

Stronger together

OUR THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
2025•2027



Stronger together



Each of the 281 cities and towns in Washington state has a unique character that makes it a special place to live. While our communities face diverse challenges, there is more that unites us than divides us—and we know that we are stronger when we partner together.

Local government is the level of government closest to the people and the most accessible to our residents. Our municipal officials are innovative and responsive to community needs. They are doing more with fewer resources to provide the services that enable their communities to thrive.

It is more important than ever that our cities and towns have the tools they need to do their jobs well. That's where AWC comes in.

The Association of Washington Cities (AWC) was founded in 1933, and throughout our history, AWC has provided a strong, united voice for all of Washington's cities and towns.

At AWC, our members are at the heart of everything we do, and this strategic plan is driven by input from our members. Over the course of fall 2024 through winter 2025, we listened to and learned from our membership. We visited each of our AWC Board districts across the state and held meetings with our members to get their feedback. We conducted a membership survey, to which 450 city and town officials responded. And our board members conducted a strategic planning retreat to focus in on the areas where AWC can be most impactful.

The AWC Board has identified six broad goals, with three strategic priorities each, to be achieved over the next three years.

ADVOCATE

Build strong cities and a great state through impactful, nonpartisan advocacy.

INFORM

Collect and share information to facilitate well-informed, data-driven decision-making.

COMMUNICATE

Tell the stories of our cities and towns to promote increased understanding of and support for our issues.

EDUCATE

Provide professional development and training to ensure that Washington's municipal officials are knowledgeable and prepared to lead effectively.

SERVE

Deliver high-quality, trusted, cost-effective benefit programs and other services to Washington cities and towns.

ENGAGE

Build meaningful connections with and among our 281 cities and towns and the officials who serve in them in order to foster a culture of knowledge sharing and innovation and build unity in support of our common goals.

Underpinning these goals is a commitment of service and leadership from our board. These goals are aligned with AWC's mission and core beliefs, and in furtherance of our vision to be the national leader in programs, services, and policy impact.



Mission

The Association of Washington Cities builds connections between our state's diverse cities and towns, while providing our members with the support needed to thrive through delivery of data-driven education, nationally recognized pooling programs, and nonpartisan advocacy.

Vision

To be the national leader in programs, services, and policy impact.

**Together we are building strong cities,
and a great state.**

Core beliefs

Leadership

Supporting the development of highly competent and principled city leaders.

Excellence

Delivering innovative and effective programs, products, and services to our members.

Advocacy

Advocating on behalf of cities, towns, and local decision-making.

Diversity

Embracing the diversity of our membership, working toward equitable outcomes for all communities, modeling inclusivity, and ensuring that all our members feel a sense of belonging in our organization.

Education

Providing high-quality education, training, and professional development opportunities to give our members the tools to build sustainable and livable communities.

Responsiveness

Nimbly responding to member needs, critical issues, and unforeseen events in a timely and effective manner.

Service

Providing exceptional service to our members in all that we do.



Strategic goals





ADVOCATE

Build strong cities and a great state through impactful, nonpartisan advocacy.

- Educate legislators about the important work of cities and towns, how they are organized and funded, and the support they need to thrive.
- Create an advocacy “boot camp” for city and town elected officials and staff.
- Assist cities and towns in creating local and regional legislative agendas.



INFORM

Collect and share information to facilitate well-informed, data-driven decision-making.

- Modernize, update, and streamline the AWC website and other communications tools to ensure resources and program information are accessible and easy to find to better assist members in making well-informed, data-driven decisions.
- Consider alternatives to emails to deliver important information to our members, including intentional and strategic use of social media tools.
- Focus on the unique needs of small cities and towns, including creation of a small city hub with resources for staff and elected officials.



COMMUNICATE

Tell the stories of our cities and towns to promote increased understanding of and support for our issues.

- Craft clear, concise, nonpartisan messaging for municipal officials to use in communicating legislative priorities.
- Draft messaging about other issues impacting cities and towns using plain language to inform and educate our members, and that our members can use to inform and educate their communities.
- Provide tools and trainings to help city and town staff and elected officials improve their communications skills.



