

BEHIND THE DAIS: HOW LOCAL LEADERS DECIDE

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VML Small Town Conference
June 6, 2025



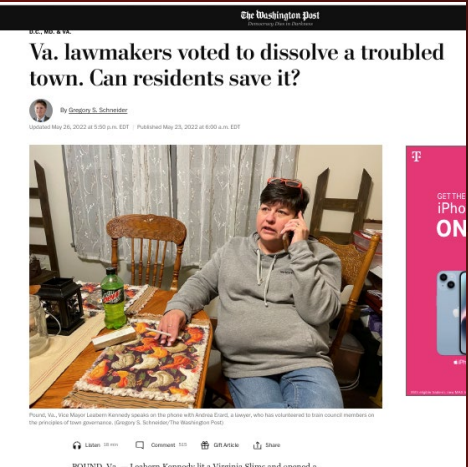
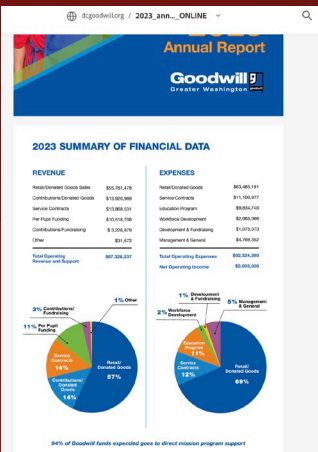
Thank You

- To the volunteers who shared their time through surveys and interviews — **your voices shaped this research.**
- To the town council members — **thank you for your service and leadership in your communities.**
- **This work is stronger because of you.**

Introduction

City of Manassas Park Total Budget				
Program Category	FY24 A2	FY 25	Percentage Change	Total Change
Property Taxes	\$ 42,774,039	\$ 45,435,852	6.22%	\$ 2,661,813
Economic Development	\$ 5,196,327	\$ 5,299,999	2.00%	\$ 103,673
Departmental Revenues	\$ 10,261,033	\$ 10,078,326	-1.78%	\$ (182,707)
Other General Fund Revenues	\$ 18,210,345	\$ 17,743,457	-2.56%	\$ (466,888)
Water & Sewer User Revenues	\$ 15,193,078	\$ 12,997,749	-14.45%	\$ (2,195,329)
Storm Water Revenues	\$ 2,216,022	\$ 1,948,336	-12.08%	\$ (267,686)
Solid Waste Revenues	\$ 1,645,318	\$ 1,726,881	4.96%	\$ 81,563
Transportation Capital Revenues	\$ 5,194,499	\$ 17,472,454	236.36%	\$ 12,277,955
Other General Fund Capital Revenues	\$ 1,317,303	\$ 2,057,000	56.15%	\$ 739,697
School Revenues	\$ 43,507,090	\$ 44,140,261	1.46%	\$ 633,171
TOTAL REVENUES	\$ 145,515,053	\$ 158,900,314	9.20%	\$ 13,385,260
GB/Clerk/Attorney	\$ 1,088,770	\$ 1,171,358	7.59%	\$ 82,588
Constitutional Officers/Registrar	\$ 2,213,909	\$ 2,321,459	4.86%	\$ 107,550
City Administration (C/M/HR/Finance/IT/GSA)	\$ 4,790,883	\$ 4,788,109	-0.06%	\$ (2,774)
Police	\$ 7,174,890	\$ 7,454,174	3.89%	\$ 279,285
Fire	\$ 6,264,564	\$ 6,314,224	0.79%	\$ 49,659
Community Development	\$ 4,140,806	\$ 4,110,010	-0.74%	\$ (30,796)
Human Services + Economic Development	\$ 5,443,291	\$ 6,019,249	10.58%	\$ 575,959
Parks & Rec	\$ 4,964,138	\$ 5,108,790	2.91%	\$ 144,652
General Fund Other	\$ 3,004,526	\$ 3,124,833	4.00%	\$ 120,307
General Fund Debt	\$ 8,159,910	\$ 8,178,346	0.23%	\$ 18,436
General Fund Reserve Contributions	\$ -	\$ 219,122	0.00%	\$ 219,122
Transportation Capital	\$ 6,055,981	\$ 18,976,516	213.35%	\$ 12,920,535
Other General Fund Capital	\$ 13,962,875	\$ 13,996,170	0.24%	\$ 33,295
Water & Sewer	\$ 15,193,078	\$ 12,997,749	-14.45%	\$ (2,195,329)
Storm Water	\$ 2,216,022	\$ 1,948,336	-12.08%	\$ (267,686)
Solid Waste	\$ 1,645,318	\$ 1,726,881	4.96%	\$ 81,563
Schools	\$ 59,196,093	\$ 60,444,988	2.11%	\$ 1,248,895
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 145,515,053	\$ 158,900,314	9.20%	\$ 13,385,260

The total FY25 City Budget is growing by 9.2% when compared to the FY24A2 Budget Amendment, which incorporates Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and several grants.




and Prevention
PH

Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER)

Flint Water Crisis

[Print](#)



View of the Flint River in Flint, MI. Credit: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

What was the need?

On April 25, 2014, the City of Flint, Michigan changed source from the Detroit-supplied Lake Huron water to water distribution pipes to corrode and leach lead into municipal drinking water. In October 2016, Flint residents were not allowed to drink municipal tap water unless it had been filtered through a filter certified to remove lead. Although the city reconnected the water system that same month, the potential damage emergency was declared on January 16, 2016.

What were the objectives?

