



# WHAT WE HEARD

## Professional Municipal Administrators Municipal Education Program



October 2025



*“Education is the most powerful weapon  
which you can use to change the world.”*

**Nelson Mandela**

# WHAT WE HEARD

## Professional Municipal Administrators Municipal Education Program

### 04 Executive Summary

---

### 07 Review of Current Training

*Core Training Program*

*Advanced Training Program*

---

### 13 Jurisdictional Review

*Municipal Training Programs Across Canada*

---

### 17 Legislative Review

*Municipal Legislation Across Canada*

---

### 21 Statistical Review

*Data Sources*

*Employment Data*

*Wage Data*

---

### 27 Survey Results and Analysis

---

### 37 Stakeholders' Interview Report

---

### 47 Training Delivery Framework

---

### 57 Conclusion



# Executive Summary

As part of Professional Municipal Administrators' (PMA) research into the redevelopment and expansion of training programs for municipal staff, project proponents, including Strategic Steps Inc. (SSI), Pat Curran + Associates & RW Consulting have conducted a series of research tasks to learn more about the existing training capacity of the municipal sector and best next steps for administrators' professional development

To that end, proponents have created this What We Heard Report, outlining in detail the results of research tasks including:

- A review of current training offered by PMA.
- A jurisdictional review of municipal training across Canada.
- A legislative review of training where it exists in provincial legislation across the country.
- A statistical review of employment and salary data for municipal administrators in NL.
- A summary of the results of a survey deployed to municipal administrators and members of Council to ask their views on municipal training in the province.
- A summary of the results of a series of 26 structured interviews conducted with key partners in the municipal sector, including municipal administrators, government officials, municipal associations, educational institutions, and policy leaders.
- A list of the key study areas and topics, noted by PMA members and associates as being essential to any new training program put forward to NL's municipal administrators.

To begin, the current state of the sector, including demographics, legislation, employment statistics, and training is collected and presented to provide a baseline set of data for analysis.

From there, respondents to surveys and interviews were asked their views on the major challenges facing municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as their thoughts on training needs and gaps for municipal administrators. Respondents were also asked to share their perspectives on how training should be developed and delivered, and to identify the topics and concepts they believe are essential to ensure municipal administrators are equipped with every available tool to perform their critical roles effectively.

Across all data sources, respondents emphasized the need to modernize Newfoundland and Labrador's municipal training ecosystem. The major challenges identified were broadly related to capacity, compliance, and culture.

Municipalities of all sizes, especially small, one-or-two-person offices, have insufficient staff and financial capacity to meet growing legislative and operational expectations. Retention of staff is also a significant concern, with high turnover and growing burnout apparent across the sector.

Administrators are overloaded with regulatory compliance including Access to Information requests, new requirements in the Towns and Local Service Districts Act (TLSDA), and Code of Conduct processes, which, although essential, are complex and time-consuming tasks.



And finally, incivility and harassment have become significant barriers for municipal administrators in performing their daily tasks, with respondents noticing rising incivility in the sector from many sources, including staff, members of Council and the general public. A lack of role clarity and general misunderstandings of the roles of Councillors and Administrators leads to tension and mistrust, underlining the need for governance and role training.

In addition to the needs outlined above, larger towns and cities are seeking specialized training that reflects their complexity, in departmental roles like legal, accounting, and human resources. Large towns and cities are seeking leadership and governance support, above and beyond their compliance and operational duties.

Overall, the collected data indicates agreement on the need for a tiered, modular training framework, with streams for foundational onboarding for

new and small-town staff, role-specific modules for mid-career administrators, and advanced professional development streams for senior directors and CAOs. Participants emphasized flexible delivery, with in-person, hybrid, and self-paced options, as well as peer-mentorship opportunities, and the integration of practical tools, templates, and real-world examples. Some interviewees suggested the creation of a municipal certification based on a defined municipal skillset could encourage staff retention.

Collaboration with sector partners and educational institutions, including Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic, on training modules, delivery, and certification with flexible learning options, was noted as a potential path forward.

The future vision articulated across interviews is a PMA-led, partner-driven learning system, supported by government, municipal associations, community partners, and stakeholder, designed to foster retention, strengthen municipal resilience, and properly reflect the needs of the municipal professionals of Newfoundland and Labrador.





*“The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.”*

**Eleanor Roosevelt**

PMA's current training regimen consists of two municipal skills designations:

### **"Core" and "Advanced"**

Both sets of curricula include coursework, recommended reading, case studies, and quizzes. Overviews of the objectives of both programs are included in this section.

# REVIEW

## Current Training





# CORE TRAINING PROGRAM

The PMA Core Training Program focuses on the basic skills needed to operate in the municipal office environment. Concepts such as role clarity, working with elected officials, basic administration, assessment and tax, managing cash and finances, accounting, and the essentials of municipal planning, legislation, and regulations are the key focus. These modules are focused on imparting the skills required by a Clerk or other technical/financial officer of a municipality. Expanded descriptions of each module are included below.

## CORE MODULE

### 1



#### Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships (3Rs)

- ✓ Roles and responsibilities of Councillors and Administrators
- ✓ Relationship between Council and Administration
- ✓ Administrator's functions and statutory responsibilities
- ✓ Processes to be an effective Municipal Administrator
- ✓ General tax rules (business, property, poll, water, etc.) that municipalities must follow
- ✓ Important legislation including: the *Municipalities Act*, the *Municipal Conduct Act*, the *Labour Standards Act*, and the *Public Procurement Act*  
*\* The Municipalities Act has since been replaced by the Towns and Local Service Districts Act.*

## CORE MODULE

### 2



#### Basic Municipal Office Administration

- ✓ Essentials of municipal office administration
- ✓ Dealing with difficult people
- ✓ Supervising staff and managing human resources
- ✓ Conflict resolution
- ✓ Communications and public relations
- ✓ Roles of Council and staff in Council meetings
- ✓ Rules of procedure and decorum for Council meeting
- ✓ Council minutes and records management
- ✓ Access to information and protection of privacy, particularly focused on the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (ATIPPA) legislation and the procedures therein

**CORE  
MODULE****3****Cash Handling, Budgeting, and Financial Evaluations**

- ✓ Cash handling and internal controls
- ✓ Receipts, deposits, expenditures, invoices, and financial documentation
- ✓ Handling float and petty cash
- ✓ Roles and responsibilities of Council and CAO in financial matters
- ✓ Managing and communicating financial risks to Council
- ✓ Budget preparation, monitoring, and legislative requirements
- ✓ Practical budgeting tips and best practices
- ✓ Financial reporting requirements
- ✓ Audit processes and financial risk mitigation

**CORE  
MODULE****4****Basic Municipal Accounting**

- ✓ Fundamental accounting principles
- ✓ Bookkeeping processes and double-entry systems
- ✓ Use of accrual accounting and GAAP standards
- ✓ The accounting cycle from transactions to closing the books
- ✓ Internal controls and fraud prevention
- ✓ Minimum monthly financial reporting requirements for Council
- ✓ Financial statements and auditing requirements
- ✓ Compliance with PSAB standards for financial statements
- ✓ Tangible capital assets and their classification, history, and use
- ✓ Best practices and tips for preparing effective briefing and information notes for Council

**CORE  
MODULE****5****Municipal Planning**

- ✓ The importance and process of planning in municipal governance
- ✓ Strategic, project, program, emergency preparedness, and succession planning
- ✓ Staff vacation and accessibility planning
- ✓ Strategic planning – vision, mission, values, mandate
- ✓ Budget and financial forecasting
- ✓ Project management and planning
- ✓ Accessibility planning
- ✓ Municipal services and program planning
- ✓ Land use planning under the *Urban and Rural Planning Act*
- ✓ Economic development planning
- ✓ Key planning success factors including engagement, communication, and innovation
- ✓ Regulations, orders, policies, and procedures essential to governance
- ✓ Professional development and networking ethos
- ✓ Email etiquette best practices



# ADVANCED TRAINING PROGRAM

PMA's Advanced Training Program expands on the curriculum covered in the Core Program, moving into formal Council communications and recommendations, briefing notes, public procurement, bookkeeping, auditing, and financial reporting, and finally strategic and capital budget planning. These modules are focused on skills required by senior management, especially a Town Manager or CAO, and particularly cover how to report and make recommendations to an elected Council. All three modules provide overviews of best practices for preparing briefing notes, presentations, and general Council communication tools for senior administrators. Expanded descriptions of each module are included below.

## ADVANCED MODULE

### 1



#### Briefing Notes & Public Procurement

- ✓ Equip participants to prepare effective briefing notes and understand the *Public Procurement Act*
- ✓ Write structured briefing notes that communicate complex issues clearly to Council
- ✓ Best practices for developing and delivering effective presentations
- ✓ Understand the statutory framework of the *Public Procurement Act*
- ✓ Apply procurement thresholds, procedures for open/limited calls for bids
- ✓ Address supplier complaints and understanding Council responsibilities in procurement
- ✓ Develop deeper skills in regulations and orders from Module 5
- ✓ Develop deeper skills in ATIPPA legislation from Module 2
- ✓ Manage conflicts of interest and understand provisions/procedures under the *Municipal Conduct Act*

## ADVANCED MODULE

### 2



#### Bookkeeping, Financial Reporting & Audits

- ✓ Continue to improve competencies in preparing briefing notes and presentations
- ✓ Strengthen foundational knowledge in municipal bookkeeping and financial reporting
- ✓ Conduct double-entry bookkeeping and maintain balanced financial records
- ✓ Classify financial assets, liabilities, and accumulated surplus/deficit
- ✓ Prepare monthly financial reports such as bank reconciliation and budget variance
- ✓ Enhance Council's oversight through regular financial review and transparency
- ✓ Understand the components and processes of annual audits
- ✓ Understand municipal revenues sources – Property, business, poll, direct sellers, and water and sewage taxes
- ✓ Strengthen understanding of cash handling procedures from Module 3
- ✓ Understand financial actions, like issuing receipts, managing deposits, keeping and using petty cash and cash float, as well as collection methods

**ADVANCED  
MODULE**

**3**



**Budgeting, Strategic & Capital Planning**

- ✓ Increase competencies in strategic and budgetary planning
- ✓ Understand legislative requirements for preparing and adopting annual and capital budgets
- ✓ Prepare realistic, multi-year operating and capital budgets
- ✓ Apply the Debt Servicing Ratio (DSR) and understanding its implications
- ✓ Link budgeting to Council's strategic goals and financial forecasting, accompanying a partial review of Module 5
- ✓ Integrate HST considerations and mid-year budget adjustments
- ✓ Monitor and report financial performance to ensure fiscal responsibility



*“The capacity to learn is a gift; the ability to learn is a skill;  
the willingness to learn is a choice.”*

**Brian Herbert**



# Jurisdictional Review

Municipal training programs across the country come in various forms and although most programs cover the same basic foundation of material, many do so to varying degrees of detail, naturally determined by the needs of the sector in their respective jurisdictions. Below we highlight how PMA's current training program compares to those captured in our jurisdictional review by examining their expected educational outcomes, serving to seek out gaps in training that may be useful to consider for future training program development. Topics that align fully with a PMA core competency are highlighted in **GREEN**, those that PMA's program touches on but does not focus on are highlighted in **YELLOW**, and those that PMA's program does not cover are highlighted in **RED**.

