

## 2018 Survey of Small Town Municipal Officials

February 2019







Pennsylvania’s 2,560 municipalities are governed by nearly 12,800 elected officials. Among these officials, 56 percent, or more than 7,100, are in municipalities with fewer than 2,500 residents.






To learn more about these officials and their communities, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania conducted a statewide survey in September 2018, and compared the results with two similar surveys conducted in 1999 and 2005.

The 2018 survey was sent to a random sample of borough council members and mayors, and supervisors of townships of the second class, with populations under 2,500. The response rate was 33 percent, with a 2.6 percent margin of error. This response rate was very similar to the 1999 and 2005 surveys. (See the survey methodology on Page 8.)

In this report, boroughs and townships of the second class are called “small towns.” In addition, borough council members, mayors, and township supervisors are called “local officials.”

### 2018 Results: Small Town Municipal Officials

	<b>Age</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 61.9 years old, on average</li> </ul>
	<b>Gender</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20% female</li> <li>• 80% male</li> </ul>
	<b>Race</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 99% white</li> </ul>
	<b>Homeownership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 97% homeowners</li> </ul>
	<b>Labor Force Status</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60% employed</li> <li>• 40% retired</li> </ul>
	<b>Military Service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24% served in the armed forces</li> </ul>

	<b>Household Income</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 38% income under \$50,000</li> <li>• 18% income \$100,000 or more</li> </ul>
	<b>Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 29% bachelor's degree or higher</li> </ul>
	<b>Internet Access</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 91% access the internet from home</li> </ul>
	<b>Households/Family</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2.3 average number of people in household</li> <li>• 15% have children (&lt;18) in their home</li> </ul>
	<b>Living in Municipality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 63% have lived in the municipality for 30 or more years</li> </ul>

## 2018 Results: At the Municipal Building



### Managers

- 20% officials reported having a municipal manager



### Employees

- 3.3 full-time employees, on average
- 3.5 part-time employees, on average



### Number of Monthly Meetings

- 83% one regularly scheduled meeting per month
- 17% two or more regularly scheduled meetings per month



### Hours Spent on Municipal Business

- 48% spent less than 10 hours per month on municipal business

## 2018 Results: Serving the Public



### Years of Service

- 11.1 years in office, on average
- 18% more than 20 years in office



### Top 3 Reasons Why Officials Initially Ran for Office

- 61% Desired to be active in the community
- 53% Received encouragement from others
- 43% Wanted to help improve their community



### In Their Last Election

- 54% ran unopposed (no other candidates)



### Expect to Seek Office Again

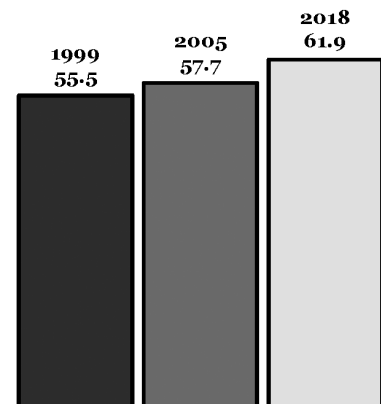
- 67% Expect to run again
- 33% do not expect to run again: of those, 48% said they served long enough and want to give others a chance

## Comparing the Results: 1999, 2005 and 2018

### Age

In 1999, local officials were 55.5 years old, on average. Nineteen years later in 2018, local officials were 61.9 years old, on average, an increase of 6.4 years. In 2018, there were no significant differences in age between borough and township officials, and between male and female officials. Not surprisingly, officials who served less than 5 years were, on average, younger (57.0 years old) than those who served 20 or more years (68.8 years old).

