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State of Canadian Municipalities Amid COVID-19 Phase Two Survey Results

Your World Amidst a Global Pandemic



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Executive Summary

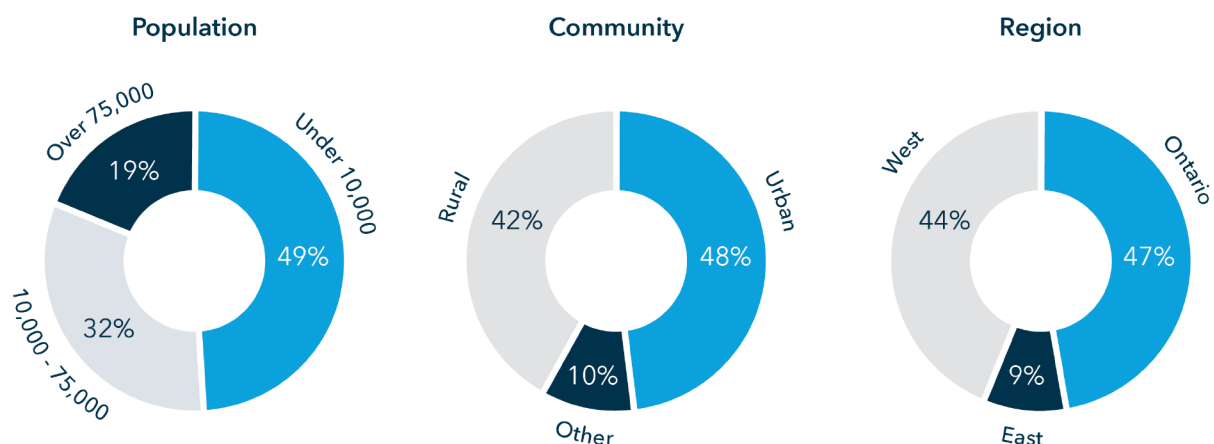
This is the second in a series of surveys by Municipal World, in collaboration with The W Group. These surveys are intended to continue the conversation and share feedback from municipal leaders across the country in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and its continued impacts on communities.

The first survey aimed to capture those “top of mind” issues related to the experiences and situations that municipal leaders found themselves to be in at the outset of the pandemic.

This second survey drills down in an attempt to understand areas where municipalities have undergone significant or permanent change, as identified in the first survey, and to reflect on performance levels within each operational area throughout the organization.

This survey received 708 responses. The demographic makeup was similar to the first survey, representing various geographic regions, populations, respondent positions and experience, as well as provincial representation. Participants from Ontario formed 47% of respondents, followed by Alberta (20%), British Columbia 11%, and Saskatchewan (8%), with the balance from other areas.

Demographic Profile



Top Line Results

Technology remains critical to the success of a municipality's COVID-19 related planning in all operational areas.

Communications, both internally and externally, have proven strong – one of the largest concerns in the first study.

Safety suppliers will continue to be in need to supply protective equipment.

Sanitization services are at levels not anticipated previously, and are now close to the top of the priority list.

Budgets have been identified as having been negatively impacted (58%), with 23% of respondents reflecting that they have experienced a “significant impact” on budgets. 72% of the negative impact on budgets was caused by loss in revenue, while 56% was related to increased expenses.

Implementing new mechanisms to maximize public access and participation has been key to successful community engagement.

Developing and maintaining healthy workplace policies and practices has resulted in greater innovation, such as digital self-screening tools and reporting systems.





Reflections on Performance Levels

In the first survey, respondents were asked to comment on the performance of various departments and functions within their municipality through an open-ended format to capture all possible themes.

Several areas were identified as contributing significantly to the success of the municipality through the pandemic. In this survey, respondents were asked to provide feedback related to how well they felt each of the following operational areas performed the noted functions or activities.

Operational areas – including emergency operations, Mayor and Council, human resources, information technology, marketing and communications, and City Manager’s Office – were all reflected on. Questions sought to determine levels of satisfaction related to performance and to provide opinions related to changes to policies, procedures, and programs as a result of the pandemic.

Performance levels were indistinguishable amongst demographic characteristics so overall averages are highlighted here.

