Final Report

Recruitment and Retention Policies and Procedures with a DEI Assessment

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Introduction

The Town of Dedham strives to be an employer of choice. The Town is committed to building a positive and equitable work environment for all and wants to build on its efforts to improve its approach to recruitment, retention, and promotion to reach the objective of having a workforce, boards, committees, and commissions that reflect a range of diverse perspectives and backgrounds.

In 2022, the Town was awarded a Commonwealth of Massachusetts Community Compact Grant to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion goals across the Town's workforce. In 2023, the Select Board identified workforce diversity as an important goal for the Town, and the Town Manager prioritized employee diversity and inclusion.

The Town contracted the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston) to help identify practices that contribute to equity and inclusion as well as barriers that challenge diverse recruitment and fair access to opportunities for the Town's workforce and boards, commissions, and committees.

The Town requested recommendations to address inequities within Town government and guidance to help the Town of Dedham to become an "employer of choice" with an inclusive workplace where everyone feels welcome.

The UMass Boston team is jointly led and staffed by the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management and Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy. Both Centers are units of the McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies. The team began working in October 2022 and completed data collection and analysis in August 2024. Working to comprehensively examine current conditions and needs related to advancing the Town's goal, the UMass Boston team designed and implemented an in-depth study to generate not only recommendations but also to create a data tool to help measure progress and identify setbacks over time.

Included in the report are findings and recommendations, a brief snapshot of the geographic, demographic, and governance features of the Town, and an overview of the methods used in this study. The appendices provide summaries of data collected, among other resources utilized in the project.

Community Overview

Located in Norfolk County, Massachusetts, the Town of Dedham has a rich history dating back to its settlement in 1635. Originally established to alleviate population pressures in surrounding areas, Dedham became a thriving hub of industry and commerce in its early years. The Town's first mill, constructed in 1642 on the Charles River, marked the start of a century-long period of industrial growth, with leather, paper, cotton, wool, and other mills serving as an important aspect of the economy.

The industrial boom spurred economic prosperity and also catalyzed a housing surge as workers came to the area, leading to the establishment of churches, shops, and other businesses. In 1793, Dedham became the county seat of Norfolk County. With three designated historic districts and a centuries-long commitment to education, Dedham has an enduring sense of history and dedication to providing quality public education. Categorized as a Mature Suburban Town by the Metropolitan Area Panning Council (MAPC), Dedham is largely characterized by owner-occupied single-family homes on lots less than one acre. While new growth primarily takes the form of infill and some redevelopment, the Town's population remains relatively stable. Dedham has grown into a diverse community of approximately 25,365 residents (2020 U.S. Census).

Governance Structure

The Town of Dedham continues to uphold its legacy of civic pride and educational excellence. Daily Town operations are the responsibility of the Town Manager, who is both appointed by and reports to the Select Board. The Select Board, composed of five members elected for 3-year terms, serves as the executive branch of Town government. Legislative responsibilities belong to the Representative Town Meeting, an assembly of 273 members elected from seven precincts for terms of one to three years. Additional governance is provided through a variety of volunteer, appointed, and elected committees, boards, and commissions. Local education policy and spending are determined by the School Committee, which consists of seven members elected for 3-year terms.

Population

In 2010, the U.S. Census measured the Town population at 24,729 people. Ten years later, the 2020 Census measured the Town population at 25,364 people, a roughly 2.5% increase. In 2010, the four largest population groups were White (85.1%), Hispanic/Latino (5.5%), Black (5.1%), and Asian (2.6%). In 2020, the four largest population groups were White (81.3%), Hispanic/Latino (7.6%), Black (6.0%), and Asian (2.3%). The three largest ancestry groups are European: Irish (29%), Italian (14%), and English (11%). Most residents are U.S. citizens (95%); 14% of residents were born outside of the United States.

