

**LGPro Emerging Leaders Program**  
**Attraction and Retention Survey of Graduates October 2008**

**Introduction**

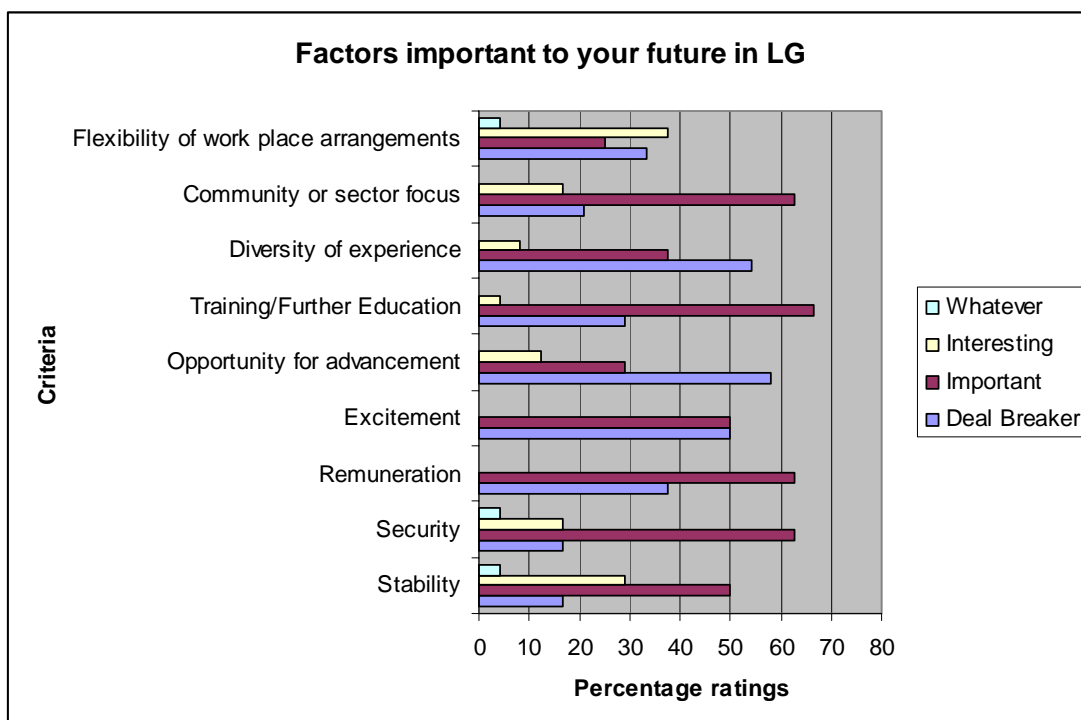
In October 2008, the LGPro Emerging Leaders Program graduate network was invited to address the CEO’s forum on the topic of attraction and retention of emerging leaders. Five graduates volunteered to facilitate this session, and in preparation conducted a survey of past graduates to gain a broader insight into the views and issues pertinent to the session topic.

The survey was sent to a total of 71 graduates of the program, and received 24 responses representing a response rate of 34%. Respondents were fairly evenly split between those who have been in local government for 5-10 years, and those that have been in local government for longer than ten years. Some of the graduates had left local government since completing the program, and were given the chance to provide their reasons for choosing to leave in order to gain insight into mechanisms for maintaining their professional ties with local government.

The survey was predominantly used to explore some key reasons emerging leaders may choose to leave local government, as well as providing some suggestions for making local government a more attractive employment option. The report from the survey is provided below<sup>1</sup>.