EDUCATE

Provide professional development and training to ensure that Washington’s municipal officials are knowledgeable and prepared to lead effectively.

- Strengthen and enhance the existing Elected Officials Essentials (EOE) and Certificate of Municipal Leadership (CML) programs by establishing a foundational program for newly elected officials and offering continuing education over a two-year period.
- Leverage partnerships with institutions of higher learning to provide next-level education for municipal officials, including exploration of certificate programs.
- Evaluate and enhance the AWC Annual Conference—identify gaps in offerings, create a feedback loop with presenters, and leverage the expertise of AWC’s Education and Training Advisory Committee (ETAC).



SERVE

Deliver high-quality, trusted, cost-effective benefit programs and other services to Washington cities and towns.

- Explore and assess opportunities to provide new, innovative, and relevant services to meet current and future needs of cities and towns.
- Explore new ways to support small cities and towns, balancing the opportunities provided by new technology and the benefits of personal connection.
- Continue to provide outstanding support to Member Pooling Programs and enhance marketing of AWC services to potential new members.



ENGAGE

Build meaningful connections with and among our 281 cities and towns and the officials who serve in them in order to foster a culture of knowledge sharing and innovation and build unity in support of our common goals.

- Provide opportunities for newer members to connect with mentors, and provide support and resources for experienced members to serve as effective mentors.
- Create new opportunities to connect members based on common interests, needs, and roles, and explore opportunities for affinity groups to ensure that members feel a sense of belonging.
- Identify, evaluate, and provide new ways to connect with members, and enhance our in-person presence throughout the state so that all cities and towns can be engaged with AWC.

Goal: ADVOCATE

Build strong cities and a great state through impactful, nonpartisan advocacy.



AWC advocates for our 281 cities and towns with the state legislature, executive branch, regulatory agencies, and at the federal level. Cities and towns are home to two-thirds of our state's residents, and the drivers of our vibrant economy. What is good for cities and towns is good for the state. We are proud that all 281 cities and towns in Washington are members of AWC, and we are strongest when we speak with one voice.

City officials in Washington state are nonpartisan, and so too is our advocacy. We pursue policy that is responsive to the needs of our communities and advocate for the issues that our residents care most about.

Our advocacy is driven by our members, for our members.



AWC's advocacy is grounded by our Statement of Policy, which was adopted by our membership at the 2024 Business Meeting, held in conjunction with the AWC Annual Conference. Our City Legislative Priorities are driven by feedback from our members, developed by our Legislative Priorities Committee comprised of representatives from each of our 14 board districts across the state, and adopted by our 25-member Board of Directors.

We conduct detailed analysis for our members on bills that would impact cities and towns. Through our *Legislative Bulletin* and bill tracker, we keep local officials up to date on legislation impacting cities and towns. Through our weekly briefings with membership during session, we ensure that our advocacy is aligned with the needs of our communities. And through our trainings, reports, and data collection, we empower our members to advocate on behalf of their jurisdictions and their residents.

In 2025-2027, we will build upon our strong advocacy with three strategic priorities:

- Educate legislators about the important work of cities and towns, how they are organized and funded, and the support they need to thrive.
- Create an advocacy boot camp for city and town elected officials and staff.
- Assist cities and towns in creating local and regional legislative agendas.



Goal: INFORM

Collect and share information to facilitate well-informed, data-driven decision-making.