In addition to likely health effects from lead exposure, there were concerns about behavioral health of Flint residents, including feelings of anxiety or depression and

LOCAL NEWS

5 years after nearly going bankrupt, Petersburg bounces back

[Ad removed](#) [Details](#)

The restaurant and tourism industry were arguably some of the hardest hit since COVID emerged.

By Wayne Covill

Posted at 5:47 PM, Nov 01, 2021 and last updated 5:47 PM, Nov 01, 2021

PETERSBURG, Va. — On the brink of being bankrupt just five years ago,

Contact Problem

Download App

The app features alerts, live video traffic incidents and more.

* CBS 6 News

Questions to Answer and Research

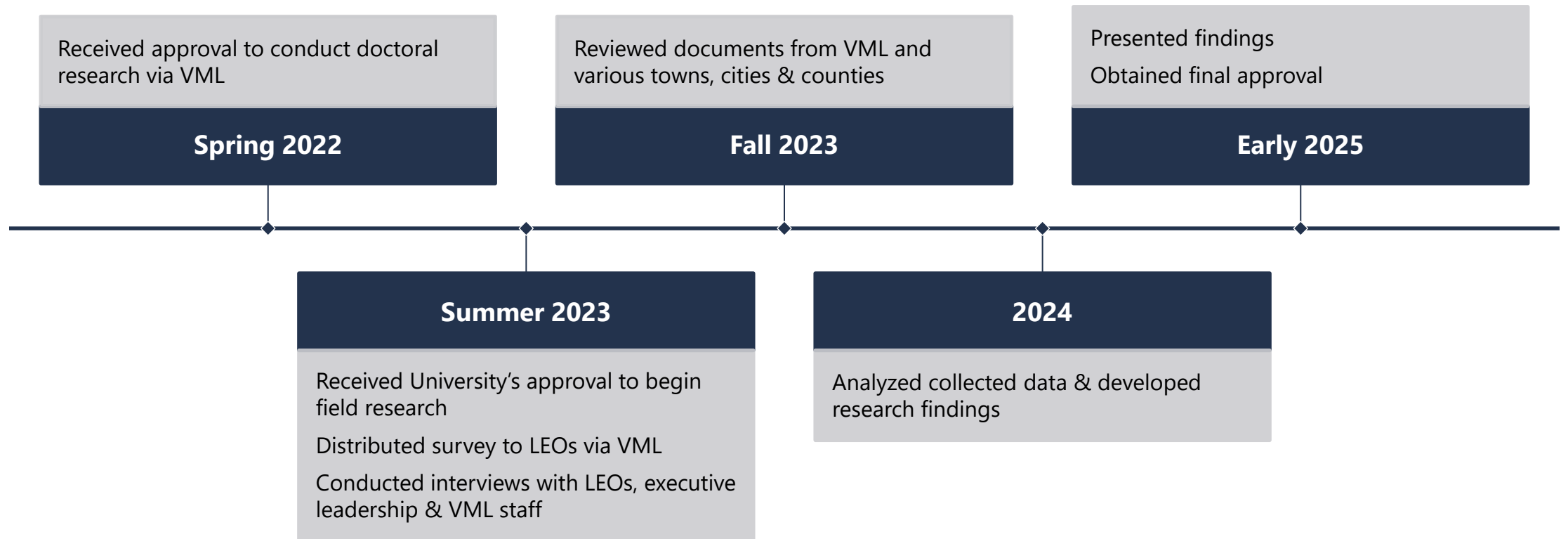
General Problem

- Ineffective decision-making among leaders of local governments in the U.S.
- Leads to implementation of flawed local government policies and programs

Specific Problem (Virginia)

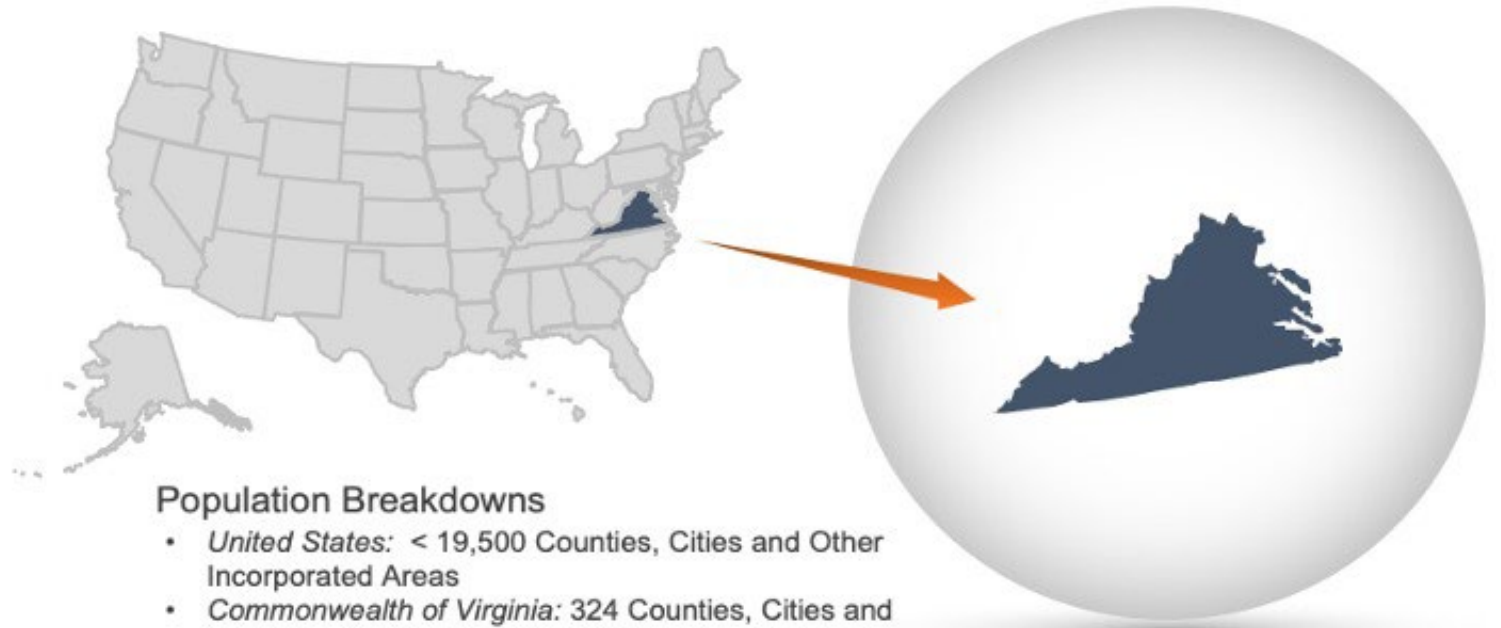
- Possible ineffective decision-making by elected leaders of local governments in Virginia
- May negatively impact the financial health of municipalities and their residents

