



Catalyst for Regional Progress

PVPC

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Audit and Feasibility Study Shared Human Resources Services

Towns of East Longmeadow and Ludlow



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Introduction

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission was engaged by the Towns of East Longmeadow and Ludlow to conduct an audit of their current Human Resource (HR) structure and to perform a feasibility study to determine the possibility for the towns to potentially share a Human Resources Department.



The objective of the study was to perform:

- A review of the overall HR organizational structure, responsibilities, and practices
- A review of the HR core functions within the towns
- A comparable study of other towns with a centralized HR department
- A cost analysis of having a shared HR Department

The information presented focuses on the built HR environment of the two individual towns and the feasibility of having a shared HR Department to serve both communities. Information from existing sources was leveraged to complete this study. It's important for us to acknowledge that there is no "one way" to determine what the shared HR Department should look like. The establishment of a centralized HR Department is a process that engages both towns to work together and build toward the goal of having a full shared HR Department.

Methodology

Interviews with key personnel were conducted;

- East Longmeadow - Town Administrator, Town Accountant, and Benefit Administrator
- Ludlow – Town Administrator and Treasurer



In addition to the interviews, a review of the individual towns existing policies and procedures were performed. Lastly, information was gathered from other communities that have an existing internal HR Department to compare with East Longmeadow and Ludlow, with neither having a centralized HR Department.

Town of Ludlow

Population: 21,103 (2010 U.S. Census)



Human Resources Structure

The town of Ludlow has approximately 750 full-time and part-time employees. This includes approximately 250 full-time and part-time town employees and approximately 500 full-time and part-time school employees. There are approximately 300 retirees. There is no designated/systematic HR department to fully and effectively carry out core HR policies, systems and services. HR duties are relied upon individual department heads and their boards as well as the Treasurer and Town Accountant to be responsible and accountable for planning, establishing, overseeing and coordinating specific HR functions to the best of their capabilities. The majority of the HR roles are completed by individual departments but administrated by the Town Treasurer's office which is made up of 1 elected full-time Treasurer; 1 full-time Assistant Treasurer; and 2 full-time Office Assistants. The Accounting Department participates in payroll and tracking of leave. The staff makeup of the Accounting Department is comprised of 1 full-time Accountant and 2 full-time staff. **Table 1** gives a clearer understanding of which HR function is managed by whom (See **Table 1** on page 8).

The responsibilities of the individual departments and boards of those departments include but are not limited to:

- Recruitment of new employees
- Development of job descriptions
- Review pay and classification plan calculations and send to Treasurer for process
- Administration of collective bargaining agreements and personnel policies
- Comply with federal and state employment laws overseen by Town Administrator
- Track leave and send to Accounting Department
- Unemployment verified by departments and sent to Treasurer

The Town Treasurer's Department is responsible for the administration of the following HR functions (but not limited to) with dependency on individual departments to verify and/or provide information:

- Payroll processing in conjunction with the Accounting Department
- New hire processing and orientation
- Administration of the pay and classification plan
- Maintenance of confidential personnel files for town and school employees
- Administration and management of benefit programs
- Pre-employment physical for Town Employees
- I-9 Verification
- Administration and tracking leave of town employees after being verified by individual departments
- Unemployment with verification from the departments

The Town Accounting Department is responsible for the following HR function but is not limited to:

- Tracking of leave for town employees; managed by departments then sent to Accounting Department
- Payroll in conjunction with the Treasurer's Office

The Town Selectmen are responsible for the following HR function but not limited to:

- Administration and management of Workers Compensation.

Based on this structure, it can be perceived that the Treasurer's office acts as the Human Resource Department for the town as it coordinates and oversees most HR duties but works closely with all other departments. One important factor to point out is that the Treasurer's office has the responsibility of overseeing and coordinating the employee benefits program but there is no designated benefits manager listed on staff. Another important factor to show is that the Board of Selectmen administers and manages the workers compensation program. The benefits program and the workers compensation program are two delicate programs with complex laws and regulations, which should be overseen by someone that is properly trained; will assure compliance; and is kept up-to-date with current requirements to insure that town employees have the best full-use of the program.