## REVIEW Jurisdictional



Educational Outcome	Outcome Description	PMA's Program Equivalent	PMA Rating	Suggested Improvements
Freedom of Information and Privacy	Ensuring transparency and protecting sensitive data.	<b>Core Module 2:</b> Basic Municipal Office Administration <b>Advanced Module I:</b> Briefing Notes & Public Procurement		N/A
Local Government Finance	Budgeting, financial reporting, and fiscal accountability.	<b>Core Module 3:</b> Cash Handling, Budgeting, and Financial Evaluations <b>Core Module 4:</b> Basic Municipal Accounting <b>Advanced Module II:</b> Bookkeeping, Financial Reporting & Audits		N/A
Local Government Structure & Function	Understanding the roles, responsibilities, and frameworks that define municipal governance.	<b>Core Module 1:</b> Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships (3Rs)		N/A
Strategic Thinking	Developing leadership capacity and strategic thinking for municipal managers.	<b>Core Module 5:</b> Municipal Planning <b>Advanced Module III:</b> Budgeting, Strategic & Capital Planning		N/A
Taxation & Assessments	Understanding revenue systems and property valuation.	<b>Advanced Module II:</b> Bookkeeping, Financial Reporting & Audits <b>Advanced Module III:</b> Budgeting, Strategic & Capital Planning		N/A

Educational Outcome	Outcome Description	PMA's Program Equivalent	PMA Rating	Suggested Improvements
Communications	Facilitating effective communication between administrators, elected officials, and the public. Includes advocacy and communications with other orders of government.	Multiple – Advanced Modules		Briefing notes, presentations and other tools covered, but communications principles and public relations should be included
Corporate Governance	Recognizing the roles and responsibilities of officers, directors, and managers in a municipal context.	<b>Core Module 2:</b> Basic Municipal Office Administration		Need a more in-depth overview of roles and responsibilities of various municipal positions
Council Support and Formal Procedure	Applying governance principles, including meeting procedures and general Council operating procedures to support Council operations.	<b>Core Module 2:</b> Basic Municipal Office Administration		Need a more in-depth look at governance and broad procedure
History of Local Government	Historical evolution and structure of NL municipalities, intergovernmental relationships and policy environments, and legislative frameworks and statutory responsibilities.	Multiple		Legislation is well-explored, but the history of NL government structures, intergovernmental relationships, and provincial/federal policy environments should be included
Municipal Bylaw Enforcement	Interpreting legal frameworks and addressing challenges in enforcing municipal regulations.	<b>Core Module 1:</b> Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships (3Rs)		Some content on legal frameworks, but need to add in elements on bylaws and enforcement best practices
Municipal Law	Navigating legal obligations, statutory responsibilities, and regulatory compliance.	Multiple		Legal concepts are spread out over the training but could use a dedicated module
Public Administration Professionalism	Applying ethical standards, accountability, and leadership principles in public service.	<b>Core Module 2:</b> Basic Municipal Office Administration		Ethical standards and leadership concepts/best practices should be included

Educational Outcome	Outcome Description	PMA's Program Equivalent	PMA Rating	Suggested Improvements
Ethical Leadership and Judgement	Using structured frameworks to guide Council choices, leading on environmental, social, and governance factors, and promoting equitable representation and inclusive practices. Includes Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, as well as administrators' roles in creating, revising, and applying codes of conduct, codes of ethics for elected officials.	N/A		Ethical frameworks, equity frameworks, DEI approaches and inclusive practices, and training on developing/reviewing Codes of Conduct.
Human Resource Management	Applying HRM principles within a municipal context, including employment law and staff development.	<b>Core Module 2:</b> Basic Municipal Office Administration		Specific HR training be made available
Organizational Behaviour & Leadership	Leading teams, managing change, and fostering effective workplace culture.	<b>Core Module 2:</b> Basic Municipal Office Administration		Organizational leadership, human resources and best practices for managing the workplace should be included
Risk Management	Designing systems to anticipate, manage, and mitigate governance, organizational, and financial risks	N/A		Financial management is good, but risk is more than financial. Need a risk management process
Service Delivery Efficiency	Enhancing operational effectiveness and responsiveness to community needs.	N/A		Service delivery is not included in the PMA program
Technology Integration	Proficiency in new and upcoming technologies	N/A		No tech instruction. Suggest development of modules on typical municipal software, AI, and other useful tools

## Municipal Legislation Across Canada

Few jurisdictions formally embed professional development and training explicitly, typically relying on indirect mechanisms such as municipal bylaws, professional associations, or internal administrative policies to support and promote professional learning for senior municipal staff. Consequentially, the delivery mechanisms and mandates for each program can vary significantly across provinces.

# REVIEW Legislative



<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Legislative Mention of Professional Development</b>	<b>Delivery Mechanism</b>	<b>Mandate Type</b>
Newfoundland & Labrador	No	Municipal Administrators' Handbook, and training from the Municipal Training and Development Corporation (MDTC)	Association-guided
Nova Scotia	Yes, but limited to enabling the creation of HR policies in the Municipal Government Act	Internal (municipal) HR policies	Council-mandated
New Brunswick	No	Municipal Management Training Program (Université de Moncton)	Voluntary/Educational Sector-led
PEI	No	Voluntary training portal from provincial government	Voluntary/Municipal Sector-led
Québec	No	Focused on legislative benchmarks	No formal support
Ontario	No	Led by organizations like AMCTO and OMAA, offering programs like the Municipal Administration Program	Voluntary/Municipal Sector-led
Manitoba	No	University of Manitoba programs	Voluntary/Educational Sector-led
Saskatchewan	No	Voluntary training portal from provincial government	Voluntary/Municipal Sector-led
Alberta	No	Delivered through the National Advanced Certificate in Local Authority Administration (NACLAA)	No formal support
British Columbia	Yes, through the Local Government Act, the Board of Examiners, and the Community Charter	Certification/credentialing through the Board of Examiners, with funding available through scholarships	Provincial Regulation
Nunavut	No, but training is supported and promoted by the territorial government	Training through the Nunavut Municipal Training Organization (MTO)	Territory-funded

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Legislative Mention of Professional Development</b>	<b>Delivery Mechanism</b>	<b>Mandate Type</b>
Northwest Territories	No	Some optional training programs delivered through Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA Learn)	No formal support
Yukon	No	None	N/A

Overall, British Columbia sets the gold standard, having explicitly defined municipal training in provincial legislation, as well as offering regulatory recognition, credentialing, and financial support.

Newfoundland & Labrador, by comparison, puts emphasis on best practices rather than legal requirements, and the training offered is supported by municipal associations but not mandated.

Nova Scotia has a minor reference to the development of Human Resources policies in their Municipal Government Act, permitting municipalities to draft their own HR policies. This bottom-up approach allows Councils the flexibility to set their policy based on local needs. No other training is included in legislation. New Brunswick and PEI also do not legislate municipal training, and rely on universities or municipal practitioners to deliver training.

Training available in Ontario is also not mandated through provincial legislation, however voluntary training initiatives are well-supported by the broader municipal sector, including through organizations like the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO), the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA), and the Ontario Municipal Administrators Association (OMAA).

In Alberta, certification is available through the National Advanced Certificate in Local Authority Administration (NACLAA), but due to a lack of provincial support, uptake in the program is uneven across the province. Manitoba relies predominantly on the University of Manitoba to provide courses to those interested practitioners, while Saskatchewan provides a portal for training resources, but no other support.

In Nunavut, the territorial government does not mandate training, however they do support, and fund, culturally sensitive municipal training delivered by the Nunavut Municipal Training Organization. The Northwest Territories offered optional programs through their Municipal and Community Affairs department, while the Yukon did not have any training programs available.

The lack of formalized approaches to municipal training ultimately leads to lower or uneven uptake in programs that would otherwise be valuable to municipal practitioners. Only BC has legislated training requirements, while other jurisdictions take mixed approaches, with some providing funding, some providing political support, and some remaining unengaged in the topic.



*“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”*

**Marie Curie**



## Data Sources

Using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) conducted by Statistics Canada and presented by the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, we have analyzed the current state of employment in the local public administration sector. We compare current and historical employment numbers in the sector with the provincial and federal administrative sectors, as well as with the broader employment landscape in NL.

The LFS includes local, municipal, regional, and indigenous administrative roles in their counts, and we believe this survey provides the most detailed and up-to-date employment figures for public administration, and as such is a good proxy for measuring provincial administrators' employment.

We have also collected data from Statistics Canada's Seasonally Adjusted Average Earnings report, which includes salary data for public administrators across Canada. Using data from the four Atlantic provinces and the country as a whole, we analyze the regional and historical changes in public administrator salaries. Due to the aggregate nature of the data, this category includes federal and provincial administrators as well as municipal, however it remains a strong indicator of the general salary trends of municipal administrators.

Finally, we have collected data from the Municipalities NL (MNL) Municipal Census, as a means of validating the data we have collected in this work, as well as seeking deeper understanding into some of the trends identified here.

All historical data ranges from 2011 to 2024, to provide an accurate, modern picture of municipal administrators' salaries and employment. MNL Census data is from 2021, the most recent data available.

# REVIEW Statistical



# Employment Data

Beginning with employment data, Figure 1 describes the absolute total employment numbers for municipal administrators in Newfoundland and Labrador.

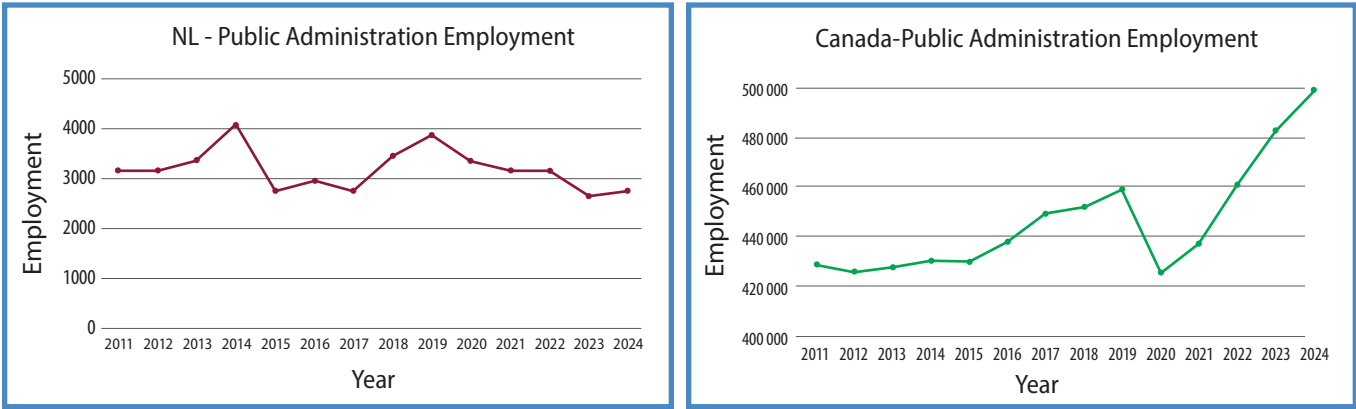
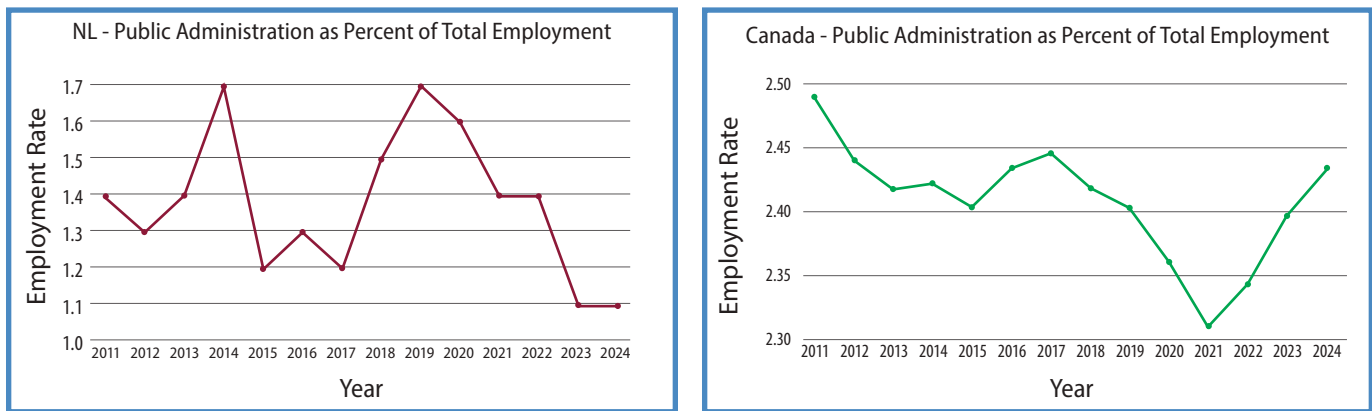


Figure 1 - Absolute historical employment numbers for municipal administrators in Newfoundland and Labrador (left) and in Canada as a whole (right).

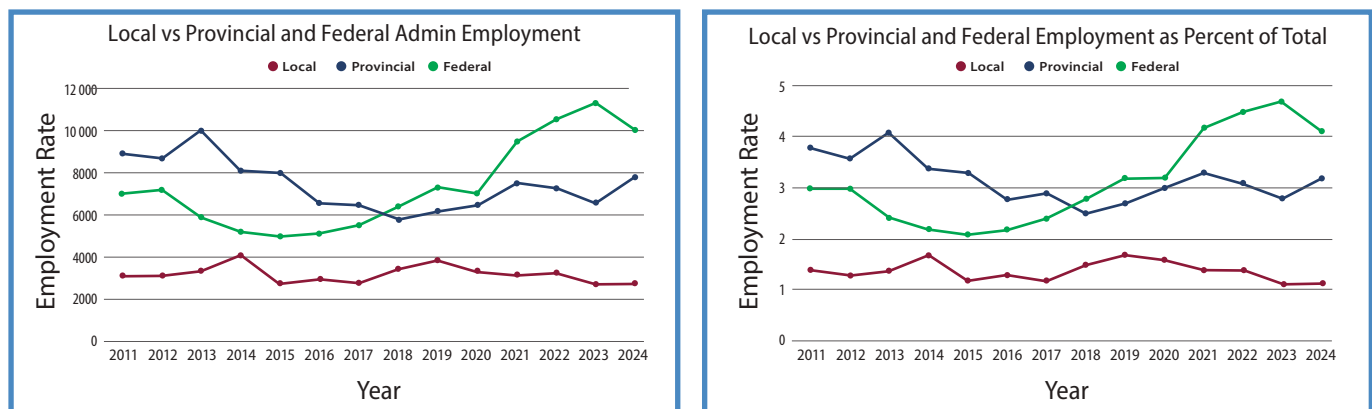
As shown above, Newfoundland and Labrador is at its lowest number of employed administrators in nearly a decade at approximately 2800, down from a peak of approximately 4100 in 2014. Although employment rates have hit comparable lows in the past, the pattern of decline has lasted since 2019. Growth in employment may continue to be flat or negative, however an increase in employment numbers is unlikely in the near future. The right-hand side of Figure 1 shows the same chart for the whole country; note the significant increase in municipal administrator employment across the country in the post-COVID era, reaching a new record in 2024.