Research Timeline



Population & Sampling

Local Government Population



Population Breakdowns

- *United States:* < 19,500 Counties, Cities and Other Incorporated Areas
- *Commonwealth of Virginia:* 324 Counties, Cities and Towns
- *Virginia Municipal League:* ~ 216 Member Local Governments with 11 Paid Staff



Population & Sampling

Proposed Sampling

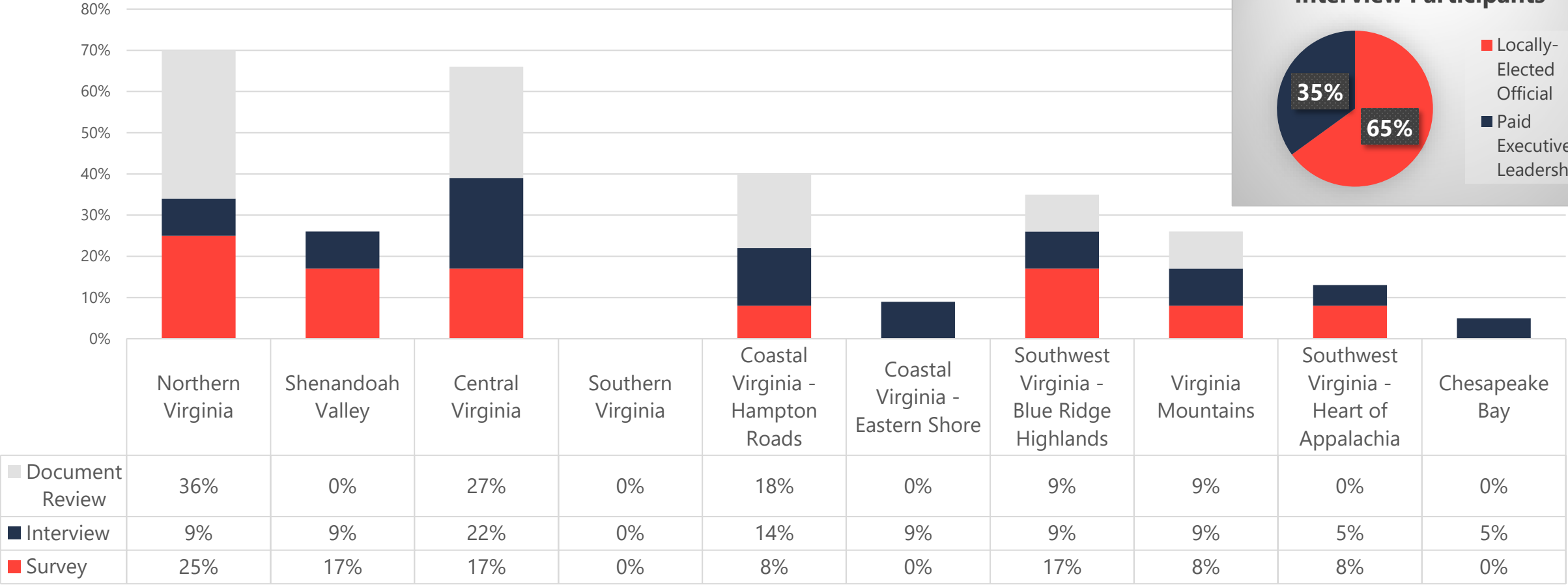
- 1 VML Member from Each of 10 Regions
- VML Staff

Actual Sampling

- 1 VML Member from 9 of 10 Regions
- VML Staff

Information Sources

VML Member Research Participation by Region



Bottom Line Up Front

June 2023 - May 2024:
Performed Research and Analysis

Inputs & Key Results

Inputs

7 of 10 Regions: Survey Responses

9 of 10 Regions: Interviews of LEOs and Paid Executive Leadership Plus VML Staff

134 Documents: Meeting Minutes, Transcripts, Training Materials, Organizational Records

Key Results

Strength of Research Findings to My Theories: Inconsistent, Low to High

Coding Analysis: Trends in Leadership, Knowledge, Communication & Decision-Making Relating to Problem Statement

Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

No definitive reasons about problem statement emerged from research and analysis.

Recommendations

VML Working Group: Develop a more comprehensive, wide-reaching training program using research findings.