Town of East Longmeadow

Population: 15,720 (2010 U.S. Census)



Human Resources Structure

The Town of East Longmeadow has approximately 630 full-time and part-time employees. This includes 130 full-time and part-time town employees and 500 full-time and part-time school employees. There are 317 retirees within the town. There is no designated/systematic HR department to fully and effectively carry out core HR policies, systems and services. HR duties are relied upon individual department heads and their boards. The Town Accountant, the Benefits Administrator Manager, and the individual departments are responsible and accountable for planning, establishing, overseeing and coordinating specific HR functions to the best of their capabilities. The Accounting Department is made up of 3 full-time employees, including the Town Accountant. **Table 1** gives a clearer description of which HR function is managed by whom (See **Table 1** on page 8).

The responsibilities of the individual departments and boards of those departments include but are not limited to:

- Recruitment of new employees
- Development of Job descriptions
- New hire processing and orientation
- Comply with federal and state employment laws with help from the Town Administrator
- Tracking of Leave except for FMLA
- Pre-employment Physical for Town Employees
- Maintenance of confidential personnel files for town
- CORI for Town Employees

The Town Accounting Department is responsible for the following HR functions but is not limited to:

- Review pay and classification plan calculations
- Administration and management of Workers Compensation in conjunction with the Town Administrator
- Payroll for Town
- I-9 Verification
- Unemployment

The Town Benefits Administrator Manager's responsibilities include:

- Administration of collective bargaining agreements
- Tracking of FMLA
- Administration and management of benefit programs

The Town Accountant and the Benefits Administrator Manager tag teams most of the HR functions and work closely with individual department heads to complete use of the programs. It is acknowledged that the Town Accountant Department is small with only 3 full-time employees that are charged to complete many tasks with high expectations. The Benefits Administrator Manager works alone but it is recognized that the town has proposed a part-time clerical worker to assist the Benefits Administrator Manager and should begin by fall 2013.



HR Comparables



With the current HR structure within the Towns of Ludlow and East Longmeadow in consideration, information was gathered from other towns similar in population size that already have a centralized HR department providing HR services for their respective town and school departments

(see **Table 1** below). The municipalities of Burlington, Northampton, and Longmeadow are compared. Keep in mind that these municipalities are not sharing HR resources but do have one centralized department within its government structure.

Table 1:

	East Longmeadow (POP: 15,720)	Ludlow (POP: 21,103)	Northampton (POP: 28,549)	Longmeadow (POP: 15,784)	Burlington (POP: 24,498)
Staff of HR Dept.	N/A	N/A	5FT	3FT & 2PT	2FT & 1PT
Payroll Town	A	T	AD	HR	T
Payroll School	A & SD	T & A	AD	HR	S
Benefits Health	BAM	T	HR	HR	T
Insurance (life, dental)	A & BAM	T	HR	HR	T
Deferred Comp. 457 Plan	A & BAM	T	HR	HR	T
Deferred Comp – 403B Plan	A & BAM	T	HR	HR	T
Workers Compensation	A & TA	SM	HR	HR	HR
Central Personnel Files Town	D	T	HR	HR	HR
Central Personnel Files School	S	T	HR	HR	HR
Tracking of Leave Town	D; BAM does FMLA	*	HR	D	HR
Tracking of Leave School	S	S	HR	HR	HR
Unemployment	A	@	HR	HR	HR
Calculating Pay Scales Town	A	@	HR	HR	HR
CORI Town Employees	D	N/A	HR	HR	HR
CORI School Employees	S	S	HR	S	HR
CORI School Interns/Volunteers	S	S	HR	S	HR
Conditional Employment Offers	D	D	D	HR	D
I-9 Verification	A	T	HR	HR	HR
Pre-employ. Physical Town	D	T	HR	HR	HR
Pre-employ. Phys. School	S	S	HR	HR	HR
Collective Bargaining Agreements	BAM	D	HR	HR	HR

Index: HR = Human Resources Dept.; S = School Dept.; SM = Selectmen; T = Treasurer; A = Accounting; AD = Town Auditor; D = Individual Departments; * = managed by departments but sent to Accounting for processing; @ = managed by departments but sent to Treasurer for processing; BAM = Benefits Admin. Manager; TA = Town Administrator; N/A = Not Applicable

Burlington, MA - There are approximately 1,200 employees and retirees reported within the Town of Burlington. The town has a centralized Human Resources Department with 1 full-time Human Resources Director; 1 full-time Human Resources Coordinator; and 1 part-time Human Resources Clerk. On the contrary, not only does Burlington have an HR department with staff dedicated to complete the majority of HR functions, additional staffs in the Treasurer/Collector's Office are available and dedicated with completing other HR functions such as payroll as well as benefit duties that include health, life, disability, dental, deferred compensation, tax shelter, and pension. The staff make-up of the Treasure/Collector's office is comprised of 1 elected full-time Treasurer/Collector; 1 full-time Assistant Tax Collector; 1 full-time Benefits Administrator; 4 full-time Principal Clerks; 2 full-time Senior Clerks; and 2 part-time Senior Clerks.