As a percentage of total employment in the province, as seen below in Figure 2, we note that the employment rate of municipal administrators in NL is at an all-time low of 1.1% and has also declined since 2019. This implies that the downturn in employment figures is not due to general economic decline, but rather to specific declines in the sector over that time period. Similarly, the public administrator employment rate for the whole nation is relatively stable over time at ~2.5%, showing a small “return-to-normalcy” bump after COVID-19. In both absolute and relative terms, therefore, it is clear that the number and rate of employment for municipal administrators is decreasing in NL, while numbers for the whole of Canada show stable growth.



*Figure 2 - A comparison of employment rates for NL (left, red) and the whole of Canada (right, green). The relative size of the sector in NL has decreased while the relative size of the sector has increased across Canada more broadly. Note that the high variation in the red curve is due to the small number effect.*

Figure 3 shows a comparison of two charts, describing employment numbers and rates respectively, for Local (red), Provincial (Blue), and Federal (Green) public administrators.



*Figure 3 - Two charts highlighting historical municipal administrator employment numbers and rates, compared with numbers and rates for federal and provincial public administrators.*

As we can see, while federal administrator numbers have increased and provincial numbers have dipped then climbed slowly, local administrator employment numbers have remained flat since 2011, with only small variations in that time. This trend is observed for both absolute employment numbers and employment rates and indicates that renewal and growth in the municipal administration sector have been slow and have not kept up with growth in administrative work in other orders of government.

# Wage Data

Figure 4 below shows a slight gap in salary growth between the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada overall. Specifically, compensation for public administrators across the country has increased at an average rate of 3.3% per year, surpassing NL in absolute terms in 2019, while compensation for public administrators in NL has grown at an average rate of 2.3% per year, lagging slightly behind the national average.

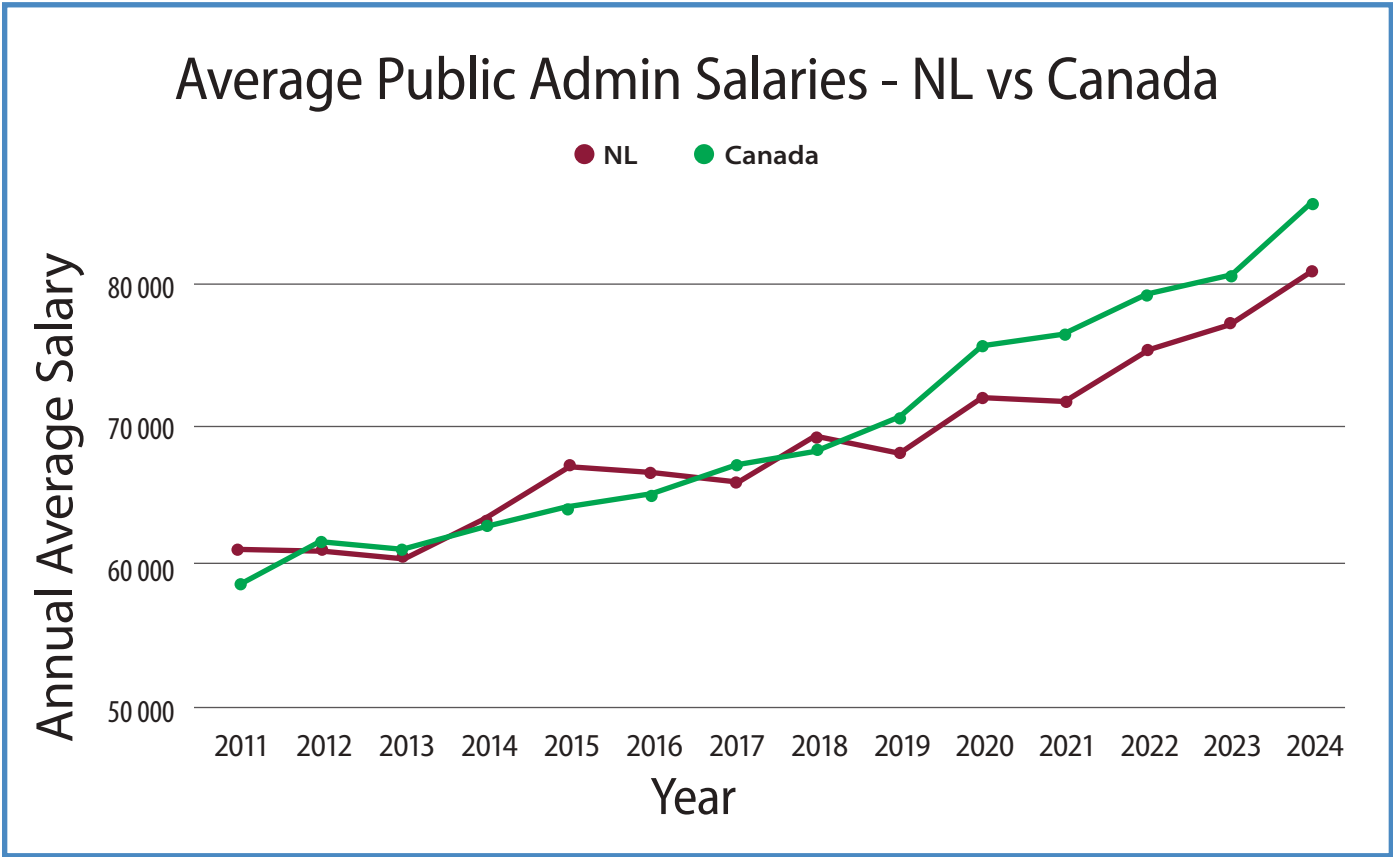


Figure 4 – A comparison of average public administration salaries in both Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada as a whole

Although wages for public administrators have lagged behind the national average, Figure 5 below shows that, in comparison with the other Atlantic Canadian provinces, NL ranks highest for wage levels, and has for nearly two decades.

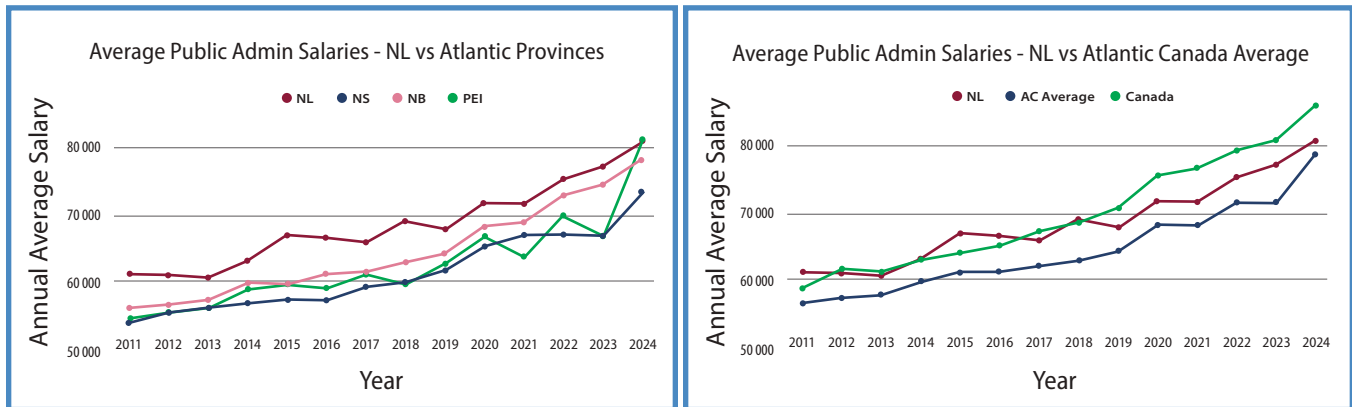


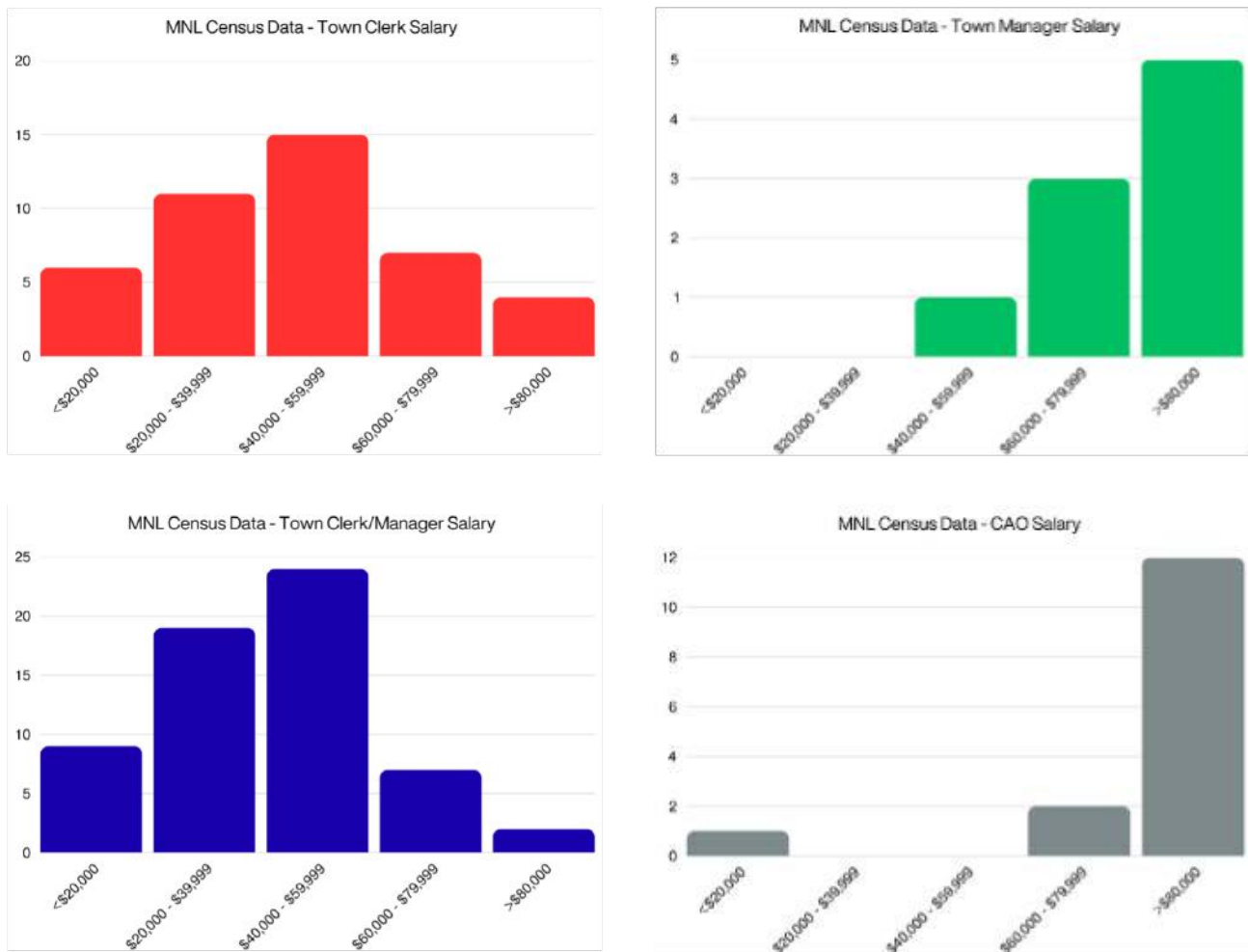
Figure 5 - A comparison of historical annual average salaries between Atlantic Canadian provinces. Figure 5a (left) shows wage data for each province starting in 2011, while Figure 5b (right) compares NL wages with both the national and regional composite averages.

As we can see, NL public administrator wages are regularly higher than those in each individual province in the region, as well as higher than the average of the four provinces. This implies that, although salary is often an important consideration in taking or remaining in a particular role, there may be other factors of higher importance to municipal administrators that govern their decisions to remain. In particular, at a time when NL is showing record lows of employed administrators, but relatively high wages, other considerations such as harassment, training, burnout, and other on-the-job concerns may be pushing out staff or stymying new hires.

## MNL Census Salary Data

As a way of validating the data collected in this process so far, we have checked our demographic and salary results against Municipalities NL's most recent (2021) Municipal Census data. Demographically, as shown in the Survey Results section of this report, we can see that both our dataset and MNL's census dataset are similar enough to be comparable. As such, we take a deeper look at salary data collected from MNL's 2021 Municipal Census as a way to gain deeper insights into the salary distributions of the key municipal administration roles.

