Municipal Needs Survey Report

Hancock County Planning Commission

2023

Purpose

This survey was conducted to identify municipal priorities, capacity gaps, and preferred forms of technical assistance in order to guide HCPC's work program, service delivery, and pursuit of funding opportunities that align with community needs. It also serves as a baseline assessment to support HCPC's organizational rebuilding and re-establishment of services following a period of limited capacity, and to ensure future efforts are responsive to municipalities across the region.

Key Findings

Housing and climate change were the two most significant concerns identified by municipalities, with frequent references to housing availability and affordability, sea level rise, and storm impacts. Respondents also reported limited staff and volunteer capacity and growing infrastructure needs. There is strong demand for grant research, writing, and management services, along with regional facilitation, training, and networking opportunities.

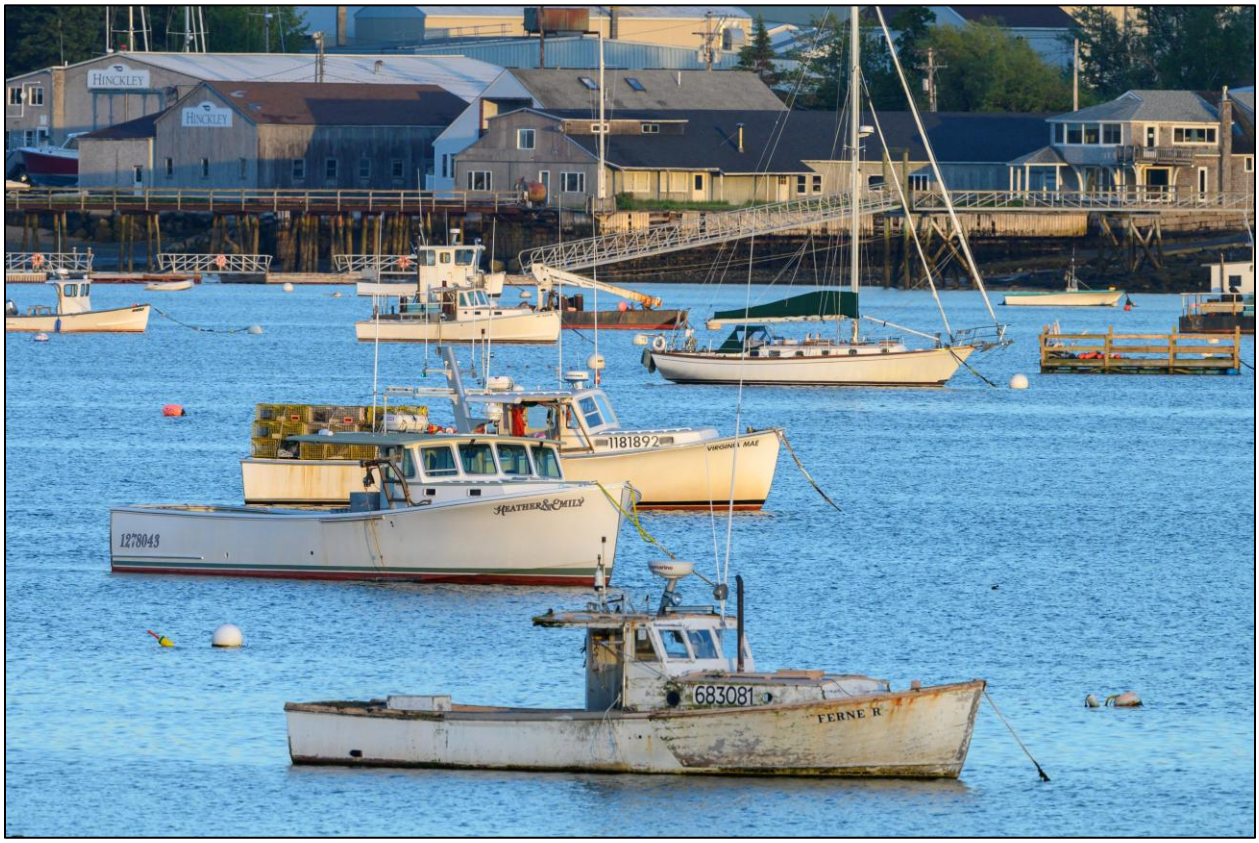


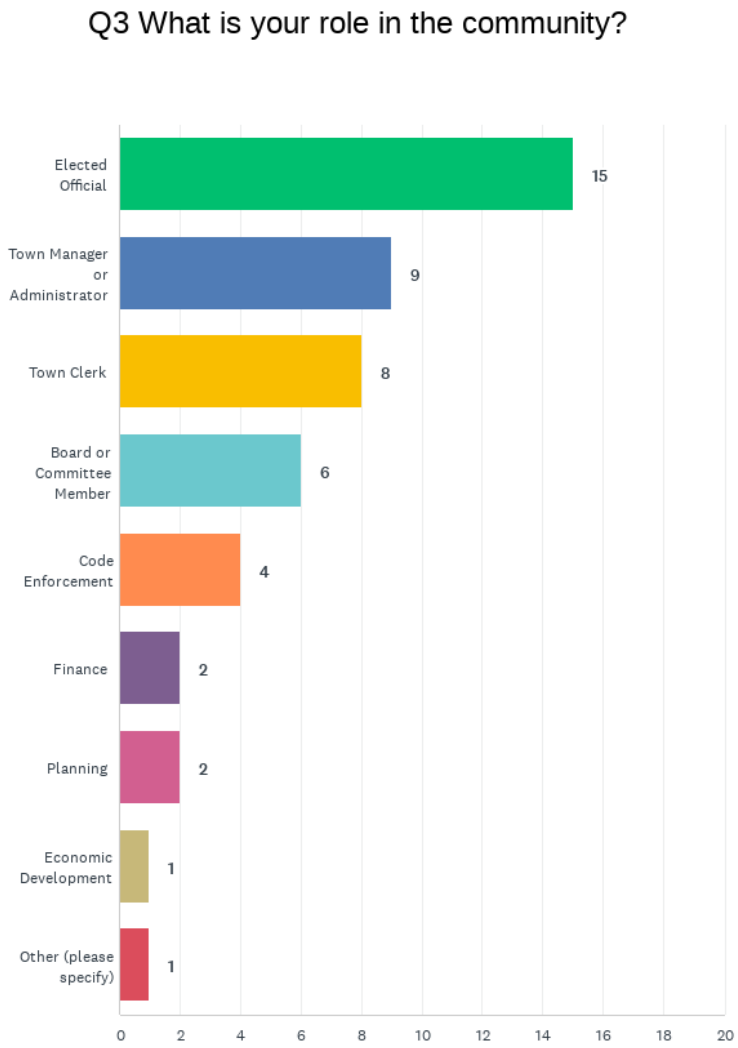
Photo by Greg Piduch

Methodology

The Municipal Needs Survey (conducted with Survey Monkey) received responses between June 2023 to January 2024. A link to the survey was distributed through the HCPC newsletter and in staff email signatures. We also targeted outreach towards municipal officials and staff by email; follow-up emails were sent to known municipal contacts for towns that had yet to respond.

Response Rate

We received a total of 48 responses. Respondents came from 33 of 39 municipalities in the Hancock County Planning Commission's service area (38 municipalities in Hancock County and Isle au Haut in Knox County)—or 85% of HCPC municipalities.