**1. Factors important to graduate careers in local government**

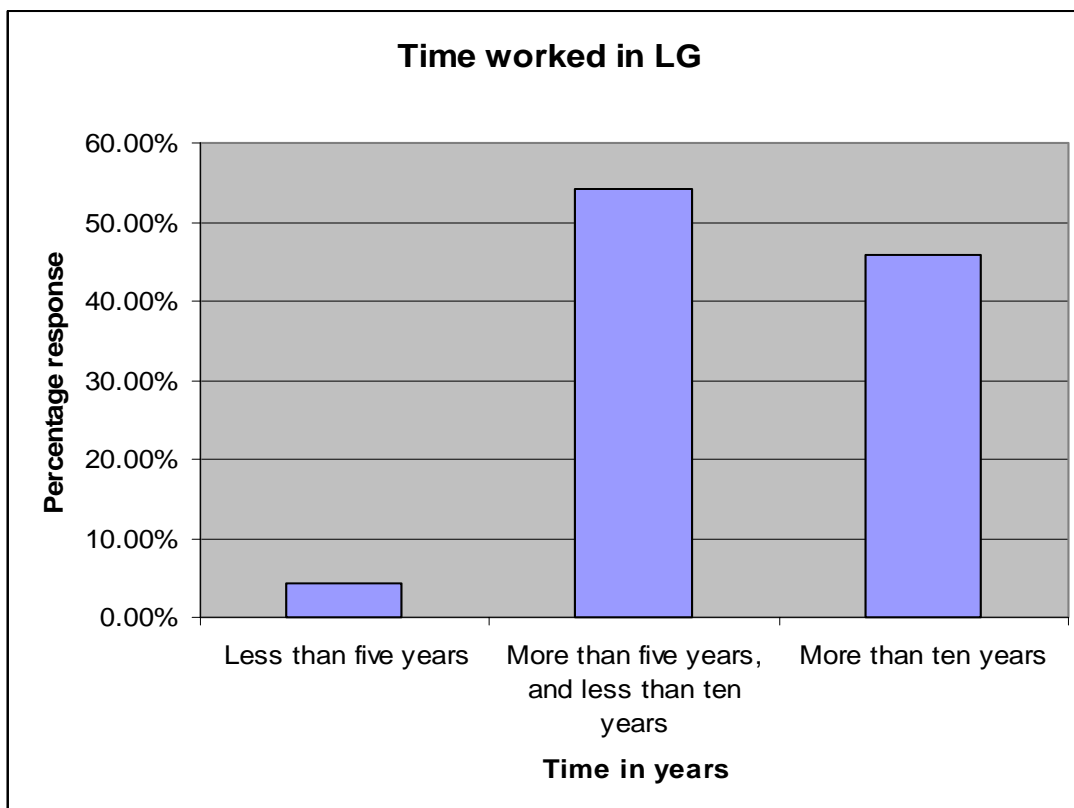
Graduates were asked “When considering your future career in Local Government how important are the following factors to you?”, and the table below provides an overview of results. More than 50% of respondents indicated that “Opportunity for advancement” is a deal breaker, while over 60% indicated that “Community or sector focus”, “Training and further education”, “Remuneration” and “Security” were important. Interestingly, 100% percent of respondents indicated that “Excitement” is either important or a deal breaker.



<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that figures in charts may add to over 100% due to the effect of rounding.

## 2. Length of employment in local government

Graduates were asked “How long have you worked/did you work in local government?”, and the table below provides an overview of results. Virtually all respondents have been in local government at least five years, with the split between those in the 5-10 year category and the over ten year category fairly even.



## 3. Reasons for leaving local government

Graduates were asked “What is your reason for leaving local government (if you have)?”, with the results of this question being open-ended. A variety of issues emerged, including career challenges and opportunities, mentoring and leadership, workplace location and flexibility. Comments provided are listed below, and have been grouped into key themes for easy reference:

### Leadership/support/flexibility:

- Working for people that I can learn from
- Mentoring & leadership both at immediate management level and within the organisation; Challenges in role (similar to 'excitement' listed above); ability to respond to change (people & the organisation) including the idea flexibility versus bureaucracy; Positive work environment
- Support from CEO, up to date equipment
- Flexibility for working mums

### Location

- Location of workplace and travel required
- Close to home - travel is a killer for personal time and planet
- Job Location

### Career opportunities

- Career opportunity in private sector
- Limited opportunities for my career (information management, i.e. not IT)
- Variety of projects and professions
- Challenges and opportunities to be exposed to new ideas

### Other

- After months of negotiating with CEO change in job title, better pay, and better equipment to manage role I realised it was a power play going on and that it would not be worth my effort to stay on
- Sustainability - I don't want to be working in a sector that is unsustainable (financially and environmentally) and where you place heaps of effort into projects which are unfulfilled

