

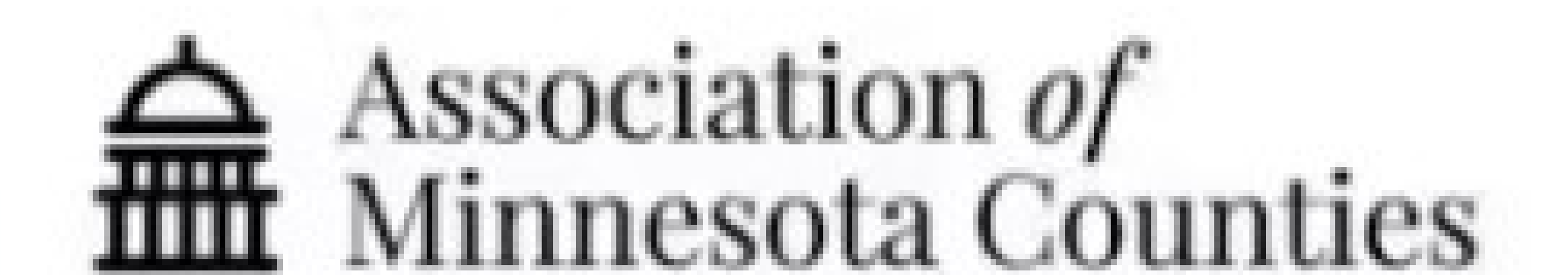
Strengthening Public Service

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

League of Minnesota Cities Annual Conference

Pre-Conference Workshop

June 25th, 2025



Who We Are

The Citizens League is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that empowers people to engage in civic life and public policy to make Minnesota a better place to live and work for everyone.



ENGAGE

many different voices
and perspectives



ACTIVATE

deeper participation
of people in policy



IMPACT

critical policy issues using
our unique approach



BUILD

organizational
sustainability

Our Work



Public Policy
Projects



Policy Events
and Panels



Capitol
Pathways
Program



Workshops
and Trainings



MN
Legislative
Exchange



What city are you representing?



Gut check! How do you feel today about workforce recruitment, hiring, and retention for your city?



Methods

1. Two **online surveys**
2. Three **virtual listening sessions**, open to the public and provided at different times throughout the day
3. **Group meetings**, conducted across the state, to solicit feedback and gather ideas from city, county, and other local government employees or association groups
4. **One-on-one interviews and conversations** with individuals holding relevant experience and feedback