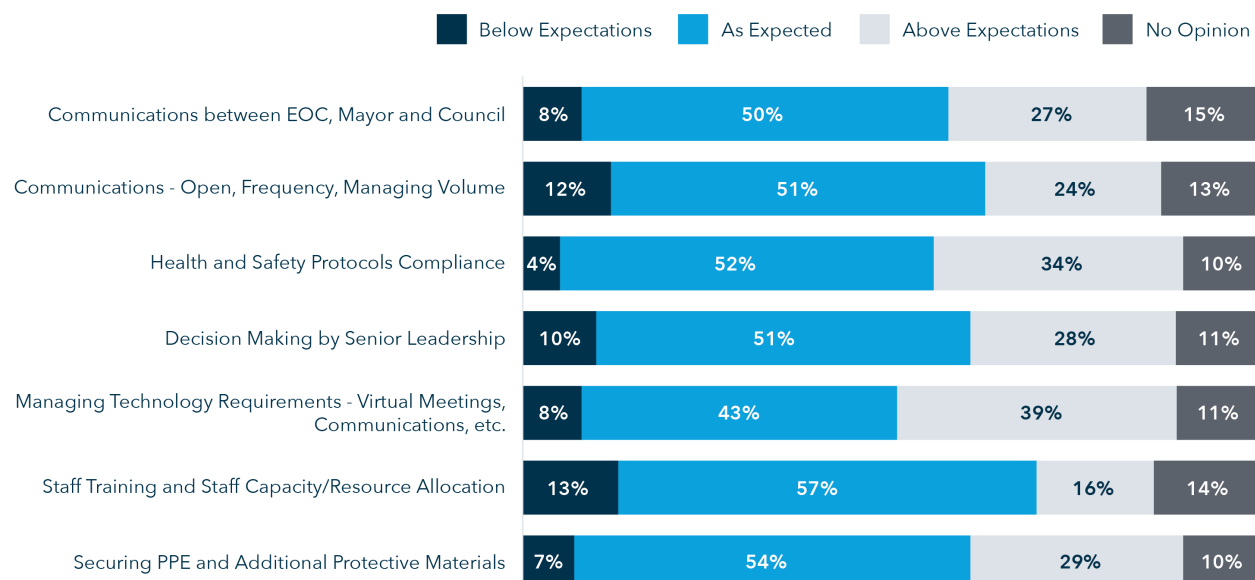


Emergency Operations Centre

Although some municipalities reported a lack of role clarity, slow decision making and poor communication between/from senior leadership, Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and Council as an issue. However, related to the expectations of performance of the EOC averaged 79%.

Activities related to health and safety protocol compliance, managing technology requirements, securing protective equipment, and decision making by senior leadership stood out as having the highest performance levels in terms of meeting or exceeding expectations.

From your perspective, how well did each of the following areas perform the noted functions/activities?



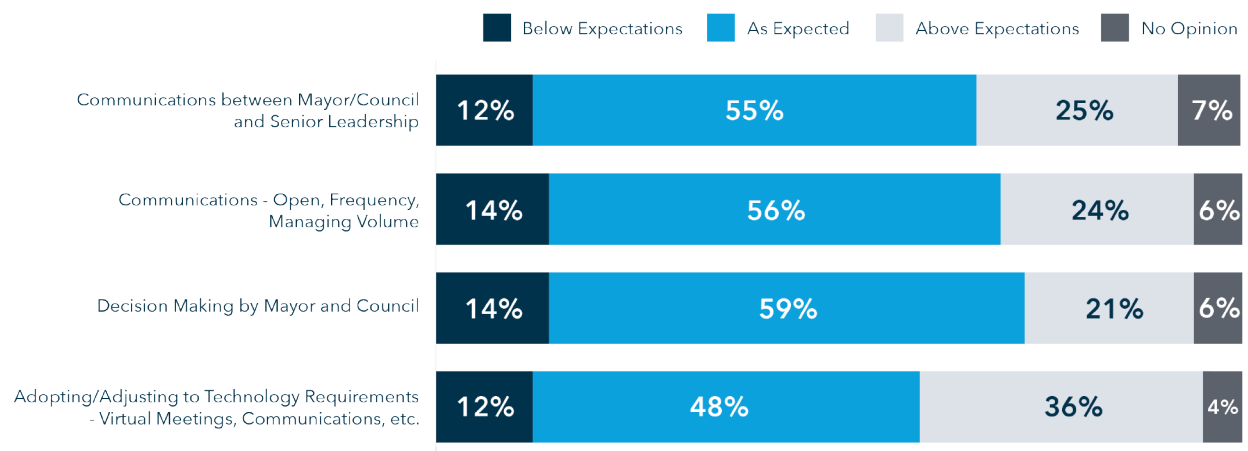


Mayor and Council

In responding to the questions related specifically to Mayor and Council, an average 82% felt that performance levels were as expected or above expectation. The highest "above expectation" performance level was associated with the adoption and adjustment to technology leading to the improvement in communications that has been mentioned in the study.

