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Review Draft

2000 Survey of Local Government Policy Issues, Training Needs and Technology Use in New York State

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Executive Summary

New York State's Local Governments & Their Leaders

A Survey of New York Local Chief Elected Officials. Local government officials in New York face a variety of important public policy issues. In the spring of 2000 the Cornell Local Government Program initiated a survey research project to get the perspective of local officials on key issues. County board chairs, town supervisors, and city and village mayors were asked to respond to questions in three key areas. Local leaders were asked to identify and rank the pressing public service and policy issues they face. Second these officials were asked to identify priority training needs and preferences for training formats, timing and location. Third, officials were asked to identify key aspects of their government's use of local information technology, e.g. microcomputer and software use, sources of technical help, internet access and use, and web site characteristics.

The 468 survey respondents represent the mix of communities in New York when gauged by size of place or region of the state. The respondents to this survey are well balanced across the population size range from small to large municipalities in New York State. For counties, cities, towns and villages communities with small, medium and large populations are well represented by the respondent sample in comparison with statewide totals. Additional analysis of survey results will also be done to compare responses from New York with partner surveys conducted in the spring of 2000 in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

New York's Local Elected Leaders. The current profile of local chief elected officials indicates that over 50% have served for four years or less, and are in their first or second term, depending on the length of term. Most of these, chief, elected officers bring a wealth of previous local service to their current position. Ten percent or less of these chief elected officials are serving for a first term in their first local position. Previous local service is clearly the norm for most chief elected officials. We would expect less tenure in office and less previous service for the other regularly elected members of New York's local governing boards.

The profile of local leaders in this survey indicates that there is a relatively large pool of local chief elected leaders that are in their first or second term of office. Most of these leaders have some previous experience in local government. However, many of them are relative new comers to the board leadership role. Their experience indicates that many of them have served under someone else's leadership as a board member. In many instances this pool of leaders, particularly those serving their first term, may be open to training opportunities that address the skills and practices that are unique to the managing and leading a governing board, particularly practices and skill that improve performance. Current trends indicate that there is probably a continuing need for this kind of board leadership development.

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Priority Public Service and Policy Issues

First, local leaders, across all major local government classes, expressed a strong need for reform in state aid (general revenue sharing, and highway aid), and for reform in the administration of the property taxation an assessment. More targeted fiscal concerns were expressed by municipal officials from some local government types for more state flexibility in local administration, policy and revenue raising options.

Second, local leaders across all local government classes expressed a strong concern for economic development related issues. These general concerns, include: business retention and expansion, recruitment of new manufacturing, and recruitment of new retail. Specific municipal groups also expressed concern about downtown revitalization, tourism development and understanding local government's role in economic development.

Some local officials expressed strong concerns about planning and land use issues but those concerns tend to be more targeted on particular groupings of local governments and are less broad based. There is a broad based and strong concern about the decline of infrastructure, generally and the adequacy of road maintenance in particular. The public safety concerns noted in this survey are strongest regarding the state requirements for equipment and personnel in Emergency Management Services.

These results suggest the need for applied research and educational outreach in a number of areas. There is a continued need for applied research on the state-local fiscal system, including the major state aid flows to localities and the local property tax. It may be appropriate to develop some new approach and/or materials on the "nuts and bolts" of property tax administration and potential avenues for reform, including the linkage with new revenue options and sales tax distribution options for localities. Second there appears to be a continuing need for programs to help local officials understand their roles and options in economic development. There are more targeted needs for research and outreach in the areas of open space preservation, the location of development and sprawl issues, the impacts of new development on public service costs and dealing with dilapidated buildings or abandoned parcels in more developed areas.

Specific Training Needs

Local officials indicate relatively strong support for training in a number of key areas. These include training for newly elected officials and clusters of communication, leadership, planning and development, and computer and information management skills. Many of the communication and leadership training skill areas have some generic content like: using public input and involving the public, presenting information to the public, finding capable people for leadership positions, and collaboration among organizations.

CARDI is initiating a new emphasis on visioning with full-time outreach support. This is a highly ranked area where support for programming will be available in the next few years.

Local officials indicated that sorting out local government's role in economic development is both a pressing policy issue and a topic for which training is greatly needed. This is an area that should be pursued in more detail with a focus group of local officials or some other technique to explore how to meet this pressing concern.

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Despite the broad-based use of computers by local governments (see section 4 of this report) there is a continuing need for training on targeted topics in this area. It is important that training and technical assistance organizations continue to note the need in this area.

Training Patterns & Preferences

Initiatives to improve training options for local officials need to consider both the existing framework of training and the preferences of local officials for training opportunities. The survey evidence reported in this section has important implications for improving local government training opportunities. Key points and their implications are summarized below.

Statewide and Regional Training Events. Roughly half of the chief elected governing board members in the state attend a statewide and a regional conference during the year. More officials attend regional conferences than statewide events sponsored by their municipal association. Town and village officials have lower attendance rates at these state and regional events than county and city officials.

Willingness to Travel. In addition to state and regional events, local officials attend other training opportunities. Local officials expressed a willingness to travel substantial distances for other training events. Half of the officials responding to our survey that they had traveled 50 miles or more for a training event in the previous year. County and city officials reported traveling substantially further than town and village officials.

Implication. Local officials indicated a pattern of traveling substantial distances for training events. For most local officials the distances traveled for training were long enough to permit regional or multi-county training sites.

Local Government Payment for Training. Roughly three quarters of the officials in the survey indicated that their local government routinely paid for governing board members to attend training. Another 20% paid for training but only rarely. The percentages vary among subgroups.

Implications. Most governing board members will be able to get reimbursed for training by their municipalities.

Best Times for Training. Weekday evenings in the winter is the most preferred time for training events when considering the aggregate responses for all governing board members in the survey. The time of week and month of the year will vary with the type and size of local government that is being targeted. For example, weekday mornings is the preferred time of the week for training by county board chairmen.

Preferences for Training Approaches. Over half of the local officials in the state have participated in face-to-face classroom training and video down link training events. Of these two popular formats, local officials in the survey strongly prefer face-to-face training over video down link events for future training opportunities. Local officials indicated a strong willingness to try new training approaches, especially microcomputer based training, video tape instruction, and web site/email instruction and interaction.

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Comprehensive Training Course for Improved Governance. Two thirds of the local officials in the survey indicated that they would be interested in enrolling in a multi-unit-training course covering key topics needed to serve more effectively as a governing board member.

Information Technology

According to these survey results computers are used by 97% of local governments in the state.. This is a rapid growth in usage over the last 15 years. Local governments, even smaller ones, are using computers for a wide variety of applications. Most local governments (54%) have in-house personnel that they turn to for technical assistance for their computers and most of them do not find it very hard to get computer assistance.

