

**FINAL REPORT**  
**Municipal Internship Program Review**

Submitted to:

**Alberta Municipal Affairs**

By:

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Municipal Internship Program is sponsored by Alberta Municipal Affairs in partnership with Alberta's municipalities. It is designed to attract recent post-secondary graduates to the field of municipal administration. The program provides funding and training resources to selected Alberta municipalities to hire and train interns over a one-year period. The program was initiated in 1980, abandoned 1993 and reintroduced in 2002 in response to a growing need to recruit and train new municipal administrators.

The objectives of the reintroduced program are to:

- Assist Alberta municipalities in their succession planning efforts to recruit, train and retain competent municipal employees who can progress into leadership positions;
- Encourage more individuals to enter the local government field and offer recent graduates who are interested in a career in municipal administration the opportunity to have first hand, real life, practical experience and training in the Alberta municipal environment; and
- Focus on retention of interns in the local government field as part of a successful succession planning strategy.

In March 2005, Municipal Affairs engaged Nichols Applied Management to conduct a review of the new Municipal Internship Program. The review was designed to include an assessment:

- from the perspective of the various client groups of those aspects of the program that are working well and those that are in need of improvement or modification;
- of the program's impact on succession planning within Alberta municipalities;
- of the stated objectives of the program; and

- of the efficiency and effectiveness of the structure, content and delivery of the program.

The review utilized a range of data sources to complete these assessments. Specific data sources included:

- telephone surveys and interviews with the interns that have participated in the program since it was reintroduced in 2002. Input was received from 21 of 24, or 88% of the interns that have participated in the program over the past three years;
- telephone surveys and interviews with the CAOs or intern supervisors of the host municipalities that have participated in the program since it was reintroduced in 2002. Input was received from 21 of 23, or 91% of the municipalities that have hosted interns over the past three years;
- telephone surveys and interviews with the alumni of the original Municipal Internship Program who are working within the local government sector in Alberta. Input was received from 25 of the 26, or 96% of these alumni;
- an online survey of CAOs in municipalities that are eligible to participate in the program, but have not done so over the past three years. The survey was completed by 49 respondents, a 30% response rate;
- interviews and working sessions with the Municipal Affairs staff that are responsible for the design and delivery of the program;
- a review of the program's handbook, toolkit and website;
- a review of internal and external program documentation (e.g., grant applications, grant application guidelines, conditional grant agreements, interim and final report requirements for host municipalities); and
- the review of the early stages of the program conducted in 2002.

Based on the input received from multiple sets of stakeholders and analysis of program support and background documents, Nichols Applied Management concludes that the program is:

- meeting a clearly identified need within the local government sector in Alberta;
- accomplishing two of the three objectives that were established when the program was reintroduced;
- well integrated across the province, properly structured to provide consistency, yet flexible enough to meet local needs and priorities and personal interests; and
- efficiently and effectively implemented.

The review clearly indicated that the reintroduced Municipal Internship Program is significantly stronger than its predecessor and has indeed been improved upon over the past three years. It has successfully attracted high quality interns within a very competitive job market. Alberta Municipal Affairs should continue to work with Alberta municipalities to in effort to continuously improve the program. To this end, Nichols Applied Management has provided the following 11 recommendations to further enhance the program and its delivery system.

1. Review the intent of the third objective of the program in relation to its capacity to influence the retention of municipal managers over time.
2. Consider the development of an annual performance measurement and reporting system for the program.
3. Review the program's minimum population threshold of 700 for host municipalities.
4. Adjust the maximum population threshold to 100,000 for host municipalities.
5. Consider options to encourage "shared hosting" arrangements in the future.
6. Consider options for encouraging regional or multi-jurisdictional hosting arrangements.

7. Review the focus of program marketing initiatives with the objective of shifting away from simply advertising the existence of the program to highlighting its positive impact.
8. Consider an annual or periodic cost of living adjustment to the level of financial support provided to host municipalities.
9. Review the current policy of providing all municipalities with the same level of support.
10. Review the advantages and disadvantages of expanding the program through increasing the number of internships or the addition of other program components such as in-place training for municipal employees.
11. Consider implementing on a pilot project a limited number of two-year internships.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 MUNICIPAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Municipal Internship Program is sponsored by Alberta Municipal Affairs (Municipal Affairs) in partnership with Alberta's municipalities. It is designed to attract recent post-secondary graduates to the field of municipal administration. The program provides funding and training resources to selected Alberta municipalities to hire and train interns over a one-year period.

The original Municipal Internship Program was introduced in 1980. Interns were recruited from post-secondary institutions and were assigned by Municipal Affairs to selected municipalities for a one-year period. Host municipalities were responsible for designing and implementing training programs. Municipal Affairs played a monitoring and support role. While the program was considered to be a success – over 100 interns participated in it over 13 years – it was discontinued in 1993 as a result of a government reorganization.

The current Municipal Internship Program was reintroduced in 2002 in response to a growing need to recruit and train new municipal administrators.<sup>1</sup> While it is still being implemented over a one-year time frame, it now includes a more formal training program developed by Municipal Affairs with the assistance of a number of Alberta municipalities. This training program includes specially designed educational and supportive materials; in-person training and networking sessions; an interactive website; site visits and reporting requirements. While Municipal Affairs continues to be responsible for recruiting prospective interns and selecting host municipalities, municipalities are now responsible for interviewing and selecting their interns.

The objectives of the new Municipal Internship Program are to:

- Assist Alberta municipalities in their succession planning efforts to recruit, train and retain competent municipal employees who can progress into leadership positions;

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<sup>1</sup> The 2000 Municipal Administrators Survey commissioned by Alberta Municipal Affairs demonstrated that a majority of municipal chief administrative officers in the province plan to leave their positions before 2010. These findings were corroborated in a subsequent Municipal Administrators Survey conducted in 2004.

- Encourage more individuals to enter the local government field and offer recent graduates who are interested in a career in municipal administration the opportunity to have first hand, real life, practical experience and training in the Alberta municipal environment; and
- Focus on retention of interns in the local government field as part of a successful succession planning strategy.

Since it was reintroduced in 2002, the Municipal Internship Program has provided an opportunity to 24 interns to spend a year learning about and experiencing local government in an Alberta municipality. Twenty-three Alberta municipalities have hosted or co-hosted interns over the past three years<sup>2</sup>.

An additional ten participants began their internships in 2005, five in municipalities that have hosted interns over the past three years and five in municipalities that are hosting for the first time.

## 1.2 STUDY BACKGROUND

While Municipal Affairs commissioned a review<sup>3</sup> of the initial stages of the new Municipal Internship Program, it has to date not undertaken a comprehensive review of the program.

In March 2005, Municipal Affairs engaged Nichols Applied Management to conduct a review of the new Municipal Internship Program. The project review was designed to include an assessment:

- from the perspective of the various client groups<sup>4</sup> of those aspects of the program that are working well

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<sup>2</sup> There are two reasons that the number of interns (24) exceeds the number of hosts (23) over the past three years. First, four municipalities (City of Spruce Grove, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Town of Taber and the Municipal District of Greenview) have twice hosted interns. Second, there were two cases last year where the hosting responsibilities were shared by more than one municipality. The towns of Jasper and Hinton co-hosted one intern while the towns of Trochu and Three Hills and Kneehill County jointly hosted another.

<sup>3</sup> *Municipal Internship Program Phase II, 2003/04 Planning Report*, Pommen Group, August 2002.

<sup>4</sup> For purposes of the review, the client groups include: 1) interns who participated in the program between 2002 and 2005; 2) CAOs or supervisors in the host municipalities; 3) alumni of the original Municipal Internship Program who are currently working in the local government sector in Alberta; and 4) CAOs of Alberta municipalities that have not been directly involved in the program over the past three years.

and those that are in need of improvement or modification;

- of the program's impact on succession planning within Alberta municipalities;
- of the stated objectives of the program; and
- of the efficiency and effectiveness of the structure, content and delivery of the program.

