



Massachusetts Municipal Management Association Strategic Plan, 2025 – 2030

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COMMUNITY PARADIGM ASSOCIATES, LLC**

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INTRODUCTION

As the Massachusetts Municipal Management Association (MMMA) looks ahead to 2030, this Strategic Plan comes at a defining moment for the organization, the profession, and the communities we serve. The 2025–2030 Strategic Plan builds on the momentum and insights of the 2018–2023 Plan, while responding to the profound changes that have shaped municipal management over the past five years.

The MMMA’s **vision**, first articulated in the 2012–2017 Strategic Plan, continues to guide this effort:

To be a member-driven organization dedicated to high ethical standards and excellence in professional management in local government, and to foster the professional development of the local government manager.

This vision is supported by the MMMA’s enduring **mission**, which outlines the core purposes of the organization:

- To provide professional support to the membership;
- To promote discussion, exchange, and development of ideas and strategies on local government and professional management issues;
- To provide professional development through education and specialized training opportunities;
- To promote management with high ethical standards in Massachusetts cities and towns;
- To actively support membership and participation in the association and profession; and
- To develop and monitor legislative items which affect the municipal management profession.

These guiding statements remain as relevant as ever in light of the dramatic shifts experienced in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered how local government operates, accelerating the adoption of virtual technologies and prompting a reevaluation of how managers lead, communicate, and engage with their communities and teams. Simultaneously, political polarization and rising incivility in public life have increased the pressures on municipal leaders and raised the stakes for ethical, balanced, and resilient governance.

These changes have been accompanied by structural and cultural shifts within the profession itself. A generational transition in the municipal management workforce has resulted in the retirement of many seasoned professionals, while fewer individuals are entering the field—prompting urgent conversations about recruitment, succession planning, and sustaining institutional knowledge. Decreased media coverage of local government has created communication challenges, while employees’ evolving expectations around work-life balance and organizational culture have forced municipalities to adapt how they operate and lead.

Against this backdrop, the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan is designed to strengthen the MMMA’s role as a leader, convener, and resource for municipal professionals across Massachusetts. Informed by broad member input and shaped through collaborative planning, this Plan reaffirms the MMMA’s commitment to its mission and vision while setting a path forward that is responsive to new realities.

As with previous plans, this document begins by restating the MMMA’s vision and mission, followed by a detailed explanation of the planning methodology. The findings from member surveys and focus groups are then presented, forming the foundation for the Strategic Goals and Objectives that will guide the MMMA’s programming, services, and advocacy over the next five years. An accompanying Implementation Strategy outlines how these goals will be translated into action through the work of committees and staff. The Appendix includes survey results and related data that informed the Plan.

This Plan reflects a profession in transition—but also one grounded in shared purpose. As municipal managers continue to face complex challenges and rising expectations, the MMMA remains committed to providing the support, knowledge, and community that allow members to thrive in service to their cities and towns.

METHODOLOGY

The process to update the MMMA Strategic Plan for 2025–2030 was designed to be inclusive, data-informed, and rooted in member engagement. Consistent with the Association’s commitment to being a member-driven organization, the methodology emphasized broad input from across the membership and built upon lessons learned from previous planning efforts.

To lead the process, the MMMA Executive Committee established a Strategic Planning Committee composed of members representing a range of career stages and municipal contexts. This committee was charged with overseeing the planning process, identifying key issues and themes, and ultimately drafting the updated Strategic Plan for consideration by the full membership.

To support this work, the MMMA once again engaged *Community Paradigm Associates, LLC*, which had successfully facilitated the development of the 2018–2023 Strategic Plan. *Community Paradigm* provided consulting services to guide the process, facilitate discussions, collect and analyze data, and ensure that the updated Plan would be grounded in both member feedback and strategic insight.

A central component of the process was a facilitated “town-hall” style forum held at the 2024 MMMA Spring Conference, which served as an open venue for members to share their perspectives on current challenges, future opportunities, and the evolving needs of the profession. This session allowed for real-time dialogue between the membership and the Strategic Planning Committee and helped surface themes that would shape subsequent phases of the process.

Following the town-hall forum, a survey was distributed to the full MMMA membership, gathering quantitative and qualitative input on key issues, such as the effectiveness of current MMMA programs, desired areas for professional development, preferred modes of engagement, and perceptions of the Association’s role moving forward. The survey was carefully designed to allow for comparisons with prior planning efforts while also capturing new and emerging issues facing the profession today.

The Strategic Planning Committee reviewed the survey results in detail, focusing on both high-level themes and specific recommendations offered by respondents. Particular attention was paid to areas that presented opportunities for the MMMA to enhance its impact, such as strengthening mentoring opportunities, supporting recruitment into the profession, addressing workforce and staffing issues, and responding to evolving expectations around work-life balance and the use of technology.