Over half, 63%, of local governments in the state have access to the internet. They are using the internet primarily to reach out for need information from state agencies, statewide local government associations and from their peer local governments, in that order of importance. A smaller but still significant number of local governments have a municipal web site. Nearly 50% of local governments in our survey have a web site. The existence of web sites varies substantially by size and type of government. Over 80% of cities and counties have web sites while only 23% of small towns have web sites. Most of these are exclusively municipal sites 63%, but the remainder demonstrates an interesting variety of shared community sites and other joint arrangements. Most municipal web sites provide basic municipal information (90%) and links to other community organizations (63%), but some local governments are utilizing their web sites for regular reporting, making forms available and other useful municipal purposes.

The level of computer use, Internet access, and web site development indicates that local governments are slowly but steadily utilizing, critical electronic resources. Those who work with local governments should increasingly seek to utilize these resources and assume that local governments will be ready to use them. In the training portions of this survey, local officials identified a clear package of needed training priorities for information technology and a willingness to experiment with computerized an web based training venues.

Introduction

New York State's Local Governments & Their Leaders

A Survey of New York Local Chief Elected Officials

Local government officials in New York face a variety of important public policy issues. In the spring of 2000 the Cornell Local Government Program initiated a survey research project to get the perspective of local officials on key issues. The purpose of this survey was to provide important information on the current needs of local governments in New York State for municipal officials, citizens, and state officials. The results of the survey contained in this report will be made broadly available to local officials, citizens and those who serve local governments.

County board chairs, town supervisors, and city and village mayors were asked to respond to questions in three key areas. Local leaders were asked to identify and rank the pressing public service and policy issues they face. Second these officials were asked to identify priority training needs and preferences for training formats, timing and location. Third, officials were asked to identify key aspects of their government's use of local information technology, e.g. microcomputer and software use, sources of technical help, internet access and use, and web site characteristics.

On April 19-20, 2000 a mail questionnaire along with a letter explaining the project, and a postage-paid reply envelope were sent to each of 800 city, village, town, and county government officials in New York state. After two weeks, those respondents who had not yet returned their completed questionnaire were mailed a reminder postcard. After an additional two weeks, all non-respondents were mailed a second copy of the questionnaire. To reduce errors in data entry, all responses were entered twice using a computer assisted interviewing system, CAI. Data collection ended on June 28, 2000. Additional analysis of survey results will also be done to compare responses from New York with partner surveys conducted in the spring of 2000 in Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The survey respondents represent the mix of communities in New York when gauged by size of place or region of the state. The respondents to this survey are well balanced across the population size range from small to large municipalities in New York State. For counties, cities, towns and villages communities with small, medium and large populations are well represented by the respondent sample in comparison with statewide totals. Only, counties with populations greater than 250,000 were slightly underrepresented in survey responses. For example, 19% of villages in New York had a 1990 population between 2,500 and 4,999. Mayors from villages in this size range account for 17% of village responses to the survey.

Table 1
Survey Response Rates

Municipal Class	Total Sample	Respondents	Non-Respondents	Response Rate	Total Statewide
Counties	57	36	21	63%	57
Cities & Villages	296	145	151	49%	615
Towns	446	282	164	63%	932
Total	799	463	336	58%	1,604

Polling results are often reported with a qualification noting the degree of accuracy or margin of error. For example, a candidate is reported to be ahead of their competitor by three percentage points with 50% support and the margin of error is reported as plus or minus one percentage point. This is an expression of how well the percent in favor of each candidate from the poll statistically represents the entire voting population. Stated in these terms the percentage estimates for the total, respondent sample reported in this document have a margin of error of plus or minus 3-4% (at a 95% level of confidence) around the reported figure. The margin of error for reported subgroups are generally larger and depend on several factors including the size of the respondent subgroup sample and the size of the subgroup total population. Despite these larger margins of error the reported percentages for sub-groups are clearly illustrative of existing differences across municipal type and population size groupings.

In many instances we might expect differences in the responses of officials from different kinds of municipalities. In this report we will highlight two kinds of differences, municipal type and municipal size. Results will be presented for different municipal types (counties, cities, towns and villages) and for large versus small municipalities. If a municipality had a total population in 1990 of 5,000 or more it was classified as large and if the population was less than 5,000 it was classified as small. All counties and cities in the sample had 1990 populations of over 5,000. As a result the analysis of the responses of officials from small versus large municipalities was conducted only for towns and villages. A total population of 5,000 was used as a breakpoint for several reasons. Several studies have indicated that average public service costs drop as population size increases until population size reaches about 5,000 and then average costs level off and later begin rising again. Second, somewhere in the range of 4,000 to 8,000 population many local governments acquire more full-time and or professional management personnel which changes the roles and needs of local elected officials. Third this grouping of small and large was confirmed through graphical analysis of population size, conducted for the towns and villages in the sample.

New York's Local Elected Leaders

There is persistent speculation about the turnover rates among local elected officials. Our results provide some important insights into turnover and the level of experience among chief elected officials in the state. In the survey we ask officials how long they have

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served in their current position, if they have previous experience in other positions and the total years of experience in all local government service.

Tenure in Office. Turnover rates for chief elected officials appear to be substantial (see Figure 1, below). Over 50% of chief elected officials have been in office for four years or less. One quarter of chief elected officials have a year or less of service. Thirty percent of these officials have been in office for between five to ten years. Approximately 18% of local chief elected officials have more than ten years of experience in their position.

Figure 1 contains comparative tenure in office data for 1972. The 1972 survey was larger with 554 total respondents (compared to 463 for the 2000 survey). The earlier survey was sent to a sample of all board members and not restricted to chief elected officials. It is also important to note that the 1972 survey was conducted near the end of a period of change for the structure of many county boards in New York related to “one-man one-vote” changes. This change precipitated a lot of turnover and change among local officials. Figures from 1972 indicated a much higher percentage of newly elected officials (those with less than one year of experience). In general the 2000 figures indicate a larger percentage of officials with a medium level of experience (1-4 and 5-10 years). Well the percent of well experienced officials (over 10 years) was approximately the same for the two time periods.

Figure 1
Years in Current Office

Years in Office	Percent	
	1972*	2000
Less than one year	35	7
1-4	24	45
5-10	22	30
Over 10 Years	19	18
Total	100	100

** Figures for 1972 are taken from Hiser, 1972, page 7.*

Previous Experience. Over two thirds of the officials surveyed in 2000 have previously held other elected offices. Almost half (48%) of the chief elected officials in the survey have previously served in appointed local offices. These offices would include positions like: planning and zoning board members, assessors, recreation commission members, etc. Among the sample of local officials 27% indicated that a portion of their previous service included a seat on a planning board or board of zoning appeals.

Total Years of Experience. Because of their service in previous local positions, chief elected local officials bring a wealth of local experience to their current job. Figure 2, below, shows the breakdown of total years of local public service for chief elected leaders in the survey. Fifty percent of those surveyed have served for ten years or more in various local elected and appointed positions. In contrast, only about 7% have a year or less of total local government service.

