



Key Trends in Municipal Workforce Development

ROMA Conference

January 22, 2024

AMO's Workforce Development Project

In 2023, AMO launched a multi-year, \$4 million Workforce Development Project to:

- **Gather** data to better understand the sector's workforce needs today and in the future.
- **Engage** municipal leaders, employees, associations, education partners and experts to gather insights into trends impacting the municipal workforce.
- **Develop** tools and strategies to support municipalities in meeting their workforce needs.



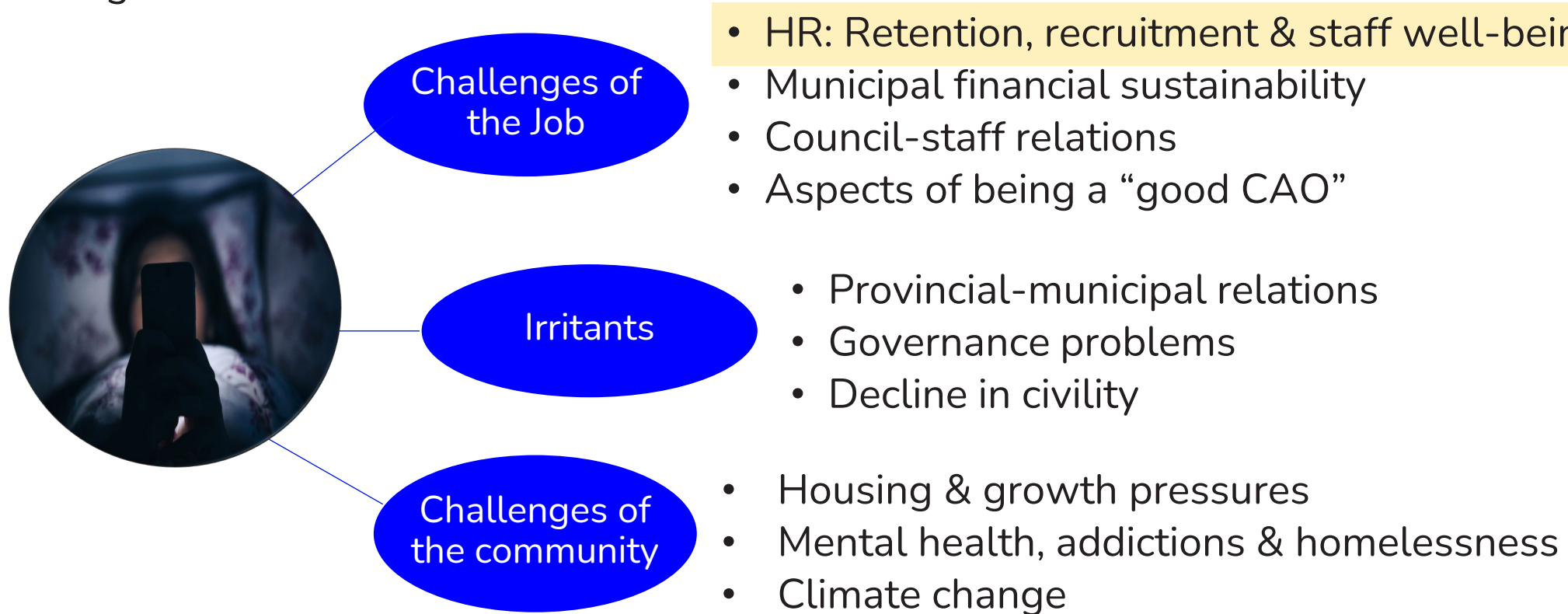
Recruitment and retention is a top issue in the sector

A convergence of factors are impacting the ability of Ontario municipalities to recruit and retain employees:

- Demographic trends, including the 'grey tsunami'
- After-effects of COVID-related stress and burnout
- Changing workplace expectations and the rise of flexible and remote work
- Growing competition for talent
- Evolving relationship between and among Council, staff and the public
- External factors, such as housing and cost of living

Human resources is the number #1 issue keeping CAOs up at night

For the past two years, **StrategyCorp's Annual CAO Survey** found that workforce issues are a top concern, including, attraction and retention, succession planning and staff well-being.



Who we've engaged to date....

Municipal Workforce

- **20** interviews with CAOs and / or HR leaders from municipalities across Ontario
- **~2,400** employees through the Municipal Workforce Survey (November 2023)

Professional Associations



Post-Secondary Partners



Other Key Organizations



As always, there's no “one size fits all” in the municipal sector

Workforce challenges exist across the entirety of municipal administration...but there is a significant amount of regional variation.