- *HR Department staff make-up:*
 - 1 full-time Human Resources Director
 - 1 full-time Human Resources Coordinator
 - 1 part-time Human Resources Clerk
- *2013 Budget for HR Department:*

2 Full-Time	104,573
1 Part-Time	\$7,500
Projected Benefit Cost	\$26,143
Expenses	\$1,500
TOTAL	\$139.716

Northampton, MA – There are approximately 1,200 full-time and part-time employees as well as approximately 550 retirees reported within the Town of Northampton. There are a total of 5 full-time employees. This includes 1 HR Director; 1 Benefits Specialist; 1 Employment Specialist; 1 NPS Payroll Coordinator; and 1 HR Assistant. The HR Department in Northampton covers all core HR functions minus the payroll for City and School employees which are done by other dedicated staff through a collective effort by each department but coordinated by the Town Auditor.

- *Human Resources Department staff make up:*
 - 1 full-time Human Resources Director
 - 1 full-time Benefits Specialist
 - 1 full-time Employment Specialist

- 1 full-time NPS Payroll Coordinator
- 1 full-time HR Assistant

➤ *2013 Budget for HR Department:*

5 Full-Time	\$196,000
Projected Benefit Cost	\$49,000
Expenses	\$4,000
TOTAL	\$249,000

Longmeadow, MA – There are approximately 900 full-time and part-time employees in Longmeadow, including approximately 350 retirees. Unlike the HR Departments reported within the other two towns, the HR Department at Longmeadow serves all of the Town's Departments including the School Department. The staffs that make up the HR Department in Longmeadow are 3 full-time and 2 part-time employees. This includes a Human Resource Manager; an Assistant Human Resource Manager; a Benefits Administrator; a Human Resource Specialist; and a Human Resource Assistant.

➤ *Human Resources Department staff make up:*

- 1 Human Resources Manager
- 1 Assistant Human Resources Manager
- 1 Benefits Administrator
- 1 Human Resource Specialist
- 1 Human Resource Assistant

➤ *2013 Budget for HR Department:*

Salary	\$196,123
Projected Benefit Cost	\$49,030
Expenses	\$7,200
TOTAL	\$252,353

Proposed Shared HR Services

It is no secret that employees' of both towns are being held to high standards where they are expected to produce what they do with a small amount of resources available. Having an HR Department would not only allow municipal departments to focus on their duties outside of the HR roles, it makes available trained professionals to solely focus on and coordinate the HR program which decreases risk of legal pitfalls and promotes consistency for town employees. Having a shared HR program between municipalities would reduce the cost to have such services available for their employees.



Upon the analysis of having the Towns of East Longmeadow and Ludlow to share a Human Resource Department, it is conceivable that this can be achieved, but in transition phases over a period of time. As you can see in the comparables reported previously, to have a full functioning HR Department in general can be rather costly to initiate at once. This initiative is a planning and development process that requires small steps for the shared HR Department to grow in the pace of each of the communities needs. There will be obstacles and nuances to work out before expansion and full implementation including overhead costs, oversight, capacity, time management, etc. With this, it is suggested to begin with sharing a person to carry out one or possibly two HR functions; and expanding the services and departments as the needs as well as the demands are more clearly identified.

Shared Benefits Manager

After analyzing the HR structure of both communities, one core HR function clearly stands out and which both Ludlow and East Longmeadow would most immediately benefit from is sharing the benefits program. Managing a town is a business and the Benefits Manager position is very important to any business as employee benefits play an imperative role in the lives of employees as well as their families. Benefit management is an important part of the human resource work and something any business should definitely be knowledgeable about. A skillful Benefits Manager analyzes how various employee benefits affect employee retention, loyalty and performance, as well as costs to the client for benefit packages. Moreover, the HR benefits manager implements benefit plans for current employees and to job candidates. Lastly, a good

benefits program which is current and administered equitably creates a positive work environment and minimizes future potential personnel issues.

East Longmeadow currently has a full-time Benefits Administrator Manager who is included in the budget under the Board of Selectmen's Office. This person has served as the Benefits Administrator since 2007. Currently, this person coordinates the town's health benefits program including health and dental insurance; deferred compensation 457 plan; deferred



compensation 403B plan; and the tracking of family medical leave. The Benefits Administrator Manager works closely with other departments including the Town Accountant to keep up with making the program effective. There is an existing proposal to include a part-time Clerical staff to assist the Benefits Administrator Manager which could be in place by the fall of 2013. This person is also included in the budget under the town's Board of Selectmen's Office.