Figure 2

Total Years of Local Government Experience

Years	Percent
0 - 1 Years	5
2 -4 Years	13
5-10 Years	32
11-15 Years	17
More than 16 years	33
Total	100

Summary. The current profile of local chief elected officials indicates that over 50% have served for four years or less, and are in their first or second term, depending on the length of term. Most of these, chief, elected officers bring a wealth of previous local service to their current position. Ten percent or less of these chief elected officials are serving for a first term in their first local position. Previous local service is clearly the norm for most chief elected officials. We would expect less tenure in office and less previous service for the other regularly elected members of New York’s local governing boards.

Implications. The profile of local leaders in this survey indicates that there is a relatively large pool of local chief elected leaders that are in their first or second term of office. Most of these leaders have some previous experience in local government. However, many of them are relative new comers to the board leadership role. Their experience indicates that many of them have served under someone else’s leadership as a board member. In many instances this pool of leaders, particularly those serving their first term, may be open to training opportunities that address the skills and practices that are unique to the managing and leading a governing board, particularly practices and skill that improve performance. While systematic evidence does not exist yet, many observers believe that the tenure of chief elected officials is at best holding its own and may be growing shorter overtime. This means that there is probably a continuing need for this kind of board leadership development.

Priority Public Service and Policy Issues

Many local leaders face a sea of issues and concerns that can sometimes be overwhelming. A shortlist of priority public issues was developed in cooperation with staff from statewide municipal associations and a number of local elected officials. Survey respondents were asked to rate this list of 42 policy issues or concerns for the degree of their importance. Local officials were asked to respond based on a five point scale with “0” representing “Not an Issue in my locality” to “4” “ a pressing issue in my locality.” The 42 items were clustered in six general categories: *Intergovernmental*

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Cooperation, Public Finance, Economic Development, Planning and Land Use, Public Works, and Public Safety.

Figure 3 below contains a list of those concerns that were ranked most highly by the total of all the local officials responding to the survey. For this ranking the percent of local officials that responded by circling one of the top two categories (a “3” or a “4”) were combined. Then the policy issues were sorted from highest to lowest. Half or more of the officials in the survey felt that each of the policy concerns in Figure 3 was a pressing issue.

Figure 3: Priority Policy Concerns of New York’s Chief Elected Officials

	Top Ten Policy Issues	
1	The need for reform in state highway aid	69%
2	The need for reform in state revenue sharing	67%
3	Retaining and expanding existing businesses	65%
4	Recruitment of new retail businesses	62%
5	Recruitment of new manufacturing industry	57%
6	State requirements for personnel training in maintaining Emergency Medical Services	56%
7	Decline of public infrastructure (water and sewer systems, roads, bridges, etc.)	53%
8	Adequate road and street maintenance	51%
9	State requirements for equipment in maintaining Emergency Medical Service	50%
10	Reform in the administration of property taxation and assessment	50%

The survey responses were broken into two important groupings for analysis. The responses of officials from counties, cities, towns and villages were broken out for comparison. Subsequently the responses of towns and villages were broken into two population groups, large and small. Towns and villages with less than 5,000 residents were classified as small. Those with populations greater than 5,000 were classified as large. The discussion below will note important aspects of the results for these survey subgroups. Appendix Table A1 contains the responses to all the needs assessment items in the survey for the total respondent sample and for each of the subgroups mentioned above. In the sections below we will highlight the policy concerns of local officials. A section is included below for each of the 6 major categories of policy concern that are included in the survey.

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Intergovernmental Cooperation

Of the three items on the survey in this category, none made the list of top ten concerns. However, 47% of all local officials in the survey indicated that the “Need for greater administrative and policy flexibility from the state” was a pressing issue. There are several other strong policy concerns regarding Intergovernmental Cooperation expressed by subgroups of survey respondents. Over two thirds of counties and cities and 60% of officials from large villages indicated the “*Need for greater administrative and policy flexibility from the state*” was a pressing issue. About 60% of officials from cities and large villages also expressed that “*relations between local government officials from different local governments*” was a pressing issue. Officials from 60% of large villages indicated that “cooperation in service delivery among local governments in the county” was a pressing issue.

Public Finance

State aid issues topped the list of local officials concerns. Over two thirds of the elected leaders in the survey communicated the need for reform of state revenue sharing and state highway aid. A third public finance policy concern, “Reform in the Administration of property taxation and assessment”, was ranked number ten in this list of top priority policy concerns. A strong majority of survey respondents in each of the four municipal groups, both large and small, communicated the need for reform in state revenue sharing and state highway aid. A majority of county, and town officials agree that property tax reform is a pressing issue. City and village officials, in general, are less concerned about this reform. However over two thirds of larger villages view property tax reform as a pressing issue. A majority of leaders from villages and cities viewed the “large loss of property tax base” and the “distribution of sales tax revenues within the county” as pressing issues. The concern over loss of property tax base was extremely high in cities, 92%, and large villages, 82%. Elected officials from cities (77%) and large villages (59%) also expressed concern over the “lack of flexibility and options in raising revenues for local services.”

Economic Development

Three economic development concerns represent the second most important cluster of pressing issues to local officials. Business retention and expansion, recruitment of new retail businesses, and recruitment of new manufacturing industry were ranked third, fourth and fifth in the list of ten priority issues. A majority of survey respondents in all four municipal groups, both large and small, indicated that these economic development issues were pressing concerns. In addition, a majority of officials from counties, cities, and villages (large and small) indicated that “main street or downtown revitalization” and “tourism development” were also pressing issues for their communities. A majority of respondents from counties, cities, large towns and large villages indicated that understanding “local government’s role in economic development” is a pressing issue.

Planning and Land Use

Ten issue items were included as public issues in the *Planning and Land Use* category. None of the items in this category were considered to be a pressing issue by 50% or more

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of all the officials in the survey. Every *Planning and Land Use* issue was ranked highly by some subgroups in the sample. These subgroup figures are included in Table 2 below. For example, City (100%) and village (60%) officials considered “dealing with dilapidated buildings or abandoned land parcels” a pressing public issue in their municipalities. Cities (77%), large towns (68%) and large villages (52%) consider “preservation of open space, natural beauty, historic landmarks, etc.” an important public issue. There are a cluster of development related issues that a majority of respondents from large towns and large villages considered important. This cluster includes: preservation of open space, dealing with the location of development and sprawl issues, and the impacts of development on public service costs. A majority of large villages also considered traffic congestion a pressing issue (71%).

