

Workforce Development and Job Vacancies

FEDERATION OF NORTHERN ONTARIO MUNICIPALITIES
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FEDERATION OF NORTHERN MUNICIPALITIES – WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND JOB VACANCIES

Introduction

Small Northern municipalities face unique workforce development challenges that can affect their ability to deliver essential services, support economic growth, and remain resilient in the face of demographic and labour market changes. Limited populations, geographic isolation, competition for skilled workers, and constrained organizational capacity often make it more difficult to recruit, retain, and develop employees than in larger urban centres.

Better understanding these challenges is important to provide evidence-based insights that can inform targeted strategies, strengthen local workforce capacity, and help ensure Northern communities are well positioned to meet current and future service and economic development needs.

Methodology

In the spring of 2026, the Federation of Northern Ontario municipalities (FONOM) partnered with the four Northeastern Ontario Workforce Planning Boards on a new initiative focused on better understanding the workforce challenges facing municipalities across Northeastern Ontario.

A survey tool was developed to gather real, on-the-ground information related to recruitment and retention, hard-to-fill positions, succession planning, skills shortages, and the broader pressures communities are facing in attracting and keeping skilled workers.

The survey was launched at the Spring FONOM conference in Timmins from May 11-13, 2026. The survey was open for a total of 3 weeks and garnered 61 responses from FONOM's 109 member municipalities.

The responses were received from the following regions:

District of Sudbury:	5 out of 10 members	50%
District of Manitoulin:	1 out of 9 members	1%
District of Temiskaming:	5 out of 23 members	22%
District of Nipissing:	6 out of 11 members	54%
District of Algoma:	10 out of 21 members	47%
District of Parry Sound:	12 out of 22 members	55%
District of Cochrane:	4 out of 13 members	30%

Overview

In total, 61 responses to the survey were received. These included seven instances where two individuals replied from the same municipality, and one instance where three individuals replied from the same municipality.

In a perfect world, one would eliminate the duplicate responses, so as not to give additional weight to those municipalities that contributed more than one response. But survey respondents can sometimes provide inaccurate responses. It is not possible to determine which of the multiple responses is accurate. The value of collecting more responses is that the overall average is more likely to reflect the accurate result. For this reason, all responses, including multiple responses, have been relied upon in this analysis.

Profile of respondents

The 61 respondents primarily represented small municipalities with populations under 5,000 residents (Table 1).

Table 1: Survey respondents by municipality population

Municipal population	Number
Under 1,000	22
1,000-5,000	28
5,000-10,000	6
10,000-50,000	1
50,000 plus	4

Number and type of employees

Respondents were asked to provide their staffing numbers by different categories of employees. Table 2 provides the responses, by different sizes of municipalities.

Table 2: Average number of employees by employment type and by size of municipality

	Full-time	Part-time	Contract	Seasonal
Under 1,000	7	2	1	3
1,000-5,000	18	5	1	5
5,000-10,000	91	14	8	13
10,000-50,000	95	52	1	20
50,000 plus	887	443	240	136

Not surprisingly, the larger the municipality, the greater the number of employees. Some other patterns are apparent as well:

- Larger municipalities have a proportionately higher number of part-time employees; among municipalities with 10,000 or more residents, the part-time workforce is approximately 50% to

55% as large as the full -time workforce, while among the smaller municipalities, that proportion of between 15% and 29%

- The largest municipalities (50,000 or more residents) have a proportionately higher number of contract workers compared to the size of their full-time workforce, but municipalities with under 1,000 residents come second in terms of the proportion comparison of their contract workers to full-time workers
- These small municipalities also hire a proportionately larger number of seasonal employees compared to their number of full-time employees

Presence of HR staff

Respondents were asked whether they had a designated HR department or a dedicated staff position whose primary focus is HR (hiring, firing and so on). Table 3 presents the results by size of municipality.

Table 3: Presence of HR department or dedicated staff position

	HR presence			Comment
	Yes	No	Other	
Under 1,000	32%	68%	0%	
1,000-5,000	14%	79%	7%	We have an HR Committee comprised of the clerk and 2 members of council; CAO/Clerk
5,000-10,000	83%	0%	17%	Payroll person has partial HR duties while our CAO also shares a big portion of HR duties
10,000-50,000	100%	0%	0%	Dedicated staff position that assists with HR and payroll
50,000 plus	75%	25%	0%	

In general, larger municipalities are more likely than smaller municipalities to have an HR department or dedicated HR staff position.

