific goals and objectives that are embedded within the City's current strategic plans.** Utilizing the Areas of Focus outlined within this report as a foundation, identify meaningful key performance indicators over the next three to five years that clearly indicate the City's progress in developing or enhancing the necessary structures and practices that sustain an IDEA-centered workplace climate and employee experience.
- 2. Establish an internal cross-departmental IDEA committee** to support framework development, including prioritization of IDEA goals and objectives, collaborate with IPS in identifying key performance indicators, and serve as an additional conduit to keep all employees informed. Initial functions of the committee would also include developing an implementation and communication plan to engage staff around recommendations and provide City leadership insight and feedback as strategic progress is achieved.
- 3. Increase human resource staffing to support the implementation of IDEA strategies,** including any key recommendations that fall within current HR responsibilities, such as performance reviews, professional development, and any recommendations that involve conducting audits of departmental practices for continuous improvement. Based on the body of work represented within this report, in addition to current constraints and opportunities the City is facing regarding staffing and providing employee resources, additional HR capacity will be critical to success. Additional recommendations related to this are included further in the report.

Global Observations

City employees that participated in and helped to coordinate assessment activities, including focus groups, surveys, and document and data collection should be commended for their engagement and contributions. Their feedback and observations make clear that fostering employees' sense of belonging, psychological safety, or level of confidence across all levels of the organization will help to fortify a culture of trust within the City workplace climate. Ensuring more consistent levels in employee perceptions of trust will continue to be a key opportunity for the City, especially as it works to grow and diversify its workforce.

Survey responses indicate that most employees feel as though they belong within their own team or department. However, responses varied depending on the tenure of the employee, their level of seniority, and the structure or size of their department (for example, an employee's "team" might be the same as their entire department due to a smaller staff count, whereas another employee's team could be one of several within a larger department).

Employee feedback (across assessment activities) also indicates a general sentiment that their colleagues are approachable and helpful, and often demonstrate a willingness to provide support when asked (for example, employees noted they could easily ask questions or for help from others, both within and outside of their department, or noted the City's Open-Door policy). Employees often cited examples related to day-to-day tasks, managing projects, etc. than in relation to addressing IDEA-specific concerns or issues.

Some employees do not always feel they can fully express their viewpoints on issues that negatively impact workplace culture; reasons for why employees might feel this way vary greatly (it should be noted that this can indicate employee perspectives over a period of time or an employee's general perception). While the issues may range regarding the department or circumstance, employees generally expressed that they felt their concerns would be heard (these issues could range from one-time or "smaller order" concerns to more persistent or serious issues); perspectives vary as to whether issues are effectively resolved (for instance, do not negatively impact team cohesion, level of inclusion, etc.).

Further, employees tended to note higher levels of trust within their own department or own leadership than at other levels of the City. Employees expressed greater levels of uncertainty or skepticism in elected leadership, primarily due to their lack of engagement with those leaders. It is clear that familiarity and more frequent opportunities to interact and get to know individuals can have a positive impact on trust levels overall.

The structure of a department's work environment also has a direct impact on trust. The functions and responsibilities of a department might mean working longer or "atypical" business hours (e.g., 24-hour shifts, 3rd shift), working outside of an office setting or 'in the field', or in high-pressure or even life-threatening situations (such as Police and Fire). All of these factors create unique and nuanced circumstances that impact employees' level of trust in their peers and leadership, and in the City as an overall employer, and are important to consider in any initiative that is meant to increase a sense of inclusion, equity or accessibility throughout the City. Supervisors and department heads, particularly, have a critical role in fostering a culture of trust within their department and employees' perceptions of other departments or leaders throughout the City.

Lastly, it should be noted that employees at times expressed wariness or skepticism around the purpose of IDEA assessment activities, how their feedback or contributions would be utilized, and whether it would result in a negative outcome (i.e., retribution or blowback). In some instances, employees understandably felt uncomfortable with participating in activities, or perceived the overall project was based on a more reactive approach than an intentional and proactive effort to be more effective. It is also understandable for employees to be wary of external facilitators or contractors, particularly when they are asked to provide feedback related to their workplace, peers, or leadership.

Area of Focus: Internal Communications

Productive, interculturally competent communication practices are foundational to an organizational culture that is inclusive, trustful and fosters a sense of belonging for all employees. Since the City's organizational structure is decentralized, consistent communication standards across all departments to keep all employees engaged, informed, and empowered would enhance their workplace and work culture. Assessment data analysis identified communication as one of the most influential factors that impacts the workplace climate and employee experience overall. The most prevalent internal communications themes were related to communication practices within and across departments, and between elected leadership and all City employees.

Department-Level Communication

This theme relates to the role of department heads managing the flow of information to and throughout their respective departments and supporting engagement between departments/teams and the City as an employer.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Communication, broadly speaking, was often cited as the most impactful factor on workplace climate in climate assessment focus groups. In most if not all instances, the information that is disseminated to departments (such as the level of detail, frequency of updates, delivery method, etc.) is left solely to the discretion of the department head.
- Based on responses from both focus groups and survey results, participants often referred to the following examples when discussing communication: updates on city leadership decisions, "all staff" updates related to policies, employee resources, etc., and updates from other departments regarding projects or initiatives.
- Perceptions on how effective department communication practices varied greatly across departments. Participants' perspectives on whether their respective department had effective communication practices depended on a number of factors, including:
 - Frequency of updates (how regularly a department head shares information)
 - Whether department heads asked for employee input or feedback on key decisions, initiatives, or policies (could be city-wide employment or department-specific)
 - Work structure (day vs night shift, traditional vs non-traditional work week, office vs. field-based work, etc.)
 - Overall size of the department (i.e., total number of employees)
 - Seniority and/or tenure of individual employees
- Focus group participants noted that when it came to requesting information, asking for assistance, etc. from their peers, those peers are typically available and willing to assist.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Conversely, inconsistent or infrequent communication across departments was often cited as an issue that can have an adverse effect on workplace climate (i.e., not knowing who to go to in certain departments for specific needs, not having a clear understanding of current initiatives or projects across

departments). There was a desire to better understand how to best exchange information across departments (beyond those who work in close proximity to each other).

- Employees also expressed a desire for more transparent communication from department heads regarding decision making. In particular, there was an expressed desire to better understand how and why certain decisions are made, especially as it relates to employment policies and practices.
- Department heads are often in the best position to determine what is appropriate and most helpful for their employees to know, which can lead to different communication practices and preferences. However, this can also cause inconsistency in the level of awareness among employees across departments (particularly when it comes to policies, procedures, and other structures that shape the employee experience). At times, friction can occur when employees within a given department learn that other departments are more forthcoming or transparent with their communications.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Inclusive and equitable work environments require a high degree of trust so that all employees can authentically express their perspectives and share their experiences. Communication within organizations serves a crucial role in cultivating workplace trust across different spheres of influence (one-on-one, team, department, and organization-wide). Frequent and transparent¹ communication practices directly impact employees' positive perceptions of their managers, their teams, and the organization.
- Inconsistency in internal communications can erode a sense of trust or team cohesion even when the *content* of key communications (regardless of format) is clear and highly informative. Generally speaking, when employees are dissatisfied with the quality of internal communications, it not only erodes the culture of trust, but can contribute to feelings of being excluded or undervalued, undermining an organization's IDEA-related goals.

Recommendations

- Establish shared standards/guidelines that inform how all department heads can share information (and to what level of detail) with staff to support appropriately consistent communication across departments. This can also help ensure that department heads remain empowered to manage the flow of information to their departments while mitigating perceptions of inconsistency between departments.
- While this recommendation is structural in nature, there are other recommendations included in this report that focus on cultivating core competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviors, etc.) that can support more interculturally competent and effective communication across all levels of the City. In particular, the *Equipping Staff* Area of Focus will provide more insight into the structures that support these more behavioral and cultural aspects.

Elected Leadership & Employees

This theme relates to the exchange of information and engagement between elected leadership (i.e., Mayor, City Commissioners) and City employees across all levels, and how those dynamics can influence the overall workplace climate.

¹<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2534570819?accountid=11243&parentSessionId=Xen0pZEukaYB6c8sSBTF%2B/pA5yr4i6g7phaZs05T2KY%3D&pg-origsite=primo&forcedol=true>

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Department heads are heavily relied upon to manage the flow of information between elected leadership and employees. If employees or departments have key projects, initiatives or issues they would like brought to the Commission, for example, it is the responsibility of the department head to share or report that information.
- This structure can work effectively to ensure that interactions between elected officials and employees are maintained in an appropriate manner, and do not cause any undue interference. It can also help to channel communications more effectively, as department heads can clearly communicate on the successes, progress, and needs of their departments so that elected officials can make informed decisions.
- Participant responses across assessment activities indicate that City employees generally have limited views or perspectives on elected leadership, in particular of the Commission. Simply put, many employees feel they do not 'know' elected leadership very well. Unsurprisingly, these limitations were more apparent among employees with less seniority or tenure (given that department heads most frequently engage elected leadership more than others).
- For example, a majority of employees in non-managerial roles were more likely to reply neutrally to survey prompts ("neither agree nor disagree") regarding elected leadership. This is due to the very limited interaction and engagement (based on survey open-ended comments cross-referenced with focus group data).
- Responses across assessment activities indicate that most employees observe or learn about elected officials based on 1) the nature of interactions between their respective department head and elected leadership, or 2) written updates on key decisions shared via email, staff intranet, etc. There also appeared to be heightened sensitivity regarding perceptions of elected leadership during assessment activities particularly as collective bargaining took place.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Despite the limited or neutral views and interactions with elected leadership, employees still recognize the highly influential roles elected leaders fulfill. The current flow of interaction and communication seems to contribute to a perception of disconnectedness or skepticism as to whether employee needs and feedback are truly centered in discussions and decisions. These perceptions were likely influenced by the collective bargaining process, in addition to ongoing stressors brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While the current communication structures between elected leaders and employees is efficient, it can also contribute to gaps in awareness or limit opportunities for employees to cultivate more well-rounded and positive perceptions of elected leadership, particularly during more stressful times. Given the influence of elected leadership and its decision-making, this can have a deeply profound impact on workplace climate and perceived efficacy of policies, practices and other resources. There is opportunity to strengthen the relationship between elected leadership and employees that can be accomplished through additional professionally appropriate communication strategies.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Organizational change like increasing and improving IDEA presents unique challenges for municipalities, given the ever-changing needs of community, financial constraints, and changing leadership dynamics resulting from election cycles. Elected leadership can help foster a workplace climate that meaningfully embodies IDEA through authentically centering the voices of individuals and groups that have traditionally had less power or influence within decision-making processes and discussions, and regularly ensuring

employees of how and when that takes place. Additionally, elected leadership can ensure resources for employee leaders and managers to effectively implement IDEA strategies². Establishing multiple feedback loops that are transparent and culturally and professionally appropriate between elected leadership and staff helps to facilitate those goals.

Recommendations

- Encourage employees to attend Committee of the Whole and City Commission meetings and other opportunities such as employee recognition events to interact with elected leadership.
 - It is recommended that the City consider additional opportunities (for instance, town halls, rounding, etc.) that can support professional relationship building between elected leadership and across City departments aimed to build a sense of community and increase employee awareness of how elected leadership roles support the City's IDEA-related goals. Increased interactions can help break down perceived barriers in communication across organizational levels while encouraging respectful and appropriate workplace engagement.
- It is also recommended that any engagements are conducted in a manner that does not interfere with the established roles of elected officials and administrative functions.

²<https://icma.org/practices-effective-local-government-management-and-leadership>

Area of Focus: Equipping Staff

The City of Kentwood's most valuable asset are its people that 'make the city run' each and every day. The health of organizational culture is fully dependent on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of City employees and their ability to foster IDEA throughout the workplace. In addition to defining and clarifying what those IDEA competencies and responsibilities are across positions and departments, the City has a great opportunity to fortify existing policies and practices that shape employees' day-to-day and strategic roles to meet IDEA-related goals more effectively.

Position Descriptions

This theme relates to how City employees understand what their role, responsibilities and/or expectations are when it comes to supporting IDEA in the workplace through their position descriptions and other related documentation throughout the course of their employment.

Current State and Potential Strengths

- Job descriptions function as legal documentation of the essential responsibilities of a given position. These responsibilities only indicate the specific functions an individual would need to perform in order to fulfill the position.
- The City has over time reviewed position descriptions and job applications processes to encourage a wider talent pool of applicants and to ensure that language used in these descriptions are inclusive. This includes revising or removing language that can unintentionally deter qualified or motivated potential candidates from applying (outside of instances in which there are legal requirements and guidelines to adhere to). As an example, the City has worked to remove application questions regarding criminal history or special licensing or certification when that information is irrelevant/not required for the position.
- Generally speaking, when the City hires for a position, postings are included on the City website, and might also be posted on the staff intranet, social media platforms, multiple job posting websites, and a number of other sites and community or professional networks to reach a diverse audience. Employee understanding of how positions are posted outside of the City website varied.
- As a local government entity, the City is also required to provide summarizing information related to the following federal acts when posting open positions: Equal Employment Opportunity Law(s), Employee Rights and Responsibilities under the Family and Medical Leave Act, and the Employee Polygraph Protection Act. Documentation regarding these regulations is linked on the Human Resources webpage of the City website.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Based on the documentation submitted, there is currently no statement or requirement that clarifies what IDEA is and/or what specific responsibilities employees are expected to fulfill in support of IDEA. In some departments, there is documentation that has language that broadly describes expectations for engaging cross-cultural stakeholders (i.e., "Dealing successfully with a variety of individuals from various socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds"; "Demonstrates courteous and cooperative behavior when interacting with public and staff; acts in a manner that promotes a harmonious and effective workplace").

- Both in climate assessment focus groups and survey responses, employees indicated generally low/lack of awareness around what was expected of them when it comes to IDEA. Data indicates staff have a basic understanding of the value that IDEA brings to the workplace yet need clarity on what is specifically expected of them and/or how their role or position supports IDEA goals.

Recommendations:

- Establish IDEA-related knowledge and skills that can be incorporated into job descriptions or other guiding documentation (identified knowledge and skill sets would be separate from the “Essential Responsibilities” outlined in job descriptions). These might include:
 - Develops or oversees IDEA strategies, metrics, and other related goals and plans.
 - Engages in efforts and initiatives to mitigate negative impact of implicit bias in the workplace.
 - Demonstrates skill in understanding cultural differences among resident populations.
 - Values cultural differences and backgrounds of coworkers, etc.
- These knowledge and skill sets should be appropriate to the level of responsibility of a position. It should be made clear that every City employee has the opportunity to support IDEA goals and should be expected to participate in some way in accordance with the City’s IDEA Policy Statement.
- While communicating to employees any IDEA-related knowledge and skills, emphasize the importance of how such knowledge can enhance their ability to perform their essential job responsibilities. See also recommendations related to core competencies (page 27).

Processes & Procedures Documentation

This theme relates to how policies, processes and other key decision-making procedures are documented in a clear, accessible and organizationally efficient manner across all departments. Data reviewed in relation to this theme included submitted examples of policies at both the city-wide and department level, in addition to synthesized perspectives and perceptions from survey and focus groups feedback.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- There was a general misperception from City employees that policies (those directly impacting employee workplace protocols) are implemented ‘at the director’s discretion’, often because the city has decided to favor more general language and guidelines so that each department can customize its approach. Employee perceptions varied across departments. As such, there is a misperception that policies are implemented inconsistently across and within departments.
- Feedback across assessment activities indicate that employees recognize and appreciate that departments vary so widely in their duties and cultures that departmental discretion often makes sense. However, participants also expressed frustration when differences in implementation appeared to stem from a lack of certainty at the administrative level, or when departmental leadership appeared to allow personal preferences to influence their decision over what served the staff of the department best.
- Overall, participants emphasized that increased transparency and clarity would reduce both confusion and any sense of unjust decision making.
- The COVID-19 pandemic was often cited as a policy-related issue that may have caused contention among employees. Though the City’s policies followed all mandates, guidelines and available data, focus

group participants expressed those efforts to be adaptive to the complex challenges landed as a “gray” area and at times caused confusion or seemed to be based on director discretion rather than an intentional or fair set of criteria, regardless of how the actual policy was structured (for instance, how directors determined which employees were permitted to work from home). Employees were less likely to mention positive policy actions implemented throughout the pandemic such as Emergency Leave and Remote Work policies which enabled employees to continue receiving full pay even when work was not available on-site.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Policy development and implementation (policies directly impacting employee workplace protocols) was cited as a particular challenge to fostering workplace equity, given the unique purposes, circumstances and challenges each department may face. Communication around policies, and ensuring employees have clear and consistent understanding, was often noted.
- Employees noted that what may work effectively for one department may be perceived as unfair or inequitable for another department, and in some instances there is no clear solution (one example discussed in a focus group is that shutting down City Hall due to inclement weather would serve a lot of departments and employees well, but that they have been told doing so won’t happen because it is unfair to departments that still need to report for duty like Police and Fire).
- The clarity of language and/or guidelines across personnel policies varies due to the myriad departments and positions that exist within the City and may contribute to employee perceptions of inconsistency or variability. Misperceptions of variability can have adverse effects on employee perceptions of fairness within the workplace and throughout the employee experience.
- Employees indicated an appreciation for allowing each department to implement policies and practices that fit their department, but frustration when there was variability *within* the department or when they did not have an opportunity to share their perspectives in department decision making.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Clearly documented policies and procedures can be utilized as tools that maintain equitable accountability and empower employees across all levels and departments within the workplace. That said, those tools can only go so far in achieving an equitable and inclusive workplace environment - they must also be utilized effectively to achieve those desired outcomes. Prioritizing time for employees to discuss policies (i.e., ask questions, raise concerns, etc.) and having leaders that both invite discussion and comply with policies encourage greater understanding and clarity around all policies, but particularly those that directly impact or influence the workplace environment.

Recommendations

- Establish a clearly defined personnel policy review process that is led by human resources and includes a process for employees to provide feedback.
- For all City-wide personnel policies, clarify the parameters to which policies are executed “at the discretion of the department head or supervisor” (e.g., implement standard operating procedures which guide managers on how to apply policy discretion and make equitable decisions and mitigate the negative impact of any potential implicit biases).

- For department-specific personnel policies, establish (if not already in place) a process for regular review and updates that are primarily directed or informed by employee feedback (e.g., policy review meetings, rotating scheduled policy review/updates, etc.).

Employee Developmental Plans

This theme relates to the equitable execution of structures and practices that guide the professional development of City employees.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Currently, the process for employees to document plans for professional development is embedded within the City's performance review form. There is a prompt for employees to identify their professional development goals as part of that process. The form currently does not include guidelines for completing that particular section or how to incorporate into the performance review process (see also *Performance Reviews & Evaluations* within the *Equitable Employment Practices* section on page 26).
- In general, practices that support professional development plans greatly vary across departments.
- Employees that are full-time and/or hold a supervisory position are most likely to have professional development opportunities or to feel supported in their career development. Part-time employees were more likely to indicate they do not receive professional development support outside of their essential job responsibilities.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Some employees expressed a perception of having taken more responsibilities or functions within their roles despite not having a change in title or position. These circumstances can contribute to feelings of being “stuck” within their career development.
- The City communicates to employees that they are “positioned to optimize both interpersonal skills and education necessary to serve the community” and that “the goal is for every member to reach their full potential.” Based on employee perspectives shared via focus groups and survey responses, such opportunities for growth are dependent on the access provided to individual employees through their department. Part-time employees hold entry level positions which do not typically require ongoing training and education to fulfill the requirements of their jobs; some part-time employees expressed a desire for training and education beyond what is required for their job.
- In general, practices that support professional development plans greatly vary across departments and within departments. In particular, employees below the management level were more likely to mention feeling undervalued or passed by for professional development opportunities
- There are a few departments where employees report a high degree of professional development and career support. In general, there is opportunity to improve and increase opportunities for professional development. Within some departments, career advancement opportunities are limited (this is primarily due to the relatively small(er) size of the department and/or more senior positions being fulfilled by long-tenured employees).
- While city administration has reported that every department has professional development budget lines, directors appear to allocate professional development funding with extreme discretion. There is an

opportunity to ensure that all employees have equitable access to at least some level of development opportunity.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- In general, implicit or unconscious bias and power dynamics within organizations can often create barriers to equitable opportunities for development for all employees³. Establishing robust employee development practices make employees feel valued, supported, and more motivated. Investing in employee development not only increases an organization's capacity to meet and exceed strategic goals, but it also helps to retain the diverse talent it works hard to recruit.

Recommendations

- Expanding upon the City's current professional development practices, establish a standard template separate from performance reviews that employees can use to create individual development plans in support of overall professional growth and IDEA competency (to be used within broader career development and/or annual work plans). In turn, either remove the professional development plan section from the current performance review form (to make such plans standalone documents) or update the form to align with the newly created template and provide summarized goals.
- Ensure that all departments have consistent planning approaches for employees to develop and document professional development plans on an annual basis. Leverage these processes to identify opportunities (i.e., projects, temporary assignments, etc.) that employees can engage in as part of their development.
- Ensuring equitable access to professional development opportunities based on the City's current professional development budget and where appropriate; reinforce that access through intentional practices and by allocating adequate financial resources.

Onboarding Consistency

This theme relates to the consistency of onboarding practices for all new City employees. Given that each City position has a unique set of responsibilities and each department has a unique set of protocols, the theme primarily focuses on the general "City-wide" onboarding process and differences or similarities in department-level onboarding processes.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Onboarding practices vary greatly across departments, and each department head is responsible for the onboarding for each new employee. Reported department experiences range from few practices in place to having robust, standardized, and clearly documented procedures (for example, the Police department has a four-week onboarding process for officers with daily schedules; Courts incorporate job shadowing to help familiarize employees to various roles). Expectedly, onboarding activities range depending on the level of responsibility of the position or the functions of the department.
- Many employees expressed frustration at their own onboarding experience or at the expectation that they onboard and train new employees with very little notice or support. In particular, employees noted a

³ <https://www.chieflearningofficer.com/2021/12/21/5-ways-to-integrate-dei-into-ld/>

common experience of being trained by a person in the particular way they do things, only to find that is not a standard approach and that leadership may have different expectations.

- Onboarding responsibilities split between the HR department and department leadership varied greatly depending on the needs of the department. The variances in the number of employees and specific skills, certifications, etc. across departments directly influence capacity to fulfill overall responsibilities (regardless of which staff member is specifically responsible).
- All new employees engage HR staff during their onboarding process (the primary focus is on introducing and discussing employee benefits and personnel policies).
- Longer-tenured employees in focus group discussions expressed a desire for opportunities to be reoriented around key policies or procedures. Several employees noted that HR staff and/or managers regularly make themselves available to address questions, but awareness of accessibility or feeling comfortable in using that resource varied.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Naturally, new employees have to process a lot of information as they learn about their role, their team and their workplace. There was an expressed desire for different modes of engaging and communicating with new employees during the onboarding period, more so for departments located within City Hall (i.e., facility tours, shadowing, mentoring, etc.).
- Focus group discussions indicated varying perceptions about the effectiveness of onboarding across departments. There is an opportunity for the City to establish more standardized protocols around onboarding to ensure that all new employees have equally effective onboarding experiences in addition to providing time for departments to plan and prepare for onboarding. Given that the measured impact of IDEA is primarily based on employees' experiences and perceptions, robust coordination and consistency can ensure a more inclusive and welcoming experience for newer employees.
- The City's employee handbook notes that the first six months of employment is considered the orientation period, and that employees are not considered "regular" until that period has concluded. There is an opportunity for the City to formally collect feedback from new employees about the overall onboarding process to inform continuous improvement efforts.
- Employees consistently expressed concerns about HR capacity to fulfill evolving priorities, particularly related to IDEA. Employees also observed the impact of limited resources to address more persistent HR-related issues (such as hiring, being understaffed, and onboarding). The ongoing pandemic has only exacerbated these issues and therefore there is a need for increased capacity.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Considering that IDEA is often noted as a top priority for organizations, it is critical to reinforce that commitment within an employee's initial experiences with the organization, such as onboarding. A commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility are often framed as a reflection of an organization's values, and organizations that effectively introduce and discuss these values within an employee's first few months of employment sets the tone and shapes that employee's perception of a welcoming workplace climate. Additionally, the onboarding experience itself, not just the content shared, is an opportunity for current staff and leadership to reinforce the behaviors and structures that support

IDEA (e.g., utilizing inclusive language, ensuring accommodations are in place, facilitating transparent discussions on team and organizational culture, etc.).