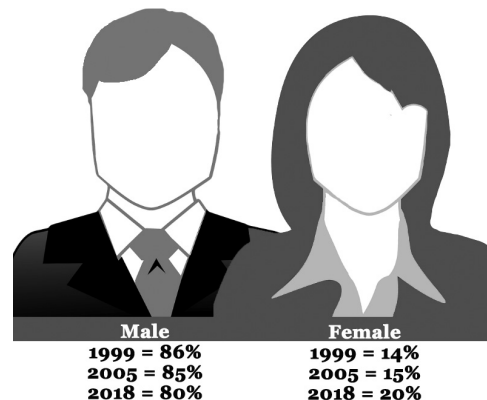
**Average Age  
of Local Officials**



### Gender

The percent of female local officials increased from 1999 to 2018, with the greatest increase in boroughs, where the percent of females increased from 22 percent in 1999 to 28 percent in 2018. In townships, the percent of female local officials increased from 7 percent in 1999 to 10 percent in 2018. In 2018, female local officials served for 8.8 years, on average, while male local officials served for 11.6 years, on average.

**Gender of Local Officials**

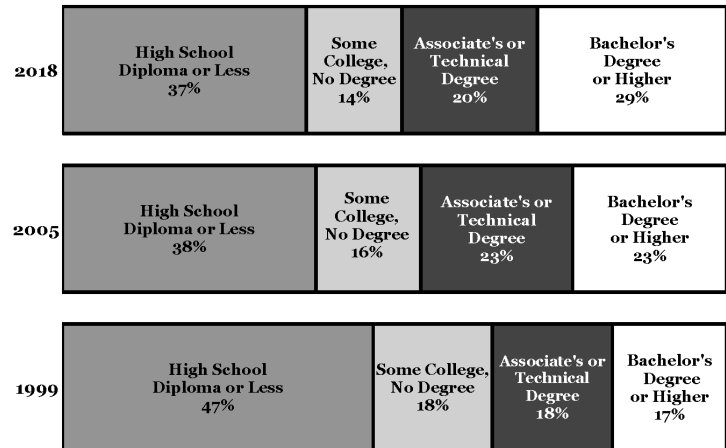


## Educational Attainment

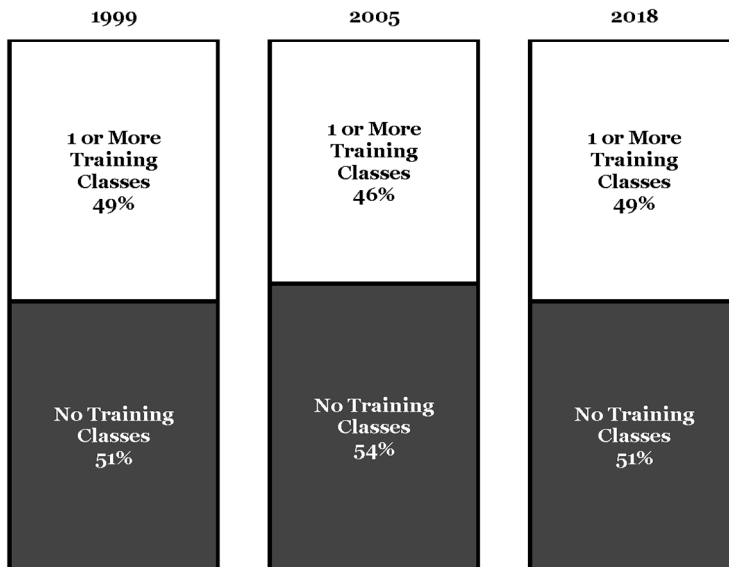
In 2018, 29 percent of local officials had a bachelor’s degree or higher. This is close to the statewide rate of 30 percent among Pennsylvania adults. From 1999 to 2018, the percent of local officials with a bachelor’s degree or higher increased 12 percentage points.

In 2018, more female local officials had a bachelor’s degree or higher (38 percent) than male local officials (26 percent). And, more officials under age 55 had a bachelor’s degree or higher (36 percent) than officials over age 55 (26 percent).

## Highest Educational Attainment Levels of Local Officials



## Local Officials Who Attended Municipal Training Classes in the Past 2 Years



## Municipal Training Classes

To be more effective public servants, local officials often participate in a wide range of educational training seminars and classes, including those on budgeting, water/wastewater systems, and emergency management. In 2018, 49 percent of local officials attended one or more training classes in the past 2 years. This participation rate was higher than the 2005 rate of 46 percent and equal to the 1999 rate of 49 percent. In 2018, more male local officials attended a class (52 percent) than female local officials (39 percent). However, there were no significant differences in age, years in office, or educational attainment levels of local officials and whether or not they attended municipal training classes.