"Council and Staff worked as a team. Frequent communication. Positive comments received from the public and very few complaints on Township response to pandemic."

From your perspective, how well did each of the following areas perform the noted functions/activities?



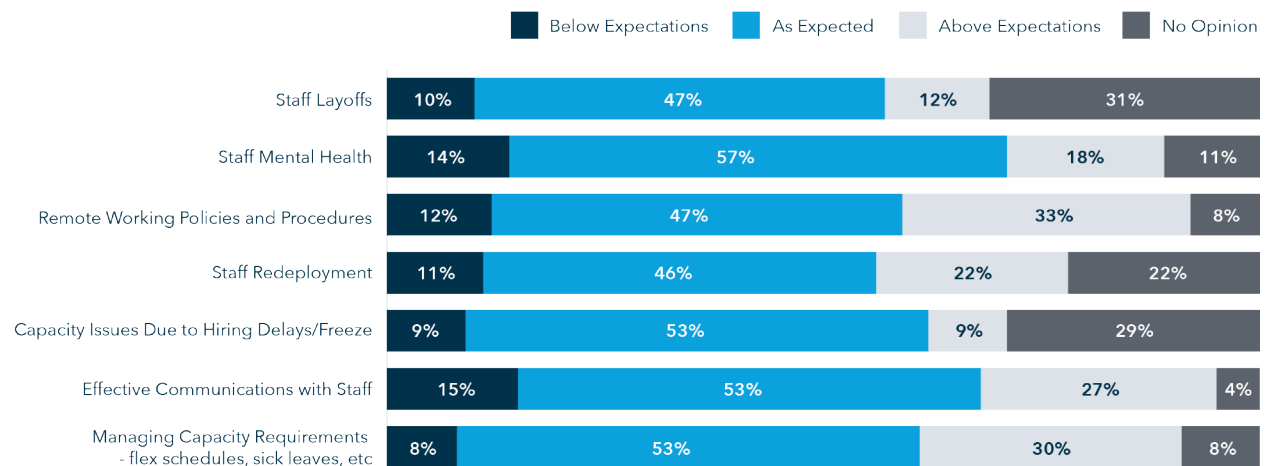
Total respondents: 600-608



Human Resources

In relation to the human resources function, 72% of respondents reflected that performance levels were as expected or above expectations. The highest performance levels related to managing capacity requirements (83%). This was followed by performance related to remote working policies and procedures and communicating effectively with staff (both 80%).

From your perspective, how well did each of the following areas perform the noted functions/activities?



Total respondents: 593-605

Information Technology

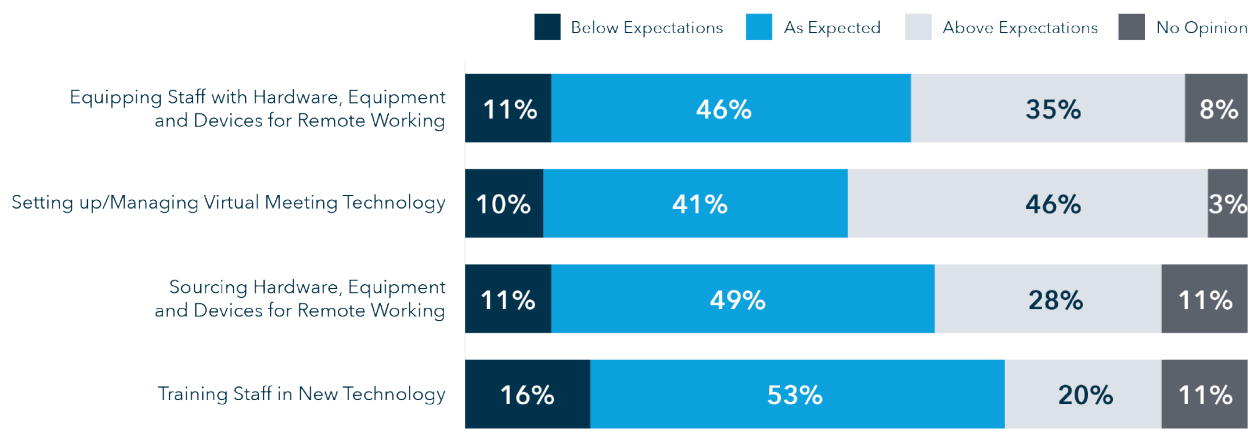
It was reflected in the first study that technology would become a key driver in managing the changes to systems and routines due to the pandemic.