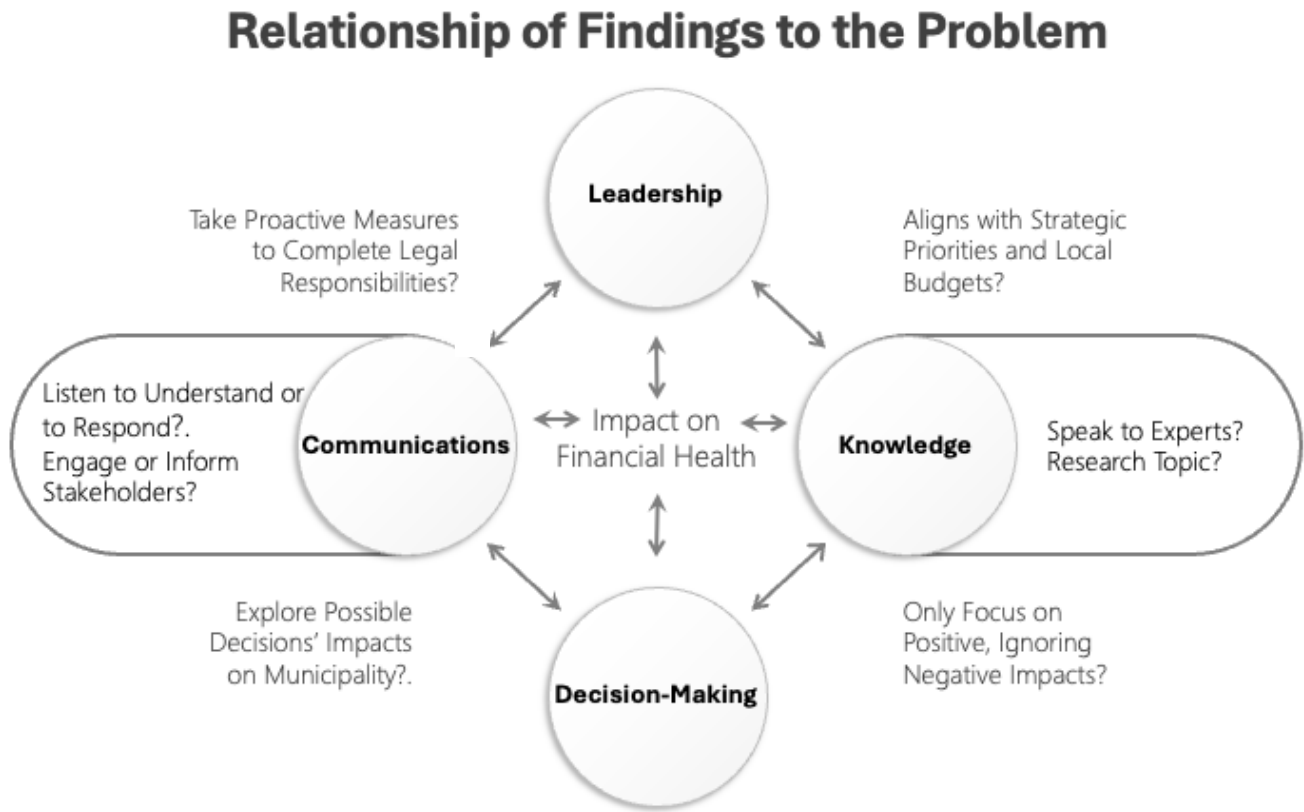
Empowering LEOs: Transform and expand LEO's understanding, mindset, and decision-making skills by viewing local government as a business, employer, and service and goods provider.

Additional Research:

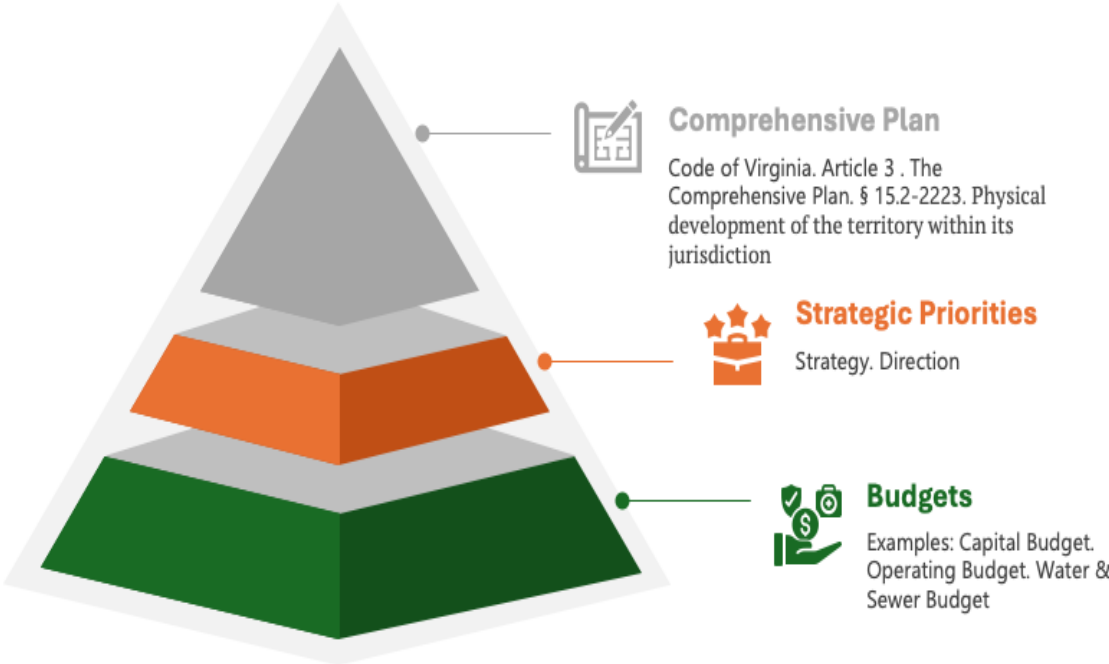
1. Legislative Requirement for LEO Training
2. Publics' Understanding of Local Government
3. Role of Paid Executive Leadership in Decision-Making
4. Changes in LEOs' Motivations for Running for Office