The review is intended to assist Municipal Affairs in understanding:

- client – intern and host – satisfaction with the program;
- the impact the program has on interns' desire and willingness to work in the local government sector;
- host municipalities' efforts to undertake succession planning;
- how best to refine the program to meet changing needs and expectations; and
- how to market the program to municipalities that have to date not participated in the program.

### **1.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This review was conducted over a ten-week period commencing April 2005. The Nichols Applied Management review team worked under the guidance of an Municipal Affairs project steering committee. The committee oversaw all aspects of the review and approved the detailed review plan, client survey questionnaires and interview guides, and the draft and final reports.

The review was designed to address each of the objectives outlined in the Municipal Internship Program Review Request for Proposal as well as additional questions identified by the consultants and steering committee at the outset of the project. The review focused on:

- the client groups' impressions of the overall program and perceptions of its major strengths and weaknesses;

- the client groups' opinions on how best to monitor and measure the outcomes and successes of the program;
- intern and host satisfaction with various aspects (e.g., marketing, intern and host recruitment and selection, funding, reporting, etc.) and components (e.g., work plan, toolkit, website, orientation sessions, site visits, executive program, wrap-up sessions, etc.) of the program;
- the marketing of the program to potential interns and host municipalities;
- the impact that the program had on interns' interest in working in local government, interns were asked if they:
  - would have pursued a career in local government in the absence of the program;
  - felt they the program had given them a better understanding and appreciation for local government; and
  - believed that their participation in the program enhanced their job prospect within the local government sector;
- the benefits interns and hosts realize through participation in the program;
- the barriers interns and hosts must address prior to participation in the program;
- the barriers that are currently preventing other municipalities from participating in the program;
- whether interns and host CAOs felt that Municipal Affairs should do more to assist interns who complete the program with placement within the local government sector;
- the design and delivery of the program, including the:

- length of internships;
- number of internships funded on an annual basis;
- level of financial support provided to interns and hosts;
- size of host municipalities; and
- number of times a municipality participates in the program as a host.

The review utilized a range of data sources in order to address the key questions from the perspective of the various client groups. The specific data sources included:

- telephone surveys and interviews with the interns that have participated in the program since it was reintroduced in 2002. Input was received from 21 of 24, or 88% of the interns that have participated in the program over the past three years;
- telephone surveys and interviews with the CAOs or intern supervisors of the host municipalities that have participated in the program since it was reintroduced in 2002. Input was received from 21 of 23, or 91% of the municipalities<sup>5</sup> that have hosted interns over the past three years;
- telephone surveys and interviews with the alumni of the original Municipal Internship Program who are working within the local government sector in Alberta. Input was received from 25 of the 26, or 96% of these alumni;
- an online survey of CAOs in municipalities<sup>6</sup> that are eligible to participate in the program, but have not

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<sup>5</sup> In most cases, interviews were conducted with the CAO of the host municipality. In those cases where another municipal manager was responsible for the day-to-day activities of the intern, this manager was interviewed.

<sup>6</sup> Email were sent to 166 municipalities with populations between 700 and 75,000. CAOs who had not participated in the program over the past three years were directed to the survey.

done so over the past three years. The survey was completed by 49 respondents, a 30% response rate;

- interviews and working sessions with the Municipal Affairs staff that are responsible for the design and delivery of the program;
- a review of the program's handbook, toolkit and website;
- a review of internal and external program documentation (e.g., grant applications, grant application guidelines, conditional grant agreements, interim and final report requirements for host municipalities); and
- the review of the early stages of the program conducted in 2002.

## **1.4 REPORT**

The following section of the report provides a summary and analysis of the input provided by the interns and hosts that have participated in the program over the past three years and the alumni of the original program. It focuses on their perceptions of various aspects and components of the program and identifies what they believe is working well and what they believe needs to be improved or modified.

Section 3 provides a summary of the input received from municipalities that have not participated in the program over the past three years. It focuses on these municipalities' awareness and understanding of the program and the barriers that have to date prevented them from participating in the program.

The report concludes in Section 4 with an analysis of how well the program is meeting its stated objectives and recommendations with respect to program structure, implementation and performance measurement.

Appendices to the report include:

- The telephone surveys and interview guides used to solicit input from the interns and hosts who participated in the program since it was reintroduced in 2002;

- The telephone survey and interview guide used to solicit input from alumni of the original Municipal Internship Program;
- The web-based survey sent to municipalities that have not participated in the program over the past three years; and
- A list of the interns, hosts and alumni that provided input to the review.

A separate technical report includes tabulations of detailed survey information.

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## **2. PROGRAM ASSESSMENT BY INTERNS, HOSTS AND ALUMNI**

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Since reintroducing the program in 2002, Municipal Affairs has implemented a number of improvements to the delivery of the program. Many of these improvements were identified in consultation with municipal stakeholders or through an independent review of the initial stages of the new program undertaken in 2002.

Municipal Affairs remains committed to improving the program on an ongoing basis and has commissioned this review to solicit intern, host and alumni input on those aspects of the new program are working well and those that are in need of improvement. Interns and hosts were asked to rate their satisfaction with various components of the program. While interns were asked about the program's impact on their future job prospects, hosts and alumni were asked about the impact of the program on municipalities' succession planning efforts. Each of the three groups of respondents were asked to provide their perspectives on how best to measure the success of the program.

This input was gathered through structured telephone interviews and surveys with the:

- 24 interns who have participated in the program since it was reintroduced in 2002;
- 23 hosts (CAOs or intern supervisors) in the municipalities that hosted or co-hosted interns over the past three years; and
- 26 alumni of the original Municipal Internship Program who are currently working within the local government sector in Alberta.

The interview guides and surveys were developed in consultation with program delivery staff and were provided to respondents in advance of scheduled telephone discussions. A total of 67 interviews – a contact rate of over 90% - were conducted in April and May 2005.

This section of the report provides a summary of the input received from interns, hosts and alumni.

## **2.2 OVERALL IMPRESSIONS**

A significant majority of interns (90%) and hosts (90%) described their participation in the program in very positive terms. Interns emphasized that their expectations of what they would learn and experience during their internships were met or exceeded. Many noted that the opportunity to participate in an experiential learning environment was the most effective aspect of the overall program. Hosts emphasized that the program provided benefits to interns and municipalities and that it is fulfilling its stated objective of assisting municipalities with succession planning. Host CAOs added that:

- improvements made to the new program make it significantly stronger than the original program;
- although internships are critically important, municipalities have found it difficult to implement them on their own; and
- the quality of interns attracted to the program over the past three years is very impressive.

Alumni also suggested that the current program demonstrates a vast improvement over the original program, noting in particular the financial support for salary and equipment and more comprehensive training, information, workshops and orientations.

When asked to comment on the overall strengths of the program, the interns noted that the program is:

- the only one of its kind for young people interested in pursuing a career in local government in Alberta;
- professionally organized and provides interns with a broad exposure to municipal governance and service delivery; and
- supportive of young people who are often pursuing their first job after university.

The host CAOs and supervisors identified these same points as overall strengths of the program and the fact that it was fulfilling a growing need

to develop new municipal managers to replace those who will leave the sector over the next five to ten years. A number of hosts also emphasized that the strength of the Municipal Internship Program rests on the quality of the interns themselves. Several remarked that the program has been successful in attracting high quality interns within a very competitive job market.

When asked to comment on the major challenges they faced in participating in the program, interns included the:

- volume of information and training involved in the program;
- adjustment to living in a new community;
- need to be self-motivated; and
- necessity of ensuring good working relationships with municipal staff.