Municipality	Responses
Amherst	1
Aurora	0
Bar Harbor	1
Blue Hill	3
Brooklin	2
Brooksville	1
Bucksport	2
Castine	3
Cranberry Isles	2
Dedham	1
Deer Isle	2
Eastbrook	1
Ellsworth	2
Franklin	1
Frenchboro	1
Gouldsboro	1
Great Pond	2
Hancock	1
Isle au Haut	1
Lamoine	1
Lucerne	0
Mariaville	1
Mount Desert	1
Orland	1
Osborn	0
Otis	0
Penobscot	1
Sedgwick	1
Sorrento	1
Southwest Harbor	1
Stonington	0
Sullivan	2
Surry	3
Swan's Island	1
Tremont	1
Trenton	1
Verona Island	0
Waltham	2
Winter Harbor	2
Total	**48**

Regional Collaboration

How often do you work with neighboring municipalities to solve problems? Share examples.

Respondents most commonly answered “mutual aid agreements” and “various environmental issues.” Five respondents noted they participated in regular meetings regarding collaboration, such as the Mount Desert Island League of Towns. Five respondents shared that they regularly share and receive general information from neighboring municipalities. Other responses included broadband, recreation, transportation, solid waste, education, animal control, public utilities, and code enforcement. Forty four (44) participants responded to the question.

Municipal Concerns

What are your top concerns for your town’s future?

Housing was the top concern across the board, followed closely by climate change, specifically sea level rise and storms. Other major concerns participants addressed are listed below. Forty-three (43) participants responded to the question.

Land Use

- Housing availability
- Land use and zoning, specifically related to sustainable development
- Maintaining and increasing public water access

Economic development

- Aging populations and ability to attract young families
- Availability of childcare

Municipalities

- Maintaining municipal infrastructure, particularly roads, bridges, and municipal buildings
- Municipal capacity, both staff and volunteer, particularly for public safety needs, code enforcement, and municipal officials
- Navigating state regulations
- Maintaining community identity, particularly maintaining a stable and vibrant year-round community
- Solid waste and recycling

What are your current projects or interests?

Infrastructure and affordable housing projects were mentioned most, followed by ordinance review and comprehensive planning. The complete list of projects sorted by popularity is provided below. Thirty-six (36) participants responded to the question.

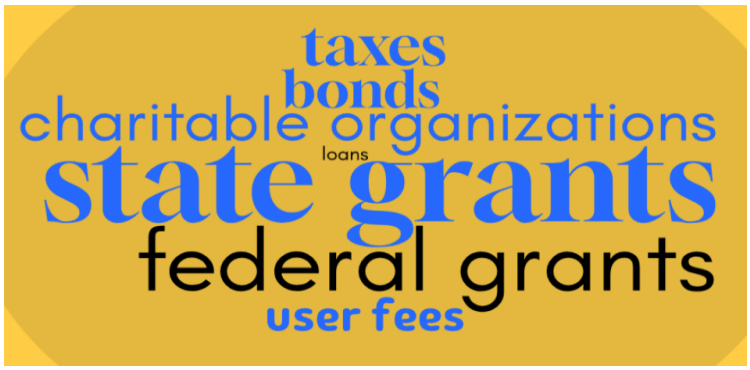
- Town infrastructure
- Housing
- Comprehensive planning
- Ordinance review
- Climate resilience
- Storm preparedness
- Working waterfront
- Transportation
- Community resources
- Storm preparedness
- Broadband
- Food security
- Shoreline protection
- Cannabis growth

What are the barriers and assistance needed?

Funding and personnel limitations were mentioned most, followed by resistance to change. Thirty-six (36) participants responded to the question about assistance. Grant assistance, planning, and regional collaboration were mentioned most, followed by regional collaboration. Thirty-nine (39) participants responded to the question about barriers.

What sources of funding would your community like to pursue?

Forty-three (43) participants responded, primarily selecting state and federal grants. A visual of the selections is represented below.



Services

What two to three services would you like to see from HCPC in the future?

Thirty (30) participants responded to the question. The most frequently mentioned services were grant, research, writing, and management, followed by facilitating regional collaboration and networking, and training and education. The complete list of services participants wish to see HCPC provide is listed below.