- Onboarding can also serve as an opportunity to ensure that new employees feel fully supported as they transition into a new work environment and their cognitive load increases with the influx of information at the start of employment.

Recommendations

- The six-month timeline for the new employee orientation period could serve as a standard parameter for all onboarding activities to occur, as well as an intentional milestone for collecting employee feedback on the overall onboarding process.
- Develop a standardized tool for new employees to provide feedback on onboarding processes after three and six months of employment that includes questions about IDEA content, onboarding activities and their effectiveness. Utilize collected feedback to inform onboarding practices that can be considered/applied across all departments.
- Develop a standard “orientation day/week” schedule/template (fully coordinated between HR and the appropriate department) that focuses on understanding the City’s IDEA goals and principles, specific responsibilities and core competencies, workplace climate, and its physical environments, in addition to being introduced to new work team members, supervisors, and workspaces. Doing so will help to clarify responsibilities between HR and the specific department, and help current employees effectively prepare for orientation activities.
- Include “reboarding” opportunities for existing employees to reintroduce current policies or introduce new or updated policies outside of email communication. This could include approaching employees returning from leave or newly promoted as new hires to support them in reacclimating to the workplace, conducting “Q&A” style meetings or recorded video sessions to present on policies and answer employee questions in real time, or hosting an annual gathering for new employees that also includes department heads, mentors, or any interested current employees.
- Consider piloting a *cross-departmental mentoring program* for new employees in which mentors from another department periodically meet with mentees to discuss their experiences, answer workplace related questions, and offer insights or suggestions for adapting to their new work environment at the City. This could provide an additional avenue to welcome new employees and to ask for support outside of their department peers, supervisors or HR. In turn, mentors are offered an additional opportunity to develop cross-cultural leadership skills and reinforce a workplace culture centered on IDEA.

Facilitating Human Resource Functions

This theme relates to the delineation of responsibilities between the Human Resources (HR) department, department heads, and managers in facilitating key functions that impact the overall employee experience and affect workplace climate. Note that “HR functions” (or variations) refers to tasks or activities that are often coordinated between departments; “HR” or “HR department” refers specifically to the Human Resource department or staff.

The totality of recommendations made within this report represents a significant amount of work that the HR department would be primarily responsible for given how IDEA strategies are currently allocated

at the City. It is clear that increasing the capacity of the HR department will be necessary for successful implementation of IDEA strategies and recommendations and would serve to benefit overall City employment needs. The primary recommendation is to evaluate the HR department's current state to better determine the appropriate structure and resources to support the City's overall or future IDEA goals. In turn, this would inform the specific responsibilities within existing roles and/or determine new roles and the broader growth plan for the HR department.

In alignment with recommendations related to IDEA responsibilities and core competencies within position descriptions, it is important for the City to review and specify how those responsibilities will be equitably distributed between HR and department heads. This shared responsibility for IDEA goals promotes organization-wide accountability that is essential for sustainable success. After such accountability is established, the City might consider a more formal position to focus on IDEA strategies in the future. It is currently premature for the City to introduce such a role without a clear and established IDEA strategy framework.

How Does this Impact IDEA?

- HR is a cross-cutting function area that serves an entire organization. In many instances, IDEA-related goals and strategies are assigned to HR (particularly when those strategies focus on recruitment, retention, compensation and benefits, or other HR-adjacent functions). However, strategies designed to increase inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility require robust employee support, adequate financial resources, full leadership buy-in and alignment with overall strategic priorities to ensure success at a basic level.
- Relegating IDEA responsibilities to HR can often backfire or undermine sustainable impact. At the same time, HR will often be a key leader and coordinator in IDEA work, so having limited HR capacity can compromise an organization's ability to remain accountable to its IDEA commitment.

Area of Focus: Equitable Employment Practices

Of the key themes identified during data analysis that most impact workplace climate and employee experiences, those related to individual performance and professional development were among the most prevalent. Additionally, the City has an immense opportunity to consider how adaptive current personnel policies are to meet the changing needs of its workforce both today and in the future. While there are many ways to consider the concept of equity when it comes to employment practices, it can be helpful for the City of Kentwood to consider equity as both a *process* and an *outcome* within the workplace (both how decisions are made and the overall outcome or effect impact of those decisions).

Performance Reviews & Evaluation

This theme relates to the equitable execution of how employee performance is monitored, evaluated, and guided throughout their employment experience at the City.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City has a standard approach for conducting performance reviews with set criteria. Submitted documentation presents distinct categories and emphasizes the importance of employee performance and how the City values its employees' development. Several components of employee performance relate to self-development, productivity, improvement, and consistency. Currently, there are no categories or criteria that align with IDEA.
- As a standard practice, all City employees should receive at least one (annual) performance review on or near the anniversary of their date of hire. Collected data indicates that frequency of performance reviews varies greatly from department to department, and that departments have different processes for conducting reviews. In some instances, departments have additional criteria on which employees are evaluated (particularly for highly specialized positions), and periodic (i.e., semi-annual) reviews and check-ins are conducted throughout the year, whereas reviews in other departments are conducted more informally and infrequently.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- The City communicates to employees that they are “positioned to optimize both interpersonal skills and education necessary to serve the community” and that “the goal is for every member to reach their full potential.” Based on employee perspectives shared via focus groups and survey responses, such opportunities for growth are dependent on the access provided to individual employees through their department. There is an opportunity for the City to ensure equitable access to development activities to part-time employees in particular.
- City employees do not have a method to provide confidential or anonymous feedback to their managers or supervisors. The City has policies in place regarding the reporting of policy violations. However, employee awareness on how to communicate performance or behavior issues varies across departments or employee tenure.
- Many items in the Self Development and Job Productivity categories are dependent on whether the department actually provides employees opportunities for continued learning, which seems to not consistently be the case. As another example of performance evaluation that is influenced by the actions

of departmental leadership, Job Improvement and Consistency can only be fully met if an employee's department is open to feedback, change, and suggestions from all levels. Some departmental policies related to professional development would enable current employees to pursue IDEA-related education and integrate such development within their review (language in such policies does not specify this, rather they provide options for employees to pursue those opportunities at their own discretion and with supervisor approval).

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Performance reviews and all feedback loops related to employee performance are among the most influential practices that impact workplace equity and inclusion (in addition to formal, regular performance reviews, this includes providing confidential feedback to managers, providing actionable follow-up to reviews, etc.). Research indicates that performance reviews, in addition to promotion and compensation practices, have a far greater positive impact on perceptions of IDEA-related effectiveness and success than other related initiatives, such as increasing diversity in hiring⁴.
- There is also an immense amount of research that indicates that there are known patterns of bias that adversely impact equitable performance reviews (particularly among historically underrepresented or marginalized groups, including women, people of color, and LGBTQIA-identifying people)⁵.
- Regularly conducted performance reviews can also be effective ways to establish stronger communication between supervisors and direct reports, enhance collaborative relationships within teams, and increase feelings of being valued, of trust, and of loyalty in the workplace. As such, investing resources to build a comprehensive performance review process can have a profound and deep impact on the success of an organization's overall IDEA strategy.

Recommendations:

- Continue auditing annual reviews of all employees and include the frequency to which employees have interim reviews and/or check-ins with their supervisors (i.e., annually, quarterly, etc.).
- Develop an IDEA core competency model to inform and guide employee professional development. While specifying responsibilities will help employees better understand how daily functions, they fulfill will support IDEA, core competencies help to encourage the general sets of knowledge, skills and behaviors that enhance the overall workplace cultural climate and employee experience for a sustainably diverse workforce. In addition to an accurate and clear understanding of the concepts of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility, core competencies might include: interculturally competent communication and conflict resolution, understanding and identifying implicit biases, and building trustful and psychologically safe workplace relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Establish standards for all departments to incorporate into their respective performance review processes to ensure all employees have equitable access to performance feedback and evaluation. These standards could include:
 - Opportunities to provide confidential feedback about their supervisors and departments.
 - Annual performance reviews periodic check-ins with supervisors or managers at least every six months.
 - A review of position descriptions against real-time responsibilities.

⁴ <https://coqual.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Coqual-Equity-At-Work-Key-Findings-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ <https://biasinterrupters.org/wp-content/uploads/bias-interrupters-master-bibliography.pdf>

- Check-ins and annual reviews would also include discussions or review of individualized IDEA development plans or educational efforts.
- Ensure department leaders in conjunction with HR staff review language within performance review documentation and revise to help mitigate any managerial subjectivity while conducting performance reviews and help reduce the impact of any managers' cultural preferences regarding behaviors, work styles, etc.
- Based on an IDEA core competency model (see also Equipping Staff recommendations), integrate criteria or categories into the performance evaluation process in support of inclusion or intercultural competency. Such additions could be integrated with existing categories such as "Self-Development," "Customer Service" and/or Attitudes and Cooperation.

Promotions

This theme relates to equitable practices that support the development and advancement of all City employees into higher-level positions, and access to and availability of such opportunities.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Promotion practices and eligibility requirements are subject to negotiation in union contracts. City administrators work with unions to determine how promotions are conducted for most positions at the City.
- Various employee groups (disaggregated by tenure, department, etc.) generally perceive the City has been able to provide a sense of job security and stability despite the "ups and downs" city governments face (though there is a high degree of uncertainty on how sustainable that will be given today's current talent challenges).
- The City conducts intentional succession planning in particular for management positions. Discussions and decisions that shape these plans primarily take place at the leadership level.
- Attention is paid to provide staff opportunities for professional development, take on additional responsibilities, and increase compensation in order to retain talent. *As discussed in other sections, the level to which these practices are perceived to be executed equitably is dependent on an employee's given department and/or tenure.*

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Opportunities for promotion vary greatly across departments given their size and scope (total employees can range from several dozen to under five). Smaller department sizes and fewer levels of responsibility naturally limit openings for higher-level positions. This can also reinforce employee perceptions of "feeling stuck" when it comes to career advancement.
- Focus group discussions included sharing varying experiences with opportunities for promotion (direct or indirect). There is a perceived tendency for specific individuals to be "groomed" for higher-level positions without having the greater context of any established succession plan. Without understanding the intentional steps to support succession planning or promotions, employees at times feel discouraged from applying for openings or have misperceptions of how promotions, changes in titles or positions, etc. are consistently handled within and across departments.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Along with performance reviews and compensation practices, promotions are a highly influential practice in achieving workplace equity and inclusion. Access to opportunities for promotions should also be a top priority for organizations committed to IDEA, especially for teams with flatter organizational structures. As such, how promotions are conducted and determined are one of the most tangible output-driven metrics on an employer's commitment to equity.
- Equitable promotion can mitigate feelings of resentment or unfairness, increase employee engagement and collaborative behavior, and attract prospective employees to the organization as an employer of choice. As such, inclusive and equitable promotions can be one of the most impactful recruitment and retention strategies for an organization to invest in.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that managers or supervisors have conversations with all team members about their career aspirations prior to announcing an open position. This can help to confirm the interest of internal applicants and encourage their participation in the process.
- Identify the behaviors and actions that all managers and supervisors can demonstrate to promote transparency around career laddering opportunities and how employees can access those opportunities. This might include mapping of potential career paths, the skills necessary to pursue those paths, and recommended development opportunities. See also recommendations for *Performance Reviews* on page 26.
- Develop a leadership development program in which employees can be nominated (by self or others) to participate that would put them on a "leadership track" to invest in employee growth and develop their leadership skills. While the City may not be able to guarantee that all employees will have opportunities to advance into higher-level positions during their tenure, this level of resource investment can ensure employees feel supported and prepared for both formal and informal leadership at Kentwood and beyond.

Perceptions of Pay Equity

This theme relates to employee perceptions of the City's compensation practices for all employees and its capacity to achieve pay equity for all employees. Findings relate to how these perceptions impact attitudes toward the workplace climate and employee experience overall.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City has previously conducted compensation and pay equity reviews for its leadership positions and has worked to address identified pay gaps. Previous reviews have found that female employees took longer to reach top of pay scale than male employees, which was primarily due to circumstances surrounding those decisions (such as accepted starting pay and promotion pay increase practices at the time of the promotion) and not the result of biased decision making. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City made the decision to freeze non-union employee wage increases and other budget considerations in 2021.
- Anecdotally, several employees across focus groups representing all tenures and different departments indicated they were generally satisfied with their compensation and felt that the City generally

compensates employees well. Benefits and titles that match performed responsibilities were referred to much more often as opportunities for growth than current compensation.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Employee feedback from both focus group discussions and survey responses indicate a desire to have more transparent and regular communication about the City's pay equity practices and efforts to address any gaps identified.
- Note that analysis focused on employee perspectives related to pay equity, rather than a full review of compensation or pay equity data. There is at least an opportunity for the City to identify the communication practices that most resonate with employees and make them feel informed about pay equity (in addition to ongoing efforts to directly monitor and address it).

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- It is well-known that, in the US, women (particularly women of color), earn a portion of every dollar that their male colleagues⁶. While more employers are making efforts to ensure pay equity, it is important for those organizations to be transparent about their practices. Transparency helps current and future employees better understand their employer's commitment to pay equity and can eliminate the often-problematic norms and practices that tend to widen pay gaps. Additionally, research indicates that prospective employees are more likely to apply for open positions when employers are transparent about salary⁷. Addressing perceptions around pay equity practices can be just as important to fostering a workplace climate centered around IDEA as addressing pay gaps can.

Recommendations:

- Continue to regularly conduct compensation and pay equity reviews to monitor progress and inform future budgeting efforts.
- Consider how the City can provide periodic updates (with high-level, summarized data) on its pay equity practices as part of ongoing monitoring of IDEA progress in this (and that accounts for or reflects how the City meets contractual obligations with collective bargaining units).

Exit Interviews

This theme relates to the structure and utilization of exit interviews as a strategy to inform ongoing IDEA strategies and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City has a standard inquiry to conduct interviews with outgoing employees leaving on a voluntary basis. Based on the exit interview data reviewed, trend analysis was not conducted. The inquiry is utilized as a tool during exit interviews; before the formal inquiry begins, however, exiting employees are invited to openly share their perspectives and experience of their employment. Employees are given as much time as is necessary to complete the exit interview questions. Current exit interview questions do not include specific prompts related to inclusion, sense of belonging, or other IDEA-related aspects.

⁶ <https://www.payscale.com/compensation-trends/black-women-equal-pay-2020/>

⁷ <https://www.benefitnews.com/news/pay-transparency-is-critical-to-dei-initiatives>

- Relatedly, HR staff conduct “stay” interviews, which are conducted to glean insight from current (but not exiting) employees to better understand factors that can impact employee retention.
- Not all departments conduct exit interviews at the departmental level. Those that do have different protocols for exit interviews. For instance, Police has an extensive inquiry for conducting exit interviews that addresses several aspects of the workplace and employee experience.
- Based on data reviewed, exit interviews are primarily conducted in-person or in real time, with the interviewer responsible for documenting interviewee feedback. Employees who conduct exit interviews at the departmental level are not trained by human resources. Guidance does not exist to inform those employees on conducting meaningful interviews. Exit interview policies do not exist.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- The depth of information collected for exit interviews varies, as does the frequency of how interviews are conducted. It is challenging for the interviewers to conduct an exit interview with all exiting employees before end of employment or to follow up with former employees.
- In addition to challenges in conducting exit interviews, the City has an opportunity to utilize such data more effectively it can gather from interviews to increase IDEA in the workplace. Few instances were reported in how the City utilizes collective employee feedback (such as exit interview trend analysis) to directly inform employee feedback efforts.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Exit interviews can be a powerful tool and resource for organizations to understand its overall performance in addition to IDEA. Insights gathered from these interviews, when utilized, can help increase retention and help employers be more proactive in improving or adapting policies and employee resources. Despite the immense value that effectively conducted exit interviews can bring to the workplace, employers across all sectors generally struggle to successfully implement this tool as exit interviews are somewhat notorious to get consistent or robust employee participation.
- In many instances, employees that are leaving see very little incentive in their participation, do not trust how their feedback will be utilized, or fear potential retaliation if their feedback is traced to them. When employees are able to participate in positive organizational change that is transparently tied to themes gained from exit interviews while they are still active, they are more likely to be willing to participate in the process when they choose to exit. However, exit interviews that primarily focus on workplace climate and IDEA can yield invaluable and specific insights that can inform more effective and responsive employee engagement, retention and development practices overall.

Recommendations:

- Review and revise exit interview questions to primarily focus on gathering employee perspectives on IDEA and workplace culture at the City. Include questions for employees to voluntarily provide demographic information to inform future trend analysis. Establish an inquiry process that includes both HR staff and the outgoing employee’s supervisor; this can provide opportunity for employees to provide honest feedback as they may feel more comfortable sharing with one person over the other.
- Establish an exit interview policy and procedure for all departments (in addition to any department-specific protocols that may currently be in place) that clarifies to employees how information will be utilized. Consider how to implement feedback mechanisms for employees to provide reply to questions

anonymously (such as a third-party online platform or external consultant), which might if they prefer to not participate in an in-person or real time interview.

- Develop a process in which anonymized, aggregated data from exit interviews (and potentially stay interviews with current employees) is reviewed by a panel or committee of leadership employees across departments to identify trends and opportunities for overall growth and improvement, in addition to recommendations specific to IDEA strategies and performance. Data review of exit or stay interview data should be conducted at least on an annual basis.
- Create a mechanism to share key trends and opportunities based on exit interview data to share with current employees, including any recommendations the City will implement or is exploring feasibility to implement. When feasible, share communications throughout the year that highlight how exit interview data was utilized to inform department-level or city-wide decisions, updates to policies, etc.
- Consider providing financial incentives for outgoing employees that participate in exit interviews to encourage participation.

Perceptions of Disciplinary Action

This theme relates to employee perceptions of practices to address employee behaviors that may negatively impact workplace climate or are in violation of personnel policies or that adversely impact team cohesion, climate, etc.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The Employee Handbook includes several policies and guidelines that define and inform workplace behaviors that are considered appropriate or inappropriate.
- Most employees are covered by a collective bargaining unit with detailed and specific contractual obligations related to employee discipline and grievance procedures.
- The city-wide policy for behavior warranting disciplinary action is clear and concise. Supplemental materials, such as the *City Disciplinary Notice Form*, contain language that helps clarify criteria or other factors to inform such decisions. Some departments have additional policies and protocols related to workplace behavior and discipline, such as Courts and Police.
- Documentation reviewed indicates some employees might have additional avenues to address disciplinary actions (i.e., predetermination hearings, more explicit protocols on how to contest a decision, etc.).

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Approaches to decision making related to addressing behaviors within the workplace environment, including those that eventually warrant disciplinary action, appear to vary across departments. Though policies are clear, circumstances surrounding decisions are often unique, and addressing.
- Even in circumstances in which the rationale for certain decisions were understood, there may have been an opportunity for department or team leaders to discuss or reflect on the decision with other team members or provide additional avenues for employees to reflect on how such decisions impact the workplace climate or team cohesion.

- Data reviewed did not clarify to what extent the City is able to collect and track data related to disciplinary actions at a disaggregated level (i.e., across employment status, tenure, gender identity, age, race/ethnicity, etc.). Staff indicated that the City currently does not have the resources to collect and track data in this manner.
- Throughout focus group discussions, employees noted different examples in which rationale behind disciplinary actions was unclear, not effectively communicated, or perceived as inconsistent in comparison to other disciplinary decisions. As such, it appears that the *process* in how these instances is addressed seem to impact (either positively or negatively) employee perceptions of workplace climate or trust.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- It can be challenging for employers to foster a strong sense of confidence in the organization's commitment to IDEA when there is a perception of inequitable disciplinary action. Even when organizations are able to ensure equitable and fair outcomes regarding disciplinary procedures and practices, balancing confidentiality needs can sometimes mean that organization struggles to determine what can be transparently explained (at a broader, policy level) to provide information that would instill a sense of procedural justice among employees.
- When employees perceive disciplinary actions as inequitable, it can also generate potential legal issues in regard to employee discrimination. Municipalities have stringent standards to uphold given their adherence to federal and state law, and commitment to fulfilling contractual obligations to applicable collective bargaining agreements. As employers, they can work to ensure that employees have a clear understanding of how policies related to disciplinary actions are intentionally designed to ensure equitable outcomes as a means to raise confidence in a commitment to procedural justice and mitigate misperceptions of inequity or unfairness.

Recommendation:

- Establish a mechanism to track disciplinary processes to evaluate for any disparities or potential biases across employee groups. This will support the City in understanding the extent to which disciplinary processes are facilitated equitably, if a more robust and appropriate solution is needed to achieve equitable disciplinary practices, and to provide information to employees that provides more clarity and transparency around such practices.

Parental Leave

This theme relates to the policies and support provided to employees who take parental leave throughout their employment at the City.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Currently, the City provides eligible employees 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in accordance with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Eligibility is based on employees who have been employed for at least one year or have worked at least 1,250 hours within the previous year of employment. The general policy covers leave for any employee experiencing “pregnancy, prenatal medical care, or childbirth.” The policy also states that employees can take leave “to care for the employee's spouse, parent, or dependent child due to that family member's serious health condition.”

The policy does establish guidelines for what constitutes “serious health issues.” Employees can take up to 12 weeks of leave within a one-year period.

- In addition to FMLA, the City provides up to 12 weeks unpaid, leave for Non-FMLA Medical Leave for employees who do not meet the hours worked and service length requirements for FMLA. The City provides up to 30 days of unpaid Personal Leave for a variety of reasons that may not be due to medical reasons.
- The amount of leave an employee has access to is dependent on their employment status (e.g., full- or part-time), tenure, and which collective bargaining agreement they are covered by. As such, the amount of leave employees have access to varies.
- The City has other policies that affect time off overall that can be used to secure additional time needed for parental leave. For instance, employees can donate hours to peers via the *Paid Leave Donation Policy*. Vacation Purchase & Sell Policies allow for exempt non-union employees to “buy” paid time off (PTO) via payroll deductions and must choose to do so during open enrollment. As such, these policies may lack the availability and flexibility needed for employees that need additional time for parental leave.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Employee feedback indicates that either the existing leave policies are not being fully adhered to or that there is a consistent and significant misunderstanding among staff about what circumstances are or are not covered by the current policies. Several staff indicated that they understood the following to be true: mothers can only take four weeks off unless they acquire a doctor's note saying the need to continue physical recovery; paternity leave is not an option for expectant or new fathers; unpaid time can only be accessed if employees have first exhausted all of their paid sick time. This last point was brought up as particularly problematic for employees, as returning mothers worried about being able to take a sick day within the year after they returned to work. These misperceptions should be addressed through better policy communication.
- It should be noted that some focus group participants expressed deep concern about having children during their tenure as a City employee based on current state, and that in some instances, staff have advised peers to not do so while working at the City.
- Employees expressed deep concern that current parental leave practices are not adequate to the evolving needs of parents or guardians (and their families) in today's workforce. There is opportunity for the City to establish a more adaptable approach to parental leave.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- The impact of inadequate parental leave policies tends to have a disproportionately negative impact on childbearing employees. Several studies have demonstrated that the lack of paid leave (or even paid leave limited to a few weeks) can increase the likelihood of negative physical, mental or emotional health outcomes⁸ for new mothers and newborns⁹.