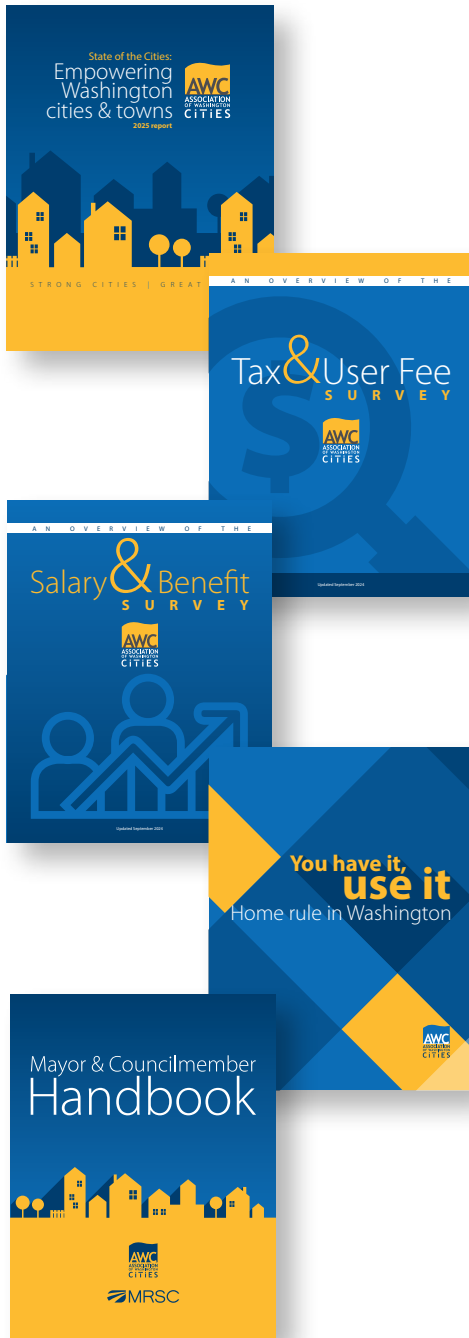
AWC collects data and publishes reports to ensure that our members can make well-informed, data-driven decisions. This work also ensures that our advocacy is grounded in fact and addresses the most pressing needs of our cities and towns.

- Our *State of the Cities* reports do a deep dive into the conditions that impact our cities and towns and provide a look ahead at what challenges and opportunities city leaders must anticipate in the future. These reports cover topics including public safety, infrastructure, housing, workforce, and transportation.
- AWC conducts the Tax and User Fee Survey every two years to help local officials make data-informed decisions on budgeting and rate setting.
- Each year, AWC conducts a comprehensive survey of salaries and benefits of employees of Washington municipalities to provide comparable data for city officials to assist with determining wages and benefits for their staff.
- Our *Home rule in Washington* report outlines the history of local decision-making (home rule) in our state; examines the case law underlying the interpretation of city powers; and provides background on preemption of local powers by the state.
- Our *Mayor and Councilmember Handbook*, published in partnership with the Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) serves as a reference guide for mayors and councilmembers.

These publications and many more resources can be found on the AWC website. In addition, AWC keeps our members informed about the latest issues through our newsletters and social media posts. And our knowledgeable staff are always available to answer questions from mayors, councilmembers, and staff.

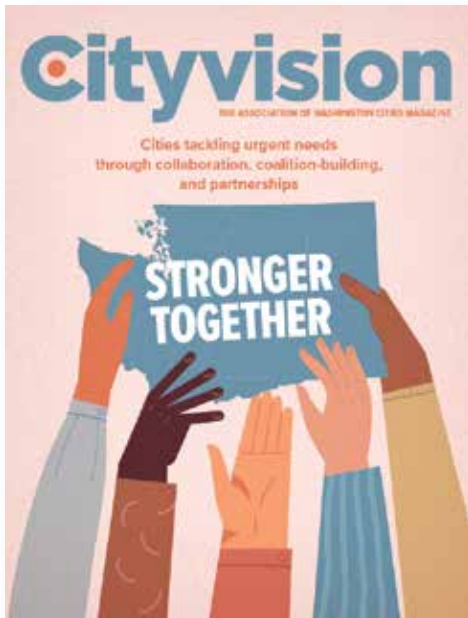
The AWC Board identified three strategic priorities to inform our members in the coming years:

- Modernize, update, and streamline the AWC website and other communications tools to ensure resources and program information are accessible and easy to find, to better assist members in making well-informed, data-driven decisions.
- Consider alternatives to emails to deliver important information to our members, including intentional and strategic use of social media tools.
- Focus on the unique needs of small cities and towns, including creation of a small city hub with resources for staff and elected officials.



Goal: COMMUNICATE

Tell the stories of our cities and towns to promote increased understanding of and support for our issues.



