

Identifying Personnel Needs, Resources, and Deficits Present in Small Municipal Governments in Washington State



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Project Background

The Association of Washington Cities (AWC) builds connections between cities and towns through education, pooling programs, and nonpartisan advocacy.

Founded in 1933, AWC is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan corporation that represents Washington's cities and towns before the state legislature, the executive branch and regulatory agencies.

Membership is voluntary. However, AWC consistently maintains **100%** participation from Washington's **281** cities and towns. There are 281 cities and towns in Washington - over half of those are small (under 5,000 in population) and about half of those (75+) have a population of under 1,000.

A 25-member Board of Directors oversees the association's activities.

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Project Motivation

Client Motivation: Small, rural communities in Washington face unique challenges in providing infrastructure and services to their residents, with extremely limited resources and limited staff capacity.

AWC aims to identify their top unmet needs, review best practices from other state municipal leagues in serving rural communities and review services and resources being provided by other partners in Washington.

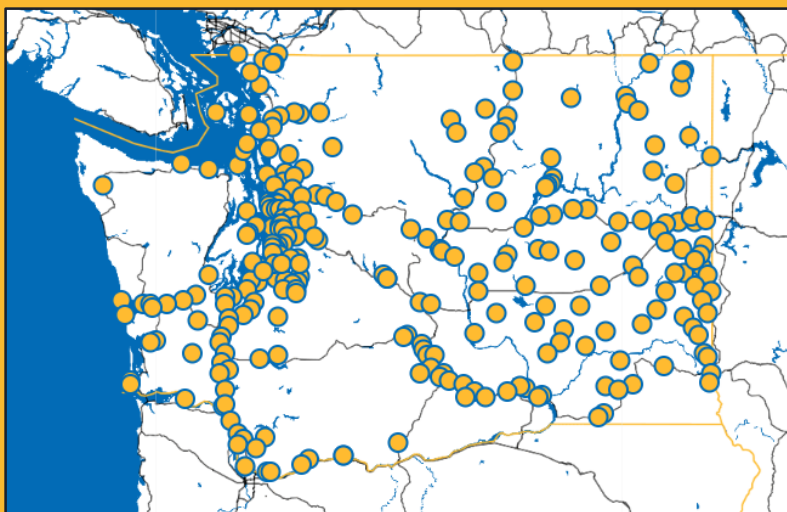
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Research Question

Research Question	Research Category	Secondary Research Questions
What needs, deficits and resources are present in small municipal governments under 5,000 in population within Washington and how can AWC provide personnel support?	Needs	What are the most common challenges faced by small municipalities under 5,000 in population in Washington State in terms of governance and resource allocation?
	Resources	What existing resources and best practices are available to small municipalities in Washington State, and how can AWC enhance or build upon these?
	Deficits	How do small municipalities in Washington State currently address their resource deficits, and what support mechanisms are in place?

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AWC Member Cities

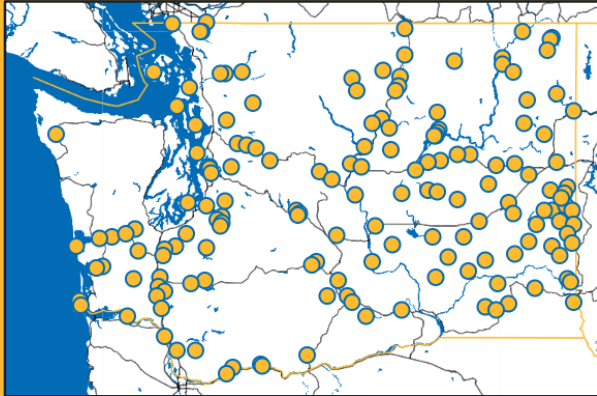


<https://wacities.org/about-us/our-281-cities-and-towns/member-cities>

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AWC Member Cities Breakdown

Of the 281 member cities, 159 have populations less than 5,000.

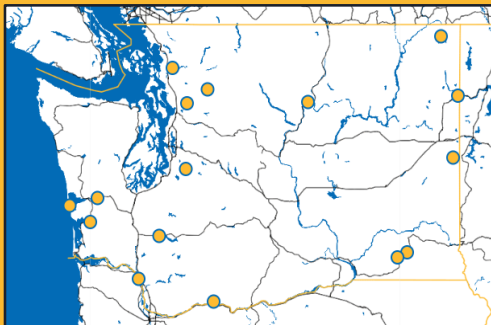


Population Range	Number of Cities
Under 500	41
500-1000	36
1,000-2,500	51
2,500-5,000	31
Total	159

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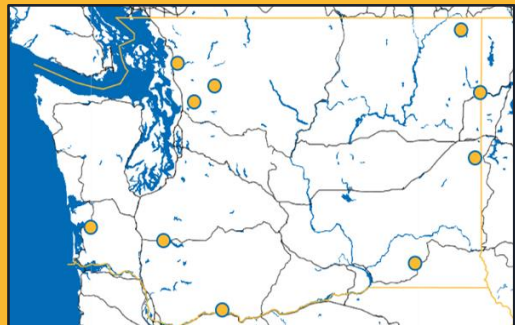
Cities of focus

16 selected cities



Black Diamond, Brewster, Dayton, Kalama, Montesano, Westport, and the ten interviewed cities.

