



# Careers that build communities

---

AMO's Municipal Workforce  
Development Project Roadmap

# Table of Contents

- 3 Ontario's Municipal Workforce Challenge
- 4 About the Project
- 4 Who We Engaged
- 4 What We Know and What We Learned
- 7 Roadmap: Planned Actions
- 14 Best Practices for Municipalities

# Executive Summary

Ontario's 444 municipalities rely on over 235,000 employees to deliver services that help communities thrive and prosper. As almost 4% of Ontario's paid workforce – municipal employees contribute to the economic and social fabric in every region of the province.

We know that municipalities offer good jobs – jobs with competitive compensation and benefits, job security, and the opportunity to make a meaningful difference to communities. Yet municipalities, like many sectors, are struggling to attract and retain the workforce they need.

In response to these challenges, many municipalities are implementing initiatives to support employee recruitment and retention. But there is also important work to be done at the sector-wide level. AMO is taking a leadership role because municipal governments care deeply about their communities and know they need the human resources to deliver critical services and infrastructure.

AMO established its Workforce Development Project to identify priorities and take action alongside its partners in and outside the sector. This Roadmap is the result of the first phase of work, setting out priority areas for the sector and actions for AMO and its partners to support Ontario's 444 municipalities in meeting their workforce needs.

We recognize the capacity challenges many municipalities are facing, but there is still a significant and primary role for individual municipalities on employee recruitment and retention. The final section identifies best practices that can support municipalities in aligning their local initiatives with this Roadmap.

## Priority Areas

- 1 | Increase awareness of what local government does and municipal career opportunities.
- 2 | Remove barriers and create opportunities for the next generation of municipal employees.
- 3 | Support the development, career growth, and well-being of current municipal employees.
- 4 | Promote positive interactions between Council members, employees, and members of the public.
- 5 | Promote best practices and scale initiatives up and across the sector.

# Ontario's Municipal Workforce Challenge

All municipalities – from large urban centres to rural and remote communities – are facing challenges in attracting and keeping the workers needed to administer and deliver these services.

These challenges are not unique to Ontario's municipal sector. Ontario's population is aging, more older adults are leaving the labour force, and the province's labour market growth is predicted to slow over the coming years.

In the municipal sector specifically, tens of thousands of employees are eligible to retire over the next few years. And for those not eligible to retire, municipal jobs can be increasingly challenging.

Municipalities and their employees are dealing with the results of chronic underinvestment by other orders of government in healthcare, mental health and addictions, social services, and social housing. Municipalities face significant financial pressures when providing services in their communities, which can impede their ability to enhance compensation and benefits and offer professional development and well-being initiatives for their staff. These choices have consequences to employee morale, retention, and recruitment.

All of this represents a critical challenge for Ontario's municipal sector: **How can we address a skills and experience gap while developing current employees to take on progressive roles and how can we attract new people to the sector?**

Municipalities invest nearly

**\$65 billion**

each year in services and infrastructure.

Almost 1/3 of those expenditures pay for services that are provincial responsibilities everywhere else in Canada.



## About the Project

The AMO Board of Directors has allocated up to \$1 million over four years for the Workforce Development Project, which aims to identify and implement actions it can take alongside its partners to support municipalities with their workforce challenges

The Project is supported by an Advisory Group, whose members represent senior municipal administrators from across Ontario, municipal staff associations, unionized municipal workers, the municipal pension administrator, and the post-secondary sector.

## Who We Engaged

- **Over 30 CAOs and HR directors** from municipalities across Ontario
- **2,400 employees** participated in the online Municipal Workforce Survey. Read the full results on AMO's [website](#).
- **Sector partners and associations:** Ontario Municipal Employees' Retirement System (OMERS), Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO), Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), Ontario Municipal Human Resources Association (OMHRA), Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Phelps Group, and Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI)
- **Post-secondary education institutions and students:** Colleges Ontario, Council of Ontario Universities, Indigenous Institutes Consortium, and five university and college programs



# What We Know and What We Learned

## Many municipalities lack capacity to support workforce development.

Many smaller municipalities lack the capacity – staff time and financial resources – to engage in best practices around workforce development, such as succession planning, professional development, and skills upgrading. They know where the gaps are and what needs to be done, but their resource challenges make it difficult to plan and implement. The sector needs to develop and promote turnkey solutions, wherever possible. Municipalities also need to partner with the education and post-secondary sectors, professional associations, and labour representatives to develop solutions that can benefit all.