- In 2021, Ontario's 444 municipalities employed 226,000 employees, or 4% of Ontario's paid workforce.
- There are some common vacancies across the sectors, such as building inspectors, and planners.
- But in many cases, workforce gaps are locally specific and depend on the municipality's size, location, tier, and service mix.

Bearing this caveat in mind, there are some key insights regarding today's municipal workforce that may be instructive....

Key Findings & Insights

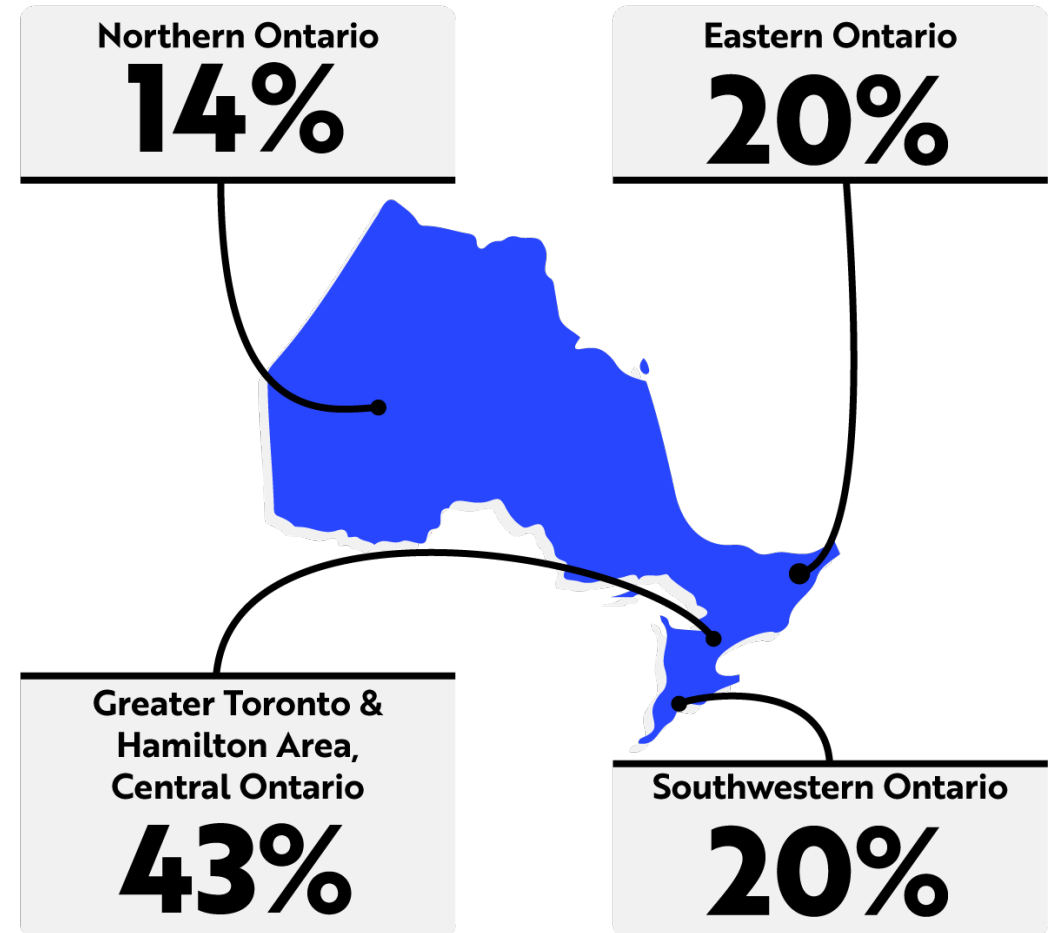
Municipal Workforce Survey

2,394 municipal employees completed the open-access digital survey.

1 in 3 work in municipalities with a population of 20,000-100,000.

62% work in non-union roles and about 1 in 4 work in Administration / Corporate Services.

43% are between 40-54 years old, although the survey saw good participation across most age brackets.



