

## Municipal Form of Government, 2011

The survey was conducted in the fall of 2011. Surveys were mailed to the city clerk in all local governments with a population of 2,500 and over and to those under 2,500 that are in ICMA's database. A second survey was sent to non-respondents. The survey response rate was 41%.

Survey respondents were provided with the following definitions to use in completing the survey.

For more information on ICMA's 2011 *Municipal Form of Government* survey, please contact [Survey Research](#).



[Click here to buy the complete dataset from bookstore.icma.org.](http://bookstore.icma.org)

The term **municipality** refers to cities, towns, townships, villages, and boroughs.

The term **council** refers to an elected body whose members may be called council members, aldermen, selectmen, freeholders, trustees, commissioners, or a similar title.

The **chief appointed official** of the local government is often referred to as city manager, chief executive officer, city administrator, chief administrative officer, town administrator, village manager, or a similar title.

The **chief elected official** of the local government may have the title of mayor, president, board chair, etc.

## FORM OF GOVERNMENT

1. Indicate your municipality's current form of government as defined by your charter, ordinance, or state law. (*Check only one.*)

| Form of government                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Percent reporting (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. <b>Mayor-Council.</b> Elected council or board serves as the legislative body. The chief elected official is the head of government, with significant administrative authority, generally elected separately from the council.                                                                                   | 33                    |
| b. <b>Council-Manager.</b> Elected council or board and chief elected official (e.g., mayor) are responsible for making policy with advice of the chief appointed official. A professional administrator appointed by the board or council has full responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the government. | 59                    |
| c. <b>Commission.</b> Members of a board of elected commissioners serve as heads of specific departments and collectively sit as the legislative body of the government.                                                                                                                                            | 1                     |
| d. <b>Town Meeting.</b> Qualified voters convene to make basic policy and to choose a board of selectmen. The selectmen and elected officers carry out the policies established by the government.                                                                                                                  | 6                     |
| e. <b>Representative Town Meeting.</b> Voters select citizens to represent them at the town meeting. All citizens may attend and participate in debate, but only representatives may vote.                                                                                                                          | 1                     |

2. How is your municipality's *structure or form of government* established? (Check only one.)

| Legal basis of form of government | Percent reporting (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Charter                        | 56                    |
| b. State law                      | 25                    |
| c. Ordinance                      | 17                    |
| d. Resolution                     | 0                     |
| e. Other                          | 2                     |

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3. Does your municipality have the position of chief appointed official? (The chief appointed official of the local government is referred to as city manager, chief executive officer, city administrator, chief administrative officer, town administrator, village manager, or a similar title.)

1. Yes – 85%
2. No – 15%

A. If your municipality does have the position of *chief appointed official*, what action established the position? (This question refers only to the establishment of the position, not to the person or group that does the hiring.)

| Action establishing position of CAO        | Percent reporting (%) |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Charter                                 | 46                    |
| b. State law                               | 7                     |
| c. Ordinance                               | 37                    |
| d. Resolution                              | 4                     |
| e. Chief elected official created position | 2                     |
| f. Other                                   | 4                     |

