

Issue at a Glance

Municipal Management Internship Program

April 2022

Key Takeaways

- Municipalities across the province struggle to recruit and retain qualified applicants for senior positions. This is especially true for small, rural and remote municipalities.
- Job seekers looking to get into the municipal sector sometimes do not yet have the expertise or experience to fill senior level roles.
- Internship programs help to bridge this gap by introducing talented professionals to the sector and ensuring that they are ready to take on exciting roles that will help them grow in their municipal career.
- AMCTO is uniquely positioned to effectively administer a formalized internship program supported by the Province.

Issue

Career pathways are needed to recruit qualified candidates to opportunities within the municipal sector. As experienced administrators retire, the municipal sector can struggle to recruit and retain qualified talent. This is especially true in small, rural and northern communities. The Municipal Management Internship Program (MMIP) delivered by AMCTO can help bridge the gap between new talent and experienced administrators, helping to ensure that opportunities in the municipal sector are met with qualified applicants ready to take on experienced and leadership level roles.

The Need for Reform

Municipal Succession Planning

According to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, succession planning is “the process of identifying an organization's current and long-term staffing needs and developing internal talent to meet those needs”¹. The ministry encourages municipalities to succession plan to help ensure that when key personnel leave an organization, community programs and services can continue to be delivered with minimal disruption.

A succession plan that considers growth expectations for the municipality, assesses human resources needs, and considers recruitment and training strategies, can help municipalities plan for the future. However, this is easier said than done.

Municipal leaders have known for years that attracting top talent requires strategic planning. According to Strategy Corp's 2021-2022 Ontario Municipal Chief Administrative Officers Survey, attracting qualified candidates, especially for management and leadership positions, continues to be a

challenge.ⁱⁱ While there are many factors that affect this, there are limited ways for candidates to understand the intricacies of municipal senior-level positions and advance their careers without direct experience working in a municipality. As a result, often the most qualified applicants for municipal senior roles are those doing the same roles in other municipalities already, creating a limited pool of talent and increased lateral moves throughout the sector. For small, rural, and remote municipalities, this can severely impact their ability to not only recruit new talent, but to retain existing talent when other advancement opportunities are available in larger communities and organizations.

According to our most recent 2021 AMCTO State of the Membership Survey findings, 37% of AMCTO members are planning to retire in the next 5-10 years. As more municipal staff retire, ample opportunities for leadership positions become available. However, municipalities' succession planning will continue to be hindered by a lack of candidates with leadership-level municipal experience. An internship program focused on building these necessary skills would help to bridge this gap.

Legacy of AMCTO's internship Program

For several years, AMCTO delivered a successful Municipal Management Internship Program (MMIP) in partnership with the Province. The program was developed to attract talented young or transitioning professionals into careers in municipal management to support municipalities in the process of management capacity building and succession planning. Unfortunately, the Provincial government cut funding to the program in 2015.

The MMIP was highly effective. Between 2008 and 2015, over 80 interns were placed for year-long opportunities across the province. The program delivered a boost in regional talent with alumni now representing a driving force in today's local government sector. Many program graduates are now leaders in the municipal sector and in their communities. After 2015, 72% of interns held leadership roles within rural and northern communities and interns covered over 25% of Ontario's 444 municipalities.ⁱⁱⁱ The MMIP brought profile to municipal governments encouraging new and recent graduates to look to local government, with its diverse range of positions, as a promising career choice.

Benefits of a Centralized Program Administered by AMCTO

Some municipalities across the province offer their own internship programs and/or other opportunities for new talent such as co-op placements or summer student contracts. Several municipalities have also been able to hire one-time interns with support from the provincial government.^{iv}

While these opportunities can undoubtedly be beneficial for supporting organizations, many smaller municipalities do not have the in-house expertise, staff time or budget to run a long-term program. A program with a multi-year commitment allows municipalities to plan for the future and integrate participation in an internship program into their existing strategic plans.

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A centralized program is cost-effective. With shared recruitment processes and resources, municipalities can focus on ensuring interns have a successful and fulsome experience without spending as much time on program administration.

Predictable funding for long-term internship programs also creates an alumni network. This allows for further mentorship opportunities beyond a formalized program while also serving to build a program's prestige. Interns can also use this type of network connect with each other throughout the duration of a formalized program to build their own professional contacts beyond the scope of their internship placements.