Many rural municipalities were challenged by unreliable internet services, which hampered internal/external communication, remote working, online meetings, etc. Survey respondents presented high levels of satisfaction with performance levels in meeting the demands of the remote workplace and changes required due to the pandemic. The highest level of satisfaction (87%) related to the logistical function of setting up and managing virtual meeting technology.

"We have discovered that virtual meetings/communication events have at times been more successful than in person - i.e., hearings, panel discussions."

"Work from home procedure was developed; worked with IT contractor to ensure work from home resources."

From your perspective, how well did each of the following areas perform the noted functions/activities?

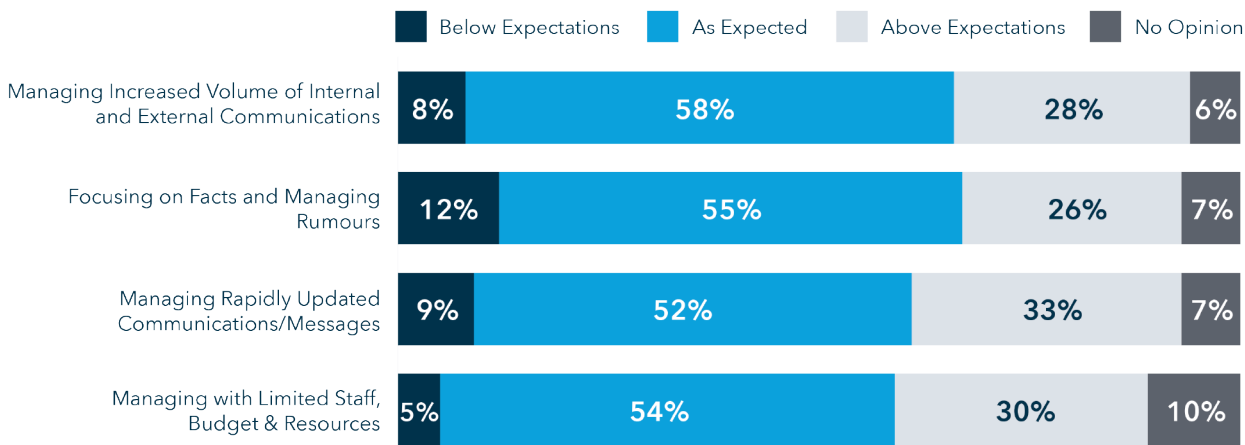


Total respondents: 604-609

Marketing and Communications

The need for formal, consistent, and continuous communications was a key “lesson learned” in the initial study. The first three activities related to communications have received high levels of satisfaction (an average of 84% felt the department had performed as expected or above expectations). The highest level of satisfaction was reflected in the 86% related to the department’s management of the increased volume of internal and external communications in particular.

From your perspective, how well did each of the following areas perform the noted functions/activities?