Representation + Participation

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



Project Participants and Representation: Numbers At A Glance

856
Surveys completed

15
Meetings and interviews

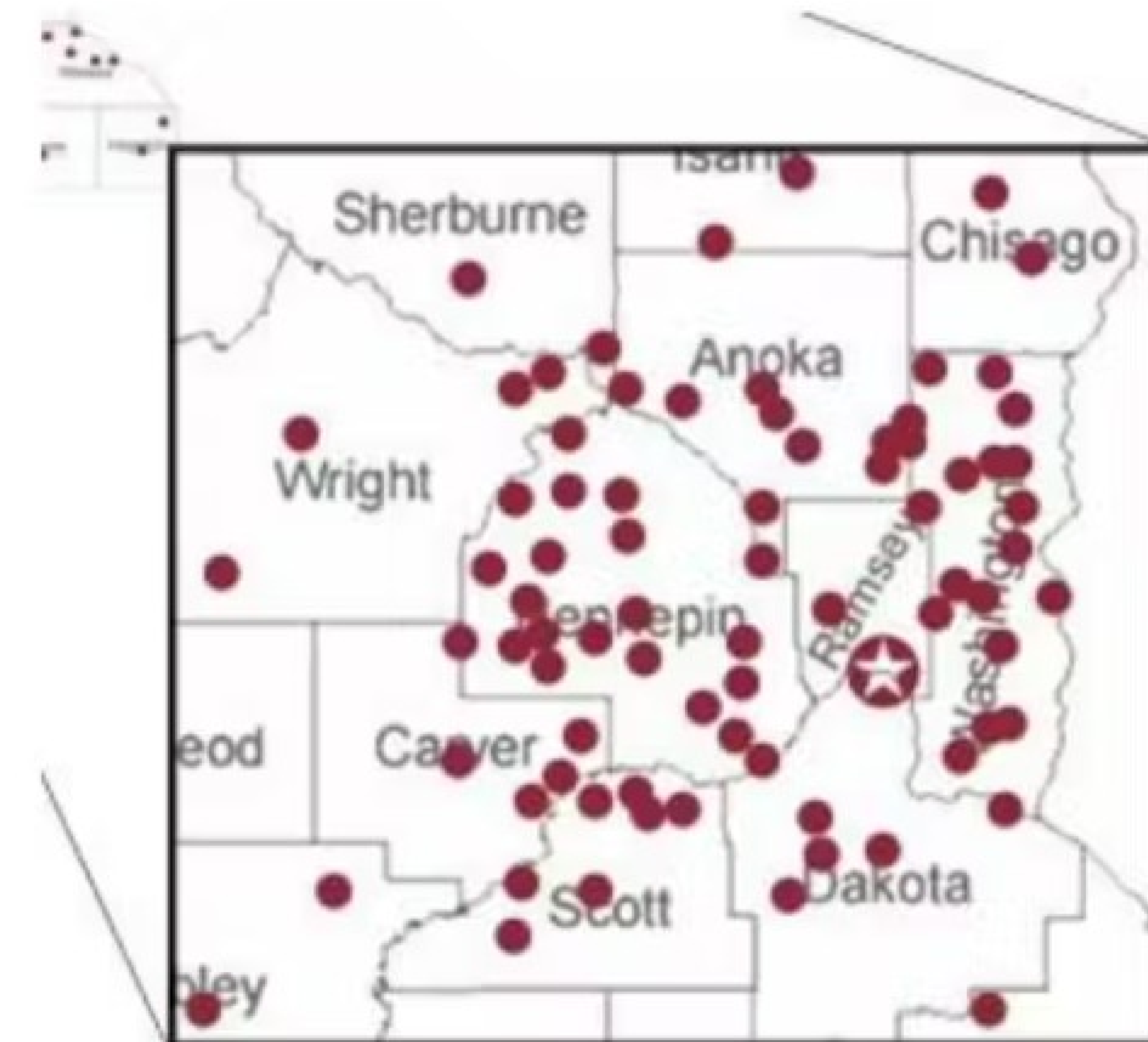
3
Virtual public sessions

