Acknowledgements

This project could not have been completed without the efforts of the following individuals:

Project Work Group

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Lisa Herges, Renville County Administrator, AMC Education & Training Committee
Jan Williams, Hennepin County, Strategy & Supports Sr. Manager, AMC Education & Training Committee
Carolyn McDonald, Murray County Administrator, AMC Education & Training Committee

Additional thanks to the other members of the AMC Education & Training Committee:

Tarryl Clark, Stearns County Commissioner
Mary Hamann-Roland, Dakota County Commissioner
Gary Hendrickx, Swift County Commissioner
Jack Kolars, Nicollet County Commissioner
David Lieser, Chippewa County Commissioner
Mary Jo McGuire, Ramsey County Commissioner
Patrick Veraguth, Douglas County Surveyor
Megan Waldsmayate, Hennepin County, Project Manager
Patrick Waletzko, Otter Tail County Emergency Manager

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Executive Summary

Background
The AMC Education & Training Committee (hereafter “Committee”) helps to determine the focus of educational programs and trainings for AMC members. These programs range from workshops, multi-day seminars, as well as conference content. The Committee decided to launch an AMC membership-wide assessment of its educational offerings to establish a baseline for future evaluation, as well as to provide direction for the development of future educational programming.

Methodology
The assessment analyzed data gathered by two evaluation tools: 1) an electronic survey; and 2) focus groups which delved deeper into the findings of the survey. It was decided that the target audience would be county commissioners, county administrators/coordinators, and county department heads, as these individuals are the most frequent participants in AMC educational programming. The following timeline was set for the 5-step assessment:

1. Initial Survey (April 2023)
2. Survey Data Analysis (May-June 2023)
3. Follow-Up Evaluation/Focus Groups (July 2023)
4. Data Analysis (Aug 2023)
5. Report Out (Sep 2023)

Questions
The survey asked members questions about 1) overall satisfaction with AMC educational programs; 2) the types of trainings and programs that members prefer; 3) desired program content; 4) logistics around attendance. Survey responses were then used to create follow-up questions which would be asked during subsequent focus groups. These questions focused on areas of 1) assessing value of educational programs; 2) program content needs; and 3) further logistical considerations.

Findings
Based on the responses to the survey, at its current level, AMC educational programs are meeting much of the needs of its membership. Most respondents indicated a preference for in-person training, but acknowledgement of the utility of different formats and the benefits they offer. Additionally, a respondent’s preference for program format depends on a multitude of factors:

- Subject matter
- Length of training (virtual better for shorter sessions)
- What formats are offered (in-person, virtual, hybrid)
- Location of training (distance from participant)
- Time of year/weather

When asked about their preferred style of instruction, most respondents showed a preference for facilitated trainings and programs which provide opportunities to connect with and learn from colleagues ran through the focus groups as well.
The program option most respondents indicated they would be likely to attend was the single day, in person course. This suggests respondents are more likely to commit to shorter timeframes for trainings or workshops, especially if they are in person and provide the types of opportunities they are looking for (e.g., opportunities to connect with and learn from their colleagues).

Respondents showed interest in a range of technical skills training (e.g., Microsoft Office and Excel, state drainage statutes, public finance basics), policy and government (open/serial meeting laws, general policy areas, County Veterans Service policies, tribal/county relations, etc.), and “soft skills” (e.g., finding consensus, addressing difficult conversations/issues, staff development, oversight w/o micromanaging).

During the focus groups, participants were asked questions about what they feel makes a valuable educational program, and several key elements were identified:

- The program should be tailored specifically to an audience of county staff and address issues at the county level.
- The program must be timely with its content and relevant to issues counties are currently facing.
- The program must provide opportunities for participants to connect and learn from each other.
- The program must provide participants with new skills or ideas which have a practical application to daily work of participants.
- Program presenters must be engaging.