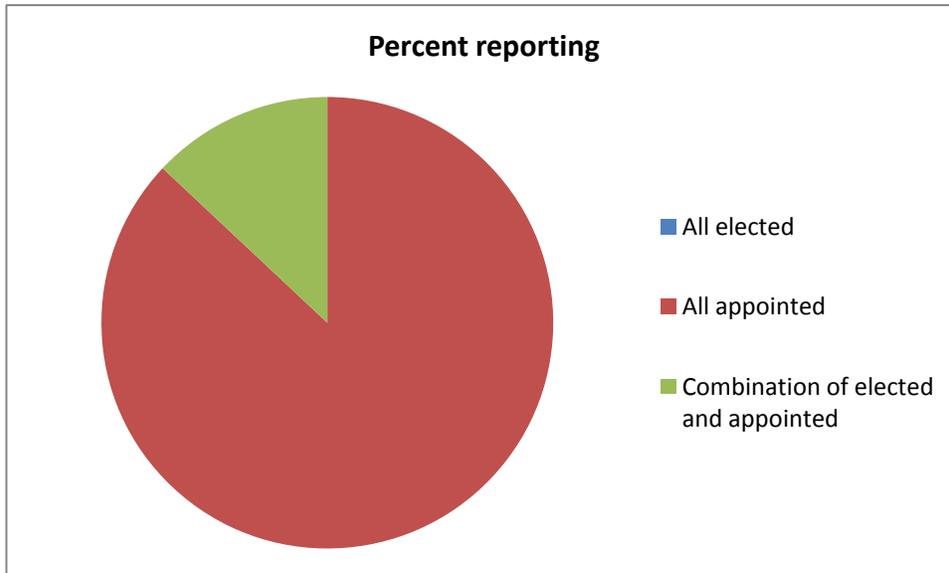
B. If your municipality does have the position of *chief appointed official*, who appoints the chief appointed official?

| Appointment of the CAO                                                       | Percent reporting (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. <u>Appointed by</u> chief elected official                                | 4                     |
| b. <u>Appointed by</u> council                                               | 68                    |
| c. <u>Appointed by</u> combination of chief elected official and council     | 18                    |
| d. <u>Nominated by</u> chief elected official and <u>approved by</u> council | 9                     |
| e. <u>Nominated by</u> council and <u>approved by</u> chief elected official | 0                     |
| f. Other                                                                     | 1                     |

4. Who has the independent authority to develop and make recommendations for the budget submitted to the council? (The term "develop" means that the person has responsibility for content of the budget.)

| Authority to develop and make recommendations for the budget submitted to council | Percent reporting (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Chief elected official                                                         | 11                    |
| b. Chief appointed official                                                       | 60                    |
| c. Combination of chief elected official and chief appointed official             | 8                     |
| d. Chief financial officer                                                        | 12                    |
| e. Other                                                                          | 10                    |

5. Are your department heads: *(Check only one.)*



(Note: No one reported that all department heads are elected.)

6. If any of your department heads are appointed, who appoints them? *(Check only one.)*

| Appointment of department heads                                       | Percent reporting (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Chief elected official                                             | 9                     |
| b. Chief appointed official                                           | 31                    |
| c. Combination of chief elected official and chief appointed official | 4                     |
| d. Combination of chief appointed official and council                | 14                    |
| e. Chief elected official with approval by council                    | 11                    |
| f. Council                                                            | 16                    |
| g. Chief appointed official with advice and consent of council        | 7                     |
| h. Chief elected official, chief appointed official, and council      | 3                     |
| i. Other <i>(Please specify.)</i>                                     | 5                     |

7. Please indicate which of the following department head positions are appointed or elected.

| Position      | Appointed (Percent reporting) | Elected (Percent reporting) |
|---------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Police chief  | 98                            | 2                           |
| Fire chief    | 97                            | 3                           |
| City attorney | 98                            | 2                           |
| City clerk    | 85                            | 16                          |

## INITIATIVE, REFERENDUM, RECALL

### 8. Does your municipality have a provision for **Initiative**?

*Initiative allows citizens to place charter, ordinance, or home rule changes on the ballot by collecting a required number of signatures on a petition.*

1. Yes – 54%
2. No – 46%

If yes, which of the following initiative processes does your municipality provide? (Check all applicable.)

| Initiative process                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Percent reporting (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. <b>Indirect:</b> Requires that <i>before</i> any charter, ordinance, or home rule change proposed by citizens through a petition process is placed on the ballot for vote, the council must consider it. Vote results are binding on the local government. | 50                    |
| b. <b>Direct:</b> Requires that any charter, ordinance, or home rule change proposed by the citizens through a petition process must be placed directly on the ballot for a vote. Vote results are binding on the local government.                           | 49                    |
| c. <b>Non-binding initiative:</b> Allows citizens to place on the ballot a question for voter approval or rejection. The voter response is non-binding on the local government.                                                                               | 16                    |

Note: Number reporting is 1,714. Respondents could check more than one initiative.