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

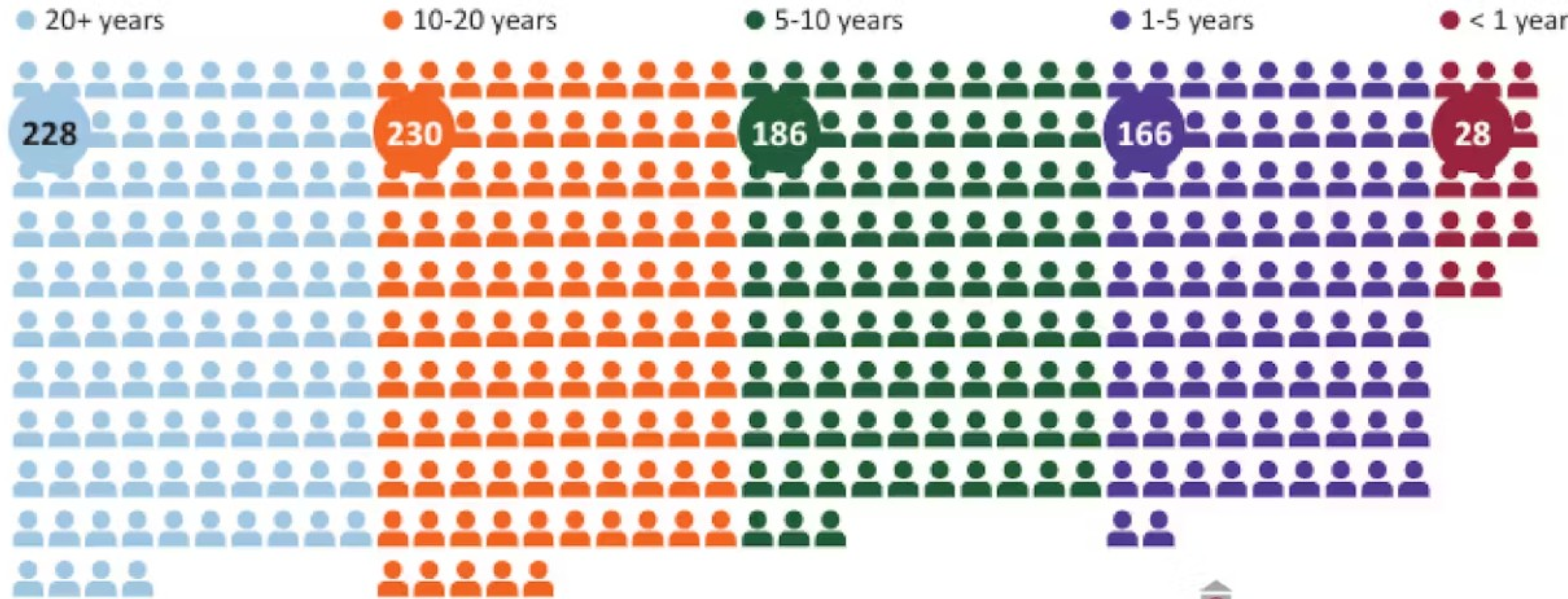
Representation + Participation



Representation + Participation

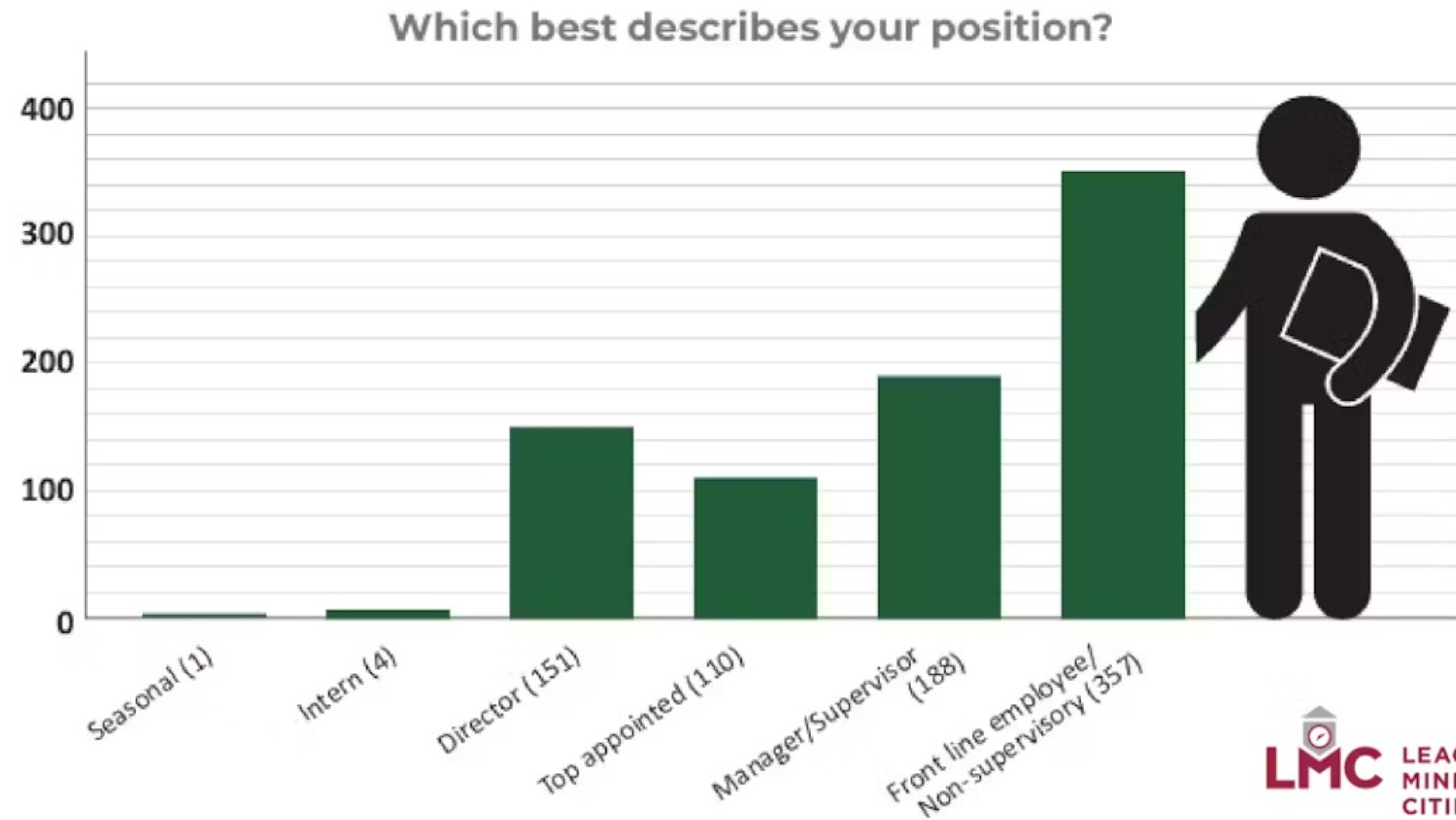
CURRENT AND FORMER LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Length of Time in Public Service