Table 2
Planning and Land Use Policy Needs
Percent Responding “a Pressing Public Issue”

Planning And Land Use Issues	All Officials	County	City	Towns			Villages		
				Total	Large	Small	Total	Large	Small
Preservation of open space, natural beauty/historic landmarks	46	32	77	48	68	43	43	52	42
Dealing with the location of development and sprawl issues	35	27	62	38	68	30	28	43	25
Dealing with lack of growth	46	53	77	42	32	45	49	38	50
Impacts of new development on public service costs	36	29	39	36	56	31	39	52	36
Conflict with other local governments over development and public service coordination	23	24	39	22	23	21	23	38	20
Loss of Farmland to New Development	22	24	15	28	43	25	10	5	11
Availability of low-income housing	26	26	42	27	28	26	22	24	21
Traffic congestion	21	15	33	18	32	14	29	71	21
Need for state authorization of local impact fees to help pay for the costs of development	29	25	58	27	41	24	31	40	29
Dealing with dilapidated buildings or abandoned land parcels	48	39	100	39	25	43	63	52	65

Public Works

Two key infrastructure concerns are included in the list of top ten issues of importance to local officials. Fifty three percent of the officials in the survey considered the “Decline in public infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, etc.)” a pressing issue for their locality. A majority of survey respondents in all four municipal groups, both large and small, communicated that the decline of infrastructure was a pressing concern. A slightly smaller fifty one percent of all respondents, considered, “Adequate road and street maintenance” a pressing public issue in their locality. This concern was shared by a

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majority of respondents from counties, cities, and villages (both large and small) but not by a majority of town respondents. Over half the respondents from large towns and villages (both large and small) expressed concern for improving or protecting water quality.

Public Safety

State requirements for personnel training and equipment in maintaining emergency medical services are included in the list of the ten most pressing issues identified by local officials. These two items are ranked number six and number ten respectively. A majority of respondents from counties, towns (large and small) and large villages indicated that these training and equipment requirements constituted pressing issues for their communities. Almost 70% of the city officials in the sample indicated that the “adequacy of existing police services” was pressing issue for their community.

Implications

First, local leaders, across all major local government classes, expressed a strong need for reform in state aid (general revenue sharing, and highway aid), and for reform in the administration of the property taxation and assessment. More targeted fiscal concerns were expressed by municipal officials from some local government types for more state flexibility in local administration, policy and revenue raising options.

Second, local leaders across all local government classes expressed a strong concern for economic development related issues. These general concerns, include: business retention and expansion, recruitment of new manufacturing, and recruitment of new retail. Specific municipal groups also expressed concern about downtown revitalization, tourism development and understanding local government’s role in economic development.

Some local officials expressed strong concerns about planning and land use issues but those concerns tend to be more targeted on particular groupings of local governments and are less broad based. There is a broad based and strong concern about the decline of infrastructure, generally and the adequacy of road maintenance in particular. The public safety concerns noted in this survey are strongest regarding the state requirements for equipment and personnel in Emergency Management Services.

These results suggest the need for applied research and educational outreach in a number of areas. There is a continued need for applied research on the state-local fiscal system, including the major state aid flows to localities and the local property tax. It may be appropriate to develop some new approach and/or materials on the “nuts and bolts” of property tax administration and potential avenues for reform, including the linkage with new revenue options and sales tax distribution options for localities. Second there appears to be a continuing need for programs to help local officials understand their roles and options in economic development. There are more targeted needs for research and outreach in the areas of open space preservation, the location of development and sprawl issues, the impacts of new development on public service costs and dealing with dilapidated buildings or abandoned parcels in more developed areas.

Specific Training Needs

The information and training needs of local government officials are very broad and change rapidly, depending on the most recent problems and public issues they face. Here an attempt is made to identify those training needs that are related to the overall effectiveness of board members and local administration. In part these relate to the generic or “cross-cutting” administrative functions of local government. This list relates to the training needs of board members in doing their jobs and, generally speaking, not the training needs of other local government employees and appointees.

Survey respondents were asked to rate a list of 32 specific training topics for the degree of need. Local officials were asked to identify their local government’s need for training assistance using three categories, *No Need*, *Moderate Need* and *Great Need*. In addition, local officials were asked to indicate with a Yes/No response if someone from their board would attend training, if it were offered, for the each topic. This question about attendance was added because of the experience with other surveys like this where need was indicated but officials did not turn out for training events. The 32 items were clustered in seven general categories: Communication, Board Management, Leadership Skills, Budget & Finance, Planning and Development, Computer and Information Management, and Other Administrative Areas. In evaluating responses the percent of those indicating a Great Need we used in calculating the percentages reported in the tables and text for this section.

Figure 4, below shows the top ten training items from the survey. These are ranked based on the percent of officials in the survey indicating that there was a *Great Need* for training in this area. For all of these items, over 40% of local leaders indicated that someone from their board would attend training on this topic. For the top five items half or more of the local governments in the sample would send a board member to training on the topic. Table A2 in the Appendix contains detailed information on the responses to all training items in the survey. In these tables responses are broken out for municipal type (counties, cities, towns and villages) and for small and large towns and villages. Survey responses to specific training needs are discussed below by general category.

Figure 4
Top Ten Training Needs

	Training Need	Percent
1	Grant application and writing	47
2	Creating a long-term vision for the municipality	42
3	How to make the vision happen	41
4	Finding capable people for local appointed boards	38
5	Training for newly elected/appointed officials	29
6	Finding local government's role in economic development	28
7	Planning and budgeting for capital improvements	26
8	Use of computers for record management	24
9	Building code enforcement	24
10	Working with other community organizations and groups	21

Communication

Four topics were included in this training category (rankings in parentheses): *using public input and involving the public* (12), *presenting information to the public* (16), *communication within the local government* (26), and *communication with other governments* (20). None of these items were ranked in the top ten based on the indicated level of need for training. However, approximately 40% or more of the officials in the survey indicated that some one from their board would attend training on each of these topics. Counties, cities, towns (large and small) and large villages indicated strong support for sending someone to training in this cluster of training topics.

Board Management

The need for *Training for newly elected/appointed officials* was ranked number five by local officials in the survey. Officials from counties, cities, towns and villages all indicated strong support for training in this area.

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Leadership Skills

Four items were included in this training category (rank in parentheses): *finding capable people for local appointed boards (4)*, *creating a long term vision for the municipality(2)*, *how to make the vision happen(3)*, and *working with other community organizations and groups(10)*. As noted, each of these items was in top ten training needs. There was strong support for training in this area from cities, towns (small and large), and villages (small and large). A much lower percentage of county officials ranked the specific training needs in this category as a great need. However, these same county officials indicated that someone from over 40% of their boards would attend training on each of these topics.

Budgeting & Finance

Grant application and writing was the only one of six items in this category to be ranked in the top ten training needs. The need for training in this area and potential for attendance at training was strong across all municipal types and sizes. Several other training items in this category were ranked highly by some sub-groups. Officials from counties and large towns expressed a strong need for training in “evaluating contracting out for services.” A relatively high percentage of officials from large towns indicated great need for training in “calculating cost of services and related fees and prices.”