⁸ <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/03/416831/national-paid-maternity-leave-makes-sense-mothers-babies-and-maybe-economy>

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/04/06/parental-leave-as-a-gateway-to-workplace-equity/?sh=1cabb823359c>

- **Newer generations of employees are more likely to join and stay with an employer with good parental leave benefits¹⁰; this is particularly true for female employees, who are more likely to leave their organization or the workforce altogether because they are not provided adequate leave benefits.** Additionally, adequate paid leave also has a positive impact on ensuring employees that are new parents (female employees, in particular) are able to maintain consistent career advancement^{11,12}. Further evidence shows that paid leave policies also help to close gender equity gaps across compensation and promotion into leadership positions, in addition to attracting and retaining talent.
- It is clear that evidence suggests that organizations with more desirable paid leave policies (both in general and for parental leave) are more likely to retain employees. Trends show that new fathers tend to underutilize parental leave as well. It is important for organizations to take a “gender neutral” approach to such policies (i.e., all employees are offered the same amount of parental leave) to reinforce gender equality, particularly within organizations with disproportionate gender representation across departments.

Recommendations:

- In order to be a competitive employer of choice, the City will need to plan on how to expand upon current federal requirements. Given evolving trends in the necessary resources to attract and retain a diverse and talented workforce, consider expanding parental leave policies to include at least 12 weeks of paid leave for all new parents, for all employees and collective bargaining agreements.
- As an immediate measure, ensure accurate employee understanding of the current policy and communicate those improvements are being seriously considered and planned for in the future. Since parameters of parental leave policies are shaped by union contracts, it will be helpful to reinforce to employees what is covered and how that may differ across collective bargaining agreements.
- Utilize plain and clear language within the policy and supplemental communication materials to ensure employees understand what the policy covers and provide opportunities for employees to ask questions and obtain further clarification.
- Considering the time and fiscal resources needed to facilitate that policy, the City may need to implement a gradual or phased approach toward implementing a more competitive approach to parental leave. **In working together with unions, the City could integrate such phased changes over a period of time through collective bargaining agreements:**
 - Four weeks of paid leave, and eight weeks of unpaid without having to utilize or exhaust any “banked” paid time off.
 - Four weeks of paid leave, and eight weeks of unpaid leave with the option of utilizing the Vacation Purchase policy at any time.
- This theme focuses on parental leave; however, the City’s current policy is designed to address leave across all family-related circumstances as covered in FMLA (e.g., caring for parents or dependent children with chronic illnesses). Though these recommendations explicitly address standards for parental leave, the City should consider a comprehensive review and update to this policy to ensure adequate paid time off for all circumstances covered within the policy.

¹⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2019/08/15/five-ways-parental-leave-can-improve-culture-and-increase-diversity-in-organizations/?sh=38ccfd7f2920>

¹¹ <https://hbr.org/2017/07/a-winning-parental-leave-policy-can-be-surprisingly-simple>

¹² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/04/06/parental-leave-as-a-gateway-to-workplace-equity/?sh=1cabb823359c>

Retirement

This theme relates to the structures and support the City offers to employees as they prepare for retirement.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Retirement protocols and practices are negotiated through collective bargaining agreements. The City offers competitive benefits packages to its employees, including retirement offerings. Some longer-term employees commented on how support or funding for some offerings (i.e., pension) has decreased over time as City budgeting has shifted.
- For employees nearing the age of 65, the City is able to direct them to resources to help them navigate and determine their Medicare options.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Feedback from focus group discussions indicate an opportunity for clearer and stronger support for employees who are planning to retire. The retirement process was often characterized as complex or at times confusing, with some employees feeling they are “on their own” when it comes to navigating the process overall. Currently, the City is limited in its ability to provide additional resources, either due to limited HR staff or mitigating potential liabilities.
- Retirement can impact any succession planning process, and oftentimes leadership (at city-wide or department level) are unaware of individual employees’ intentions to retire until they are prepared to submit their notice. While requirements for providing notice do not need to change as they follow all mandated guidelines, there is an opportunity to establish more open lines of communication in which employees feel encouraged to proactively share their intentions to retire and help support succession planning efforts.
- Making key decisions, such as determining healthcare, continuing to work after the age of 65, or even knowing what options or resources are available are common challenges retirees face throughout the country. As this process can often be overwhelming, there is opportunity for the City to secure more clarity or guidance for employees who have reached this phase in the employee experience.

Recommendations

- Encourage intentional employee feedback to inform overall succession planning, particularly when retirement (across all levels of employment) can influence succession plans. As succession planning efforts are currently more of a “behind the scenes” effort, leadership should consider ways to collect employee feedback regularly and proactively in this regard (for instance, employee engagement surveys, ‘stay’ interviews, etc.).
- In adherence to the City’s current liability parameters, consider inviting licensed agents that are able to provide information on Medicare (or other relevant retirement information) at regular intervals throughout the year to explain key points of the employment transition, with particular attention to benefits. Provide employees education on the benefits they can access outside of what is provided by the City after retirement, and the pros and cons of choosing various options (it should be made clear that these events are purely informative, rather than promotional, and are delineated from the City’s responsibilities).

- Schedule One-on-One meetings with retiring employees to review specific benefits and resources. Ideally, at least one meeting would be conducted to help the employee to determine their retirement date, and one meeting would be conducted closer to the retirement date to address final questions and needs.

Area of Focus: Pre-Employment Practices

The challenges we have collectively faced as a society throughout the pandemic have a profound impact on how we view work and careers. As of this report's publication, the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, and has placed restrictions on how the City is able to recruit and cultivate talent, in addition to exacerbating several challenges that departments faced prior to the pandemic. The City has been able to implement some strategies that are targeted to specific populations and for specific departments.

Pipeline Cultivation

This theme relates to the general practices the City engages in to identify and recruit candidates for open positions. It is important to note that some positions and departments have specific requirements and qualifications for positions and might also use resources with other entities to support recruitment efforts.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Recruitment (in general) and cultivating a diverse workforce was often cited as the most pressing concern or issue for the City of Kentwood throughout assessment activities and other discussions with City staff and leadership.
- While staffing needs vary across departments, finding talent to fulfill existing positions, or to expand teams or departments is a persistent and long-standing opportunity for the City. Employees and city leaders also noted how the pandemic has exacerbated these issues, and in 2021, the rate of employee turnover increased.
- Few departments have targeted approaches for recruitment of new employees. For example, the Police Department's High School Police Academy was established to attract talent for fully paid police recruit positions to attend the academy as employees with paid tuition. The City's Community Services Bureau also includes school resource officers that help cultivate relationships and positive interactions between youth and police officers.
- Though staff racial demographics were not representative of the general Kentwood population at the time of the assessment, there was adequate representation of gender identity in overall staff (this shifts greatly at the department level).

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Staff feedback across assessment activities noted that recruitment challenges are, in part, beyond the control or influence of the City. For instance, limited candidate pools for certain positions could be due to the very limited group of individuals that have the requisite certifications. Some departments also noted a steady increase in how challenging recruitment has become over the years within their profession. Fire and Police department personnel, in particular, noted that the physical and mental health issues employees can face, in addition to general public perceptions, are factors that directly impact future generations of potential recruits.

- That said, each department faces their own unique challenges in terms of recruitment, and also experience the need for recruitment at varying timelines, making this a very complex issue for the City to address. Several departments rely on HR staff to support or lead recruitment efforts; however, the HR department currently does not have the capacity to expand or enhance recruitment strategies.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Employers throughout the country are navigating a tumultuous talent market. Recent polling indicates that nearly a quarter of employed Americans intend to resign from their current positions during 2022, continuing the trend referred to as the 'Great Resignation'¹³. This presents a significant opportunity for the public sector in particular, to take advantage of shifting talent trends and address their own talent needs.
- Upcoming generations of talent indicate a strong desire to work for mission-driven or community-focused organizations, which presents a unique opportunity for local municipalities. However, research indicates that younger generations (current high school or college students, for instance) are mostly unaware of the wide scope of available employment opportunities within the public sector¹⁴. They are also unaware of, or may not have accurate perceptions of compensation, benefits, and other resources that would be available to them in a public sector career.
- While raising awareness of the employment opportunities and resources available within the public sector can entice more diverse candidate pools, candidates want to ensure their workplace climate is welcoming and fosters a sense of belonging. This can be challenging to achieve for candidates who do not see themselves represented within a current workforce or who have a limited understanding of intentional IDEA efforts. As such, municipalities have to directly address the structures and behaviors that interfere with fostering an inclusive and equitable workplace climate as the initial step to entice prospective employees.

Recommendations:

- Given the complexity of recruitment across different departments, the City will need to ensure it invests the necessary time and resources to address pipeline cultivation. As the scope of this project focused on the City at an administrative (organizational) level, assessment findings do not provide enough data to inform specific recommendations for each department. That said, it is clear that each department faces its own unique opportunities and challenges when it comes to cultivating talent pipelines. These are certainly impacted by current staff capacity, level of requisite IDEA knowledge to inform pipeline strategies, allocation of resources, and so on. As such, the City can, as an initial step, ensure resources are allocated at an administrative level to support departments in further developing such strategies.
- Conduct an audit of each department's own pipeline cultivation practices to understand current level of activity, engagement with community stakeholders (e.g., local schools, businesses, higher education institutions, etc.), participation in professional networks (local, regional, and national), job posting practices, participation in job fairs, and the extent to which department employees engage in recruitment or pipeline activities, either formally or informally. Use findings from the audit to determine standard practices or guidelines for all departments to implement.

¹³ https://www.careerarc.com/blog/great-resignation-rehire-survey-infographic/?utm_source=pr&utm_medium=newswire&utm_campaign=great-resignation-rehire-survey

¹⁴ <https://bit.ly/3MWqwgF>

Candidate Selection

This theme relates to how coordinated efforts between departments and HR influence the candidate selection process (i.e., recruitment, interviewing, hiring).

Current State & Potential Strengths

- As previously noted, the City posts all open positions on its own website, and will utilize other online platforms (i.e., social media, job boards, etc.) to spread awareness of opportunities. The need for specialized skills, credentials, or education for certain positions also leads to posting positions on platforms of professional networks and recommendations from departments or encouraging employees to spread the work through their own personal and professional networks to aid the recruitment process.
- Depending on the needs and capacity of the department, HR primarily oversees the interview process, and works with department heads to determine timelines, scheduling, key review criteria, etc., which can vary across positions depending on the needs, availability, and preferences of a given department.
- The City has developed and utilizes standard questions for candidates, and typically utilizes a panel-style interview involving two to three department members throughout the process. The number of interviews also varies depending on the number of applicants or urgency to fulfill a particular role.
- Candidate selection for higher-level positions tend to be more internally focused, e.g., current employees may be identified as potential candidates with the full intention of hiring internally versus externally.
- Longer-tenured employees were more likely to note that they found out about the position they initially applied for through their own networks or because they were a City employee at the time. Newer employees were more likely to mention finding out through other online or indirect sources about their position.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Employees noted how selection processes seemed to be more collaborative in nature, intentionally seeking out input from employees throughout a team or department to help facilitate the process. Over time, the process has shifted and is now primarily facilitated between HR and department leadership. While the hiring of any candidate will influence workplace dynamics, this is particularly true for smaller departments in which the addition of a new team member may be more immediately or acutely felt. As inclusive interview processes and efficient interview processes are not mutually exclusive, there is opportunity for the City to further incorporate the insight and input from other department employees in the candidate selection process.
- In focus group discussions, employees noted varying experiences when it came to their department's approach to interviewing and hiring candidates. Based on feedback provided, there is some inconsistency in the length of certain selection processes, including the total number of interviews of a candidate before making an official offer. Some employees noted that their hiring processes were expedient, while others noted participating in several interviews a number of weeks before receiving an offer. Anecdotally, some employees noted how previous candidates had the opportunity to tour City facilities as part of their interview process, which tended to have a positive impact on the early days of employment.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Factors that influenced these circumstances vary; it is clear that a longer turnaround time can have an adverse effect on being able to secure top candidates. Having the team capacity between HR and department heads to ensure a more consistent selection process, regardless of the number of open positions at a given time, can help address this issue.
- Some departments have more particular selection processes due to the specific qualifications of a role; some positions might require background checks, verification processes, etc. that add to the overall time of finding the best candidate. For other departments, an open position may be an infrequent occurrence, due to smaller staff size and a tendency for employees to stay in those positions longer. These variances can also make it challenging to ensure a diverse candidate pool for every open position that becomes available throughout a given year and might demand further coordination or time between HR and departments to facilitate a successful process.

Recommendations:

- Continue involving relevant department staff throughout the selection and decision-making process for all open positions. This might include team discussions to determine the most important qualifications, eliciting feedback on potential interview questions to include, or to reflect on the overall needs of the department informally/generally at the time of hiring.
- Intentionally seeking this information can help current employees feel heard in addition to preparing them for welcoming a new employee; it can also serve as a potential checkpoint for department heads and hiring managers (i.e., mitigating negative impact of their own preferences/biases on the selection processes, identifying potential avenues to increase awareness about an open position, etc.). HR staff and director-level employees can still maintain control and consistency of the interview process while providing current employees assurance and support to prepare for the new hire.
- Update interview protocols to require candidates to participate in a “meet and greet” with the department (or full team within the department, depending on staff size) once the candidate has completed a specific number of interviews. It is recommended that these meet and greets occur after at least two rounds of interviews. Doing so can help to expedite final decisions regarding candidate selection.
- Should the City eventually increase its HR staffing, there is opportunity to allow for HR team members to concentrate on specific departments or provide more specialized support and coordination to help departments manage their recruitment needs. Doing so would also allow for HR staff to become more intricately familiar with the nuances of recruiting and provide more support effectively.

Area of Focus: Organizational Values & Leadership

The City of Kentwood's values include extraordinary customer service, integrity, equity, communication, and leadership. It is evident that employees strive to imbue those values into their daily roles and responsibilities, and there is opportunity for the City to further clarify and make stronger connections to how those values support IDEA overall. Additionally, the City has an opportunity to specify how IDEA better enables employees to uphold those values within daily workplace operations and while engaging City residents.

IDEA Knowledge

This theme relates to employee levels of awareness in IDEA concepts, practices and behaviors within the workplace. It also relates to employees' perceptions of confidence in applying such knowledge into their roles or into department strategies.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City's vision frames Kentwood to be "a diverse Michigan community where people can find opportunity, safety, health, and happiness." Kentwood's current population has a rich cultural diversity, which is often acknowledged within external City communications and within documentation of strategic goals, objectives, and related plans.
- The City identified IDEA-related goals within its strategic plan, including assessing current efforts and practices to identify opportunities for growth and improvement. Equity has been identified as a core value for the City, and a central component to the City achieving its strategic priorities.
- There is a sense that employees understand the general importance or significance of IDEA but need more clarity on the "why" behind the City in trying to fortify its strategic efforts around these values. In some instances, employees expressed skepticism or questioned the City's motivation around IDEA activities (including assessment activities). Based on employee feedback, having a clearer understanding that the City is being intentional and proactive in increasing the inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility within its workplace can have positive implications in terms of employee awareness, readiness for change.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- There is opportunity for IDEA to be discussed more frequently within department and team settings. The frequency and depth to which IDEA and related topics are discussed varies across departments and is often dependent on department leadership to facilitate how often more informal or reflective conversations are encouraged, as well as how integrated IDEA content or criteria is formally included in training or education protocols at a department level.
- Additionally, hiring and diversifying the current City workforce were oft-cited examples of how a commitment to IDEA would impact the workplace environment. Some employees expressed concerns about compromising talent among the workforce or standards of performance for the sake of diversifying the City's employee base, or that standards would be lowered in order to meet goals for talent slates, thus undermining the intent behind the City's commitment.

- Employee responses varied within both focus groups and survey prompts when it came to how IDEA might influence the workplace environment. Some employees were not able to think of any dimensions of identity (e.g., gender identity, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious or spiritual beliefs, etc.) or lived experiences that might influence their workplace. Some did not feel that there were any IDEA-related issues within their team or departments. Other employees were able to identify specific and multiple examples (be they one-time or ongoing) in which increased IDEA knowledge would improve the workplace climate. This presents an opportunity for the City to be clearer and more consistent in the value proposition that IDEA brings to the workplace.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Municipalities face unique challenges to meeting IDEA goals, particularly regarding budgeting and allocation of resources and recruitment and retention within highly specialized fields. The complexity of fulfilling an organizational IDEA commitment can also be challenging for employees across departments to fully comprehend, which is why formalized documentation of IDEA-related values is often an initial or early step for organizations to take. It is an important part of an organization's commitment to IDEA, as such documentation becomes a primary resource for employees to increase their understanding of IDEA and what it means to the organization and to them individually.
- Fostering shared and consistent understanding of IDEA values, topics, etc. provides the necessary foundation that allows other strategies to succeed. Employees have a clearer understanding of the “why” for IDEA, which better enables them to both inform and implement the “how” at the organizational and departmental levels¹⁵.

Recommendations:

- Increasing general knowledge of City employees around IDEA should be based on a shared understanding of these values. Formalize language that clearly states how the City of Kentwood defines inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (note: a component of the overall IDEA project includes a recommended IDEA Policy Statement). Developing such language can help facilitate necessary discussions that help to clarify the “why” for employees across departments and at all levels. Build upon language that has been utilized to inform stakeholders about IDEA activities to date. Establish a “roll out” plan to introduce said language across departments, encourage department or team level discussions, and include opportunities for employees to provide feedback on the language.
- At the department level, create standards of behavior at the department level connected to IDEA values as defined at the City level. Each department at the City has its own unique work culture in addition to its overall role and function. As such, it is important for departments to encourage reflective discussions on those roles and responsibilities specifically to help the City achieve its overarching IDEA goals.
- Incorporate any IDEA statements and language (current and future) within all educational or developmental processes, including onboarding, employee handbooks, relevant training protocols, as well as “reboarding” opportunities (see also *Onboarding Consistency on page 22*).

¹⁵ <https://www.brighterstrategies.com/blog/starting-your-dei-strategy/>

Communication & Demonstration of IDEA Values

This theme relates to how the City's commitment to IDEA is communicated and discussed across all levels and departments, to ensure all employees understand the authentic and intentional commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility within the workplace and throughout the employee experience.

Current State and Potential Strengths

- Documentation of guiding principles reinforces a commitment to IDEA. The City's vision and mission focus on cultivating and providing services for a "diverse" and "thriving community for all." "Equity" is explicitly named as one of the City's core values. Documentation of the City's strategic priorities also clearly connect to these guiding principles and are structured to advance the City's articulated commitment to IDEA.
- Other key documentation and employee resources, such as the Employee Handbook, reinforce the City's values and outlines behaviors, protocol and other expectations on workplace decorum that support IDEA. City personnel policies include clear and specific examples of behaviors that interfere or contradict IDEA values, such as inappropriate or harassing behavior. Language in related policies also specifies what is considered sexual, race-based and other forms of harassment or discrimination so that employees are clearly informed. The City has established fairly extensive rules of conduct that prohibit many behaviors that would impede a culture supportive of IDEA.
- Employees are aware that IDEA has been made a strategic priority for the City. In focus groups, participants at times shared their enthusiasm and/or interest in the City embedding IDEA into its strategic priorities.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Responses across focus groups and survey results also indicate a need for the "bigger picture" of what the City's commitment to IDEA and resulting strategies might look like. While employees are aware that IDEA has been made a priority, there is a need for greater clarity on what "IDEA" means to the City of Kentwood and how to measure progress and maintain accountability. There is a desire among a significant proportion of staff for more discussion and reflection about IDEA in general, which the City can leverage to maintain forward momentum.
- Employee-facing documentation (i.e., Employee Handbook, staff intranet, department-level policies) includes information that provides guidance on what types of behaviors and modes of communication are *not* acceptable in the workplace but are less likely to state which behaviors *explicitly affirm* IDEA-related issues or concepts.
- For example, the Employee Handbook also includes expectations for a cooperative, collaborative, and helpful work environment but does not make an explicit connection to how it reinforces IDEA in the workplace. Additionally, updated language could affirm the cultural value of certain behaviors and manners across cultural differences, such as manners of dress and hairstyles within the definition of "professional and neat appearance" (which can have different meanings across cultural differences).

Leadership Accountability for IDEA

This theme relates to the roles, responsibilities and competencies that leaders can fulfill to foster a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible workplace climate and employee experience.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Overall, employees tend to feel that their own teams or departments are effective at fostering a workplace environment that promotes collaboration and collegiality. These perceptions vary across departments; there is a general sense that employees feel they can work effectively alongside their peers. In some instances, employees characterized relationships (within teams or shifts, with leaders, etc.) are very strong due to the intensity of the work and time spent working together (such as first responders in Fire or Police).
- Employees noted that fostering this type of workplace environment requires consistent leadership, and in a style that is most effective for that department (i.e., the leadership style that works best for one department may not be as effective for another). As such, a department head's particular leadership style and approach to communication are primary influential factors to how employees feel within the workplace.
- As discussed in Position Descriptions, there are various "Knowledge & Skills" noted for individuals in managerial (or above) positions to be effective in supporting a diverse team.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Though perceptions of leadership effectiveness vary across departments, employees generally feel their department heads are effective in their roles. However, there is an opportunity to increase the level of intercultural competence and inclusive leadership skills for anyone in a leadership position (managers, supervisors, and department heads). City-wide mechanisms and resources that outline what effective leadership can look like could be more explicit in naming the competencies and specific skills necessary to lead IDEA strategies and initiatives at a departmental level.
- Few departments were noted as not having any discussions about IDEA among their own employees; some employees noted in focus group discussions that it was never or rarely discussed. Regardless, the frequency or degree to which IDEA was discussed was driven by department leadership, which contributes to inconsistency among employees in understanding IDEA, why it matters, how it impacts their respective department, etc.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- The impact of inclusive leadership to embed IDEA values within the workplace environment is essential to the culture and sustainable growth within any organization. Inclusive leadership involves demonstrating behaviors and actions that supports a strong sense of belonging for all team members, being accommodating and validating of diverse perspectives and identities, and fosters adaptability across differences and challenges that arise within a team or organizational setting. Research indicates that ethnically diverse teams within the public sector are more likely to have welcoming, positive, workplace experiences¹⁶.
- Organizations who are committed to diversifying their workforce will also need to make concentrated and strategic efforts to ensure that leaders are equipped to foster inclusive climates to attract and retain talent. Doing so demonstrates a more authentic "walking the talk" atmosphere when it comes to committing to

¹⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0734371X19899722>

IDEA and enhances a sense of trust that IDEA-related strategies and changes are designed to benefit all employees.

Recommendations:

- Additional recommendations address establishing IDEA-specific responsibilities within position descriptions within Knowledge & Skills, in addition to establishing a core competency model for IDEA. It is recommended that department heads be among the initial groups of employees to participate in the development of such structures given their visibility within their department and the City, and the collective knowledge on City operations.
- In addition to establishing a city-wide IDEA education plan, require department heads to participate in regular IDEA training and education that is targeted toward municipal leaders. Any educational or developmental opportunities that leaders participate in should be clearly connected to the responsibilities, knowledge and skills as outlined in position descriptions. More specialized developmental resources can help to ensure the investment of time and resources leads to practical application of learning.
- Should the City choose to implement IDEA-related education for leaders as a short-term goal, it is important to clarify expectations with any participants regarding the intended use and impact of those opportunities and participation expectations as it relates to their own responsibilities as an employee. This is particularly necessary if education is offered prior to any updated language in position descriptions. It is also important to ensure there is designated time for participants to periodically meet after training is completed to help ensure that acquired skills, knowledge, etc. are practically applied. Considering the time and investment needed to implement any training, the City might consider leading a "pilot" group of leaders to help inform future or long-term IDEA education or training decisions.