East Longmeadow's current approximate budget for their Benefits Manager from Board of Selectmen's Office:

Full-Time Benefits Manager	\$51,589
Part-Time Assistant (proposed)	\$23,000
Projected Benefit Cost	\$18,647
Expenses	unknown
TOTAL	\$87,486

In Ludlow the Benefits program is administered by the Treasurer and the cost is included in the Treasurer Departments budget. The Treasurer's Department oversees and coordinates the benefits health program; life and dental insurance; deferred compensation 457 plan; and deferred compensation 403B plan. These functions are being coordinated along with the many other responsibilities the Treasurer's office is expected to complete. There is no designated trained Benefits Manager to focus solely on the benefits program.

Looking back and Comparing Costs to have Full HR Department

Reflecting from the three comparables reported earlier, you'll recognize in **Chart 1** below an approximate cost of those communities to have a full functioning HR Department.

Chart 1

Community	Population	# Employees	HR Budget
Burlington	24,498	1,200	\$139,716
Longmeadow	15,784	1,250	\$241,353
Northampton	28,549	1,200	\$249,000

Chart 2

Community	Population	# Employees	HR Budget
East Longmeadow	15,720	1,130	\$0
Ludlow	21,103	750	\$0

Comparing **Chart 1** with East Longmeadow and Ludlow that are displayed on **Chart 2**, clearly the representatives and individual departments at East Longmeadow and Ludlow are doing much more with less compared to other communities who have designated skilled HR professionals to carry out the HR functions. These comparables should give an idea of what East Longmeadow and Ludlow would spend to have a full running HR department on their own. Realizing the budget constraints in both municipalities, this may not be feasible to do in entirety at the present time.

Options to Move Forward

Scenario 1: Approximate projected budget for a proposed shared Benefits Manager and shared Assistant:

- This scenario anticipates two-full time employees; a Benefits Manager and an Assistant. It also includes the benefit costs for these full-time positions. The employees benefit costs were identified by a projected 25% increase of the overall salary. A total of \$106,586 is the projected shared cost between both municipalities



Full-Time Benefits Manager	\$52,589
Full-Time Assistant	\$30,000
Benefit Cost for 2 full-time	\$20,647
Expenses	\$3,350
TOTAL	\$106,586

The chart below is the projected cost for each municipality. These costs were determined by factoring in the towns individual Equalized Evaluations (EQV) of the 2012 Department of Revenues EQV report.

East Longmeadow	Ludlow
\$52,617	\$53,969

Scenario 2: Alternative – approximate budget for a proposed shared Benefits Manager with part-time shared assistant:

- This scenario reports 1 full-time and 1 part-time position; a Benefits Manager and a part-time assistant. The employees benefit costs were identified by a projected 25% increase of the overall salary. This option is \$7,500 less than scenario 1 with the projected overall cost totaling \$99,086.

Full-Time Benefits Manager	\$52,589
Part-Time Assistant	\$24,000
Projected Benefit Cost	\$19,147
Expenses	\$3,350
TOTAL	\$99,086

The chart below is the anticipated projected cost for each municipality. These costs were determined by factoring in the towns individual Equalized Evaluations (EQV) of the 2012 Department of Revenues EQV report.

East Longmeadow	Ludlow
\$48,915	\$50,171

Scenario 3: Each community develops its own in-house HR Department and/or Benefits Manager position:

- **East Longmeadow** is currently growing its HR capabilities. The town has a full-time Benefits Manager that has been in this position for seven years. There is a proposal in their budget to have a part-time assistant that will work with the Benefits Manager. This is a budget already put in place by the town that includes a new position of a part-

time assistant. Over a period of time, East Longmeadow may consider expanding the HR Department by turning the part-time assistant to a full-time and include an HR Manager/Director, and an HR Specialist to meet the towns' full HR needs. Below is the projected cost for East Longmeadow to expand its HR staff that includes a part-time assistant and an HR Project Manager.

East Longmeadow	HR Budget
Full-Time Benefits Specialist	\$51,589
Part-Time Assistant (proposed)	\$23,000
HR Project Manager	\$58,000
Projected Benefit Cost	\$33,147.25
Expenses	unknown
Estimated TOTAL	\$165,736.25

- As **Ludlow** moves forward with their interest in beginning an HR Department, Ludlow is looking at the same projected cost as East Longmeadow beginning with the Benefits Manager at an estimated cost of \$64,486. This is not including additional expenses.