The findings from the survey, combined with insights from the Spring Conference forum and the committee’s own deliberations, were used to shape the Goals and Objectives outlined in this revised Strategic Plan. These goals reflect not only the priorities of today but also the need for flexibility and responsiveness in the years ahead. The result is a plan that remains true to the MMMA’s core mission and vision while equipping the organization to meet the demands of a changing profession and world.

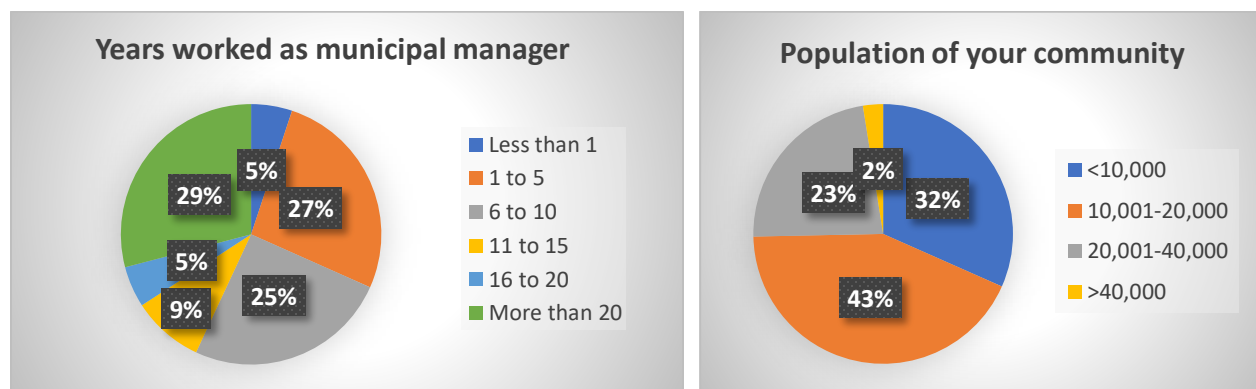
SURVEY ANALYSIS

Background Information

The link to a detailed survey was sent to all MMMA members on October 18, 2024. Two weeks was allotted for response. The survey garnered 80 respondents out of 280 potential responses for a 28.6% response rate. Of the 80 total survey respondents, 18 respondents serve in Middlesex County, 15 in Worcester County, 11 each in Norfolk and Plymouth counties, 7 in Barnstable County, 5 in Hampden County, 3 in Bristol County, 2 each in Berkshire and Hampshire counties, and 1 each in Franklin, Suffolk, and Nantucket counties. Dukes County had 0 respondents.

The majority of survey respondents (74.6%) serve in municipalities of 20,000 or fewer residents, which is to be expected given the number of small- to medium-sized communities in Massachusetts.

Interestingly, 29.1% of survey respondents reported having more than 20 years of experience working as a municipal manager, with another 5.1% having between 16-20 years of experience in a manager position. Additionally, 39.7% of respondents reported their age as being between 56 and 65 years. This indicates that a fairly significant number of municipal manager retirements may be expected over the next 10 years.



Further characteristics of the respondents are as follows:

- 63.7% identify as male, 35% identify as female, 1.2% preferred not to reply.
- 75.9% manager, 22.8% assistant manager, 1.3% other.
- 72.2% have never held an elected position.
- 77.5% have a Master's degree, 12.5% a Bachelor's degree, and 7.5% a Juris Doctor.