### 9. Does your municipality have a provision for **Legislative referendum**?

*Legislative referendum allows the council to place any question on the ballot for voter approval or rejection. The results may be binding or non-binding.*

1. Yes – 70%
2. No – 31%

If yes, which of the following items must be placed on the ballot for voter approval (Check all applicable.)

| Item placed on the ballot      | Percent reporting (%) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Local bond measures         | 64                    |
| b. Proposed charter amendments | 56                    |
| c. Proposed ordinances         | 20                    |
| d. Proposed home rule changes  | 27                    |
| e. Other                       | 12                    |

Note: Number reporting is 2,104. Respondents could check more than one item.

### 10. Does your municipality have a provision for **popular referendum**?

*Allows citizens to collect signatures on a petition to place on the ballot any charter, ordinance, or home rule change that has been adopted by the local government before the change can take effect.*

1. Yes – 38%
2. No – 62%

### 11. Does your municipality have a provision for **Recall**?

*Allows citizens to collect signatures on a petition to place on the ballot a question of whether an elected official should be removed from office before the expiration of his/her term.*

1. Yes – 56%
2. No – 44%

12. Since January 1, 2006, have there been any attempts to change your municipality's structure or form of government (e.g., change from at-large to ward or district elections or add or eliminate the position of chief appointed official, etc.)?

- 1. Yes – 7%
- 2. No – 93%

A. If yes, approximately how many attempts have been made to change your municipality's structure or form of government since January 1, 2006?

The average number of attempts is 1.

B. Check each item that describes the proposed change(s) and indicate whether the change(s) was approved.

(Note: The raw data include the year the attempted change was approved if applicable.)

| Attempted change                                                                                                    | Change was proposed (Number reporting)* | Not approved (Number reporting)* | Approved (Number reporting)* |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Change from at-large to ward or district elections                                                               | 66                                      | 37                               | 11                           |
| 2. Change from ward or district to at-large elections                                                               | 50                                      | 25                               | 7                            |
| 3. Change to a mixed system with some at-large and some ward or district elections                                  | 48                                      | 23                               | 9                            |
| 4. Change the mix between the number of council members elected at large and the number elected by ward or district | 38                                      | 18                               | 4                            |
| 5. Increase the number of council or board members                                                                  | 77                                      | 35                               | 24                           |
| 6. Decrease the number of council or board members                                                                  | 58                                      | 29                               | 10                           |
| 7. Change the method of election of the chief elected official                                                      | 55                                      | 26                               | 11                           |
| 8. Increase in powers/authorities of the chief elected official                                                     | 55                                      | 23                               | 16                           |
| 9. Decrease in powers/authorities of the chief elected official                                                     | 53                                      | 23                               | 14                           |
| 10. Add the position of chief appointed official (the appointed professional administrator)                         | 96                                      | 24                               | 46                           |
| 11. Eliminate the position of chief appointed official (the appointed professional administrator)                   | 49                                      | 28                               | 5                            |
| 12. Change who appoints the chief appointed official from (enter the previous appointment authority)                | 35                                      | 19                               | 3                            |

\*These are numbers of local governments reporting, not percentages.

C. If a change in form of government was proposed, what was the proposed change? (Place a check in the box in the "From" column that indicates the original form and a check in the box in the "To" column that indicates the proposed form.)

The responses to this question cannot be averaged, so they are available only in the raw data.

- | From                                                    | To                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Mayor-council               | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Mayor-council                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Council-manager             | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Council-manager              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Commission                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Commission                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Town meeting                | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Town meeting                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Representative town meeting | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Representative town meeting |

## CHIEF ELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL/MAYOR/BOARD CHAIR

The chief elected official of the local government may have the title of mayor, president, board chair, etc.