The lack of time to support and mentor interns was cited as a major challenge by a number of CAOs and supervisors. This concern has two distinct dimensions. First, CAOs indicated that they are extremely busy and have a difficult time identifying an appropriate amount of time to work with interns. Second, CAOs emphasized that one year is simply not enough time to give interns the level of training and experience required by the program. A number of CAOs recommended lengthening the term of the internships to two years. The question of the appropriate length of an internship is specifically addressed later in this report.

Several CAOs from smaller municipalities noted that it was difficult to ensure that their interns were exposed to a wide variety of municipal programs and services or had enough meaningful work to keep them busy.

Overall, impressions of the program are very positive<sup>7</sup>. No major weaknesses or fundamental flaws in the mandate or delivery of the program were identified through the interviews with interns, hosts and alumni.

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<sup>7</sup> While a couple of interns and hosts noted that their participation in the program may not have met all of their expectations, this was typically attributed to personal issues rather than the way the program has been developed and implemented.

## **2.3 MARKETING OF THE PROGRAM**

Interns learn about the existence of the program in a variety of ways, including career boards and fairs, professors, family and friends, presentations by Municipal Affairs staff, websites and newspaper advertisements. More interesting than how they found out about the program is the fact that over half of the interns interviewed (57%) emphasized that previous to learning about the program, they had not considered a career in local government. Given the identified need to attract more people to the local government, this is a significant finding. The program and the way it is being marketed appear to be factors in promoting local government as a career option among post-secondary students.

The interns interviewed as part of this review noted that the following aspects of the program were particularly appealing to them:

- exposure to a broad range of programs and services;
- combination of theoretical learning and practical experience; and
- the opportunity to be involved in public service.

Most host CAOs and supervisors indicated that they first learned about the program through correspondence – letters and/or emails – from Municipal Affairs or through word-of-mouth from other municipalities. Several CAOs indicated that they had direct or indirect involvement with the original program. The majority of CAOs and supervisors noted that current marketing of the program is efficient and effective. Input from alumni (74% awareness of the new program) of the original program and CAOs that have not participated in the program over the past three years (96% awareness, refer to Section 3 of this report for more detail on the input of these CAOs) corroborates this conclusion.

## **2.4 PROGRAM SUPPORTS**

Interns and hosts were asked to provide input on how the program is delivered. They were asked to rate their satisfaction with a number of key supports and to recommend possible improvements. The following subsections of the report offer a summary of the input received on each of these supports.

It should be noted that many of the components of the program have evolved over the past three years. Support material has been

augmented and refined and a number of processes have been redesigned. The fact that these components may change from year to year makes it somewhat problematic to report average satisfaction ratings from interns and hosts. There are a number of cases where the stated reason for a relatively low rating of particular component of the program (e.g., the lack of networking capacity on the internship website) in the early years of the program has been addressed and is now viewed as a strength of the program. It should be noted that an overall comparison of satisfaction ratings over the three-year term of the program illustrates a steady year-to-year improvement in satisfaction amongst both interns and hosts.

#### **2.4.1      CONDITIONAL GRANT AGREEMENT PROCESS**

A strong majority (95%) of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated that they believed that the grant application process was fair and efficient. Several CAOs commented that changes to this process over the past year have made it more efficient and flexible than it has been in the past. A few indicated that it would be helpful if Municipal Affairs clearly stated the criteria by which the applications to host an intern are reviewed (this information is available in the current grant application guidelines).

#### **2.4.2      INTERN APPLICATION PROCESS**

This process has changed over the past three years. While several of the interns who participated in the early years of the program commented that the application process was lacking – particularly in regard to the time it took municipalities to notify, interview and hire interns – the majority of the interns who participated in the program over the past year indicated that they believed that the application process was fair, transparent and efficient. A number of interns commented that applying to the program was a relatively intensive exercise, but emphasized that this helped them discern whether or not they wanted to enter the municipal government sector. Many interns commented that program delivery staff were particularly helpful in answering questions they had during the application process. Finally, several interns commented that the waiting period between applying for the program, attending interviews with municipalities and receiving an offer was long and stressful. One intern noted concern with the different approaches municipalities used to interview and assess internship candidates.

Hosts report that they are generally satisfied with the process that is now in place to recruit potential interns. They are very satisfied with the quality and quantity of candidates that Municipal Affairs refers to them and the information that is provided on each candidate. Most (90%) of the CAOs and supervisors indicated that they are not interested in having Municipal Affairs do more than a general screening of the candidates for internships and are not particularly concerned with the volume of information that may be provided to them. Several CAOs commented that the decision to now have candidates indicate which municipalities they are interested in locating in significantly improves the application process.

### **2.4.3 INTERNSHIP WEBSITE**

The interns were asked to rate their satisfaction with the website on a five-point scale, one being low, three neutral and five high. The average satisfaction rating was 3.8. It should be noted that lower ratings were generally provided by interns who participated in the first two years of the new program, ratings of recent interns were statistically higher on average. This is likely the result of improvements that have been made to the website over the past two years, many of which have been recommended to the program delivery staff as part of ongoing, internal evaluations of the program. It is clear from the input provided by interns that the website is a particularly important part of the program, particularly from the perspective of providing a communications network between and amongst interns. Interns also noted that the website provides a:

- marketing tool for the program;
- guide to the application process; and
- source of valuable insight on the experiences of other interns.

Only a quarter of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated that they used the website for anything other than accessing the grant application. Hosts were not asked to rate their satisfaction with the website.

#### **2.4.4 WORKPLAN**

The workplan is valued by interns and hosts. The average satisfaction rating<sup>8</sup> for interns and hosts was 3.9 and 4.6, respectively. Interns and hosts noted that it provided a foundation for their work and emphasized that it was well integrated with other supports such as the internship guidebook. For the most part, interns and hosts understood that while the workplan is intended to provide the structure for or an outline of an internship, it is also flexible enough to enable them to accommodate personal interests and local circumstances.

Interns emphasized that the workplan helped them prepare to transition into different municipal departments. Hosts noted that they often used the workplan as a means of preparing their departmental managers to work with interns.

#### **2.4.5 TOOLKIT**

The toolkit, including the guidebook, handbook and personal development manual, was also highly valued by the interns and hosts. The average satisfaction rating for interns and hosts was 4.0 and 4.4, respectively. The guidebook in particular drew very positive comments from both the interns and hosts. Interns emphasized that it provided:

- an excellent source of information that prompted good discussion with hosts and municipal department supervisors;
- guidance in terms of determining what areas of municipal governance and service delivery they might be most interested in; and
- the necessary background for them to begin to network with municipal staff and Members of Council.

The host CAOs and supervisors recognized the value of the toolkit as a learning resource for interns, many commented that it would easily form the foundation for a training program for new employees or Members of Council. Several CAOs commented that they would have appreciated receiving their own copy of the entire toolkit for use within their municipalities.

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<sup>8</sup> All satisfaction ratings undertaken as part of this review were based on a five-point scale where one is low, three is neutral and five is high.

#### **2.4.6 INTERN ORIENTATION WORKSHOPS**

The average satisfaction rating by interns for these workshops was 4.0. Interns emphasized the importance of formally initiating the program through this workshop, one described this workshop as being the point where they “realized I’m a municipal intern”. Most interns noted that the opportunity to meet their colleagues face-to-face early in their internships was the key factor in making these workshops successful. Interns who did not participate in an orientation workshop commented that they felt that they were at a disadvantage relative to those who did have the opportunity. Several interns commented that it would be helpful if they were given more opportunity to work with each other in a less structured format at these sessions.