Demographic changes in the Town population generally reflect changes in the larger population of Norfolk County. Between 2010 and 2020, Norfolk County saw the following changes in population groups: White (-7.0%), Black (+13.7%), Asian (+45.2%), and Hispanic/Latino (+41.4%). Currently, 19.2% of Norfolk County residents were born outside of the United States.

In early 2024, Boston Indicators, a nonpartisan research center at the Boston Foundation, published a report on immigration in the greater Boston region. In 2020, Boston's immigrant population reached 30% but dropped slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Immigrants' country of origin has shifted significantly over the past few decades. In 1990, the top ten countries of origin were a mix of countries from Europe, Central/Latin America, and Asia. By 2021, the immigrant population had shifted such that the top ten countries of origin did not include any European countries. According to the Boston Indicators' 2024 *Global Greater Boston: Immigrants in a Changing Region* report, the top five immigrant groups in the Town of Dedham are Russian, Brazilian, Italian, Haitian, and Albanian.

Currently Dedham residents are nearly equally split by gender as 53% are female and 47% male. The median age is 44 years old and 21% of residents are 65 years or older. The rate of reported disability is 10.9%. The size of the average family in Dedham is 2.99 people, slightly less than the average family size of 3.14 people in Norfolk County. Nearly half (49.6%) of Dedham households are headed by a married couple; another 45.1% are headed by either a male or female with no associated spouse.

Dedham is a well-educated community; 56% of residents over 18 years of age have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. English is the primary language of most Dedham residents. Nearly one in five residents (17%) speak a different language at home, with Spanish being the most common language other than English. The median income is $118,000 and the homeownership rate is 70.5%. The median property values are slightly over $600,000; the median gross rent is $2,006 per month. Dedham has low unemployment (2.9%) and relatively low poverty rate (4.1%).

Methods

Guiding Principles
The guiding principles for the UMass Boston team focused on obtaining diverse points of view to the greatest extent possible; refraining from passing judgments on past occurrences; and preparing pragmatic recommendations adaptable over time. The team also employed principles from its Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism Practice which may be found in the appendices.

Collaborative Approach
The UMass Boston team worked with two groups of individuals from the Town of Dedham who contributed in different capacities to support the project. The Town employees who served as members of the *Project Advisory Team* offered general guidance throughout the entire duration of the project; members of the *Workforce Data Dashboard Working Group* provided insights and suggestions as the dashboard was developed over a several-month period. Members of both teams are listed in the appendices.

Data Sources
The team collected data from a wide range of data sources in preparing recommendations for this report. These sources include:

- Employee survey
- Employee interviews
- Supplemental interviews with members of boards, commissions, and committees
- Workforce data analysis and *Workforce Data Dashboard* development process
- Document analysis [Town organizational chart, Town Charter, Human Resources policies, Collective Bargaining Agreements, Master Plan, Budget, etc.]
- Review of best practices in the field including equity and workforce audits and reports from other municipalities and settings

For both the employee survey and interview efforts, multiple outreach methods and rounds were conducted to garner as much participation as possible. Additional methodological details regarding the survey, interviews, town documents analyzed, and *Workforce Data Dashboard* may be found in the appendices.

Workforce Data Dashboard
In response to the UMass Boston team's identified need for ongoing management and analysis of demographic data about the Town's workforce, the UMass Boston team developed a *Workforce Data Dashboard*. The dashboard, designed to be user-friendly and easily updatable, was built using Equal Employment Opportunity data in combination with role information provided by the Department of Human Resources. Additional details about dashboard developed are available in the appendices.

Data Analysis and Report Preparation
The UMass Boston team engaged in several phases of data analysis and report preparation. The initial data analysis phase focused on analyzing quantitative and qualitative (open response) findings from the Spring 2023 employee survey, which was made available to all employees in electronic and paper format. The team released aggregate quantitative data and a summary of qualitative responses from the survey on the Town's website in July and November 2023. Following interview analysis completed in June 2024, the team began to coalesce all data utilized in the study to develop preliminary findings and recommendations which served as the basis for the final findings and recommendations issued in this report.

