



Survey of Pennsylvania Elected Municipal Officials, 2021

January 2022

Figure 1: Results Snapshot

In 2021, the Pennsylvania Local Government Commission and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania surveyed Pennsylvania's 12,809 elected municipal officials. Pennsylvania local government associations emailed the electronic survey to their members. A total of 866 officials returned usable surveys, for a response rate of about 7 percent. The estimated margin of error was +/-3.2 percent. The survey had at least one respondent from every Pennsylvania county.

Municipal Official Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60.8: Average age • 43%: Female • 37%: Household incomes \$100,000 or more • 98%: Have internet access at home, however, 20% have limited connectivity
Municipal Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56%: Have municipal manager • 34%: Have revenues under \$500,000 • 5: Median number of full-time employees • 60%: Have only one meeting per month
Being a Municipal Official	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10.8: Average number of years in office • 43%: Spend 20+ hours/month on municipal business • 74%: Attended training course(s) in the last two years • 50%: Ran unopposed in last election (both primary and general)

Municipal Official Profile

In 2021, municipal officials were about 61 years old, on average. The majority were white (93 percent) and male (56 percent). In general, male officials were older (62 years old) than female officials (59 years old).

In terms of educational attainment, 46 percent of officials had a bachelor's degree or higher. These officials tended to be slightly younger (60 years old) than officials without a bachelor's degree (62 years old). The majority of officials (74 percent) attended municipal training courses within the past two years.

The majority of municipal officials were homeowners (96 percent) and most lived in a household with other people (85 percent). On average, there were 2.4 people living in the household. Seventeen percent of officials lived in a household with children (under 18 years old).

Most officials (73 percent) lived in their municipality for more than 20 years. Those who lived in their municipality for fewer than 20 years were younger (53 years old) than those who lived there 20 or more years (64 years old), had higher levels of educational attainment, and were more likely to have children in the household.

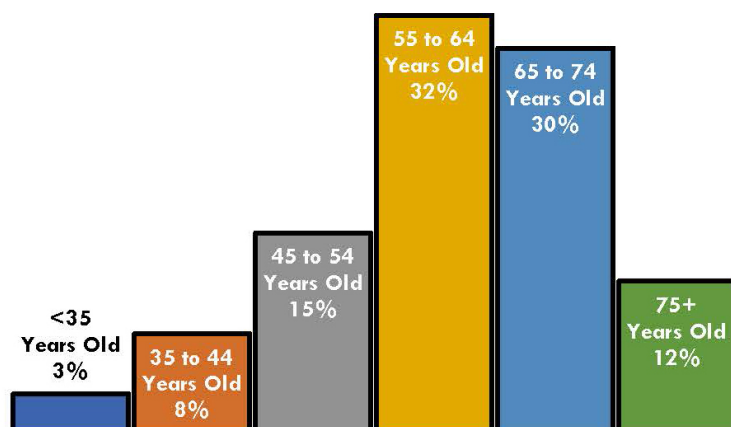
Fifty-eight percent of officials were in the workforce and 36 percent were retired. Five percent of officials were either unemployed or other. In terms of household income, 20 percent had income under \$50,000, 43 percent had

income from \$50,000 to \$99,999, and 37 percent had income of \$100,000 or more.

In addition to their municipal duties, 85 percent of officials volunteered in other capacities. The top two activities were religious (47 percent) and social/civic organizations (41 percent). Nearly one-quarter of officials (23 percent) volunteered with the fire company, EMS, or fire police.

The majority of officials (98 percent) said they could access the internet from their home. However, when asked if they could attend virtual meetings or watch movies without interruptions or freezing, 20 percent said they could not. The majority of officials with connectivity problems (71 percent) were located in a rural county.

Figure 2: Age of Municipal Officials (n=866)



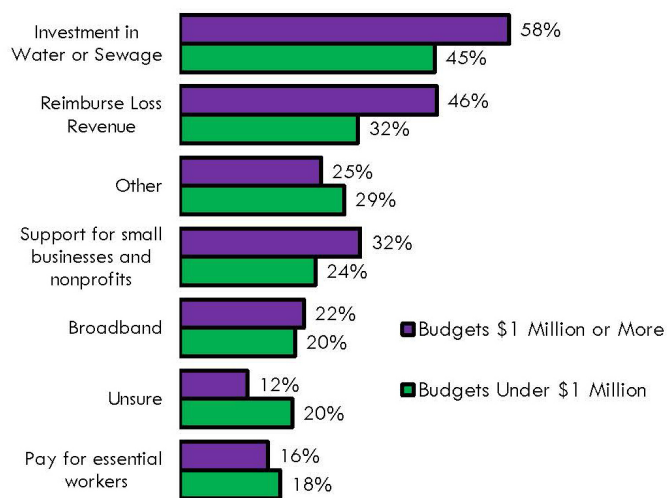
Municipal Profile

Financially, officials could be divided into two nearly equal groups: municipalities with budgets under \$1 million (53 percent) and municipalities with budgets of \$1 million or more (47 percent). Municipalities with smaller budgets tended to have fewer full-time employees than municipalities with larger budgets (median of 2.0 and 14.5, respectively).