- Comprehensive planning
- Ordinance development and review
- Housing related services
- Solid waste related service
- Facilitating regional collaboration and networking
- Public engagement and meeting facilitation
- Training and education
- Grant research, writing, and management
- Advocacy to the State on behalf of municipalities
- Mapping
- Development and management of municipal websites

Communication

What would be the best method of service delivery?

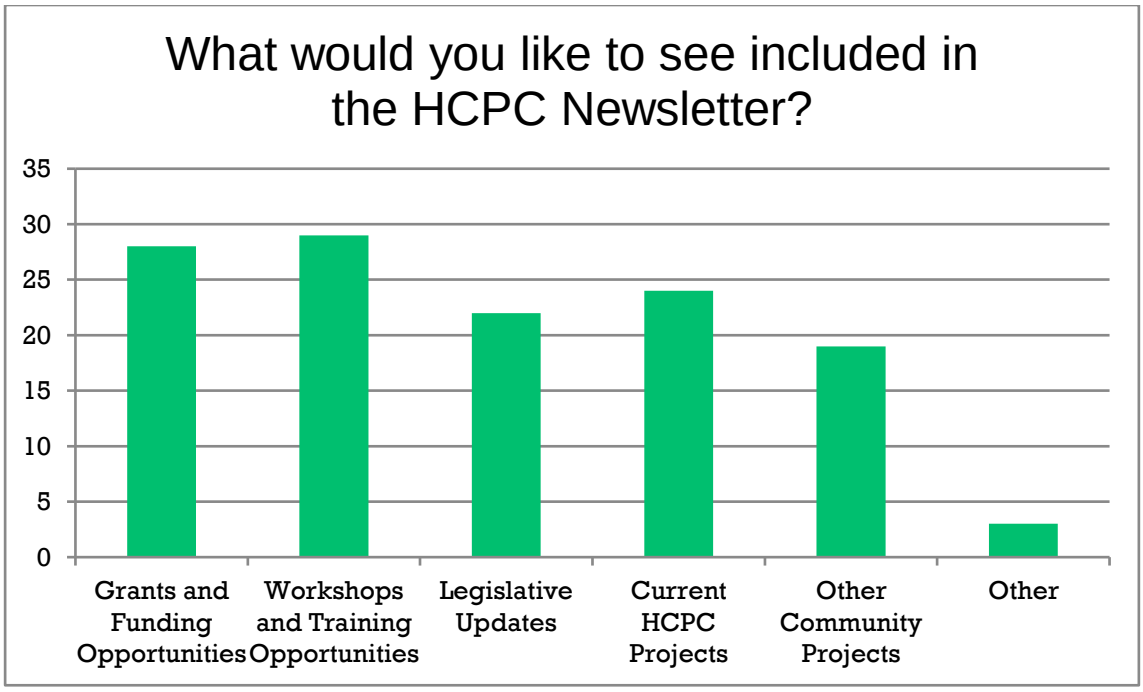
Availability during the day for answering questions via phone was the most preferred method of service delivery, followed by workshops and attending community meetings. Thirty-nine (39) participants responded to the question.

How would you prefer to learn about HCPC services and events?

Almost 70% of participants responded that they prefer monthly newsletters and email. Under "other," 2 participants responded that they would like to see HCPC host quarterly meetings. Forty-one (41) participants responded to the question.

What would you like to see included in the HCPC Newsletter?

Participants tended to favor all types of content that were offered as options, with the biggest emphasis placed on grants and funding opportunities, and workshops and training opportunities. One participant noted that they would like to see volunteer opportunities. Forty-two (42) participants responded to the question.