For the roles of Town Manager, Town Clerk/Manager, Town Clerk, and CAO, we have the following salary distribution results:



*Figure 6 – From MNL's 2021 Municipal Census, a comparison of salaries for the key administrator positions, including Town Clerks (red), Town Managers (green), Town Clerk/Managers (Blue) and Chief Administrative Officers (gray).*

From the charts above, it is clear that CAOs are the highest paid role, typically employed in larger and urban municipalities. Similarly, Town Managers fulfill a similar role in smaller communities, and are paid on average only slightly less than CAOs.

The most interesting comparison comes between Town Clerks and Town Clerk/Managers. Both distributions are very similar, despite the reality that Town Clerk/Managers often have roles more akin to CAO's or Town Managers. Indeed, Town Clerk/Managers are often the only employee in their office, meaning they often have to handle every aspect of administration on their own.

One key reason for this could be that all municipalities have Town Clerks, including large and urban, implying that some of the salaries for Town Clerks may be coming from larger urban centres, which typically have higher cost of living and thus higher salaries. Typically, only small/medium municipalities have Town Clerk/Managers, and so their salaries may reflect that reality.

# **SURVEY**

## **Results and Analysis**



# Survey Results and Analysis

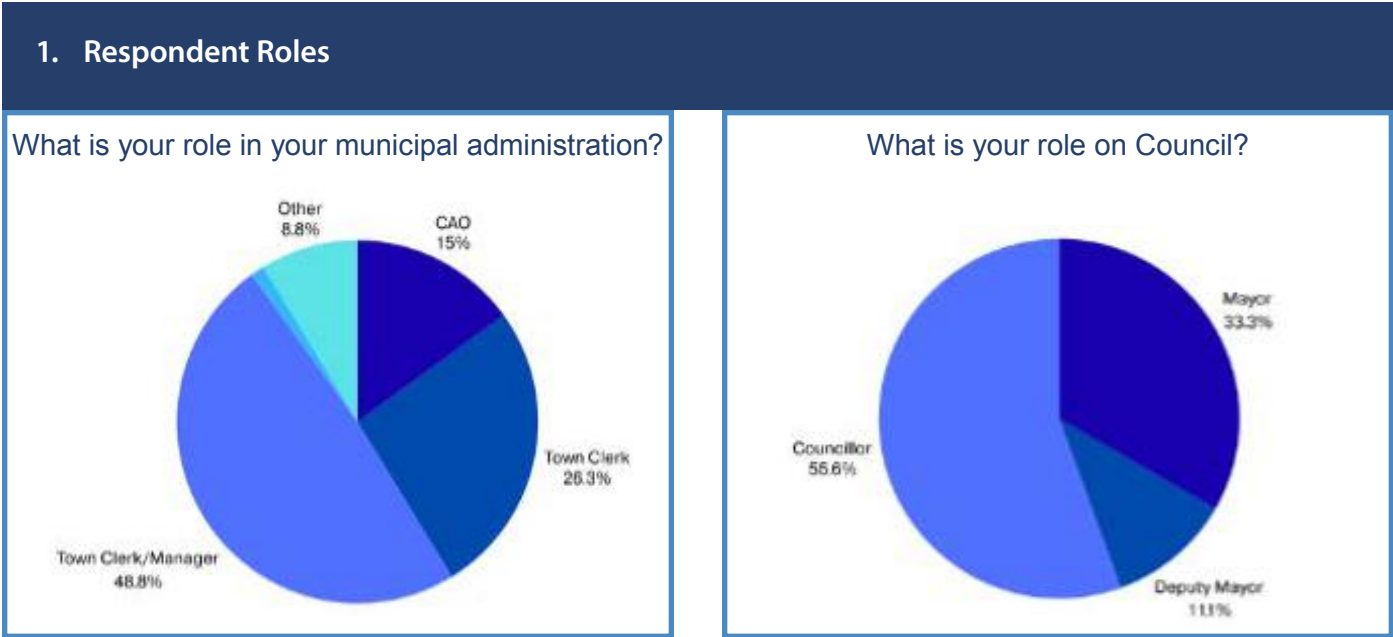


Figure 7 – Survey respondent roles – Administration (left) and Council (right)

- Majority of Administrator respondents are Town Clerk/Managers. Large minority of Town Clerks, and CAOs.
- This group is likely to have a full view of everything that happens in their municipality.
- Most Council respondents were Councillors, but with a handful of Mayors and a Deputy Mayor.
- As part of our data validation process, we have also reviewed data collected by Municipalities NL (MNL) for their 2021 Municipal Census, the most recent available.
- Comparing the three charts above, it is clear that the roles of respondents collected here and by MNL are in good agreement, yielding a decent picture of the key administrator roles filled in this province.

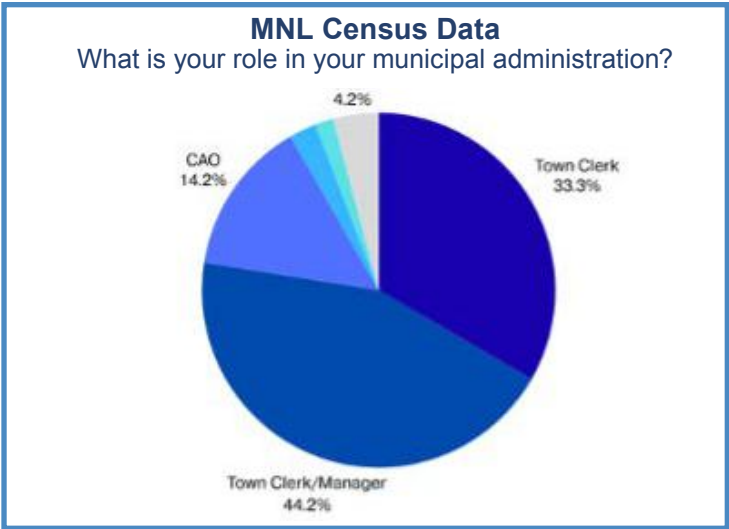


Figure 8 – MNL Census respondent roles – Administration only. In good agreement with survey results above.



## 2. Length of Time in Role and Sector

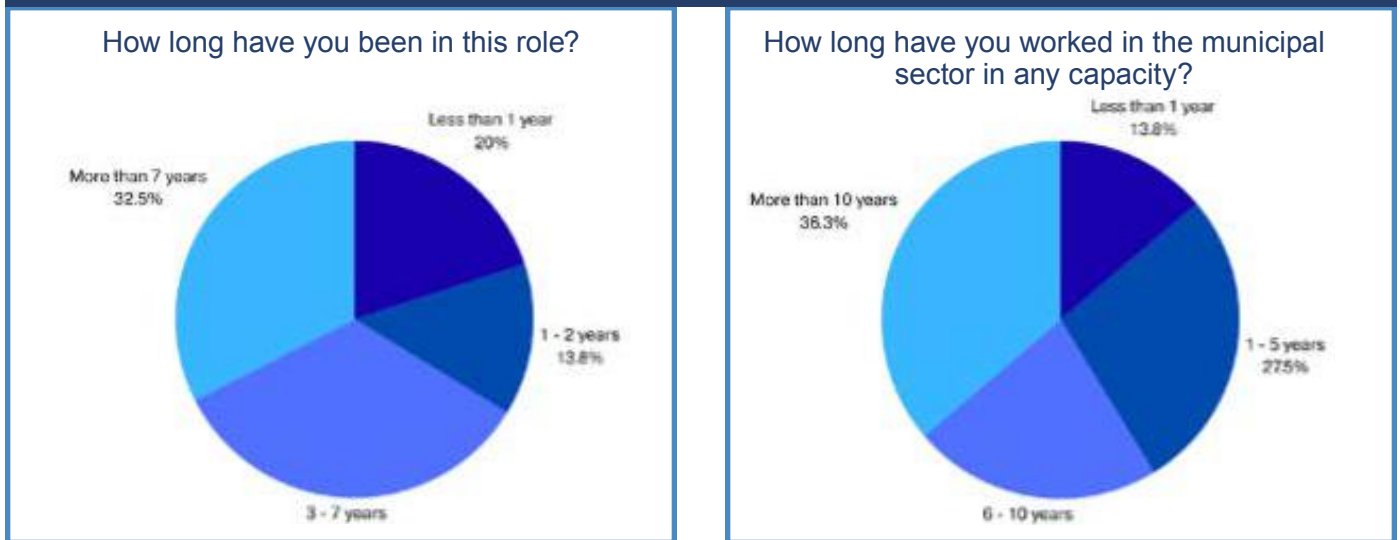


Figure 9 – Administrators - Length of time in current role (left) and in the municipal sector more broadly (right).

- One third of respondents are quite new (< 2 years), one third are intermediate (<7 years), and one third are long-term (> 7 years).
- Lots of veterans (> 10 years) who know the sector well.
- A good balance of perspectives based on experience.

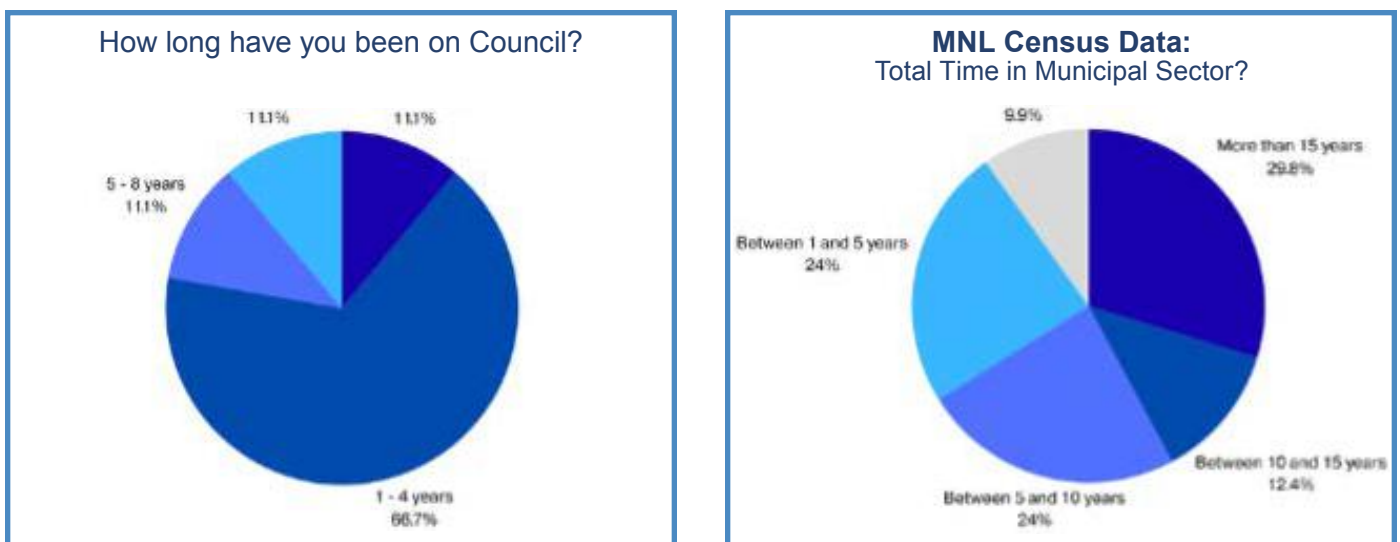


Figure 10 – Members of Council - Length of time in current role (left) and in the municipal sector more broadly (right).

- The majority of Council respondents were in their first term, with only a few around longer than 4 years. This group will likely be most influenced by recent changes in the sector (recency bias).
- In terms of length of service, the results of this survey are in good agreement with MNL's census data.

### 3. Municipal Population and Workforce Size

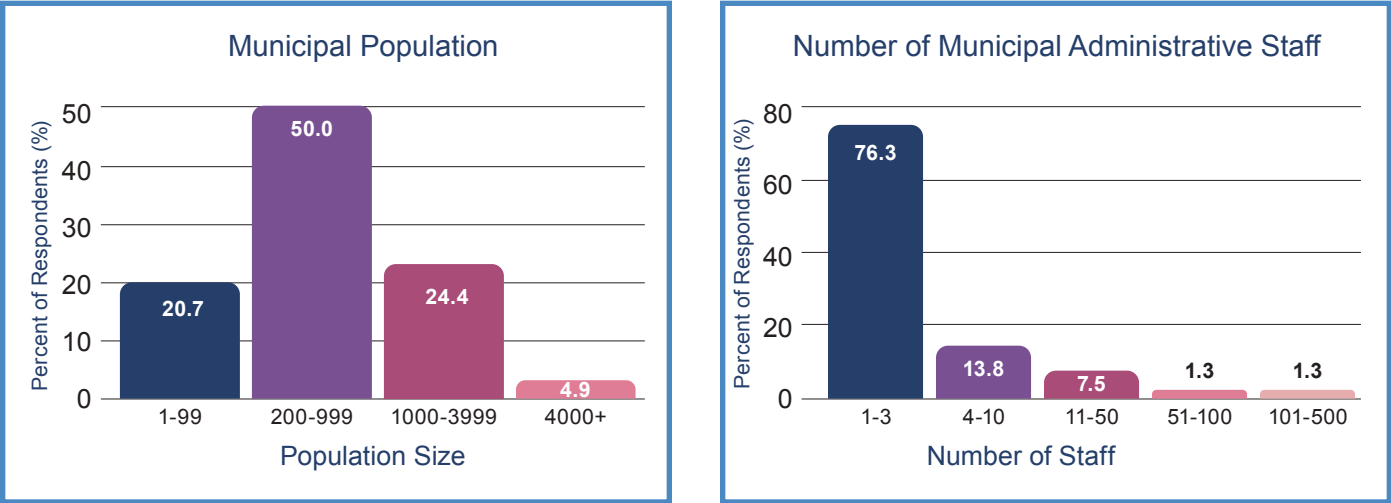


Figure 11 - Respondents municipal population (left) and number of administrative staff (right)

- Around 50% of respondents are in municipalities with between 200 and 999 residents. Administrators from a few larger towns/cities responded, but most of the remainder came from small or medium-size municipalities.
- Approximately 70% of respondents came from municipalities with fewer than 1000 residents, which corresponds to good agreement with the number of respondent communities having 3 or fewer administrative staff at 76%.
- A strong majority of respondents work in municipalities with at most 3 administrative staff, indicating the respondents likely fulfill many roles in their municipal administration (“many hats”).

