

Future of Municipal Government What We Learned Report

Changing Dynamics for CAOs

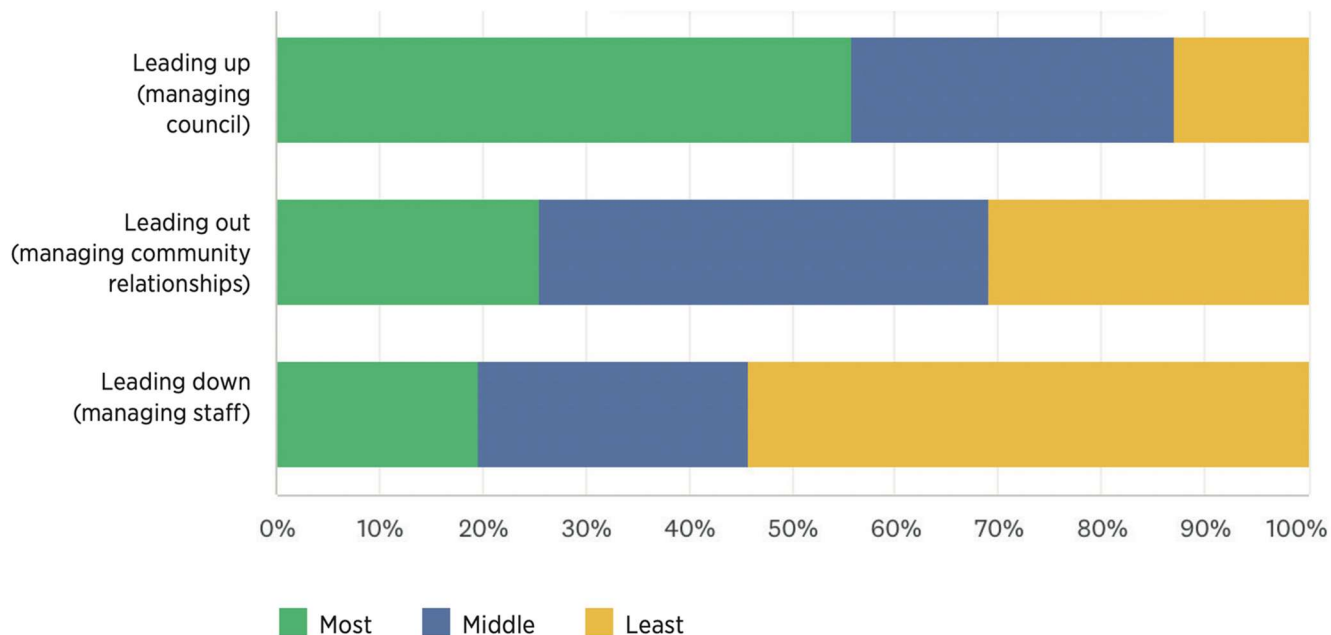
Theme

[Lonely at the Top: An Examination of the Changing Dynamics for Chief Administrative Officers in Alberta Municipalities](#) by Kate Graham and Jesse Helmer is the sixth paper released as part of the [Future of Municipal Government \(FOMG\)](#) Project. The paper explores the role and tenure of Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) in Alberta municipalities and the implications for those municipalities.

Key Findings

- The average tenure of A CAO has steadily declined over the past two decades and is now well under the length of a council term.
- The higher rate of CAO turnover is costly in terms of recruitment and severance packages, organizational disruption and reduced opportunity for incumbent CAOs to reach peak performance.
- Increasingly fractious political dynamics drive CAO turnover and make attraction to specific municipalities and the profession overall more challenging.

Figure 1 : What is the most challenging part of the Job?*



*As part of their research, the report's authors distributed a survey to all CAOs in Alberta in early 2023 using contact information in the Government of Alberta directory. A total of 179 responses were received from current CAOs, representing a distribution of across municipal population size and length of tenure in the role.



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310.MUNI ■ hello@abmunis.ca ■ abmunis.ca

Member Engagement

Two opportunities were provided to discuss the report’s findings with the authors:

- The Help Wanted Session held on September 27, 2023 as part of ABmunis convention featured a panel with author Kate Graham and CAO June Boyda discussing research findings specific to small communities as well as tips for attracting and retaining CAOs.
- A webinar on October 13 with both authors offered an opportunity for participants to ask questions and share feedback on the report’s findings.

Many participants at the convention session and webinar noted that the report’s findings confirmed what they believed anecdotally.

A key theme that also emerged from both sessions was the importance of councils understanding their roles and developing a strong, positive working relationship with their CAOs.

Future Direction

Based on the paper’s findings and feedback, further work will be done as part of the FOMG project and related Alberta Municipalities initiatives to:

- Seek opportunities to enhance council/administration role clarity and trust through forums such as the Elected Officials Education Program and ABmunis events.
- Help to advance a positive culture in municipal politics, which enables productive engagement among council, administration, and the public through ABmunis Fostering a Culture of Respect Initiative.
- Promote participation by CAOs and other administrators in organizations that provide networking, mentorship, education, and peer support including:
 - Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators’ Association (ARMAA)
 - Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA)
 - Local Government Administration Association of Alberta (LGAA)
 - Society of Local Government Managers (SLGM)

CAO Tenure

Figures in the following table were calculated using the Ministry of Municipal Affairs CAO changes file, 2003-2022 by taking the median and mean (average) duration of tenure for CAOs with start dates and end dates between Jan. 1, 2003 and Nov. 28, 2022.

Municipality Type	Median (years)	Average (years)	Number of Observations
City	3.0	2.9	53
Municipal District	1.9	2.8	150
Town	1.9	2.4	324
Village	1.3	2.0	277
Summer Village	2.0	2.7	102
Specialized Municipality	1.8	2.4	31
Improvement District	1.1	2.0	17