Similarly, officials in municipalities with smaller budgets were less likely to have a municipal manager or administrator (33 percent) than larger budget municipalities (82 percent). This same pattern was evident in the number of monthly meetings, as 82 percent of municipalities with smaller budgets tended to meet only once per month compared to 34 percent of officials in larger budget municipalities.

When asked how they think funds from the American Rescue Plan should be spent, most officials, regardless of municipal budget size, said: water and sewage investment (51 percent), reimbursement for lost revenues (38 percent), and support for small businesses and nonprofits (28 percent).

Figure 3: How American Rescue Plan Funds Should be Spent, According to Municipal Officials by Municipal Budget (n=770)



Being a Municipal Official

On average, municipal officials have been in office for 11 years. Male officials, on average, have served longer (12.2 years) than female officials (8.8 years). Similarly, officials in municipalities that typically meet once per month have served longer (12.3 years) compared to municipalities that meet two or more times per month (9.3 years). There was, however, no statistical difference in the number of years an official served and the size of the municipal budget, or whether or not the municipality had a manager.

Fifty-six percent of officials said they spend less than 20 hours per month on municipal business and 43 percent spend 20 hours or more each month. There was no statistical difference in the number of hours an official spent on

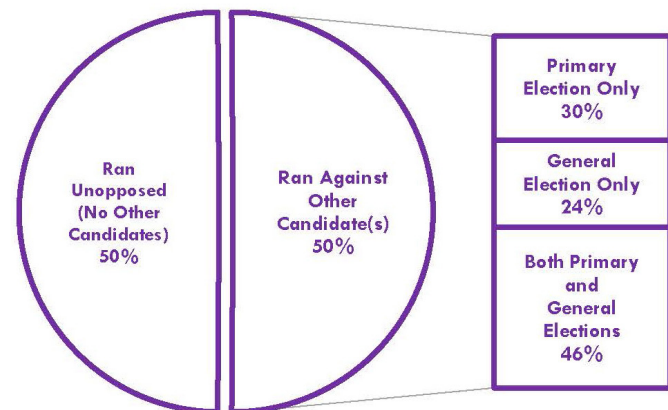
municipal business each month and the number of full-time employees, or whether the municipality had a manager.

When asked why they first ran for municipal office, the majority of officials gave altruistic or non-issue reasons: 50 percent said encouragement from others, 43 percent said they wanted to improve the area, and 41 percent said they had expertise and experience to share. (Officials could select multiple reasons.)

In their most recent election, 50 percent said they ran unopposed in both the primary and general elections. Among those who faced other candidates, 30 percent had opposition in the primary election only, and 24 percent had opposition in only the general election. There was no difference between the age of officials and whether or not they ran unopposed. There was, however, a difference in the years in office. On average, officials with fewer than 10 years in office were more likely to have opposition compared to those with more years in office.

Twenty-nine percent of the officials said they were not planning to run for re-election. When asked why, most officials said they served long enough and wanted to give others a chance (56 percent), were frustrated/disillusioned with public office (16 percent), and accomplished their goals (15 percent). Officials who were not planning to run again, were, on average, 66 years old and had been in office for 11 years.

Figure 4: Municipal Officials Who Ran Against Other Candidates in their Last Election (n=673)



Municipal and Community Issues

In addition to demographic information, the survey asked municipal officials what they saw as the three biggest issues facing municipal government, and their community.

Over half of all municipal officials (53 percent) thought that streets and highway maintenance was the biggest issue for their municipal government, followed by public safety (38 percent) and taxes and spending (37 percent). In terms of community issues, municipal officials cited an aging population (52 percent), resident apathy (42 percent), and loss of small businesses (33 percent) as the three top concerns.

Figure 5: Biggest Government Issues Facing the Municipality (n=656)