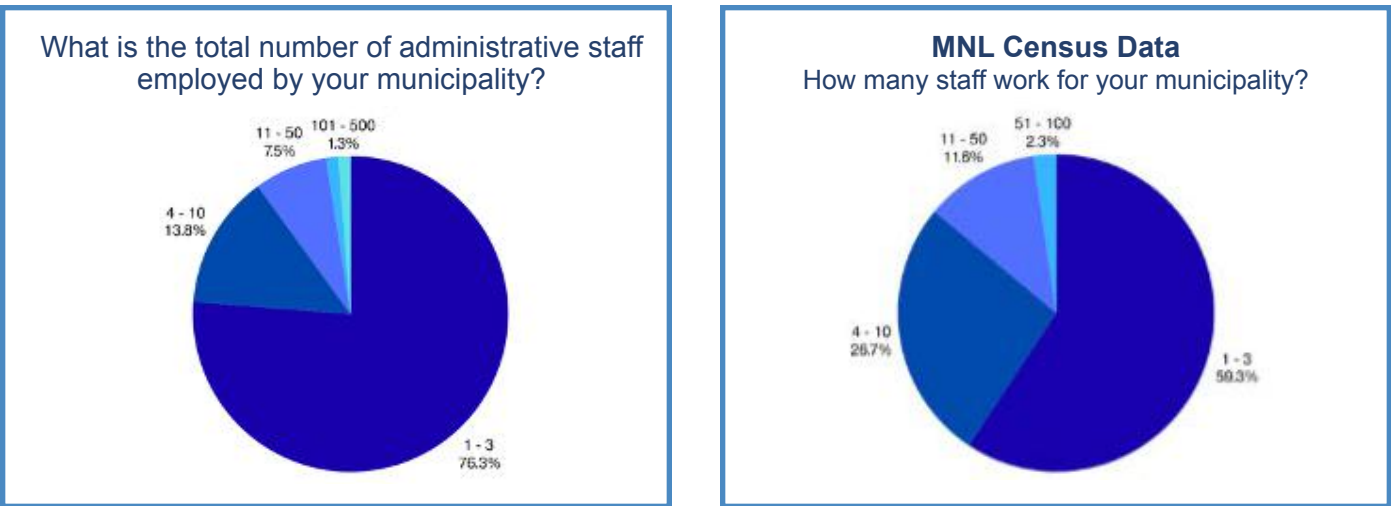


Figure 12 – Comparison of “total number of municipal staff” charts with data from this survey (left) and from MNL’s 2021 Municipal Census. They are in relatively good agreement.

- Even with slightly different wording between the questions (“Municipal Administrators” vs “staff”), we still see a significant majority of respondents work in 1-3 or perhaps 1-4 person offices in both our survey and MNL’s census data.
- Council respondents were in good agreement with admin, with ~78% of respondents coming from municipalities with 3 or fewer staff.

#### 4. Education and Training

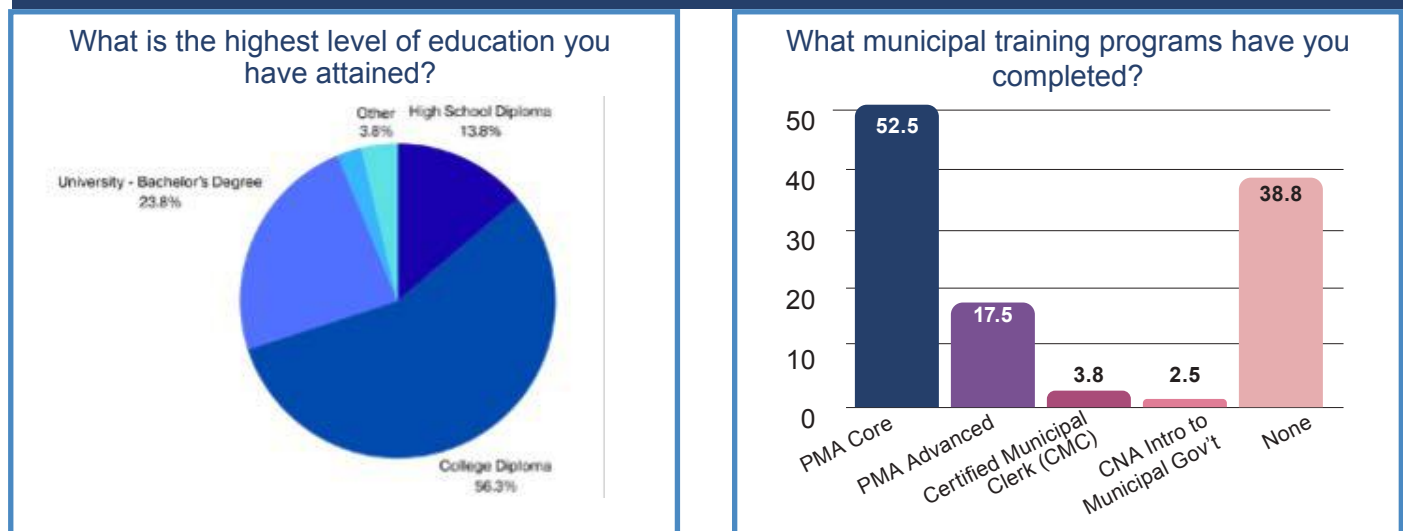
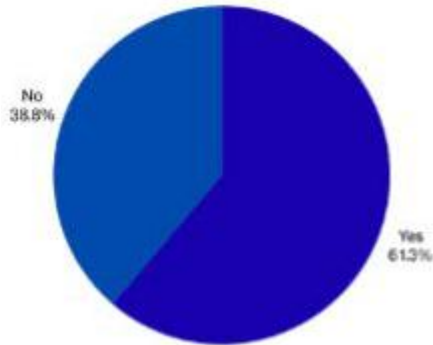


Figure 13 – Administrators - Highest level of education attained (left) and a view on the types of municipal training programs completed by administrators.

- A majority of respondents have both a college diploma and some specific municipal training. Some undergraduate university, little post-graduate.
- Municipal workforce in NL tend to be educated, trained specialists.
- Will be interesting to compare likelihood of pursuing municipal designations with current educational attainment.
- PMA programs, especially CORE, are often the only major source of municipal training respondents have received, if they’ve received any (39% say they have no formal additional municipal-specific training).

## 5. Municipal Designations and Additional Training

Do you have any municipal certifications?



Do you think a municipal designation certification would be useful for your role?

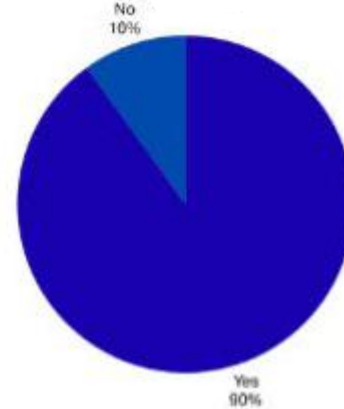
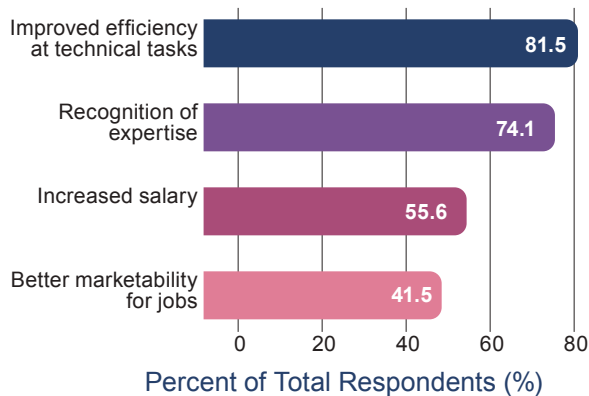


Figure 14 – Administrators – Do you have any municipal certifications (left), and do you think a certification would be helpful to you? (right)?

How would a municipal designation support you in your role?



Most common non-municipal designations

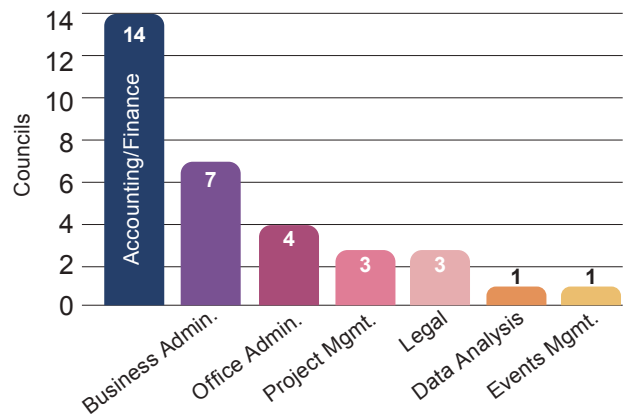


Figure 15 – Administrators – How would a municipal designation/certification support you in your role (left) and what non-municipal designations are common amongst administrators? (right).

- 90% of respondents say a municipal designation would be useful in their role, but only 61.3% have one. This nearly 30% difference implies there is a sizeable audience for additional training, if it's available, accessible, etc.
- Respondents say their number one priority is to become skilled at particular tasks in their day-to-day work (81.5%) and be recognized for their ability (74.1%). Following behind (55.6%), respondents recognize the salary increase that would likely come from technical skill attainment. They do not seem to be thinking too far beyond their current role, with less than half thinking about looking good for other jobs (48.1%).
- Municipal administrators were most likely to be educated in accounting or financial best practices, as well as business and office administration. Beyond that, some administrators had skills in project management, the law, data analysis, and managing events.

## 6. Barriers to Accessing Training

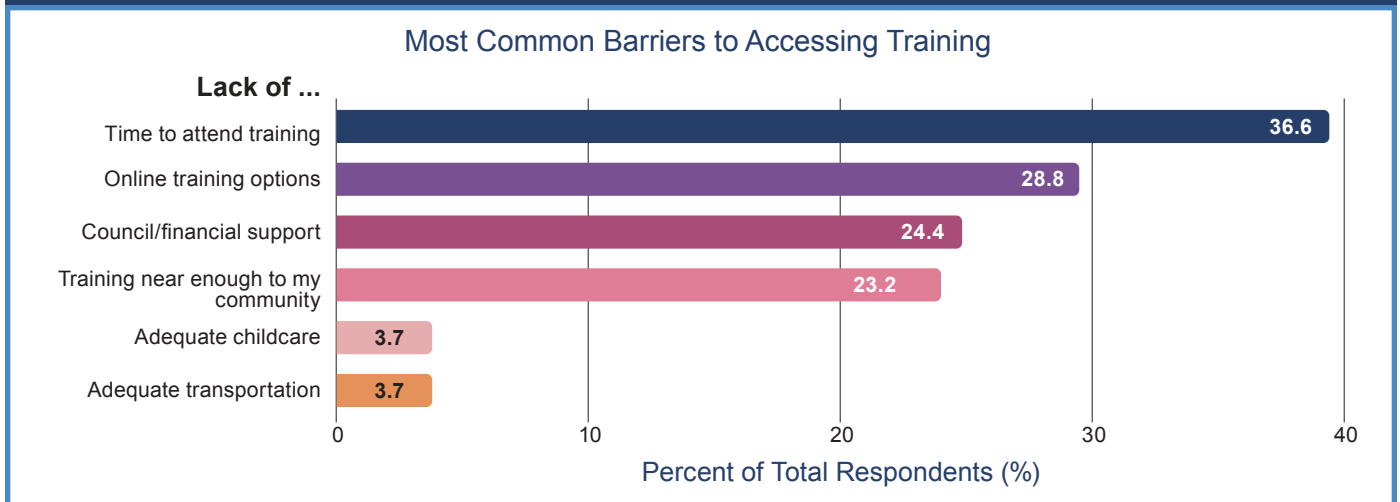


Figure 16 – Administrators – What are the most common barriers to accessing training?