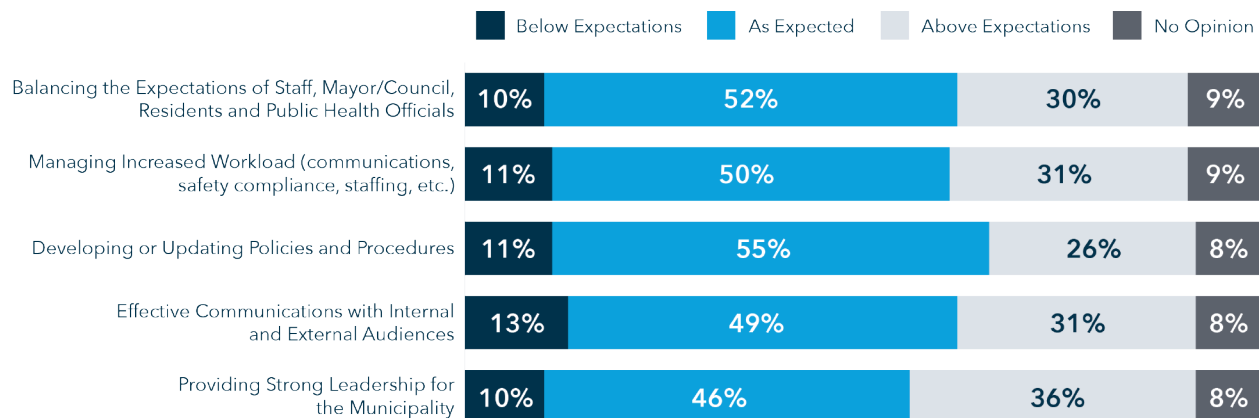
Total respondents: 598-601

City Manager’s Office

Respondents to this question felt that the City Manager’s Office was performing at a high level (81%). The highest performances were considered to be in the areas of providing strong leadership and balancing the expectations of all stakeholders.

“We are using this time to speed up the implementation of a continuous improvement program. We are defining and learning processes and evaluating gaps.”

From your perspective, how well did each of the following areas perform the noted functions/activities?



Total respondents: 598-600





Biggest Lessons, Permanent Changes

Respondents were asked the following question: “As a result of COVID-19, has your municipality made or is it planning to make any permanent changes, such as ...”

They reiterated the themes of technological solutions for work and customer service practices, and policy development related to safety protocols and the new employee work reality as top priorities.

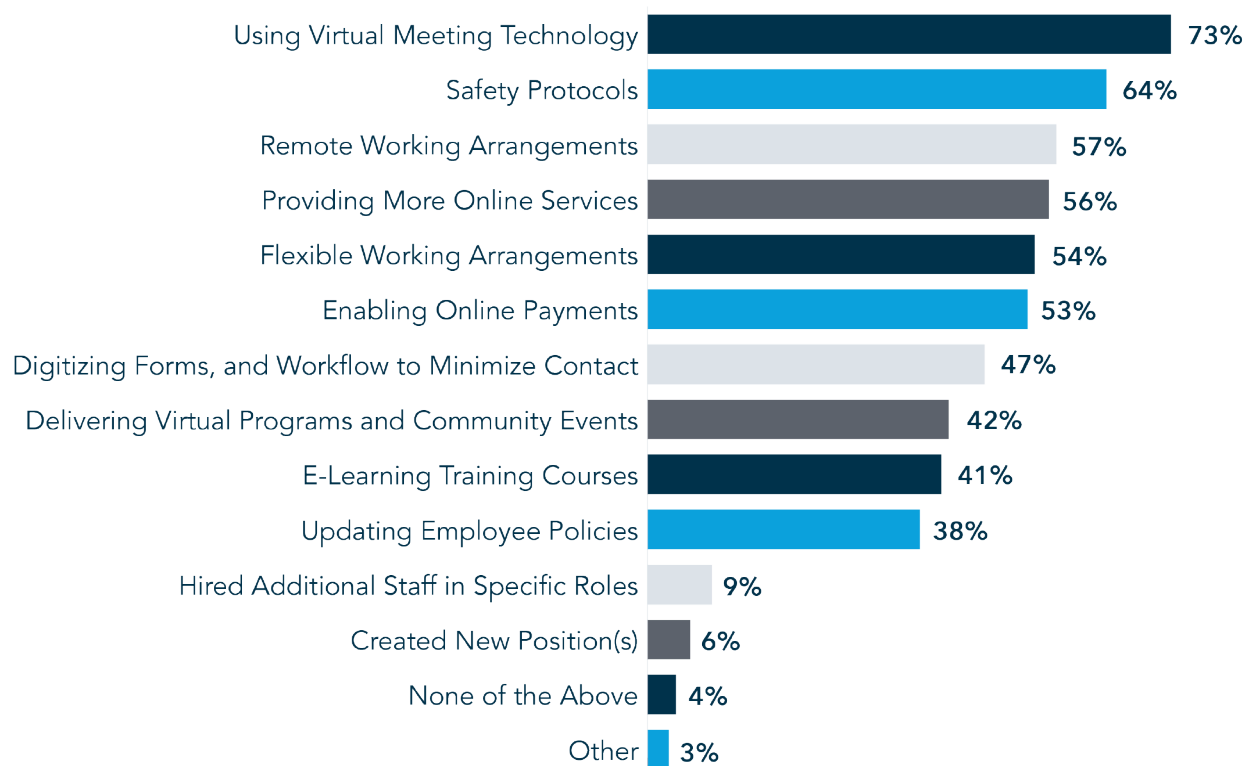
“We have reinforced or expanded the number of online services already available – and developed opportunities related to remote work and impact on future operational space requirements.”