Findings and Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed to address the study's primary aims: to help guide the Town in building a positive and equitable work environment for all employees reflecting a range of diverse perspectives and backgrounds, which are essential to advancing broader diversity equity, inclusion, and anti-racism goals of the Town in both the short- and long-term. The recommendations also address the identified need for boards, commissions, and committees to reflect the demographic diversity of the Town's population and operate in an equitable and inclusive manner.

The following findings and recommendations are intended to guide the Town in its decision-making process in the development of policies and procedures, and strategic planning in the short-, medium-, and long-term. The discussion of each finding and recommendation is a brief summary of the information coalesced from interviews and data collected throughout the project, and substantiation and backup data are attached in the Appendices of this report.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Statements

Finding 1: The Town's statements related to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and equal opportunity are not as comprehensive nor as publicized as they could be.

Recommendation 1: Create a universal, comprehensive statement that addresses diversity, equity, anti-racism, inclusion, and equal opportunity. The statement should articulate the Town's commitment to building a positive and equitable work environment for all. The statement should be displayed prominently on the Town's employment web page(s) and in all recruitment materials, as well as referenced in position advertisements.

Discussion: Interviews with employees and board, commission, and committee members indicated the need for clear and strong statements about the Town's commitment to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Overall, Town leadership was seen as taking steps to advance DEI goals yet there was also a sense that there should be stronger leadership with clarity of intentions and goals. The process of developing a statement will provide the Town an opportunity to clarify such intentions and goals so that they may be accessed by the Town's workforce, boards, commissions, and committees, and Town residents.

Workforce Demographics

Finding 1: When compared to Dedham's population, there is limited representation of diverse racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, linguistic, varied abilities, and veteran status backgrounds across the workforce. Based on available demographic data the Town's workforce overall is not diverse across these identities and significantly so in some departments.

Recommendation 1: Utilize the newly created *Workforce Data Dashboard* to identify current demographics of the workforce and compare to current demographics of the Town population; modify the voluntary, self-identified form for job applicants and employees to be more inclusive and encourage higher rates of completion.

Discussion: Quantitative survey findings noted a lack of demographic similarity between the Town's population and the Town's workforce and indicated the need for enhancing practices in recruitment and hiring to improve hiring to better represent the demographic diversity of the Town. Equal Employment

Opportunity (EEO) data collected from the Town identified that the Town has limited racial/ethnic diversity information about the Town's workforce and highlighted the limitation of current capacity to analyze the demographic composition of the workforce. Data gaps exist resulting in the lack of data on cultural, linguistic backgrounds, gender identification. The Town would benefit from modifications to its current voluntary, self-identification data form that could be used for current and new employees which should include additional gender categories and updated racial/ethnic categories. Since the beginning of the UMass Boston project, the Town has implemented the recruitment module within its software which includes a voluntary self-identification of EEO data and enhanced gender identity categories.

Finding 2: Civil Service requirements make recruitment of diverse candidates challenging.

Recommendation 2: Continue efforts that began with an agreement with the police union to remove the Town from the Commonwealth's Civil Service system.

Discussion: Several employees noted that Civil Service requirements make it difficult to achieve a diverse applicant pool, particularly in terms of race, gender and ethnic identity, for positions in the Dedham Police Department (DPD). As confirmed by the *Workforce Data Dashboard*, there is limited racial and ethnic diversity in the DPD and there are only a few female officers in the Department. A recent MOA (April 2024) has begun the process to remove the DPD from Civil Service Law. Many municipalities have faced these constraints and as a result have rescinded Civil Service adoption in recent years.

Language Capacity

Finding 1: The Town currently has limited capacity to address language barriers that can make it challenging for Town employees to effectively provide services and/or meet the needs of all residents.

Recommendation 1: Evaluate the various language needs in the Town, including American Sign Language, and pursue avenues for translation and interpretation assistance through existing employees, vendors, or a combination of both.