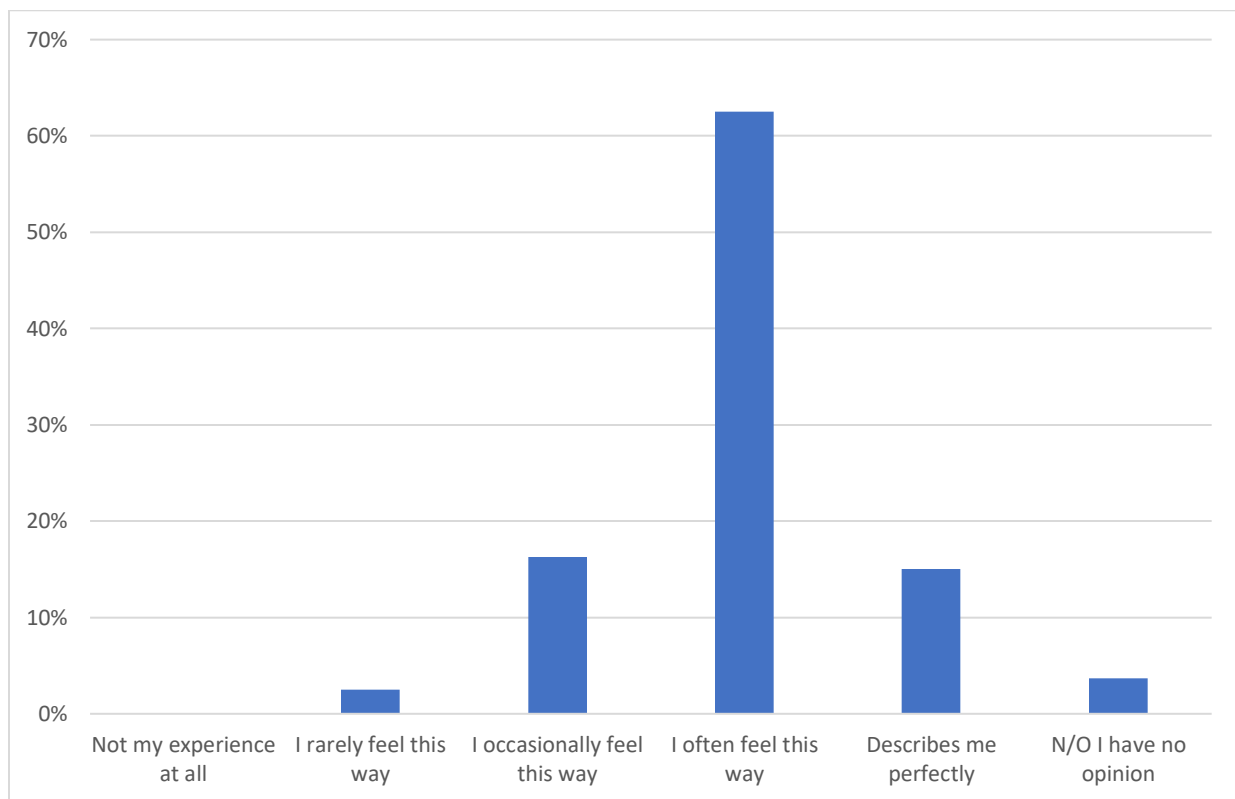
Survey Findings

Satisfaction with MMMA Resources and Services

Overall, respondents expressed satisfaction with the resources and services provided by the MMMA as can be noted throughout the majority of survey responses. For example, to the statement ‘I receive quality professional development from MMMA events’, 77.5 percent of respondents answered that they “often feel this way” or “describes me perfectly” as illustrated in the chart below.

Figure 1: Professional Development Quality

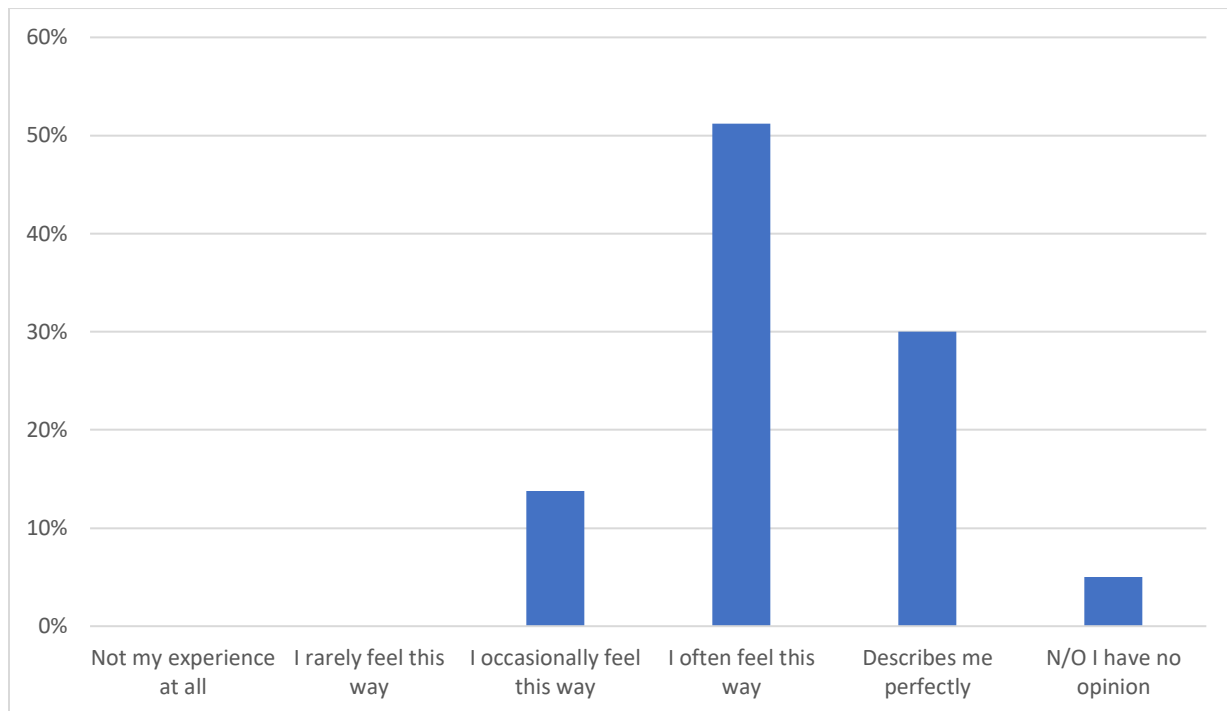
“I receive quality professional development from MMMA events.”