Leadership Culture

This theme relates to how leadership (generally speaking) is viewed and discussed throughout the City, in addition to the influence leaders have on workplace climate and employee experiences. See also *Leadership Accountability to IDEA*.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City has a particular emphasis on promoting a culture of servant leadership, an approach to leadership that focuses on putting 'followers' (i.e., employees) first through empowerment and personal development. As public employees, this approach to leadership can be positively impactful in strengthening relationships between residents and City employees. Positioning its leaders as those who serve both their employees *and* the community is prevalent and frequently reiterated throughout City materials and documentation of guiding principles, strategic priorities, as well as messaging, etc.
- The City's decentralized structure also influences how leadership culture manifests itself within a given department. As noted in *Leadership Accountability*, department heads or team leaders may take a different approach to leadership to best meet the needs of employees. The City also has a traditional hierarchical structure, and this is particularly prevalent and adhered to in departments that need to maintain stringent protocols due to the department's function and/or in larger departments (this includes Police, Fire, Court, and Public Works).

- While the ongoing pandemic certainly factors into how employees feel about how they are appreciated within any organization, employee feedback indicates that a sense of belonging and feeling appreciated across different employee groups in particular are greatly influenced by department leadership and in some instances city-wide leadership.
- A number of focus group participants expressed that the resourcefulness of leaders and their peers in particular made their jobs desirable and stable. While longer tenured employees are more likely to have those perceptions than shorter tenured employees, there is a general sense that when department heads are deliberate in empowering employees it has a very positive impact.

Recommendation:

- Other recommendations made in this report address professional development and internal communication, two important factors that influence leadership culture within the City. In conjunction with implementing those strategies, the City can focus on encouraging more discussions across departments in how decisions are made and appropriately engage employees in those processes. Increased communication of policy and practice updates, sharing rationale for decisions, and improving overall consistency in decision making that directly impacts employees (e.g., promotions, disciplinary actions, etc.) will help increase employee trust and confidence in leadership and can help employees feel empowered.

Appendix A: Methodology Details

The following appendix sections provide detail on the inquiry used across the various methodologies of the IDEA climate assessment.

Employment Continuum

Inclusive Performance Strategies collaboratively finalized the categories of the employment continuum with Kentwood staff. Focus group questions and document audit requests were based on gathering data related to these categories:

- Pipeline Development
- Recruiting Practices
- Interview Process
- Onboarding and re-boarding
- Overall Employment Policies
- Team Member Development
- Retention
- Leadership Advancement Opportunities
- Retirement

Employment Continuum Focus Group Questions

To gain additional context and understand employee experience across the employment continuum, IPS facilitated three focus groups that were organized by tenure: two years and under, three to six years, and seven years or more. Each participant was provided with a handout describing each phase of the continuum. Focus groups began by clarifying the intention of the conversations and how these groups differ from the workplace climate focus groups, which some people had already participated in. The following questions were asked:

New Employees (two years and under)

- How did you initially find out about the job you applied for at the City of Kentwood?
- How would you define some of the strengths and challenges you experienced in the application and interview process?
- What were the most useful parts of your onboarding experience? What would you have liked to see more of/included?
- Did anyone discuss expectations for organizational culture or mention expectations for supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion during your onboarding? If so, please describe.
- We all have multiple identities and aspects of ourselves that are important to us. This may have to do with our cultural or religious background and how we express those aspects of ourselves, our abilities and disabilities, our status as parents or caregivers to others, or any number of other things. Do you feel that Kentwood's policies and practices fully support accommodations an individual might need given those things?
- What have you appreciated about your training and professional development so far? What could be more effective/do you wish was in place?
- Anything else you want to comment on related to the focus areas we are sharing in the continuum?

Mid-Range Employees (three to six years)

- How did you initially find out about the job you applied for at the City of Kentwood?
- How would you define some of the strengths and challenges you experienced in the application and interview process?
- How would you describe some of the strengths and challenges of your onboarding experience?
- Have you had any first-hand experience in recruiting new members to your team or department? If so, share a story/example, highlighting what you thought went well and what was challenging.
- How often do you discuss or reflect on organizational culture or supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion with your team or department? Why do you think that is?
- We all have multiple identities and aspects of ourselves that are important to us. This may have to do with our cultural or religious background and how we express those aspects of ourselves, our abilities and disabilities, our status as parents or caregivers to others, or any number of other things. Do you feel that Kentwood's policies and practices fully support accommodations an individual might need given those things?
- Let's discuss how the City of Kentwood supports professional development. What examples come to mind of Kentwood and have helped you to grow in your career?
- Anything else you want to comment on related to the focus areas we are sharing in the continuum?

Long-Term Employees (seven years or more)

- Have you had any first-hand experience in recruiting new members to your team or department? If so, share a story/example, highlighting what you thought went well and what was challenging.
- How would you define some of the strengths and challenges you experienced in the application and interview process?
- How often are you re-oriented to employee/personnel policies? In what way would "reboarding" help?
- How often do you discuss or reflect on organizational culture or supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion with your team or department? Why do you think that is?
- We all have multiple identities and aspects of ourselves that are important to us. This may have to do with our cultural or religious background and how we express those aspects of ourselves, our abilities and disabilities, our status as parents or caregivers to others, or any number of other things. Do you feel that Kentwood's policies and practices fully support accommodations an individual might need given those things?
- Let's discuss how the City of Kentwood supports professional development. What examples come to mind of Kentwood has helped you to grow in your career?
- What strengths and challenges do you see with Kentwood helping staff (you or others) prepare for leadership/management roles?
- Anything else you want to comment on related to the focus areas we are sharing in the continuum?

Document Audit

IPS provided Kentwood staff with a comprehensive list that detailed the pipeline stages and focus areas for the document review (see next page). City staff were provided a secure, cloud-based spreadsheet to which they submit requested documentation. IPS staff met with staff to discuss what was being requested to ensure staff had clarity and were able to successfully complete the audit. City staff submitted documentation, weblinks or

narratives as examples of relevant documentation. City staff also submitted union contracts and met with IPS staff to review the contracts and highlight sections relevant to the inquiry.

<p>Pipeline Development Internships School Partnerships (middle school through higher education) Job shadowing Volunteer engagement (event/program & board/committee) Seasonal employees</p>	<p>Recruitment Practices (Building candidate pools/slates) Job Descriptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive Qualifications • Consistent Language • IDEA Commitment • Transparency of Benefits Job Posting/Advertising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website posting • Diverse Networking • Referral Programs • Internal and External Access • Accessibility Application Process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial Candidate Screening Processes • Benchmarking and use of talent data </p>
<p>Interview Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of qualification/certification/assessment • Establishing diverse interview teams • Interview questions • Decision making processes • Community Engagement 	<p>Onboarding & Re-boarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented consistent processes • Opportunity for evaluation and feedback • Mentorship • Ongoing resources and support • Departmental Follow Up • IDEA Culture Commitment
<p>Overall Employment Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Handbook • Cultural and identity-based accommodations 	<p>Team Member Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable professional development opportunities and processes • Mentorship • Development plans and performance evaluations • Disciplinary action • IDEA training and education
<p>Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid leave • Benefits • Recognition • Employee engagement, feedback loops • Affinity groups/ERGs • Grievance policies/complaint resolution • Pay equity • Exit interviews: Consistency, use of information 	<p>Leadership Advancement Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession planning • New leadership identification • Professional development and mentorship
<p>Retirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits • Ongoing engagement 	

Workplace Climate Survey Questions

As part of the workplace climate assessment, a staff-wide survey was sent. In total, IPS received 151 total responses. Survey questions are provided below. Most questions were designed using a Likert rating system, with potential responses consisting of strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Open-ended questions provided opportunities for employees to provide additional contextual comments to their responses or provide specific feedback.

Survey Prompt
I know what is expected of me when it comes to supporting IDEA in the workplace as a City of Kentwood employee.
I am aware of the career pathways available to me through the City.
I feel as supported in pursuing my professional development as my co-workers are.
I am confident in my ability to work with people who have a different cultural background than me without fear or anxiety.
I feel valued as a City of Kentwood employee.
I feel like I belong within my team or department.
My team/department has the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to support an inclusive and equitable workplace climate.
Overall, I feel my team (as a whole) works together productively and effectively.
The process to determine compensation is fair and equitable.
Workloads are distributed fairly and equitably.
Rewards and acknowledgement for performance are given equitably.
The level of emphasis on inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) within my team/department is...
The City of Kentwood is committed to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA).
Committed to supporting an inclusive and equitable workplace climate.
Able to effectively resolve conflict or address tension within our team/department.
Encourages all team members to speak up and share perspectives.
Exhibits behaviors that would support an inclusive and equitable workplace culture.
Holds all employees accountable to behaviors that support an inclusive and equitable workplace culture.
Able to lead strategies designed to increase inclusion, diversity, equity & accessibility in our department.
Consistently behaves in a way that demonstrates a deep commitment to IDEA.
Makes decisions that effectively support or promote IDEA in the workplace.
Works effectively and equitably with City staff members at all levels.

The survey concluded with a demographic section that was optional for respondents to complete. The following prompts were given; if participants preferred not to respond to a given question, they could respond "Prefer Not to Answer." Respondents were assured that the survey was confidential and that responses were anonymous and could not be used to identify individual respondents.

Demographic Survey Prompts
What is your current work status?
What is your current role (by leadership level)?
What is your gender?
What is your current age?
What is your race or ethnicity? (Includes option to self-describe)
What is your sexual orientation? (Includes option to self-describe)
Do you have a disability?
Have you ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces, military, or National Guard?
What is your current level of education?

Workplace Climate Focus Group Questions

The workplace climate assessment also involved eight focus groups Three focus groups open to all employees across all departments. Three additional focus groups were conducted with the Fire, Police, and Public Works department employees (one per department). Two focus groups were also conducted with department heads. Unlike the employment continuum focus groups, which had a more targeted focus on operations that relate to employee development, these groups were more focused on employee’s overall perception of the City of Kentwood as an employer and their overall work experience. The questions for these focus groups are provided below:

- Review the definitions for IDEA on the sheet in front of you. Essentially, the City of Kentwood is trying to make these definitions into true statements. What factors influence the City’s ability to achieve these goals (either positively or negatively)?
 - *(For this question, participants were provided with a handout that included definitions for inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility that were used to inform assessment activities.)*
- How would you rate the current work climate on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being poor, 10 being excellent): within your department? At the City of Kentwood as a whole? Take the Post-It and use it to write down how you would rate the current work climate here (you can base this on whatever criteria or experience you prefer). When you write it down, I'll take them and we'll discuss the group’s ratings.
 - *(For this question, participants were provided with Post-It sticky notes and markers to anonymously note their responses. Facilitators then collected the Post-Its and posted them on a wall for participants to view and respond to).*
- What keeps you here as a City employee?
- What resources make you feel supported in your role?
- When you think about your own department, what separates your workplace climate from other departments (positively or negatively)?
- What are the most pressing issues or challenges you’re facing that affect the workplace climate?

- Imagine that with a ‘snap of a finger’ you could instantly do anything at work better. What would you want to improve?

Site Visits

Department heads escorted IPS staff on tours of their respective facilities. Most tours lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, depending on the size of the site and areas that were accessible/relevant. The features were observed and noted as either present (“Yes”), not present (“No”), or “Other” if the feature was partially present, not relevant to the site. Employees provided additional information based on the site (such as building history, typical use, etc.) and were asked clarifying questions depending on a particular space (e.g., “Who typically utilizes this space/resource?”; “How is this space working for your team/department currently?” etc.) or to clarify if a particular feature was present.

Feature
Outside facility is accessible to individuals with disabilities or physical limitations (parking, sidewalks, doorways)
Outside signage clearly marks entrances for personnel and visitors (i.e., “authorized personnel only” when applicable)
Outside signage includes languages other than English
For secure entrances: instructions for visitor access clearly listed and understandable
Inside spaces include wayfinding indicators (marked pathways, welcome signs, directional signs)
Inside signage includes language(s) other than English
Restrooms are inclusive to various abilities, individuals that need assistance, gender identities
Inside signage is clearly featured and easily visible (high contrast, large print)
Doorways, hallways are accessible for individuals with disabilities or physical limitations
For secure inside areas: signage clearly marks areas for personnel
Workspace lighting is adaptable or adjustable for various sight abilities or sensitivities (i.e., dimmers, window blinds)
Workspace furniture (desks, chairs) are adjustable and/or portable to accommodate heights, assistive equipment
Common employee areas (meeting rooms, breakrooms) are accessible to
Staff announcements and important info are in a clear and easily accessible space
Overall environment includes features welcoming/appealing to variety of cultural backgrounds and characteristics
Procedures or protocol in place to accommodate requests for assistance

Executive Summary

As an intentional strategy to affirm its commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (or IDEA), the City of Kentwood partnered with Inclusive Performance Strategies (IPS) to conduct an organizational assessment through an IDEA lens. The purpose of this assessment was to help the City understand its organizational capacity to support a diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive working environment and more effectively serve the culturally diverse population of Kentwood residents.

This point-in-time assessment captures a snapshot of the City, providing important information and data to inform meaningful and relevant recommendations that will lead to sustainable growth moving forward. This report summarizes the findings of assessment activities conducted between March and December 2021. The assessment was also designed to inform recommendations for the City to consider in order to enhance its structures and culture to meet its IDEA goals and grow as an employer of choice to a diverse workforce.

Key findings and recommendations have been organized into five Areas of Focus for the City to consider moving forward. These Areas of Focus can be utilized as a foundational framework through which the City can strategize its IDEA efforts moving forward. The following chart provides a high-level summary of the Areas of Focus.

Internal Communication

Relates to the internal communication practices that influence transparency, maintain employee engagement and awareness, and help to promote healthy workplace relationships across various spheres of influences (i.e., team, department, organization). Growth in this area will help the City ensure employee clarity and buy-in related to IDEA and promote effective collaboration among employees, staff leadership and elected leadership.

Equitable Employment Experience

Relates to the City's capacity to provide consistent resources and opportunities to all employees in an accessible and equitable manner. Growth in this area will help ensure all current and future employees feel valued and supported and increase the City's capacity to sustain a culture of fairness and organizational justice.

Equipping Staff

Relates to how the City sets employees up for success to fulfill job responsibilities, to cultivate the knowledge, skills and attitudes to support an IDEA-centered workplace. Growth in this area will help support departmental and organizational performance and prepare employees to adapt and collaborate within highly diverse and talented teams.

Pre-Employment Practices

Relates to the primary interactions between the City and prospective employees to build a diverse and talented workforce at the City. Growth in this area will help secure the best talent, prepare current employees to welcome and support new employees, and help ensure success with future recruitment strategies.

Organizational Values & Leadership

Relates to how leaders (across all levels of the City, both formal and informal) support a strong leadership culture centered around IDEA, reinforcing the values, behaviors and practices that promote inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the workplace. Growth in this area can help the City cultivate further transparency in its decision-making processes in an effective and appropriate manner, in addition to maintaining accountability to IDEA across all organizational levels.

Key Insights

- The City is deeply committed to IDEA and ensuring its workplace climate and employee experience center those values. This commitment is at the center of the City's strategic perspectives and is increasingly reflected within its strategic planning.
- Due to the complex scope of jobs and facilities across the City, there is significant variance in how each department supports IDEA. The decentralized structure of the City both encourages autonomy (which can foster a stronger sense of ownership of IDEA responsibilities at the departmental level) and can contribute to inconsistency across employee experiences.
- The City has the opportunity to establish or adapt standardized structures that would increase consistency of IDEA performance across departments.
- There is an opportunity to immediately clarify the meaning of IDEA, ensuring all staff members have a shared understanding of the value proposition for IDEA.
- The City's unions will serve an important and influential role in ensuring that IDEA goals are understood and that staff are equipped to support the work to meet them.
- Equipping staff members at all levels and across all departments is vital to sustaining the City's commitment.

Overall, IPS recommends that the City of Kentwood utilize assessment findings and recommendations to develop a strategic IDEA framework that clearly outlines specific goals and objectives that are embedded within the City's current strategic plans. Additionally, it is recommended that the City establish an internal cross-departmental IDEA committee to support framework development, including prioritization of IDEA goals and objectives and identification of performance metrics. Lastly, as implementation of recommendations will require strategic allocation of City resources, it is recommended that the City increase its human resources capacity to support the implementation of IDEA strategies (both short- and long-term).

Using the Report

This report was developed to be a reference document to help determine the City's strategic steps moving forward. After the introduction, the report is primarily composed of five sections that summarize the key findings and recommendations based on the five Areas of Focus. Appendices are also included to provide insight into assessment methodology and activities.

The assessment was designed to understand the City as a whole. However, each department at the City operates differently, with variations in autonomy, structures, and team culture and norms. This dynamic became very evident throughout the assessment process, particularly through documentation review. As such, it is recommended that each department review findings and recommendations through the lens of their own departmental context, considering to what extent a finding may reflect their own context and what steps, resources, support, etc. are necessary to implement a given recommendation.

Introduction

Background

Kentwood, Michigan is home to approximately 54,000 people (an 11.5 percent increase since 2010 according to the 2020 U.S. Census) and is considered one of the most rapidly growing metropolitan areas in the State of Michigan. Kentwood is often noted for the rich cultural diversity among its residents, with approximately 17.6 percent of the City's residents born outside of the U.S, and approximately 23.5 percent of its households speaking a language other than English at home (as of 2019).

Elected leadership consists of the mayor, city clerk, treasurer, and commissioners. In addition to the City Commission, several committees, boards and commissions support various aspects of city operations and functions. Membership of such bodies is cultivated through an application and appointment process open to residents of Kentwood.

A deputy city administrator supports the oversight of the City's approximately two dozen departments, which comprise of over 280 employees. Organizationally, departments function within a decentralized structure, with each department primarily responsible for overseeing its strategic and operational functions.

The departments of Police, Fire and Public Works are the largest departments, representing approximately 63% of the total City employees. Union employees are represented by the Kentwood General Employees Association, Kentwood Professional Fire Fighters Association, and the Police Officers Labor Council (Kentwood Supervisory Unit and Patrol Unit).

About This Project

As an intentional strategy to affirm its commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (or IDEA), the City of Kentwood partnered with Inclusive Performance Strategies (IPS) to conduct an IDEA assessment. The purpose of this assessment was to help the City understand its organizational capacity to support a diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive working environment and more effectively serve the culturally diverse population of Kentwood residents. The project overall was structured to inform strategic improvements related to the following components:

- The City's current hiring and employment continuum inclusive of but not limited to compensation practices, recruitment, hiring, mentoring, safety, onboarding, orientation, training, discipline, promotions, performance reviews, retention and associated City policies/procedures/programs/technology.
- The City's current workplace climate, competencies, and physical environment through an IDEA lens.
- The City's volunteer opportunity processes including applications, selections, and appointments (these findings are reported in a companion document).
- Provision of a draft organizational IDEA policy statement.

It is important to emphasize that inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) are interdependent yet distinct concepts. The acronym "IDEA" is repeatedly used throughout the report, mainly to be concise or to generally discuss how the City can generally imbue those concepts as values into its structures and operations.

While there are numerous definitions for each concept, and for the City of Kentwood, it is important to consider what these terms mean through a public service lens. For the purpose of this engagement, these terms were defined as follows:

- **Inclusion:** can be described as the behaviors and engagement that make people feel their voices are heard and valued and have ample opportunities to inform the decisions that will impact them.
- **Diversity:** can be described as the different characteristics or traits that individuals bring with them into a given setting or group and/or that ties their belonging to a particular group(s).
- **Equity:** can be described as the process to make policies, procedures, and resources available to all, especially those that have been historically or currently underrepresented or marginalized.
- **Accessibility:** can be described as any person or group who is able and is empowered to use resources, spaces, processes, or other key tasks with a similar amount of effort or time regardless of their ability status or identity.

At a conceptual level, IDEA can be extremely broad: there are several ways to understand each of those concepts, in addition to the strategies, practices and behaviors organizations can use to reinforce them. Organizations that try to implement IDEA strategies without having a clear vision and established strategic framework often fail to implement or sustain strategies that yield meaningful results, especially for those designed to serve growing communities. The City of Kentwood, as a way to harness the momentum from its efforts to date, is taking intentional, proactive steps to address its growth moving forward. The assessment findings, recommendations, and considerations included in this report will provide insight into how the City can continuously improve the effectiveness of its IDEA strategies.

In order to define the goals and objectives that will promote sustainable change and success, it is crucial to establish a clearer and shared understanding of the City's current state through an IDEA lens at a structural level. Understanding the structures (i.e., resources, infrastructure, policies, personnel, capacity, etc.) at this time can have a profound, positive impact for the future. While there are a number of processes and outcomes that the City has implemented and is monitoring related to IDEA, it is important to clarify what structures are (or are not) in place to support those processes and achieve those outcomes. While this can take more time in initial goal setting, planning, and initial implementation, this step will ultimately support the City's longer-term success in meeting IDEA goals while supporting the rapid and inclusive growth of Kentwood.

Broadly speaking, there is a tendency for organizations to focus their IDEA commitment on tactical, external facing or output-driven work that emphasizes diversity, such as the recruitment and hiring of underrepresented groups. Having a workforce representative of the populations or communities served is critical to providing excellent customer service. However, the lack of effective structures to support an inclusive, equitable and accessible workplace climate makes it more difficult for organizations to *retain* the diverse and talented workforce into which time and resources have been invested in recruiting. The lack of a comprehensive approach to IDEA can also perpetuate a pattern of starts and stops, rather than maintaining momentum.

The wide-ranging scope of this engagement overall presented several avenues for the City to pursue in order to demonstrate its commitment to IDEA. Yet, a lack of an established IDEA framework can make pursuit of those avenues appear as piecemeal, lacking intentionality and cohesion in how the many parts add to the whole. As a municipality, the City of Kentwood is a complex entity, but it is one that is committed to serving a vibrant, diverse and growing community and demonstrating leadership as an employer of choice for current and future

employees. The findings and recommendations included in this report represent the most relevant, feasible, and in some instances most urgent opportunities for the City to pursue moving forward. Building upon these opportunities now can increase the likelihood of the City's capacity to achieve success in the future.

The scope of this project examined the City itself as an employer, primarily concentrating on how city-wide structures can help to not only grow across the identified Areas of Focus, but to more effectively support the unique opportunities and challenges that each department faces. Recommendations were developed in that light, and some may be more relevant or timely for one department over another. Regardless, this report is meant to serve as a resource to inform City-wide strategy moving forward and provide a foundation of knowledge and reflection for departments to consider as well.

Methodology

In many instances, organizational commitments to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility are exclusive to values statements, staff education, or marketing efforts designed to increase positive public perception. The City of Kentwood's goal runs much deeper than that. The City has articulated that through its commitment to IDEA, it can improve its capacity to be an employer of choice to current and future employees and better serve the constituents of Kentwood. The City recognizes that to have true value and sustainable impact, IDEA must be fully integrated throughout the organization. With that goal in mind, assessment activities were primarily based on three key focuses:

- **IDEA Workplace Climate:** understanding how employees perceive their workplace environment across different levels (interpersonal, team/department, organizational) and in turn how the environment influences or impacts employees through an IDEA lens.
- **Continuum of Employment Experience:** understanding the effectiveness of the City's employment practices from initial recruitment to retirement or resignation and the opportunities for growth.
- **Board and Volunteer Cultivation:** how the City cultivates members for its numerous boards, committees and commissions to support or supplement City operations.