Table 4: Presence of union

	Union presence		
	Yes	No	Other
Under 1,000	41%	59%	0%
1,000-5,000	43%	57%	0%
5,000-10,000	50%	33%	17%
10,000-50,000	100%	0%	0%
50,000 plus	100%	0%	0%

The likelihood of a unionized workplace increases with the size of the municipality. Indeed, municipalities with over 10,000 residents all had a unionized workplace, whereas in the case of those with less than 10,000 residents half or less had a unionized workplace. The one instance of an “Other” response was because the workplace represented a mix of unionized and non-unionized workers.

Job vacancies and job candidate recruitment

Respondents were asked how many municipal staff positions were vacant at the time the survey was being completed, as well as the nature of the position. The average responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Average number of job vacancies, by type of position and by size of municipality

	Union Positions	Non-Union Positions	Skilled Trades	Permanent	Temporary	Professional
Under 1,000	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1
1,000-5,000	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.7
5,000-10,000	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.0
10,000-50,000	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0
50,000 plus	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.8	1.0

While there were more vacancies among larger municipalities than among smaller ones, the magnitude of the difference was not nearly as much as one might expect. For example, municipalities with 50,000 or more residents have more than 100 times the number of full-time employees as municipalities with 1,000 or less employees, yet they only have at most 10 times the number of job vacancies in any given category.

Duration of job vacancies

Respondents were asked how long job vacancies remained unfilled. The responses by size of municipality are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Duration of job postings by size of municipality

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Less than 1 month	29%	29%	32%	20%	0%	25%
1-3 months	19%	10%	18%	40%	100%	25%
3-6 months	7%	10%	7%	0%	0%	0%
More than 6 months	5%	5%	4%	20%	0%	0%
More than 1 year	3%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%
None of the above	22%	29%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Other	15%	10%	14%	20%	0%	50%

By and large. Job postings last from zero to three months. What is more difficult to interpret is what respondents may have meant by selecting “none of the above,” as the time frames offered would seemed to have covered all the options. Their comments submitted under the “Other” category may shed some light here. In most instances, respondents indicated that the answer to this question varied by the type of occupation. Also, some positions are permanently posted (the example given was lifeguards and temporary front desk clerks).

One can compare those answers that selected a specific time frame to the available data on duration of job vacancies, available through the Job Vacancy and Wage Survey. Table 7 compares the results. The Job Vacancy and Wage Survey data represents the average duration over the last five reported quarters for all Ontario. It is striking that the values are virtually identical.

Table 7: Reported duration of job postings, FONOM survey and Ontario data

	FONOM	ONTARIO
Less than 1 month	46%	49%
1-3 months	30%	29%
3-6 months	24%	22%

Ontario data from Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0443-01

Hardest to fill positions

Respondents were asked which positions were hardest to fill by selecting from a set of occupational categories. Table 8 shows the results by size of municipality and is ordered from the most to least difficult among all municipalities.

Table 8: Hardest to fill positions by size of municipality

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Senior Management	38%	36%	39%	50%	0%	25%
Public Works	31%	45%	21%	33%	0%	25%
Finance	31%	14%	39%	50%	0%	50%
Administrative/Clerical	25%	27%	25%	33%	0%	0%
By-Law Enforcement	20%	14%	18%	50%	0%	25%
Water/Wastewater	18%	5%	18%	33%	0%	75%
Fire Services	8%	5%	11%	17%	0%	0%
Recreation	5%	0%	7%	17%	0%	0%
None of the above	5%	5%	7%	0%	0%	0%
Other	26%	27%	21%	17%	100%	50%

The positions most often cited as most difficult are senior management, public works and finance.

A medium number of municipalities expressed high recruitment difficulty with positions relating to administrative/clerical, by-law enforcement and water/wastewater.

Few municipalities expressed high levels of difficulty recruiting for positions in fire services and recreation.

Under the “Other” category, seven municipalities named Chief Building Official, Building Inspector, Building Official or Building Department, three mentioned Planners or Planning, and two mentioned IT. A few mentioned employment categories such as part-time, casual or seasonal, and then there were half a dozen individual positions mentioned, each by one respondent, from Transfer Station Attendant to Chief Administrative Officer.