Representation + Participation

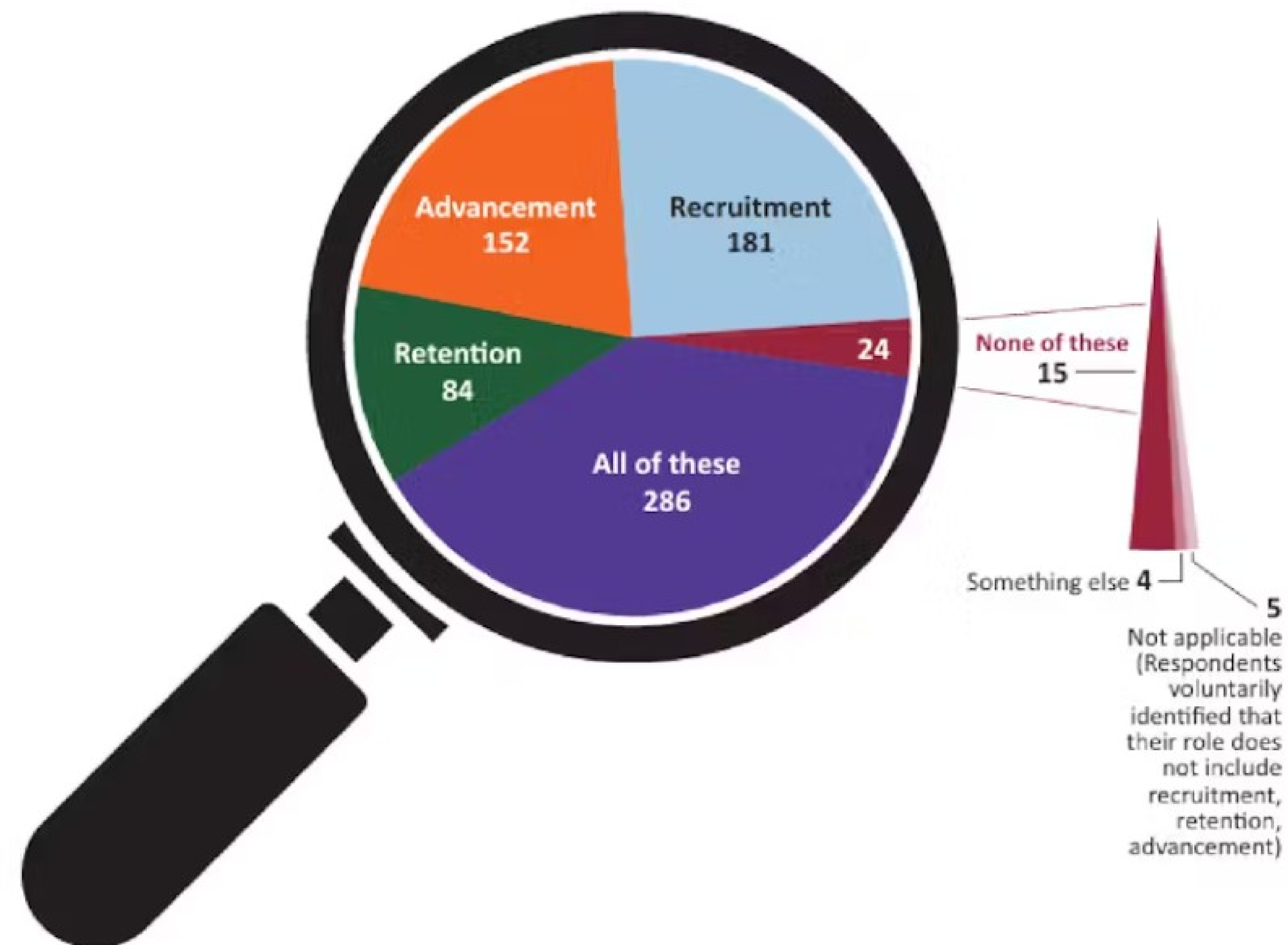
CURRENT AND FORMER LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Representation + Participation