- Respondents felt they simply did not have enough time in the day to complete training and fulfill their required tasks at work. The largest proportion (36.6%) of respondents said this.
- Accessibility in terms of location and delivery were also key barriers, including a lack of online options, a lack of in person training near enough to many communities, and in some cases, a lack of financial resources to access training.

## 7. Effectiveness of Training

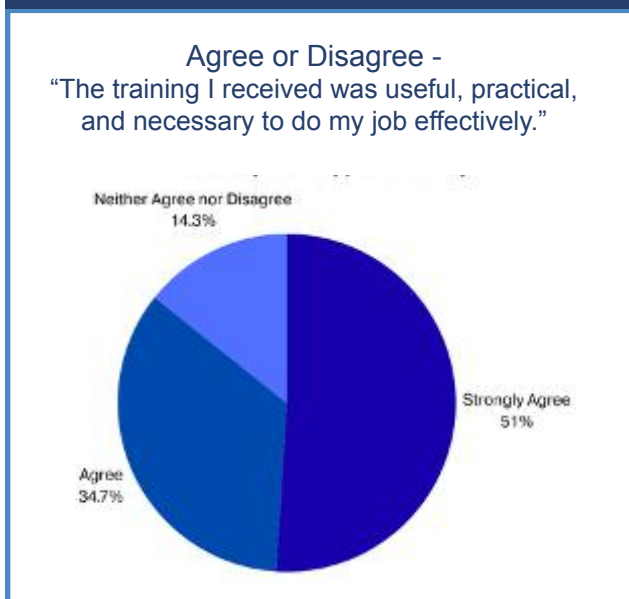


Figure 17 – Agree or Disagree  
“The training I received was useful, practical, and  
necessary to do my job effectively”



Figure 18 – Administrators’ most commonly  
requested training topics.

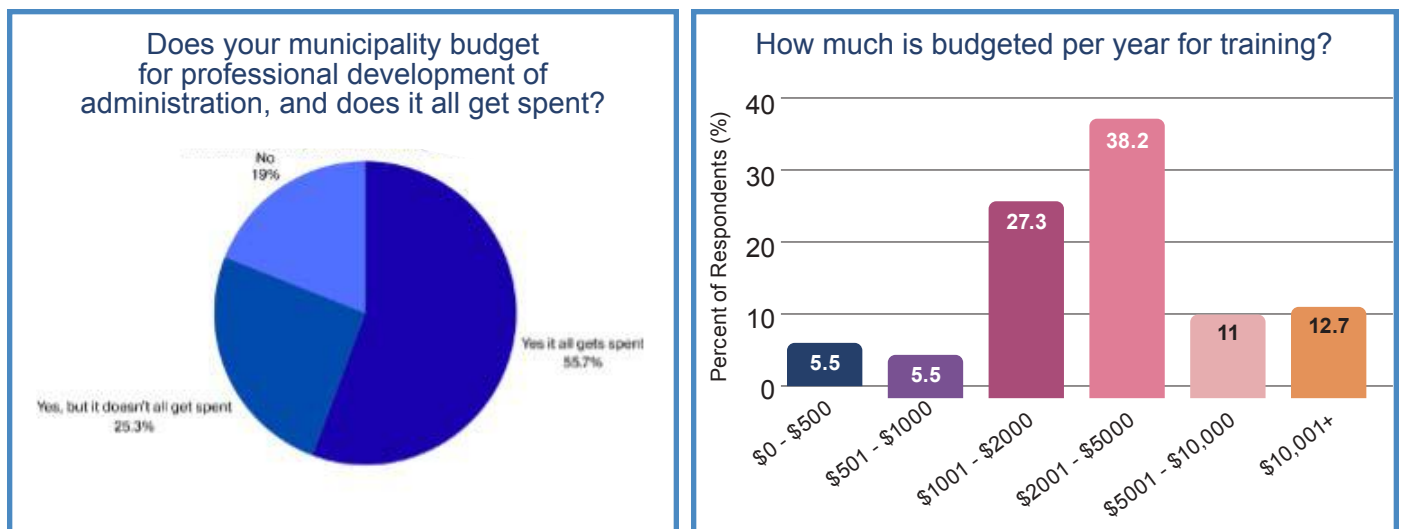
- Although most respondents feel they would benefit from additional training, the ones who have completed some municipal training were generally (85.7%) satisfied that it helped them navigate their day-to-day work. 75% said the training was sufficient for most of their day-to-day role.
- That said, most (72.9%) of respondents identified at least some gaps in training, with their priorities for new training offerings capture as well.
- Policy and By-law Development topped the list, with deep dives in Accounting and Finance, Emergency Management, and preparing applications, all while onboarding new tools. Some departmental specific competencies (Legal, HR, ATIPP) were also mentioned.

## 8. Perceptions of Council and Admin on Importance of Training

Importance of Professional Development to:	Council's Perception	Admin's Perception
Council	4.1 (High)	3.7 (Neutral-High)
Administration	4.3 (High)	4.2 (High)

*Figure 19 – Administrators' and Members of Council  
Response scoring for perceived sentiment on importance of training.*

- On average, Council respondents generally believe that professional development is a high priority to administrators. It is also a high priority among Councillors.
- Administrators also rate professional development as a high priority, but their perception of how much Council cares is a bit lower, at the Neutral-High level.
- This shows that, although both groups of respondents care about administrators' PD, administrators need a bit more convincing that Councils care about the topic as much as they do.

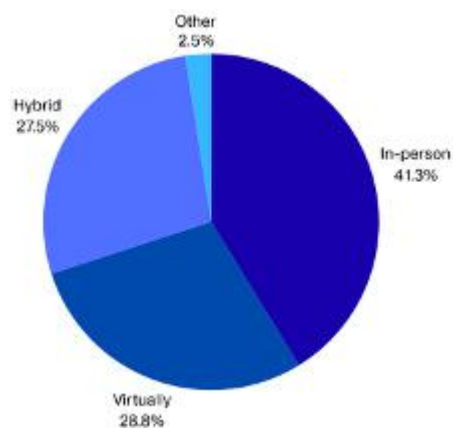


*Figure 20 – Administrators - Does your municipality budget for professional development for administration? (left). How much? (right).*

- Looking at professional development budgets, we see that 55% of respondents have a budget from Council and use it all. A quarter have a budget but don't manage to spend it all, likely due to a lack of time to take training, and a quarter have no budget at all.
- Most respondents have less than \$5000/year for their team PD budget.

## 9. Accessing Training

What is the best way for you to access professional development and training opportunities?

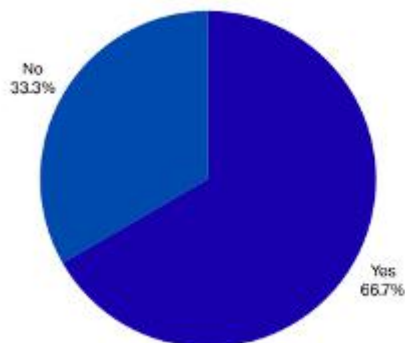


- Generally, respondents accessed training through work, whether it's onboarding offered by their municipality, or PMA training courses, or something else. Some sought out training beyond that offered at work, but very few felt they needed to seek outside training because work did not provide any.
- A plurality of respondents would prefer to access training in person, if it were available in their community, but a majority are comfortable with virtual training as an option if needed. Locations for training offerings may be a key determinant in who takes the training.

Figure 21 – Administrators - What's the best way for you to access professional development and training opportunities?

## 10. Council's Views on Training

Are municipal administrators provided adequate training for their roles?



Council's Suggested Areas for Training

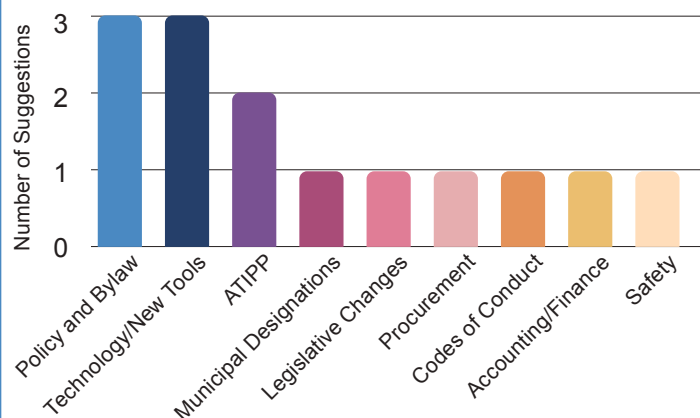
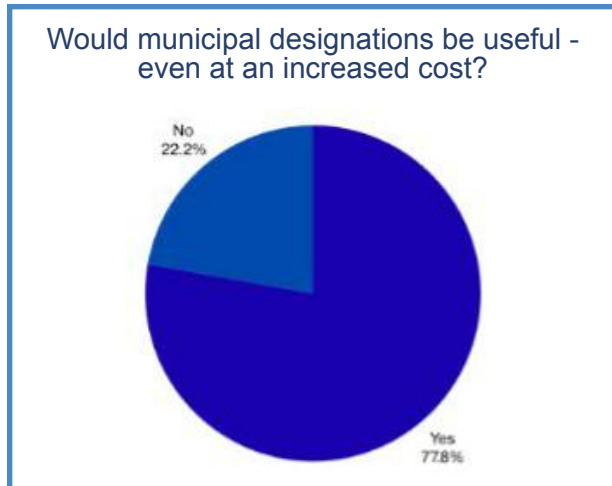


Figure 22 – Members of Council - Are municipal administrators provided adequate training for their roles? (left). What areas do you think require the most training? (right)

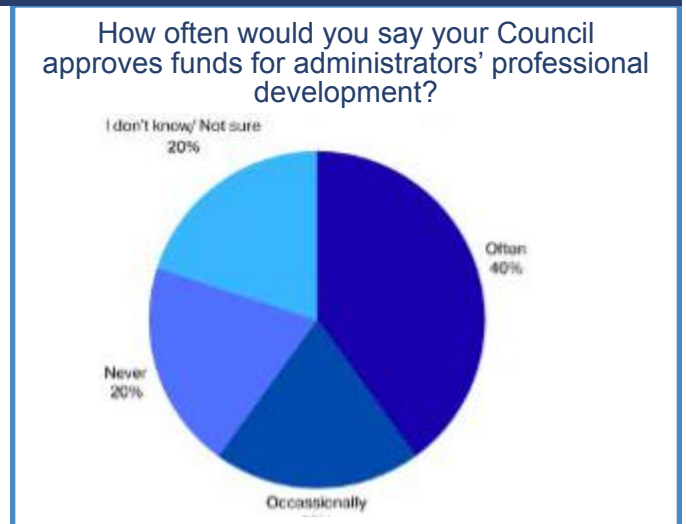
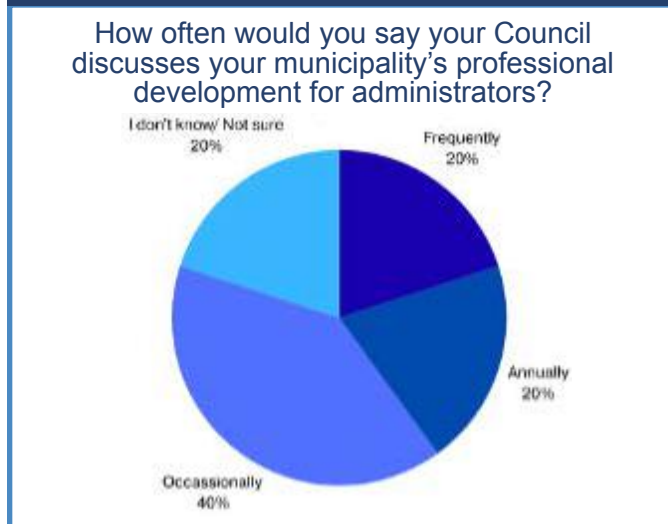




- A majority of Council respondents believe administrators are trained well enough for their roles, although a third did not agree. This implies there could be some appetite/a receptive audience for new training opportunities among councillors.
- Council respondents agreed with administration respondents that Policy and By-Law Development is a top skill that is needed amongst administrators.
- 78% of Council respondents agreed that municipal designations would be useful, and those who did not simply said they were not sure.

*Figure 23 – Members of Council - Would municipal designations for administrators be useful – even at an increased cost?*

## 11. Council Support for Professional Development



*Figure 24 – Members of Council – How often does your Council discuss administrators professional development? (left). How often does your Council approve funds for administrators' professional development? (right)*

- Council respondents at most seem to discuss Administrators' Professional Development yearly or less frequently, with only 20% saying they discuss it multiple times per year.
- Council respondents generally did not seem to know how often they approved budgetary increases to PD for Admin. Taken together with the general level of support for training and municipal designations throughout the survey, this implies that an educational campaign about the values and benefits of additional training may be needed to get the issue on the radar of Councillors in order to move the issue forward.