Identifying and assessing recruitment methods

The next two questions asked about recruitment methods, firstly, about which methods were used, then about which worked best. In asking about recruitment methods, respondents were provided with a list of the typical recruitment activities. The survey was set up in such a way that only one method could be selected. The method with the largest number of responses (one out of three respondents) was “Other,” where they were allowed to write in their response. In almost all instances, the answer was that they used some multiple of these options, and quite a few indicated that they used a majority or all of them. For this reason, Table 9 illustrating the responses has labelled the “Other” selection as “Multiple/All.” The table is ordered from the method with the most responses to the least, followed by none of above.

Table 9: Recruitment methods by size of municipality

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Multiple/All	33%	23%	36%	17%	100%	75%
Municipal website	20%	18%	29%	0%	0%	0%
Social Media	18%	18%	18%	33%	0%	0%
Other online job boards	18%	23%	11%	50%	0%	0%
Local newspapers	3%	9%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Indeed	3%	5%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Word of mouth/ community networks	3%	0%	4%	0%	0%	25%
Colleges/Universities	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
LinkedIn	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
None of the above	2%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Some respondents did specify which multiple methods they used. Among those which received many mentions were social media, job boards and the municipal website. Methods which were mentioned that were not part of the survey list included professional associations, Municipal World for management positions and local employment services offices.

Respondents were next asked which of these recruitment methods worked best. The survey asked that they write in their response. In some cases, the respondents entered two responses or provided a comment. Several respondents noted that a different method was used depending on the occupation. To reflect all the input, where a response has two entries it was treated as two responses and all the answers were aggregated for all sizes of municipalities. In total, there were 74 entries, counting the multiple responses mentioned earlier.

By far, social media received the most mentions with 20, followed by on-line job boards (11) and the municipal website (8). Seven respondents specifically mentioned Indeed, although only four cited it as the best method, while three commented that it attracted many applicants but also many more unqualified candidates. Six respondents mentioned professional associations or industry associations (AMCOT, OBOA). Another six cited a variety of local resources (local advertising, local job boards, local media, and local employment services).

In cases where a comment was provided, it is usually explained that the best method depended on the position, requiring a more targeted approach for a professional position, whereas social media, the municipal website or local media was relied upon for other positions.

Challenges relating to job recruitment

With regard to recruitment challenges, respondents were first asked whether they had difficulty attracting qualified candidates. In the closed-ended question, respondents were provided with several possible responses to choose from:

- Yes
- Yes, for some positions
- No
- None of the above
- Other (please specify)

No respondent chose “none of the above” or “other.” Table 10 shows the remaining responses.

Table 10: Difficulty in attracting qualified candidates

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Yes	51%	68%	50%	17%	0%	25%
Yes, for some positions	43%	27%	43%	67%	100%	75%
No	7%	5%	7%	17%	0%	0%

Very few respondents expressed no difficulty in attracting qualified candidates – only 7% (four of 61 responses). Half said they experienced difficulty, while slightly over four in ten qualified the difficulty, saying it was present for some positions. It appears that smaller municipalities were more likely to experience difficulty overall, while larger municipalities were much more likely to limit the difficulty to some positions.

Respondents were next asked the extent to which competition with other industry sectors impacted their ability to recruit job candidates. The answers (measured in percentages) are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Extent to which competition with other industry sectors impacts ability to recruit

ALL	< 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	> 50,000
54%	49%	53%	70%	---	59%

There were no replies from municipalities with 10,000 to 50,000 residents

Perhaps the best way to express the result is that municipalities face a moderate degree of competition with other industry sectors in attracting job candidates. It is worth diving deeper into the responses, however. Among municipalities with 5,000 or fewer residents, where the overall rating around 50% (49% and 53%), the actual answers fall into three distinct categories: approximately one-third express a high level of competition (a score of 65% or more); around one-third score it as medium (41% to 63%) and one-third score it as low (30% or less). In short, municipalities experience the recruitment competition to significantly different degrees, from high through moderate to low, where the average rating is moderate.

Respondents were further asked which industries they felt they were competing against for employees. Respondents were required to write in their responses, and the results are presented in Table 12, divided by the degree of competition respondents felt from other industry sectors for job applicants.

