

A photograph of the Rhode Island State Capitol building, a large, ornate, light-colored stone structure with a prominent central dome and several smaller domes. The building is surrounded by greenery and a clear blue sky. The image is partially obscured by a blue overlay on the right side.

Planners Education Commission & Local Government

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RI LEAGUE OF CITIES & TOWNS

OCTOBER 22, 2024

Overview



**Objective of
Commission**



**Challenges Faced
by Cities and Towns**



Survey Data



Recommendations



Questions

Objectives

- **Purpose:**
 - To review the ability of Rhode Island's educational system to provide cities and towns with a pipeline of qualified planners, planning technicians, and staff.
 - To identify and implement solutions that improve local governments' access to skilled professionals essential for future planning.

Scope of the Study



- **Key Areas of Focus:**
 - Assess how well Rhode Island's educational institutions are preparing planning professionals.
 - Identify workforce gaps that impact cities and towns' ability to meet their planning needs.
 - Recommend ways to increase the supply of planning talent at the local level.

Why This Matters to Cities and Towns



- **Challenges Local Governments Face:**

- Growing complexity of municipal planning needs (land use, housing, infrastructure).
- Shortage of skilled planning professionals within many municipalities.
- Limited capacity to recruit or retain qualified planning staff

- **The Role of Education:**

- Local governments rely on well-trained professionals to manage growth, sustainability, and community development effectively.

Current Planning Workforce Challenges



- **Challenges Faced by Cities and Towns:**
 - Difficulty filling key planning roles due to a lack of qualified candidates.
 - Small and rural towns especially struggle with staffing and expertise.
 - Increasing demands on local governments for long-term strategic planning and zoning management.

Opportunities for Rhode Island Cities and Towns



- **Building a Strong Pipeline:**
 - Expanding degree and certificate programs will provide cities and towns with the professional talent needed.
 - Collaborating with universities to offer specialized training in municipal planning.
 - Ensuring planners are equipped with practical skills to address real-world challenges in local governance.

Recommendations for Strengthening Municipal Capacity



- **Education Recommendations:**
 - Develop or expand programs in state institutions focused on municipal and regional planning.
 - Promote internships and partnerships between educational institutions and local governments.
 - Offer certificate programs for mid-career professionals to upgrade planning skills.

Recommendations for Strengthening Municipal Capacity



- **Workforce Development Recommendations:**
 - Establish career pipelines from educational programs directly into municipal roles.
 - Provide incentives for planning graduates to work in Rhode Island's cities and towns.
 - Create continuing education programs to keep local planners up-to-date with emerging trends.

Benefits for Cities and Towns



- **Stronger Local Governance:**
 - Increased access to qualified planning professionals ensures effective long-term development.
 - Better planning leads to more sustainable, well-managed communities.
 - Supporting educational programs fosters economic development, smart growth, and improved quality of life for residents.

Benefits for Cities and Towns



- **Collaboration and Innovation:**
 - Cities and towns benefit from innovative ideas brought by well-trained, local planners.
 - Improved capacity to respond to challenges like housing, climate resilience, and infrastructure.