# Shaping the Future of Municipal Training - Stakeholders' Interview Report

## STAKEHOLDERS' Interview Report



# Respondents

The set of respondents contacted for interviews comprise a diverse group of municipal practitioners, regulators, trainers, and policy experts, each with their own perspective on the challenges facing municipalities and their potential remedies. Respondents are outlined in the table below:

Respondent Group	Roles	Experience
Municipal Administrators	Current and former CAOs, Town Clerks, and Town Clerk/Managers	Operating towns day-to-day, and direct experience with workload
Government Departments	Municipal Affairs/Community Engagement (MACE), Transport and Infrastructure (TI), Canada Community-Building Fund (CCBF)	Compliance, funding, and legislation
Legal & Insurance Advisors	Lawyers and insurance brokers with experience working with municipalities	Risk management, claims, and legislative and policy interpretation
Municipal/Sectoral Associations	Professional Municipal Administrators (PMA), Municipalities NL (MNL), Canadian Assoc. of Municipal Administrators (CAMA), Economic Developers' Assoc. NL (EDANL)	Represent, advocate, and support for municipal staff and elected officials, and offer policy guidance and training
Educational Institutions	Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) and the Gardiner Centre	Studying, designing, and delivering professional training curriculum
Policy and Research Leaders	Academics and strategists with years of experience in the municipal sector	Examining emerging issues, including AI and technology, climate resilience, governance reform, regionalization, and changes to municipal policy

# Key Challenges and Needs

The set of respondents contacted for interviews comprise a diverse group of municipal practitioners, regulators, trainers, and policy experts, each with their own perspective on the challenges facing municipalities and their potential remedies. Respondents are outlined in the table below:

At a high level, what are the key issues facing municipal administrators, and what do they need to solve their challenges? Below is an overview of the top challenges and needs, followed by a deeper look at what elements were particularly important to respondents.



## CAPACITY & STAFFING

Nearly universal concern, especially for one-person offices. Many respondent described capacity as the core issue facing municipalities in NL, leading to high turnover and a loss of institutional knowledge.



## FINANCIAL SKILLS

One of the largest and most systematic training gaps, underpinning almost all other areas of municipal operations. Budgeting, auditing, internal controls, and fraud prevention are major vulnerabilities.



## COMPLIANCE

Administrators are overloaded with regulatory compliance tasks (ATIPP, TLSDA, Code of Conduct) and need complete, plain-language training with templates for easier compliance.



## GOVERNANCE & HR

Incivility, harassment, and unclear roles erode morale. A lack of role clarity and resulting micromanagement fuels tensions and destroys trust and credibility.



## EMERGING ISSUES

Municipalities are dealing with more issues now than ever before, whether through emerging technologies, a changing political landscape, or downloaded responsibilities from the provincial government. AI and computer skills, and climate mitigation and adaptation are growing needs.

# A Deeper Look

At one level deeper, we see that most of the difficulties outlined above are related to specific operational tasks for which administrators require more training and support. Many relate to legislative and regulatory compliance, as one of the most technical and time-consuming sets of tasks on an administrator’s workload.

## Procurement and Contracts

- This was the most frequently cited pain point among interview respondents.
- There is confusion, especially among smaller towns, about how to evaluate tender bids based on “best value” rather than “lowest price”.
- A lack of confidence in knowledge on procurement as well as role confusion among councillors and staff leads to confusion over the procurement process.

Possible Remedies:

- ✓ Step-by-step procurement model with real examples
- ✓ Template procurement checklists and sample Requests for Proposals (RFPs)
- ✓ Basic skills training in contract law

## Human Resources (HR), Labour Relations, and Employment Law

- Administrators often must manage HR issues without training or legal support.
- Performance management and hiring practices are inconsistent across and even within towns, and there is often confusion about union obligations.

Possible Remedies:

- ✓ Required HR training for all administrators with HR tasks
- ✓ Shared access to model HR policies and job descriptions
- ✓ Regular labour law updates for CAOs/Town Managers and Councils
- ✓ HR workshops from legal, labour and HR professionals

## Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Processes

- Described by respondents as one of the most stressful and politically charged areas for administrators.
- CAOs/Town Managers are often caught in the middle of council disputes and have to act as investigators because external hiring is often too expensive.
- Code of Conduct complaints have been weaponized, often with the intention of slowing down municipal work.
- Conflict of Interest rules are not consistently applied both across and within towns.

Possible Remedies:

- ✓ Clear flowcharts and templates for managing complaints
- ✓ Joint council-administration training on ethics, conflicts and professional boundaries
- ✓ Independent Code of Conduct review panels
- ✓ Advocate for changes to legislation

## Access to Information and Protection of Privacy (ATIPP)

- ATIPP requests have become a major time-sink for municipal administrators, especially for one-or-two-person offices, despite being essential to the accountability mechanisms of municipal governance.
- Staff also find them intimidating – they are afraid to make mistakes and cause a potential political problem for their town.
- Some towns are not compliant with privacy, faxing sensitive data and storing files in unlocked cabinets

### Possible Remedies:

- ✓ A central ATIPP support desk through government or municipal partners
- ✓ Scenario-based online training with sample requests, clear procedure, and responses
- ✓ Shared templates and checklists for regulations, particularly around redaction of personal information
- ✓ Encourage digital recordkeeping systems with privacy safeguards

## Towns and Local Service District Act Implementation

- Training on the new municipal act has been insufficient, and many administrators do not yet fully understand the new responsibilities and powers outlined in the Act.

### Possible Remedies:

- ✓ An updated TLSDA Handbook with real-world examples
- ✓ Regional implementation workshops

# Large Towns and Cities

All of the above issues affect large towns and cities as well as small towns, but oftentimes on a larger scale with more complexity. Large towns and cities tend to be multi-departmental, with administrators who have strong expertise in their particular roles, but are seeking leadership development and stronger governance literacy, particularly for senior directors and CAOs. What are the specific challenges facing larger towns and cities?

## Advanced Skill Needs

Administrators already have strong technical expertise in finance, engineering, planning, etc. but lack political acumen and plain-language communication skills for dealing with councils and the public.

## Complex Governance

Respondents noted that managers need deeper governance literacy — understanding legislative authority, council–administration boundaries, and respectful workplace practices.

## Professional Management

Large towns and cities are focused on leadership development for directors who were promoted from technical roles but never trained to manage people.

## Need for High-Tier Training

Respondents said large towns and cities are seeking advanced, large-municipality training streams rather than repeat entry-level topics like basic budgeting.

## Credentialing

Respondents also spoke to the need for certificate programs with university-level credentials, citing Ontario’s municipal-university partnerships as models.

## Inter-Municipal Communication

Include mentorship and peer “mastermind” groups among large-town and city CAOs.



# Looking to the Future

With the key challenges and needs described, we now turn to the future, to determine which topics and elements of training are most important to include in any future municipal administrator training. Respondents were in clear agreement that any new training must consider the following topics.

Digital Transformation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Data Literacy	Possible Training
<p>Nearly every respondent in the later interviews mentioned digital skills or AI, though most framed it as a future need that must be built on basic digital literacy first.</p>	<p>Build foundational digital literacy and data management skills before introducing AI.</p>
	<p>Develop short AI-for-administrators courses: practical uses, such as agenda writing, analytics, grants, communications. Courses must include ethics and privacy safeguards.</p>
	<p>Encourage collaboration with MUN, EDANL, and Gardiner Centre for micro-credentials.</p>
Cybersecurity and Fraud Prevention	Possible Training
<p>Many respondents, especially insurers, legal partners, and CAOs, identified cybersecurity risk as a rapidly growing threat for small towns.</p>	<p>Develop a Cyber 101 course with fraud prevention and digital security modules, including internal control checklists and practical case studies.</p>
Climate Resilience and Emergency Management	Possible Training
<p>Municipalities need support for planning and budgeting for emergencies, as well as managing emergencies once they arise.</p> <p>Municipalities are also looking at climate mitigation and adaptation policy and infrastructure as ways to protect themselves from worsening weather and climate conditions.</p>	<p>Develop an emergency preparedness and management module in core curriculum.</p>
	<p>Offer regional, hands-on, scenario-based workshops with emergency services professionals.</p>
	<p>Closely link climate resilience with asset management and capital planning processes.</p>

Complex Legal and Compliance Landscape	Possible Training
<p>As noted throughout this report, legislative and regulatory compliance are becoming more complex than ever, and with the new TLSDA, new responsibilities and powers are unclear to administrators.</p>	<p>Develop a legislative and legal training program that updates annually along with regulations, with a big push when new legislation comes into force.</p>
	<p>Create plain language summaries and flowcharts for legislative changes.</p>
	<p>Offer templates and scenarios for Code of Conduct and ATIPP requests.</p>

Political Acumen, Governance, and Communication Skills	Possible Training
<p>In particular for large towns and cities, respondents stressed that emerging leadership challenges are less technical and more relational, such as dealing with politics, the media, and public engagement.</p>	<p>Offer Political Acumen and Plain-Language Communication training for technical directors.</p>
	<p>Develop joint governance training for councils and administrators to clarify boundaries and roles.</p>
	<p>Include conflict management and respectful workplace modules in all leadership programs.</p>

Economic Development and Regional Collaboration	Possible Training
<p>Many respondents noted that municipalities need training in economic development and inter-municipal collaboration to address demographic and fiscal decline. Towns often operate in silos, and often do not communicate much with other towns, partners, associations, or others in their regions.</p>	<p>Include economic development literacy in the core curriculum.</p>
	<p>Offer shared regional development workshops in partnership with EDANL and ACOA.</p>
	<p>Teach funding navigation, i.e. how to write effective grant proposals and manage multi-source funding, particularly for complex provincial or FMC funding applications.</p>



Culture, Civility, and Mental Health	Possible Training
<p>A common theme discussed by practically all respondents was that civility, harassment, and mental health must be treated as core training content, not peripheral topics. The world has changed, and incivility and harassment are on the rise, particularly at the most accessible level to the public – municipal government.</p>	<p>Incorporate mental health and respectful workplace training across all PMA programs.</p>
	<p>Deliver joint council–staff sessions on civility, communication, and leadership accountability.</p>
	<p>Frame civility as an organizational skill, not just interpersonal behaviour.</p>



*“The ability to read, write, and analyze; the confidence to stand up and demand justice and equality; the qualifications and connections to get your foot in the door and take your seat at the table — all of that starts with education.”*

**Michelle Obama**

# TRAINING

## Delivery Framework



# Partners in Professional Development

All of the above issues affect large towns and cities as well as small towns, but oftentimes on a larger scale with more complexity. Large towns and cities tend to be multi-departmental, with administrators who have strong expertise in their particular roles, but are seeking leadership development and stronger governance literacy, particularly for senior directors and CAOs. What are the specific challenges facing larger towns and cities?

Respondents were clear in their view that municipal administrator training rests chiefly in the purview of PMA, but that PMA should collaborate widely with partners to deliver comprehensive and flexible training programs. Respondents unanimously envisioned a collaborative “partnership ecosystem” around PMA where:


- **PMA leads and convenes.**
- **Universities credential.**
- **The province funds and interprets.**
- **Insurers and lawyers train for risk.**
- **Associations advocate and co-deliver.**
- **Municipalities co-own the learning process.**

So how should municipal sector partners engage with PMA to deliver effect training?

## Provincial Government Departments and Agencies: Policy, Legislation & Funding

- ✓ Respondents repeatedly highlighted **MACE, Transportation & Infrastructure (TI), CCBF, and Fire and Emergency Services** as *critical enablers*; not just funders but interpreters of complex policy.


### Respondents suggested that provincial departments could:

- 
- Provide plain-language summaries and templates for new legislation (TLSDA, ATIPP, Code of Conduct).
  - Co-develop annual legislative update sessions with PMA.
  - Fund program design and course subsidies (e.g., through CCBF or training grants).
  - Help establish regional training rotations so small towns can attend locally.
  - Coordinate shared services for legal and compliance support (e.g., ATIPP helpdesk, Code of Conduct investigator pool).

## Municipal Associations

- ✓ These associations were seen as crucial for joint messaging, culture change, and cross-audience learning — particularly for bridging the divide between councils and administrators.

### Respondents suggested that municipal associations could:

- 
- MNL: Promote and endorse PMA training to councils; integrate joint sessions at MNL conferences.
  - EDANL: Provide economic development content and co-host regional workshops on local growth and resilience.
  - CAMA: Share national leadership and HR toolkits and provide mentorship to provincial administrators.
  - MAA: Continue to deliver assessment and taxation modules, integrated into PMA’s framework.

## Educational and Training Institutions

- ✓ Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of leveraging existing academic capacity for professional-quality training.

### Respondents suggested that educational and training institutions could:



- MUN: Develop and deliver leadership, HR, and governance modules; assist with course design, evaluation, and credentialing.
- CNA: Deliver technical and operational training regionally (finance, project management, procurement).
- Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA): Provide funding for pilot programs, digital learning infrastructure, and innovation.
- All: Partner on certified or micro-credential programs so that training certification can be used as proof of professional capabilities.

## Legal, Insurance, and Professional Service Partners

- ✓ Respondents identified law firms, insurers, and auditors as both content experts and risk-reduction allies.

### Respondents suggested that professional service partners could:



- Co-deliver training on legal compliance, procurement, and HR fundamentals.
- Provide risk management workshops with real case examples.
- Develop model policies and templates such as for procurement, contracts, insurance, cybersecurity, etc.
- Offer sessions at PMA and MNL events to build awareness.