L. Hampton

Study Findings: Relationship to Problem



LEO's Decision-Making Pyramid



Research Examples

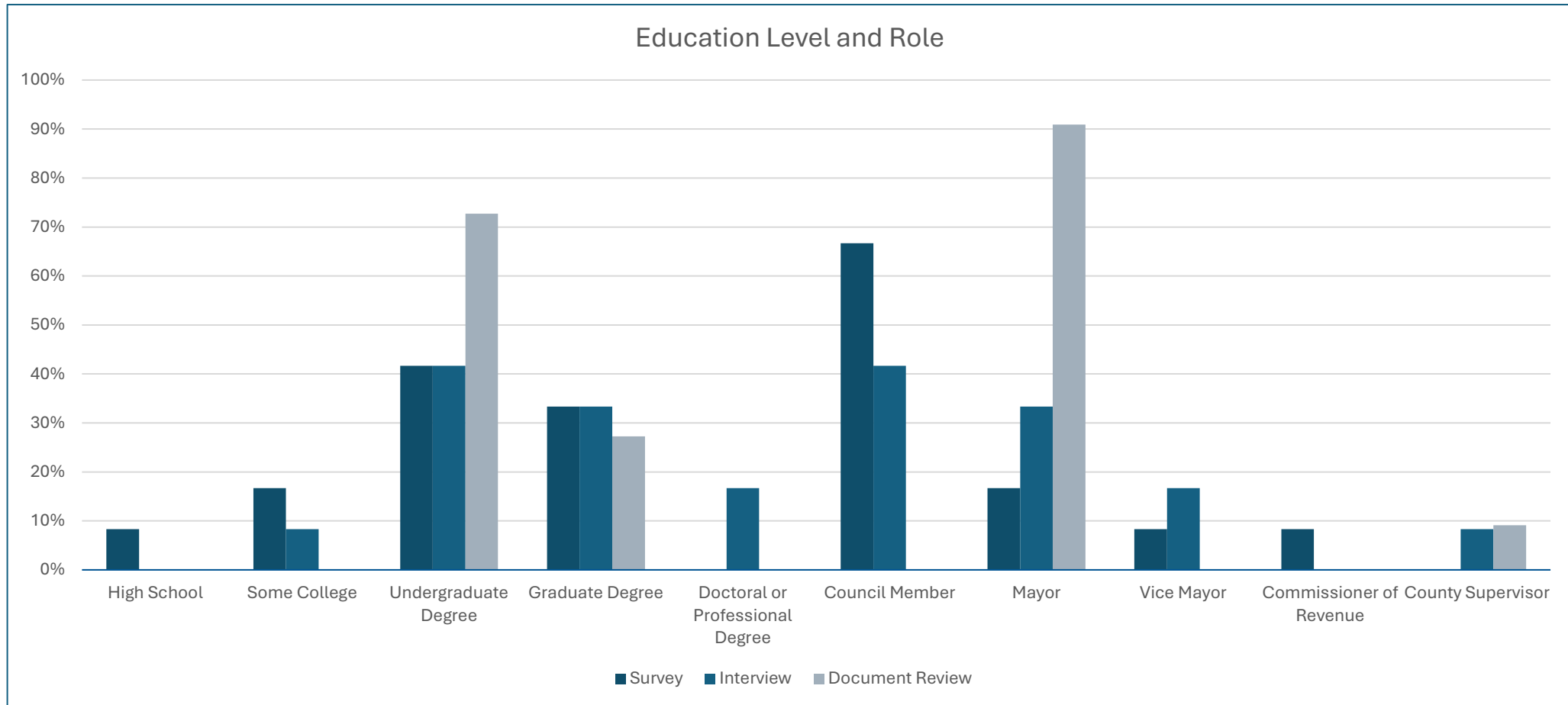
- Alexandria City Council Removal of School Resource Officer Funding
- Hopewell City Council Forgoing Legally Required Annual Financial Reporting
- Purcellville Town Council Ignoring Paid Leaderships' Advice

