

Key Takeaways

- Reporting is a critical component of the provincial-municipal relationship and over-regulation has created a 'reporting burden' for municipalities
- Ontario municipalities currently view reporting as negatively impacting service delivery, onerous and excessive, burdensome, unclearly defined or communicated purpose, fragmented, while yet, still serving an important function
- AMCTO is committed to reducing the red tape around the reporting process to derive more value and focus on the effective delivery of services

Issue

Reporting is both an important and necessary part of the provincial and municipal relationship. It helps the province ensure accountability, monitor performance and that transferred funding is being spent appropriately. However, over the past few decades the intergovernmental relationship between the Province and local government has shifted. More specifically, the regulatory relationship has grown resulting in a greater number of reports on a range of new areas including: financial, performance, compliance, and various grant requirements (Côté and Fenn 2014). As a result, local governments are dealing with an increasing burdensome nature of reporting to the province.

"We estimate that the province collects at least 422 reports from municipalities every year - 225 separate reports, collected monthly, quarterly, biannually, and annually. We think that this is a conservative estimate."

The Need for Reform

Over time, the relationship between the province and municipal governments in Ontario has become increasingly complex. New regulations, funding agreements, and programs have increased the complexity and workload on municipal government. As new requirements were added, too few are ever taken away creating a 'reporting burden' for municipalities. In 2016 AMCTO conducted interviews and focus groups with 29 local government professionals and collected over 300 survey responses from municipal staff. The information gathered during this research formed the basis of AMCTO's Bearing the Burden report, which included the following five key findings:

Reporting negative impacts service delivery and prevents municipalities from innovating and preparing for the future: Almost half of respondents to AMCTO's survey agreed that reporting is negatively impacting their ability to efficiently deliver services and that they are forced to squeeze reporting into their already busy schedules (AMCTO 2017, 7). While efforts are made to ensure this reporting is completed, such as working overtime, it often results in diverting already scarce resources away from core service delivery.

Reporting is onerous and excessive: There was broad consensus amongst participants in AMCTO's research that reporting has become onerous and excessive (AMCTO 2017, 4). While the exact figure varies from municipality to municipality, there was agreement it has become increasingly time-consuming. At the same time, vague requirements surrounding reporting often leaves key details up to interpretation with support from the provincial government is inconsistent.

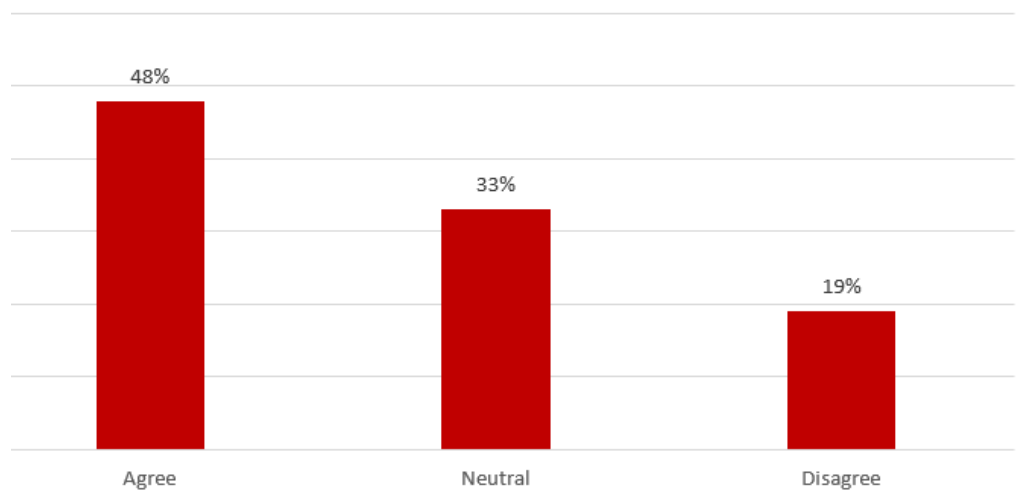
The purpose of reporting is often unclear: Municipalities report that they benefit little from the reporting as its

purpose is often unclear (AMCTO 2017, 11). One reason for this lack of clarity is that the information reported is rarely shared back with the municipality. Additionally, most municipal public servants do not know how the reporting they do is being used or why it is being collected. Some in the sector have noted that reporting seems to be used more for 'surveillance' and accountability than for improving outcomes for its citizens.

Municipal-provincial reporting is highly fragmented: The lack of cohesion among different provincial ministries and agencies means that even the province does not completely understand the scale and scope of municipal reporting (AMCTO 2017, 13). There is also no coordination or common standards for reporting across the government. Such a lack of consistency results in municipalities seeking continuous clarification, reporting the same data multiple times, and constantly adjusting their reporting formats. Municipalities themselves also fall victim to the highly fragmented reporting due to challenges with scope, organizational structure, knowledge, technological capacity. (AMCTO 2017, 13).

Municipalities think reporting is important: Despite the multiple reasons associated with the need to reform municipal-provincial reporting, there is a strong belief among municipal public servants that reporting holds importance as a component of intergovernmental arrangements (AMCTO 2017, 14).

Provincial Reporting Requirements Are Impacting My Ability To Productively Deliver Services



Conclusion

The recommendations noted by AMCTO represent principled steps in working towards a modernized reporting regime. This addresses a significant barrier that municipalities deal with and will give them the opportunity to maintain accountability with a strong focus toward service delivery.

References

AMCTO, "Bearing the Burden: A Review of Municipal Reporting to the Province," 2017.

Côté, Andre and Michael Fenn, "Approaching an Inflection Point in Ontario's Provincial-Municipal Relations," IMFG 1 Perspectives, No. 6, 2014, 33.