10 interviewed cities



Darrington, Granite Falls, Metaline Falls, Mossyrock, Newport, Raymond, Rockford, Sedro-Woolley, Waitsburg, and White Salmon.

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Literature Review

Key challenges facing small municipalities:

- **Financial Constraints:** Low tax revenue, reliance on state/federal aid, shrinking population reduces funding for essential services.
- **Staffing Shortages:** Limited budgets hinder recruitment; employees handle multiple roles, causing burnout and inefficiencies.
- **IT & Cybersecurity Risks:** Outdated systems, lack of IT staff, and rising cyber threats leave cities vulnerable to attacks and service disruptions.

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Literature Review

State & National Support Programs for Small Cities

National League of Cities (NLC)

- City Inclusive Entrepreneurship Network (economic/workforce development).
- Digital Equity and Broadband Toolkits (expanding internet access).

Washington State Department of Commerce

- Short courses for municipal planning & budgeting.

Municipal Research Services Center (MRSC)

- Legal & policy guidance, training, procurement assistance.

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Literature Review

Gaps in support small municipalities

Funding Limitations

- Grants focus on large-scale projects, leaving daily operations underfunded.
- Competitive applications & administrative burden make access difficult.

Workforce & Training Challenges

- Shortages in key roles (city clerks, finance officers, IT staff) persist.
- Existing training programs do not fully address recruitment & retention.

Technology & Cybersecurity Risks

- Cyberattacks are increasing, but small cities lack dedicated IT staff.
- Limited funding for modernizing digital infrastructure.

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Data & Methodology

Quantitative Data Sources

- U.S. Census.
- 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.
- Office of Financial Management (OFM) population data from 2020-2024

Quantitative Data Analysis

- Focused on population, median age and racial demographics. Compared these trends to state averages and other comparable small cities.
- Analyzed population growth trends and assessed how these trends might impact the demand for municipal services and resources.

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Data & Methodology

Population Trends (2023-2024)				
One year growth trend	281 Cities in WA	159 small cities	16 cities of focus	10 interviewed cities
<i>Growth</i>	2.22% (207)	3.10% (92)	2.17% (11)	2% (10)
<i>Stable population</i>	0.00% (58)	0.00% (57)	0.00% (5)	0.00% (0)
<i>Decline</i>	-1.42% (16)	-2.15% (10)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)

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Data & Methodology

Population Trends (2020-2024)				
Five year growth trend	281 Cities in WA	159 small cities	16 cities of focus	10 interviewed cities
<i>Growth</i>	1.47% (250)	1.47% (131)	1.82% (14)	1.11% (10)
<i>Stable population</i>	0.00% (3)	0.00% (3)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)
<i>Decline</i>	-0.51% (28)	-0.51% (25)	-0.02% (2)	0.00% (0)

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Key Findings: Analysis of Population Trends

5 years estimates (2020-2025)	281 cities in WA	159 small cities in WA	16 cities of focus	10 cities interviewed
Growth	88%	79%	86%	100%
Stable Population	1%	2%	—	—
Decline	11%	19%	14%	—

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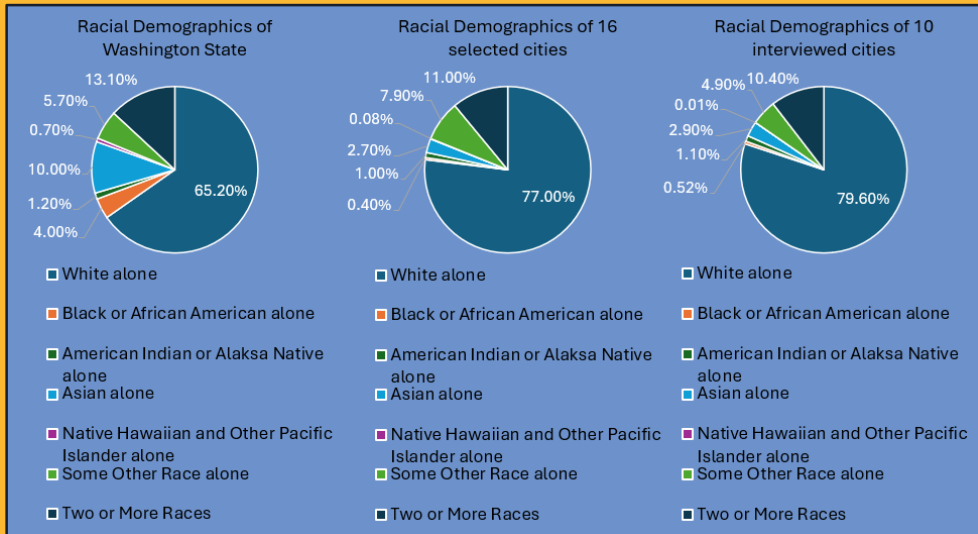
Data & Methodology