13. Does your municipality have a:

| Position                         | Percent reporting (%) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Mayor                         | 68                    |
| b. Council president/board chair | 15                    |
| c. Both                          | 18                    |

If you have both a mayor and a council/board president, answer the questions below for the position of **mayor**. If you do not have a mayor, but have a council president/board chair; answer the questions for the position of **council president/board**

14. Is the position of chief elected official in your local government *officially* full-time or part-time?

- a. Full-time – 15%
- b. Part-time – 85%

15. How is your chief elected official selected? (Check only one.)

| Election method                                                                                           | Percent reporting (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Voters elect directly                                                                                  | 76                    |
| b. Council selects from among its members                                                                 | 21                    |
| c. The council member receiving the most votes in the general election becomes the chief elected official | 0                     |
| d. Council members rotate into the position of chief elected official                                     | 2                     |
| e. Other                                                                                                  | 1                     |

16. How long is the chief elected official's term of office? (Important: If the chief elected official is a member of the council, specify the term for the position of chief elected official, not of council member.) (Check only one.)

| Term of office | Percent reporting (%) |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| a. 1 year      | 13                    |
| b. 2 years     | 33                    |
| c. 3 years     | 7                     |
| d. 4 years     | 46                    |
| e. Other       | 1                     |

17. Is there a legal limit on the number of terms allowed for the position of chief elected official?

- 1. Yes – 10%
- 2. No – 90%

A. If yes, what is the maximum number of terms allowed by law?

| Maximum terms allowed | Percent reporting (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. 1 term             | 4                     |
| b. 2 terms            | 56                    |
| c. 3 terms            | 25                    |
| d. 4 terms            | 33                    |
| e. Other              | 5                     |

Note: the number reporting is 325.

B. If yes, when was the term limitation for the position of chief elected official enacted?

The mode is 1994. (The mode is the year most frequently reported.)

C. If yes, what authority limits the number of terms for the position of chief elected official? (Check only one.)

| Term limit authority | Percent reporting (%) |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Ordinance         | 13                    |
| b. Charter           | 72                    |
| c. State law         | 14                    |
| d. Other             | 2                     |

Note: The number reporting is 287.

18. Is the chief elected official a member of council, that is, does the chief elected official serve on the council?

- 1. Yes - 72%
- 2. No – 28%

A. If yes, does the chief elected official receive supplemental compensation for these additional duties?

- 1. Yes – 52%
- 2. No – 49%

19. Under what circumstances does the chief elected official have the authority to vote in council meetings?

| Voting authority       | Percent reporting (%) |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. On all issues       | 56                    |
| b. Only to break a tie | 35                    |
| c. Never               | 7                     |
| d. Other               | 2                     |

20. Does the chief elected official have the authority to veto council-passed measures?

- 1. Yes – 27%
- 2. No – 73%

A. If yes, is a “super majority” vote of the council required to overturn the mayoral veto?

- 1. Yes – 90%
- 2. No – 10%

(Note: The number reporting is 824.)

21. Does the chief elected official have the authority to *(Check all applicable.)*

| Chief elected official's authority                                                                                                                           | Percent reporting (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Nominate the chief appointed official without council review or approval                                                                                  | 9                     |
| b. Appoint the chief appointed official without council review or approval                                                                                   | 4                     |
| c. Assign council members to chair or serve on committees and make assignments to those committees                                                           | 68                    |
| d. Appoint citizens to serve on advisory or quasi-judicial authorities, boards, or commissions                                                               | 68                    |
| e. Receive the annual budget developed by the chief appointed official and present the budget with comments and suggestions to the council for consideration | 34                    |
| f. Prepare the annual budget                                                                                                                                 | 19                    |
| g. Make an annual report to the council and citizens on the state of the community                                                                           | 51                    |
| h. Remove the chief appointed official without council review or approval                                                                                    | 6                     |

(Note: The number reporting is 2,574.)