Effective communication is crucial for fostering understanding and support for the issues important to cities and towns. Cities and towns provide the infrastructure and services that sustain our state's vibrant economy. They provide our most important services, like police and fire protection, local roads and sidewalks, and safe, clean drinking water. Our cities and towns are home to two-thirds of residents in our state, and the health and vitality of our cities and towns is key to the high quality of life that Washington residents enjoy. By telling the stories of Washington cities and towns, AWC highlights their indispensable role in residents' lives and emphasizes that local governments are best suited to address the unique needs of their communities.

AWC tells these stories through our publications and reports, podcasts, and in our *Cityvision* magazine. Our communications team also supports the work of our education and events staff, pooling programs, and advocacy team.

Our advocacy is most effective when it is backed up by facts and data and supported by the compelling stories of how policies make a real-world impact on the residents in our cities and towns. Local elected officials are the most trusted and accessible government officials and are the ones most likely to hear directly from their constituents about how policies affect them. It is essential that city and town officials have the tools they need to communicate effectively with their constituents and to communicate the needs of their constituents to our partners at the state and federal level.

To that end, the AWC Board identified three key strategic priorities to drive our communications work in the coming years:

- Craft clear, concise, nonpartisan messaging for municipal officials to use in communicating legislative priorities.
- Draft messaging about other issues impacting cities and towns using plain language to inform and educate our members, and that our members can use to inform and educate their communities.
- Provide tools and trainings to help city and town staff and elected officials improve their communications skills.

Goal: EDUCATE

Provide professional development and training to ensure that Washington's municipal officials are knowledgeable and prepared to lead effectively.

Councilmembers and mayors are not “professional politicians.” They bring to the table a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences, and many work full-time jobs in addition to their public service. But just because they are not professional politicians doesn't mean that professional development isn't important for them. AWC's educational programs help local elected officials navigate complex laws and mandates and give them the tools to be effective leaders.

AWC helps our members start off on the right foot. Each election year, before city and town officials are even sworn into office, we offer our full-day Elected Officials Essentials (EOE) Workshop for newly elected officials. This popular training is offered both online and in person at various locations around the state, and features training on the roles and responsibilities of councilmembers and mayors, open government, and effective meeting facilitation. We keep the EOE training going with online trainings on budgeting, land use, ethics, and other basics of local government.

As our elected officials' experience grows, our training grows with them. Our members can pursue a Certificate of Municipal Leadership (CML) by obtaining 30 training credits in areas such as land use and infrastructure, budgeting and fiscal management, public safety, leadership development, and other topics that are critical for our city councilmembers and mayors. For those elected officials who want to take their leadership development to the next level, we offer an Advanced Certificate of Municipal Leadership.

We also offer trainings geared toward the specific roles and needs of our members. These include our popular Mayors Exchanges, which combine educational sessions with peer-to-peer learning and sharing of best practices. And our immersive Washington Collaborative Elected Leaders Institute (WA-CELI) is designed to equip leaders with collaborative leadership skills to govern across differences, improve civic engagement, build trust, and address the complex challenges facing Washington cities and towns.

Councilmembers and mayors are busy people, so we offer education and training in a variety of formats, from online trainings to in-person workshops, to our multi-day conferences such as City Action Days and Annual Conference. Whatever our members' specific goals, our educational programs help them achieve their broader goals of providing efficient, effective, responsive public services to their constituents.

To improve our already-outstanding educational offerings, the AWC Board has identified three strategic priorities:

- Strengthen and enhance the existing Elected Officials Essentials (EOE) and Certificate of Municipal Leadership (CML) programs by establishing a foundational program for newly elected officials and offering continuing education over a two-year period.
- Leverage partnerships with institutions of higher learning to provide next-level education for municipal officials, including exploration of certificate programs.
- Evaluate and enhance the AWC Annual Conference—identify gaps in offerings, create a feedback loop with presenters, and leverage the expertise of AWC's Education and Training Advisory Committee (ETAC).



Goal: SERVE

Deliver high-quality, trusted, cost-effective benefit programs and other services to Washington cities and towns.