## There is a lack of public knowledge about local government and municipal career opportunities.

The public does not understand what local government does or municipal career opportunities, and there is consensus that this is negatively impacting recruitment efforts. There is also consensus that if more people, particularly secondary and post-secondary students, had better knowledge of the municipal sector, there would be greater interest to work there.

## Employee retention is the first line of defense to workforce challenges.

The Municipal Employee Survey provided helpful guidance on what employees like about their jobs and what could be improved. Employers can work with their own employees to gather and use feedback. What employees like most can form the basis for future recruitment efforts and areas for improvement should be where time and financial resources are focused to keep current employees engaged. Municipalities also need to develop their own succession plans and support employees with skills development and mentorship so that they can take on leadership roles and support long-term institutional knowledge.

---


*“We know there are things we should be doing but we’re overwhelmed. We need some processes to change but we’ve also got to reduce the work for municipalities to be able to do it.”*

Chief Administrative  
Officer

---

## What do employees like most about their job?

 **43%**  
Pension and  
benefits


 **33%**  
Job stability  
and security

 **32%**  
It is close to  
where I live


 **32%**  
I find my work  
interesting

 **25%**  
The opportunity to  
make a difference  
in the community

## What do employees want to see improved?

 **43%**  
Base salary  
or wage

 **30%**  
Effective  
leadership

 **29%**  
Feeling that their  
work is recognized  
and valued

 **24%**  
Workplace  
culture and  
team dynamics

 **21%**  
Workplace flexibility  
(e.g., remote /  
hybrid work policies)

**The municipal sector needs to remove barriers to employment to expand its talent pool.**

To attract the next generation of municipal employees, the sector needs to do more to recruit young people, newcomers, Indigenous peoples, and individuals who belong to equity-deserving groups. Many municipalities are making strides to foster inclusive workplaces and communities, but barriers continue to exist that are preventing these groups from joining the sector and the sector needs to identify and remove them. There are social and economic benefits when municipalities have a workforce that represents the residents they serve.

**Declining civility is negatively affecting employee well-being and retention.**

Working at the level of government closest to the people has its challenges. An erosion of trust in all levels of government and the toxicity of social media contribute to increased tension, and municipal employees are experiencing abuse and harassment from the public and even Council members. The sector needs to protect employees from abuse and harassment and promote respectful civil engagement.

---

*“Why would I want to work for and live in a community where nobody looks like me?”*

Employee

---

*“In my opinion, Council behaviour makes or breaks a municipality.”*

Employee

---



# Roadmap: Planned Actions

---

This Roadmap sets out five priority areas where AMO believes it can best support local governments with employee recruitment and retention. Each priority includes recommendations for actions and initiatives at the sector-wide level: marketing and communications, strategic partnerships, research, advocacy, and resource development and coordination.

---

## Increase awareness of what local government does and municipal career opportunities.

- 01** Create a marketing and communications strategy to improve public awareness of local government and municipal careers.
- 02** Strengthen connections and build new partnerships with education sectors to integrate municipal issues and career options at all levels.
- 03** Partner with professional associations to build awareness and engage in joint advocacy.
- 04** Lend support to OMERS to communicate the value of the defined benefit pension plan to prospective and current employees.

---

## Remove barriers and create opportunities for the next generation of municipal employees.

- 05** Develop tools and resources for municipalities to reduce barriers to employment for young people, newcomers, Indigenous peoples, and people who belong to equity-deserving groups.
- 06** Partner with and support newcomer service organizations to address employment barriers faced by newcomers.
- 07** Support municipalities with creating more experiential learning and entry-level opportunities in local government.

---

## Support the development, career growth, and well-being of current municipal employees.

- 08** Educate Council members and the public about the importance of skilled and engaged employees to deliver local services.
- 09** Promote opportunities for skill-building and professional development through secondments, job exchanges, and mentorships.

---

## Promote positive interactions between Council members, employees, and members of the public.

- 10** Advocate for good governance practices and stronger accountability measures for Councils.
- 11** Protect municipal employees from abuse and harassment and promote respectful civic engagement.

---

## Promote best practices and scale initiatives up and across the sector.

- 12** Create and promote a digital hub of municipal best practice resources.
- 13** Offer programs and services for municipalities that benefit and add value for employees.

## Increase awareness of what local government does and municipal career opportunities.

---

### Action #1

#### **Create a marketing and communications strategy to improve public awareness of local government and municipal careers.**

We know that many people do not fully understand what local governments do, the variety of services they deliver, or the range of municipal career opportunities available. To address this, AMO will create a marketing and communications strategy to educate the public about local government and its career opportunities. The strategy would use a combination of digital marketing, traditional advertising, and media relations with the central message that municipal careers offer a way for individuals to make a difference in their communities.