These focuses aligned with the City's expressed desire to better understand its opportunities for growth and how to sustain that growth moving forward. As such, IPS focused its inquiry to understand the City's structures to assess overall effectiveness of efforts regarding the workplace climate, employee experience, and board/committee cultivation practices. Through this approach, we identified the most relevant and prevalent factors that promote or inhibit a healthy, IDEA-centered workplace culture for the City at this point in time.

As assessment activities were conducted, there were clear themes that consistently emerged across all activities (for example, key themes that emerged from workplace climate focus groups were also prevalent in the employee continuum focus groups, despite the difference in inquiry). Once the synthesis of assessment activities was completed, analysis was conducted across them all. As such, findings and recommendations within this report are presented thematically rather than for each assessment activity to mitigate redundancy.

IDEA Areas of Focus

Several themes emerged through analysis of collected data from various assessment activities. Through further synthesis of these themes, IPS identified five primary Areas of Focus. Rather than to discuss the findings of each assessment component separately, discussion of main findings and recommendations are organized around each Area of Focus to help clarify the relevance of each theme discussed, and to aid further discussion of findings and recommendations (i.e., prioritizing, implementation, etc.):

- **Internal Communication:** relates to the internal communication practices that influence transparency, maintain employee engagement and awareness, and help to promote healthy workplace relationships across various spheres of influences (i.e., team, department, organization). Growth in this area will help the City ensure employee clarity and buy-in related to IDEA and promote effective collaboration among employees, staff leadership and elected leadership.
- **Equitable Employment Experience:** relates to the City's capacity to provide consistent resources and opportunities to all employees in an accessible and equitable manner. Growth in this area will help ensure all current and future employees feel valued and supported and increase the City's capacity to sustain a culture of fairness and organizational justice.
- **Equipping Staff:** relates to how the City sets employees up for success to fulfill job responsibilities, to cultivate the knowledge, skills and attitudes to support an IDEA-centered workplace. Growth in this area will help support departmental and organizational performance and prepare employees to adapt and collaborate within highly diverse and talented teams.
- **Pre-Employment Practices:** relates to key interactions between the City and prospective employees to build a diverse and talented workforce at the City. Growth in this area will help secure the best talent, prepare current employees to welcome and support new employees, and help ensure success with future recruitment strategies.
- **Organizational Values & Leadership:** relates to how leaders (across all levels of the City, both formal and informal) support a strong leadership culture centered around IDEA, reinforcing the values, behaviors and practices that promote inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the workplace. Growth in this area can help the City cultivate further transparency in its decision-making processes in an effective and appropriate manner, in addition to maintaining accountability to IDEA across all organizational levels.

These Areas of Focus are not exhaustive; they do not represent all of the strategic opportunities that an organization could potentially address. These are intentionally presented based on the data presented and considering what is in the City's current capacity to address and to support the City in refining and specifying its IDEA strategic priorities and to promote truly progressive improvement.

Inquiry Development

The base inquiry for each method and activity was predetermined utilizing several key questions to inform initial assessment activities:

- **Accessibility:** is the given practice or element accessible to all intended stakeholders?
- **Adaptability:** is the given practice or element adaptable to accommodate evolving stakeholder needs and strategic goals?

- **Intercultural Competence:** does the given practice or element acknowledge and consider the diverse attributes and cultural perspectives of the involved stakeholders?
- **Resources:** are there adequate resources (budget, personnel, infrastructure, time) for the given practice or element to be implemented feasibly and successfully?
- **Equipping:** are the stakeholders responsible for implementation equipped to do so and/or does the given practice or element successfully support the equipping of stakeholders as designed?

IPS engaged the principles of Grounded Theory throughout the engagement. The Grounded Theory approach to qualitative data collection allows early research results to inform ongoing discovery methods. Essentially, grounded theory recognizes that the focus of qualitative research can and should adjust according to early findings. Our commitment to this approach means that as IPS learns more about the organization through early assessment activities, we revisit and finalize our inquiry and assessment approaches. This process ensures that our assessment is designed to be as relevant to the current state of the client as possible.

It also helps to ensure that the assessment process is grounded in organizational reality and makes efficient use of participant time. As an example, early learnings in the document audit, discussions with City staff members, and initial focus groups informed survey inquiry and additional continuum focus groups. Focus group discussions directly informed further review of documentation and the inquiry for the Board/Committee online survey.

Data Analysis

Multiple IPS team members collected and reviewed data in support of this project. As a mixed-method approach was utilized for data collection (both qualitative and quantitative), the following steps were implemented for analysis:

- Initial activities focused on collection of key documentation (i.e., policies, procedures, etc.). Documentation was coded according to various phases of employment experience and aspects of the workplace climate.
- Initial documentation synthesis helped inform inquiry for workplace climate focus groups and the online workplace climate survey.
- A second review of documentation and initial themes and findings from workplace climate assessment activities informed further refinement of the employment experience continuum and the inquiry for continuum focus groups.
- As synthesis was conducted, additional requests for documentation or data were made to further understand key themes and further clarify the current state.
- Initial analysis of both workplace climate and employment experience assessment activities informed the initial inquiry of the Board & Committee Membership survey (the initial focus of the survey broadly focused on volunteership across the City; after further discussion and clarification, the focus was narrowed to understanding current state regarding board and committee membership and how that platform supports/influences IDEA. This led to the survey being launched after key analysis began for the other assessment activities).
- All data collected, reviewed and synthesized was then reviewed to identify initial themes. An iterative process was utilized to compare and contrast themes across all data to determine the most prevalent themes that provided insight into the current state through an IDEA lens at a structural level.
- Themes were then organized into broader categories, which are referred to as Areas of Focus throughout the report.

Departmental Considerations

This assessment and each component were designed to examine the City of Kentwood as a whole entity in regard to the workplace climate and employee experience through an IDEA lens. However, each department at the City operates differently, with variations in autonomy, structures, and team culture and norms. This dynamic became very evident throughout the assessment process, particularly through documentation review. All departments participated in document discovery. Larger departments had more substantial documentation to provide due to their size and complexity. All information that was submitted to IPS for review, in addition to other methods used in this assessment, were utilized to inform the recommendations within this report.

Departments are strongly encouraged to review the report through the lens and context of their own department and consider what potential strengths and opportunities for growth are most prevalent. As the report is designed to provide insight into the City as a whole while protecting confidentiality of all assessment participants, recommendations can be viewed as potential practices that will need some level of adaptation to each department's operations.

To support this necessary reflection, IPS has provided reflection questions for departments to utilize while reviewing and discussing the report. Departmental heads and other leaders can use these questions to better understand the experiences and perspectives of their employees, and to foster discussion and ideation around how results can enhance future work and their role in supporting the City's commitment to IDEA. Departments that take intentional steps and time to understand how assessment findings provide insight into their own departments will be better equipped to create, inform and support IDEA strategies applied at the City-wide level and align them with the operations and goals at the department level.

Notes on Methodology & Scope

- **Every effort has been made to both protect the confidentiality of participants and share insights that can meaningfully impact the City’s IDEA work.** For this purpose, feedback directly collected from employees was not cross-tabulated or referenced (for example, responses are not disaggregated by two or more demographics, such as “Male Black respondents”). Such disaggregation could further endanger the confidentiality of populations with already small response rates or participation. As such, **feedback from focus groups is also discussed in a general, synthesized manner** (i.e., overall themes and discussion points across groups). Any specific comments or quotes are de-identified and anonymized. At times, focus groups discussions are delineated by the activity (climate assessment or employment continuum) if relevant to findings.
- **The activities and collected data were conducted as a point-in-time assessment.** Overall findings and recommendations are structured to represent the most relevant and prevalent feedback and insight, but the assessment is not guaranteed to reflect the current state of the organization after December 2021. That said, it is helpful to frame findings as a captured “reflection” of the City that can provide insight into IDEA-related behaviors and structures that can support the City’s future state.
- **Data collected for this assessment was self-reported.** IPS analyzed the information and perspectives that City of Kentwood employees and other stakeholders provided. Main findings and recommendations are reflective of all information made available to IPS through assessment activities and direct discussions with employees.
- **Any analysis of disaggregated groups within survey data points to correlation, not causation.** For example, if a certain respondent group is much more likely to disagree on a given survey question than the general population, it cannot be concretely said that respondents disagree *because* of that particular demographic marker (i.e., 40–49-year-old individuals are not more or less likely to disagree with a specific question due to of their age). The correlation is simply an indication of a pattern that is worth exploring further when developing implementation strategies of recommendations.

How to Read This Report

The bulk of this report is organized into five sections, one for each of the Areas of Focus. Each section begins with a brief summary describing the Area of Focus and highlights related to key points and observations. The prevalent themes (referred to as “Key Themes”) related to the Area of Focus are then discussed.

Each “*Key Theme*” section has a brief descriptor (i.e., what the theme relates to). Main findings are organized into two subsections: 1) “*Current State & Potential Strengths*” (which describes the status of key structures related to the theme and any efforts that appeared to work productively for the City and/or could potentially support forward IDEA progress) and 2) “*Potential Opportunities for Growth*” (which describes the status of key structures that could be improved or re-examined to ensure future, including any efforts or factors that can make forward progress more challenging).

“**How Does This Impact IDEA?**” is a subsection that includes research, best or emerging practices, and other relevant information to help illustrate how that theme directly relates to IDEA. **This content is meant to be educational and general**, so as to help increase IDEA knowledge for the City and help internal stakeholders in particular better understand how various aspects of workplace climate and employment directly influence the City’s commitment and progress regarding IDEA. This content does not necessarily reflect the City’s current state.

Finally, the *Key Theme* discussion concludes with Recommendations for the City to consider related to the main findings. It is important to keep in mind that, in general, recommendations **are structural in nature**. Many organizations tend to focus on outputs and activities without giving enough consideration to the structures that are essential to sustaining that work. Therefore, IPS is focusing on recommendations that will help build a stronger structural foundation for the City to build on moving forward (also note *Departmental Considerations* on page 10).

Supplemental report materials summarize additional assessment activities and data, including Board & Committee Membership, the City Website, and Site Visits. These separate documents provide a methodology overview, main findings and recommendations.

Global Recommendations & Observations

Global Recommendations

The findings and recommendations made throughout this report outline numerous opportunities for the City to capitalize on current strengths and continuously improve upon its commitment to IDEA. As analysis was conducted and recommendations formulated, it was clear that key capacity-building was necessary in order to put the City in a position to be successful in implementing IDEA strategies moving forward and could have an immediate positive impact. These global recommendations could be considered as initial priorities for the City to pursue regardless of what recommendations or strategies it decides to implement.

- 1. Develop an IDEA strategic framework that clearly outlines specific goals and objectives that are embedded within the City's current strategic plans.** Utilizing the Areas of Focus outlined within this report as a foundation, identify meaningful key performance indicators over the next three to five years that clearly indicate the City's progress in developing or enhancing the necessary structures and practices that sustain an IDEA-centered workplace climate and employee experience.
- 2. Establish an internal cross-departmental IDEA committee** to support framework development, including prioritization of IDEA goals and objectives, collaborate with IPS in identifying key performance indicators, and serve as an additional conduit to keep all employees informed. Initial functions of the committee would also include developing an implementation and communication plan to engage staff around recommendations and provide City leadership insight and feedback as strategic progress is achieved.
- 3. Increase human resource staffing to support the implementation of IDEA strategies,** including any key recommendations that fall within current HR responsibilities, such as performance reviews, professional development, and any recommendations that involve conducting audits of departmental practices for continuous improvement. Based on the body of work represented within this report, in addition to current constraints and opportunities the City is facing regarding staffing and providing employee resources, additional HR capacity will be critical to success. Additional recommendations related to this are included further in the report.

Global Observations

City employees that participated in and helped to coordinate assessment activities, including focus groups, surveys, and document and data collection should be commended for their engagement and contributions. Their feedback and observations make clear that fostering employees' sense of belonging, psychological safety, or level of confidence across all levels of the organization will help to fortify a culture of trust within the City workplace climate. Ensuring more consistent levels in employee perceptions of trust will continue to be a key opportunity for the City, especially as it works to grow and diversify its workforce.

Survey responses indicate that most employees feel as though they belong within their own team or department. However, responses varied depending on the tenure of the employee, their level of seniority, and the structure or size of their department (for example, an employee's "team" might be the same as their entire department due to a smaller staff count, whereas another employee's team could be one of several within a larger department).

Employee feedback (across assessment activities) also indicates a general sentiment that their colleagues are approachable and helpful, and often demonstrate a willingness to provide support when asked (for example, employees noted they could easily ask questions or for help from others, both within and outside of their department, or noted the City's Open-Door policy). Employees often cited examples related to day-to-day tasks, managing projects, etc. than in relation to addressing IDEA-specific concerns or issues.

Some employees do not always feel they can fully express their viewpoints on issues that negatively impact workplace culture; reasons for why employees might feel this way vary greatly (it should be noted that this can indicate employee perspectives over a period of time or an employee's general perception). While the issues may range regarding the department or circumstance, employees generally expressed that they felt their concerns would be heard (these issues could range from one-time or "smaller order" concerns to more persistent or serious issues); perspectives vary as to whether issues are effectively resolved (for instance, do not negatively impact team cohesion, level of inclusion, etc.).

Further, employees tended to note higher levels of trust within their own department or own leadership than at other levels of the City. Employees expressed greater levels of uncertainty or skepticism in elected leadership, primarily due to their lack of engagement with those leaders. It is clear that familiarity and more frequent opportunities to interact and get to know individuals can have a positive impact on trust levels overall.

The structure of a department's work environment also has a direct impact on trust. The functions and responsibilities of a department might mean working longer or "atypical" business hours (e.g., 24-hour shifts, 3rd shift), working outside of an office setting or 'in the field', or in high-pressure or even life-threatening situations (such as Police and Fire). All of these factors create unique and nuanced circumstances that impact employees' level of trust in their peers and leadership, and in the City as an overall employer, and are important to consider in any initiative that is meant to increase a sense of inclusion, equity or accessibility throughout the City. Supervisors and department heads, particularly, have a critical role in fostering a culture of trust within their department and employees' perceptions of other departments or leaders throughout the City.

Lastly, it should be noted that employees at times expressed wariness or skepticism around the purpose of IDEA assessment activities, how their feedback or contributions would be utilized, and whether it would result in a negative outcome (i.e., retribution or blowback). In some instances, employees understandably felt uncomfortable with participating in activities, or perceived the overall project was based on a more reactive approach than an intentional and proactive effort to be more effective. It is also understandable for employees to be wary of external facilitators or contractors, particularly when they are asked to provide feedback related to their workplace, peers, or leadership.

Area of Focus: Internal Communications

Productive, interculturally competent communication practices are foundational to an organizational culture that is inclusive, trustful and fosters a sense of belonging for all employees. Since the City's organizational structure is decentralized, consistent communication standards across all departments to keep all employees engaged, informed, and empowered would enhance their workplace and work culture. Assessment data analysis identified communication as one of the most influential factors that impacts the workplace climate and employee experience overall. The most prevalent internal communications themes were related to communication practices within and across departments, and between elected leadership and all City employees.

Department-Level Communication

This theme relates to the role of department heads managing the flow of information to and throughout their respective departments and supporting engagement between departments/teams and the City as an employer.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Communication, broadly speaking, was often cited as the most impactful factor on workplace climate in climate assessment focus groups. In most if not all instances, the information that is disseminated to departments (such as the level of detail, frequency of updates, delivery method, etc.) is left solely to the discretion of the department head.
- Based on responses from both focus groups and survey results, participants often referred to the following examples when discussing communication: updates on city leadership decisions, "all staff" updates related to policies, employee resources, etc., and updates from other departments regarding projects or initiatives.
- Perceptions on how effective department communication practices varied greatly across departments. Participants' perspectives on whether their respective department had effective communication practices depended on a number of factors, including:
 - Frequency of updates (how regularly a department head shares information)
 - Whether department heads asked for employee input or feedback on key decisions, initiatives, or policies (could be city-wide employment or department-specific)
 - Work structure (day vs night shift, traditional vs non-traditional work week, office vs. field-based work, etc.)
 - Overall size of the department (i.e., total number of employees)
 - Seniority and/or tenure of individual employees
- Focus group participants noted that when it came to requesting information, asking for assistance, etc. from their peers, those peers are typically available and willing to assist.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Conversely, inconsistent or infrequent communication across departments was often cited as an issue that can have an adverse effect on workplace climate (i.e., not knowing who to go to in certain departments for specific needs, not having a clear understanding of current initiatives or projects across

departments). There was a desire to better understand how to best exchange information across departments (beyond those who work in close proximity to each other).

- Employees also expressed a desire for more transparent communication from department heads regarding decision making. In particular, there was an expressed desire to better understand how and why certain decisions are made, especially as it relates to employment policies and practices.
- Department heads are often in the best position to determine what is appropriate and most helpful for their employees to know, which can lead to different communication practices and preferences. However, this can also cause inconsistency in the level of awareness among employees across departments (particularly when it comes to policies, procedures, and other structures that shape the employee experience). At times, friction can occur when employees within a given department learn that other departments are more forthcoming or transparent with their communications.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Inclusive and equitable work environments require a high degree of trust so that all employees can authentically express their perspectives and share their experiences. Communication within organizations serves a crucial role in cultivating workplace trust across different spheres of influence (one-on-one, team, department, and organization-wide). Frequent and transparent¹ communication practices directly impact employees' positive perceptions of their managers, their teams, and the organization.
- Inconsistency in internal communications can erode a sense of trust or team cohesion even when the *content* of key communications (regardless of format) is clear and highly informative. Generally speaking, when employees are dissatisfied with the quality of internal communications, it not only erodes the culture of trust, but can contribute to feelings of being excluded or undervalued, undermining an organization's IDEA-related goals.

Recommendations

- Establish shared standards/guidelines that inform how all department heads can share information (and to what level of detail) with staff to support appropriately consistent communication across departments. This can also help ensure that department heads remain empowered to manage the flow of information to their departments while mitigating perceptions of inconsistency between departments.
- While this recommendation is structural in nature, there are other recommendations included in this report that focus on cultivating core competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviors, etc.) that can support more interculturally competent and effective communication across all levels of the City. In particular, the *Equipping Staff* Area of Focus will provide more insight into the structures that support these more behavioral and cultural aspects.

Elected Leadership & Employees

This theme relates to the exchange of information and engagement between elected leadership (i.e., Mayor, City Commissioners) and City employees across all levels, and how those dynamics can influence the overall workplace climate.

¹<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2534570819?accountid=11243&parentSessionId=Xen0pZEukaYB6c8sSBTF%2B/pA5yr4i6g7phaZs05T2KY%3D&pg-origsite=primo&forcedol=true>

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Department heads are heavily relied upon to manage the flow of information between elected leadership and employees. If employees or departments have key projects, initiatives or issues they would like brought to the Commission, for example, it is the responsibility of the department head to share or report that information.
- This structure can work effectively to ensure that interactions between elected officials and employees are maintained in an appropriate manner, and do not cause any undue interference. It can also help to channel communications more effectively, as department heads can clearly communicate on the successes, progress, and needs of their departments so that elected officials can make informed decisions.
- Participant responses across assessment activities indicate that City employees generally have limited views or perspectives on elected leadership, in particular of the Commission. Simply put, many employees feel they do not 'know' elected leadership very well. Unsurprisingly, these limitations were more apparent among employees with less seniority or tenure (given that department heads most frequently engage elected leadership more than others).
- For example, a majority of employees in non-managerial roles were more likely to reply neutrally to survey prompts ("neither agree nor disagree") regarding elected leadership. This is due to the very limited interaction and engagement (based on survey open-ended comments cross-referenced with focus group data).
- Responses across assessment activities indicate that most employees observe or learn about elected officials based on 1) the nature of interactions between their respective department head and elected leadership, or 2) written updates on key decisions shared via email, staff intranet, etc. There also appeared to be heightened sensitivity regarding perceptions of elected leadership during assessment activities particularly as collective bargaining took place.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Despite the limited or neutral views and interactions with elected leadership, employees still recognize the highly influential roles elected leaders fulfill. The current flow of interaction and communication seems to contribute to a perception of disconnectedness or skepticism as to whether employee needs and feedback are truly centered in discussions and decisions. These perceptions were likely influenced by the collective bargaining process, in addition to ongoing stressors brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While the current communication structures between elected leaders and employees is efficient, it can also contribute to gaps in awareness or limit opportunities for employees to cultivate more well-rounded and positive perceptions of elected leadership, particularly during more stressful times. Given the influence of elected leadership and its decision-making, this can have a deeply profound impact on workplace climate and perceived efficacy of policies, practices and other resources. There is opportunity to strengthen the relationship between elected leadership and employees that can be accomplished through additional professionally appropriate communication strategies.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Organizational change like increasing and improving IDEA presents unique challenges for municipalities, given the ever-changing needs of community, financial constraints, and changing leadership dynamics resulting from election cycles. Elected leadership can help foster a workplace climate that meaningfully embodies IDEA through authentically centering the voices of individuals and groups that have traditionally had less power or influence within decision-making processes and discussions, and regularly ensuring

employees of how and when that takes place. Additionally, elected leadership can ensure resources for employee leaders and managers to effectively implement IDEA strategies². Establishing multiple feedback loops that are transparent and culturally and professionally appropriate between elected leadership and staff helps to facilitate those goals.

Recommendations

- Encourage employees to attend Committee of the Whole and City Commission meetings and other opportunities such as employee recognition events to interact with elected leadership.
 - It is recommended that the City consider additional opportunities (for instance, town halls, rounding, etc.) that can support professional relationship building between elected leadership and across City departments aimed to build a sense of community and increase employee awareness of how elected leadership roles support the City's IDEA-related goals. Increased interactions can help break down perceived barriers in communication across organizational levels while encouraging respectful and appropriate workplace engagement.
- It is also recommended that any engagements are conducted in a manner that does not interfere with the established roles of elected officials and administrative functions.

²<https://icma.org/practices-effective-local-government-management-and-leadership>

Area of Focus: Equipping Staff

The City of Kentwood's most valuable asset are its people that 'make the city run' each and every day. The health of organizational culture is fully dependent on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of City employees and their ability to foster IDEA throughout the workplace. In addition to defining and clarifying what those IDEA competencies and responsibilities are across positions and departments, the City has a great opportunity to fortify existing policies and practices that shape employees' day-to-day and strategic roles to meet IDEA-related goals more effectively.

Position Descriptions

This theme relates to how City employees understand what their role, responsibilities and/or expectations are when it comes to supporting IDEA in the workplace through their position descriptions and other related documentation throughout the course of their employment.

Current State and Potential Strengths

- Job descriptions function as legal documentation of the essential responsibilities of a given position. These responsibilities only indicate the specific functions an individual would need to perform in order to fulfill the position.
- The City has over time reviewed position descriptions and job applications processes to encourage a wider talent pool of applicants and to ensure that language used in these descriptions are inclusive. This includes revising or removing language that can unintentionally deter qualified or motivated potential candidates from applying (outside of instances in which there are legal requirements and guidelines to adhere to). As an example, the City has worked to remove application questions regarding criminal history or special licensing or certification when that information is irrelevant/not required for the position.
- Generally speaking, when the City hires for a position, postings are included on the City website, and might also be posted on the staff intranet, social media platforms, multiple job posting websites, and a number of other sites and community or professional networks to reach a diverse audience. Employee understanding of how positions are posted outside of the City website varied.
- As a local government entity, the City is also required to provide summarizing information related to the following federal acts when posting open positions: Equal Employment Opportunity Law(s), Employee Rights and Responsibilities under the Family and Medical Leave Act, and the Employee Polygraph Protection Act. Documentation regarding these regulations is linked on the Human Resources webpage of the City website.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Based on the documentation submitted, there is currently no statement or requirement that clarifies what IDEA is and/or what specific responsibilities employees are expected to fulfill in support of IDEA. In some departments, there is documentation that has language that broadly describes expectations for engaging cross-cultural stakeholders (i.e., "Dealing successfully with a variety of individuals from various socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds"; "Demonstrates courteous and cooperative behavior when interacting with public and staff; acts in a manner that promotes a harmonious and effective workplace").