Discussion: Language access is essential to meeting the needs of the Town's population and having robust community engagement in local governance, a point raised during interviews with employees as well as board/commission/committee members. Many municipalities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are working to determine language needs in their communities and to identify internal and external resources to ensure adequate language access for residents. In addition to connecting with Dedham Public Schools on their approach to language access and services for the student population and their families, the Town may look to peer municipalities for ways to most effectively assess existing needs and identify the best approach to meeting language needs.

Recruitment Strategy

Finding 1: The Town lacks a consistent comprehensive recruitment strategy.

Recommendation 1: Using the *Workforce Data Dashboard*, the Town should review each department's demographic composition and compare its composition to the overall Town workforce and Town population, as well as the scope and methods of recruitment to achieve the goal of reaching underrepresented groups in the labor force with employment opportunities, including part-time, full-time,

and seasonal positions. The Town should include strategies to promote diversity in all its forms to be reflected in the Town's workforce.

Discussion: Both employee survey data and interviews indicate satisfaction with the Town's Human Resources Department. Additionally, there was specific appreciation for the efforts of the Human Resources Director to enhance recruitment efforts and take steps to provide more diverse candidate pools for positions across Town government, including seasonal and part-time opportunities. A comprehensive and strategic plan to identify the most effective approaches to ensuring that applicant pools are as diverse as possible, including but beyond racial and ethnic backgrounds, is needed.

Finding 2: Advertising and outreach to diverse populations are limited.

Recommendation 2: Continue efforts to share job postings with diverse entities including community colleges; trade organizations; career centers; social clubs; professional and/or affinity groups; places of worship; community leaders of color; vocational, career and adult learning institutions; and employment fairs. The Town may consider working to establish and/or strengthen relationships with the above entities through a variety of activities and/or initiatives that are geared to recruiting a diverse workforce.

Discussion: Survey and interview data indicate that some employees recognize recent improvements in recruiting and hiring processes; yet, at the same time, the need to expand efforts to reach diverse candidates was seen as important by many study participants. Some employees noted that it was particularly important to consider nontraditional approaches to advertising to reach younger populations, particularly through the use of social media and other modes of communication. It should be noted that the Town created and filled a Communications Director position in 2022 which has greatly increased the use of various methods of outreach.

Selection and Screening Process

Finding 1: The Town does not consistently apply a universal process for screening and selecting candidates.

Recommendation 1: Create a documented policy and process for screening applications and evaluating candidates based on best practices that achieves a review free from bias and discrimination and train hiring authorities, as necessary. Such a policy and process would help to provide fair assessment based on requisite skills and competencies in accordance with employment and disability laws and regulations.

Discussion: While there have been steps taken by the Human Resources Department to establish a standardized and universal process for reviewing, evaluating, and selecting candidates for interviews and appointments it would be beneficial to develop a clear policy with relevant procedures for use in all hiring process and with all Town departments. In recent months, the Town has adopted this recommendation and successfully bargained the impact of the new policy with Dedham's collective bargaining units which enables the policy to implement.

Onboarding Process

Finding 1: The Town does not follow a consistent standard onboarding process.

Recommendation 1: Develop a comprehensive onboarding process that not only brings on a new employee but also promotes a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Discussion: Qualitative survey findings suggest a need to improve the onboarding process. Employee interviews revealed that while there have been some improvements over the past year or two, there exists a general need to standardize and clarify the onboarding process so that it is more comprehensive. As noted above, the Town has recently purchased recruitment software which also includes the onboarding module which will allow new employees to complete the onboarding paperwork online, which will enhance the onboarding experience and provide for universal (standardized) approaches for onboarding, orientation and welcoming.

Workplace Environment and Climate

Finding 1: Some employees indicated they do not feel welcomed nor that they belong for reasons such as, but not limited to, not being from Dedham, gender identification, and race.

Recommendation 1a: As mentioned above (Onboarding Process), develop and adhere to a more comprehensive onboarding process.