As an association, we know our membership and their needs. AMCTO has established relationships with post-secondary institutions, including those that focus on municipal public policy and administration. Through AMCTO education and professional development programs, municipal professionals are provided with the foundational skills and knowledge they need to grow their careers in the sector, and through our mentorship program, AMCTO members can learn one-on-one from each other. With this 80+ year history and our proven track record of administering a successful municipal internship program, AMCTO is uniquely positioned to ensure talent entering the municipal sector is ready to take on leadership roles.

Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

There are many examples of public sector internship programs and programs aimed at recruiting new talent to careers in public service. This section provides three examples of public sector programs designed to graduate participants ready to take-on meaningful careers in the public service. All three programs are targeted at recent graduates and have a centralized recruitment process supporting placements in various organizations.

The Government of Canada has several opportunities for recent graduates both through centralized programs and within specific departments and agencies. Their [Advanced Policy Analyst Program](#) offers recent master's level graduates a three-year program with placements across the three central agencies and a line department. Participants have access to mentorship and formal training as well as exposure to a variety of policy areas and policy-making and the overall functioning of government. Upon successful completion of the first two years of the program, participants are placed in their sponsoring department. Recruitment is coordinated by Finance Canada on behalf of participating organizations.

While the Government of Ontario no longer supports the MMIP, it does administer the [Ontario Internship Program](#), a paid development opportunity to grow talent within the Ontario public service. Applicants can choose from seven streams and successful candidates are offered one-year placements with a provincial ministry or agency. In addition to hands-on experience, interns are offered mentorship and formal training opportunities to help achieve their professional goals. Approximately 94% of program interns secure employment immediately following the program, and 60% choose to stay in the Ontario public service five years after completing the program.^v

The Government of Alberta administers an 18-month intensive [Municipal Internship Program](#) for recent post-secondary graduates to gain first-hand practical experience and training in municipal

government. The program has three streams: administrator, finance officer, and land-use planner. Municipalities and planning service agencies can apply to host an intern individually or in partnership with another organization. Host organizations are supported by a grant from the Alberta Community Partnership program to assist with the costs of hosting an intern including providing for their compensation and other expenses such as recruitment, relocation, professional development and association membership fees.^{vi}

Other orders of government and jurisdictions invest in internship programs and/or programs for recent graduates and those new to the sector because they work. These programs offer a chance for new professionals to use their creative thinking and innovative skill sets to contribute to public sector work, while ensuring that the sector can be replenished with talent ready to hit the ground running.

Conclusion

It is more important than ever to help job seekers find employment opportunities. Public sector internship programs can be highly successful at recruiting and helping to retain talent in the long-term. A municipal internship program with funding support from the provincial government delivered by AMCTO is a smart asset and a small investment with significant returns. It is a proven way to continue to advance the municipal profession while providing opportunities for people to grow in the sector and service their communities.

Ideal solution

Our members would like to see:

1. Support for the next generation of municipal leaders to develop skills and valuable work experience; and
2. A multi-year financial commitment from the Province supporting a municipal internship program that meets the needs of the municipal sector, administered by AMCTO.

ⁱ Government of Ontario. "Ontario Municipal Councillors Guide". 2018. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-municipal-councillors-guide/1-role-council-councillor-and-staff#section-6>

ⁱⁱ StrategyCorp Inc. "Ontario Municipal Chief Administrative Officer Survey 2021/22." 2022. <https://strategycorp.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/StrategyCorp-CAO-Survey-2022.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ AMCTO, "Municipal Management Internship Program Evaluation Report". 2015. <https://www.amcto.com/getattachment/7c92d7b8-0ebe-412b-aab4-ceb6c75973fe/.aspx>

^{iv} In October 2021, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's the Implementation Stream of Intake 3 of the Municipal Modernization Program considered temporary hires to contribute to an implementation project an eligible expense. Eligible municipalities have the option of hiring an intern to implement projects with internships funded through provincial-municipal cost-share.

^v Government of Ontario, "Ontario Internship Program: FAQs". 2022. <https://www.internship.gov.on.ca/mbs/sdb/intern.nsf/LkpWebContent/ePublishedFAQs>

^{vi} Government of Alberta "Municipal Internship Program: Host a municipal inter". 2022. <https://www.alberta.ca/municipal-internship-program-host-municipalities-and-organizations.aspx>