#### **2.4.7 SUPERVISOR ORIENTATION WORKSHOPS**

The average satisfaction rating by hosts for these workshops was 4.2. Host CAOs and supervisors noted that the opportunity to hear the personal experiences of hosts that were completing their internships was particularly beneficial. It was clear from the input received on these workshops that the decision to combine the orientation workshop for upcoming internships with the wrap-up session for outgoing internships is considered by most CAOs to be a good one. Most of the hosts also indicated that the opportunity to network with their colleagues is always important to them.

#### **2.4.8 SITE VISITS**

Satisfaction ratings for the site visit process were mixed amongst both interns and hosts with the average ratings being 3.5 for interns and 3.8 for hosts. Many interns and hosts indicated that while they understood that site visits were necessary to provide some accountability for the program, they felt that their particular internships were going so well that there wasn’t a compelling requirement for Municipal Affairs to undertake this level of due diligence in their cases. On the other hand, a couple of interns indicated that the site visits to their municipalities successfully resolved issues that had arisen early in their internships.

Several interns and hosts emphasized that the site visits promoted relationship building between Municipal Affairs and municipalities. Finally, a number of host CAOs indicated that they were unsure of Municipal Affairs’s objectives for site visits and would appreciate some clarity in this regard.

### **2.4.9 EXECUTIVE PROGRAM**

The executive program is also highly valued by both interns and hosts. The average satisfaction rating for interns and host was 4.1 and 4.3, respectively. Again, the interns and hosts pointed to the opportunity to network with colleagues as one of the strengths of the executive program. Many interns commented on the intensity of the executive program and the volume of information to be absorbed during the week. Several indicated that they appreciated the information they received as it was not always available to them within their municipalities.

Many of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated that their ratings of the executive program were based on discussion with their interns. They appreciated the fact that the interns received the information that was provided through the executive program and commented that it would be helpful to have similar programs established for themselves and their managers.

Hosts were asked to comment on their role in the executive program. Many noted that while they would be interested in attending more of the program, they stressed that their availability is very limited. Most would not support making their attendance at training sessions like the executive program mandatory.

Host CAOs and supervisors were also asked to comment on the amount of time interns are away from their municipalities during the course of their internships. Most hosts do not have an issue with the amount of time interns devote to training sessions and courses. In fact, many of them indicated that they felt it was appropriate and necessary for the interns to be exposed to as much training as possible.

### **2.4.10 WRAP-UP WORKSHOPS**

The wrap-up sessions are a highlight for interns, these sessions received an average satisfaction rating of 4.4, highest amongst the program components interns were asked to provide input on. The interns again pointed to the importance of these sessions as an opportunity to network, particularly in advance of moving into the municipal sector without the ongoing support of the internship program. It is clear from their input that interns develop strong supportive networks over the year, networks that will likely continue well into the future. This is particularly significant in that research suggests that CAOs and municipal managers highly value the formal and informal networks they have developed within the local government sector.

Many interns emphasized that the opportunity to meet alumni of the Municipal Internship Program enabled them to expand their networks.

The average satisfaction rating of the host CAOs and supervisors was 4.0. Hosts noted that these sessions provided an opportunity to compare notes with their colleagues and to address particular issues and concerns they might have with the delivery of the program. As noted above, hosts that have had an opportunity to participate in wrap-up sessions held in conjunction with orientation sessions for new hosts see tremendous value in this linkage. They point out that this provides an excellent opportunity to share first-hand experience with the program.

### **2.4.11 INTERIM AND FINAL REPORTING**

Host CAOs and supervisors are supportive of the need to provide Municipal Affairs with interim and final reports. They assessed each of the reporting processes with an average score of 4.0 on the 5-point satisfaction scale used in this review. They emphasized that reporting is not overly onerous and provides them with an opportunity to pull their thoughts on the program and their experience with their interns together in one place. They recognize the need for program accountability and see the interim and final reporting processes as fulfillment of this obligation.

Interns were asked if they believed that they should also be required to prepare interim and final reports. Most (76%) interns indicated that they supported the idea of providing these reports and emphasized that doing so would add more intern accountability to the program. Several indicated that reports of this nature would provide them with an opportunity to “de-brief” their experiences with the program.

## **2.5 PROGRAM IMPACTS**

The program is intended to assist Alberta municipalities in their succession planning efforts; encourage more individuals to enter the local government sector, and to provide interns with practical experience and training. The interviews and surveys conducted with interns, hosts and program alumni sought to define each of these groups’ perspectives on the overall impact of the Municipal Internship Program.

### **2.5.1 Interns**

Interns were asked to comment on the impact of the program on their:

- level of interest in entering the municipal government sector;
- exposure to municipal governance and service delivery; and
- future job prospects.

Slightly more than half (52%) of the interns interviewed indicated that they would likely not have explored a career in local government in the absence of the program. Several of the interns that noted that they intended to pursue a career in local government emphasized that the program was a unique opportunity to do so in a supportive environment. Over 85% of the interns surveyed reported that their involvement in the program had increased their interest in working in local government.

Every intern interviewed felt that their internship gave them a better understanding of local government. Almost every intern (95%) indicated that the program gave them the opportunity to have first hand, real life, practical experience and training in local government. One person expressed the opinion that their host municipality did not provide the same level of practical experience that fellow interns enjoyed in other municipalities. With respect to the impact of the program on their future job prospects, 81% of the interns reported that they felt the program enhanced their prospects within the local government sector. Most interns (71%) reported that they felt that people who participate in the program are more likely to be hired within the local government sector.

## **2.5.2 Host CAOs and Supervisors**

The majority (76%) of CAOs and supervisors indicated that they believed that the program stimulated interest in succession planning within their municipalities. Over 60% agreed that their involvement in the program actually assisted their municipality with succession planning. Various CAOs emphasized that hosting an intern:

- prompted their municipalities to review their existing succession plans;
- increased awareness within their administrations of the number of people who will be retiring in the near future; and
- increased their councils' interest in and understanding of the importance of succession planning.

CAOs and supervisors were unanimous in agreeing that the program met its objective of providing interns with a better understanding of local government. Several CAOs emphasized the importance of providing interns with an appreciation for municipal governance and service delivery, regardless of whether interns stay in the municipal sector or not. Every CAO and supervisor interviewed as part of the review also indicated that they believed that an intern who has successfully completed the program would make a stronger candidate for employment within the local government sector.

CAOs and hosts identified a number of other benefits to their involvement in the program. Examples of these unintended benefits include:

- hearing fresh ideas and perspectives on different issues;
- increased networking with other communities involved in the program;
- accomplishment of priority projects;
- assistance with computing systems and the development of automated templates and procedures;
- validation of existing training programs for municipal managers; and
- increased communication and information sharing across departments.

Finally, 86% of the CAOs and supervisors indicated that their involvement in the program increased their interest in hosting another intern in the future.

### **2.5.3 Alumni**

A majority (74%) of the alumni of the original Municipal Internship Program who continue to work within the local government sector in Alberta believe that internships assist municipalities with succession planning. These alumni recognize succession planning as a “hot button” issue in Alberta and emphasize that the program provides a training and mentoring opportunity for future senior staff. They noted that smaller communities particularly benefit from the program as they

typically do not have internal capacity or resources to groom new managers. They also noted that the program effectively introduces “new blood” and thinking into municipalities.

## **2.6 PROGRAM DELIVERY ISSUES**

In addition to gathering perspectives on various program delivery components, the intern, host and alumni interviews and surveys sought to solicit input on a number of key program delivery issues, including the:

- number of internships provided on an annual basis;
- length of an internship;
- number of times a particular municipality hosts and intern;
- level of financial support municipal hosts receive through the program;
- eligibility of different sized municipalities to participate in the program; and
- appropriateness of Municipal Affairs assisting interns to find future employment within the local government sector.