Ludlow	HR Budget
Full-Time Benefits Specialist	\$51,589
Projected Benefits Cost	\$12,897
Estimated TOTAL	\$64,486

Looking back at the three scenarios presented, a cost savings for East Longmeadow is realized through the shared options of scenarios 1 and 2; projecting a savings of roughly \$35,000 (see chart on next page). Scenario 3 does not have a cost savings opportunity compared to the other scenarios. On the other hand, Scenario 3 gives a projected amount of what it would cost to expand their HR staff if East Longmeadow decides to go with Scenario 3 and build an HR department within their community.

Ludlow would not immediately see a cost savings with any of the three scenarios. However, Ludlow does have an interest in building an HR department and a cost savings is realized with



scenarios 1 and 2 after understanding what the total cost would be, projected in scenario 3, just to invest in its own Benefits Manager and an Assistant. Ludlow's projected cost savings to share these positions would be roughly \$50,000 (see chart below).

Overall, if municipalities go with either scenarios presented, there is no doubt that there will be an increase of assurance of compliance and consistency; employee retention, loyalty and increase in performance; the availability of a comprehensive program in place for employees that provides information and support; and minimal vulnerability to legal pitfalls and inconsistencies.

The chart below displays the projected cost savings amount by scenario for sharing the Benefits Manager:

Town	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
East Longmeadow	\$34,869	\$38,571	\$0.00
Ludlow	\$52,617	\$48,915	\$0.00

OVERVIEW

The Towns of East Longmeadow and Ludlow have had a long desired ambition to build and expand an HR Department within their individual communities. With budget constraints realized within both towns, we anticipate that sharing HR services would not only fulfill that desire, but save cost to have such services available for its employees. After analyzing the current HR structure in both communities, we anticipate that the best place to start building a Shared HR Department is by beginning with sharing a Benefits Manager and an Assistant. East Longmeadow has an existing well established Benefits Manager professional and Ludlow does not. It is foreseen that East Longmeadow would serve as the host community providing shared HR services beginning with their Benefits Manager. The fairest cost for each community to share the service was determined by totaling the Department of Revenue's 2012 EQV report. East Longmeadow will immediately see a cost savings of roughly \$35,000 from what they are currently spending.

Ludlow would not see an immediate cost savings per se, however, a cost savings is recognized as Ludlow explores their ambition of beginning to create an HR Department within their town and factor in how much they will spend on a benefits manager alone. It is projected that a total cost savings for Ludlow, if they were to share this service with East Longmeadow, would be roughly \$50,000. In addition to having a Benefits Manager servicing Ludlow, productivity will increase in the Treasurer's office as the burden will reduce on the Town Treasurer who currently administers the Benefits Program, allowing the Treasurer to place more emphasis on the other Treasurer duties. Lastly, Ludlow would reduce their vulnerability to any legal pitfalls

and inconsistencies that can potentially come about and at the same time create a positive working experience for their employees.

By beginning with sharing the Benefits Manager as a pilot to growing toward having a full shared HR department as time progresses, it will allow the opportunity to determine any unforeseen issues or other consequences that may later arise. Although short-term costs are realized in this method, this pilot can save time and resources in the long-run.



Realizing the PRO's and CON's

PROS:

- Assurance of compliance and consistency.
 - There are required complex mandates that have to be met for employees when it comes to workers compensation, deferred compensation, health benefits, life insurance (health and dental), unemployment, disability laws, leave benefits, family and medical leave, etc. Having a trained and dedicated shared Benefits Manager will assure that these mandates are being met.
- Employee retention, loyalty and increase in performance.
 - Benefits play an imperative role in the lives of employees as well as their families. A skillful Benefits Manager analyzes how various employee benefits affect employee retention, loyalty and performance, as well as costs to the client for benefit packages.
- The availability of a comprehensive program in place for employees that provides information and support.
 - Having a trained Benefits Manager on staff to oversee and administer the program will strengthen the service delivery and assure the availability of a working Benefits program to employees.
- Cost savings for both municipalities as they share the cost of this important service for employees.
 - Ludlow would see a cost savings of approximately \$35,000 and East Longmeadow would see a cost savings of roughly \$50,000 beginning with sharing a Benefits Manager and an Assistant as they venture on a joint effort of establishing a shared HR department.