## Housing and Household Characteristics

Over all three survey years, the majority of local officials (97 percent) were homeowners (3 percent were renters). In 2018, the number of people living in the home of local officials was 2.3, on average. This was a slight, but statistically significant, decline from 1999, when households had 2.8 people, on average. One possible explanation for this change is a decline in the percent of households with children (persons under 18 years old). In 1999, 30 percent of local officials had children living in their household. In 2005, that percentage dropped to 24 percent, and, in 2018, that percentage dropped again to 15 percent.

In 2018, there were no significant differences in the number of people living in male local official households and female local official households. Younger local officials (under 55 years old) had, on average, more people in their households (3.1) than local officials who were 55 years old and older (2.1).

## Employment

From 1999 to 2018, there was a shift in the percent of local officials who were and were not in the labor force. In 1999, 69 percent of local officials were either employed or looking for work; the remaining 31 percent were either retired or not in the labor force. In 2018, 60 percent of local officials were in the labor force and 40 percent were not. Also, in 2018, there was no difference in labor force participation by gender. There was, however, a difference in age. A smaller percentage of local officials who were 55 years old and older were in the labor force (48 percent) than local officials who were under 55 years old (97 percent).

## Labor Force Participation Rates Among Local Officials



## Volunteering in the Community

Many local officials volunteer in their community. In 1999, 79 percent of local officials volunteered in their community. In 2018, the rate declined to 74 percent. In 2018, there were no significant differences in volunteerism rates when it came to age, income, or employment status. However, there were significant differences in the volunteerism rates among: local officials with a bachelor's degree (85 percent) and those without a bachelor's degree (69 percent); female officials (81 percent) and male officials (72 percent); and boroughs officials (81 percent) and township officials (65 percent). In 1999, 2005, and 2018, the top three types of volunteer activities were: religious organizations, social/civic organizations; and fire companies.

## Types of Volunteer Activities Among Local Government Officials

	1999	2005	2018
Religious Organizations	53%	52%	47%
Social/Civic Organizations	45%	36%	32%
Volunteer Fire Companies	37%	32%	27%
Youth Activities/Sports	26%	23%	17%
Schools	18%	18%	14%
Arts/Culture Activities	11%	11%	12%
Other Organizations	20%	26%	27%

## Percent of Small Towns with Municipal Managers



## Municipal Managers

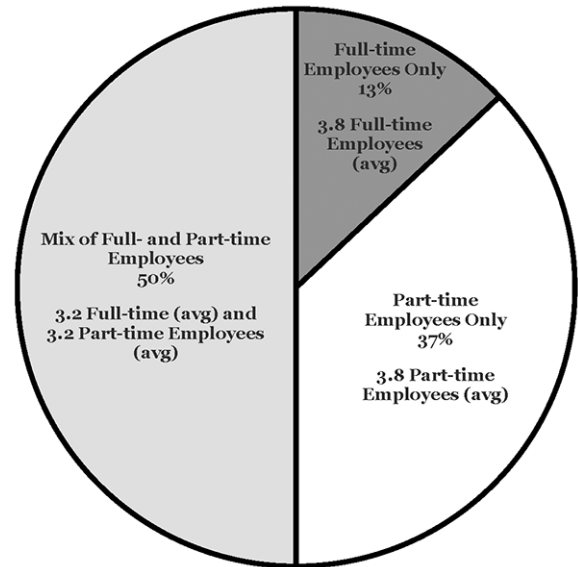
In 1999, 11 percent of local officials said that they had a municipal manager. By 2018, 20 percent said they had a manager. According to the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, a municipal manager is appointed by elected officials and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the borough or township. In 2018, boroughs were more likely to have a manager (27 percent) than townships (12 percent). In addition, small towns located in urban counties were more likely to have a manager (31 percent) than those located in rural counties (17 percent).