CURRENT AND FORMER LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

In your experience, which of these is most difficult:



Report Outcomes

- **Three** key themes
- **Seven** relevant topics
 - Challenges, opportunities, and recommendations
- **36** recommendations
 - Many recommendations come directly from the feedback and suggestions of local government employees

Key Themes

Not 'One and the Same' – Local Governments are Distinct

Perhaps the single most important takeaway from this report is: local governments are distinct... and **not all have the same needs or challenges.**

Local governments range in density, rurality, tourism, topography, climate, demographics and more...these all play a prominent role in the way governments make decisions, how local governments ought to be considered in policy shifts and expectations made more broadly, and consequently how Minnesota residents experience quality of life.

One meeting participant stated that there is simply ***“no cookie cutter way – every [local government] is different.”***

‘The Times, They Are A’ Changin’ ’ - Social, Political, Cultural Impacts

Local governments have all been impacted by a global pandemic and public health crisis, calls for racial justice with a magnifying glass on Minnesota since 2020, the evolving nature of work and “work-life balance,” and increasing political polarization and partisanship.

Institutions don’t just exist – they consist of **real people, showing up and doing critical jobs every day.**

And while government systems have many tried and trusted ways of doing business, change is critical and the **‘status quo’ may not always be the right answer on its own.**

‘Must Be the Money’ – Resources Matter

Local communities having the least amount of trouble with recruitment and retention tend to be the ones with more capital and access to resources.

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,** and there are concerns about cuts to higher levels of funding.

Ultimately, local resource allocation centers the key question: **what does our community value?**

Relevant Topics

Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations

Recruitment

A challenge faced by local governments of all sizes and in all areas – particularly in areas like law enforcement, maintenance, IT and human services.

Challenges include:

- Restrictions on remote and hybrid work as key considerations for new hires: “number one question in interviews”
- Generational differences
- Hiring techniques and technologies
- Competition amongst neighboring jurisdictions

Opportunities include:

- Tours of facilities and hands-on experiences
- Word-of-mouth from current employees
- High school recruitment, paid college internships

Recommendations include:

- Adopt flexibility in job descriptions
- Encourage new marketing opportunities for local government roles
- Clearly communicate financial equivalent of benefits

Salary and Benefits

Across the board, compensation was indicated as a challenge for local governments – but there was no consensus about how salaries and benefits compare with the private sector.

Challenges include:

- Limited abilities to provide incentives, such as sign-on or retention bonuses or merit increases
- Feelings of ‘poaching’ from one local government to another
- Risks and fears about public opinion and salaries for public sector employees

Opportunities include:

- Wage studies/compensation assessments
- Training opportunities for certification, advancement, and professional development
- Student loan forgiveness and tuition reimbursement programs

Recommendations include:

- Develop creative/flexible benefit solutions
- Protect and stabilize PERA
- Provide thorough, regular education for employees about existing benefits; consider opportunities to create new benefits

Training

Training was identified as critical to readying local government job-seekers pre-recruitment as well as for maintaining skill sets and benefitting workplace culture for existing employees and electeds.