To the statement, ‘I have ample opportunity to network at MMMA events’, 81.2 percent of respondents answered that they ‘often feel this way’ or ‘describes me perfectly’ as seen in the chart below.

Figure 2: MMMA Event Networking

“I have ample opportunity to network at MMMA events.”



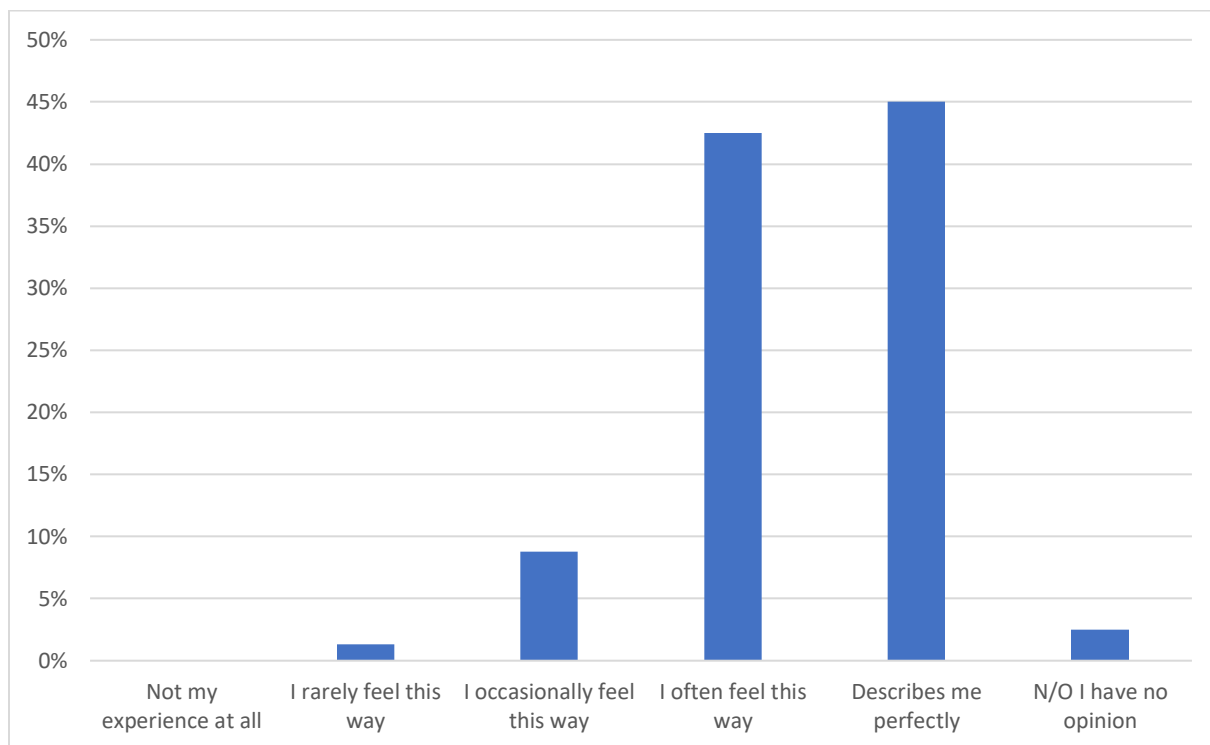
A significant majority of respondents also reported feeling ‘comfortable and welcome’ when participating in MMMA events as well as feeling that the costs of MMMA dues, meetings, and the spring and fall conferences are reasonable.

Slightly over 77% of respondents report that the MMMA is a helpful resource for information related to their positions (often feel this way or describes them perfectly), however, a lesser percentage (55%) of respondents (often feel or describes them perfectly) relate knowing what services the MMMA offers that are *unique* from those offered by the MMA. This provides the MMMA with the opportunity to better inform its members of the specific programs and services that it exclusively provides and to increase participation in those unique programs.

Another example in which respondents noted high satisfaction with the MMMA is regarding its commitment to high ethical standards in the profession of municipal management. Of 80 respondents, 87.5 percent selected “describes me perfectly” or “I often feel this way” to the statement “I feel the MMMA stresses an appropriate commitment to high ethical standards for the profession.”

Figure 3: Ethical Standards

“I feel that the MMMA stresses an appropriate commitment to high ethical standards for the profession.”



While respondents were satisfied with MMMA services overall, there are some areas in which notable percentages of respondents feel they would like to see increased services or support from the MMMA. These areas, for the most part, focus on challenges that municipal managers did not typically face – certainly not to as high a degree as today – until the past 10 to 15 years. Interestingly, but not unexpectedly, the issues in which respondents would like to see greater MMMA support were also some of the top challenges listed in the respondents’ answers to the open-ended survey questions. For example, notable percentages of respondents are interested in increased assistance by the MMMA in the areas of:

- mentoring amongst managers,
- strengthening understanding between elected officials and managers,
- work/life balance, and
- working in a public-facing position.