## Municipal Employees

From 2005 to 2018, there was no significant change in the number of full- and part-time municipal employees (the employment question was not included in the 1999 survey). In 2005, the surveyed municipalities had 3.5 full-time and 3.6 part-time employees, on average. In 2018, there were 3.3 full-time and 3.5 part-time employees, on average. In 2018, municipalities with a manager had, on average, more full-time employees than municipalities without managers (4.6 and 2.9 employees, respectively). Among the local officials that reported the number of employees in 2018, 13 percent had only full-time employees, 37 percent had only part-time employees, and the remaining 50 percent had a mix of full- and part-time employees. These ratios were not significantly different from the 2005 ratios.

## Average Number of Employees, 2018

(Includes only officials that reported employees)



## Time on Municipal Business

From 1999 to 2005 to 2018, there were no significant changes in the number of hours local officials spent on municipal business. In 2018, 77 percent of officials spent less than 20 hours per month on municipal business, including regularly scheduled meetings. Twenty-three percent spent more than 20 hours per month on municipal business. In 2018, local officials in small towns with a manager spent less time on municipal business than those without a manager. And, the older the local official, the more time he/she spent on municipal business.

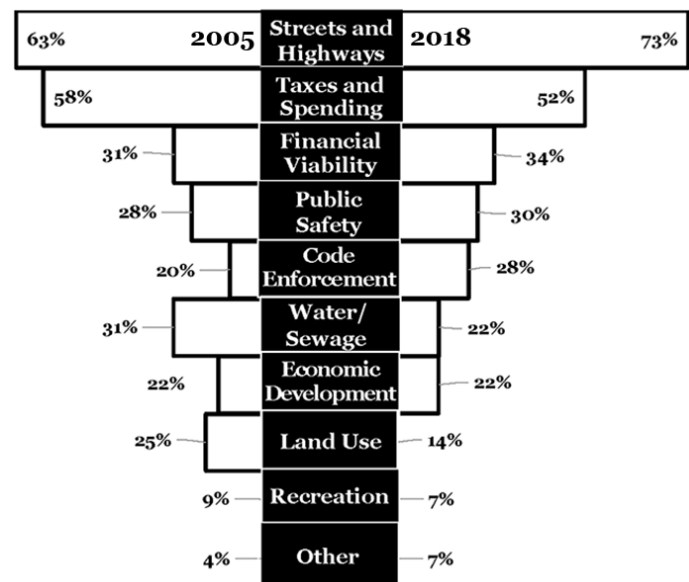
Also in 2018, township officials spent more time on municipal business than borough officials. There were no significant differences in the time spent on municipal business between male and female local officials or between rural and urban local officials.

## Issues in the Municipality

In 2018, the top three municipal issues were: streets and highways; taxes and spending; and financial viability. These were also the top issues in 2005, with the exception of financial viability, which tied with water and sewage issues. (In 1999, this question was different so it could not be compared with other years.)

In 2018, a higher percentage of male officials (76 percent) emphasized streets and highways than female officials (61 percent). A higher percentage of female officials (31 percent) emphasized economic development than male officials (20 percent). A higher percentage of township officials (87 percent) emphasized streets and highways than borough officials (62 percent). A higher percentage of borough officials emphasized code enforcement (36 percent) than township officials (19 percent).

## Important Issues, 2005 and 2018

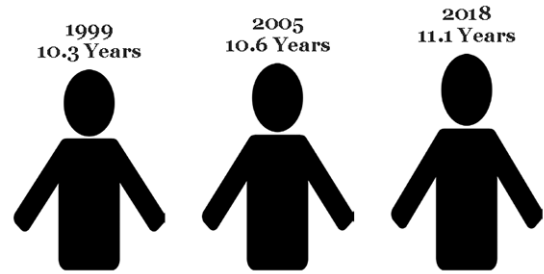


## Years of Service

From 1999 to 2018, there was no statistically significant change in the number of years local officials served in office. In 1999, local officials were in office 10.3 years, on average. By 2018, the number of years increased to 11.1 years, on average, an increase of less than 1 year.