15% of respondents identified that additional staff have been or will be hired, or new positions have been or will be created. New roles support emergency management in terms of data analytics and reporting, as well as economic development and project management.

In addition to the new roles mentioned above, the majority reflected on the hiring of these key positions: additional cleaning staff, bylaw enforcement officers, screening and support staff at long-term care homes, nursing staff, case contact tracers, database management staff, and public health inspectors.

Permanent Changes Made or Planned

As a result of COVID-19, has your municipality made, or is it planning on making, any permanent changes such as ...? (Select all that apply.)



Total respondents: 608

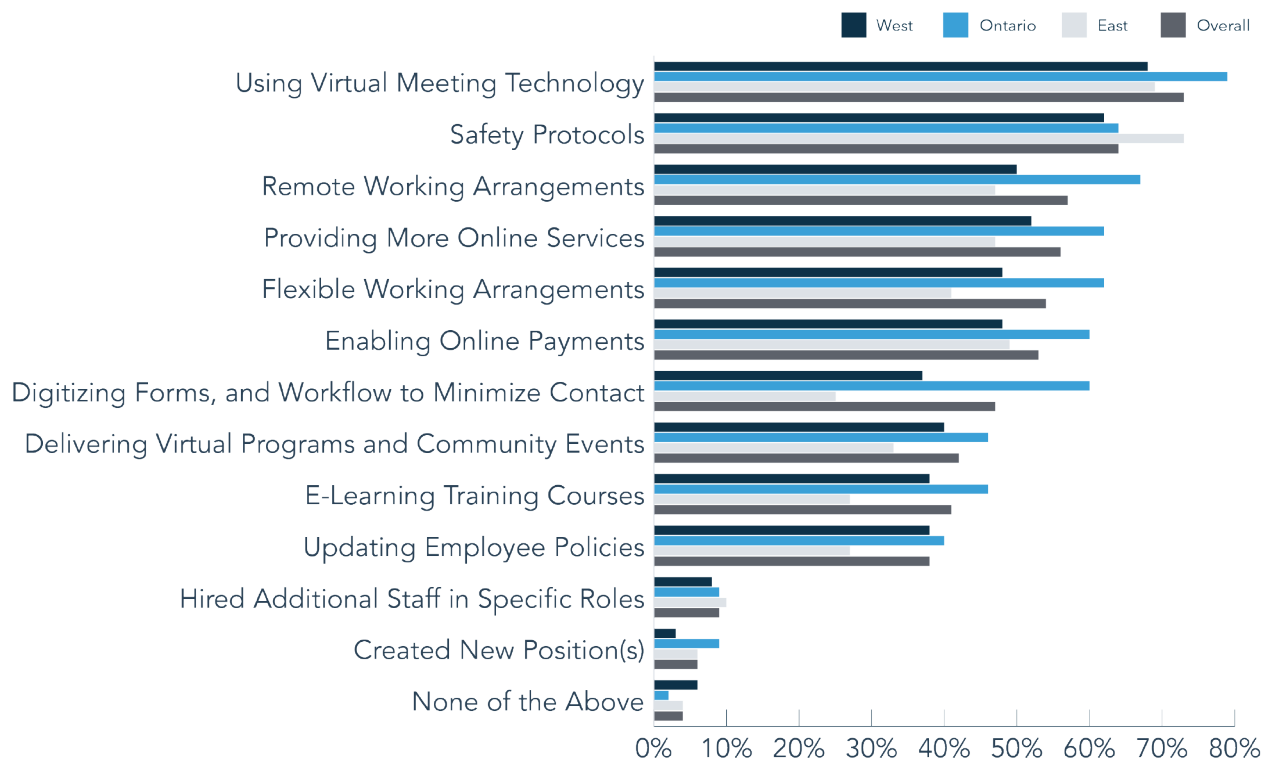
*Note: Safety Protocols (use of PPE, dividers, sanitization routines, etc.)
Updating Employee Policies (Sick days, stress leave, etc.)*

When reviewed by region, almost all regions (with the exception of the eastern provinces) reflected that using virtual meeting technology was the primary permanent change made throughout this period.