Table 12: Industries that provide competition for employees

High level of competition from other employers		Moderate level of competition from other employers		Low level of competition from other employers	
Industry	#	Industry	#	Industry	#
Mining	12	Mining	5	Mining	2
Other public sector	7	Other public sector	7	Other public sector	6
All industries	4	All industries		All industries	
Other	5	Other	8	Other	4
Don't know	1	Don't know	4	Don't know	4

The two sectors most likely to be named as competitors for employees were other public sector (usually expressed as other municipalities, but also included other public services or agencies, provincial parks, and First Nations governments) and mining. Mining was by far most often cited among municipalities that experienced a high level of competition from other employers (who also were the only category to feel that the competition came from all industries). Otherwise, other public sectors were more often named by those municipalities who experienced a moderate or low degree of competition from other industries. These latter municipalities were also more likely to say they did not know which industries were providing recruitment competition or they did not provide an answer.

Respondents were next specifically asked which positions were most affected by salary competition with mining operations. In total, 49 respondents provided an answer:

- One-third (35%) said there was no impact or that it was not applicable (several indicating there was no mining operation close by)
- Over four in ten (43%) named public works primarily, or equipment operators or labourers
- The larger municipalities (over 10,000 residents) specifically cited mechanics, engineers and other skilled trades positions

Questions relating to wages, pension and benefits as part of the attraction package

The next set of questions inquired about strategies relating to wages, as well as how pension and benefits may influence recruitment outcomes.

The first question asked whether the municipality had increased salaries or adjusted pay scales to remain competitive. In most cases (75% of all respondents), said they had (Table 13). As shown in Table 13, approximately one in eight (12%) indicated it was not possible within their budget (all were municipalities with fewer than 10,000 residents), while one in ten (10%) said no.

Table 13: Increasing salaries or adjusting pay scales to remain competitive

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Yes	75%	67%	79%	83%	0%	100%
Not possible within budget	12%	14%	11%	17%	0%	0%
No	10%	10%	11%	0%	100%	0%
Considering it	3%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Those municipalities that answered yes were asked to indicate what adjustments were made. The 45 responses fell into numerous categories:

- Cost of living increased
- Added benefit (s) (e.g. vacation time)
- Offered a bonus
- Increased starting rates of positions
- Increased wage for specific positions to remain competitive or retain staff
- Pay increased to attract candidates with experience or with desired educational credentials
- Some increased for certain positions based on comparisons with neighbouring municipalities or market levels
- Increased the wage grid
- Increased wages through collective agreement negotiations
- Pay equity increased
- Review of all positions together with a labour market survey
- Periodic salary reviews
- Compensation review by outside consultant

Next, all respondents were asked whether they believed job candidates understood the value of the OMERS or municipal pension plan. The responses are provided in Table 14.

Table 14: Job candidates' understanding of value of municipal pension plan

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Yes	33%	38%	21%	67%	0%	50%
No	27%	10%	46%	0%	0%	25%
Not certain	28%	33%	21%	33%	100%	25%
Other	12%	19%	11%	0%	0%	0%

While there are large variations in the responses by size of municipality, there is no obvious pattern of response by size. The overall results for all respondents better reflect reality; one-third (33%) say that job candidates do understand, just under one-third (27%) say they do not, and a similar proportion (28%) are uncertain. Those municipalities that answered “Other” as a response usually had no pension plan or only had it for certain positions. In a few other instances, the “Other” response was used to express the view that young people are less concerned about preparing for their retirement.

Further on the topic of pensions as part of the compensation package, respondents were asked what challenges they faced in promoting pension value to younger or mid-career applicants. The answer relied on respondents writing in their reply.

Of the 50 comments entered, almost half (24, or 48%) said some variant of “younger workers are more interested in the immediate pay cheque.” This included such observations as “the future is too far away for younger workers,” “younger workers have immediate cash needs, such as saving for a house, as opposed to saving for retirement,” or “they feel it represents a large cut into their pay cheque (every dollar counts).” Most suggest this immediate-term attitude is particularly prevalent among this generation of youth, although a couple of respondents said that it has always been this way.

Eight respondents (16%) said they had no challenges in communicating about the benefits, while another five (10%) said the question was not applicable. A further five (10%) said that current workers are less interested in or committed to employment for the long-term. Another three (6%) felt that the workers did not understand the mechanics of how a pension worked.