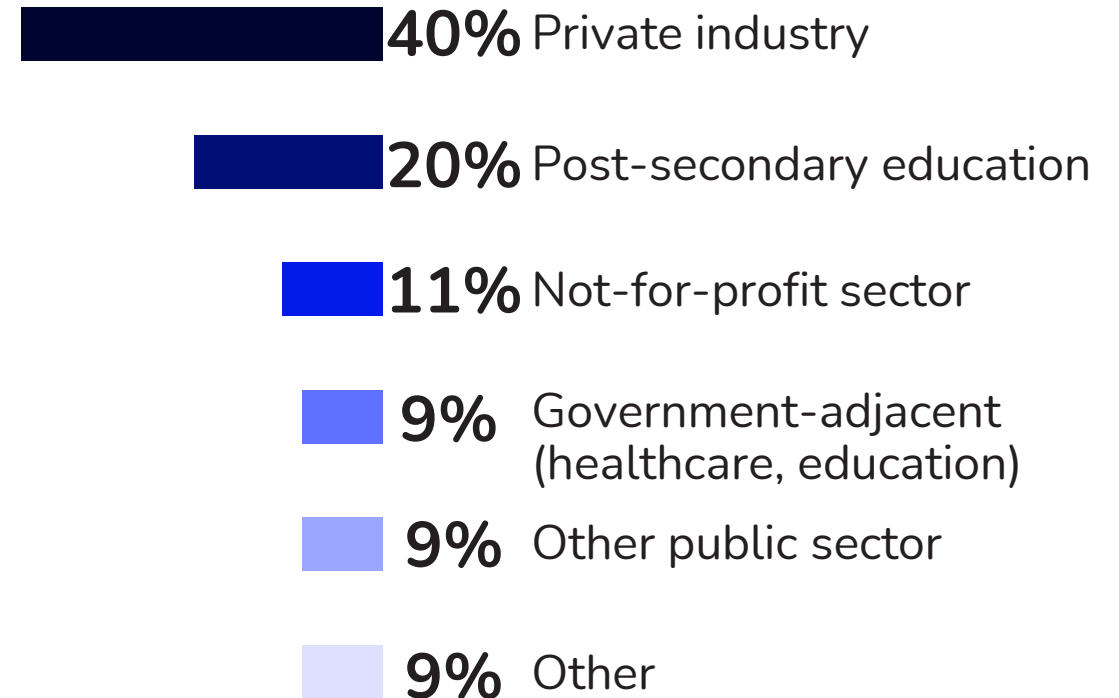
Entering the municipal sector

Employee attraction has two parts:

- Are prospective employees **aware** of career opportunities in local government?
- If they are aware, do they find the prospect of working in a municipality **attractive**?

31% heard about their jobs through family and friends.

Before joining the sector, municipal employees were in ...



Careers in local government are not “on the radar” of most people

- Lack of knowledge about local government is a critical barrier.
- **Only 20% of new entrants into municipal administration are coming from school.**
- Improved communications and marketing of the sector as an esteemed employer is critical.
- More internship and experiential education opportunities for students may also help bridge the awareness gap.

“ It would be a great idea for municipal staff to interact more with students to encourage younger job seekers to understand the roles of municipal staff.
- Survey Respondent

“ People don’t understand what municipalities do. They take us for granted.
-CAO

Jobs and career opportunities are not necessarily self-evident

The municipal sector can be hard to break into:

- Some job titles may be dated or unclear to prospective employees (e.g., by-law officer, clerk).
- Many entry-level roles call for experience or specialized skills.
- Career pathways and the “next step” are not always clear.

51% of municipal employees started out in entry-level roles.

“ For entry-level jobs, there really aren’t many for non-specialists ... or people are not sure what the jobs are because of the monicker attached to them. What does a clerk do? An MPA might be attracted to a policy analyst position - but what does a bylaw enforcement officer do?

- Former CAO

”

For those who are aware of the opportunity....

What brought people to the sector?



- **Compensation** in the global sense (including pension) is important...but there are other facets of the job that are attractive.
- The “classics” – **pension and benefits and job stability and security** – continue to be high motivators.
 - For the right audiences, we need to emphasize these factors.
- Another key motivator is the **desire to contribute to the community** – some people have the “calling”!

Many expect a modern, progressive workplace...

- The nature of work has changed since the pandemic, impacting both staff attraction and retention.
- Hybrid work is a fundamental change for municipal workplaces...and many continue to “iron out the kinks.”
- Expectations of workplace culture are changing:
 - Desire for more flexibility in work environment (e.g., schedules, location).
 - But also flexibility in terms of driving innovation and speeding up the pace of government.

“The pandemic had a profound impact on people’s outlook on the nature of work and work-life balance...they began to seriously rethink their priorities.”
- CAO”

“It is important for municipal leaders to be more forward thinking ... We have managers facing high levels of burnout with little to no flexibility.”
- Survey Respondent”

Current municipal employees: what they like and why they stay

60% of employees are satisfied with their jobs...