Throughout our history, when cities and towns have faced challenges, AWC has answered the call. We provide services that are tailored to meet the needs of cities and towns with unmatched service at affordable rates. We offer employee benefit, risk management, workplace safety, and other services to ensure financial stability for our members:

- The AWC Employee Benefit Trust is Washington's largest local government benefit pool, providing comprehensive health care coverage with outstanding service at a cost that meets members' needs. Our WellCity discount can save cities and towns 2% on their medical premiums.
- The AWC Risk Management Service Agency (RMSA) provides comprehensive risk management to reduce insurance costs and minimize loss exposures through risk-sharing and joint indemnification. We help our members avoid and mitigate risks through training and on-site assessments, offer liability and property financial protection, and provide claims management and litigation support.
- The AWC Workers' Comp Retro Program provides training and tools to lower risks for on-the-job injuries. Our focus on injury prevention and safety reduces overall workers' compensation costs for our members. Members of the Retro Pool can earn refunds on L&I premiums and enjoy greater predictability of claims costs.
- The AWC Drug & Alcohol Consortium helps members stay in compliance with federal drug and alcohol testing requirements.
- The AWC GIS Consortium gives small cities and towns flexible access to GIS services to increase internal efficiency, support community engagement and data transparency, and improve the delivery of services to residents.
- AWC JobNet helps cities and towns recruit quality employees with hundreds of public sector job postings and over 9,000 visits per month.

AWC is working proactively to identify and address the current and future needs of cities and towns. To that end, the AWC Board adopted three strategic priorities, which complement the separate strategic plans adopted by the Trust and RMSA boards:

- Explore and assess opportunities to provide new, innovative, and relevant services to meet current and future needs of cities and towns.
- Explore new ways to support small cities and towns, balancing the opportunities provided by new technology and the benefits of personal connection.
- Continue to provide outstanding support to Member Pooling Programs and enhance marketing of AWC services to potential new members.



Goal: ENGAGE



Build meaningful connections with and among our 281 cities and towns and the officials who serve in them in order to foster a culture of knowledge sharing and innovation and build unity in support of our common goals.

Everything we do at AWC is driven by our members, for our members. Engagement with and among our members is key to our success as an organization.

All of our programs and services are strengthened by our membership engagement efforts.

Strong membership engagement ensures that our advocacy is grounded in the needs of all 281 of our cities and towns. And our advocacy efforts are stronger when our members are on the same page and speak with one voice.

We provide the highest value to our member cities and towns when we truly understand the challenges they are facing. Being actively engaged with our membership helps us to identify the most pressing needs of our communities and to carefully tailor our services to meet those needs.

Strong membership engagement helps us to provide timely and relevant educational opportunities for our members at our conferences and events. And when our members attend our conferences and events, it helps them to build meaningful connections to their peers who can serve as a source of support in their challenging roles.

While we support today's leaders, we are also working to ensure that we have a strong leadership pipeline to lead the organization into the future.

We engage with our members through our in-person events such as conferences, Mayors Exchanges, district meetings, and Small City Connectors. And through our leadership training programs, including the Washington Collaborative Elected Leaders Institute (WA-CELI), we are not only building connections among our members and helping them to understand the challenges faced by cities and towns across the state—we are also training our leaders to engage more effectively with their communities.

In our 2024 membership survey, we heard from our members that they want more in-person opportunities to learn and connect, and that they want us to meet them where they are. To that end, our board identified three strategic priorities to advance our goal of engagement:

- Provide opportunities for newer members to connect with mentors, and provide support and resources for experienced members to serve as effective mentors.
- Create new opportunities to connect members based on common interests, needs, and roles, and explore opportunities for affinity groups to ensure that members feel a sense of belonging.
- Identify, evaluate, and provide new ways to connect with members, and enhance our in-person presence throughout the state so that all cities and towns can be engaged with AWC.



The AWC Board's leadership is critical to ensuring our success in achieving these goals.

LEAD

The AWC Board is united by a shared commitment to our members, our communities, and our state, and has an important role to play in supporting the goals in the 2025-2027 strategic plan.

As leaders, the AWC Board will:

- Engage in continuous reflection on the needs of our membership.
- Safeguard the long-term sustainability of AWC.
- Listen to, capture, and share the feedback heard from our districts, and ensure that all voices are heard when establishing shared goals and priorities.







Strong cities,
great state





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