22. Since 2006 have any recall initiatives been filed against the chief elected official?

- 1. Yes - 3% (113)
- 2. No – 97%

(Note: the number reporting is 3,374.)

If yes, were any successful?

- 1. Yes – 22% (23)
- 2. No – 78% (82)

(Note: The number reporting is 105.)

23. How many staff work directly for the chief elected official?

- a. Full-time staff: 12 (average)
- b. Part-time staff 4 (average)

**COUNCIL/BOARD OF SELECTMEN/TRUSTEES**

*The term **council** refers to the elected governing body of the local government. The elected body may be called the board of selectmen, trustees, aldermen, etc.*

24. Does the political party affiliation of council candidates appear on the ballot in a local general election?

- 1. Yes – 21%
- 2. No – 80%

25. What is the current filing fee for running for a seat on the council? *(If there is no fee, enter zero.)* \$47.00 (average)

26. How many council positions are there on your council? 6 average *(Include the chief elected official if that position serves on the council. If the chief elected official is a member of the council, your answer to question 18 should be “yes.”)*

27. How are your council members selected? (Check only one.)

| Council member election                       | Percent reporting (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. All at large                               | 66                    |
| b. All by ward/district                       | 17                    |
| c. Combination of at large and ward/district. | 17                    |

A. If you selected **c**, indicate the number of council members elected by each of the following methods:

- a. At large 2 (average)                      b. By ward/district 5 (average)  
 (Note: The number reporting is 578.)

28. How many current council members are

- a. Male – 5 (average)  
 b. Female – 2 (average)

29. How many current council members fall into the following age groups?

| Council member age groups | Average number in each group |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. Under 22               | 0                            |
| b. 22-29                  | 1                            |
| c. 30-39                  | 1                            |
| d. 40-49                  | 2                            |
| e. 50-59                  | 2                            |
| f. 60 and over            | 3                            |

30. How many current council members are

| Council member race/ethnicity    | Average number in each group |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. Native American               | 1                            |
| b. Hispanic                      | 1                            |
| c. Asian or Pacific Islander     | 0                            |
| d. White, not of Hispanic origin | 6                            |
| e. Black, not of Hispanic origin | 1                            |

31. How many current council members are in each of these occupational categories? (**Count members only once.** If any member has more than one occupation, include that person in the category where he or she spends the greatest amount of time.)

| Council member occupational categories               | Average number in each group |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a. Lawyers                                           | 1                            |
| b. Other professionals (medicine, engineering, etc.) | 1                            |
| c. Business executives/managers                      | 2                            |
| d. Business/industry employees                       | 2                            |
| e. Service industry employees                        | 2                            |
| f. Farmers or ranchers                               | 1                            |
| g. Homemakers                                        | 1                            |
| h. Teachers and other educational personnel          | 1                            |
| i. Clergy                                            | 1                            |
| j. Retired persons                                   | 2                            |
| k. Other                                             | 2                            |

32. How many council members are part time? 6 (average) full time 3 (average)  
(Excluding the chief elected official)

33. Indicate the length of term for council members. (Even if the chief elected official is a member of council, specify the length of term for other council members, not for the chief elected official.)

| Election method                                       | Length of term – Percent reporting (%) |         |         |         |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
|                                                       | 2 years                                | 3 years | 4 years | 6 years | Other |
| A. Council members elected <i>at large</i>            | 19                                     | 15      | 63      | 1       | 1     |
| B. Council members elected <i>by ward or district</i> | 26                                     | 9       | 64      | 0       | 0     |

Terms of office are (Check only one.)

| Type of term  | Percent reporting (%) |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| a. Staggered  | 85                    |
| b. Concurrent | 15                    |

34. Is there a legal limit on the number of terms a council member may serve?

1. Yes - 10%
2. No - 90%

A. If yes, what is the maximum number of terms allowed by law? 3 years (average) 317 reported.

B. If yes, when was the term limitation enacted? 1994 (year) (The year cannot be average, so the mode is use.)

C. If yes, by what authority is the number of terms limited? (Check only one.)

| Authority for term limit | Percent reporting (%) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Ordinance             | 14                    |
| 2. Charter               | 69                    |
| 3. State law             | 14                    |
| 4. Other                 | 3                     |

(Note: The number reporting is 333.)