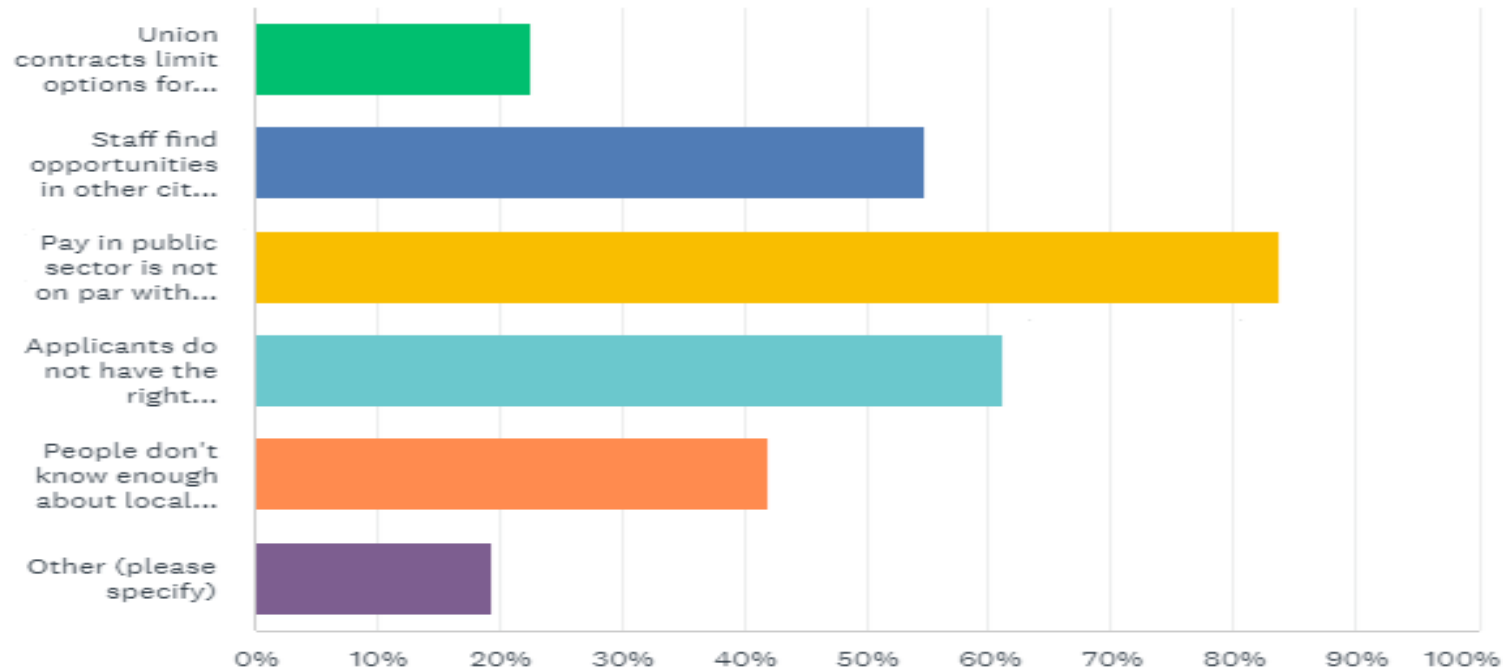
Next Steps

- **Immediate Actions:**
 - Collaborate with universities to assess program feasibility and identify municipal needs.
 - Develop a strategic plan that aligns educational offerings with workforce gaps.
 - Engage state agencies and local governments to support and sustain these initiatives.

Challenges Communities Face in Recruiting and Retaining Employees

Which key challenges does your community encounter in recruiting and retaining employees? Check all that apply.