Planning & Development

Three training needs in the planning and development area were ranked in the top ten (ranking in parentheses): Planning and budgeting for capital improvements (7), Building code enforcement (9), and Finding local government’s role in economic development (6). With one exception the indication of training need for these three items was strong across all municipal types and sizes. County officials did not indicate a high need for “Building code enforcement” training. Officials from counties and large towns also indicated strong support for training in “evaluating the fiscal impacts of development proposals.”

Computers & Information Management

One item in this category, “Use of computers for record management” was ranked in the top ten training needs. The expressed need for training in this area was relatively strong across counties, cities, towns (small and large), and villages (large and small). “The use of computers for electronic communications” was ranked eleventh among all specific training items. Support for training in this area was strong among officials from cities and towns (small and large). Officials from cities and towns also expressed strong support for training on the “use of computers for financial-related tasks.”

Other Administrative Areas

None of the items in this area were ranked among the top ten training needs. The strongest support in this area was for “evaluating and rewarding employee performance.” A relatively high percentage of larger towns and villages indicated a great need for training in this area.

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Implications

Local officials indicate relatively strong support for training in a number of key areas. These include training for newly elected officials and clusters of communication, leadership, planning and development, and computer and information management skills. Many of the communication and leadership training skill areas have some generic content. In particular many extension professionals have exposure and experience with training content with items like: using public input and involving the public, presenting information to the public, finding capable people for leadership positions, and collaboration among organizations. In other instances extension professionals can help coordinate access to training resources in topics like “grant application and writing.”

CARDI is initiating a new emphasis on visioning with full-time outreach support. This is a highly ranked area where support for programming will be available in the next few years.

Local officials indicated that sorting out local government’s role in economic development is both a pressing policy issue and a topic for which training is greatly needed. This is an area that should be pursued in more detail with a focus group of local officials or some other technique to explore how to meet this pressing concern.

Despite the broad-based use of computers by local governments (see section 4 of this report) there is a continuing need for training on targeted topics in this area. It is important that training and technical assistance organizations continue to note the need in this area.

Training Patterns & Preferences

Current Training Opportunities

A variety of training opportunities currently exist for local officials. The state's major municipal associations provide a variety of training opportunities for their members. New York's Association of Counties, Association of Towns and Conference of Mayors and Other Municipal Officials each hold at least one major statewide event with training for governing board members. In addition to these statewide events annual regional training events for local officials are a growing phenomena in the state. A variety of other, more localized training events are held each year.

Table 3 below indicates the current pattern of attendance at statewide and regional events. Nearly half (46%) of local chief elected officials in the sample attended a statewide meeting, sponsored by a local government association, for training during the previous year. Over half (55%) of this group attended a regional local government meeting for training during the same period. Higher percentages of local officials from each local government municipal type, except cities, attended regional meeting in contrast with those attending statewide municipal association events. Participation in statewide and regional training events are substantially lower for towns and village officials than county and city officials. A higher percentage of large town and large village officials in the survey attended both statewide and regional events than their small town and small village counterparts.

Table 3: Attendance by Local Officials at State Wide Association and Regional Local Government Conferences

Type of Chief Elected Official	Percent Attending a Meeting in the Last Year	
	Statewide	Regional
All Officials	46	55
County	72	75
City	100	77
All Towns	45	54
Small towns	41	52
Large towns	59	60
All Villages	37	51
Small villages	33	47
Large villages	59	73

Willingness to Travel

A key aspect in serving the training needs of local elected officials is location. Onsite training events need to be located within a reasonable travel distance. To measure what is a reasonable distance, respondents were asked “what was the further distance traveled in the last 12 months to attend training (other than going to a national, statewide or regional municipal conference)?” Table 4 below summarizes the responses of local officials to this question. On average local officials demonstrated a willingness to travel over 120 miles to attend training sessions. The median is the number that separates the top and bottom half of a distribution. The median indicates that half of the local officials in the distribution traveled 50 miles or less for other training opportunities during the previous year. County and city officials demonstrated a willingness to travel much further than their town and village counterparts for additional training opportunities. Village officials traveled further than town officials, and officials from larger towns and villages were willing to travel further than their counterparts from smaller communities.

Table 4
Furthest Distance Traveled to Attend Other Training Opportunities*

	Distance Traveled	
	Mean	Median
All Officials	127	50
County	163	160
City	247	200
Town	105	45
small	89	40
large	169	60
Village	160	75
small	162	75
large	148	150

* Only 51% valid responses to the question

Local Government Support for Training

One important influence on the decision to attend training is cost. One of the most striking conclusions from Table 3, above, is the lower rate of attendance at both state and regional meetings by officials from small towns and villages. In Table 5, below, the figures indicates that one reason for this lower rate may be a lower willingness by local boards from small towns and villages to pay for the costs of attending training. One anomaly, in these results is the high level of attendance at training by city officials given the relatively low percentage of cities that pay for training. With the exception of cities,

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almost three quarters of all local governments, and a strong majority of all the subgroups do routinely pay for board member to attend training.

Table 5
Does Your Local Government Pay for Local Board Members to Attend Training?

	% Yes Routinely	% Yes Rarely	% No	% Don't Know
All Officials	74	19	6	1
County	89	6	6	0
City	39	39	15	8
Town	78	19	3	0
Small	76	20	4	0
Large	86	14	0	0
Village	66	23	10	2
Small	62	24	12	2
Large	82	18	0	0

Best Times for Training

The life and employment circumstances of governing board members vary substantially. These circumstances and personal preferences determine the availability of local officials for training opportunities. Several questions were included in the survey to help identify priority times during the week and year when local officials are most available for training.

Table 6 summarizes the responses of chief elected officials to six specific weekly time “zones” for training. In the aggregate local officials prefer weekday evenings followed by weekday mornings and afternoons. Weekends, Sunday in particular, are the least preferred of the six time zones. A different picture emerges when we examine municipal subgroups. Weekday evenings remains the most preferred time slot for officials from small towns and small villages. However, for county officials, and large towns and villages, weekday mornings are the most preferred. With the exception of large villages and to a lesser extent small villages, most subgroups prefer to avoid Saturday training sessions.

Table 6
Best Time of Day for Training

	%Total	County		Town			Village		
		County	City	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Weekday Morning	31	58	23	28	24	45	30	28	36
Weekday Afternoon	23	39	23	22	20	31	18	17	27
Weekday All-Day	26	39	39	28	25	36	16	16	18
Weekday Evening	43	19	23	47	50	33	45	48	32
Saturday	18	11	15	16	18	10	24	22	36
Sunday	4	3	8	3	3	3	6	6	9
Other (Specify)	2	0	0	1	1	2	3	4	0
None	3	0	23	3	2	7	2	3	0

Equally important is the seasonal availability of local officials. Survey respondents were asked which of the four seasons of the year generally worked best for training sessions. Winter was selected by the largest percentage of all officials (45%) and a majority of all subgroups, except cities and large villages, as the season that worked best for training. Summer was the least preferred season for all groups, except city officials. Substantial numbers of officials from most subgroups expressed a preference for fall and/or spring as the best season for training.