The eastern provinces, in comparison, indicated the safety protocols were permanently adjusted ahead of technological enhancements.

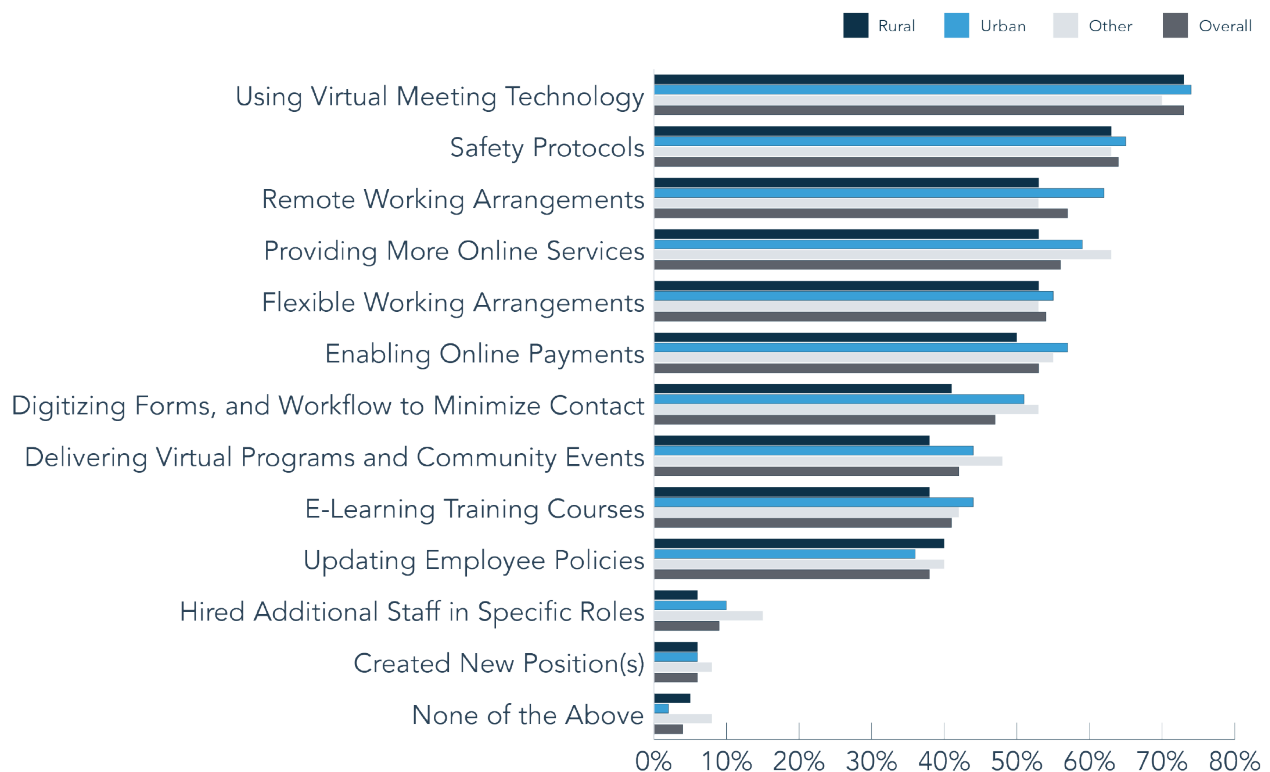
There were few permanent changes related to human resource management in terms of updating policies, hiring staff, or creating new positions.

Permanent Changes Made or Planned by Region



When analyzing permanent or planned changes by community, almost all community types identified the same areas of top interest. However, remote working arrangements are a higher priority for urban communities. For rural (or those not considered urban), higher priorities included providing more online services, digitizing forms and workflow to minimize contact, and delivering virtual programs and events.