Recommendation 1b: As mentioned below (Professional Development and Training), provide Respectful and Inclusive Workplace training for all employees and provide that training for all new employees within one year of hiring.

Recommendation 1c: Department heads and supervisors should be held accountable for setting the expectations for the workforce, monitoring the workplace, and identifying and addressing issues as they arise.

Discussion: Employee survey and interview data suggest that while many employees feel that they can bring their true and authentic selves to work, not all feel this way. Employee survey and interview data indicate that demographic changes in the workforce, including the increased hiring of individuals who do not reside in Dedham, have not been fully accepted across the workforce. Creating a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable workplace will require many actions on multiple levels, and recommendations 1a-1c as well as 3a-3c reflect key steps to take at this time.

Finding 2: The Town does not have an established mechanism or system to collect information about challenges and opportunities in the workplace.

Recommendation 2: Create a mechanism for employee feedback through department heads and supervisors, through union representatives, and directly with the Human Resources Department. The Town may wish to conduct an annual or bi-annual survey to track and measure employee feedback to be used to set administrative goals and priorities, perhaps using the UMass Boston-administered employee survey as a resource for future surveys.

Discussion: Based on employee interviews, there was a strong sense that one of the workforce strengths was dedicated coworkers and staff in the Town of Dedham. Employee quantitative survey findings suggested a need to address gaps in regular feedback for employees. Employee qualitative survey data addressed topics related to co-worker relations with an emphasis on fairness, respect, and conflict resolution with mixed results, indicating that there is room for improvement in all areas. Also, departmental isolation (silos) was identified as a challenge by some qualitative survey responses from employees.

Finding 3: The Town does not have a consistent or universal approach to addressing workplace conflict.

Recommendation 3a: Department heads and supervisors should be trained to recognize and handle multiple types of workplace conflict (see Professional Development and Training below).

Recommendation 3b: Department heads and supervisors should be held accountable for setting the expectations for the workforce, monitoring the workplace, and identifying and addressing issues as they arise (Recommendation 1c above).

Recommendation 3c: See Recommendation 2 above.

Discussion: Conflict resolution was identified as an area needing attention in both quantitative and qualitative survey findings. Employee quantitative survey data identified conflict resolution as a high priority improvement area.

Professional Development and Training

Finding 1: The Town does not have a structured training and workforce development program.

Recommendation 1: Develop a systematic training program for department heads, managers, and supervisors.

Recommendation 1a: The Town has planned management and supervisory training on "Managing a Respectful and Inclusive Workplace" included as part of this UMass Boston DEI project, which includes addressing issues related to equity, inclusion, unconscious bias, discrimination, and harassment.

Recommendation 1b: Build on the above recommendation (1a) by providing regular trainings for managers on a host of supervisor leadership topics which may include Communication, Managing Conflict, Coaching and Performance Management, and Effective Methods of Administering Human Resources Rules, Regulations, and Policies.

Discussion: Quantitative survey items highlighted employee interest in more growth and training opportunities and this interest was confirmed in employee interviews. Qualitative survey responses also emphasized the need for leadership/management training. Employee interviews suggested DEI trainings in particular as one training area needing attention and resources.

Finding 2: The Town does not have a comprehensive approach to professional development.

Recommendation 2a: Provide the "Managing a Respectful and Inclusive Workplace" training for all employees and board, commission, and committee members. (Note: The Town has adopted this recommendation and is determining funding.)

Recommendation 2b: Using the data from the UMass Boston-administered employee survey, develop an approach to providing professional development opportunities for all employees either internally or externally to address competency gaps, enhance current skills, and develop new professional skills.

Discussion: Employee survey and interview data emphasized the need for enhanced professional growth opportunities and resources, as indicated by the overall satisfaction score of less than 50% for both workplace growth and training items in the employee survey. In acknowledging the work that needs to be

done, in January 2023, the Town established a professional development committee which has already recommended development programs which have been established.