Answered: 31 Skipped: 1



Key Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining Employees

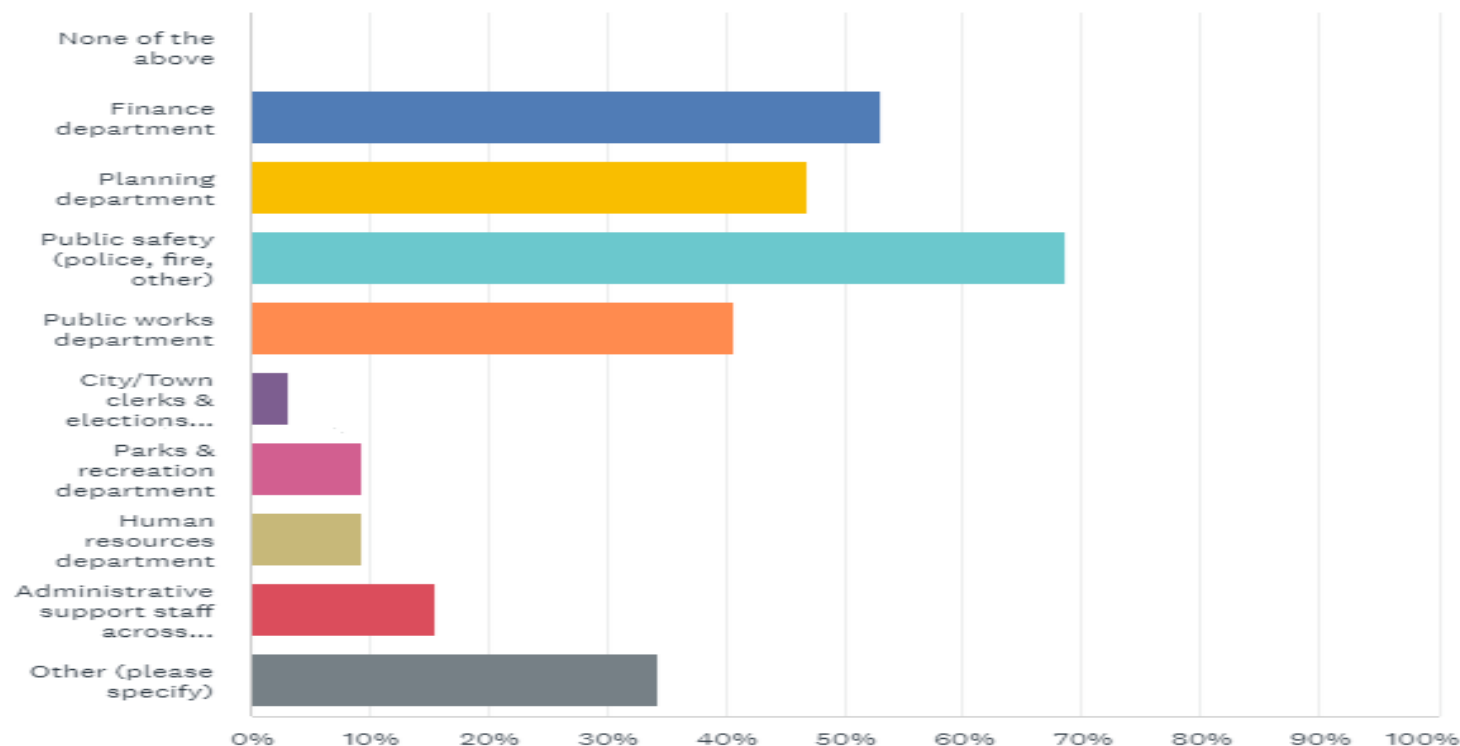


- **Top Challenges Identified by Cities and Towns:**
 - Pay in public sector is not on par with private sector.
 - Staff find opportunities in other cities or states.
 - Applicants do not have the right skills for available positions.
 - Union contracts limit flexibility in hiring or retention.
 - People don't know enough about local government roles.

Positions Most Difficult to Fill

Based on your current staffing levels, which types of positions are most in need and/or are most difficult to fill? Check all that apply.

Answered: 32 Skipped: 0



Survey Data on Recruitment Challenges



- **Key Positions Facing Staffing Shortages:**
 - **Public safety** roles (police, fire, etc.) are the most difficult to fill, with a high demand across many municipalities.
 - The **Planning department** also ranks among the hardest-to-fill positions, highlighting the need for qualified planners.
 - Other key areas of need include **Public Works** and **Finance** departments.