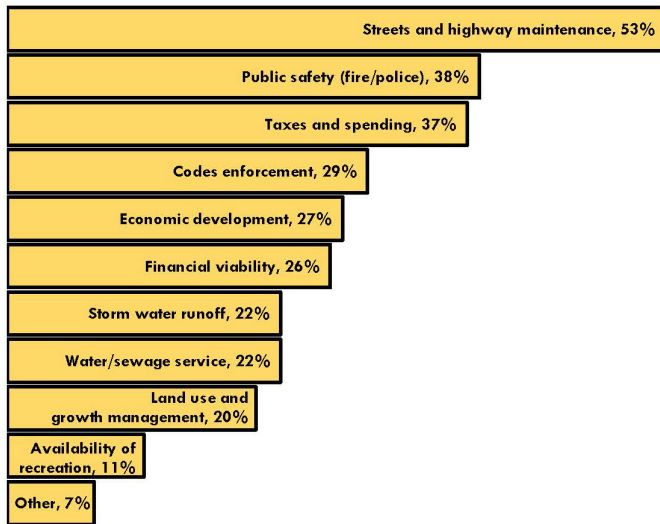
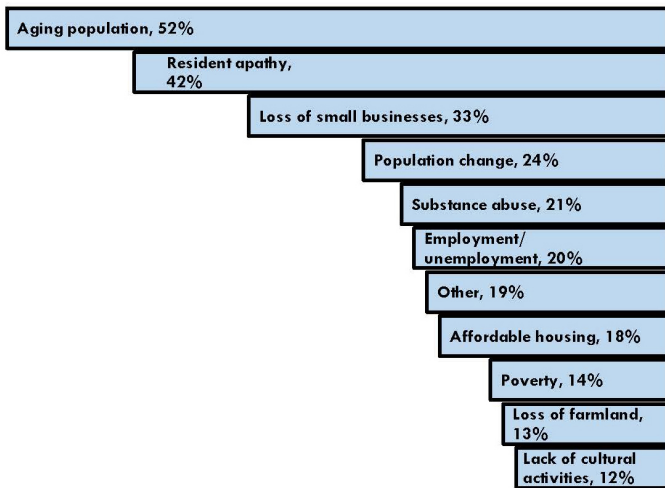


Figure 6: Biggest Challenges Facing the Community (n=656)



Discussion

Demographic Gap

The survey results indicated that, when compared to all Pennsylvanians, municipal officials tended to be, on average, older, less racially diverse, and predominantly male.

The demographic gap between municipal officials and the residents they serve is not unique. At the state and federal levels, the profile of officials and the residents they represent do not always align. At the municipal level, this gap is likely exacerbated by the limited number of residents running for office.

Capacity Gap

Pennsylvania municipalities range from very small to very large. Regardless of their size, all municipalities strive to meet residents’ needs. For some municipalities, meeting this need may be a challenge due to limited budgets, staff, and managerial capacity. According to the survey results, a significant percent of officials serve in municipalities without a manager, and they also have smaller budgets, and fewer employees. This capacity gap is not new, but the survey results indicated that many of the municipal and community issues faced by elected officials will require new approaches and resources. One bright spot is that the majority of officials have taken municipal training courses

within the past two years. This training will help them keep current on local government topics and to identify resources to address community concerns.

Pending Leadership Shift

According to the survey, municipal officials were 61 years old, on average, and have been in office for 11 years. Projecting this trend forward over the next 10 years, many municipalities are likely to see a shift in local leadership as older officials retire from office and younger officials take charge. This shift is not unique to local governments: businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations are all experiencing leadership shifts as the baby boomer generation retires. One key difference local governments may face is recruiting new candidates to run for office.

Lack of Competitive Races

The survey results indicated that one-half of municipal officials ran unopposed in their last election. From the survey, it is impossible to know why no other candidates chose to run. However, the lack of competitive elections suggests that municipalities may face a leadership vacuum as the older generation of leaders begins to retire. This was emphasized by 42 percent of officials who said citizen apathy was an important issue in their community.

Figure 7: Pennsylvania Demographics

Demographic Factor	Survey Results	Pennsylvania, At Large (2019 5-year Average, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau)
Age	60.8, average	40.8, average
Race	93% white	81.6% white
Gender	43% female	51% female
Education level	46% with bachelor’s degree or higher	31.4% with bachelor’s degree or higher
Homeownership	96% own their home	68.9% own their home

Methods

In July 2021, four of Pennsylvania’s statewide municipal associations assisted in emailing the survey to their members: the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, the Pennsylvania Municipal League, the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, and the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners. The survey was modeled after previous municipal officials surveys conducted by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

Of the 12,809 municipal officials in Pennsylvania, a total of 866 returned usable surveys, for a response rate of about 7 percent, with a confidence interval, or margin of error, of plus or minus 3.16. This means that, with 95 percent certainty, the results are within 3.16 percentage points of what all elected officials would have answered. The response rate was lower than expected; however, feedback from the municipal associations indicated that many of their members were experiencing “survey fatigue” as there were numerous requests from many organizations seeking information on issues primarily related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey results were split evenly among municipalities located in urban counties and those in rural counties. Additionally, there was a fairly even split geographically, with 31 percent of municipalities located in the eastern portion of the Commonwealth, 34.5 percent located in the central portion, and 34.5 percent in the western portion. However,

the results did not break down evenly between municipal classifications: only 1 percent of respondents were from cities, 3 percent were from townships of the first class, 2 percent were from home rule municipalities, 39 percent were from townships of the second class, and 55 percent were from boroughs/town.

	# Municipal Officials	# Survey Respondents	Response Rate	Margin of Error (+/-)
Cities	364	7	1.9%	36.73
Boroughs	7,110	425	6.0%	4.61
Twp 1st Class	550	26	4.7%	18.78
Twp 2nd Class	4,785	295	6.2%	5.53
Home Rule/Other	n.a.	17	n.a.	n.a.
Municipal Type Missing	n.a.	96	n.a.	n.a.
Total	12,809	866	6.7%	3.22

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