In 2018, male officials reported more years of service (11.6) than female officials (8.8). Local officials in a municipality without a manager had more years of service (11.7) than those with a manager (9.1). In general, however, there were no significant differences among local officials' years of service and their educational attainment, hours spent on municipal business, whether they served in a borough or township, or rural or urban location.

### Average Number of Years as a Local Official



### Reasons Why Local Officials Initially Sought Elected Office, 2018

• Be Active in the Community	61%
• Encouragement from Others	53%
• Improve Community	43%
• Have Expertise	32%
• Control Taxes/Spending	31%
• Streets	30%
• Dissatisfied with Prior Officials	30%
• Public Safety	21%
• Economic Development	16%
• Other Reasons	11%
• Increase Municipal Services	11%
• Political Aspirations	4%

Totals do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses.

### Why They Ran

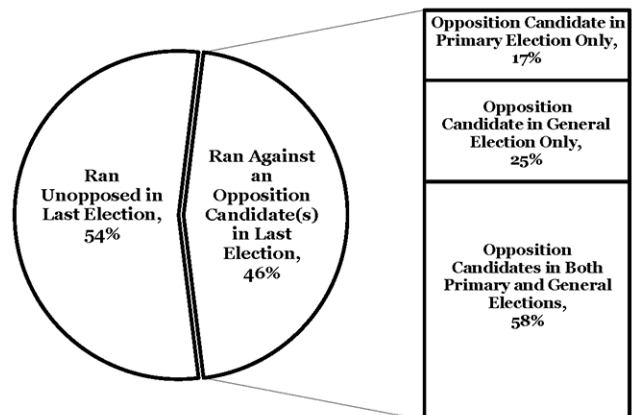
In all three survey years, the top three reasons why local officials initially sought local elected office were: a desire to be active in the community; encouragement from others; and to improve their community. The least cited reasons for running for local office included: economic development, increasing municipal services, and political aspirations.

## Running for Office

From 1999 to 2018, the percent of officials who ran for office unopposed increased 10 percentage points. In 1999, 45 percent of local officials ran unopposed in their last primary and general election. In 2018, 54 percent said they ran unopposed in their last election.

In 2018, two factors distinguished officials who ran unopposed from those who ran against another candidate: years of service and time spent on municipal business. Officials who had an opposition candidate(s) had 10 years of service, on average, while those without an opposition candidate had over 12 years of service, on average. In addition, officials who spent 20 or more hours per month on municipal business were more likely to have an opposition candidate(s) than those who spent less than 20 hours a month on municipal business. There were no significant differences between local officials who ran unopposed/opposed in their last election in terms of gender, municipality type (borough/township), age, and rural/urban status.

### Percent of Local Officials Who Ran Against Another Candidate in Their Last Election, 2018



## Planning to Run for Re-election

In 1999, 69 percent of local officials planned to run for re-election, and 31 percent did not. In 2018, there were no significant changes in these percentages.

In 2018, those who were not planning to run for re-election were, on average, older (65 years old) and had more years of service (12 years) than those who were planning to run for re-election (60 years, and 10 years, respectively).

In general, there were no significant differences between local officials who planned to run for re-election and those who did not when it came to: gender, rural/urban status, township/borough, and educational attainment. Among those local officials who were not planning to run again, the number one reason they gave was they served long enough and wanted to give others a chance to serve.

## Discussion

According to the 2018 survey results, small town local officials are, in general, male, and nearing retirement age. They have lived in their municipality for more than 30 years, own their own home, and live with one other person. They can access the internet at home.

At the municipal building, these officials govern in municipalities with three full-time and 3.5 part-time employees, do not have a manager, and spend less than 20 hours a month on municipal business. On average, these local officials have served a little more than 11 years, and initially ran for office because of encouragement from others and as a way to be more active in their communities. In their last election, these local officials ran unopposed, and they were likely to seek re-election.

From 1999-2005 to 2018, the most striking differences in the results were:

- **Age:** In 1999-2005, local officials were 56.5 years old, on average. By 2018, their age, on average, was 61.9 years old.
- **Gender:** In 1999-2005, 15 percent of local officials were female. By 2018, 20 percent were female.
- **Veteran Status:** In 1999-2005, 33 percent of local officials were military veterans. In 2018, 24 percent were veterans.
- **Educational Attainment:** In 1999-2005, 20

percent of local officials had a bachelor's degree or higher. By 2018, 29 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher.