### **2.6.1 Number of Internships**

Host CAOs and supervisors were informed during interviews that ten interns will participate in the program in 2005-06. They were asked whether the number of interns supported through the program should increase in the future. Over half (52%) of the CAOs indicated that the number of internships should be increased. Approximately two-thirds of these CAOs believe that an increase to 15 or 20 per annum is required and should be supported. The other third who suggested that the number of interns be increased did not recommend a particular number, but emphasized that the actual number should reflect the availability of quality interns and suitable host municipalities.

Approximately one-quarter of the CAOs suggested that the current number of ten interns per annum was appropriate. A quarter of the CAOs chose not to express an opinion on this question.

The question concerning number of internships was not put to the interns or alumni.

### **2.6.2 Length of Internships**

Two-thirds of the host CAOs and supervisors surveyed indicated that they would support a move to a two-year internship program. Many of these CAOs and supervisors indicated that increasing the length of internships would provide more time to ensure that interns receive an appropriate level of training and experience. Several suggested that the first year of an internship could focus on general training while the second would see the intern specializing in a particular area of municipal governance or service delivery. Several others suggested that the two years may not need to take place in the same municipality. The other third of the CAOs and supervisors felt that the current one-year timeframe for internships is appropriate.

Interns were split on the question of how long internships should last. Approximately half (48%) of the interns indicated that they believe a two-year internship would be more effective. These interns suggested that:

- one year allows them to learn, while a second year would provide an opportunity “to do”;
- a second year would provide interns an opportunity to focus their efforts in areas of particular interest;
- a two-year internship would make them more “marketable” within the local government sector.

Support for continuing to deliver the program over one year was expressed by 43% of the interns. These interns felt that two years was a long time to commit to an internship and emphasized that the success of the current program proves that a one-year timeframe can be very effective. Several interns indicated that they were unsure which would work better.

The question of the most appropriate length of an internship also drew a mixed response from alumni. A slight majority (57%) indicated that one year is adequate to provide an appropriate level of training and hands-on experience. These alumni emphasized that a one-year timeframe is adequate to assess the “fit” for both the intern and the municipality in terms of future employment within the local government sector. Almost

one quarter of the alumni interviewed were supportive of lengthening internships to two years. These alumni identified many of the same points that host CAOs put forward in support of two-year internships.

### **2.6.3 Number of Times a Municipality Hosts**

The survey of hosts and alumni queried respondents on the question of whether municipalities should be allowed to host interns in consecutive or multiple years. Two-thirds of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated that they would not support a limit on the number of times a municipality could host an intern. They noted that:

- committed municipalities that do a good job of hosting should be able to do so on an ongoing basis;
- municipalities often spend resources setting up the program and should be given the opportunity to host again, if only to ensure a greater return on their investment; and
- municipalities should be chosen primarily on their capacity to provide an appropriate learning experience for interns.

The remaining third of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated full or qualified support for limitations on the number of times a municipality hosts an intern. One concern expressed by this group was the possibility that a municipality may use the program as a temporary employment program as opposed to a training internship. Others noted that the more municipalities that have an opportunity to host an intern, especially smaller municipalities, the more effective the program will be.

The alumni interviewed as part of the review of the program concurred with the hosts, with the provisos that internships are appropriately designed and implemented and that all municipalities interested in participating in the program are provided the opportunity to do so. Many alumni emphasized that interns will typically receive better training and experience from a municipality that is familiar with the program and its expectations.

### **2.6.4 Level of Financial Support**

The level and type of financial support available through the program has been modified slightly over the past three years. Host CAOs and supervisors were asked to comment on the level of support available through the program and whether there is a rationale for varying financial support by municipal type or size.

Almost 70% of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated that they were supportive of the current level and type of support provided to host municipalities. Most CAOs emphasized that their municipalities also invest considerable resources in the program and believe that they are responsible for ensuring that the base amount of funding provided by Municipal Affairs is appropriately augmented to meet local and personal circumstances. The minority of CAOs and supervisors who provided a dissenting opinion typically suggested that the salary component should be raised to between \$30,000 and \$35,000. One CAO recommended that the salary support amount be subject to a cost-of-living index while another suggested combining the salary and expenses allocations and giving municipalities the authority to allocate the total as they see fit.

Currently, all host municipalities receive the same level of financial support through the program. A third of the host CAOs and supervisors surveyed indicated support for this approach. Two-thirds suggested that there was at least some rationale for consideration of having different levels of support. Examples of the rationales cited by these CAOs and supervisors for additional support included:

- municipalities with higher-than-average costs of living (e.g., Jasper, Banff, Wood Buffalo, etc.);
- small municipalities;
- financially-constrained municipalities; and
- remote municipalities, measured by distance from Edmonton.

Interns and alumni were not asked to comment upon the issue of financial support.

### **2.6.5 Size of Host Municipalities**

Currently, municipalities with populations between 700 and 75,000 or those who have hosted since 2002 are eligible to host interns. The CAOs and supervisors of host municipalities and the alumni of the original program were asked to comment upon the appropriateness of these population thresholds, interns were not.

Host CAOs and supervisors are split with respect to their opinions on population thresholds. Half of these respondents indicated that they did not see the need for minimum or maximum population thresholds as long as the objectives of the program could be met by a municipality.

Approximately 35% of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated supported for thresholds, typically within a range between 3,000 and 10,000. The remaining hosts stated that they were unsure whether thresholds should be in place or not.

The alumni also expressed a variety of opinions on the question of population thresholds. Slightly more than half of the alumni noted that while a large municipality may have the potential to offer training opportunities in a variety of functional areas, interns may not get a good opportunity to work with the CAOs. On the other hand, very small municipalities may not be capable of providing an adequately rich and varied learning experience to interns or may simply use the program as a source of labour, as opposed to a training program. Approximately half of the alumni indicated that a range of between 5,000 and 20,000 would be most appropriate for the program.

### **2.6.6 Assisting Interns to Find Future Employment**

The program clearly has an impact on interns' perceptions of their future job prospects. The surveys of interns and host CAOs and supervisors probed for opinions on whether Municipal Affairs should do more to help "graduating" interns find work with Alberta's local government sector. This issue was not discussed with alumni.

Interns are split on this question. Approximately half of them believe that they are personally responsible for finding employment and should not rely on additional assistance from Municipal Affairs. Several pointed out that their involvement in the program should speak for itself. The other half of the interns thought that Municipal Affairs should provide this type of assistance. These interns noted that:

- the transition to full-time employment is difficult and any help from Municipal Affairs would be appreciated;
- Municipal Affairs has already made a significant investment in training interns and should market them as a way of improving their return on investment; and
- Municipal Affairs knows what particular municipalities require and could help link intern skills with these needs.

About 60% of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated that believe that Municipal Affairs should do more to assist interns as they approach the end of their internships. These hosts indicated that it would not be

difficult for Municipal Affairs to send out emails and letters profiling interns and promoting the merits of the program itself. Several CAOs emphasized that municipalities, interns and Municipal Affairs have a shared responsibility to do more to ensure that interns remain within Alberta's local government sector. Several other CAOs suggested that Municipal Affairs may want to assist interns with job searches as a means of reducing the need for interns to shift their attention in the latter stages of their internships from their municipalities to job hunting.

Almost 30% of the CAOs and supervisors indicated that interns should be solely responsible for finding employment within the local government sector and should not rely on the province for assistance. The remaining 10% did not express an opinion on this question.

## **2.7 MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM**

The program is clearly meeting the expectations of interns and hosts. Almost every intern (95%) interviewed as part of the review indicated that they would recommend the program to friends. Every host (100%) CAO and supervisor indicated that they would recommend the program to other municipalities. Despite these general endorsements, it is important to measure the impact and the delivery of the program on an ongoing basis.