Respondents were asked how they communicated pension and benefit information to applicants. Table 15 provides the results.

Table 15: How pension and benefit information is provided to applicants

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Job posting	35%	29%	39%	50%	0%	25%
Interview stage	25%	29%	25%	33%	0%	0%
Offer letter	12%	19%	11%	0%	0%	0%
Website	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%
None of the above	3%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	23%	14%	25%	17%	100%	50%

A little over one third (35%) of all respondents provide this information in the job posting and another quarter (25%) convey it during the interview stage. Almost a quarter (23%) chose “Other,” which when asked to specify, meant all of the above options or some mix of most of the options. In one instance, a respondent indicated that they communicated this information during onboarding.

Finally, respondents were asked whether tools or benefits from FONOM would help better communicate about these benefits. Only one-quarter (27%) said yes, while two-thirds were uncertain; that high level of uncertainty was consistent across all sizes of municipalities (Table 16). One possible reason for the uncertainty might be that it is unclear what that support from FONOM could look like.

Table 16: Would communication tools from FONOM help?

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Yes	27%	40%	18%	33%	0%	25%
No	7%	0%	14%	0%	0%	0%
Uncertain	66%	60%	68%	67%	100%	75%

Skill gaps and addressing workforce and recruitment challenges

Respondents were asked to identify the most evident skills gap by selecting from a list of options. Table 17 presents the answers. They are listed from highest to lowest percentage response among all responses.

Table 17: Most evident skills gaps

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Leadership/management	21%	15%	25%	33%	0%	0%
Regulatory/technical knowledge	17%	15%	18%	33%	0%	0%
Skilled trades certifications	16%	15%	11%	0%	0%	100%
Soft skills (communication, reliability)	12%	15%	14%	0%	0%	0%
Heavy equipment operation	10%	10%	7%	33%	0%	0%
Digital/IT skills	2%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	17%	20%	18%	0%	100%	0%
None of the above	5%	5%	7%	0%	0%	0%

Three skills top the list (between one in five and one in six of respondents): leadership/management; regulatory/technical knowledge; and skilled trades certifications. Two other skills attracted around one in ten respondents: soft skills (communication, reliability) and heavy equipment operation. Digital/IT skills received a small number of responses and only among municipalities with under 1,000 residents.

Among those who selected “Other,” four in ten indicated that all of the listed options represented skills gaps, while two others selected two options from the list.

Additional comments were:

- Many municipal staff obtain training once hired as opposed to coming with a municipal education
- There is a lack of skills for any municipal management positions: i.e. Clerk, Treasurer, CBO, Fire Chief. As these people retire, it is getting harder to find replacements. Often "stealing" from other municipalities.

Respondents were next asked what specific supports or policy changes would help their municipality address workforce challenges. The question invited respondents to write in their response. Of the 40 comments offered, 15 were either “don’t know,” “unsure” or “unknown.” The largest substantive cluster of responses involved six comments supporting training, notably soft skills training at the high school and post-secondary levels, more funding to support training (in relation to DZ or AZ license, or heavy equipment certification), including more classrooms beyond the five biggest cities in the North to improve access, and streamlined qualification and certification pathways. Two other comments specifically targeted more promotion of skilled trades, another two desired more support with succession planning, and two sought policies encouraging migration to the North or expanding housing options for people wishing to work in the North.

More specifically, respondents were next asked what they saw as the primary barrier to successful recruitment in their municipality. The 55 respondents often cited more than one barrier; the three most common issues (each mentioned by around a third of respondents) were:

- Salary: the inability to offer a competitive wage, in relation to other municipalities, other employers and the fact that the job sometimes involves multiple hats; some noted that either their council was skeptical about the need for higher wages or their tax base precluded higher wages
- Lack of candidates: This was often expressed as a lack of qualified or skilled/educated candidates, often related to their smaller population base and remote location, and the consequent competition for qualified staff with other employers (often combined with the issue of a less than competitive salary)
- Location: A more remote location not only limited the job candidate pool, but it could also be less attractive as a draw for people to relocate for a position; several simply stated theirs was a rural location less enticing to younger staff, others noticed the limited availability of public services, retailers, restaurants and other amenities available in larger urban settings

Several respondents also mentioned either the cost or limited availability of suitable housing, combining this with the remote location and/or less competitive salary barrier.