Figure 4: Mentoring Amongst Managers

“The MMMA could do more to encourage mentoring amongst managers.”

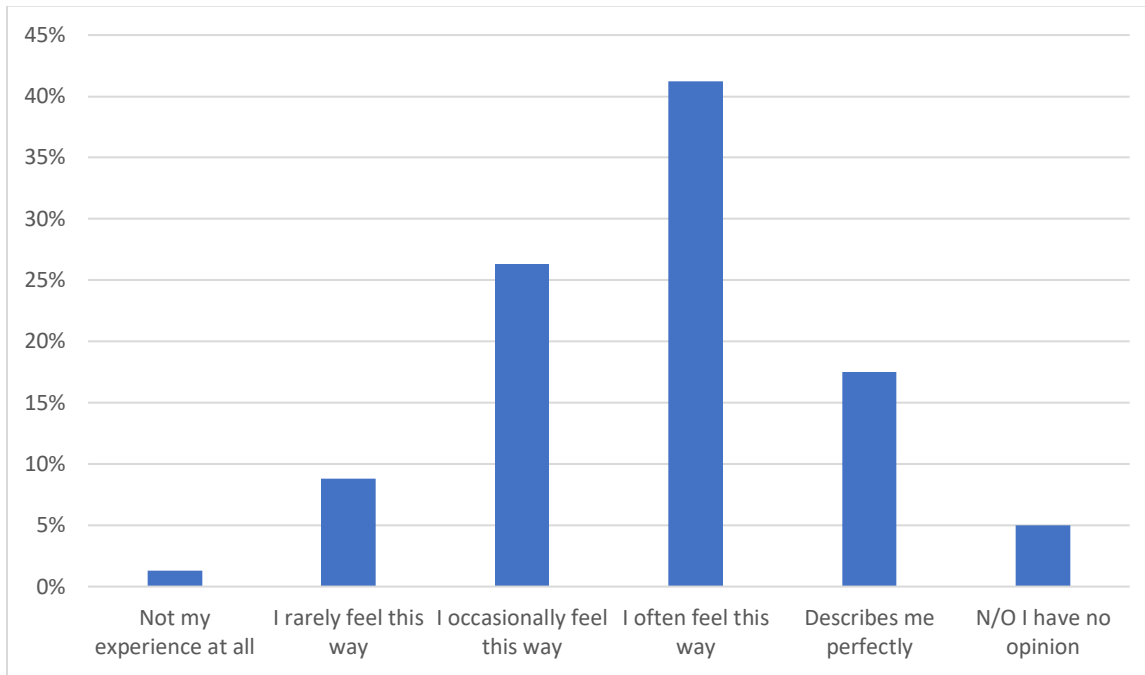


Figure 5: Strengthening Board-Manager Relationships

“The MMMA could do more to help strengthen understanding and relationships between Select Board/Council members and the manager/administrator.”