### Action #2

#### **Strengthen connections and build new partnerships with education sectors to integrate municipal issues and career options at all levels.**

The K-12 and post-secondary education sectors are important partners to improve awareness of local government and municipal careers. These partners include the Ministry of Education, school board associations, Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and post-secondary associations such as Colleges Ontario, the Council of Ontario Universities, and the Indigenous Institutes Consortium. AMO will continue to work with these organizations to integrate learning about local government and municipal careers in the K-12 curriculum and explore changes to existing post-secondary programs or the creation of new programs to provide students with the skills and experience municipalities need.

### Action #3

#### **Partner with professional associations to build awareness and engage in joint advocacy.**

There are several in-demand municipal jobs that require specific intervention because of licensing and certification. Roles such as planners, building inspectors, water and wastewater operators, and healthcare professionals are unique because municipal employers compete with other public and private employers for individuals with these distinct skills and credentials. AMO will partner with professional associations to build awareness of municipal career opportunities and to engage in joint advocacy to increase enrolment in training and education programs that address these skills shortages.



## Increase awareness of what local government does and municipal career opportunities.

### Action #4

#### Lend support to OMERS to communicate the value of the defined benefit pension plan to prospective and current employees.

The OMERS pension plan is an important benefit that gives municipal employees financial security in retirement. As the plan administrator, OMERS provides current and potential members with information about the value of the plan. While many employees see pension and benefits as a top motivator to work in local government, many young people are more focused on their take-home pay due to high costs of living. AMO will support OMERS in building awareness and showcasing the full value of a defined benefit pension plan, especially among younger employees.



## Remove barriers and create opportunities for the next generation of municipal employees.

---

### Action #5

#### **Develop tools and resources for municipalities to reduce barriers to employment for young people, newcomers, Indigenous peoples, and people who belong to equity-deserving groups.\***

AMO recognizes that we lack sector-wide data on diversity in municipal workplaces. However, this data gap shouldn't stop us from acting because we know there are economic and social benefits to reducing employment barriers. Some municipalities have done their own employment audits and studies on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which helps identify local issues and barriers to employment. AMO will develop tools and resources to pinpoint barriers faced by young people, newcomers, Indigenous peoples, and people who belong to equity-deserving groups and suggest practical steps to remove these barriers.

### Action #6

#### **Partner with and support newcomer service organizations to address employment barriers faced by newcomers.**

Immigration is a vital contributor to Ontario's workforce and our overall economic prosperity. The Financial Accountability Office notes that since the mid-2010s, newcomers have made up 63 per cent of the growth in the province's labour force. Municipalities need to tap into the skills and experience of newcomers to meet their workforce needs. AMO will reach out to and partner with newcomer service organizations to build awareness of municipal careers and lend support to advocacy efforts to make it easier for newcomers to access employment in Ontario. These initiatives include removing domestic experience requirements, recognizing foreign credentials, and bolstering job matching programs.

### Action #7

#### **Support municipalities with creating more experiential learning and entry-level opportunities in local government.**

Experiential learning benefits municipalities by bringing in new talent who might become full-time workers. It also gives students and recent graduates work experience and exposure to the day-to-day workings of municipal government. To attract the next generation of employees, municipalities should be developing their own talent pipelines by creating more co-op positions, apprenticeships, and internships. AMO will develop guidance and resources to connect municipal employers with education institutions and with funding opportunities.

---

\* People from equity-deserving groups include people who are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Persons of Colour), women, non-binary, transgender, 2SLGBTQ+, English as a second language, newcomers to Canada, lower income, neurodivergent, living with physical disabilities, and holding non-Christian religious or spiritual affiliations.

## Support the development, career growth, and well-being of current municipal employees.

### Action #8

#### **Educate Council members and the public about the importance of skilled and engaged employees to deliver local services.**

Municipalities often face difficult choices due to limited resources. They might consider cutting employee-related expenses like training and compensation raises, but this can harm morale and lead to higher turnover costs. Through its website, education and conference programming, and ongoing media relations and member communications, AMO can show that investing in retention pays off – happier and more engaged employees, less turnover and reduced hiring costs, and consistency and quality in service delivery.