The interview guides designed to solicit the opinions of interns, hosts and alumni included a question about how best to measure the success of the program. The responses from each of the three groups are strikingly similar.

Most respondents within each group indicated that the number of interns hired within Alberta's local government sector and the number who continue to work within the sector after a period of approximately five years are good measures of the program's success. They emphasized that while it would not be appropriate to expect all interns to find or retain employment within the local government sector, it is reasonable to expect that a majority – percentages in the range of 60% to 80% were suggested – would. Most respondents view the program as a “discernment process” and readily accept that some interns will realize that they are not suited to or not interested in a career in local government.

Most respondents within each group also emphasized that some sort of satisfaction monitoring should also be included within the program's

performance measurement system. They indicated that both intern and host satisfaction with the program are important to consider and should include measures geared toward the stated objectives of the program and its delivery mechanisms. For example, interns should be surveyed with respect to their satisfaction with the program and their desire to work within the local government sector. Hosts should be surveyed with respect to their satisfaction with the program and their desire to host another intern in the future. The alumni emphasized that the program is intended to provide interns with broad exposure to municipal governance and service delivery and suggest that interns and hosts should be surveyed to ensure that this is happening.

Several interns and hosts recommended that a performance measurement system for the program include pre- and post- testing of interns to monitor their knowledge and perceptions of key municipal issues.

Other identified potential measures of success included:

- cost-benefit analysis of the program;
- general awareness of the program within the Alberta local government sector (administrative and elected); and
- the number of interns and municipalities applying to participate in the program on an annual basis.

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### **3. PROGRAM ASSESSMENT BY NON-PARTICIPATING MUNICIPALITIES**

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#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

While an understanding of intern and host perceptions of the program enables Municipal Affairs to continuously improve the delivery of the program, it is also important for Municipal Affairs to consider the opinions that non-participating municipalities may have regarding the program. Municipal Affairs is very interested in gaining insight into the awareness and understanding of the program amongst those municipalities that while eligible to host an intern have not done so since the program was reintroduced in 2002. This information is critical to marketing the program and addressing barriers that may be preventing more municipalities from participating in it.

In order to develop an understanding of the opinions of the program amongst these municipalities, an email was sent to the CAOs of non-participating municipalities requesting participation in an online survey. There were 49 responses to the survey, a 30% response rate. The online survey was administered between May 13 and May 20, 2005.

This section of the report provides a summary of the input received from these 49 CAOs.

#### **3.2 FAMILIARITY WITH THE PROGRAM**

A significant majority (96%) of these CAOs indicated that they are familiar with the Municipal Internship Program. They emphasized that they learned about the program through a variety of channels, including presentations at association conventions, letters from Municipal Affairs and discussions with colleagues and program alumni. Not only are these CAOs aware of the overall program, they are quite familiar with many of its key attributes. For example, CAOs indicated that they understood that:

- the program provides mentoring and training for potential municipal managers;
- municipalities apply to host interns and that Municipal Affairs provides resources and support to hosts;

- internships are held over a one-year period and that interns work and gain experience in all aspects of municipal governance and service delivery;
- internships are available to recent post-secondary graduates; and
- the program is intended to help municipalities address increasing succession planning issues.

These CAOs are also aware of the intended benefits of the program. Approximately 70% of the CAOs that responded to the online survey noted that a this type of program is beneficial to municipalities' efforts to address succession planning issues. They emphasized that:

- interns will be needed to replace administrators as many reach retirement age;
- it is beneficial to have highly educated individuals ready to replace senior staff; and
- the program helps to address a building shortage of trained professionals with the local government sector.

Others noted that interns gain valuable experience and appreciation for municipal issues through their internships. Several CAOs noted that the program is particularly important as it is a unique opportunity for young people who have a particular interest in local government.

This relatively high level of awareness and understanding of the program amongst CAOs who have not been directly involved in the program over the past three years suggests that current program marketing initiatives are effective. The fact that many CAOs indicated that they know or have had discussions with alumni and hosts of the original or current program suggests that a network of program supporters has begun to develop within the Alberta local government sector.

Finally, it is significant to note that with minor exceptions, these CAOs have not formed major misconceptions of or strong negative opinions about the program. While open-ended surveys often provide a forum for respondents to highlight concerns or dissatisfaction, no serious negative issues regarding the program were identified by respondents to this survey.

### 3.3 INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROGRAM

While the vast majority of these CAOs are aware of the program, just over half (53%) of those surveyed indicated that their municipalities have contemplated involvement in the program. In response to a survey question that asked respondents to identify the barriers to participation in the program, CAOs indicated that a lack of funding, time and space were key concerns. For example, CAOs noted that they:

- did not have sufficient time to appropriately manage an intern;
- are facing financial constraints that would make it difficult to identify funding for an internship; and
- don't have space within their offices to accommodate an intern.

A number of CAOs also indicated that they did not believe that their municipalities were large enough or diversified enough to provide an intern with the broad range of experience expected under the program. Several indicated that their municipalities were too remote to participate in the program. Many CAOs indicated that a small municipality does not have enough staff to provide the required training or is not directly involved in the delivery of all municipal programs and services.

While several CAOs indicated that the timing is not right for them to consider participation in the program at this time, they may do so in the future. These CAOs suggested that timing is often dictated by how long they have worked in a municipality, the experience or comfort level of their councils and the priority of an internship relative to ongoing project priorities.

Half of the CAOs surveyed indicated that they believed that a minimum population threshold should be in place to define a municipality's eligibility to host an intern. While a quarter of these CAOs were supportive of the current threshold of 700, others suggested that the minimum population range should be in the range of 1,000 to 5,000. However, it should be noted that half of the CAOs surveyed indicated that they did not believe that any population thresholds – minimum or maximum – should be in place.

CAO input regarding future participation in the program is important to Municipal Affairs. While program adjustments could be made to

address some of the barriers identified by CAOs, it is clear that many CAOs and municipalities are not likely to contemplate participation in the program in the future. Municipal Affairs has been forthright in advising municipalities about the time required to host an intern and would be well-advised to continue to do so. There is nothing to be gained and much to be compromised by understating the time required to implement an internship in an effort to convince more municipalities to become involved in the program.

### **3.4 PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

A strong majority (95%) of the CAOs surveyed concurred with program's objective of assisting "Alberta municipalities in their succession planning efforts to recruit, train and retain competent municipal employees who can progress into leadership positions". In fact, a number of these CAOs recommended that the program should be expanded beyond its current mandate of developing future administrators to include the training and development of planners, assessors and financial officers. Only two respondents indicated that they had their own succession plans in place and therefore did not need the assistance of the Municipal Internship Program.

Several CAOs indicated that they believe the program will be particularly helpful in addressing a perceived decline in the attractiveness of a career in local government, especially in smaller, rural municipalities.

Almost all (98%) of the respondents to the online survey indicated support for the program objective of encouraging "more individuals to enter the local government field and offer recent graduates the opportunity to get practical experience in a municipal environment". Many of these CAOs recommended that the program be expanded to develop internships for experienced people from the private sector or other levels of government or existing municipal employees. While they are very supportive of the need to attract young, highly educated people to the local government sector, they believe there is also significant benefits to be gained from attracting other types of people to local government through internships.

Municipal Affairs will need to carefully consider this input as it continues to refine and deliver the Municipal Internship Program in the future. While the program could be expanded or modified to develop managers in particular municipal fields or to offer internship opportunities to more than just recent post-secondary graduates, attention will have to be

given to ensuring that the original (and highly supported) objectives of the program are not compromised.