Table 7
Best Time of Year for Training
Percent Indicating Season is the Best for Training Sessions

Season	%Total	County		Town			Village		
		County	City	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Fall	23	28	40	21	21	20	27	28	22
Winter	45	40	20	50	49	48	40	41	33
Spring	21	24	0	22	21	26	19	15	39
Summer	7	8	40	5	5	2	10	11	6
Other	4	0	0	4	4	4	5	6	0

Officials were also asked what season of the year should be avoided for training governing board members. The responses to this question are summarized in Table 8. With some exceptions, Table 8 communicates a similar recommended pattern for training to that suggested by Table 7. Table 8 shows that there is a substantial component of local

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officials that prefer not to have training in the winter. This holds for every subgroup but large villages. Almost a quarter of officials from counties and large towns indicate that fall should be avoided for training sessions. This may be because of the heavy time commitment to budgeting for county and town board members in the fall.

Table 8
Time of Year to be Avoided for Training
Percent Indicating Season Should be Avoided for Training Sessions

	%Total	County	City	Town			Village		
				Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
1. Fall	10	23	9	12	8	25	4	3	6
2. Winter	24	32	27	23	24	17	24	28	6
3. Spring	6	7	0	5	6	0	10	8	19
4. Summer	57	39	64	58	60	54	58	56	69
5. Other	3	0	0	3	2	4	4	5	0

Preferences for Training Approaches

A variety of approaches are available for working with local elected leaders. In the survey leaders were asked what types of training approaches they have participated in, and what approaches they would like participate in the future. Table 9 contains a summary of responses on what kinds of training local officials have had exposure to. Overall half of all officials in the survey have had exposure to face to face classroom training in their county (57%) and to video down link training of live or taped presentations (54%). Half or more of the local officials from each of our subgroups, except cities, have experienced face to face classroom training. For all subgroups, except cities and towns, a higher percent of officials have been exposed to face to face training than video downlink formats.

Elected leaders indicated a much lower level of exposure to the other six types of training listed in the questionnaire. These include: correspondence courses, micro-computer based training, audio/cassette tape instruction, video tape instruction, web-site/email based instruction, and PIC-TEL instruction and interaction. Some subgroups express a much higher rates of “experience” with particular training approaches. For example, 36% of responding county officials expressed experience with video tape instruction.

Table 9
What Kinds of Training Have You Participated In?
Percent Responding “Have Tried”

Training Approach	All			Town			Village		
	Officials	County	City	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Face-to-face Classroom, in county	57	72	31	59	59	59	52	50	64
Video- down-link of Live or Taped Presentation	54	67	39	64	66	59	31	28	50
Correspondence Course with Workbooks	11	17	8	10	11	5	13	14	9
Microcomputer Based Training Course	12	25	8	10	8	14	14	14	14
Audio (cassette tape) Instruction	12	28	23	8	6	16	15	14	18
Video Tape Instruction	18	36	15	13	13	14	23	22	27
Web site/email Instruction and Interaction	7	14	15	6	6	7	7	7	5
PIC-TEL Instruction and Interaction	5	1	0	4	4	2	5	6	0

Survey respondents were asked to indicate which training approaches that they had participated in, would they like to try again. Table 10 contains a summary of responses to this question. It is interesting to note that equally large numbers (expressed as a percent of the sample in Table 9) of officials have participated in face to face classroom training (57%) and video down link (54%) formats. Their preferences for future training remain very high for face-to-face classroom experiences (44%), but drop off significantly for Video-down-link formats (10%). Thus while over half the officials in the survey have experienced training via Video Down Link just over one tenth of these officials want to continue to use this format in the future. Similarly 10% of individuals have tried correspondence course formats but only 1% would like to use this format in the future.

Responses are somewhat stronger for microcomputer based training and web site/email instruction and interaction. Those wanting to try these “higher tech” formats in the future represent over 50% of the number that have previously tried these educational venues.

Table 10
Which One of the Training Approaches You Have Experienced Would You
Most Prefer in the Future?
Percent indicating a preference for this approach

Training Approach	All			Town			Village		
	Officials	County	City	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Face-to-face Classroom	44	42	23	44	43	48	46	43	59
Video- down-link of Live or Taped Presentation	10	19	15	12	12	12	4	3	9
Correspondence Course with Workbooks	1	3	0	1	1	0	2	2	0
Microcomputer Based Training Course	7	0	0	8	9	5	6	6	9
Audio (cassette tape) Instruction	2	0	0	2	2	2	2	3	0
Video Tape Instruction	4	6	15	4	4	7	3	4	0
Web site/email Instruction and Interaction	4	6	15	3	3	3	5	5	5
PIC-TEL Instruction and Interaction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Refused	28	25	31	27	28	22	33	36	18

With an increasing number of new avenues for instruction available it is important to know how willing local officials are to try new options. Local officials were asked to indicate if they would like to try the training approaches that they have not yet experienced. Table 11 contains a summary of responses to this question. There were three approaches that 20% or more of local official expressed an interest in trying. The three are: microcomputer based training course (29%), video tape instruction (20%), and web site/email instruction and interaction (22%). Support for trying these three options were strongest among town and village respondents. These results indicate that there is substantial support for targeted experimentation with new training technology options particularly among town and village officials.

Table 11
For those Kinds of Training You Have Not Experienced, Indicate if You
Would Like to Try This Approach?
Percent Responding “Would Like to Try”

Training Approach	All			Town			Village		
	Officials	County	City	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Face-to-face Classroom	17	6	8	17	18	16	19	18	23
Video- down-link of Live or Taped Presentation	11	8	23	9	8	12	16	16	18
Correspondence Course with Workbooks	15	3	15	15	15	16	18	19	9
Microcomputer Based Training Course	29	11	31	31	32	26	30	30	27
Audio (cassette tape) Instruction	16	3	0	17	17	17	17	17	18
Video Tape Instruction	20	6	8	23	22	26	18	17	27
Web-site/email Instruction and Interaction	22	11	15	24	25	17	23	19	41
PIC-TEL Instruction and Interaction	11	8	0	11	12	9	12	12	14

Comprehensive Training Course for Improved Governance

In a variety of forums local elected officials have expressed an interest in a more cohesive training program that touches on the basic skills and subjects that would help them perform more effectively as local governing board members. The survey addressed this issue with the following question.

“Some have suggested that it would be good to offer a training program that would involve multiple training sessions, covering key topics needed to serve effectively as a governing board member. If cost, location and timing met your needs, would you be interested in enrolling in such a basic course specifically designed to help you in your role as a local government official?”

“Do you think that such a basic course would be of interest to other members of your governing board?”

Responses to these two questions are summarized in Table 12. Two thirds of all local officials in the survey indicated that they would be interested in such a multi-unit training course. Over half of all respondents indicated that other members of their board would be interested in this kind of training opportunity. Interest in this kind of training was particularly strong among officials from smaller towns (74%) and large villages (81%).