- Minimal vulnerability to legal pitfalls and inconsistencies.
 - A good benefits program which is current and administered equitably creates a positive work environment and minimizes future potential personnel issues.
- An opportunity for both communities to build a productive relationship and grow a model of sharing an HR department that's relatively new in the State of MA and possibly within the country. **(Note: Info. was not located stating that this model is occurring elsewhere).**

CONS:

There are some instances that need to be looked at and discussed between both communities in order to make the shared HR services work. The following are occurrences that should be reviewed and decided upon collectively:

- **Logistics:**
 - The benefit packages at both municipalities are different from one another as far as benefits insurance companies, and costs. A system would have to be put into place to insure employee benefits are properly accounted for by community. HR staff will have a steep learning curve and more expansive base upon which to track benefits and programs.
- **Access:**
 - Since East Longmeadow would essentially be sharing their Benefits Manager, would employees from Ludlow have to travel to East Longmeadow when they need to meet with the Benefits Manager? Or should the Benefits Manager setup office hours at Ludlow to be available for municipal employees within Ludlow? Are there unforeseen costs to that?
 - If the Benefits Manager or the Assistant has to travel to Ludlow, the town would have to decide about providing the materials and space necessary for the Benefits Manager to work. The cost for mileage and office equipment should also be worked out if travelling between towns is a factor.
- **Oversight:**
 - As East Longmeadow serves as the host and sharing the cost with Ludlow, the shared Benefits Manager would be an employee of East Longmeadow therefore making the town responsible for administering the benefits of the shared employee/s. However, would Ludlow have input in the establishment of the shared employee benefits as well as the performance evaluation of the shared employees?

Next Steps

Establishing a planning committee to oversee this process is encouraged as it will allow the opportunity to have transparency and guidance from both municipalities in this joint effort of building a shared HR Department.

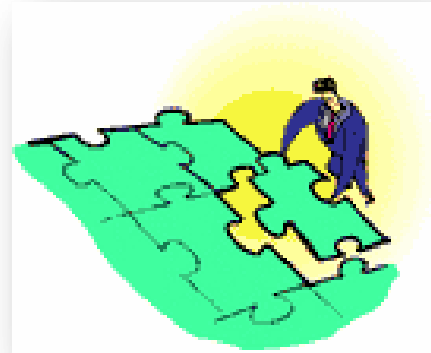
Inter-municipal Agreements (IMA) are the most commonly used form of contracts in sharing services and are often used to create mutual aid agreements, shared service agreements, and agreements between municipalities and host agencies. The type of IMA that is best suited for this type of service venture would be a joint service agreement. These are agreements between two or more municipalities to join forces to plan, finance and/or deliver a service within the boundaries of all participating communities. A joint service agreement gives local governments the broad flexibility to tailor the agreement to reflect the unique needs of the service provided.

The Board of Selectmen of the individual towns should approve if whether or not they want to move forward in sharing the service before getting into an IMA. Once the decision to enter into an IMA is made, the participating municipalities must negotiate its terms and conditions. This could be done through the planning committee. This step is critical to creating a legally sound agreement that is beneficial to all participants. Thus, municipal leaders should anticipate the potential problems that could arise in the future and incorporate provisions addressing such issues into the agreement accordingly. Seeking legal counsel is recommended to review an agreement before executing.



Conclusion

After recognizing the need to have an HR department and after exploring the possibility of sharing the HR services between both municipalities, it has been determined that doing so can be done and should benefit both East Longmeadow and Ludlow.



Given the complex responsibilities of HR functions, it is recommended that both towns start small with a pilot program and build. Expansion of the East Longmeadow Benefits Manager services to assist Ludlow seems to be the most logical starting point. Managing a town is a business and it is important to have a trained HR professional skilled in the area of managing benefits whose sole responsibility would be to coordinate and oversee the town's benefits program and other programs important to employees to assure total compliance and program consistency. In turn, both communities should experience financial cost savings through shared services and would have the ability to attract, motivate, and retain talent. This effort would reduce having any legal pitfalls and inconsistencies. There are required complex mandates that have to be met for employees when it comes to workers compensation, deferred compensation, health benefits, life insurance (health and dental), unemployment, disability laws, leave benefits, family and medical leave, etc. Having a trained and dedicated shared Benefits Manager for both municipalities will assure that these mandates are being met while at the same time, reducing the cost for both towns to have this service, and assuring happiness to their employees. We strongly encourage for an advisory planning committee to be formed assisting with overseeing this process of shared services model to assure transparency and guidance throughout the development.