### **3.5 PROGRAM IMPACTS**

The program is intended to develop people for jobs within the local government sector. Most of the CAOs who completed the online survey indicated that they believed that people who have successfully completed an internship under the program are better candidates for jobs in the municipal sector. Over half (53%) of these CAOs stated that they were confident that interns who complete the program are better candidates for municipal sector jobs. Just under half (43%) of the CAOs indicated that while they assumed that interns would make good job candidates for local government management positions, they wanted to see tangible evidence to support this assumption. These CAOs emphasized that:

- most interns will have obtained a good background in municipal governance and service delivery and will easily transition into permanent municipal employment;
- having worked in and experienced the municipal sector, interns will be better prepared; and
- “on the job training far outweighs theory”.

A small minority (4%) of these CAOs noted that the quality of a particular candidate is more dependent on the quality of the intern than the program itself.

This input clearly indicates that CAOs who have not directly participated in the program over the past three years are interested in reviewing data relative to the transition of “graduating” interns into the municipal sector. Municipal Affairs may want to consider developing this data and making it available through the Municipal Internship Program website and program marketing material.

### **3.6 PROGRAM DELIVERY**

While these CAOs were not asked to comment on specific aspects of program delivery, they were asked for their opinions on the:

- number of internships provided on an annual basis;

- length of an internship; and
- level of financial support municipal hosts receive through the program.

CAOs were informed through the online survey that ten interns will participate in the program in 2005-06. They were asked whether the number of interns should increase in the future. Over 40% of respondents indicated that they were unsure whether the number should increase. 15% indicated that they felt that ten interns per year is appropriate. Just under 40% indicated that the number should be increased to meet future demands for municipal administrators. The range in the number of annual internships recommended by this subset of CAOs was 15 to 40.

CAOs who have not been directly involved in the program over the past three years are split on how long an internship should last. Just over half of the respondents to the online survey indicated that they believe that the current one-year timeframe is appropriate. Just under half of the respondents indicated that they thought an internship should last for two years. No respondent indicated that the program should be delivered in less than one year or more than two years.

The CAOs were informed through the survey that all host municipalities receive the same level of financial support through the program and were asked if there was a rationale for providing varying levels of support. Once again, the responses to the question indicate a split amongst these CAOs. Just under half indicated that they believe there is some rationale for varying the level of support across host municipalities. These CAOs noted that:

- some Alberta municipalities have high costs of living and should receive more funding through the program to attract interns;
- it is more expensive to train people in rural and remote municipalities;
- distance from Edmonton should be a variable in determining support; and
- smaller municipalities require more financial assistance than larger municipalities.

### **3.7 MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM**

Finally, these CAOs were asked how they would measure the success of the program. Just over half of the respondents to the online survey offered opinions on this question. Over half of these respondents indicated that the retention of the intern within the municipal sector should be the key measure of success for the program. These CAOs indicated that they believe that the program should be considered a success if most of the individuals who complete an internship find employment in Alberta's municipal sector. Other responses to this question included:

- the number of interns and municipalities applying to participate in the program on an annual basis;
- the number of interns who complete their internships; and
- satisfaction of interns and hosts with the program.

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## 4. PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Three years after being reintroduced, the Municipal Internship Program appears to have already become a well-recognized, much-appreciated program within Alberta's local government sector. Based on the input received from multiple sets of stakeholders and analysis of program support and background documents, this review concludes that the program is:

- meeting a clearly identified need within the local government sector in Alberta;
- attracting high quality interns within a very competitive job market;
- accomplishing the two of the three objectives<sup>9</sup> that were established when the program was reintroduced;
- well integrated across the province, properly structured to provide consistency, yet flexible enough to meet local needs and priorities and personal interests; and
- efficiently and effectively implemented.

### 4.1 PROGRAM NEED AND OBJECTIVES

The Municipal Internship Program was reintroduced by Municipal Affairs in 2002 as a response to a growing concern with CAO turnover and succession planning within Alberta's local government sector. Surveys conducted by Municipal Affairs over the past several years have consistently pointed to an impending shortage of CAOs as current municipal managers retire or leave the sector. Individual municipalities and municipal associations have also indicated that the anticipated loss of senior municipal managers is a key area of concern.

The program was reintroduced as a partnership between Municipal Affairs and municipalities – a fundamental shift from the original program – and was redesigned to meet the demands and expectations

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<sup>9</sup> As the program has only been in existence for three years, it is impossible to determine whether the third goal which addresses retention of interns is been met at this time.

identified by municipalities. Individual municipal managers were directly involved in the redesign of the program.

The program was reintroduced on a pilot basis in 2002 and was reviewed by an independent evaluator. This review concluded that the program assisted municipalities to attract and retain qualified people for municipal management and was well-supported by the municipalities that participated in the pilot. This review made a number of recommendations with respect to provincial commitment to municipal internships and program delivery, most of which have been implemented by Municipal Affairs over the past two years.

The input received through this review validates that the program assists municipalities to respond to a defined need, the attraction of new managers to help replace outgoing CAOs. The CAOs – those who have hosted interns as well as those who have not participated in the program over the past three years – confirm that the program is definitely required. They emphasize that while many of them already have succession plans in place within their municipalities, the ability to access the program is welcomed and appreciated.

The program seeks to accomplish three, inter-related objectives:

- Assist Alberta municipalities in their succession planning efforts to recruit, train and retain competent municipal employees who can progress into leadership positions;
- Encourage more individuals to enter the local government field and offer recent graduates who are interested in a career in municipal administration the opportunity to have first hand, real life, practical experience and training in the Alberta municipal environment; and
- Focus on retention of interns in the local government field as part of a successful succession planning strategy.

While it is clearly meeting the first two objectives, it would be premature to suggest that it is accomplishing the third. While the majority of interns interviewed during the course of the review indicated that their interest in and ability to work within the local government sector have increased

as a result of their participation in the program, the question of longer-term retention cannot be adequately addressed at this juncture.

### **Recommendation 1**

Municipal Affairs may want to review the intent of the third objective, especially in relation to its capacity to influence the retention of municipal managers over time. While the department may offer and deliver the program in a manner that assists municipalities to address succession planning and encourages post-secondary graduates to consider careers in local government, it will likely not have the same level of influence on retention within the municipal management sector over the long-run.

### **Recommendation 2**

Municipal Affairs may also want to consider the development of an annual performance measurement and reporting system for the program. It is clear from the review that while awareness of the program is relatively high within the local government sector, many municipalities are interested in learning more about the actual impact of the program. The development of an annual performance measurement system would enable Municipal Affairs to consistently monitor and report on the program's progress with respect to intended and unintended impacts, stakeholder satisfaction and costs and benefits.

## **4.2 PROGRAM CONTEXT**

While the program is designed to ensure consistency across individual internships, it is flexible enough to meet local needs and priorities and personal interests.

### **4.2.1 Size of Host Municipalities**

It is currently available to all municipalities with populations between 700 and 75,000<sup>10</sup>. Municipal Affairs may want to review the eligibility requirements for the program. This review identified that there are a variety of opinions about the appropriate or optimum size of a host municipality. Many stakeholders noted that population should not be a factor in determining eligibility for the program as long as potential hosts can ensure they will meet the program delivery requirements. Other

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<sup>10</sup> Municipalities with populations outside of this range that have participated in the program since 2002 are also eligible.

stakeholders emphasized that relatively small or large municipalities may not be well-positioned to provide interns with the requisite balance of training and work experience. Most of these stakeholders suggested a narrower population range, typically between 5,000 and 20,000.