Average Population and Growth Comparison			
2023-2024	10 interviewed cities	16 selected cities	159 cities under 5,000
Average Population	1,701	3,268	1,465
Overall Average Growth	1.40%	1.49%	1.66%

Median Age Comparison			
10 cities interviewed	16 cities selected	159 cities under 5,000	State
42.95	43.2	42	38.6

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Data & Methodology



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Data & Methodology

Qualitative Data Sources

- Semi-Structured interviews.
- Allows for a deeper exploration of these issues through direct engagement with municipal officials and other key stakeholders.

Qualitative Methodology

- In person and online interview format.
- Forty-five minutes to an hour long, semi structured interviews, covering a broad range of topics with a consistent set of questions in each interview.
- Some interviews may be recorded in order to assist with accurate data collection and analysis.

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Interview Questions

Opening questions:

1. Tell me about your relationship to AWC - How would you describe it? What do they provide and in what ways could they support you better?

Personnel:

1. Could you describe the size and structure of your municipal government?
2. Which tasks or roles are the most difficult to fill, and how often do you have vacancies?
3. How do you handle leadership transitions when staff leave?
4. Do you have formal transition documents in place, and is there any training for incoming personnel?

Finances:

1. What are your city's current practices for managing finances?
Follow up if applicable: what are the main challenges you face managing finances?

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Interview Questions

IT:

1. How do you manage IT needs and cybersecurity? (Do you have dedicated staff or do you outsource these services?)
2. What do you see as the biggest technology barriers?

Research:

1. What are your primary funding sources? (eg. state grants, federal grants)
2. Which resources or programs have been most helpful? (state programs, AWC services)

Closing Questions:

1. Who or what other resources would you refer us to look into more?
2. What are the top three most pressing needs?

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Town of Darrington

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
1,515	0.66%	43.2	Mayor-Council	Town

Interview Highlights

- Recruitment and retention challenges
- Dependence on grants
- Grant reporting limitations
- Gaps in public services
- Limited capacity in communications and engagement
- Administrative planning and implementation limitations



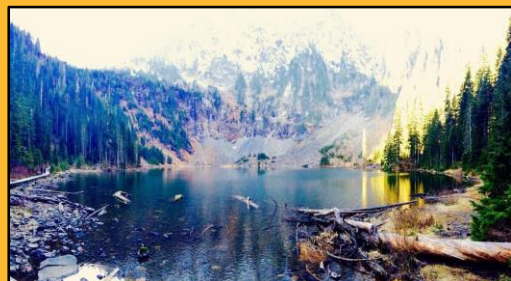
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City of Granite Falls

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
4,775	0.00%	35.2	Council-Manager	Code City

Interview Highlights

- Recruitment of experienced staff
- Specialized staff training
- Expanding administrative capacity to manage compliance and strategic planning
- Federal grant support
- Enhanced resources tailored to small cities



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Town of Metaline Falls

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
275	0.00%	58.1	Mayor-Council	Town

Interview Highlights

- Recruitment and retention challenges
- Lack of transition documents
- Dependence on grants
- Cybersecurity Preparedness
- Community Well-being
- Local business support to promote economic growth



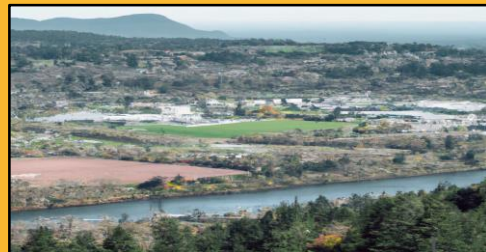
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City of Mossyrock

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
800	1.91%	31.8	Mayor-Council	Code City

Interview Highlights

- Recruitment and retention challenges
- Grant accessibility
- Technology training needs
- In-person support for AWC
- Small city advocacy support from AWC



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City of Newport

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
2,140	0.23%	35.3	Mayor-Council	Code City

Interview Highlights

- Lack of transition documents
- Grant writing support
- GIS service improvements
- In-person support from AWC
- Legal and Policy support



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City of Raymond

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
3,160	1.61%	43.8	Mayor-Council	Code City