Study Findings: Discovered Themes

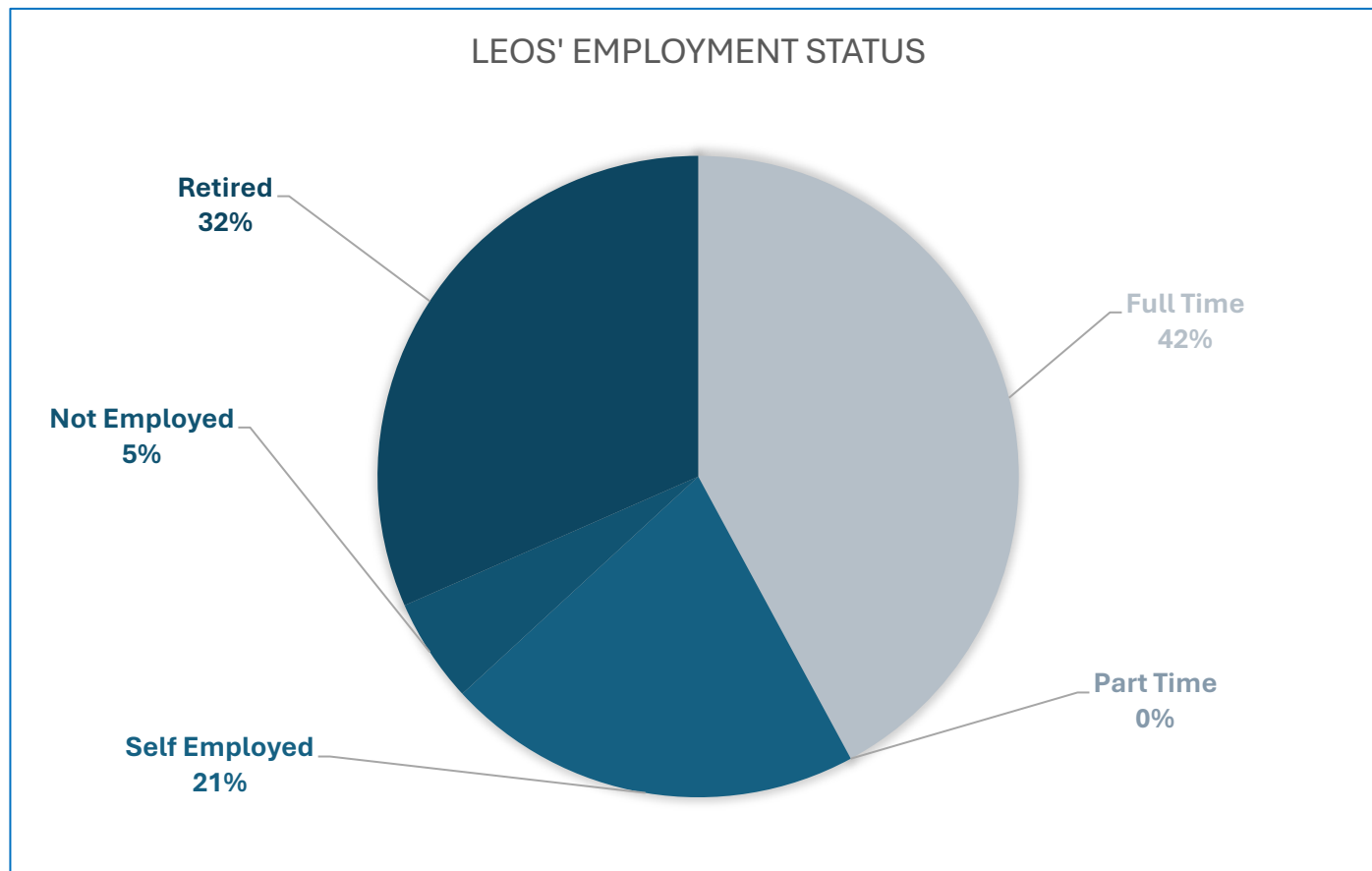
Discovered Theme	Subtheme	Source	# of Reviewed Documents or Related Codes
Leadership	Education and Career* Previous Community Involvement Leadership Influence	Surveys, Transcripts, Meeting Minutes, Guides & Other Documents	128 Documents
Communications	Communications and Governing Body Meeting* Positive and Negative Communications Possible Solution for Negative Communications Standard Operating Procedures	Transcripts, Meeting Minutes, Guides & Other Documents	507 Appearances
Decision-Making	Information Gathering in Decision-Making Impacts of LEOs' Decisions* Impacts of LEOs' Abdication of Responsibilities	Transcripts, Meeting Minutes, Guides & Other Documents	70 Documents
Knowledge	Training Source Leadership Skill Set* Financial Knowledge*	Surveys, Transcripts, Meeting Minutes, Guides & Other Documents	3,327 Appearances