Table 12
Interest in enrolling in a multi-unit training course aimed at covering key topics needed to serve more effectively as a governing board member

Percent that would be interested in attending

	Would you be interested?			Would other members of your board be interested?		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
All Officials	66	8	24	54	7	38
County	58	19	22	61	3	36
City	54	15	31	46	0	54
Town-all	70	7	23	53	8	39
Small	74	6	20	55	6	39
Large	55	12	33	47	14	40
Village-all	67	8	25	56	9	35
Small	64	9	27	53	10	37
Large	81	5	14	71	0	29

Summary of Training Patterns & Preferences

Initiatives to improve training options for local officials need to consider both the existing framework of training and the preferences of local officials for training opportunities. The survey evidence reported in this section has important implications for improving local government training opportunities. Key points and their implications are summarized below.

Statewide and Regional Training Events. Roughly half of the chief elected governing board members in the state attend a statewide and a regional conference during the year. More officials attend regional conferences than statewide events sponsored by their municipal association. Town and village officials have lower attendance rates at these state and regional events than county and city officials.

Willingness to Travel. In addition to state and regional events, local officials attend other training opportunities. Local officials expressed a willingness to travel substantial distances for other training events. Half of the officials responding to our survey that they had traveled 50 miles or more for a training event in the previous year. County and city officials reported traveling substantially further than town and village officials.

Implication. Local officials indicated a pattern of traveling substantial distances for training events. For most local officials the distances traveled for training were long enough to permit regional or multi-county training sites.

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Local Government Payment for Training. Roughly three quarters of the officials in the survey indicated that their local government routinely paid for governing board members to attend training. Another 20% paid for training but only rarely. The percentages vary among subgroups.

Implications. Most governing board members will be able to get reimbursed for training by their municipalities.

Best Times for Training. Weekday evenings in the winter is the most preferred time for training events when considering the aggregate responses for all governing board members in the survey. The time of week and month of the year will vary with the type and size of local government that is being targeted. For example, weekday mornings is the preferred time of the week for training by county board chairmen.

Preferences for Training Approaches. Over half of the local officials in the state have participated in face-to-face classroom training and video down link training events. Of these two popular formats, local officials in the survey strongly prefer face-to-face training over video down link events for future training opportunities. Local officials indicated a strong willingness to try new training approaches, especially microcomputer based training, video tape instruction, and web site/email instruction and interaction.

Comprehensive Training Course for Improved Governance. Two thirds of the local officials in the survey indicated that they would be interested in enrolling in a multi-unit-training course covering key topics needed to serve more effectively as a governing board member.

Information Technology

Computer use among local governments has grown dramatically in recent years. About 97% of the local governments in our sample indicated that they currently use computers in their operations. Usage among towns helps to illustrate this growth since the late 1980s. In 1986 about 23% of towns statewide were using microcomputers (Wilcox, 1987). By 2000 use of computers had grown to over 95% of all towns statewide. Table 13 summarizes some of the functions that local governments in New York are using computers for.

Table 13
For Which Functions is a Computer Used?
Percent Responding “Yes”

	Total County City			Town			Village		
				Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Accounting	94	100	100	93	92	96	95	94	100
Payroll	89	97	100	85	84	90	93	91	100
Annual Budgeting	87	94	100	82	82	86	95	94	100
Capital Planning	47	71	83	36	33	44	61	54	86
Board Minutes & Correspondence	87	92	92	82	80	87	95	97	86
Inventory/Materials Management	59	86	92	50	46	64	69	66	85
GIS - Mapping	34	82	67	27	20	50	28	22	48
Police/Sheriff	44	94	100	23	15	49	63	54	95

Most municipalities in the sample use computers for basic administrative functions. About 90% of all survey respondents have computer software applications for accounting, payroll, annual budgeting, and for basic word processing functions (eg. board minutes and correspondence). Less than half of responding municipalities use software for capital planning, GIS and mapping applications, and Police/Sheriff applications. Town governments in the sample indicated the lowest level of utilization for capital planning software.

Local officials were asked to indicate other service and administrative areas where software is being used by their municipality. Officials in the survey indicated that software applications were also used in the following areas: clerk’s office records (licenses and fees), justice court records, assessment, property tax billing and collection, utility billing, code enforcement, planning and zoning, animal census, highway records, history, and water and sewer system operation.

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Good support and technical assistance is a critical aspect in effectively using computer applications. National survey evidence indicates that vendors are the primary source of information about new technology for larger local governments (Sprecher, et. al. 1996:43). In general we would expect that smaller and rural governments are under served by the private sector in this area. (Cutlip, 1995). New York’s local governments look to in-house personnel as their primary source of technical assistance in solving computer problems (see Table . In-house personnel is followed by local computer consultants, software vendors, and local computer vendors as the primary sources of help in solving computer problems. To a lesser extent local officials look to telephone based product support and citizen volunteers to address this need for help.

Table 14
Where Do You Get Technical Assistance to Help Solve Computer Problems? *(Please Check all that apply)*
Percent Indicating This Source

Source of Assistance	County City			Town			Village		
	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Someone in Office is Knowledgeable	54	75	69	53	51	60	49	45	64
Local Computer Consultant	43	25	46	42	36	66	52	51	59
Software Vendor	40	33	15	42	40	50	38	38	36
Local Computer Vendor	39	11	15	41	37	53	48	49	46
Telephone-Based Product Support	29	22	8	31	31	33	29	26	46
Citizen Volunteer	14	3	0	19	21	14	8	7	9
Other (Specify)	7	28	0	6	7	2	3	4	0

Over half (52%) of the local officials in the survey indicate that it was relatively easy (1-3 on a 9 point scale) to get needed computer assistance (see Table 15 below). About a third (31%) found it moderately difficult (4-6 on a nine point scale) to find computer assistance. Only ten percent of those responding considered assistance hard to get (7-9 on a 9 point scale). Among municipalities in New York, cities appear to find computer technical assistance more difficult to get than others.

Table 15
How Easy or Hard it is to get Computer Assistance
Percent Indicating Level of Difficulty

				Town			Village		
	Total	County	City	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
1= Very Easy	19	28	0	18	18	19	24	23	29
2	17	17	31	20	20	21	15	18	0
3	16	19	15	16	15	21	18	17	24
	52	64	46	55	53	60	57	58	52
4	10	17	15	11	11	9	10	11	5
5	15	8	8	19	20	17	14	12	24
6	6	3	8	6	5	9	8	8	5
	31	28	31	36	36	34	31	31	33
7	7	8	8	7	8	3	10	8	14
8	1	0	0	2	2	2	1	1	0
9=Very Hard	2	0	15	1	2	0	2	2	0
	10	8	23	10	11	5	12	12	14

Internet Access and Use

Over half (63%) of New York’s local governments have access to the internet (see Table 16). Access varies by municipal type and size. In particular there are much higher rates of access among counties, cities, larger towns, and larger villages. Access to the internet is lowest among small towns (52%).