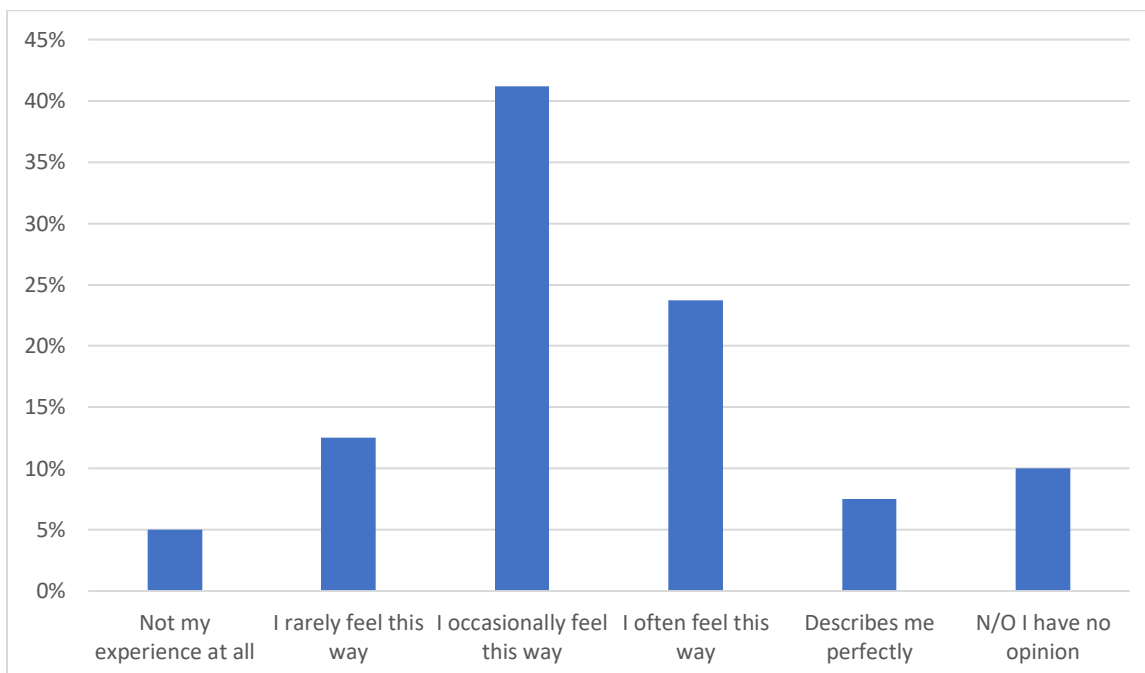
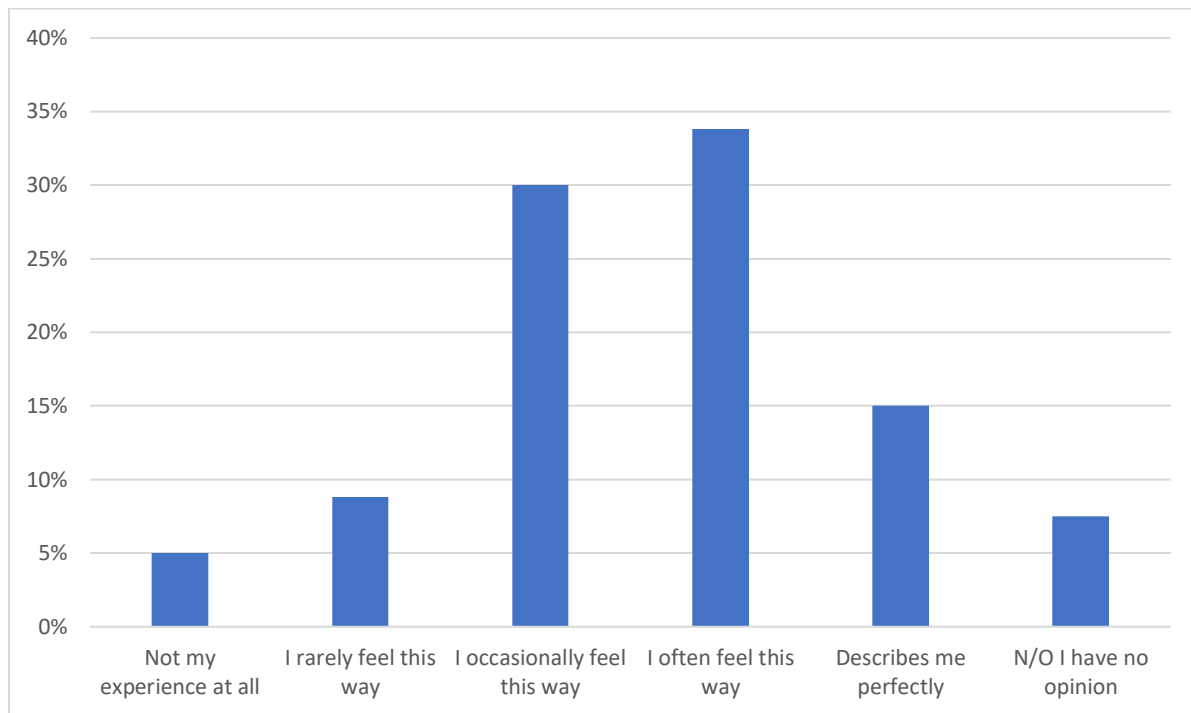


Figure 6: Work/Life Balance and Public Role

“The MMMA should do more to assist and support all members but particularly newer managers as they learn to manage work/life balance, and the public nature of a municipal manager position.”



Significant numbers of survey respondents and discussion group participants reported that mentoring and training of new managers and assistant managers is an increasing need in municipal management, particularly given ongoing turnover in the field. Suggestions included:

- Developing structured mentorship programs for new managers and assistants.
- Expansion of ‘Boot Camp’ programs with such subjects as collective bargaining, municipal finance, and managing boards.
- Training for managers on how to mentor an assistant.
- Practical training for assistants and department heads interested in moving up in the organization.
- Re-establishment of an emerging leadership program.

IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The respondents detailed several challenges faced by municipal management in today's municipal environment. The challenges most often listed by respondents within the first three of the open-ended questions in the MMMA Priorities section are listed in the table below.