* Relate to Research Questions

Study Findings: Discovered Theme of Leadership



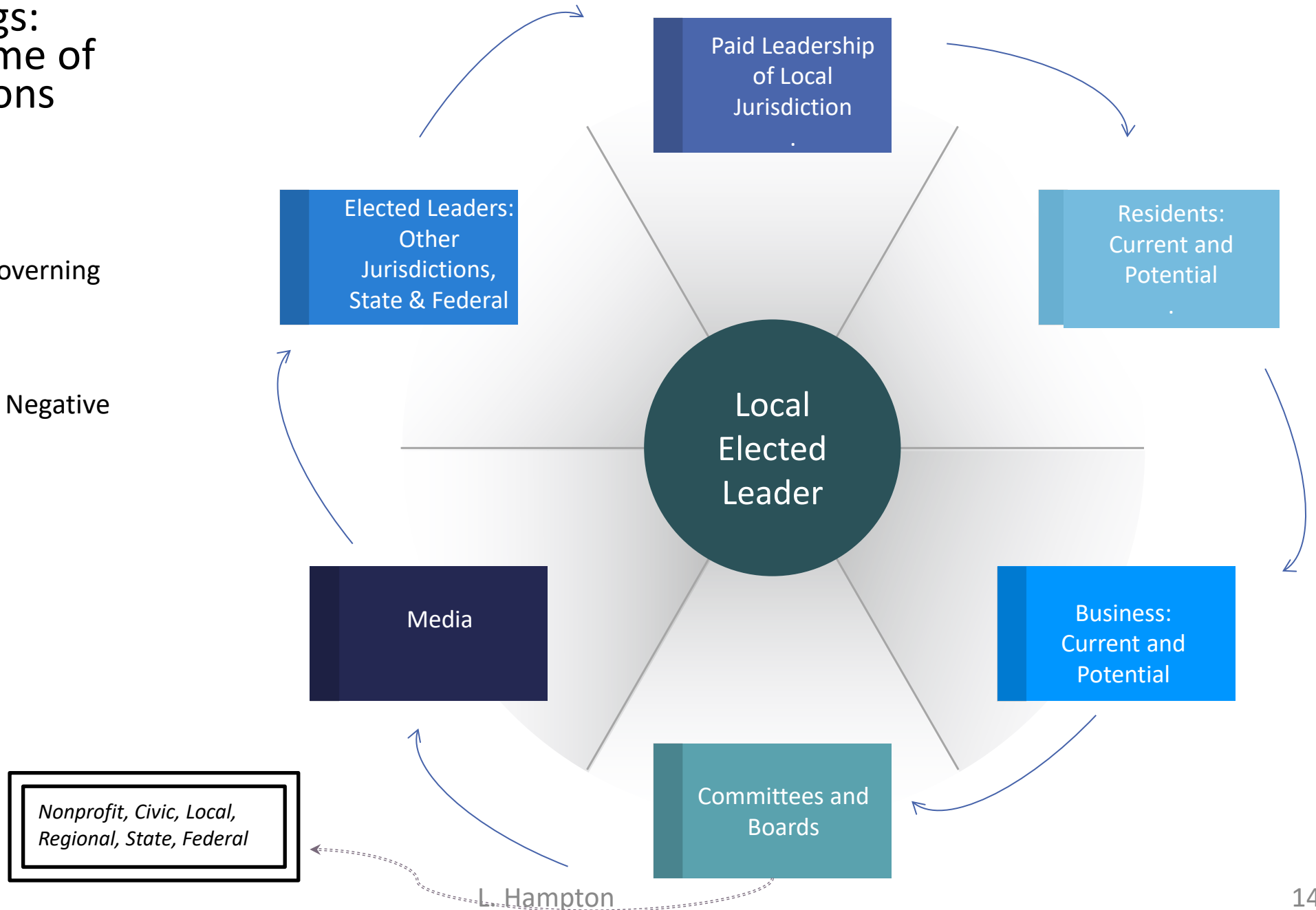
Study Findings: Discovered Theme of Leadership



Study Findings: Discovered Theme of Communications

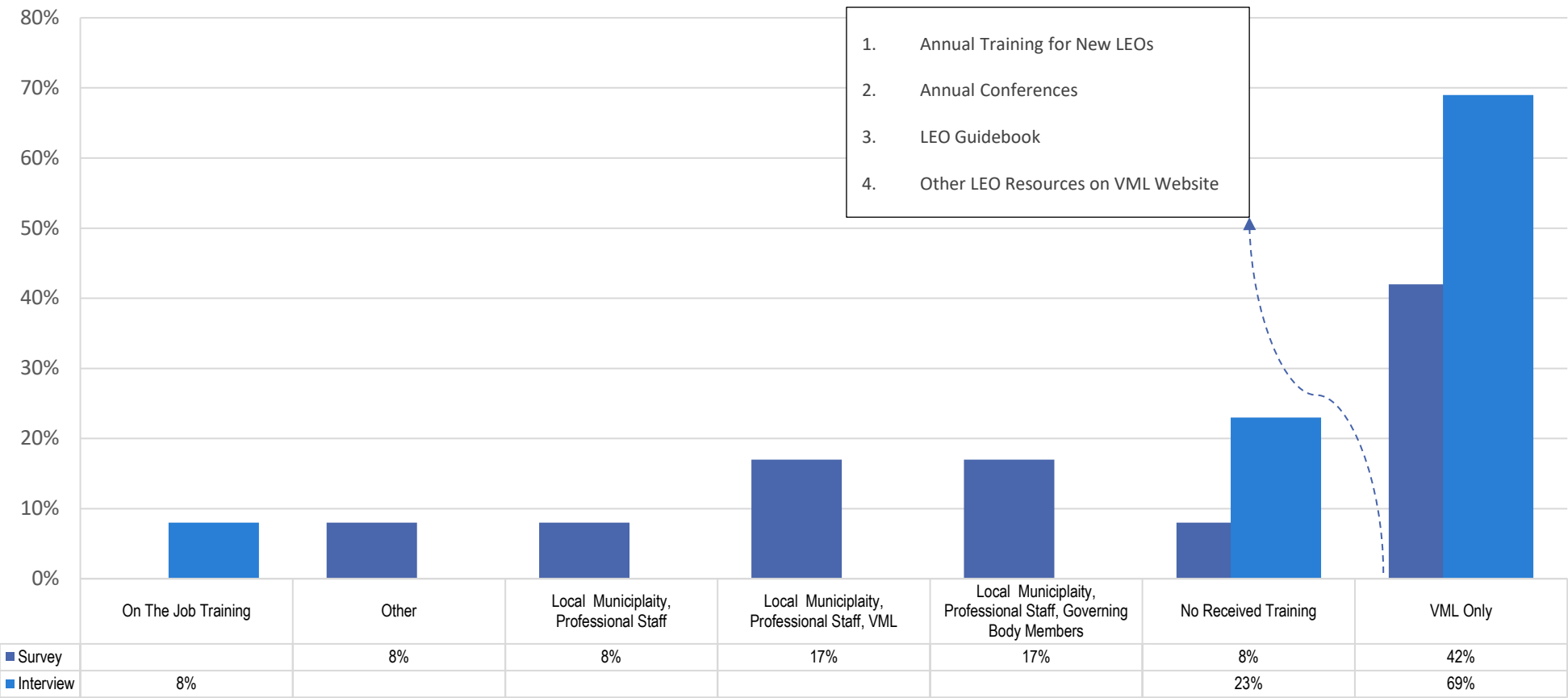
Sub Themes

- Communications & Governing Body Meetings
- Positive & Negative Communications
- Possible Solutions for Negative Communications
- Standard Operating Procedures