- **Labor Force Participation:** In 1999-2005, 68 percent of local officials were in the labor force (employed or looking for work). In 2018, the percentage declined to 60 percent.
- **Community Volunteerism:** In 1999-2005, 78 percent of local officials volunteered in their community. In 2018, 74 percent volunteered. The decline is most noticeable among those who served as volunteer firefighters. In 1999-2005, 34 percent of local officials were also volunteer firefighters; by 2018, 27 percent were volunteer firefighters.
- **Municipal Managers:** In 1999-2005, 12 percent of local officials said they had managers to handle the day-to-day responsibilities of the municipality. In 2018, 21 percent said they had managers.
- **Competitive Elections:** In 1999-2005, 46 percent of local officials ran unopposed in their last election. In 2018, 54 percent said they were unopposed in their last election.

The similarities were:

- **Homeownership:** In all surveys, more than 97 percent of local officials were homeowners; about 3 percent were renters.
- **Municipal Training:** In 1999-2005, 48 percent of local officials attended one or more municipal training classes within the past 2 years and 52 percent had not. In 2018, 49 percent had attended one or more training classes and 51 percent had not.
- **Hours on Municipal Business:** In all surveys, the majority of local officials (77 percent) spent less than 20 hours a month on municipal business, including regularly scheduled meetings.
- **Years in Office:** In 1999-2005, local officials were in office 10.2 years, on average. In 2018, this rate increased to 11.1 years, on average, which is not a statistically significant change.
- **Reasons for Running:** In all three surveys, the top three reasons why local officials initially ran for office remained unchanged: a desire to be active in the community (63 percent); encouragement from other (55 percent); and improving their community (54 percent).

## Implications

### Pending Generational Leadership

**Shift:** The 2018 survey results indicate that most local officials are older. Projecting this trend forward over the next 10 years, we may see a shift in local leadership as older officials retire from office and younger officials take charge. This shift is not unique to local governments; businesses, nonprofits and other organizations are experiencing leadership changes as the baby boomer generation (born 1946-1964) retires and younger leaders take charge. One key difference for local governments is the need for new candidates to run for office (see below).

**Lack of Competitive Races:** The 2018 survey results indicate that more than one-half of local officials ran unopposed in their last election. From the survey, it is impossible to know why no other candidates stepped forward. However, the lack of competitive elections suggests that municipalities may face a leadership vacuum as the older generation of leaders begins to retire.

## Methodology

The 2018 survey was modeled after the 1999 and 2005 surveys of local government officials. In all 3 years, the sample was drawn from a list of elected officials maintained by the Governor's Center for Local Government Services. From this list, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania excluded all officials in municipalities with 2,500 or more residents as well as officials in townships of the first class and all first-class through third-class cities.

In 2018, there were 7,131 officials on this revised list. A sample of 3,579 officials in boroughs and townships of the second class (hereafter townships) was taken to more accurately reflect the proportion of officials in each type of municipality in the state. In September 2018, the survey was mailed to 2,263 borough officials and 1,316 township officials.

There were 1,196 usable surveys returned for a total response rate of about 33 percent. The confidence interval, or margin of error, was plus or minus 2.6. This means we are 95 percent confident that the results are within 2.6 percentage points of what all small town officials would have answered. Because of the large response rate, it was possible to examine borough and township officials separately. The response rate for borough officials was 30 percent and for township officials was 40 percent.

The table below shows the response rates from the 1999, 2005, and 2018 surveys.

	2018	2005	1999
# Elected Officials in Townships and Boroughs with fewer than 2,500 Residents	7,131	7,323	8,174
# Surveys mailed	3,579	3,500	3,500
# Completed surveys returned	1,196	1,208	1,128
Response rate	33.4%	34.5%	32.2%
Margin of Error (Confidence interval at 95%)	2.59	2.51	2.40

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