Interview Highlights

- Recruitment challenges
- Roving Support
- Lack of Transition support
- Grant management assistance
- Lack of IT support
- Cybersecurity Preparedness



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Town of Rockford

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
605	6.14%	50.2	Mayor-Council	Town

Interview Highlights

- Recruitment and retention challenges
- High Turnover and lack of transition documents
- Cybersecurity Preparedness
- Clerk communication and collaboration gaps



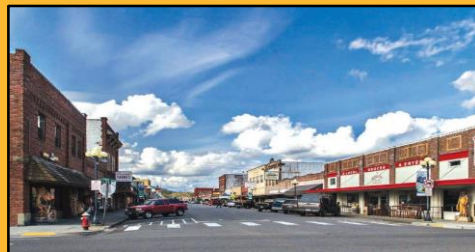
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City of Sedro-Woolley

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
13,080	1.40%	35.1	Mayor-Council	Code City

Interview Highlights

- Recruitment and retention challenges
- Specialized staff training
- Lack of financing for capital project needs
- Lack of skilled labor in cybersecurity
- Aging infrastructure



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City of Waitsburg

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
1,185	0.00%	46.2	Mayor-Council	Unclassified City

Interview Highlights

- Recruitment and retention challenges
- High turnover
- Succession challenges
- Limited access to federal funding
- Infrastructure and affordable housing challenges



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City of White Salmon

<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
2,550	2.00%	50.8	Mayor-Council	Code City

Interview Highlights

- Grant writing support
- Cybersecurity Consortium between various cities in order to cost share
- A shared planner or clerk position between cities.
- City Action Days: teaching elected officials on federal-level engagement



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Cities Not Interviewed:

Black Diamond	<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
	7,195	4.58%	38.1	Mayor-Council	Code City
Brewster	<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
	1,195	0.00%	28.6	Mayor-Council	Code City
Dayton	<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
	2,445	0.00%	51.3	Mayor-Council	Code City
Kalama	<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
	3,160	2.93%	52	Mayor-Council	Code City
Montesano	<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
	4,135	1.1%	42.3	Mayor-Council	Code City
Westport	<i>Population</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Form of Government</i>	<i>Classification</i>
	2,325	1.31%	48.9	Mayor-Council	Code City

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Key Findings



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Recommendations

1. Recruitment and Early-Career Pathways (AWC-supported fellowship program)
2. Retention and Tiered Training Structure (interactive, small group sessions)
3. Grant Management Support
4. IT and Cybersecurity Resource Sharing
5. Leadership Transitions and Knowledge (well structured transition documents)
6. Peer Support and Cross-City Collaboration
7. Centralized Resource Hub (Small Cities Resource Page)

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Recruitment and Early-Career Pathways

- State-funded or AWC-sponsored fellowship program for college students or recent graduates.
- Year long placements with local small-town governments for students or graduates studying or who have earned a degree in Public Administration, Finance, or Policy.
- Fellowships could offer stipends, housing assistance, mentorship programs or academic credit as a means to attract experienced professionals.
- Not only can it stabilize key positions in the short term, but also accumulate a group of talents who are familiar with local affairs and can be retained in the long term.

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Retention and Tiered Training Structure

- Quarterly learning modules
- Group into foundational, intermediate or advanced level
- Each training cycle includes interactive, small group sessions
 - Topics like grant compliance, policy execution, internal controls, and community engagement.

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Grant Management Support

- Support for identifying and acquiring State and Federal Grants.
- Standardized Templates for applications, reports and audits.
- Establish a roving grant manager/fellow for each region or county to assist with State and Federal Grants.

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IT and Cybersecurity Resource Sharing

Shared IT Resource Group—a centralized team supports multiple municipalities

- rotate physically between locations
- offer remote maintenance
- provide emergency response capabilities

To ensure cities are protected without bearing the full cost of dedicated personnel.

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Leadership Transitions and Knowledge

- Equip every municipality with well structured and up to date transition documents for high level roles/positions such as Clerk, Treasurer, and Administrator.
- Documents would include the following:
 - Outline of Duties
 - Key Contacts
 - Timelines
 - Current Initiatives
- This process could be done through the fellowship recommendation previously mentioned or as a standalone process.

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Peer Support and Cross-City Collaboration

- Establish formal and recurring “sharing communities” as either online platforms or in-person meetups.
- Allows staff and elected officials to discuss best practices or collaborate on similar issues across municipalities.
- Reduces information loss and reinforces a collective knowledge base across municipalities. Could incentivize resource sharing and pooling programs.

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Centralized Resource Hub

Create a Small Cities Resource Page

- **Unified Online Portal**
 - Consolidate templates, training materials, policy guides, and compliance resources.
- **Regular Updates and User Feedback**
 - Continuous review and improvement based on users' need
- **Transition document repository**

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Questions?



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