Table 1: Top Challenges

Challenges	# of Comments
Work force issues (including recruitment, retention, succession planning)	49
Financial/budgetary constraints	43
Rising incivility, public distrust, political environment	42
Work/life balance	11
Social media and prevalence of misinformation	9

Work force issues

A number of work force issues were listed as a primary concern mentioned by respondents. Such issues include recruitment, retention, and succession planning as well as providing necessary training for staff members to move into new roles in the municipal field. Several of the work force issues, particularly recruitment and retention, have become increasingly challenging because of other concerns respondents listed, such as incivility, public distrust, difficult political environments, and work/life balance. Respondents are concerned that interest in municipal careers is waning and would like the MMMA to develop methods of communicating the positives aspects of municipal careers to high school, college, and graduate students as well as those just beginning their careers in the private and nonprofit sectors.

Finances

Financial/budgetary constraints were cited as a significant concern by survey respondents, with many citing the limitations of Proposition 2½ and reductions to federal assistance and state aid as worrisome as well as the rising costs of public education, health insurance, and unfunded mandates. With decreasing funding and increasing demands, it is becoming more difficult to fund the municipal services residents expect and deserve. Respondents noted that these fiscal challenges are not always understood by town officials and residents. Several respondents mentioned that the MMMA could assist by advocating for full funding of Chapter 70.

Incivility

It is clear from the respondents' comments that there is also a significant level of concern regarding the rising level of incivility faced by municipal managers and all municipal staff. There is concern that the level of vitriol at the federal level has spilled into the state and municipal levels, sparking heightened distrust in local government as well as increasingly toxic environments in numerous communities. There is concern that these difficulties are not only pushing talented people out of municipal professions but are also preventing others from entering municipal fields.

Work/life balance

Survey respondents listed challenges related to work/life balance in three of the open-ended questions, two of which were in the MMMA Priorities section and one in the 'informative comments' portion of the Member Experience with MMMA Resources and Services section. Managers have been accorded an increased role as community leaders, shouldering a heightened level of public-facing responsibilities accompanied with the related public accountability and scrutiny. One respondent suggested the MMMA should emphasize to Select Boards and City/Town Councils the need for municipal managers to have a healthy work/life balance noting that "it can be a deterrent to people moving up to know how difficult it is to find a balance with family life." Respondents noted that long workdays coupled with a high volume of night meetings and expected attendance at various community events can add to managers' stress levels in the office and at home and may prevent department heads from wanting to advance in their careers and/or may prompt recent graduates and people from other sectors to reconsider entering the municipal field.

Social Media/Misinformation

Respondents perceive social media as both a useful tool and an avenue for misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. They appreciate the ability via the various social media platforms to widely share accurate information with their communities; however, municipal managers often do not have the resources to constantly review the various social media platforms for the spread and amplification of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. They recognize that inaccurate information that may be disseminated by others via Facebook, X, LinkedIn, Reddit, etc., can quickly spin out of control and cause harm to communities and individuals.

Misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation can also be circulated, intentionally or unintentionally, via other communication means, such as word of mouth, which further highlights the need and significance of timely and accurate communication from municipal officials. This importance is exemplified by the creation of the Massachusetts Municipal Communicators group, which the MMA launched in 2024, to support municipalities in their communications efforts.

Respondents cited interest in having the MMMA assist in developing methods that would aid communities in navigating misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, and polarized discourse while also allowing for use of digital and other communication platforms as helpful communication tools. Additionally, communicating the value of the role of municipal managers and other municipal positions via a public education campaign would aid in increasing acceptance of the veracity of the information municipalities share.

STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The MMMA's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan builds upon a foundation of strong membership satisfaction and sustained success while recognizing the evolving needs and challenges of the municipal management profession. The strategic goals and objectives outlined in this section reflect both continuity and innovation: maintaining the high-quality programs that members value while also taking bold steps to respond to shifting professional, societal, and organizational landscapes.

Goal 1: Maintain and Enhance Core Member Services

One of the clearest findings from the membership survey and town hall forum is that members value the MMMA's current suite of services—and want to see these services preserved and enhanced.

The MMMA has built a reputation for high-quality programming, networking, and professional support. Survey results show that members are largely satisfied with the organization's performance over the past five years and consider most MMMA services to be important. To maintain this level of satisfaction and engagement, the MMMA will prioritize sustained investment and incremental improvements in the following areas:

- **Monthly Meetings:** Continue to offer relevant, high-value content and networking opportunities at monthly meetings, while exploring new formats or guest speakers to keep programming fresh.
- **Spring and Fall Conferences:** Maintain high-quality, well-attended conferences with updated content that reflects emerging trends and challenges in local government.
- **Ethics and Professional Standards:** Reinforce the MMMA's commitment to high ethical standards in local governance through training, peer support, and clear messaging.
- **Boot Camp Expansion:** Increase the frequency and topical diversity of the MMMA Boot Camp, expanding its reach and appeal to newer managers, assistant managers, and department heads.
- **Social and Informal Networking:** Build in more opportunities for informal interaction, wellness programming, and inclusivity into existing events to foster collegiality and well-being among members.