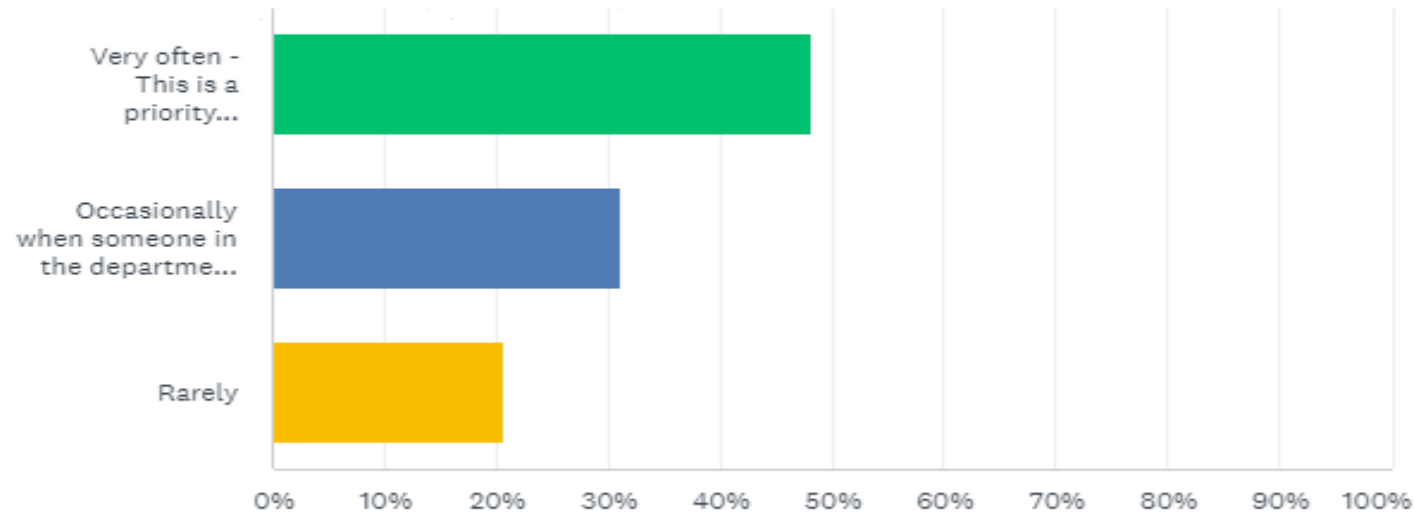
Conclusion

- **Summary:**
 - The success of Rhode Island's cities and towns depends on the availability of well-trained planning professionals.
 - By enhancing educational programs, we ensure that local governments have the talent and resources to meet future challenges and opportunities.

Training Opportunities

How often do you suggest training opportunities for current employees to build skills to take on positions of greater responsibility in your city or town?

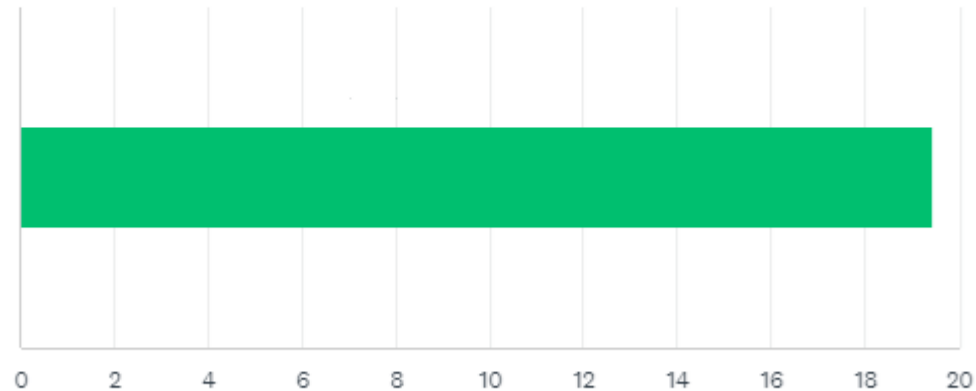
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Retirements

In the next 1-5 years, what percentage of your staff do you estimate will retire?