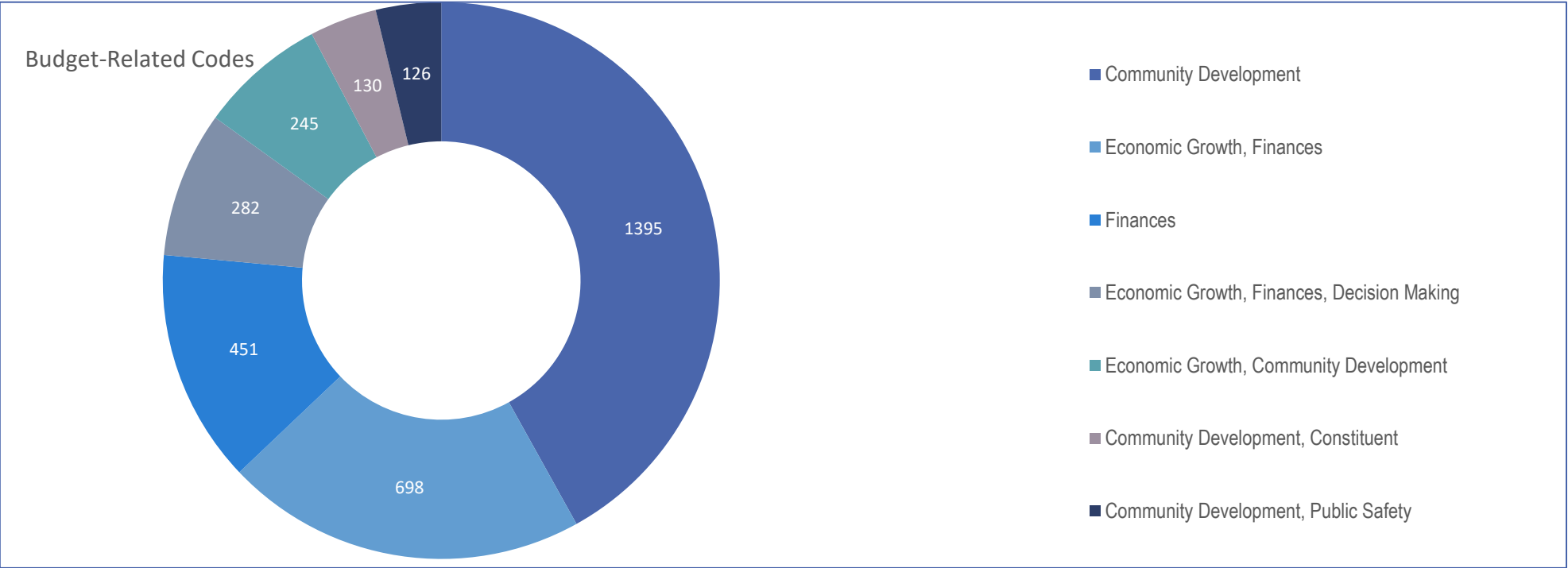
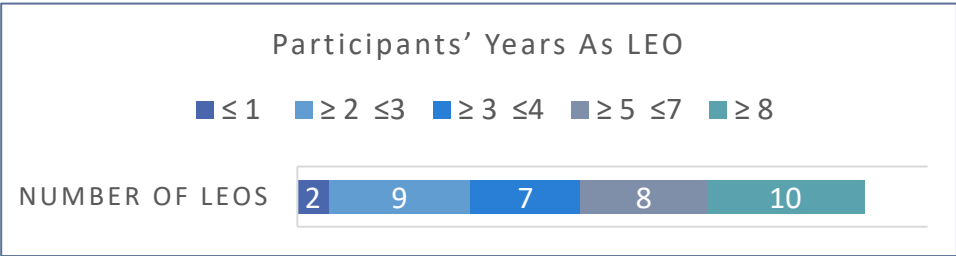


Knowledge

Source of LEOs' Training



Knowledge



Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

Overall

No definitive reasons for problem statement emerged from research and analysis.

Results' ability to provide definite answer to research questions and match proposed research framework and anticipated themes was not consistently strong.

One theme (decision-making and financial impact) linked strongly to the anticipated theme and actual findings.

Reoccurring themes (education level, professional background) had moderate to weak links.

Coding Analysis identified four trends providing possible insight into LEOs' ineffective decision-making.

1. Leadership
2. Knowledge
3. Communication
4. Decision-Making

Recommendations

Recommendations

VML Working Group: Develop a more comprehensive, wide-reaching training program using research findings.

Empowering LEOs: Transform and expand LEO's understanding, mindset, and decision-making skills by viewing local government as a business, employer, and service and goods provider.

Additional Research:

1. Legislative Requirement of Ongoing Training, Need for Expanding Training, and Relationship Between Training Quality and LEOs' Decisions
2. Publics' Understanding of Local Government
3. Role of Paid Executive Leadership in Decision-Making
4. Changes in LEOs' Motivations for Running for Office

Questions?



Thank you!



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