A couple of respondents noted the challenge of competing for qualified bilingual staff or the difficulties of working in an environment that attracts more public scrutiny. Only two respondents said they were not facing recruitment difficulties.

The next question asked respondents which supports from FONOM would be most helpful when recruiting qualified individuals for municipal positions. The survey offered a set of possible responses, with the results shown in Table 18, in order of the highest to lowest scores among all respondents.

Table 18: Preferred supports from FONOM for recruiting qualified job candidates

	ALL	Under 1,000	1,000-5,000	5,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Over 50,000
Salary benchmarking data	31%	24%	32%	33%	100%	50%
Centralized job posting platform	19%	33%	11%	17%	0%	0%
Shared HR resources	7%	10%	7%	0%	0%	0%
Recruitment best practices guide	5%	0%	11%	0%	0%	0%
Pension/benefits communication toolkit	3%	0%	0%	33%	0%	0%
Template job descriptions	2%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	24%	24%	29%	17%	0%	0%
None of the above	9%	5%	11%	0%	0%	50%

The support which was clearly the most preferred was salary benchmarking data, which increased in preference the larger the municipality. Second was a centralized job posting platform, but mainly of interest to municipalities with fewer than 10,000 residents. The remaining options received limited support. Nearly one-quarter of respondents selected “Other” with most indicated that they would have chosen all of the available options.

Finally, respondents were asked if they wished to provide any further comments relating to the workforce development challenges they are facing. Of the fourteen comments made, only one topic was referenced by three respondents, that is, the challenge of managing with a small staff team. In their view, it meant individuals taking on multiple roles, which can pose availability, scheduling and workload management challenges (especially with respect to seasonal demands or emergencies), create difficulties for training and succession planning, cause disruptions due to staff leaves or retirements, and make it difficult to find job candidates with the necessary skills, experience and versatility. It also generates compounded pressures arising from increased administrative and regulatory requirements.

The other comments were:

- Rising transportation costs for employees
- Use FONOM to host sessions to train new councillors or to develop a roster of consultants for staff training
- Sharing with others that succession planning was very useful to them
- Cannot always guarantee enough hours for part-time staff
- Retention is an issue too; younger staff come to build their resumes, but then some move on

- Council sometimes goes beyond their role and gets too involved in operational issues
- Sometimes a toxic dynamic may develop with some members of council or the public
- Firefighter training is a big burden for small municipalities
- Have had hires who turned out to have been less qualified than they stated, resulting in people being let go soon after they are hired

In closing, respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview or discussion about workforce development challenges. Three in ten said yes, another three in ten said no, and four in ten said maybe.

Conclusion

The survey findings demonstrate that workforce recruitment and retention remain significant challenges for municipalities across Northeastern Ontario, regardless of community size. While the nature and scale of these challenges vary, respondents consistently identified difficulty attracting qualified candidates, competition from other employers, succession planning pressures, and limited organizational capacity as key barriers to building and sustaining a stable municipal workforce.

Smaller municipalities face particularly complex challenges. Limited financial resources, smaller candidate pools, geographic isolation, and fewer dedicated human resources supports often make it more difficult to compete for skilled workers. At the same time, respondents highlighted increasing competition from mining, other public sector employers and larger municipalities, particularly for technical, skilled trades, public works, finance and senior management positions.

The findings also demonstrate that municipalities are actively adapting their recruitment strategies through salary adjustments, broader advertising approaches, and enhanced benefits. However, many respondents indicated that compensation alone is insufficient to address long-term workforce shortages. Sustainable solutions will require continued investment in workforce development, skills training, succession planning and strategies that improve the attractiveness of municipal careers.

Respondents identified several areas where regional collaboration could strengthen municipal workforce capacity. Salary benchmarking information, centralized recruitment resources, shared human resource supports, and improved access to training and certification opportunities were among the most frequently identified priorities. These findings suggest that coordinated regional approaches, supported by organizations such as FONOM and workforce planning partners, can help municipalities respond more effectively to shared labour market challenges.

Overall, the survey provides valuable evidence of the workforce realities facing Northern Ontario municipalities. The findings establish a foundation for future workforce planning initiatives and highlight opportunities to strengthen recruitment, retention and workforce development strategies that support resilient municipal services and sustainable community growth across the region.