

Unlocking Workforce Potential in Local Government



Future Ready Workforce

Practical, evidence-backed approaches to engagement, leadership, and culture

Introduction

Making Local Government careers appealing

Local government plays a visible and essential role in shaping strong, connected communities. Delivering on that responsibility takes more than technical capability. It requires a workforce that is clear on expectations, supported by strong leadership, and able to see how their work contributes to something bigger.

Across the sector, councils are navigating increasing complexity.

Community expectations are rising, labour markets are tightening, and leaders are being asked to balance compliance, performance, wellbeing, and service delivery – often with limited internal support.

To attract and retain capable people, local government must be intentional about the experience it creates at work.

This includes clear job design, aligned leadership behaviours, opportunities for growth, and a culture that supports people to do their best work.

This guide has been developed by The People & Culture Office to support councils to move beyond good intent and into practical action. It brings together evidence-backed frameworks, strengths-based development, and employee engagement tools designed to help local governments build a workforce that is capable, connected, and future-ready.

future ready your team



section 1

Align Actions With Strategic Goals

A strong workforce doesn't happen by accident. It's built when people understand what's expected of them, how they're expected to work, and why their role matters.

The Key Behavioural & Capability Framework provides a shared language for how work gets done across the organisation. It defines the behaviours and capabilities required to support strategic objectives, not just the tasks listed in a position description.

Position descriptions explain what needs to be done. This framework clarifies how people are expected to show up at work – individually and collectively – to achieve consistent, high-quality outcomes.

Core capabilities for all employees focus on:

- personal accountability and adaptability
- respectful, collaborative working relationships
- outcome-focused thinking and problem solving
- responsible use of resources and systems

For leaders, this extends to workforce leadership – modelling expectations, building trust, and creating the conditions for teams to perform well.

Applications of the Framework:

- 1. Recruitment:** Hire individuals who align with organisational culture and values using behavioural-based interview questions.
- 2. Performance Management:** Evaluate both what employees achieve and how they achieve it, fostering meaningful development.
- 3. Succession Planning:** Map progression paths to prepare future leaders.
- 4. Induction:** Introduce new hires to expected behaviours and values, ensuring cultural alignment from day one.

section 2

Leverage Strengths for Workforce Development

Every employee brings natural patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving to their role. When those talents are understood and intentionally developed, they become strengths that improve performance, collaboration, and engagement.

CliftonStrengths provides a practical way to identify and apply individual and team strengths at work. Rather than focusing on gaps, a strengths-based approach helps people understand how they add value and how to work more effectively with others.

For local government teams, this creates:

- clearer contribution at an individual level
- improved collaboration across roles and functions
- higher engagement and reduced turnover
- stronger development conversations between leaders and employees

Coaching supports this process by helping people apply their strengths in real work scenarios, ensuring development aligns with organisational priorities rather than generic capability building.

section 3

The Case for Intentional Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is often misunderstood. It's not about morale, perks, or how people feel on a good day. Engagement reflects whether the conditions for good work exist.

Gallup research shows only around 23% of Australian employees are engaged, with local government engagement sitting below this benchmark. This gap has real implications for retention, safety, productivity, and leadership capability.

Engaged employees are more likely to stay, contribute discretionary effort, and develop into future leaders. Disengagement, on the other hand, increases absenteeism, turnover, and operational risk.

The Gallup Q12 measures the elements that matter most – role clarity, support, recognition, development, and connection to purpose. With decades of global research behind it, the Q12 provides clear, actionable insight that leaders can use to improve engagement at a team level.

This isn't about raising numbers for reporting purposes. It's about understanding what the data is telling you – and acting on it.



decrease in absenteeism incidents



decrease in turnover



fewer safety

With over 30 million respondents worldwide, Gallup Q12 has proven results in increasing retention, reducing absenteeism, and boosting productivity.

section 4

Culture Clarity: understanding what's really shaping behaviour at work

Culture shapes how work actually gets done. It influences decision-making, leadership behaviour, collaboration, and how people respond when pressure is on.

Most organisations have stated values. Fewer have a clear picture of whether those values are being experienced day to day.

Culture clarity helps bridge that gap.

The Culture Clarity Survey provides a snapshot of what's really happening inside the organisation by asking employees what they experience at work, not what's written on the wall.

A values-based view of culture

The Culture Clarity Survey is grounded in the Barrett Values model. It looks at:

- what people value personally
- what they experience in the current workplace culture
- what they want more of to do their best work

It also highlights where energy is being lost through friction, confusion, or misalignment. This doesn't indicate poor intent. It usually points to systems, leadership practices, or ways of working that are getting in the way.

Culture, experience, and engagement

Culture sets expectations.

Employee experience reflects how those expectations are lived.

Engagement is the result.

When culture is understood and shaped intentionally, engagement initiatives are more effective and easier to sustain.

section 5

Intentional Recruitment Tailored to You

Recruitment sets the foundation for culture, engagement, and performance. Intentional recruitment focuses on more than technical capability. It considers alignment with values, behaviours, and the realities of the role.

When recruitment is aligned to organisational purpose and culture, employees are more likely to settle, stay, and contribute meaningfully.

Intentional recruitment includes:

- clarity on the role beyond tasks
- defined behavioural expectations
- values-aligned interview processes
- realistic job previews
- onboarding that reinforces expectations from day one

For local government, this approach reduces early turnover, strengthens team cohesion, and builds a workforce that grows together over time.

section 6

Leadership Development in Emotional Intelligence

Leadership is experienced through behaviour. Emotional intelligence shapes how leaders communicate, make decisions, manage pressure, and build trust.

In local government, where leaders operate in highly visible environments and manage competing stakeholder demands, emotional intelligence is not optional. It directly impacts culture, psychological safety, and team performance.

Leaders with strong emotional intelligence:

- communicate clearly and respectfully
- manage conflict constructively
- create trust through consistency
- support development without avoidance

This capability is particularly important for attracting and retaining younger generations, who value transparency, empathy, and purposeful leadership.

section 7

Embedding Work Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a business issue. When people feel unsupported, overextended, or unclear, performance and retention suffer.

In regional and remote contexts, poor wellbeing often leads to relocation, talent loss, and increased pressure on remaining team members. Investing in wellbeing helps councils stabilise their workforce and reduce long-term risk.

Effective wellbeing strategies focus on:

- realistic workloads and role clarity
- supportive leadership practices
- flexibility where possible
- early intervention rather than crisis response

When wellbeing is taken seriously, absenteeism reduces, engagement improves, and people are more likely to stay and contribute.

section 8

It's Time For Action

Building a future-ready workforce requires intentional choices. Clear expectations. Evidence-backed engagement. Leadership capability that matches the complexity of the work.

At The People & Culture Office, we don't deliver standalone tools and walk away. We work alongside organisations to embed practical systems that support real change.

If you're ready to strengthen engagement, leadership, and culture in a way that fits your organisation and your community, we're ready to partner with you.

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