### Action #9

#### **Promote opportunities for skill-building and professional development through secondments, job exchanges, and mentorships.**

Many municipal employees want chances to improve their skills and take on new challenges, but not all municipalities offer ongoing training, mentorships, or secondments. These opportunities provide employees with skills and experience and enable organizations to meet their operational needs while planning for the future through succession planning and internal progression. AMO can promote employee exchange, mentorship, and secondment programs within the sector, with the provincial and federal governments, and with other broader public sector partners and Band Councils. AMO can also help municipalities by providing guidance and templates for establishing these programs.



## Promote positive interactions between Council members, employees, and members of the public.



### Action #10

#### **Advocate for good governance practices and stronger accountability measures for Councils.**

Council members' conduct and behaviour have a direct influence on workplace culture and can affect employee recruitment and retention. There have been reported instances of employees being harassed by Council members or of Council members inserting themselves in operational matters and staff duties. To support good governance, recruitment and retention, and the municipality's reputation as an employer, Councils must allow staff to fulfill their responsibilities without harassment or impingement. AMO will continue to monitor the impacts of the *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act*, and advocate for stronger provincial measures regarding good governance and municipal codes of conduct. AMO will also continue to offer education and conference programming to elected officials about their roles and responsibilities in relation to those of municipal employees.

### Action #11

#### **Protect municipal employees from abuse and harassment and promote respectful civic engagement.**

Municipal employees in a variety of job categories and levels engage directly and regularly with members of the public, where they can be at risk of in-person and online harassment and abuse and even physical aggression. AMO will offer resources on how employers can put in place policies and procedures to support and enhance employee safety. This action will also be supported through AMO's Healthy Democracy Project which includes initiative to foster respectful civic dialogue and idea exchange.

## Promote best practices and scale initiatives up and across the sector.

### Action #12

#### Create and promote a digital hub of municipal best practice resources.

Although there are many resources available, volume and duplication can make it difficult for municipalities to identify the resources best suited for their needs. In coordination with municipal association partners, including AMCTO, OMAA, OMHRA, OMSSA, and others, AMO will explore the creation of a comprehensive digital hub of templates, guides, and reports developed by public and private sector organizations that support local workforce development initiatives.



### Action #13

#### Offer programs and services for municipalities that benefit and add value for employees.

LAS, AMO's business services, is the preferred provider of innovative and creative programs for Ontario municipalities and the broader public sector. Through LAS, there is a long-standing Group Benefits Program and a new offering through Canoe, a municipally-focused cooperating purchasing group, that can help municipalities support and meet the needs of their employees – such as group benefits, financial literacy programs, and health and wellness programs and services.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR MUNICIPALITIES

We know that many municipalities are undertaking their own local initiatives to build up their workforces. We also know that local leadership and staff know their communities and workplaces best. AMO's planned actions are aimed to support the whole sector, but individual municipalities will still need to take action. Municipalities can consider the list of best practices below to build upon the five priorities and planned actions in this Roadmap within their own organizations.

## **Anticipate change: create and implement a succession plan for the critical roles in your workplace.**

Succession planning involves planning for when key roles become vacant – it is critical for business continuity and reduces the burden on other employees. Succession planning identifies interim coverage of critical duties and then developing internal candidates for progression or establishing an external recruitment plan. There are a wealth of resources, best practices, and templates that can help municipalities plan for future vacancies and skill gaps. Municipalities don't need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to organizational planning and, as is often the case, a plan is better than no plan.

## **Regularly review and update compensation and benefits.**

Municipalities should review their employee compensation at least every three to four years. The principles of fairness, competitiveness, and equity should be the focus when negotiating collective agreements and negotiations with management or non-unionized employees. Municipalities should also review benefits packages regularly to ensure benefits are in line with leading-edge practices and employee needs.

## **Develop or update local recruitment strategies and consider new tactics to attract candidates.**

Most municipalities lack a formal recruitment strategy, often using traditional methods when it comes to advertising job openings and the benefits of working in local government. In today's competitive job market, municipalities need to ensure that they are reaching new audiences and communicating what makes them an "employer of choice." This can include using social media, participating in local job fairs, and if necessary, offering incentives, such as signing bonuses or reimbursing moving expenses to attract talent.



## **Engage in local outreach to secondary schools, post-secondary institutions, and training programs to build awareness and identify opportunities for partnerships.**

Local education and training institutions have a ready-made pool of educated candidates who have a tie to the local area and may stay after graduation for the right opportunity. Building formal partnerships takes time, but the first step is for municipal staff to identify and engage with key contacts at these institutions, likely with the institution's career services department or with a specific program.