- Both in climate assessment focus groups and survey responses, employees indicated generally low/lack of awareness around what was expected of them when it comes to IDEA. Data indicates staff have a basic understanding of the value that IDEA brings to the workplace yet need clarity on what is specifically expected of them and/or how their role or position supports IDEA goals.

Recommendations:

- Establish IDEA-related knowledge and skills that can be incorporated into job descriptions or other guiding documentation (identified knowledge and skill sets would be separate from the “Essential Responsibilities” outlined in job descriptions). These might include:
 - Develops or oversees IDEA strategies, metrics, and other related goals and plans.
 - Engages in efforts and initiatives to mitigate negative impact of implicit bias in the workplace.
 - Demonstrates skill in understanding cultural differences among resident populations.
 - Values cultural differences and backgrounds of coworkers, etc.
- These knowledge and skill sets should be appropriate to the level of responsibility of a position. It should be made clear that every City employee has the opportunity to support IDEA goals and should be expected to participate in some way in accordance with the City’s IDEA Policy Statement.
- While communicating to employees any IDEA-related knowledge and skills, emphasize the importance of how such knowledge can enhance their ability to perform their essential job responsibilities. See also recommendations related to core competencies (page 27).

Processes & Procedures Documentation

This theme relates to how policies, processes and other key decision-making procedures are documented in a clear, accessible and organizationally efficient manner across all departments. Data reviewed in relation to this theme included submitted examples of policies at both the city-wide and department level, in addition to synthesized perspectives and perceptions from survey and focus groups feedback.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- There was a general misperception from City employees that policies (those directly impacting employee workplace protocols) are implemented ‘at the director’s discretion’, often because the city has decided to favor more general language and guidelines so that each department can customize its approach. Employee perceptions varied across departments. As such, there is a misperception that policies are implemented inconsistently across and within departments.
- Feedback across assessment activities indicate that employees recognize and appreciate that departments vary so widely in their duties and cultures that departmental discretion often makes sense. However, participants also expressed frustration when differences in implementation appeared to stem from a lack of certainty at the administrative level, or when departmental leadership appeared to allow personal preferences to influence their decision over what served the staff of the department best.
- Overall, participants emphasized that increased transparency and clarity would reduce both confusion and any sense of unjust decision making.
- The COVID-19 pandemic was often cited as a policy-related issue that may have caused contention among employees. Though the City’s policies followed all mandates, guidelines and available data, focus

group participants expressed those efforts to be adaptive to the complex challenges landed as a “gray” area and at times caused confusion or seemed to be based on director discretion rather than an intentional or fair set of criteria, regardless of how the actual policy was structured (for instance, how directors determined which employees were permitted to work from home). Employees were less likely to mention positive policy actions implemented throughout the pandemic such as Emergency Leave and Remote Work policies which enabled employees to continue receiving full pay even when work was not available on-site.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Policy development and implementation (policies directly impacting employee workplace protocols) was cited as a particular challenge to fostering workplace equity, given the unique purposes, circumstances and challenges each department may face. Communication around policies, and ensuring employees have clear and consistent understanding, was often noted.
- Employees noted that what may work effectively for one department may be perceived as unfair or inequitable for another department, and in some instances there is no clear solution (one example discussed in a focus group is that shutting down City Hall due to inclement weather would serve a lot of departments and employees well, but that they have been told doing so won’t happen because it is unfair to departments that still need to report for duty like Police and Fire).
- The clarity of language and/or guidelines across personnel policies varies due to the myriad departments and positions that exist within the City and may contribute to employee perceptions of inconsistency or variability. Misperceptions of variability can have adverse effects on employee perceptions of fairness within the workplace and throughout the employee experience.
- Employees indicated an appreciation for allowing each department to implement policies and practices that fit their department, but frustration when there was variability *within* the department or when they did not have an opportunity to share their perspectives in department decision making.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Clearly documented policies and procedures can be utilized as tools that maintain equitable accountability and empower employees across all levels and departments within the workplace. That said, those tools can only go so far in achieving an equitable and inclusive workplace environment - they must also be utilized effectively to achieve those desired outcomes. Prioritizing time for employees to discuss policies (i.e., ask questions, raise concerns, etc.) and having leaders that both invite discussion and comply with policies encourage greater understanding and clarity around all policies, but particularly those that directly impact or influence the workplace environment.

Recommendations

- Establish a clearly defined personnel policy review process that is led by human resources and includes a process for employees to provide feedback.
- For all City-wide personnel policies, clarify the parameters to which policies are executed “at the discretion of the department head or supervisor” (e.g., implement standard operating procedures which guide managers on how to apply policy discretion and make equitable decisions and mitigate the negative impact of any potential implicit biases).

- For department-specific personnel policies, establish (if not already in place) a process for regular review and updates that are primarily directed or informed by employee feedback (e.g., policy review meetings, rotating scheduled policy review/updates, etc.).

Employee Developmental Plans

This theme relates to the equitable execution of structures and practices that guide the professional development of City employees.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Currently, the process for employees to document plans for professional development is embedded within the City's performance review form. There is a prompt for employees to identify their professional development goals as part of that process. The form currently does not include guidelines for completing that particular section or how to incorporate into the performance review process (see also *Performance Reviews & Evaluations* within the *Equitable Employment Practices* section on page 26).
- In general, practices that support professional development plans greatly vary across departments.
- Employees that are full-time and/or hold a supervisory position are most likely to have professional development opportunities or to feel supported in their career development. Part-time employees were more likely to indicate they do not receive professional development support outside of their essential job responsibilities.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Some employees expressed a perception of having taken more responsibilities or functions within their roles despite not having a change in title or position. These circumstances can contribute to feelings of being “stuck” within their career development.
- The City communicates to employees that they are “positioned to optimize both interpersonal skills and education necessary to serve the community” and that “the goal is for every member to reach their full potential.” Based on employee perspectives shared via focus groups and survey responses, such opportunities for growth are dependent on the access provided to individual employees through their department. Part-time employees hold entry level positions which do not typically require ongoing training and education to fulfill the requirements of their jobs; some part-time employees expressed a desire for training and education beyond what is required for their job.
- In general, practices that support professional development plans greatly vary across departments and within departments. In particular, employees below the management level were more likely to mention feeling undervalued or passed by for professional development opportunities
- There are a few departments where employees report a high degree of professional development and career support. In general, there is opportunity to improve and increase opportunities for professional development. Within some departments, career advancement opportunities are limited (this is primarily due to the relatively small(er) size of the department and/or more senior positions being fulfilled by long-tenured employees).
- While city administration has reported that every department has professional development budget lines, directors appear to allocate professional development funding with extreme discretion. There is an

opportunity to ensure that all employees have equitable access to at least some level of development opportunity.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- In general, implicit or unconscious bias and power dynamics within organizations can often create barriers to equitable opportunities for development for all employees³. Establishing robust employee development practices make employees feel valued, supported, and more motivated. Investing in employee development not only increases an organization's capacity to meet and exceed strategic goals, but it also helps to retain the diverse talent it works hard to recruit.

Recommendations

- Expanding upon the City's current professional development practices, establish a standard template separate from performance reviews that employees can use to create individual development plans in support of overall professional growth and IDEA competency (to be used within broader career development and/or annual work plans). In turn, either remove the professional development plan section from the current performance review form (to make such plans standalone documents) or update the form to align with the newly created template and provide summarized goals.
- Ensure that all departments have consistent planning approaches for employees to develop and document professional development plans on an annual basis. Leverage these processes to identify opportunities (i.e., projects, temporary assignments, etc.) that employees can engage in as part of their development.
- Ensuring equitable access to professional development opportunities based on the City's current professional development budget and where appropriate; reinforce that access through intentional practices and by allocating adequate financial resources.

Onboarding Consistency

This theme relates to the consistency of onboarding practices for all new City employees. Given that each City position has a unique set of responsibilities and each department has a unique set of protocols, the theme primarily focuses on the general "City-wide" onboarding process and differences or similarities in department-level onboarding processes.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Onboarding practices vary greatly across departments, and each department head is responsible for the onboarding for each new employee. Reported department experiences range from few practices in place to having robust, standardized, and clearly documented procedures (for example, the Police department has a four-week onboarding process for officers with daily schedules; Courts incorporate job shadowing to help familiarize employees to various roles). Expectedly, onboarding activities range depending on the level of responsibility of the position or the functions of the department.
- Many employees expressed frustration at their own onboarding experience or at the expectation that they onboard and train new employees with very little notice or support. In particular, employees noted a

³ <https://www.chieflearningofficer.com/2021/12/21/5-ways-to-integrate-dei-into-ld/>

common experience of being trained by a person in the particular way they do things, only to find that is not a standard approach and that leadership may have different expectations.

- Onboarding responsibilities split between the HR department and department leadership varied greatly depending on the needs of the department. The variances in the number of employees and specific skills, certifications, etc. across departments directly influence capacity to fulfill overall responsibilities (regardless of which staff member is specifically responsible).
- All new employees engage HR staff during their onboarding process (the primary focus is on introducing and discussing employee benefits and personnel policies).
- Longer-tenured employees in focus group discussions expressed a desire for opportunities to be reoriented around key policies or procedures. Several employees noted that HR staff and/or managers regularly make themselves available to address questions, but awareness of accessibility or feeling comfortable in using that resource varied.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Naturally, new employees have to process a lot of information as they learn about their role, their team and their workplace. There was an expressed desire for different modes of engaging and communicating with new employees during the onboarding period, more so for departments located within City Hall (i.e., facility tours, shadowing, mentoring, etc.).
- Focus group discussions indicated varying perceptions about the effectiveness of onboarding across departments. There is an opportunity for the City to establish more standardized protocols around onboarding to ensure that all new employees have equally effective onboarding experiences in addition to providing time for departments to plan and prepare for onboarding. Given that the measured impact of IDEA is primarily based on employees' experiences and perceptions, robust coordination and consistency can ensure a more inclusive and welcoming experience for newer employees.
- The City's employee handbook notes that the first six months of employment is considered the orientation period, and that employees are not considered "regular" until that period has concluded. There is an opportunity for the City to formally collect feedback from new employees about the overall onboarding process to inform continuous improvement efforts.
- Employees consistently expressed concerns about HR capacity to fulfill evolving priorities, particularly related to IDEA. Employees also observed the impact of limited resources to address more persistent HR-related issues (such as hiring, being understaffed, and onboarding). The ongoing pandemic has only exacerbated these issues and therefore there is a need for increased capacity.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Considering that IDEA is often noted as a top priority for organizations, it is critical to reinforce that commitment within an employee's initial experiences with the organization, such as onboarding. A commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility are often framed as a reflection of an organization's values, and organizations that effectively introduce and discuss these values within an employee's first few months of employment sets the tone and shapes that employee's perception of a welcoming workplace climate. Additionally, the onboarding experience itself, not just the content shared, is an opportunity for current staff and leadership to reinforce the behaviors and structures that support

IDEA (e.g., utilizing inclusive language, ensuring accommodations are in place, facilitating transparent discussions on team and organizational culture, etc.).

- Onboarding can also serve as an opportunity to ensure that new employees feel fully supported as they transition into a new work environment and their cognitive load increases with the influx of information at the start of employment.

Recommendations

- The six-month timeline for the new employee orientation period could serve as a standard parameter for all onboarding activities to occur, as well as an intentional milestone for collecting employee feedback on the overall onboarding process.
- Develop a standardized tool for new employees to provide feedback on onboarding processes after three and six months of employment that includes questions about IDEA content, onboarding activities and their effectiveness. Utilize collected feedback to inform onboarding practices that can be considered/applied across all departments.
- Develop a standard “orientation day/week” schedule/template (fully coordinated between HR and the appropriate department) that focuses on understanding the City’s IDEA goals and principles, specific responsibilities and core competencies, workplace climate, and its physical environments, in addition to being introduced to new work team members, supervisors, and workspaces. Doing so will help to clarify responsibilities between HR and the specific department, and help current employees effectively prepare for orientation activities.
- Include “reboarding” opportunities for existing employees to reintroduce current policies or introduce new or updated policies outside of email communication. This could include approaching employees returning from leave or newly promoted as new hires to support them in reacclimating to the workplace, conducting “Q&A” style meetings or recorded video sessions to present on policies and answer employee questions in real time, or hosting an annual gathering for new employees that also includes department heads, mentors, or any interested current employees.
- Consider piloting a *cross-departmental mentoring program* for new employees in which mentors from another department periodically meet with mentees to discuss their experiences, answer workplace related questions, and offer insights or suggestions for adapting to their new work environment at the City. This could provide an additional avenue to welcome new employees and to ask for support outside of their department peers, supervisors or HR. In turn, mentors are offered an additional opportunity to develop cross-cultural leadership skills and reinforce a workplace culture centered on IDEA.

Facilitating Human Resource Functions

This theme relates to the delineation of responsibilities between the Human Resources (HR) department, department heads, and managers in facilitating key functions that impact the overall employee experience and affect workplace climate. Note that “HR functions” (or variations) refers to tasks or activities that are often coordinated between departments; “HR” or “HR department” refers specifically to the Human Resource department or staff.

The totality of recommendations made within this report represents a significant amount of work that the HR department would be primarily responsible for given how IDEA strategies are currently allocated

at the City. It is clear that increasing the capacity of the HR department will be necessary for successful implementation of IDEA strategies and recommendations and would serve to benefit overall City employment needs. The primary recommendation is to evaluate the HR department's current state to better determine the appropriate structure and resources to support the City's overall or future IDEA goals. In turn, this would inform the specific responsibilities within existing roles and/or determine new roles and the broader growth plan for the HR department.

In alignment with recommendations related to IDEA responsibilities and core competencies within position descriptions, it is important for the City to review and specify how those responsibilities will be equitably distributed between HR and department heads. This shared responsibility for IDEA goals promotes organization-wide accountability that is essential for sustainable success. After such accountability is established, the City might consider a more formal position to focus on IDEA strategies in the future. It is currently premature for the City to introduce such a role without a clear and established IDEA strategy framework.

How Does this Impact IDEA?

- HR is a cross-cutting function area that serves an entire organization. In many instances, IDEA-related goals and strategies are assigned to HR (particularly when those strategies focus on recruitment, retention, compensation and benefits, or other HR-adjacent functions). However, strategies designed to increase inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility require robust employee support, adequate financial resources, full leadership buy-in and alignment with overall strategic priorities to ensure success at a basic level.
- Relegating IDEA responsibilities to HR can often backfire or undermine sustainable impact. At the same time, HR will often be a key leader and coordinator in IDEA work, so having limited HR capacity can compromise an organization's ability to remain accountable to its IDEA commitment.

Area of Focus: Equitable Employment Practices

Of the key themes identified during data analysis that most impact workplace climate and employee experiences, those related to individual performance and professional development were among the most prevalent. Additionally, the City has an immense opportunity to consider how adaptive current personnel policies are to meet the changing needs of its workforce both today and in the future. While there are many ways to consider the concept of equity when it comes to employment practices, it can be helpful for the City of Kentwood to consider equity as both a *process* and an *outcome* within the workplace (both how decisions are made and the overall outcome or effect impact of those decisions).

Performance Reviews & Evaluation

This theme relates to the equitable execution of how employee performance is monitored, evaluated, and guided throughout their employment experience at the City.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City has a standard approach for conducting performance reviews with set criteria. Submitted documentation presents distinct categories and emphasizes the importance of employee performance and how the City values its employees' development. Several components of employee performance relate to self-development, productivity, improvement, and consistency. Currently, there are no categories or criteria that align with IDEA.
- As a standard practice, all City employees should receive at least one (annual) performance review on or near the anniversary of their date of hire. Collected data indicates that frequency of performance reviews varies greatly from department to department, and that departments have different processes for conducting reviews. In some instances, departments have additional criteria on which employees are evaluated (particularly for highly specialized positions), and periodic (i.e., semi-annual) reviews and check-ins are conducted throughout the year, whereas reviews in other departments are conducted more informally and infrequently.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- The City communicates to employees that they are “positioned to optimize both interpersonal skills and education necessary to serve the community” and that “the goal is for every member to reach their full potential.” Based on employee perspectives shared via focus groups and survey responses, such opportunities for growth are dependent on the access provided to individual employees through their department. There is an opportunity for the City to ensure equitable access to development activities to part-time employees in particular.
- City employees do not have a method to provide confidential or anonymous feedback to their managers or supervisors. The City has policies in place regarding the reporting of policy violations. However, employee awareness on how to communicate performance or behavior issues varies across departments or employee tenure.
- Many items in the Self Development and Job Productivity categories are dependent on whether the department actually provides employees opportunities for continued learning, which seems to not consistently be the case. As another example of performance evaluation that is influenced by the actions

of departmental leadership, Job Improvement and Consistency can only be fully met if an employee's department is open to feedback, change, and suggestions from all levels. Some departmental policies related to professional development would enable current employees to pursue IDEA-related education and integrate such development within their review (language in such policies does not specify this, rather they provide options for employees to pursue those opportunities at their own discretion and with supervisor approval).

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Performance reviews and all feedback loops related to employee performance are among the most influential practices that impact workplace equity and inclusion (in addition to formal, regular performance reviews, this includes providing confidential feedback to managers, providing actionable follow-up to reviews, etc.). Research indicates that performance reviews, in addition to promotion and compensation practices, have a far greater positive impact on perceptions of IDEA-related effectiveness and success than other related initiatives, such as increasing diversity in hiring⁴.
- There is also an immense amount of research that indicates that there are known patterns of bias that adversely impact equitable performance reviews (particularly among historically underrepresented or marginalized groups, including women, people of color, and LGBTQIA-identifying people)⁵.
- Regularly conducted performance reviews can also be effective ways to establish stronger communication between supervisors and direct reports, enhance collaborative relationships within teams, and increase feelings of being valued, of trust, and of loyalty in the workplace. As such, investing resources to build a comprehensive performance review process can have a profound and deep impact on the success of an organization's overall IDEA strategy.

Recommendations:

- Continue auditing annual reviews of all employees and include the frequency to which employees have interim reviews and/or check-ins with their supervisors (i.e., annually, quarterly, etc.).
- Develop an IDEA core competency model to inform and guide employee professional development. While specifying responsibilities will help employees better understand how daily functions, they fulfill will support IDEA, core competencies help to encourage the general sets of knowledge, skills and behaviors that enhance the overall workplace cultural climate and employee experience for a sustainably diverse workforce. In addition to an accurate and clear understanding of the concepts of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility, core competencies might include: interculturally competent communication and conflict resolution, understanding and identifying implicit biases, and building trustful and psychologically safe workplace relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Establish standards for all departments to incorporate into their respective performance review processes to ensure all employees have equitable access to performance feedback and evaluation. These standards could include:
 - Opportunities to provide confidential feedback about their supervisors and departments.
 - Annual performance reviews periodic check-ins with supervisors or managers at least every six months.
 - A review of position descriptions against real-time responsibilities.

⁴ <https://coqual.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Coqual-Equity-At-Work-Key-Findings-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ <https://biasinterrupters.org/wp-content/uploads/bias-interrupters-master-bibliography.pdf>

- Check-ins and annual reviews would also include discussions or review of individualized IDEA development plans or educational efforts.
- Ensure department leaders in conjunction with HR staff review language within performance review documentation and revise to help mitigate any managerial subjectivity while conducting performance reviews and help reduce the impact of any managers' cultural preferences regarding behaviors, work styles, etc.
- Based on an IDEA core competency model (see also Equipping Staff recommendations), integrate criteria or categories into the performance evaluation process in support of inclusion or intercultural competency. Such additions could be integrated with existing categories such as "Self-Development," "Customer Service" and/or Attitudes and Cooperation.

Promotions

This theme relates to equitable practices that support the development and advancement of all City employees into higher-level positions, and access to and availability of such opportunities.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Promotion practices and eligibility requirements are subject to negotiation in union contracts. City administrators work with unions to determine how promotions are conducted for most positions at the City.
- Various employee groups (disaggregated by tenure, department, etc.) generally perceive the City has been able to provide a sense of job security and stability despite the "ups and downs" city governments face (though there is a high degree of uncertainty on how sustainable that will be given today's current talent challenges).
- The City conducts intentional succession planning in particular for management positions. Discussions and decisions that shape these plans primarily take place at the leadership level.
- Attention is paid to provide staff opportunities for professional development, take on additional responsibilities, and increase compensation in order to retain talent. *As discussed in other sections, the level to which these practices are perceived to be executed equitably is dependent on an employee's given department and/or tenure.*

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Opportunities for promotion vary greatly across departments given their size and scope (total employees can range from several dozen to under five). Smaller department sizes and fewer levels of responsibility naturally limit openings for higher-level positions. This can also reinforce employee perceptions of "feeling stuck" when it comes to career advancement.
- Focus group discussions included sharing varying experiences with opportunities for promotion (direct or indirect). There is a perceived tendency for specific individuals to be "groomed" for higher-level positions without having the greater context of any established succession plan. Without understanding the intentional steps to support succession planning or promotions, employees at times feel discouraged from applying for openings or have misperceptions of how promotions, changes in titles or positions, etc. are consistently handled within and across departments.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Along with performance reviews and compensation practices, promotions are a highly influential practice in achieving workplace equity and inclusion. Access to opportunities for promotions should also be a top priority for organizations committed to IDEA, especially for teams with flatter organizational structures. As such, how promotions are conducted and determined are one of the most tangible output-driven metrics on an employer's commitment to equity.
- Equitable promotion can mitigate feelings of resentment or unfairness, increase employee engagement and collaborative behavior, and attract prospective employees to the organization as an employer of choice. As such, inclusive and equitable promotions can be one of the most impactful recruitment and retention strategies for an organization to invest in.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that managers or supervisors have conversations with all team members about their career aspirations prior to announcing an open position. This can help to confirm the interest of internal applicants and encourage their participation in the process.
- Identify the behaviors and actions that all managers and supervisors can demonstrate to promote transparency around career laddering opportunities and how employees can access those opportunities. This might include mapping of potential career paths, the skills necessary to pursue those paths, and recommended development opportunities. See also recommendations for *Performance Reviews* on page 26.
- Develop a leadership development program in which employees can be nominated (by self or others) to participate that would put them on a "leadership track" to invest in employee growth and develop their leadership skills. While the City may not be able to guarantee that all employees will have opportunities to advance into higher-level positions during their tenure, this level of resource investment can ensure employees feel supported and prepared for both formal and informal leadership at Kentwood and beyond.

Perceptions of Pay Equity

This theme relates to employee perceptions of the City's compensation practices for all employees and its capacity to achieve pay equity for all employees. Findings relate to how these perceptions impact attitudes toward the workplace climate and employee experience overall.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City has previously conducted compensation and pay equity reviews for its leadership positions and has worked to address identified pay gaps. Previous reviews have found that female employees took longer to reach top of pay scale than male employees, which was primarily due to circumstances surrounding those decisions (such as accepted starting pay and promotion pay increase practices at the time of the promotion) and not the result of biased decision making. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City made the decision to freeze non-union employee wage increases and other budget considerations in 2021.
- Anecdotally, several employees across focus groups representing all tenures and different departments indicated they were generally satisfied with their compensation and felt that the City generally

compensates employees well. Benefits and titles that match performed responsibilities were referred to much more often as opportunities for growth than current compensation.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Employee feedback from both focus group discussions and survey responses indicate a desire to have more transparent and regular communication about the City's pay equity practices and efforts to address any gaps identified.
- Note that analysis focused on employee perspectives related to pay equity, rather than a full review of compensation or pay equity data. There is at least an opportunity for the City to identify the communication practices that most resonate with employees and make them feel informed about pay equity (in addition to ongoing efforts to directly monitor and address it).