## Funding A New Approach

When it comes to funding a new approach to training, respondents were pragmatic: training won't scale without stable funding and cost-sharing. They suggested blending **provincial support, ACOA contributions, and municipal buy-in** under a **shared funding model**. Municipalities are seeking good training opportunities, and if the training is high quality, readily available, and flexible enough for all municipalities to learn something new, there will be significant uptake.

Respondents suggested some ideas for how a new training program could be funded:



- Establish a **"Municipal Training Fund"** co-managed by PMA and MACE.
- Tie funding access to **training completion or professional development plans**.
- Use **ACOA or federal innovation funding** for e-learning platforms.
- Explore **cost-sharing by region** to reduce travel and venue expenses.

# Delivering Training Equitably

A key question for project proponents was to determine the best method(s) of training delivery so that municipalities of all sizes and of all geographic regions can access and learn from experts, peers, and trainers.

Although all respondents chose in-person training sessions as the gold standard, most also acknowledged the relative difficulty in ensuring that training is accessible across the province. And though online options are often held up as an opportunity for equalization, it is equally true that most people learn best in-person, and online options are not ideal as a sole delivery method.

Ultimately, respondents coalesced around the need for a “blended learning ecosystem”, one that incorporates various elements of delivery to create flexible options for all. Below is one view of how this ecosystem could be structured:

## IN-PERSON WORKSHOPS

- Typically yields the highest engagement and builds trust and community with administrators.
- Workshop locations need to be rotated regionally so that each region can access in-person training options, without needing to travel all the way to Gander or St. John’s Metro.

## HYBRID MODELS

- A mixture of online preparation and in-person discussion. Hybrid sessions offer a wide reach and balance accessibility and quality.

## VIRTUAL (LIVE)

- Short, 2–3-hour sessions delivered live online with interactive and practical examples to hold participants’ focus and provide them with real take-aways for their daily work. The most accessible delivery type, particularly for rural and remote communities.

## SELF-PACED MODULES

- A novel idea in NL, designed to support busy professionals who do not have the time in their workdays to take training or depart for a conference.
- Modules should be short, certificate-based, and role-specific, so administrators can self-direct the learning that matters most to them.

## PEER MENTORSHIP

- Peer mentorship is particularly helpful when trying to get concepts and processes to stick for the long-term. Talking frankly with peers is also an important way to put their work in context and improves retention and morale.
- Increased promotion and support for new staff to sign up and be matched with long-serving staff in their same role and meet regularly for check-ins and advice.

Respondents' final thoughts on training delivery included the usefulness of integrating training into municipal conferences from MNL, PMA, CAMA, etc. to reach people who attend these events regularly, and to encourage participation in these events.

Respondents also pointed out styles of training delivery they would like to avoid, based on their experiences with such styles. Respondents suggest that training not include:

### PASSIVE WEBINARS

- When webinars are non-interactive, people often log into the session and work on municipal tasks, without paying full attention and without being truly engaged.

### DAY-LONG ZOOM SESSIONS

- Sessions that are too long run the risk of not being retained.

### ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL SESSIONS

- Small towns and big cities need different types of training. It is not simply a matter of scale; small towns need compliance and capacity support, while large towns and cities need strategy and leadership training.

### SESSIONS/TRAINING WITHOUT ANY FOLLOW-UP

- Sessions that end without any possibility of follow-up run the risk of being easily forgotten and not integrated into administrators' daily work.

Respondents across all groups — small-town administrators, large-municipality CAOs, provincial partners, and training providers — said a “one-size-fits-all” approach will fail. Respondents endorsed a tiered or modular training system, where learning pathways differ by municipal size, complexity, and staff capacity, but share a common foundation. Learning streams could be broken up in the following way:

Foundational Stream	Intermediate Stream	Advanced Stream
Core essentials, including finance, compliance, record keeping, processes, and basic governance for one-person or small-town offices.	Specialized role-based content, for HR, communications, project management, legal, risk, etc.	Strategic leadership, political acumen, and organizational development for larger towns.

# Key Recommendations

In order of priority, here are the recommendations made by interview respondents to create a strong, sustainable, flexible, and comprehensive training framework for municipal administrators in NL.



Develop a tiered PMA Training Framework to address differing needs by size and experience



Launch core financial and compliance modules to create a universal baseline of capacity and ability, leading to greater accountability.



Integrate HR, incivility, governance, and ethics into the program, to help support staff retention and to develop professional culture.



Build a shared resource hub with templates, model policies, case studies, and real-world examples to reduce duplication, increase efficiency, and eliminate anxiety.



Create a partner network and joint funding pool, to leverage existing expertise and funding.



Pilot hybrid learning systems with peer mentorship to deliver a sustainable and scalable training experience.



Introduce credentials and micro-credentials in core topics and emerging fields respectively, to help administrators keep their focus on the path ahead.



# Member Feedback

Over the course of conversations with municipal practitioners in the province, we have collected a set of feedback and suggestions from PMA members for areas of training they would like to see included in a new training program. Ideas are categorized by training area and listed below.

At a high level, respondents were pleased to see an initiative focused on improving and increasing training resources available to municipal administrators, with many citing either a need for continuous learning to work in complex roles, or a lack of sufficient training from their own municipality.

Key areas for improvement included more inclusive methods of training delivery, including virtual options and in-person options for smaller municipalities.

The most common areas of requested training generally pertained to operations for Town Clerks and Town Clerk/Managers. Topics included:

## 1. Procedures

- Tax Sales, Procurement, Capital Works Applications, Non-Compliances, Managing/Retaining Documents, ATIPP Process, Emergency Preparedness, Using MSIS, Best Practices for Town Clerk/Managers

## 2. Finance

- Small Claims, Bankruptcies, Risk Management, Pension Plans

## 3. Legislation

- Updates to the Towns and Local Service Districts Act, Privacy Impact Assessments, and ATIPP Regulations

## 4. Policy and Bylaw Development and Enforcement

## 5. Emerging Technology and Tools (AI)

## 6. Communications and Relationships

- Managing Council-Staff relations, Dealing with difficult residents, Workplace Ethics, Strategic Planning, Succession Planning, Team Building.

One key area that pertained to the actual delivery of training. Several suggestions for more flexible and accessible training have been included below:

- Hear from more local practitioners/experts, including accountants, lawyers, other Town Clerk/Managers and administrative professionals.
- Virtual/hybrid options especially for small and remote communities.
- Asynchronous training options for self-directed, self-paced learning (online portals).
- Mock versions of procedures and events in an administrators' work-life – such as tax sales, council meetings, elections and electoral process, code of conduct/disciplinary processes.
- Having someone to call when in need of advice is essential.
- More practical case studies and examples related to municipal operations. Ongoing access to recorded sessions and resource material, so that everyone can learn at their own pace.
- Onboarding should include details on statutory responsibilities, provide the PMA Administrators Handbook (updated) and Councillors Handbook (updated) as well as office functions in a municipal setting. Continuous learning could be task specific, such as Records Management, Legislative Updates, etc.
- Create an Online Discussion Forum

## Complete List of Collected Responses

Communications & Relationships
Best practices in the office environment
Council-Staff Relations; how to keep the ship on an even keel
Dealing with difficult residents, co-workers, and council members
Deeper sessions on municipal law and communications
Effective Communication – tips tricks and general principles
How to better manage change in the workplace and how to inform Council
Leadership & confidence
Workplace ethics, labour relations, strategic planning, succession planning, and team building

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Women in Leadership: Breaking Barriers and Empowering Change

Finance and Funding
Accounting practices - Gas Tax comes to mind - and processes for tenders/ bids etc.
Grants and Funding Opportunities – where to find them and how to apply
How to complete capital works applications
More topics on financial literacy/management
Municipal fraud awareness and risk management
Pension plans for administrative staff – how to create, operate, and maintain them
The training was good but covered topics that I had already accomplished in my day-to-day work. I feel that the training should cover funding opportunities and how to apply i.e. Capital Works

## Legislation

I think there should be more training on the new legislation and assisting clerks, new and older in preparing legal orders, letters, etc. Lately it seems like the only support clerks have are from other clerks, not Municipal Affairs or other groups. We seek advice and is told to get legal advice. Easier said than done in many circumstances.

More on the new Towns and Local Service Districts Act

More information on Privacy Impact Assessments for ATIPP

Some more training on the new legislation for Towns, Towns and Local Service District Act ( I couldn't make the training that was provided)

## Operations

A detailed, step by step session that outlines the whole tax sale process.

As a new town manager, I would like to see training that can help us get through the procedures, ex: public procurement, capital works projects, etc.

Defined roles based on written legislation for Town Clerk when separate from

Emergency preparedness and planning

How to deal with and improve residents issues

How to write technical specifications for public procurement

I cannot stress strongly enough the need for on-boarding at the start for new hires. I personally help a lot of new clerks through the role in the early days because they are simply dumped in a job with no support. When I first started, Municipal Affairs was a great resource. That is not the case today, so these new hires are left to their own devices

Mock tax sale similar to the mock council meeting

More operations-based information, like dealing with small claims, bankruptcies, non-compliances, day to day office operations, ATIPP, record retention, safe keeping of documents, by-laws and enforcement

More info on elections; how they run, how to manage the election period

More sessions and information from professionals in our communities like planners, accountants, public works directors, etc.

Town Clerk and Town Manager roles in one, how to navigate both roles with best practices

Town Manager role. e.g. clerk is responsible to council, Council is responsible for hiring and firing and salary, and therefore the org chart should be changed via a motion of council Training on legal implications with taking minutes, why and what must be included, not included. Which minutes need to be adopted Training on Code of Conduct process as it relates to Procedural fairness and/or natural justice rules

## Operations

The new training program has to have an aspect to it that deals with department specific training (Human resources, planning etc.) while still teaching the basics to those who need it

The role of the Town Clerk-Manager is a very complex and important one - and I cannot stress enough how important it is for Municipal councillors to fully understand and respect that role in such a way to create a ripple effect of respect for the Town office within the community

Training on the Municipal Support Information System (MSIS)

## Policy & ByLaws

By-law and policy development - how to write them, examples of well written bylaws, how administrators organize and track bylaws

More training on bylaw enforcement for municipalities without the capacity to hire a bylaw enforcement officer

## Technology

Cyber Security and the municipal role in managing online security

Something on the use of AI in municipal government - how to integrate it into work to streamline things and be more efficient.

Shaping the Future: Trends and Insights for Tomorrow

## Training Delivery

Virtual Training, asynchronous. Day-to-day small town municipal schedules tend to unfold as slightly chaotic, specifically for Administrators with young families

I think a self-paced platform, with assessments available would be beneficial. The opportunity to participate virtually would be best suited for me personally

After learning from and helping other town clerk managers from other towns I think that some real-life experiences & how to from long term Town Clerk Managers could benefit

Training is very important and having someone to call when in need is even more important

It would be helpful if the program includes more practical case studies and examples related to municipal operations. Ongoing access to recorded sessions and resource material, so that everyone can learn at their own pace

Onboarding should include details on statutory responsibilities, provide the PMA Administrators Handbook (updated) and Councillors Handbook (updated) as well as office functions in a municipal setting. Continuous learning could be task specific, such as Records Management, Legislative Updates, etc.

## Training Delivery

Online Discussion Forum

A lot of training that was offered did not relate to smaller communities, so it was useless to even attend

I live in an isolated community Being able to attend training virtually is very beneficial for me.

## Workplace Health

Work Life Balance / Mental Health in the Workplace

Health and Wellness in the Workplace: Strategies for Success

## Miscellaneous

Working alone in my office, I find every bit of training I can take part in is a huge help in guiding me to do the best job possible. Municipal work is unlike anything else I have done in my work life, nothing prepared me for all the different roles and responsibilities that come with the job. Even though we are a small rural town the work is just as complex and important as in a larger town. That's why the training is so valuable; each session, no matter the topic, touches on a different aspect that helps us better serve our town, our community and our residents. There really isn't any training that isn't important because it all contributes to running our town more effectively

## Conclusion

It is clear that the municipal sector is at a crossroads. With retiring administrators not being replaced, high burnout, legislative overload, and increasing public pressure and incivility, the sector is facing significant headwinds.

Municipal administrators can't keep doing more with less. Without structure and investments in professional development, the sector is at risk of losing an entire generation of talented administrators. The pathway to professional recognition, staff retention, and sector stability runs directly through training. Real training based on real life for real people is the engine of professionalism, the key way that administrators can work to change the culture of their sector.

To that end, collaboration is key. All practitioners across the sector formally working together to improve outcomes for municipal administrators and, in turn, our communities, is the best way to ensure that municipal administrators aren't just surviving but thriving.



# Contact Us



**Website**

[www.strategicsteps.ca](http://www.strategicsteps.ca)



**Phone**

709.728.0065



**E-mail**

[craig@strategicsteps.ca](mailto:craig@strategicsteps.ca)



**HQ Address**

235, 450 Ordze Road,  
Sherwood Park, AB T8B 0C5