## **Allocate funds and staff resources to create co-op and internship opportunities.**

While AMO can support the sector in building capacity to expand experiential learning opportunities, Councils and senior leadership need to create co-op and internship positions that provide meaningful experiences for young people. This means allocating budget and staff resources to supporting these positions and achieving outcomes that benefit both students and municipalities – a short-term investment for long-term gain. Allocating staff time to support and mentor co-op and intern positions is critical to ensure that these individuals learn on-the-job and can share their skills and knowledge. Municipalities should also consider how they might support these temporary or short-term positions with finding housing or transportation to create a more attractive opportunity.

## **Conduct employment equity audits to identify and address the barriers impacting the full inclusion of equity-deserving groups.**

An equity audit is a comprehensive review of an organization's demographics and formal and informal policies, practices, and procedures as they relate to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of equity-deserving individuals. Like a mirror, an equity audit reflects the organization's strengths and challenges and provides recommendations to address the identified barriers. Many barriers to full inclusion remain unidentified because those responsible for removing the barriers might not experience those same barriers. An equity audit provides outside perspective on what can or should be changed to attract and retain members of equity-deserving groups to your municipality.





### **Adopt and apply an equity lens to all programs and services.**

Many municipalities have adopted an “equity lens” to evaluate the impact of policy and spending decisions on individuals and groups that experience marginalization. Although the application of an equity lens looks different in every organization, at a fundamental level, it embeds equity across all departments and programs, which is critical to driving structural transformation across the organization and in the community. This approach can help to make your community more attractive for diverse people to live in and your organization more attractive for diverse people to work at.

### **Support employees with skills development and career progression using performance plans and reviews.**

Performance plans and reviews are a way for employees to set goals and discuss career progression opportunities with their managers. A regular performance review cycle keeps both employees and their leaders accountable to the goals set, while the process ensures two-way communication is ongoing. When done right, performance management is a vehicle to engage employees in defining their own career path and identifying the supports required to get there.

### **Regularly review workplace health, safety, harassment, and conduct policies and protocols.**

Everyone should feel safe and supported at their place of work. Municipalities need to ensure that they have policies and protocols in place to protect employees and that employees are trained to recognize and manage problematic situations, whether that be with a member of the public, colleague, or Council member. This is particularly important given the alarming increases in cases of harassment and abuse of municipal employees.



**The Workforce Development Project is supported by an Advisory Group, whose members bring extensive expertise related to employee recruitment and retention in the public sector.**

**Chair: Fareed Amin**

Senior Consultant, Phelps Group, Chair

**David Arbuckle**

Executive Director, AMCTO

**Kyle Attansio**

Chief Administrative Officer, City of Kenora

**Doug Bell**

Executive Director, OMSSA

**Elaine Baxter-Tahir**

Chief Administrative Officer, Region of Durham

**Lori Bolton**

President, OMHRA and Director of Human Resources, City of Orillia

**Celine Chiovitti**

Chief Pension Officer, OMERS

**Marnie Cluckie**

City Manager, City of Hamilton

**Michael Duben**

Chief Administrative Officer, Municipality of Chatham-Kent

**Adam Garcia**

Manager, Executive Office, AMO

**Fred Hahn**

President, CUPE Ontario

**Janet Hope**

Vice President, Policy & Innovation, Colleges Ontario

**Lanie Hurdle**

Chief Administrative Officer, City of Kingston

**Lindsay Jones**

Director of Policy, AMO

**Marsha Josephs**

Executive Director, Indigenous Institutes Consortium

**Don MacLeod**

Chief Administrative Officer, Township of Zorra

**Mary Madigan-Lee**

Chief People Officer, City of Toronto

**Peter Neufeld**

Chief Administrative Officer, Municipality, Leamington and President, OMAA

**Krista Orendorff**

Vice-President, Public Affairs, Council of Ontario Universities

**Brian Rosborough**

Executive Director, AMO

**Janette Smith**

Former City Manager (retired), City of Hamilton

**Amy Vickery**

City Manager, City of Temiskaming Shores





**Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)**  
155 University Ave., Suite 800, Toronto, ON M5H 3B7

**Telephone direct:** 416-971-9856  
**Fax:** 416-971-6191  
**Toll-free in Ontario:** 1-877-426-6527  
**E-mail:** [amo@amo.on.ca](mailto:amo@amo.on.ca)  
**Website:** [www.amo.on.ca](http://www.amo.on.ca)