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- It is well-known that, in the US, women (particularly women of color), earn a portion of every dollar that their male colleagues⁶. While more employers are making efforts to ensure pay equity, it is important for those organizations to be transparent about their practices. Transparency helps current and future employees better understand their employer's commitment to pay equity and can eliminate the often-problematic norms and practices that tend to widen pay gaps. Additionally, research indicates that prospective employees are more likely to apply for open positions when employers are transparent about salary⁷. Addressing perceptions around pay equity practices can be just as important to fostering a workplace climate centered around IDEA as addressing pay gaps can.

Recommendations:

- Continue to regularly conduct compensation and pay equity reviews to monitor progress and inform future budgeting efforts.
- Consider how the City can provide periodic updates (with high-level, summarized data) on its pay equity practices as part of ongoing monitoring of IDEA progress in this (and that accounts for or reflects how the City meets contractual obligations with collective bargaining units).

Exit Interviews

This theme relates to the structure and utilization of exit interviews as a strategy to inform ongoing IDEA strategies and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City has a standard inquiry to conduct interviews with outgoing employees leaving on a voluntary basis. Based on the exit interview data reviewed, trend analysis was not conducted. The inquiry is utilized as a tool during exit interviews; before the formal inquiry begins, however, exiting employees are invited to openly share their perspectives and experience of their employment. Employees are given as much time as is necessary to complete the exit interview questions. Current exit interview questions do not include specific prompts related to inclusion, sense of belonging, or other IDEA-related aspects.

⁶ <https://www.payscale.com/compensation-trends/black-women-equal-pay-2020/>

⁷ <https://www.benefitnews.com/news/pay-transparency-is-critical-to-dei-initiatives>

- Relatedly, HR staff conduct “stay” interviews, which are conducted to glean insight from current (but not exiting) employees to better understand factors that can impact employee retention.
- Not all departments conduct exit interviews at the departmental level. Those that do have different protocols for exit interviews. For instance, Police has an extensive inquiry for conducting exit interviews that addresses several aspects of the workplace and employee experience.
- Based on data reviewed, exit interviews are primarily conducted in-person or in real time, with the interviewer responsible for documenting interviewee feedback. Employees who conduct exit interviews at the departmental level are not trained by human resources. Guidance does not exist to inform those employees on conducting meaningful interviews. Exit interview policies do not exist.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- The depth of information collected for exit interviews varies, as does the frequency of how interviews are conducted. It is challenging for the interviewers to conduct an exit interview with all exiting employees before end of employment or to follow up with former employees.
- In addition to challenges in conducting exit interviews, the City has an opportunity to utilize such data more effectively it can gather from interviews to increase IDEA in the workplace. Few instances were reported in how the City utilizes collective employee feedback (such as exit interview trend analysis) to directly inform employee feedback efforts.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Exit interviews can be a powerful tool and resource for organizations to understand its overall performance in addition to IDEA. Insights gathered from these interviews, when utilized, can help increase retention and help employers be more proactive in improving or adapting policies and employee resources. Despite the immense value that effectively conducted exit interviews can bring to the workplace, employers across all sectors generally struggle to successfully implement this tool as exit interviews are somewhat notorious to get consistent or robust employee participation.
- In many instances, employees that are leaving see very little incentive in their participation, do not trust how their feedback will be utilized, or fear potential retaliation if their feedback is traced to them. When employees are able to participate in positive organizational change that is transparently tied to themes gained from exit interviews while they are still active, they are more likely to be willing to participate in the process when they choose to exit. However, exit interviews that primarily focus on workplace climate and IDEA can yield invaluable and specific insights that can inform more effective and responsive employee engagement, retention and development practices overall.

Recommendations:

- Review and revise exit interview questions to primarily focus on gathering employee perspectives on IDEA and workplace culture at the City. Include questions for employees to voluntarily provide demographic information to inform future trend analysis. Establish an inquiry process that includes both HR staff and the outgoing employee’s supervisor; this can provide opportunity for employees to provide honest feedback as they may feel more comfortable sharing with one person over the other.
- Establish an exit interview policy and procedure for all departments (in addition to any department-specific protocols that may currently be in place) that clarifies to employees how information will be utilized. Consider how to implement feedback mechanisms for employees to provide reply to questions

anonymously (such as a third-party online platform or external consultant), which might if they prefer to not participate in an in-person or real time interview.

- Develop a process in which anonymized, aggregated data from exit interviews (and potentially stay interviews with current employees) is reviewed by a panel or committee of leadership employees across departments to identify trends and opportunities for overall growth and improvement, in addition to recommendations specific to IDEA strategies and performance. Data review of exit or stay interview data should be conducted at least on an annual basis.
- Create a mechanism to share key trends and opportunities based on exit interview data to share with current employees, including any recommendations the City will implement or is exploring feasibility to implement. When feasible, share communications throughout the year that highlight how exit interview data was utilized to inform department-level or city-wide decisions, updates to policies, etc.
- Consider providing financial incentives for outgoing employees that participate in exit interviews to encourage participation.

Perceptions of Disciplinary Action

This theme relates to employee perceptions of practices to address employee behaviors that may negatively impact workplace climate or are in violation of personnel policies or that adversely impact team cohesion, climate, etc.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The Employee Handbook includes several policies and guidelines that define and inform workplace behaviors that are considered appropriate or inappropriate.
- Most employees are covered by a collective bargaining unit with detailed and specific contractual obligations related to employee discipline and grievance procedures.
- The city-wide policy for behavior warranting disciplinary action is clear and concise. Supplemental materials, such as the *City Disciplinary Notice Form*, contain language that helps clarify criteria or other factors to inform such decisions. Some departments have additional policies and protocols related to workplace behavior and discipline, such as Courts and Police.
- Documentation reviewed indicates some employees might have additional avenues to address disciplinary actions (i.e., predetermination hearings, more explicit protocols on how to contest a decision, etc.).

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Approaches to decision making related to addressing behaviors within the workplace environment, including those that eventually warrant disciplinary action, appear to vary across departments. Though policies are clear, circumstances surrounding decisions are often unique, and addressing.
- Even in circumstances in which the rationale for certain decisions were understood, there may have been an opportunity for department or team leaders to discuss or reflect on the decision with other team members or provide additional avenues for employees to reflect on how such decisions impact the workplace climate or team cohesion.

- Data reviewed did not clarify to what extent the City is able to collect and track data related to disciplinary actions at a disaggregated level (i.e., across employment status, tenure, gender identity, age, race/ethnicity, etc.). Staff indicated that the City currently does not have the resources to collect and track data in this manner.
- Throughout focus group discussions, employees noted different examples in which rationale behind disciplinary actions was unclear, not effectively communicated, or perceived as inconsistent in comparison to other disciplinary decisions. As such, it appears that the *process* in how these instances is addressed seem to impact (either positively or negatively) employee perceptions of workplace climate or trust.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- It can be challenging for employers to foster a strong sense of confidence in the organization's commitment to IDEA when there is a perception of inequitable disciplinary action. Even when organizations are able to ensure equitable and fair outcomes regarding disciplinary procedures and practices, balancing confidentiality needs can sometimes mean that organization struggles to determine what can be transparently explained (at a broader, policy level) to provide information that would instill a sense of procedural justice among employees.
- When employees perceive disciplinary actions as inequitable, it can also generate potential legal issues in regard to employee discrimination. Municipalities have stringent standards to uphold given their adherence to federal and state law, and commitment to fulfilling contractual obligations to applicable collective bargaining agreements. As employers, they can work to ensure that employees have a clear understanding of how policies related to disciplinary actions are intentionally designed to ensure equitable outcomes as a means to raise confidence in a commitment to procedural justice and mitigate misperceptions of inequity or unfairness.

Recommendation:

- Establish a mechanism to track disciplinary processes to evaluate for any disparities or potential biases across employee groups. This will support the City in understanding the extent to which disciplinary processes are facilitated equitably, if a more robust and appropriate solution is needed to achieve equitable disciplinary practices, and to provide information to employees that provides more clarity and transparency around such practices.

Parental Leave

This theme relates to the policies and support provided to employees who take parental leave throughout their employment at the City.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Currently, the City provides eligible employees 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in accordance with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Eligibility is based on employees who have been employed for at least one year or have worked at least 1,250 hours within the previous year of employment. The general policy covers leave for any employee experiencing “pregnancy, prenatal medical care, or childbirth.” The policy also states that employees can take leave “to care for the employee's spouse, parent, or dependent child due to that family member's serious health condition.”

The policy does establish guidelines for what constitutes “serious health issues.” Employees can take up to 12 weeks of leave within a one-year period.

- In addition to FMLA, the City provides up to 12 weeks unpaid, leave for Non-FMLA Medical Leave for employees who do not meet the hours worked and service length requirements for FMLA. The City provides up to 30 days of unpaid Personal Leave for a variety of reasons that may not be due to medical reasons.
- The amount of leave an employee has access to is dependent on their employment status (e.g., full- or part-time), tenure, and which collective bargaining agreement they are covered by. As such, the amount of leave employees have access to varies.
- The City has other policies that affect time off overall that can be used to secure additional time needed for parental leave. For instance, employees can donate hours to peers via the *Paid Leave Donation Policy*. Vacation Purchase & Sell Policies allow for exempt non-union employees to “buy” paid time off (PTO) via payroll deductions and must choose to do so during open enrollment. As such, these policies may lack the availability and flexibility needed for employees that need additional time for parental leave.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Employee feedback indicates that either the existing leave policies are not being fully adhered to or that there is a consistent and significant misunderstanding among staff about what circumstances are or are not covered by the current policies. Several staff indicated that they understood the following to be true: mothers can only take four weeks off unless they acquire a doctor's note saying the need to continue physical recovery; paternity leave is not an option for expectant or new fathers; unpaid time can only be accessed if employees have first exhausted all of their paid sick time. This last point was brought up as particularly problematic for employees, as returning mothers worried about being able to take a sick day within the year after they returned to work. These misperceptions should be addressed through better policy communication.
- It should be noted that some focus group participants expressed deep concern about having children during their tenure as a City employee based on current state, and that in some instances, staff have advised peers to not do so while working at the City.
- Employees expressed deep concern that current parental leave practices are not adequate to the evolving needs of parents or guardians (and their families) in today's workforce. There is opportunity for the City to establish a more adaptable approach to parental leave.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- The impact of inadequate parental leave policies tends to have a disproportionately negative impact on childbearing employees. Several studies have demonstrated that the lack of paid leave (or even paid leave limited to a few weeks) can increase the likelihood of negative physical, mental or emotional health outcomes⁸ for new mothers and newborns⁹.

⁸ <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/03/416831/national-paid-maternity-leave-makes-sense-mothers-babies-and-maybe-economy>

⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/04/06/parental-leave-as-a-gateway-to-workplace-equity/?sh=1cabb823359c>

- **Newer generations of employees are more likely to join and stay with an employer with good parental leave benefits¹⁰; this is particularly true for female employees, who are more likely to leave their organization or the workforce altogether because they are not provided adequate leave benefits.** Additionally, adequate paid leave also has a positive impact on ensuring employees that are new parents (female employees, in particular) are able to maintain consistent career advancement^{11,12}. Further evidence shows that paid leave policies also help to close gender equity gaps across compensation and promotion into leadership positions, in addition to attracting and retaining talent.
- It is clear that evidence suggests that organizations with more desirable paid leave policies (both in general and for parental leave) are more likely to retain employees. Trends show that new fathers tend to underutilize parental leave as well. It is important for organizations to take a “gender neutral” approach to such policies (i.e., all employees are offered the same amount of parental leave) to reinforce gender equality, particularly within organizations with disproportionate gender representation across departments.

Recommendations:

- In order to be a competitive employer of choice, the City will need to plan on how to expand upon current federal requirements. Given evolving trends in the necessary resources to attract and retain a diverse and talented workforce, consider expanding parental leave policies to include at least 12 weeks of paid leave for all new parents, for all employees and collective bargaining agreements.
- As an immediate measure, ensure accurate employee understanding of the current policy and communicate those improvements are being seriously considered and planned for in the future. Since parameters of parental leave policies are shaped by union contracts, it will be helpful to reinforce to employees what is covered and how that may differ across collective bargaining agreements.
- Utilize plain and clear language within the policy and supplemental communication materials to ensure employees understand what the policy covers and provide opportunities for employees to ask questions and obtain further clarification.
- Considering the time and fiscal resources needed to facilitate that policy, the City may need to implement a gradual or phased approach toward implementing a more competitive approach to parental leave. **In working together with unions, the City could integrate such phased changes over a period of time through collective bargaining agreements:**
 - Four weeks of paid leave, and eight weeks of unpaid without having to utilize or exhaust any “banked” paid time off.
 - Four weeks of paid leave, and eight weeks of unpaid leave with the option of utilizing the Vacation Purchase policy at any time.
- This theme focuses on parental leave; however, the City’s current policy is designed to address leave across all family-related circumstances as covered in FMLA (e.g., caring for parents or dependent children with chronic illnesses). Though these recommendations explicitly address standards for parental leave, the City should consider a comprehensive review and update to this policy to ensure adequate paid time off for all circumstances covered within the policy.

¹⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2019/08/15/five-ways-parental-leave-can-improve-culture-and-increase-diversity-in-organizations/?sh+38ccfd7f2920>

¹¹ <https://hbr.org/2017/07/a-winning-parental-leave-policy-can-be-surprisingly-simple>

¹² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/04/06/parental-leave-as-a-gateway-to-workplace-equity/?sh=1cabb823359c>

Retirement

This theme relates to the structures and support the City offers to employees as they prepare for retirement.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Retirement protocols and practices are negotiated through collective bargaining agreements. The City offers competitive benefits packages to its employees, including retirement offerings. Some longer-term employees commented on how support or funding for some offerings (i.e., pension) has decreased over time as City budgeting has shifted.
- For employees nearing the age of 65, the City is able to direct them to resources to help them navigate and determine their Medicare options.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Feedback from focus group discussions indicate an opportunity for clearer and stronger support for employees who are planning to retire. The retirement process was often characterized as complex or at times confusing, with some employees feeling they are “on their own” when it comes to navigating the process overall. Currently, the City is limited in its ability to provide additional resources, either due to limited HR staff or mitigating potential liabilities.
- Retirement can impact any succession planning process, and oftentimes leadership (at city-wide or department level) are unaware of individual employees’ intentions to retire until they are prepared to submit their notice. While requirements for providing notice do not need to change as they follow all mandated guidelines, there is an opportunity to establish more open lines of communication in which employees feel encouraged to proactively share their intentions to retire and help support succession planning efforts.
- Making key decisions, such as determining healthcare, continuing to work after the age of 65, or even knowing what options or resources are available are common challenges retirees face throughout the country. As this process can often be overwhelming, there is opportunity for the City to secure more clarity or guidance for employees who have reached this phase in the employee experience.

Recommendations

- Encourage intentional employee feedback to inform overall succession planning, particularly when retirement (across all levels of employment) can influence succession plans. As succession planning efforts are currently more of a “behind the scenes” effort, leadership should consider ways to collect employee feedback regularly and proactively in this regard (for instance, employee engagement surveys, ‘stay’ interviews, etc.).
- In adherence to the City’s current liability parameters, consider inviting licensed agents that are able to provide information on Medicare (or other relevant retirement information) at regular intervals throughout the year to explain key points of the employment transition, with particular attention to benefits. Provide employees education on the benefits they can access outside of what is provided by the City after retirement, and the pros and cons of choosing various options (it should be made clear that these events are purely informative, rather than promotional, and are delineated from the City’s responsibilities).

- Schedule One-on-One meetings with retiring employees to review specific benefits and resources. Ideally, at least one meeting would be conducted to help the employee to determine their retirement date, and one meeting would be conducted closer to the retirement date to address final questions and needs.

Area of Focus: Pre-Employment Practices

The challenges we have collectively faced as a society throughout the pandemic have a profound impact on how we view work and careers. As of this report's publication, the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, and has placed restrictions on how the City is able to recruit and cultivate talent, in addition to exacerbating several challenges that departments faced prior to the pandemic. The City has been able to implement some strategies that are targeted to specific populations and for specific departments.

Pipeline Cultivation

This theme relates to the general practices the City engages in to identify and recruit candidates for open positions. It is important to note that some positions and departments have specific requirements and qualifications for positions and might also use resources with other entities to support recruitment efforts.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Recruitment (in general) and cultivating a diverse workforce was often cited as the most pressing concern or issue for the City of Kentwood throughout assessment activities and other discussions with City staff and leadership.
- While staffing needs vary across departments, finding talent to fulfill existing positions, or to expand teams or departments is a persistent and long-standing opportunity for the City. Employees and city leaders also noted how the pandemic has exacerbated these issues, and in 2021, the rate of employee turnover increased.
- Few departments have targeted approaches for recruitment of new employees. For example, the Police Department's High School Police Academy was established to attract talent for fully paid police recruit positions to attend the academy as employees with paid tuition. The City's Community Services Bureau also includes school resource officers that help cultivate relationships and positive interactions between youth and police officers.
- Though staff racial demographics were not representative of the general Kentwood population at the time of the assessment, there was adequate representation of gender identity in overall staff (this shifts greatly at the department level).

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Staff feedback across assessment activities noted that recruitment challenges are, in part, beyond the control or influence of the City. For instance, limited candidate pools for certain positions could be due to the very limited group of individuals that have the requisite certifications. Some departments also noted a steady increase in how challenging recruitment has become over the years within their profession. Fire and Police department personnel, in particular, noted that the physical and mental health issues employees can face, in addition to general public perceptions, are factors that directly impact future generations of potential recruits.

- That said, each department faces their own unique challenges in terms of recruitment, and also experience the need for recruitment at varying timelines, making this a very complex issue for the City to address. Several departments rely on HR staff to support or lead recruitment efforts; however, the HR department currently does not have the capacity to expand or enhance recruitment strategies.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Employers throughout the country are navigating a tumultuous talent market. Recent polling indicates that nearly a quarter of employed Americans intend to resign from their current positions during 2022, continuing the trend referred to as the 'Great Resignation'¹³. This presents a significant opportunity for the public sector in particular, to take advantage of shifting talent trends and address their own talent needs.
- Upcoming generations of talent indicate a strong desire to work for mission-driven or community-focused organizations, which presents a unique opportunity for local municipalities. However, research indicates that younger generations (current high school or college students, for instance) are mostly unaware of the wide scope of available employment opportunities within the public sector¹⁴. They are also unaware of, or may not have accurate perceptions of compensation, benefits, and other resources that would be available to them in a public sector career.
- While raising awareness of the employment opportunities and resources available within the public sector can entice more diverse candidate pools, candidates want to ensure their workplace climate is welcoming and fosters a sense of belonging. This can be challenging to achieve for candidates who do not see themselves represented within a current workforce or who have a limited understanding of intentional IDEA efforts. As such, municipalities have to directly address the structures and behaviors that interfere with fostering an inclusive and equitable workplace climate as the initial step to entice prospective employees.

Recommendations:

- Given the complexity of recruitment across different departments, the City will need to ensure it invests the necessary time and resources to address pipeline cultivation. As the scope of this project focused on the City at an administrative (organizational) level, assessment findings do not provide enough data to inform specific recommendations for each department. That said, it is clear that each department faces its own unique opportunities and challenges when it comes to cultivating talent pipelines. These are certainly impacted by current staff capacity, level of requisite IDEA knowledge to inform pipeline strategies, allocation of resources, and so on. As such, the City can, as an initial step, ensure resources are allocated at an administrative level to support departments in further developing such strategies.
- Conduct an audit of each department's own pipeline cultivation practices to understand current level of activity, engagement with community stakeholders (e.g., local schools, businesses, higher education institutions, etc.), participation in professional networks (local, regional, and national), job posting practices, participation in job fairs, and the extent to which department employees engage in recruitment or pipeline activities, either formally or informally. Use findings from the audit to determine standard practices or guidelines for all departments to implement.

¹³ https://www.careerarc.com/blog/great-resignation-rehire-survey-infographic/?utm_source=pr&utm_medium=newswire&utm_campaign=great-resignation-rehire-survey

¹⁴ <https://bit.ly/3MWqwgF>

Candidate Selection

This theme relates to how coordinated efforts between departments and HR influence the candidate selection process (i.e., recruitment, interviewing, hiring).

Current State & Potential Strengths

- As previously noted, the City posts all open positions on its own website, and will utilize other online platforms (i.e., social media, job boards, etc.) to spread awareness of opportunities. The need for specialized skills, credentials, or education for certain positions also leads to posting positions on platforms of professional networks and recommendations from departments or encouraging employees to spread the work through their own personal and professional networks to aid the recruitment process.
- Depending on the needs and capacity of the department, HR primarily oversees the interview process, and works with department heads to determine timelines, scheduling, key review criteria, etc., which can vary across positions depending on the needs, availability, and preferences of a given department.
- The City has developed and utilizes standard questions for candidates, and typically utilizes a panel-style interview involving two to three department members throughout the process. The number of interviews also varies depending on the number of applicants or urgency to fulfill a particular role.
- Candidate selection for higher-level positions tend to be more internally focused, e.g., current employees may be identified as potential candidates with the full intention of hiring internally versus externally.
- Longer-tenured employees were more likely to note that they found out about the position they initially applied for through their own networks or because they were a City employee at the time. Newer employees were more likely to mention finding out through other online or indirect sources about their position.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Employees noted how selection processes seemed to be more collaborative in nature, intentionally seeking out input from employees throughout a team or department to help facilitate the process. Over time, the process has shifted and is now primarily facilitated between HR and department leadership. While the hiring of any candidate will influence workplace dynamics, this is particularly true for smaller departments in which the addition of a new team member may be more immediately or acutely felt. As inclusive interview processes and efficient interview processes are not mutually exclusive, there is opportunity for the City to further incorporate the insight and input from other department employees in the candidate selection process.
- In focus group discussions, employees noted varying experiences when it came to their department's approach to interviewing and hiring candidates. Based on feedback provided, there is some inconsistency in the length of certain selection processes, including the total number of interviews of a candidate before making an official offer. Some employees noted that their hiring processes were expedient, while others noted participating in several interviews a number of weeks before receiving an offer. Anecdotally, some employees noted how previous candidates had the opportunity to tour City facilities as part of their interview process, which tended to have a positive impact on the early days of employment.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Factors that influenced these circumstances vary; it is clear that a longer turnaround time can have an adverse effect on being able to secure top candidates. Having the team capacity between HR and department heads to ensure a more consistent selection process, regardless of the number of open positions at a given time, can help address this issue.
- Some departments have more particular selection processes due to the specific qualifications of a role; some positions might require background checks, verification processes, etc. that add to the overall time of finding the best candidate. For other departments, an open position may be an infrequent occurrence, due to smaller staff size and a tendency for employees to stay in those positions longer. These variances can also make it challenging to ensure a diverse candidate pool for every open position that becomes available throughout a given year and might demand further coordination or time between HR and departments to facilitate a successful process.