Permanent Changes Made or Planned by Community

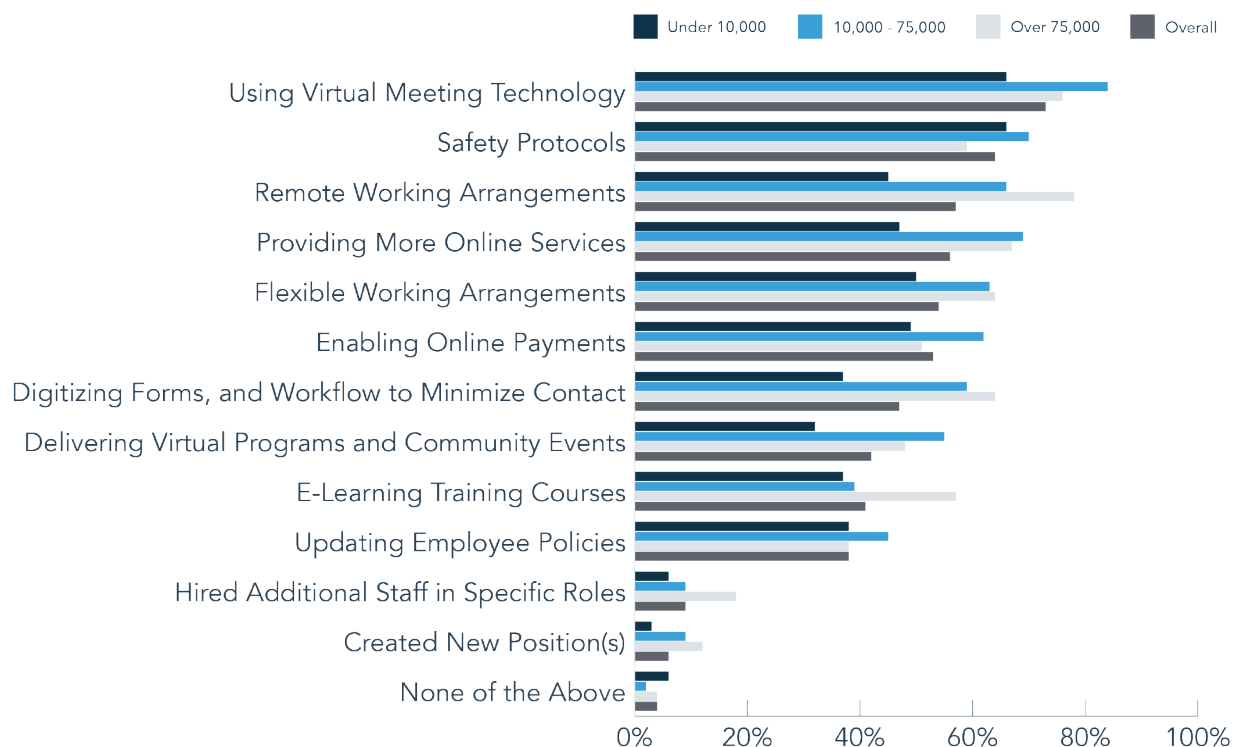


As a comparison, responses from municipalities by population size showed the following priorities. Those with a population of 10,000-75,000 recorded using virtual meeting technology (over 80%) as the top areas of change or planned change, followed by safety protocols and providing more online services.

Those with a population over 75,000 recorded remote working arrangements as the largest change or planned change (just under 80%), followed by using virtual meeting technology and providing more online services.

Smaller communities with a population of less than 10,000 have indicated in general that meeting technology, safety protocols, and remote working arrangements are changes that have been made or that are planned.

Permanent Changes Made or Planned by Population



Final Thoughts

"Despite the huge financial and mental health impact of COVID-19, our small municipality has weathered the storm thus far through incredible residents and volunteerism and with outstanding leadership and dedicated councillors, Mayor, CAO and staff members."

"Very proud of how staff have responded to issues related to COVID-19. As an essential service, we have kept our staff working at our offices, delivering the services expected. We said from the beginning that we are in this together, so everyone is coming in and doing their jobs."

"Perhaps too much cutting and working within existing roles rather than looking at how new or combined roles could be more efficient. Lack of performance management culture."

"It seems the goal is to return to pre-COVID status-quo, and this is disappointing because of how changes because of COVID opened up new options, new data, and ways of addressing issues."

"Staff training for some roles can be difficult when staff are working remotely."

"Having dedicated communications staff has been a key success factor."