## **4. Opportunities in local government for the next five years**

Graduates were asked "What opportunities would you like to see emerge for you in Local Government over the next 5 years?", with the results to this question being open-ended. A similar range of issues was raised in response to this question as the previous question, plus additional issues such as raising the profile and recognition of local government, difficulties with the political aspects of local government work, and challenges around bureaucracy. Comments provided are listed below, and have been grouped into key themes for easy reference:

### Flexibility

- Flexibility in working hours/cross council secondment opportunities
- Local Government are working towards family friendly environments on paper, but not necessarily in practice. LG needs to follow through in order to keep good staff, experience and job satisfaction. If LG can support part time workers in a better manner then they would provide a much better environment and outcome, as part timers have been reported to be more productive (don't get caught up in day to day office "stuff") and are less stressed.
- I would like my council to be more flexible about its management arrangements - I currently report to someone who doesn't know my area and would prefer to directly report to the person who can provide me with the appropriate support.
- More opportunity for flexibility in the workplace, currently it is rigid.

### Recognition

- A conscious effort to create real sustainability and recognition of professions within local government are equal to private practice. Opportunities for a national link of local governments/practices and policy making so there is synergy.
- Recognition of the important services/roles/outcomes that Local government provides for especially regional and rural communities and it written into the constitution. Good/Great leadership that is not always dictated too by politic but driven from sound research and evidence.
- Research in local government to be recognised and valued for evidence based decisions
- Greater profile of the level of professional staff who work within Local Government
- Our HR team have been working on promoting local government as a smart, worthwhile place to work for professionals - especially young professionals. More of that type of marketing can only assist to strengthen the sector and make more people realise that it is an employer of choice

### Professional development

- I would like to see local government offer opportunities for employees to have career development opportunities with other Council's. Might include short term relocation to another Council to gain experience at higher level or different working environment.
- Continued training and exposure to new opportunities for knowledge growth and experiences
- Invitations to apply for positions coming from other Local Governments. Opportunities to fulfil an overseas or interstate secondment in local government. Promotion and learning opportunities supported by my employer in the areas identified that I need more experience to become a better leader and manager.
- Further Leadership training. Ability to work from home occasionally
- Greater opportunities to network and share knowledge
- Continued professional development
- Chances to learn and develop, and advance in my career but also broaden my skills and knowledge base. Chances to work in different environments and contexts

### Career path/advancement:

- The ability to progress within the organisation.
- A managerial role - either at my current council or another - but as long as I can be assured that there is enough flexibility to have a child and have flexible work arrangements to suit Council places in a child care facility Opportunity to contribute to some big ticket projects that contribute to the positive development of Melbourne such as those that are being done at my Council at the moment Mentoring and support for team leaders to make pathways to management
- More CEO positions in the rural LGA's due to 'moving on' rather than sustainability issues with the LGA
- Senior executive roles in strategic information management. There are many established roles like this in the state government sector, but local governments tend to position strategic information management lower in the organisational hierarchy.
- Advancement and recognition of my experience and capabilities

### Politics

- Having left local government I'm not interested in returning in the next 5 years, however the politics and constant intrusion into planning decision making is one issue that saw me start looking for private work opportunities.

### Remuneration

- Not so much for me, but for local government to consider - Idea of paying valuable senior professional staff wages consistent with the private sector to remain in professional roles and not need to move to management to receive increased remuneration; More flexibility in dealing with solutions to problems and considering less bureaucratic outcomes e.g. in area of employment of staff as an example (ie not in relation to regulated/legislated matters)
- Increased remuneration and career prospects. Improved reputation as little LG - improved governance. Improved capacity to attract and retain skilled staff - the place to be.

### Other

- I probably won't return to local government

## Conclusion

The range of survey responses identified a wide variety of issues and challenges for attracting and retaining emerging leaders to local government. These challenges were considered by the CEO forum of Friday 24 October 2008, and a range of innovative strategies were suggested for meeting the challenge. These strategies will be published for consideration by the sector at large in a forthcoming article in LGPro's Profile Magazine.

This survey was conducted on behalf of the LGPro Emerging Leaders Graduate Network by the following ELP graduates:

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