Table 16
Does Your Community Have Access to the Internet in Your Offices?
Percent Responding

				Town			Village		
	Total	County	City	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Yes	63	89	100	56	52	72	66	63	82
No	30	8	0	39	42	28	20	20	18
Don't Know	1	3	0	1	1	0	2	3	0
Refused	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	3	0
Don't have Computer	5	0	0	3	4	0	9	11	0

Local officials were asked to indicate what purposes their local government uses web access for. The largest use (89%) noted in the survey is “Retrieving Information from State Agencies.” The next highest use is correspondence or e-mail communication of all

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types (78%). This is followed by: retrieving information from statewide local government associations (64%), retrieving information from other local governments (48%) and sharing information with citizens(37%). Only 7% of local governments are using the internet for participating in on-line training programs. This pattern of use indicates that local governments are using the Internet primarily to reach out for needed information, albeit from traditional sources. The state, statewide associations and other governments have a long history as primary sources that local officials use to get information and solve problems.

Table 17
For What Purposes Does Your Local Government Use the Web?
 (please check all that apply)

Percent Responding

	County			Town			Village		
	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Retrieving Information from State Agencies	89	97	100	89	90	88	83	81	89
Retrieving Information from Local Gov'ts. State Association	64	91	92	60	61	55	59	57	67
Retrieving Information from Other Local Governments	48	72	69	46	43	52	40	38	50
Sharing Information with Citizens	37	47	69	35	24	67	30	30	28
Correspondence (e-mail)	78	84	100	74	73	76	79	78	83
Participating in on-line Training Programs	7	16	8	6	9	0	6	7	0
other	8	0	0	10	12	5	8	10	0

Municipal Web Sites

About 40% of local governments in the state have a municipal web site (see Table 18, below). The percent of local governments with Web sites appears to vary substantially by municipal type and size. Over 80% of cities and counties have web sites, followed by villages (44%) and towns (30%). Small towns and villages have much lower rates with only 23% of small towns having a web site.

Table 18
Does Your Municipality have its Own Web Page?
Percent Responding

	County			Town			Village		
	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large	Total	Small	Large
Yes	39	81	85	30	23	55	44	39	64
No	53	17	8	64	69	41	43	45	32
Don't Know	1	3	8	1	1	0	1	1	0
Don't have Computer	5	0	0	3	4	0	9	11	0
Refused	3	0	0	3	3	3	4	4	5

As indicated in Table 18, above, 39% of the municipalities in the sample have websites. Most of these, 63%, are “exclusively a municipal web site” (see Table 19 below). Most of the other municipalities, that have a web site, it is part of another site in the community. About 5% of those responding indicated “Other” arrangements. These “Other” arrangement include sites that are linked to: police department or fire department web sites, municipal historian or local museum sites, a county government web site, or a web site of a local development organization (IDA, tourism, chamber of commerce, etc.).

Table 19
Is Your Municipality’s Web Site Solely a Municipal Site?
Percent Responding

Type of Web Site	Percent
Exclusively a Municipal Web-site	63
Part of a General Community, Business/Other Site	25
Other (Describe)	12

Table 20, below, summarizes the kinds of information that citizens find on municipal web sites. Among municipalities that have a web site, basic contact information (90%) is the material that municipalities most commonly maintain on there site followed by links to other organizations in the community (63%) and regularly posted meeting minutes (35%). Some municipalities also use there web sites for local community newsletter information (29%), planning information (24%) and budget information (18%).

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Municipalities in the survey also indicated that they also used their web sites for: police information, municipal and community history, general information on public services, FAQs, local laws - including planning and zoning regulations, basic forms, tourism/visitor information, driving instructions (to visit the municipality), a kid's section, a municipal map, and public notices.

Table 20
What Types of Materials Do You Have on your Web Page
Check all that apply (Percent Responding)

Type of material on Web site	Percent
Contact Information such as Local Officials names & telephone numbers	90
Links to Other organizations in your Locality	63
Local Community Newsletter	29
Planning Information	24
Budget Information	18
Regularly-Posted Meeting Minutes	35
Other (describe)	20

The current pattern of municipal web site hosting is summarized in Table 21, below. Most municipalities, with a web site, have their site hosted by a local vendor or Web developer (38%) or on their own municipal equipment (29%). For a smaller number (13%) their web site resides on a national web server. Some communities had their sites hosted through arrangements not listed in the survey, including: a local museum or library, the county, or a local college or community college.

Table 21
Where is Your Municipality's Web Page Hosted?

Type of Web Hosting	Percent
On a municipal computer/web server	29
On a local vendor's or web Developer's server	38
On a national web server (such as AOL)	13
Other (Specify)	7
Don't Know	12

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Almost 40% of municipalities with web sites pay for web site hosting, while 45% do not pay (see Table 22).

Table 22
Do you pay for Web Site Hosting?

	Percent
Yes	39
No	45
Don't Know	15

Updated information can be a key to maintaining citizen contact and interest. Table 23 below summarizes current updating practices. Most municipal web sites are updated at least once a month (56%). Only a small number of sites are updated on a daily basis (5%) and some sites have not been updated since they were created (13%).

Table 23
How Often is Your Municipality's Web Page Updated?

Only one response selected

	Percent
Daily	5
At least Once a Week	19
At least Once a Month	32
Less than Once a Month	14
It has not been Updated	13
Do Not Know	17

Summary & Implications of Information Technology Practices

According to these survey results computers are used by 97% of local governments in the state.. This is a rapid growth in usage over the last 15 years. Local governments, even smaller ones, are using computers for a wide variety of applications. Most local governments (54%) have in-house personnel that they turn to for technical assistance for their computers and most of them do not find it very hard to get computer assistance.

Over half, 63%, of local governments in the state have access to the internet. They are using the internet primarily to reach out for need information from state agencies,

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statewide local government associations and from their peer local governments, in that order of importance. A smaller but still significant number of local governments have a municipal web site. Nearly 50% of local governments in our survey have a web site. The existence of web sites varies substantially by size and type of government. Over 80% of cities and counties have web sites while only 23% of small towns have web sites. Most of these are exclusively municipal sites 63%, but the remainder demonstrate an interesting variety of shared community sites and other joint arrangements. Most municipal web sites provide basic municipal information (90%) and links to other community organizations (63%), but some local governments are utilizing their web sites for regular reporting, making forms available and other useful municipal purposes.

The level of computer use, internet access, and web site development indicates that local governments are slowly but steadily utilizing, critical electronic resources. Those who work with local governments should increasingly seek to utilize these resources and assume that local governments will be ready to use them. In the training portions of this survey, local officials identified a clear package of needed training priorities for information technology and a willingness to experiment with computerized and web based training venues.

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Appendix