Challenges include:

- Limited locations for training and certification for specified and technical roles
- In-house training of new hires bears risk of losing them after certification is complete
- Local government employees who may benefit from training are reluctant to take advantage of that which is offered

Opportunities include:

- On-the-job trainee programs and tuition reimbursement
- Available training opportunities from association groups
- Realistic balance of skills and qualifications for employees balanced with ongoing training opportunities

Recommendations include:

- Cost reduction for post-secondary programs education and training for local government careers
- Require city and county orientations for elected and hired employees
- Continue to invest in internal curriculum or partnership opportunities

Turnover and Retention

Turnover can contribute to feelings of distress and instability – but also, fresh perspectives and new opportunities for collaboration.

Challenges include:

- Lack of succession planning
- Recruiting new employees vs. overlooking existing talent in the workplace
- Burnout
- Safety concerns – both physical and psychological

Opportunities include:

- Benefits, policies and initiatives customized to assist employees in their jobs
- Exit surveys and interviews, including transparency and opportunity for genuine employee participation
- Phased retirements

Recommendations include:

- Implement flexible options for partial retirements and temporary work assignments
- Build transition and succession planning into job duties and expectations; begin conversations early
- Offer regular feedback opportunities (entry, exit, satisfaction surveys)

Silos of Administrative and Elected Work Areas

The dynamics between elected officials and local government personnel became apparent in our research and feedback – including misunderstandings and disconnects, but also a strong interest in improving these relationships and finding opportunities for collaboration.

Challenges include:

- Misunderstanding and misinformation about the differences between administrative and elected sides of local government
- Post-election onboarding and adjustment time
- Perceptions about partisan endorsements with electeds vs. nonpartisan commitments and responsibilities of staff

Opportunities include:

- Arrangements around approvals of major tasks vs. more day-to-day details contribute to stronger relationships and more humility, trust and collaboration
- Establishing work groups to address topics such as restructuring/salary steps

Recommendations include:

- Discourage partisan endorsements in local government elections
- Provide robust onboarding opportunities and trainings about roles
- Opportunities for elected officials to learn more about various departments/work

Public Understanding and Civic Education

There is a noted lack of knowledge and understanding about the many roles, functions, and responsibilities of local government entities in Minnesota, in young people and among the general public.

Challenges include:

- Public / constituent misunderstanding, confusion, frustration, entitlement, and even hostility around local government roles and responsibilities, expressed to employees and elected officials
- Young people lack awareness of local government roles or of local government as a sector within which to pursue career avenues

Opportunities include:

- Intentional partnerships with schools and learning groups to provide exposure to local government buildings, practices, and jobs
- Public awareness campaigns to seek out new audiences

Recommendations include:

- Amplify local Board and Commission recruitment and allow youth participation
- Advocate for the expansion of civics education with focus on local government

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.

Challenges include:

- Individuals working in local government may experience isolation, burnout, and frustration in unique situations
- Elected, appointed, or hired officials themselves may have some confusion around local government role delineation
- Budget and capacity realities can limit opportunities for participation in associations, peer groups, etc.

Opportunities include:

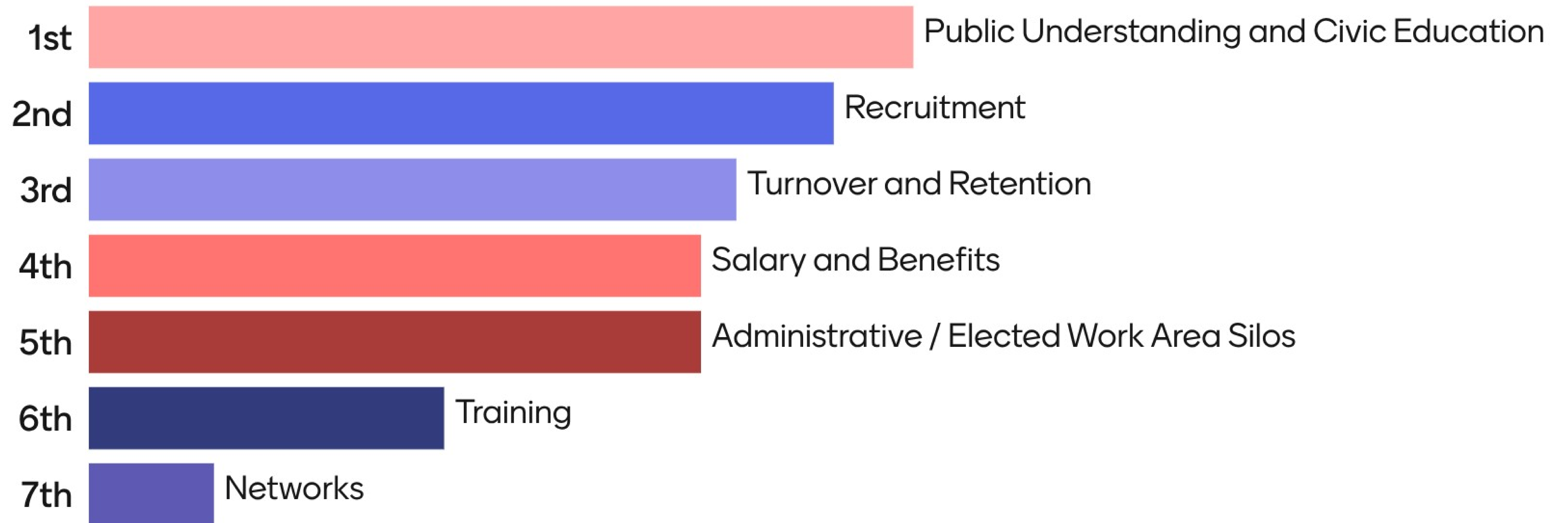
- Peer network spaces offer an opportunity to process, receive and offer advice, and feel understood
- Training opportunities with external groups (rather than intra-jurisdiction) can be more beneficial
- Pairing tactical skills training with peer relationship building can support morale and retention

Recommendations include:

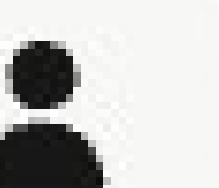
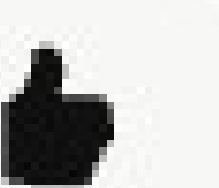
- Create opportunities for size- or budget- limited localities to participate in dues-based membership groups
- Promote opportunities for participation in advocacy days or summits for shared local government narrative building
- Inform employees about network opportunities through regular communications



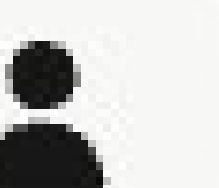
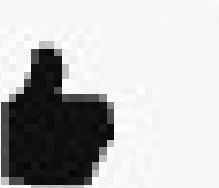
Select the top three relevant topics in order of importance for your work and jurisdiction:



Have you tried any intentional educational partnerships? (shadow days, internships, etc?)



What have you tried that has worked well to strengthen the public service workforce in your city?



What questions or other innovative ideas do you have?

Public service alumni network

How to handle short/long-term disability when you have a small city staff.

I just wanted to add: before running for Council, I attended almost all City Council meetings for 4 years. When I finally ran, I led with that fact, and was not asked what my pol party is.

I think it would be interesting to see you think/talk about how some of these themes impact the other/systems thinking. E.g. training/benefits/network links to job satisfaction/retention

Thank You!

The wealth and breadth of insights and experiences in this report are likely just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the myriad of workforce challenges and opportunities facing local governments in Minnesota.

It has been a privilege for Citizens League to be trusted with the insights of hundreds of local government leaders, employees and elected officials.

“It has served me well for more than 25 years. I wish more people would consider it.”

“Public service is very rewarding and a worthwhile mission. I feel good about serving my community.”

“Public service jobs can be so incredibly rewarding! The work we do keeps society not just surviving, but thriving.”

It has been my experience that individuals in local government tend to like what they do and get a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction by helping others.