### **Recommendation 3**

This review recommends that Municipal Affairs review the minimum population threshold of 700. While there is no evidence to suggest that a municipality of this size could not successfully host an intern, it is unlikely that a small municipality would be able to provide an intern with direct exposure to all of the municipal governance and service delivery components included in the program. As is unlikely that a very small municipality will be able to “compete” with larger municipalities to host an intern, it would be prudent to raise the minimum population threshold. Municipal Affairs should work with a cross-section of partner municipalities to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of raising the threshold to somewhere between 2,500 and 5,000.

### **Recommendation 4**

Municipal Affairs should also adjust the maximum threshold upwards to 100,000 to ensure that cities like Red Deer and Lethbridge and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo remain eligible to host interns for the foreseeable future. As part of this adjustment, Municipal Affairs may want to contact the cities of Calgary and Edmonton and offer to share with them information on the program. Given their size, Calgary and Edmonton should be working to develop their own internship programs.

#### **4.2.2 “Shared Hosting”**

### **Recommendation 5**

Municipal Affairs should consider options to encourage “shared hosting” arrangements in the future. To date, there have been two such arrangements, one between the towns of Jasper and Hinton and the other between the towns of Trochu and Three Hills and Kneehill County. Feedback from participants in these internships was very positive. Shared hosting arrangements may be a viable approach to opening up the program to smaller municipalities. Shared hosting responsibilities may also encourage stronger levels of regional or urban-rural cooperation and communication and would be consistent with Municipal

Affairs's ongoing encouragement and support of regional approaches to municipal service delivery and cost and revenue sharing.

### **Recommendation 6**

Municipal Affairs should also consider options for encouraging regional or multi-jurisdictional hosting arrangements. These options could range from highlighting the possibility of such arrangements within current marketing initiatives to defining that one or more of the available internships each year will be awarded to regional or multi-jurisdictional hosts.

## **4.3 PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

The Municipal Internship Program is currently being delivered in a very efficient and effective manner. The training materials and program website are particularly well developed and add considerable strength to the overall delivery of the program. As noted above, interns and host CAOs and supervisors are very satisfied with these components of the program. Alumni emphasize that the training materials and website represent significant improvements over the program which they participated in. Municipal Affairs reviews and refines these components of the program on an ongoing basis and is encouraged to continue doing so in the future.

### **4.3.1 Program Marketing**

As noted above, the program has been well marketed. Awareness of the program, its objectives and many of its components is relatively high within Alberta's local government sector.

### **Recommendation 7**

Municipal Affairs should review the focus of its marketing initiatives with the objective of shifting from an awareness message to an impact message. In other words, Municipal Affairs should shift its marketing efforts away from simply advertising the existence of the program to highlighting the positive impacts it is creating. This type of messaging may encourage more CAOs and municipalities<sup>11</sup> to get involved in the program.

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that while the online survey of non-participating CAOs indicated a high level of program awareness, it also illustrated that just over half indicated that they have considered hosting an intern.

### **4.3.2 Funding – Hosts and Interns**

The current level of funding provided through the program for intern salaries and support costs is appropriate. The number of municipalities and individuals applying to be program hosts and interns, respectively, suggests that the program funding levels are appropriate. While many municipalities indicated during the review process that they “top up” the financial support provided to interns, the majority of hosts believe that the current level of funding from Municipal Affairs is adequate. The majority of interns also indicated support for the current level of program funding.

#### **Recommendation 8**

Municipal Affairs may want to consider applying a cost of living index to the level of support on an annual or periodic basis to ensure that it continues to be sufficient.

#### **Recommendation 9**

Municipal Affairs may also want to undertake a review of the current policy of providing all municipalities with the same level of support. Intern salaries may have to vary by location to ensure that municipalities with particularly high costs of living remain attractive to potential interns. As training costs, travel in particular, vary across municipalities, it may be necessary to provide additional support to particular municipalities to ensure equitability amongst hosts.

### **4.3.3 Funding – Program Delivery**

The current level of funding and resources dedicated to the delivery of the program is adequate to support approximately ten interns on an annual basis. Expansion of the program – through a greater number of internships or the addition of other program components such as in-place training for municipal employees – would not be financially viable at existing funding levels.

#### **Recommendation 10**

Municipal Affairs should, however, review the advantages and disadvantages of both types of program expansion. It is likely that interest in the internship program will continue to grow and that the demand for interns will continue to increase as more and more municipal administrators retire or leave the sector. It is also clear from the information provided by CAOs and alumni during the course of the

review that there is significant demand for internship programs aimed at recruiting and training financial officers, assessors, planners and municipal engineers. Finally, there is also a growing demand for training programs that would be available all municipal employees.

Municipal Affairs's consideration of program expansion to meet any of these demands should carefully consider the impact that any change in program focus or delivery would have on the implementation of the existing program. As emphasized time and again in this review, the existing program is effective and efficient and meets a clearly defined need. Any change in program focus or delivery has the potential to jeopardize the ongoing program.

#### **4.3.4 Length of Internships**

Internships are designed to last a full year. This provides an intern with an opportunity to experience a complete "cycle" in the life of a municipality and sufficient time to gain exposure to a broad range of municipal programs and services.

Input received from the four stakeholder groups confirms an interest in lengthening the term of a typical internship to two years. Almost two-thirds of the host CAOs and supervisors indicated that they would be supportive of such a change. Half of the interns, alumni and CAOs who have not participated in the program over the past three years expressed a similar opinion.

#### **Recommendation 11**

Municipal Affairs is informally reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of two-year internships. This review has considered many of the suggestions and concerns identified by stakeholders during this course of this review. Municipal Affairs should continue to review this question using a more formal evaluative approach. Consideration should be given to implementing, as a pilot project, a limited number of two-year internships. Municipal Affairs would be well advised to work with experienced host municipalities and former interns to design the parameters of the two-year internships.

Delivery options for two-year internships may include interns:

- working in a larger municipality for their first year and a smaller municipality for their second year;

- taking a generalist approach in the their first year before assuming a specialization in the second year; and
- following the existing program for a year before assuming an acting or assistant CAO internship position for a year.

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## 5. SUMMARY

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The Municipal Internship Program is sponsored by Municipal Affairs in partnership with Alberta's municipalities. It is designed to attract recent post-secondary graduates to the field of municipal administration. The program provides funding and training resources to selected Alberta municipalities to hire and train interns over a one-year period.

The objectives of the new Municipal Internship Program are to:

- Assist Alberta municipalities in their succession planning efforts to recruit, train and retain competent municipal employees who can progress into leadership positions;
- Encourage more individuals to enter the local government field and offer recent graduates who are interested in a career in municipal administration the opportunity to have first hand, real life, practical experience and training in the Alberta municipal environment; and
- Focus on retention of interns in the local government field as part of a successful succession planning strategy.

In March 2005, Municipal Affairs engaged Nichols Applied Management to conduct a review of the new Municipal Internship Program. The project review was designed to include an assessment:

- from the perspective of the various client groups of those aspects of the program that are working well and those that are in need of improvement or modification;
- of the program's impact on succession planning within Alberta municipalities;
- of the stated objectives of the program; and
- of the efficiency and effectiveness of the structure, content and delivery of the program.

Based on the input received from multiple sets of stakeholders and analysis of program support and background documents, Nichols Applied Management concludes that the program is:

- meeting a clearly identified need within the local government sector in Alberta;
- attracting high quality interns within in a very competitive job market;
- accomplishing two of the three objectives that were established when the program was reintroduced;
- well integrated across the province, properly structured to provide consistency, yet flexible enough to meet local needs and priorities and personal interests; and
- efficiently and effectively implemented.

Nichols Applied Management recommends that Municipal Affairs consider a number of options designed to improve the program in the future, including:

- a review of the program's objectives;
- new marketing approaches;
- different eligibility requirements for host municipalities;
- encouragement of shared hosting opportunities;
- funding levels and program length; and
- program expansion.