These initiatives not only sustain the quality of existing services but also adapt them to reflect member input and evolving professional needs.

Goal 2: Promote the Value of Professional Municipal Management

As public discourse becomes increasingly polarized and the media's coverage of local government diminishes, the MMMA must take a more active role in advocating for the value of professional municipal management. Local government managers serve in non-political roles that are critical to the stable, ethical, and effective operation of municipal government.

The MMMA will:

- **Develop a Public Education Campaign** focused on the benefits of professional management, including accountability, transparency, operational efficiency, and long-term stability.

- **Highlight Ethical Standards and Qualifications** that distinguish professional managers from political appointees or elected officials, particularly in times of heightened political tension.
- **Promote Local Government Success Stories** to demonstrate how professional management leads to better outcomes for communities.
- **Build Partnerships with Media and Academic Institutions** to elevate understanding of the municipal management profession.

This advocacy is essential not only to safeguard the profession but also to ensure public trust in local government.

Goal 3: Prepare the Next Generation of Municipal Managers

The profession is facing a significant generational transition. The retirements of many “baby boomer” managers, coupled with a limited pipeline of qualified successors, threatens the long-term vitality of the field. Survey findings also indicate that a significant number of current managers plan to retire or leave the profession in the next five to ten years. Without strategic action, this could lead to a further shortage of candidates and a potential decline in the quality of local government leadership. A multi-pronged approach is necessary to respond to this concern, including a public education campaign regarding the impactful nature, and the benefits, of the professional municipal manager position.

To address this challenge, the MMMA will:

- **Support and Expand Leadership Development Programs** such as the Suffolk University/ MMA Certificate in Local Government and other targeted training initiatives.
- **Promote Succession Planning** within member municipalities to develop internal talent and ensure smooth leadership transitions.
- **Increase diversity** by encouraging participation from underrepresented groups reflecting varied backgrounds, identities, experiences, and perspectives to broaden the talent pipeline and reflect the full diversity of the members and the communities we serve.
- **Create Mentoring Networks** that connect senior managers with early-career professionals and those transitioning into the field from other sectors.
- **Strengthen Outreach to Students and Career Changers** to increase awareness and interest in municipal management as a career path.

The MMMA recognizes that its future depends on attracting and preparing talented, committed individuals to lead the next generation of municipal governments.

Goal 4: Provide Leadership on Key Challenges Facing Local Government

The landscape of municipal governance continues to evolve rapidly. In the face of major societal, technological, and economic shifts, the MMMA must provide leadership and guidance to help managers navigate uncertainty and seize new opportunities. The following focus areas represent priority challenges identified by members and are central to this Strategic Plan:

- **Education About Local Government:** Lead initiatives to improve public understanding of how local government works and the role of professional managers within it.
- **Civility and Public Trust:** Provide tools, training, and support for managers dealing with incivility in public discourse, attacks on professionalism, and erosion of community trust.
- **Municipal Finance Constraints:** Offer resources, training, and policy advocacy related to fiscal sustainability, creative budgeting, and long-term financial planning.
- **21st Century Workforce Development:** Address workforce recruitment, retention, and engagement in a new era defined by hybrid work, evolving employee expectations, and competition for talent.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Equip managers to lead the adoption of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, enhance service delivery, and protect cybersecurity while maintaining transparency and accessibility.
- **Inclusivity:** Advance efforts to make both the MMMA and local governments more inclusive, equitable, and representative through education, policy guidance, and intentional outreach.

By addressing these issues head-on, the MMMA can serve not only its membership but also the broader field of municipal governance in Massachusetts.

Together, these four strategic goals reflect a balanced approach: honoring what works, expanding where needed, and innovating boldly in the face of new realities. They will guide the MMMA's work over the next five years, ensuring that it continues to be a member-driven, forward-thinking, and mission-focused organization.

IMPLEMENTATION

The MMMA views its Strategic Plan as a living and adaptive document that must remain relevant to both the current realities and future possibilities of the municipal management profession. To ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness, the Strategic Plan will undergo regular reviews and updates, at a minimum on an annual basis.

To integrate the Strategic Plan into the organization's day-to-day work, each MMMA Committee will be tasked with reviewing the plan annually and aligning its multi-year work plans with the Strategic Goals and Objectives outlined herein. Committees will be encouraged to identify where their ongoing efforts contribute to the broader strategic vision, and to adapt or initiate new activities in response to emerging needs or opportunities.

These updated work plans will then be presented to the MMMA Executive Committee for review and approval, providing a structured process through which the Strategic Plan informs decision-making and resource allocation. This cyclical review will ensure the plan remains responsive and will foster a culture of strategic thinking throughout the MMMA's organizational structure.

Through this dynamic and participatory approach, the Strategic Plan will serve as both a guiding framework and an evolving blueprint—supporting the MMMA in delivering on its mission and realizing its vision in a rapidly changing world.