35. How is a council member's seat filled if it is vacated before the term has expired? (Check only one.)

| Method for filling seat                             | Percent reporting (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Method depends on length of term remaining       | 26                    |
| b. Special election                                 | 9                     |
| c. Appointed by council                             | 48                    |
| d. Appointed by chief elected official              | 9                     |
| e. Position left vacant until next regular election | 1                     |
| f. Other                                            | 7                     |

36. Since 2006, have any recall initiatives been filed against council members?

1. Yes - 5% (153 is the number reported.)
2. No – 95%

A. If yes, were any successful? (139 is the number answering the question.)

1. Yes – 36 (number)
2. No – 103 (number)

37. Are any council members (*excluding the chief elected official*) paid an annual salary or stipend for any of their services? ☐

- 1. Yes - 83%
- 2. No - 18%

A. If yes, please indicate the approximate annual dollar amount that your council members receive.

- 1. Full-time council member
  - 378 respondents reported full-time amounts. The average for those with a population over 1,000,000 is \$56,298; and the overall average is \$8,000.
- 2. Part-time council member
  - 1,868 reported a salary for part-time members. The average for those with a population over 1,000,000 is 40,500; and the overall average is \$5,156.

38. How often does the council meet in formal session excluding work sessions? (*Check only one.*)

| Frequency of meeting in formal session | Percent reporting (%) |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Once a week                         | 3                     |
| b. More than once a week               | 0                     |
| c. Once a month                        | 26                    |
| d. Twice a month                       | 66                    |
| e. Three times a month                 | 2                     |
| f. Less than once a month              | 0                     |
| g. Other                               | 2                     |

39. Does your municipality have standing committees (*permanent bodies with set memberships and regularly scheduled meeting times*) that consider specific policy matters?

- 1. Yes – 66%
- 2. No – 34%

40. Does your municipality have citizen authorities, boards, or commissions?

- 1. Yes – 95%
- 2. No – 5%

A. If yes, are members

- 1. Elected – 7%
- 2. Appointed - 99% (Some respondents show both elected and appointed.)

B. If yes, in what capacity do they serve? (*Check all applicable.*)

- 1. Advisory – 89%
- 2. Decision/policy making – 39%
- 3. Quasi-judicial - 33%

C. If yes, in which areas are they used? (Check all applicable in the list below.)

| Committee area    | Percent reporting (%) | Committee area                | Percent reporting (%) | Committee area                | Percent reporting (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Growth         | 27                    | i. Civil service              | 16                    | q. Architectural review       | 21                    |
| b. Transportation | 21                    | j. Libraries                  | 39                    | r. Code enforcement           | 24                    |
| c. Zoning         | 86                    | k. Housing                    | 29                    | s. Parks and recreation       | 66                    |
| d. Finance        | 23                    | l. Community-police relations | 12                    | t. Ethics                     | 8                     |
| e. Airports       | 17                    | m. Economic development       | 43                    | u. Charter review commissions | 13                    |
| f. Art            | 16                    | n. Planning                   | 85                    | v. Other                      | 17                    |
| g. Beautification | 25                    | o. Environmental issues       | 22                    |                               |                       |
| h. Cable TV       | 12                    | p. Historic preservation      | 39                    |                               |                       |

41. Does the council employ staff to work exclusively on council business?

1. Yes – 16%
2. No – 84%

If “yes,” how many staff are

- a. Full-time staff
  - 424 respondents reported the number of full-time staff; there is an average of 32 in the two cities reporting with a population over 1,000,000, and 2 in places under 2,500.
- b. Part-time staff
  - 146 respondents reported part-time staff, with an overall average of 2 staff.