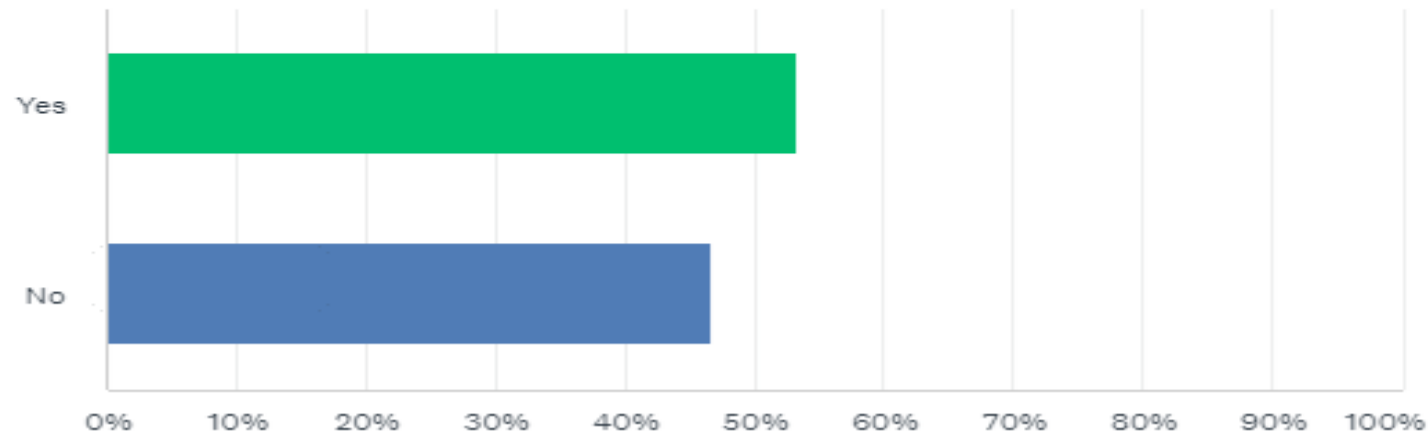
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Job Audit

Has your community completed an audit of job roles, position descriptions, and/or salaries in the last 10 years?

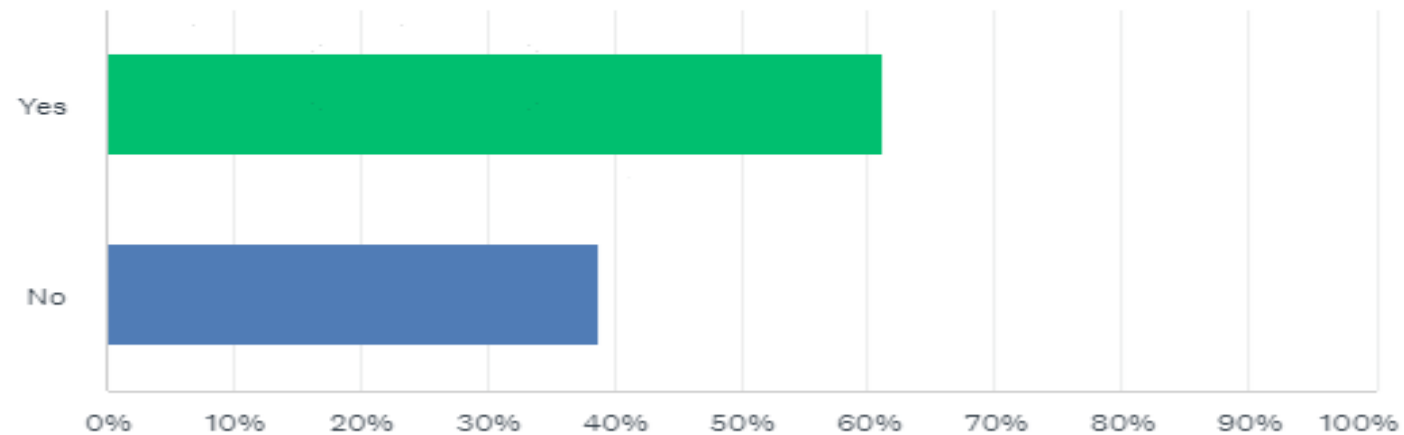
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Local Internship Programs

Do you have an internship program or would you be interested in hosting interns?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 1



Review Questions



1. How many states have one or more public colleges or universities that offer a Masters, Bachelors, Associates, or Certificate level program of study in planning?
2. In the prior five (5) years have any planning or building official positions been eliminated, and if so, was it due to an inability to fill those positions?
3. What is the average age of planners and building officials employed at the municipal level?
4. In Massachusetts and Connecticut what public or private colleges or universities offer online or in person Planning degree programs? Of those that offer in person only what is the feasibility of living and working in Rhode Island and commuting to that institution?
5. In New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine what public or private colleges or universities offer online Planning degree programs?
6. What is the average salary of planners and building officials in Rhode Island? What are the highest five and lowest five salaries for planners and building officials in Rhode Island?

Questions/Contact



Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns

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