Recommendations:

- Continue involving relevant department staff throughout the selection and decision-making process for all open positions. This might include team discussions to determine the most important qualifications, eliciting feedback on potential interview questions to include, or to reflect on the overall needs of the department informally/generally at the time of hiring.
- Intentionally seeking this information can help current employees feel heard in addition to preparing them for welcoming a new employee; it can also serve as a potential checkpoint for department heads and hiring managers (i.e., mitigating negative impact of their own preferences/biases on the selection processes, identifying potential avenues to increase awareness about an open position, etc.). HR staff and director-level employees can still maintain control and consistency of the interview process while providing current employees assurance and support to prepare for the new hire.
- Update interview protocols to require candidates to participate in a “meet and greet” with the department (or full team within the department, depending on staff size) once the candidate has completed a specific number of interviews. It is recommended that these meet and greets occur after at least two rounds of interviews. Doing so can help to expedite final decisions regarding candidate selection.
- Should the City eventually increase its HR staffing, there is opportunity to allow for HR team members to concentrate on specific departments or provide more specialized support and coordination to help departments manage their recruitment needs. Doing so would also allow for HR staff to become more intricately familiar with the nuances of recruiting and provide more support effectively.

Area of Focus: Organizational Values & Leadership

The City of Kentwood's values include extraordinary customer service, integrity, equity, communication, and leadership. It is evident that employees strive to imbue those values into their daily roles and responsibilities, and there is opportunity for the City to further clarify and make stronger connections to how those values support IDEA overall. Additionally, the City has an opportunity to specify how IDEA better enables employees to uphold those values within daily workplace operations and while engaging City residents.

IDEA Knowledge

This theme relates to employee levels of awareness in IDEA concepts, practices and behaviors within the workplace. It also relates to employees' perceptions of confidence in applying such knowledge into their roles or into department strategies.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City's vision frames Kentwood to be "a diverse Michigan community where people can find opportunity, safety, health, and happiness." Kentwood's current population has a rich cultural diversity, which is often acknowledged within external City communications and within documentation of strategic goals, objectives, and related plans.
- The City identified IDEA-related goals within its strategic plan, including assessing current efforts and practices to identify opportunities for growth and improvement. Equity has been identified as a core value for the City, and a central component to the City achieving its strategic priorities.
- There is a sense that employees understand the general importance or significance of IDEA but need more clarity on the "why" behind the City in trying to fortify its strategic efforts around these values. In some instances, employees expressed skepticism or questioned the City's motivation around IDEA activities (including assessment activities). Based on employee feedback, having a clearer understanding that the City is being intentional and proactive in increasing the inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility within its workplace can have positive implications in terms of employee awareness, readiness for change.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- There is opportunity for IDEA to be discussed more frequently within department and team settings. The frequency and depth to which IDEA and related topics are discussed varies across departments and is often dependent on department leadership to facilitate how often more informal or reflective conversations are encouraged, as well as how integrated IDEA content or criteria is formally included in training or education protocols at a department level.
- Additionally, hiring and diversifying the current City workforce were oft-cited examples of how a commitment to IDEA would impact the workplace environment. Some employees expressed concerns about compromising talent among the workforce or standards of performance for the sake of diversifying the City's employee base, or that standards would be lowered in order to meet goals for talent slates, thus undermining the intent behind the City's commitment.

- Employee responses varied within both focus groups and survey prompts when it came to how IDEA might influence the workplace environment. Some employees were not able to think of any dimensions of identity (e.g., gender identity, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious or spiritual beliefs, etc.) or lived experiences that might influence their workplace. Some did not feel that there were any IDEA-related issues within their team or departments. Other employees were able to identify specific and multiple examples (be they one-time or ongoing) in which increased IDEA knowledge would improve the workplace climate. This presents an opportunity for the City to be clearer and more consistent in the value proposition that IDEA brings to the workplace.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- Municipalities face unique challenges to meeting IDEA goals, particularly regarding budgeting and allocation of resources and recruitment and retention within highly specialized fields. The complexity of fulfilling an organizational IDEA commitment can also be challenging for employees across departments to fully comprehend, which is why formalized documentation of IDEA-related values is often an initial or early step for organizations to take. It is an important part of an organization's commitment to IDEA, as such documentation becomes a primary resource for employees to increase their understanding of IDEA and what it means to the organization and to them individually.
- Fostering shared and consistent understanding of IDEA values, topics, etc. provides the necessary foundation that allows other strategies to succeed. Employees have a clearer understanding of the “why” for IDEA, which better enables them to both inform and implement the “how” at the organizational and departmental levels¹⁵.

Recommendations:

- Increasing general knowledge of City employees around IDEA should be based on a shared understanding of these values. Formalize language that clearly states how the City of Kentwood defines inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (note: a component of the overall IDEA project includes a recommended IDEA Policy Statement). Developing such language can help facilitate necessary discussions that help to clarify the “why” for employees across departments and at all levels. Build upon language that has been utilized to inform stakeholders about IDEA activities to date. Establish a “roll out” plan to introduce said language across departments, encourage department or team level discussions, and include opportunities for employees to provide feedback on the language.
- At the department level, create standards of behavior at the department level connected to IDEA values as defined at the City level. Each department at the City has its own unique work culture in addition to its overall role and function. As such, it is important for departments to encourage reflective discussions on those roles and responsibilities specifically to help the City achieve its overarching IDEA goals.
- Incorporate any IDEA statements and language (current and future) within all educational or developmental processes, including onboarding, employee handbooks, relevant training protocols, as well as “reboarding” opportunities (see also *Onboarding Consistency on page 22*).

¹⁵ <https://www.brighterstrategies.com/blog/starting-your-dei-strategy/>

Communication & Demonstration of IDEA Values

This theme relates to how the City's commitment to IDEA is communicated and discussed across all levels and departments, to ensure all employees understand the authentic and intentional commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility within the workplace and throughout the employee experience.

Current State and Potential Strengths

- Documentation of guiding principles reinforces a commitment to IDEA. The City's vision and mission focus on cultivating and providing services for a "diverse" and "thriving community for all." "Equity" is explicitly named as one of the City's core values. Documentation of the City's strategic priorities also clearly connect to these guiding principles and are structured to advance the City's articulated commitment to IDEA.
- Other key documentation and employee resources, such as the Employee Handbook, reinforce the City's values and outlines behaviors, protocol and other expectations on workplace decorum that support IDEA. City personnel policies include clear and specific examples of behaviors that interfere or contradict IDEA values, such as inappropriate or harassing behavior. Language in related policies also specifies what is considered sexual, race-based and other forms of harassment or discrimination so that employees are clearly informed. The City has established fairly extensive rules of conduct that prohibit many behaviors that would impede a culture supportive of IDEA.
- Employees are aware that IDEA has been made a strategic priority for the City. In focus groups, participants at times shared their enthusiasm and/or interest in the City embedding IDEA into its strategic priorities.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Responses across focus groups and survey results also indicate a need for the "bigger picture" of what the City's commitment to IDEA and resulting strategies might look like. While employees are aware that IDEA has been made a priority, there is a need for greater clarity on what "IDEA" means to the City of Kentwood and how to measure progress and maintain accountability. There is a desire among a significant proportion of staff for more discussion and reflection about IDEA in general, which the City can leverage to maintain forward momentum.
- Employee-facing documentation (i.e., Employee Handbook, staff intranet, department-level policies) includes information that provides guidance on what types of behaviors and modes of communication are *not* acceptable in the workplace but are less likely to state which behaviors *explicitly affirm* IDEA-related issues or concepts.
- For example, the Employee Handbook also includes expectations for a cooperative, collaborative, and helpful work environment but does not make an explicit connection to how it reinforces IDEA in the workplace. Additionally, updated language could affirm the cultural value of certain behaviors and manners across cultural differences, such as manners of dress and hairstyles within the definition of "professional and neat appearance" (which can have different meanings across cultural differences).

Leadership Accountability for IDEA

This theme relates to the roles, responsibilities and competencies that leaders can fulfill to foster a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible workplace climate and employee experience.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- Overall, employees tend to feel that their own teams or departments are effective at fostering a workplace environment that promotes collaboration and collegiality. These perceptions vary across departments; there is a general sense that employees feel they can work effectively alongside their peers. In some instances, employees characterized relationships (within teams or shifts, with leaders, etc.) are very strong due to the intensity of the work and time spent working together (such as first responders in Fire or Police).
- Employees noted that fostering this type of workplace environment requires consistent leadership, and in a style that is most effective for that department (i.e., the leadership style that works best for one department may not be as effective for another). As such, a department head's particular leadership style and approach to communication are primary influential factors to how employees feel within the workplace.
- As discussed in Position Descriptions, there are various "Knowledge & Skills" noted for individuals in managerial (or above) positions to be effective in supporting a diverse team.

Potential Opportunities for Growth

- Though perceptions of leadership effectiveness vary across departments, employees generally feel their department heads are effective in their roles. However, there is an opportunity to increase the level of intercultural competence and inclusive leadership skills for anyone in a leadership position (managers, supervisors, and department heads). City-wide mechanisms and resources that outline what effective leadership can look like could be more explicit in naming the competencies and specific skills necessary to lead IDEA strategies and initiatives at a departmental level.
- Few departments were noted as not having any discussions about IDEA among their own employees; some employees noted in focus group discussions that it was never or rarely discussed. Regardless, the frequency or degree to which IDEA was discussed was driven by department leadership, which contributes to inconsistency among employees in understanding IDEA, why it matters, how it impacts their respective department, etc.

How Does This Impact IDEA?

- The impact of inclusive leadership to embed IDEA values within the workplace environment is essential to the culture and sustainable growth within any organization. Inclusive leadership involves demonstrating behaviors and actions that supports a strong sense of belonging for all team members, being accommodating and validating of diverse perspectives and identities, and fosters adaptability across differences and challenges that arise within a team or organizational setting. Research indicates that ethnically diverse teams within the public sector are more likely to have welcoming, positive, workplace experiences¹⁶.
- Organizations who are committed to diversifying their workforce will also need to make concentrated and strategic efforts to ensure that leaders are equipped to foster inclusive climates to attract and retain talent. Doing so demonstrates a more authentic "walking the talk" atmosphere when it comes to committing to

¹⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0734371X19899722>

IDEA and enhances a sense of trust that IDEA-related strategies and changes are designed to benefit all employees.

Recommendations:

- Additional recommendations address establishing IDEA-specific responsibilities within position descriptions within Knowledge & Skills, in addition to establishing a core competency model for IDEA. It is recommended that department heads be among the initial groups of employees to participate in the development of such structures given their visibility within their department and the City, and the collective knowledge on City operations.
- In addition to establishing a city-wide IDEA education plan, require department heads to participate in regular IDEA training and education that is targeted toward municipal leaders. Any educational or developmental opportunities that leaders participate in should be clearly connected to the responsibilities, knowledge and skills as outlined in position descriptions. More specialized developmental resources can help to ensure the investment of time and resources leads to practical application of learning.
- Should the City choose to implement IDEA-related education for leaders as a short-term goal, it is important to clarify expectations with any participants regarding the intended use and impact of those opportunities and participation expectations as it relates to their own responsibilities as an employee. This is particularly necessary if education is offered prior to any updated language in position descriptions. It is also important to ensure there is designated time for participants to periodically meet after training is completed to help ensure that acquired skills, knowledge, etc. are practically applied. Considering the time and investment needed to implement any training, the City might consider leading a "pilot" group of leaders to help inform future or long-term IDEA education or training decisions.

Leadership Culture

This theme relates to how leadership (generally speaking) is viewed and discussed throughout the City, in addition to the influence leaders have on workplace climate and employee experiences. See also *Leadership Accountability to IDEA*.

Current State & Potential Strengths

- The City has a particular emphasis on promoting a culture of servant leadership, an approach to leadership that focuses on putting 'followers' (i.e., employees) first through empowerment and personal development. As public employees, this approach to leadership can be positively impactful in strengthening relationships between residents and City employees. Positioning its leaders as those who serve both their employees *and* the community is prevalent and frequently reiterated throughout City materials and documentation of guiding principles, strategic priorities, as well as messaging, etc.
- The City's decentralized structure also influences how leadership culture manifests itself within a given department. As noted in *Leadership Accountability*, department heads or team leaders may take a different approach to leadership to best meet the needs of employees. The City also has a traditional hierarchical structure, and this is particularly prevalent and adhered to in departments that need to maintain stringent protocols due to the department's function and/or in larger departments (this includes Police, Fire, Court, and Public Works).

- While the ongoing pandemic certainly factors into how employees feel about how they are appreciated within any organization, employee feedback indicates that a sense of belonging and feeling appreciated across different employee groups in particular are greatly influenced by department leadership and in some instances city-wide leadership.
- A number of focus group participants expressed that the resourcefulness of leaders and their peers in particular made their jobs desirable and stable. While longer tenured employees are more likely to have those perceptions than shorter tenured employees, there is a general sense that when department heads are deliberate in empowering employees it has a very positive impact.

Recommendation:

- Other recommendations made in this report address professional development and internal communication, two important factors that influence leadership culture within the City. In conjunction with implementing those strategies, the City can focus on encouraging more discussions across departments in how decisions are made and appropriately engage employees in those processes. Increased communication of policy and practice updates, sharing rationale for decisions, and improving overall consistency in decision making that directly impacts employees (e.g., promotions, disciplinary actions, etc.) will help increase employee trust and confidence in leadership and can help employees feel empowered.

Appendix A: Methodology Details

The following appendix sections provide detail on the inquiry used across the various methodologies of the IDEA climate assessment.

Employment Continuum

Inclusive Performance Strategies collaboratively finalized the categories of the employment continuum with Kentwood staff. Focus group questions and document audit requests were based on gathering data related to these categories:

- Pipeline Development
- Recruiting Practices
- Interview Process
- Onboarding and re-boarding
- Overall Employment Policies
- Team Member Development
- Retention
- Leadership Advancement Opportunities
- Retirement

Employment Continuum Focus Group Questions

To gain additional context and understand employee experience across the employment continuum, IPS facilitated three focus groups that were organized by tenure: two years and under, three to six years, and seven years or more. Each participant was provided with a handout describing each phase of the continuum. Focus groups began by clarifying the intention of the conversations and how these groups differ from the workplace climate focus groups, which some people had already participated in. The following questions were asked:

New Employees (two years and under)

- How did you initially find out about the job you applied for at the City of Kentwood?
- How would you define some of the strengths and challenges you experienced in the application and interview process?
- What were the most useful parts of your onboarding experience? What would you have liked to see more of/included?
- Did anyone discuss expectations for organizational culture or mention expectations for supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion during your onboarding? If so, please describe.
- We all have multiple identities and aspects of ourselves that are important to us. This may have to do with our cultural or religious background and how we express those aspects of ourselves, our abilities and disabilities, our status as parents or caregivers to others, or any number of other things. Do you feel that Kentwood's policies and practices fully support accommodations an individual might need given those things?
- What have you appreciated about your training and professional development so far? What could be more effective/do you wish was in place?
- Anything else you want to comment on related to the focus areas we are sharing in the continuum?

Mid-Range Employees (three to six years)

- How did you initially find out about the job you applied for at the City of Kentwood?
- How would you define some of the strengths and challenges you experienced in the application and interview process?
- How would you describe some of the strengths and challenges of your onboarding experience?
- Have you had any first-hand experience in recruiting new members to your team or department? If so, share a story/example, highlighting what you thought went well and what was challenging.
- How often do you discuss or reflect on organizational culture or supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion with your team or department? Why do you think that is?
- We all have multiple identities and aspects of ourselves that are important to us. This may have to do with our cultural or religious background and how we express those aspects of ourselves, our abilities and disabilities, our status as parents or caregivers to others, or any number of other things. Do you feel that Kentwood's policies and practices fully support accommodations an individual might need given those things?
- Let's discuss how the City of Kentwood supports professional development. What examples come to mind of Kentwood and have helped you to grow in your career?
- Anything else you want to comment on related to the focus areas we are sharing in the continuum?

Long-Term Employees (seven years or more)

- Have you had any first-hand experience in recruiting new members to your team or department? If so, share a story/example, highlighting what you thought went well and what was challenging.
- How would you define some of the strengths and challenges you experienced in the application and interview process?
- How often are you re-oriented to employee/personnel policies? In what way would "reboarding" help?
- How often do you discuss or reflect on organizational culture or supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion with your team or department? Why do you think that is?
- We all have multiple identities and aspects of ourselves that are important to us. This may have to do with our cultural or religious background and how we express those aspects of ourselves, our abilities and disabilities, our status as parents or caregivers to others, or any number of other things. Do you feel that Kentwood's policies and practices fully support accommodations an individual might need given those things?
- Let's discuss how the City of Kentwood supports professional development. What examples come to mind of Kentwood has helped you to grow in your career?
- What strengths and challenges do you see with Kentwood helping staff (you or others) prepare for leadership/management roles?
- Anything else you want to comment on related to the focus areas we are sharing in the continuum?

Document Audit

IPS provided Kentwood staff with a comprehensive list that detailed the pipeline stages and focus areas for the document review (see next page). City staff were provided a secure, cloud-based spreadsheet to which they submit requested documentation. IPS staff met with staff to discuss what was being requested to ensure staff had clarity and were able to successfully complete the audit. City staff submitted documentation, weblinks or

narratives as examples of relevant documentation. City staff also submitted union contracts and met with IPS staff to review the contracts and highlight sections relevant to the inquiry.

<p>Pipeline Development Internships School Partnerships (middle school through higher education) Job shadowing Volunteer engagement (event/program & board/committee) Seasonal employees</p>	<p>Recruitment Practices (Building candidate pools/slates) Job Descriptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive Qualifications • Consistent Language • IDEA Commitment • Transparency of Benefits Job Posting/Advertising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website posting • Diverse Networking • Referral Programs • Internal and External Access • Accessibility Application Process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial Candidate Screening Processes • Benchmarking and use of talent data </p>
<p>Interview Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof of qualification/certification/assessment • Establishing diverse interview teams • Interview questions • Decision making processes • Community Engagement 	<p>Onboarding & Re-boarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented consistent processes • Opportunity for evaluation and feedback • Mentorship • Ongoing resources and support • Departmental Follow Up • IDEA Culture Commitment
<p>Overall Employment Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Handbook • Cultural and identity-based accommodations 	<p>Team Member Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable professional development opportunities and processes • Mentorship • Development plans and performance evaluations • Disciplinary action • IDEA training and education
<p>Retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid leave • Benefits • Recognition • Employee engagement, feedback loops • Affinity groups/ERGs • Grievance policies/complaint resolution • Pay equity • Exit interviews: Consistency, use of information 	<p>Leadership Advancement Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession planning • New leadership identification • Professional development and mentorship
<p>Retirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits • Ongoing engagement 	

Workplace Climate Survey Questions

As part of the workplace climate assessment, a staff-wide survey was sent. In total, IPS received 151 total responses. Survey questions are provided below. Most questions were designed using a Likert rating system, with potential responses consisting of strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Open-ended questions provided opportunities for employees to provide additional contextual comments to their responses or provide specific feedback.

Survey Prompt
I know what is expected of me when it comes to supporting IDEA in the workplace as a City of Kentwood employee.
I am aware of the career pathways available to me through the City.
I feel as supported in pursuing my professional development as my co-workers are.
I am confident in my ability to work with people who have a different cultural background than me without fear or anxiety.
I feel valued as a City of Kentwood employee.
I feel like I belong within my team or department.
My team/department has the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to support an inclusive and equitable workplace climate.
Overall, I feel my team (as a whole) works together productively and effectively.
The process to determine compensation is fair and equitable.
Workloads are distributed fairly and equitably.
Rewards and acknowledgement for performance are given equitably.
The level of emphasis on inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) within my team/department is...
The City of Kentwood is committed to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA).
Committed to supporting an inclusive and equitable workplace climate.
Able to effectively resolve conflict or address tension within our team/department.
Encourages all team members to speak up and share perspectives.
Exhibits behaviors that would support an inclusive and equitable workplace culture.
Holds all employees accountable to behaviors that support an inclusive and equitable workplace culture.
Able to lead strategies designed to increase inclusion, diversity, equity & accessibility in our department.
Consistently behaves in a way that demonstrates a deep commitment to IDEA.
Makes decisions that effectively support or promote IDEA in the workplace.
Works effectively and equitably with City staff members at all levels.

The survey concluded with a demographic section that was optional for respondents to complete. The following prompts were given; if participants preferred not to respond to a given question, they could respond "Prefer Not to Answer." Respondents were assured that the survey was confidential and that responses were anonymous and could not be used to identify individual respondents.

Demographic Survey Prompts
What is your current work status?
What is your current role (by leadership level)?
What is your gender?
What is your current age?
What is your race or ethnicity? (Includes option to self-describe)
What is your sexual orientation? (Includes option to self-describe)
Do you have a disability?
Have you ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces, military, or National Guard?
What is your current level of education?

Workplace Climate Focus Group Questions

The workplace climate assessment also involved eight focus groups Three focus groups open to all employees across all departments. Three additional focus groups were conducted with the Fire, Police, and Public Works department employees (one per department). Two focus groups were also conducted with department heads. Unlike the employment continuum focus groups, which had a more targeted focus on operations that relate to employee development, these groups were more focused on employee’s overall perception of the City of Kentwood as an employer and their overall work experience. The questions for these focus groups are provided below:

- Review the definitions for IDEA on the sheet in front of you. Essentially, the City of Kentwood is trying to make these definitions into true statements. What factors influence the City’s ability to achieve these goals (either positively or negatively)?
 - *(For this question, participants were provided with a handout that included definitions for inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility that were used to inform assessment activities.)*
- How would you rate the current work climate on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being poor, 10 being excellent): within your department? At the City of Kentwood as a whole? Take the Post-It and use it to write down how you would rate the current work climate here (you can base this on whatever criteria or experience you prefer). When you write it down, I'll take them and we'll discuss the group’s ratings.
 - *(For this question, participants were provided with Post-It sticky notes and markers to anonymously note their responses. Facilitators then collected the Post-Its and posted them on a wall for participants to view and respond to).*
- What keeps you here as a City employee?
- What resources make you feel supported in your role?
- When you think about your own department, what separates your workplace climate from other departments (positively or negatively)?
- What are the most pressing issues or challenges you’re facing that affect the workplace climate?

- Imagine that with a ‘snap of a finger’ you could instantly do anything at work better. What would you want to improve?

Site Visits

Department heads escorted IPS staff on tours of their respective facilities. Most tours lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, depending on the size of the site and areas that were accessible/relevant. The features were observed and noted as either present (“Yes”), not present (“No”), or “Other” if the feature was partially present, not relevant to the site. Employees provided additional information based on the site (such as building history, typical use, etc.) and were asked clarifying questions depending on a particular space (e.g., “Who typically utilizes this space/resource?”; “How is this space working for your team/department currently?” etc.) or to clarify if a particular feature was present.

Feature
Outside facility is accessible to individuals with disabilities or physical limitations (parking, sidewalks, doorways)
Outside signage clearly marks entrances for personnel and visitors (i.e., “authorized personnel only” when applicable)
Outside signage includes languages other than English
For secure entrances: instructions for visitor access clearly listed and understandable
Inside spaces include wayfinding indicators (marked pathways, welcome signs, directional signs)
Inside signage includes language(s) other than English
Restrooms are inclusive to various abilities, individuals that need assistance, gender identities
Inside signage is clearly featured and easily visible (high contrast, large print)
Doorways, hallways are accessible for individuals with disabilities or physical limitations
For secure inside areas: signage clearly marks areas for personnel
Workspace lighting is adaptable or adjustable for various sight abilities or sensitivities (i.e., dimmers, window blinds)
Workspace furniture (desks, chairs) are adjustable and/or portable to accommodate heights, assistive equipment
Common employee areas (meeting rooms, breakrooms) are accessible to
Staff announcements and important info are in a clear and easily accessible space
Overall environment includes features welcoming/appealing to variety of cultural backgrounds and characteristics
Procedures or protocol in place to accommodate requests for assistance