Workforce Data Dashboard

Finding 1: Maintain the *Workforce Data Dashboard* for its effective use.

Recommendation 1: Develop a *Workforce Data Dashboard* policy and procedure, as well as dedicate the necessary staff resources to maintain, develop, and enhance the effectiveness of the tool in analysis and making decisions about workforce policies and practices, both in the short- and long-term.

Discussion: With the *Workforce Data Dashboard* developed in this project, the Town has a tool to offer essential data points in an accessible manner that can be expanded over time. However, the Town will need to identify staffing and other resources for the tool to be used as fully and effectively as possible for the Town's goal to become an "employer of choice" to be fully realized.

Boards, Commissions, and Committees

Finding 1: The Town does not have a comprehensive, up-to-date listing of all board, commission, and committee members with email addresses.

Recommendation 1: Dedicate resources to create and maintain a listing of all board, commission, and committee members. The listing should be available on the Town's website.

Discussion: The Town has improved its collection and organization of board/commission/committee contact information which will enhance the Town's ability to communicate and be transparent.

Finding 2: The Town does not sufficiently advertise and recruit to fill vacancies on boards, commissions, and committees. Doing so could improve diversity in board/commission/committee membership.

Recommendation 2a: Develop a strategy and process, similar to job posting recommendations listed above, for broadly advertising the roles of boards, commissions, and committees and for using specific, strong, and focused outreach to diverse populations and entities across the Town when vacancies exist.

Recommendation 2b: The Town may wish to evaluate its policies regarding hybrid meetings with an intent to increase the potential for interest and ease of participation in serving on boards, commissions, and committees. The action could encourage resident participation in meetings and increase access to meetings.

Recommendation 2c: The Town may wish to consider regular communication across the Town through print, digital, and cable media, including potential collaboration with the school system through its communication channel(s). Communications should highlight the purpose, roles, and responsibilities of boards, commissions, and committees as a means of garnering interest across the Town on the need for and benefits of serving on a board, commission, or committee.

Discussion: Interviews with board/commission/committee members provided a wide disparity in perspectives on the extent to which Dedham is a welcoming place. In addition, members addressed the need to diversify boards/commissions/committees; to adapt meeting formats to increase accessibility and interactivity between entities; to identify opportunities to improve communication and engagement with

the community; and to increase training opportunities for board/commission/committee members. This study provided an initial exploration of DEI-related topics across local governance entities through a limited number of board/commission/committee member interviews, indicating that there is tremendous opportunity to expand upon the first step taken here.

Internal and External Communication

Finding 1: Communication gaps exist between and amongst managers and employees which impact the effectiveness of serving the public.

Recommendation 1: Continue and build on efforts in communication. With the hiring of a Director of Communications, the Town is working towards an improved approach to communications. Efforts should be made to improve internal communication with department managers with a focus on sharing information with staff as appropriate and in a timely manner and through appropriate (multiple) modalities.

Discussion: Interviews with employees and board/commission/committee members indicated a high level of satisfaction with the relatively recent creation of a Director of Communications position for the Town and the efforts of the Director to enhance communications activities. Interview data summaries contain specific ideas and suggestions for both internal and external communications efforts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report, and the recommendations contained herein, is to help the Town "build a positive and equitable work environment for all employees and to help ensure that the workforce reflects a range of diverse perspectives and backgrounds."

By retaining the services of UMass Boston to advance the diversity, equity, and inclusion priorities for the Town, Dedham has taken an important step in moving toward an evidenced-based, intentional manner. Grounded in data, evidenced findings, and carefully prepared recommendations contained herein, the Town is now equipped to develop, support, and implement its next steps.

The work conducted by the UMass Boston team, along with interactions with many employees, appointed and elected personnel and volunteers, revealed the Town is well-served by concerned, caring, committed, and engaged individuals. The Town is well-positioned and has a tremendous opportunity to draw upon the strengths of the workforce and the community in the effort to advance true diversity, equity, and inclusion goals both in the short- and the long-term.