

# Strengthening Public Service:

## Workforce Challenges and Opportunities for Local Government Entities in Minnesota

### Background

In fall 2024, the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and the League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) partnered with the Citizens League to develop a policy project to research and explore recruitment and retention challenges and opportunities facing local governments statewide. What emerged was a six-month project period to gather data, which was synthesized in early 2025 into a report of findings, including recommendations and solutions to support a robust and thriving public workforce.

### Scope

‘Public service’ is vast and varied. For this research and report, ‘local government public service’ referred to City and County municipal government work in the State of Minnesota. Minnesota’s public sector workforce spans well beyond these two institutions, and the report does include feedback and insights representing other units of government.

### Methods

- Two online surveys:
  - One for individuals who currently work or formerly worked in a local government capacity
  - A second for members of the public who have not been employed by a local unit of government, focused on their interactions with and understanding of local government roles and responsibilities
- Three virtual listening sessions, open to the public and provided at different times throughout the day
- Group meetings, conducted across the state, to solicit feedback and gather ideas from city, county, and other local government employees or association groups
- One-on-one interviews and conversations with individuals holding relevant experience and feedback

**Across all data collection methods, findings represent roughly 91% of counties and roughly 25% of cities in Minnesota statewide.**

With questions, feedback, ideas, additional research opportunities or to request a presentation of our findings, please contact [policy@citizensleague.org](mailto:policy@citizensleague.org).



### **Project Participants and Representation:**

*Numbers At A  
Glance*

**856**

Surveys Completed

**15**

Meetings and interviews

**3**

Virtual public sessions

**79**

MN Counties  
represented in all data  
collection methods

**211**

MN Cities represented  
in all data collection  
methods

**940+**

Total number of  
Minnesotans who  
contributed feedback to  
inform this report.

# Findings

## Key Themes

Local Governments are Distinct	Social, Political, and Cultural Shifts Impact Local Government	Resources Matter
Though they may share similar governing structures, regulations, language and underlying commitments to serving their community members, it is critical to remember that not all local governments have the same needs or challenges when considering opportunities to bolster public service.	As the world changes, so must our institutions. It is important to recognize that our institutions don't just exist – they consist of real people, showing up and doing critical jobs every day.	Levy differences (and resistance), unequal revenue streams, and competition for capital investment greatly impact city and county workforce considerations. Rising costs often mean tough decisions for local leaders.

## Relevant Topics

*(detailed in the Report with Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations)*

- **Recruitment:** Recruitment is a challenge faced by local governments of all sizes and in all areas of the state, with hiring challenges most prominent in law enforcement and public safety, maintenance (water and wastewater treatment, building inspection), information technology, and human services providers.
- **Salary and Benefits:** Across the board, compensation was indicated as a challenge for local government entities in Minnesota – but there was no strong consensus or agreement amongst our survey respondents about how salaries and benefits compare to the private sector.
- **Training:** Training was raised as an opportunity to advance qualifications of local government job seekers, and project participants also centered experiences and expectations for training opportunities for existing employees and electeds.
- **Turnover and Retention:** The ability to retain talented and skilled employees in local government is a serious concern. Many local governments report heightened turnover and expect challenges in filling roles with upcoming expected generational retirements.
- **Silos of Administrative and Elected Work Areas:** Misunderstanding or misinformation about the differences between administrative and elected sides of local government puts a strain on important working relationships, and can negatively impact morale and efficacy.
- **Public Understanding and Civic Education:** There is a noted lack of knowledge and understanding about the many roles, functions, and responsibilities of local government in Minnesota, both within schools and among the general public.
- **Networks:** Networks of support are critical to the success of local government staff at all levels. Networks can refer to membership-based association groups, partner and adjacent organizations, national peer connections and conferences, and state and regional peer groups.