...but satisfaction appears to drop somewhat with tenure in the sector.



...satisfaction is relatively consistent across service areas.

When asked if they see themselves working at their current municipality in 2 years, **two-thirds said yes.**

Why?

- Job satisfaction and fulfillment
- Job security and benefits
- Career growth and advancement
- Proximity to home

What do employees like most?

43%

Pension and benefits

33%

Job stability and security

32%

Living in or close to the municipality they work in

32%

I find my work interesting

25%

The opportunity to make a difference in a community

In terms of what employees want improved, salary reigns supreme



43% Base salary or wage



30% Effective leadership



29% Feeling their work is valued and appreciated



24% Workplace culture and team dynamics



21% Workplace flexibility

- It's an old adage of HR that compensation isn't everything.
 - If employees don't feel valued or respected or well treated, no amount of money can correct for that.
- **But in Ontario in 2024, cost of living is the top concern for residents.**

“Gone are the days of being a martyr for the ‘corporation.’ You're still a public servant, but you need to be paid at the market rate.

- HR Director



Workloads are growing...as is staff burnout

- Municipal sector employment still has the perception of a 9-to-5 job...but this isn't the reality.
- Workloads and stress continue to increase due to the pressure to “do more with the same, or less.”
- In many municipalities, resident expectations of services and service levels are growing, adding more pressure to staff.
- Work-life balance matters for many employees and especially younger ones.
 - **More than 1 in 4 employees aged 18 – 29 listed work-life balance as one of the top 3 things they like about their jobs.**



Massively increased workload, working double what my weekly hours are supposed to be ... It's like running a marathon and never crossing the finish line.

- Survey Respondent



Working in the fishbowl environment isn't easy

- As much as employees are attracted to the public service, it has its downsides, particularly for those who have been in the sector for a while.
- Staff increasingly facing harassment and abuse from the public – both online and in-person.
- Maintaining the civility of the workplace is critical.
- Some municipalities are exploring policies to protect employees.

“ Working in municipal government is a thankless job that is always criticized, even more so with social media and keyboard warriors.

-Survey Respondent

“ Senior staff are in a fishbowl. Frontline workers get pushback from residents. The sense of entitlement to bad behaviour – it's not acceptable.

- CAO

Council-staff relations are always a work in progress...

- Conduct and behaviour of Council can impact employee retention and attraction, mainly for senior management.

16% of survey respondents selected “Council-staff relations” as an area requiring attention.

- More training for elected officials on their roles and responsibilities and stronger Codes of Conduct may be beneficial.
- “Strong Mayor” legislation also continues to loom over the sector.

“ With the strong mayor powers, nobody will say anything ... they are thinking, ‘Why should I stir up the hornets’ nest?’

- CAO

“ The implementation of a strong mayor’s system ... I feel the municipal sector is taking a turn for the worst. I have always felt that municipal government was a great career choice. Now I question if this will continue to be the case..

- Survey Respondent

Diversity, equity and inclusion – a challenge and an opportunity

Only 22% of survey respondents identified as a member of an equity deserving group.

- Many municipalities are developing corporate DEI strategies and/or undertaking equity audits to better understand gaps and barriers.
- Creating more inclusive workplaces will also involve considering internal processes, policies and procedures (i.e., hiring).
- Newcomers and immigrants are a critical talent pool for public sector organizations.
- Greater attention to DEI *within* communities also required.

“ [My municipality] needs an intervention of positive culture to eliminate bullying, DEI, and eliminate exclusion.
- Survey Respondent ”

“ I find it hard to believe that in this day in age we're still having conversations about diversity and leadership.
- HR Director ”

So, what's next?

There's no single solution that can address the full range of issues and challenges facing Ontario's municipal workforce. Rather, **there are multiple opportunities and strategies that will need to be tailored to the needs of individual municipalities.**

Outreach & Communications

- Tell the story of local government, share the value
- Build stronger connections with prospective employees (students, newcomers)

Policies & Procedures

- Develop best practices / templates that can be shared
- Review compensation competitiveness
- Update hiring practices to reduce barriers

People & Culture

- Council-staff relations training
- Staff recognition and wellness initiatives
- Leadership development

Technology & Process Improvement

- Shared services between municipalities
- AI opportunities to reduce workloads

Thank You

To learn more about **AMO's Workforce Development Project** and results from the **Municipal Employee Survey**, visit <https://www.amo.on.ca>



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