

MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY & TRANSITION REPORT™

Preparing Municipalities for Leadership Change, Governance
Renewal, and Organizational Stability

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Prepared for: **Municipal Leaders Across
Canada**

Prepared by:
KIRAH Executive Search & Leadership Advisory

A MESSAGE TO MUNICIPAL LEADERS



Municipalities across Canada are entering a period of significant transition.

Across provinces and regions, municipalities are preparing for leadership retirements, governance renewal, executive transitions, organizational change, and long-term service delivery pressures.

Municipalities that proactively plan for leadership continuity, succession readiness, and organizational alignment are better positioned to maintain momentum and continue delivering for their communities.

This report has been developed to support municipal leaders as they prepare for leadership transition and organizational continuity.

SIX FORCES SHAPING MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP

Six Forces Shaping Municipal Leadership

Canadian municipalities are navigating a period of significant transition. From executive retirements and governance change to increasing service demands and talent shortages, several factors are reshaping how municipalities approach leadership continuity and succession planning.

01

Executive Retirements

Many municipalities are preparing for the retirement of long-serving executives, creating both succession challenges and opportunities for renewal.

02

Governance Transition

Upcoming municipal elections may introduce new priorities, leadership styles, and expectations for administration.

03

Infrastructure & Growth

Population growth, housing demands, and infrastructure pressures continue to increase leadership complexity.

04

Talent Attraction Challenges

Municipalities are competing for a limited pool of experienced executive leaders across Canada.

05

Community Expectations

Residents expect continuity of services, transparency, and strong leadership regardless of political or administrative transitions.

06

Organizational Resilience

Strong organizations focus on continuity, knowledge transfer, and leadership development before vacancies occur.

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES FACING MUNICIPALITIES

Municipalities across Canada face three interconnected risk areas that threaten leadership continuity and organizational stability.



01

Leadership Risk

CAO retirements
Director turnover
Executive vacancies

02

Governance Risk

New councils
Shifting priorities
Policy transitions

03

Talent Risk

Smaller candidate pools
Competition between
municipalities
Recruitment delays

HOW MUNICIPALITIES CAN PREPARE

Proactive strategies help municipalities maintain leadership continuity through periods of transition and governance change.

01

Succession Planning

Identify and develop internal candidates for critical leadership roles before vacancies occur.

02

Leadership Continuity Planning

Establish frameworks that ensure organizational stability regardless of individual departures.

03

Executive Recruitment Readiness

Build relationships and processes that enable rapid, high-quality executive searches when needed.

04

Knowledge Transfer

Capture institutional knowledge and ensure continuity of strategic priorities across leadership transitions.

05

Governance Alignment

Prepare administrative leadership to work effectively with new councils and shifting political priorities.

MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY ASSESSMENT

A strategic assessment of organizational readiness for leadership transition.

Strengths

- Stable leadership team
- Strong organizational culture
- Internal talent pipeline

Weaknesses

- Limited succession plans
- Retirement exposure
- Insufficient leadership development

Opportunities

- Leadership development programs
- Governance renewal
- Strategic recruitment partnerships

Risks

- Leadership vacancies
- Loss of institutional knowledge
- Governance transition disruption

THE KIRAH LEADERSHIP RISK EQUATION™

A proprietary framework for understanding and managing municipal leadership risk through four interconnected dimensions.

Culture

Organizational values, norms, and leadership expectations that shape how transitions are experienced.

Continuity

Preservation of institutional knowledge, relationships, and strategic direction during leadership change.

Context

External factors including political environment, community expectations, and regulatory landscape.

Capability

Internal talent readiness, development pipelines, and organizational capacity to manage transitions.

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION SCENARIOS

Every municipality will see themselves in one of these scenarios. Proactive planning determines whether transitions become crises or opportunities.

01

CAO Retirement

A long-serving CAO announces retirement, triggering succession planning needs across the senior leadership team.

02

New Council

A newly elected council brings different priorities and expectations, requiring administrative leadership to adapt quickly.

03

Executive Team Turnover

Multiple senior leaders depart within a short period, creating compounding knowledge and capacity gaps.

04

Rapid Community Growth

Population growth outpaces organizational capacity, demanding new leadership roles and expanded executive capability.

MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP TRANSITION TIMELINE



6 MO. Leadership Assessment

Evaluate leadership readiness, identify gaps, and prepare contingency plans for potential transitions.

100 DAYS Leadership Alignment

Align administrative leadership with new council priorities, establish working relationships, and confirm strategic direction.

12 MO. Succession Planning

Identify critical roles, assess internal talent depth, and begin developing succession candidates for key leadership positions.

TRANSITION Governance Transition Readiness

Prepare orientation materials, establish communication protocols, and ensure administrative continuity through periods of governance change.

THE MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE

Municipalities across Canada are facing a generational shift in executive leadership. Understanding the scope of this transition is essential for proactive planning, succession readiness, and organizational continuity.

MUNICIPALITIES

3,500+

Local governments across Canada

GOVERNMENT TYPES

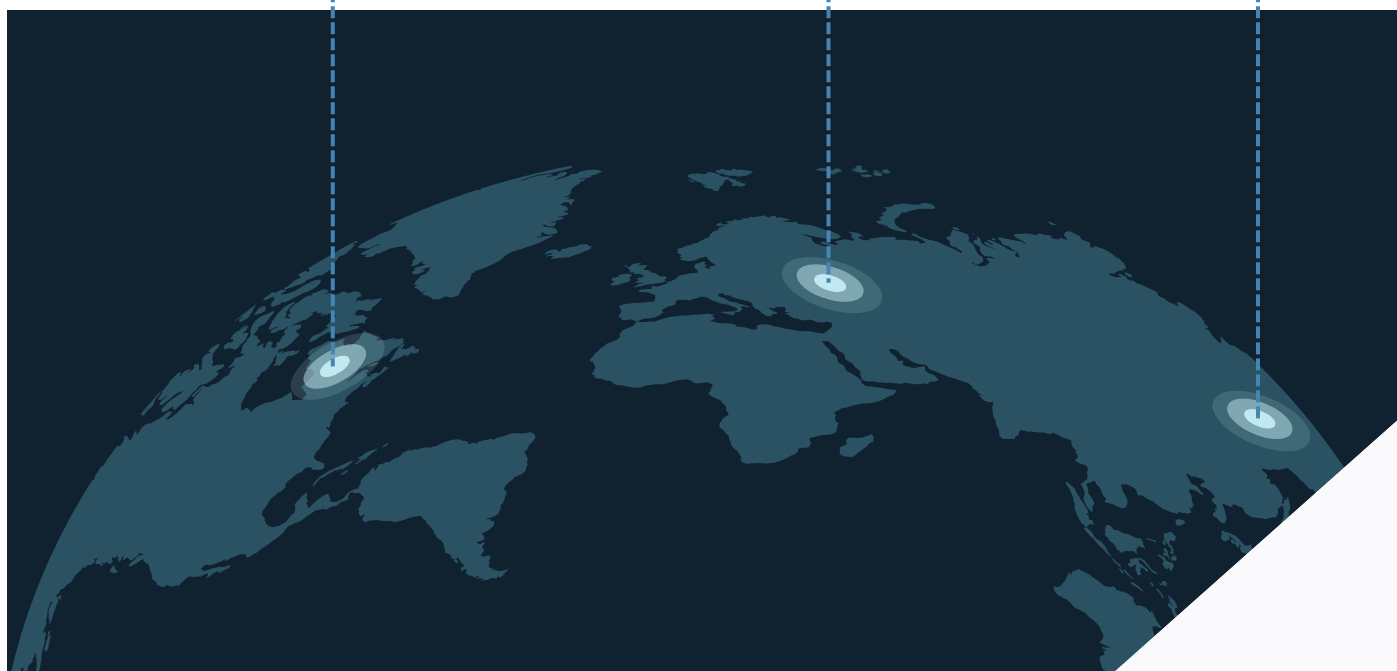
TYPES

National municipal associations, regional districts, counties, towns, cities, and Indigenous governments

AVG. AGE

GENERATIONAL SHIFT

Executive retirements and leadership transitions are increasing across the sector.



CRITICAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

Leadership continuity extends beyond the CAO office. Municipalities rely on a broad network of executive and senior leadership roles to deliver services, manage growth, maintain public trust, and execute strategic priorities. Vacancies in any of these positions can significantly impact organizational performance and community outcomes.

CAO / City Manager

Provides overall organizational leadership, strategic direction, governance alignment, and accountability between Council and Administration.

Deputy CAO / General Managers

Provide operational leadership across major portfolios and often serve as key succession candidates for executive leadership positions.

Finance Leadership

CFO, Treasurer, Director of Finance

Responsible for financial stewardship, budgeting, long term financial planning, risk management, and organizational sustainability.

Corporate Services & People Leadership

HR Directors, Corporate Services Leaders, Organizational Development Executives

Lead talent strategy, labour relations, workforce planning, leadership development, and organizational culture.

Infrastructure & Community Services

Public Works, Engineering, Planning, Utilities, Parks & Recreation, Transit

Manage essential services, capital projects, infrastructure renewal, community growth, and operational delivery.

Public Safety & Professional Services

Police Chiefs, Fire Chiefs, Emergency Management Leaders, Legal Counsel, Corporate Solicitors

Provide leadership in public safety, risk management, emergency response, governance, compliance, and legal matters.

Leadership continuity planning should encompass all executive and senior leadership roles that are critical to service delivery, governance, and community outcomes.

MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP READINESS SCORECARD

Rate your municipality on each dimension below. This self-assessment helps identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement in leadership continuity planning.



SCORECARD

10

Key Questions

ASSESSMENT AREAS

5

Readiness Levels



Assessment Dimensions

- Succession Planning
- Leadership Development
- Knowledge Transfer
- Recruitment Readiness
- Governance Alignment
- Executive Retention
- Internal Talent Pipeline
- Emergency Succession
- Board/Council Preparedness
- Strategic Talent Planning



WHAT STRONG MUNICIPALITIES DO DIFFERENTLY

01

PROACTIVE SUCCESSION

They identify and develop successors before vacancies occur, not after.

02

KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

They document institutional knowledge and create transfer protocols.

03

GOVERNANCE PREP

They prepare for council transitions with orientation and alignment processes.

High-performing municipalities share common practices that distinguish them from organizations that struggle during leadership transitions. These five best practices create organizational resilience and ensure continuity regardless of individual departures.

THE COST OF WAITING



Reactive Recruitment

Higher costs, longer timelines



Knowledge Loss

Institutional memory gaps



Leadership Gaps

Delayed projects, lost momentum

EXECUTIVE RECRUITMENT TRENDS



Current Municipal Market

The municipal executive recruitment landscape is shifting across Canada. Increased competition, longer search timelines, and evolving candidate expectations are reshaping how municipalities attract, assess, and retain senior leaders.

**AVERAGE SEARCH
TIMELINE**

4-6 Months

**CANDIDATE DROP-OFF
RISK**

30-40%



SUCCESSION PLANNING CHECKLIST



Practical Steps for Municipal Leaders

A structured approach to succession planning ensures leadership continuity and organizational stability during periods of transition.



Identify Critical Roles

CAO, Directors, CFO



Assess Bench Strength

Internal candidates



Develop Succession Plans

Documented plans per role



Knowledge Transfer Protocols

Capture institutional knowledge



LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY DASHBOARD

GOVERNANCE READINESS:

Assessment

Score

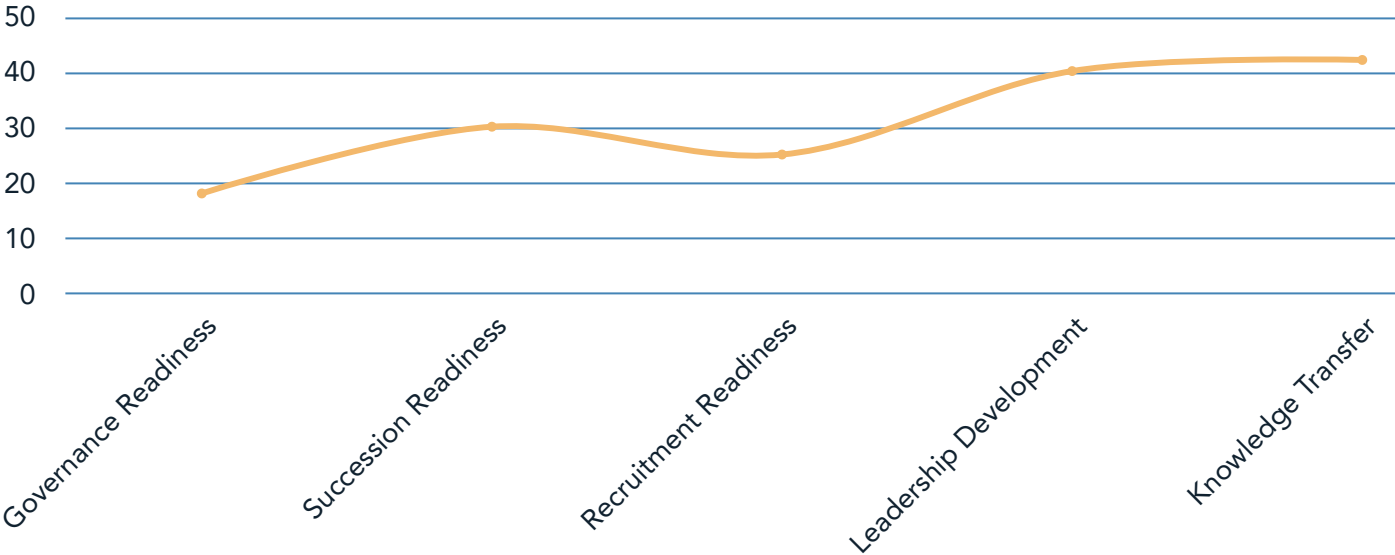
SUCCESSION READINESS VS RECRUITMENT READINESS



SUCCESSION READINESS
High

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
Active

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROGRESS:



THE KIRAH EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY FRAMEWORK™

A proprietary five-step model designed to help municipalities build sustainable leadership pipelines and ensure seamless executive transitions.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY

Map critical leadership roles and determine retirement timelines, vacancy risks, and succession gaps.

STEP 2: ASSESS

Evaluate internal bench strength, leadership competencies, and organizational readiness for transition.

STEP 3: PREPARE

Develop leadership pipelines, mentorship programs, and knowledge transfer protocols for key positions.

STEP 4: TRANSITION

Execute planned leadership transitions with structured onboarding, governance alignment, and stakeholder communication.

STEP 5: SUSTAIN

Monitor leadership effectiveness, maintain continuity plans, and adapt to evolving organizational needs.

MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES

Examples of outcomes municipalities can achieve when they invest in proactive leadership continuity planning and executive recruitment readiness.

WESTERN CANADIAN MUNICIPALITY

Seamless CAO transition with zero service disruption

MID-SIZED MUNICIPALITY

Built internal leadership pipeline across 9 director roles

FAST-GROWTH MUNICIPALITY

Recruited partial executive team within 6 months



ABOUT KIRAH

Executive Search & Leadership Advisory

KIRAH is a specialized executive search and leadership advisory firm serving municipalities, public sector organizations, Indigenous governments, and mission-driven organizations across Canada.

We help leaders prepare for executive transitions, build succession capacity, and recruit senior leaders who align with community values, governance expectations, and organizational culture.

Our approach combines deep sector expertise with a proprietary continuity framework designed specifically for the unique governance environment of Canadian municipalities.

Executive
Search

Leadership
Advisory

Succession
Planning

LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY IS A STRATEGIC RESPONSIBILITY

The strongest municipalities are not those that avoid change.
They are those that prepare for it.

As municipalities across Canada navigate leadership transition, governance renewal, and growing service delivery pressures, proactive planning today can strengthen organizational stability, leadership continuity, and community confidence tomorrow.

Proactive
Planning

Leadership
Continuity

Governance
Renewal

Prepared for Municipal Leaders Across Canada

This report has been prepared to support municipal leaders in discussions regarding leadership continuity, succession planning, governance transition, and executive recruitment readiness.

KIRAH Executive Search & Leadership Advisory welcomes opportunities to contribute to future conversations, executive roundtables, educational sessions, and thought leadership initiatives that support municipalities across Canada.

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