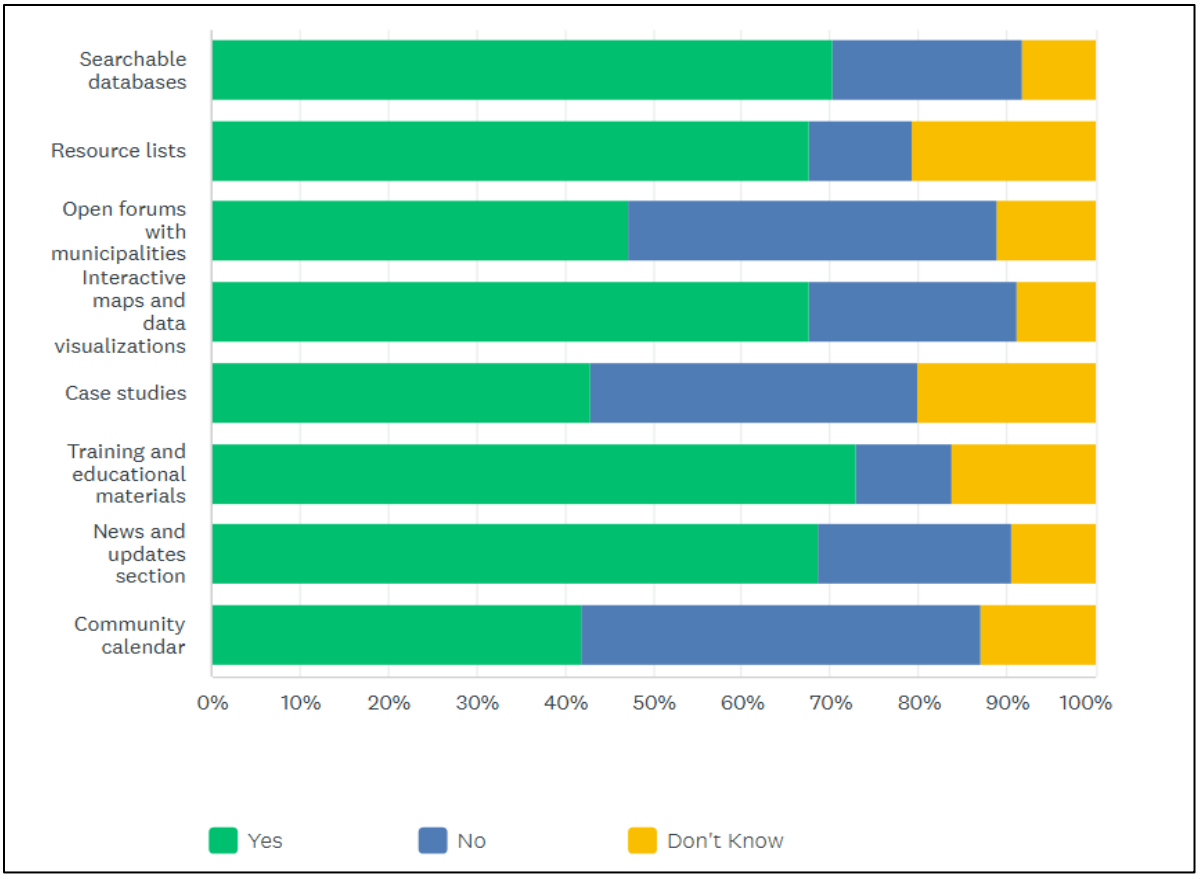
What can HCPC do to improve communication with municipalities?

Below is a summarized list of responses. Twenty-one (21) participants responded to the question.

- Attending regularly scheduled municipal meetings, particularly selectboard and planning board meetings
- Quarterly meetings with Hancock County leaders
- Hosting in-person workshops
- Direct phone calls to municipal officials and staff
- Send out direct emails to municipal officials and staff
- Shorter newsletter designed for municipal officials

Do you use the following online tools and resources?

Thirty-seven (37) participants responded to the question.



Other Concerns and Observations

What other concerns and observations do you wish to share with the Hancock County Planning Commission?

Only thirteen (13) participants responded to the question. Half the responses were of appreciation for HCPCs return, skilled grant writing, and strong website resources. Half related concern for the aging population and need for climate and storm resilience. Two (2) related concerns about HCPC's history and the need to rebuild trust. One requested connection with community non-profits as well as municipalities.