Participants were also asked what specific skills training they believed is needed in the following categories: 1) Leadership; 2) Supervision; 3) Change Management; 4) Human Resources; and 5) Conflict Management. These categories were selected based on the frequency with which they were mentioned by survey respondents as areas for potential training. Some highlights for each category are listed below:

1) **Leadership**
   - Leadership looks different at different levels (ex. Elected as opposed to Staff leadership) and can’t be a cookie cutter approach.
   - Effective communication skills are crucial.
   - Learning from the experiences of others in similar circumstances is important.

2) **Management & Supervision**
   - Basic supervision skills training should be a minimum requirement for all supervisors but should also be available to staff who are on that career track.
   - Communication skills for supervisors.
   - Maintaining a healthy work/life balance

3) **Change Management**
   - Since the pace of change is increasing, skills around change management are increasingly important at the leadership and management levels.

4) **Human Resources**
   - Training in the proper relationship between elected officials and HR is crucial.
   - Counties need training in how to recruit and retain quality staff.
• Therefore, some counties have need of unique training for their commissioners:
  o Collective bargaining negotiations
  o Managing hybrid work environments
  o New Family Leave Act
  o Interviewing skills (question writing, etc.)
• How to build morale and a promote a positive work environment.

5) Conflict Management
• Addressing and managing different kinds of conflict
• Skill building around fostering and maintaining trust and empathy with colleagues and constituents.

Focus group participants also expanded on the information gathered around logistical considerations for educational programs:
• Participants are willing to travel if they think the training or workshop will be valuable.
• Weather is a major factor in determining if someone will attend.
• Members want to have opportunities to connect with and learn from their colleagues.
• Members ask themselves a series of questions when considering travelling for a training:
  o How long is the training?
  o What is the training format? (e.g., lecture, workshop, conference, etc.)
  o Do I have the budget to afford it?
  o What time of year is it happening? (Strong desire to limit winter travelling)
  o Who is the presenter?
• The most common methods for participants to stay connected with their peers outside of trainings includes email, phone calls, Slack, and message boards, but all agreed that their preference is in person.

Conclusions and Recommendations
An analysis of all the data collected has led to the following conclusions and recommendations regarding educational programs at AMC (in no particular order):

Conclusion A:
At its current level, AMC educational programs are meeting the needs of much of its membership.

Recommendation A:
Program developers have an opportunity to expand educational programming to include content relevant to other AMC members.

Conclusion B:
There are numerous factors, including logistics, structure, and content-related, which influence a member's decision whether to attend a program.

Recommendation B:
Is important for AMC to clearly identify the target audience so that the following can be specifically tailored to their needs.
Conclusion C:
Members place a high value on connecting with and learning from their colleagues.

Recommendation C:
When planning educational programs, intentionally look for ways to incorporate opportunities for sharing and conversation.

Conclusion D:
Members want flexibility with educational and training programs.

Recommendation D:
Explore ways to increase access to programs for more members. This could include offering more flexibility with delivery (e.g. virtual, asynchronous, on-demand, etc.) to encourage participation.

Conclusion E:
Comments from survey respondents and focus group participants suggest there are several key areas in which they would like to see more training: 1) Leadership; 2) Workplace Culture, 3) Management/Supervision skills, 4) Conflict Management, and 5) “Technical” Skills.

Recommendation E:
Provide a mix of “soft” and technical skills training in the each of the five key areas.
Introduction

The AMC Education & Training Committee (hereafter “Committee”) helps to determine the focus of educational programs offered by AMC to its members. These can include workshops, multi-day trainings, and conference content. The Committee decided to launch an AMC membership-wide assessment of its educational offerings in order to establish a baseline for future evaluation, as well as to provide direction for the development of future educational programming. A group of committee members (hereafter “Work Group”) was selected to develop and implement an evaluation plan. This group determined the scope of the project, the questions to be asked, and analyzed the data gathered.

Methodology

Once the decision was reached to conduct an assessment, the Work Group identified key areas to investigate: 1) overall satisfaction of AMC members with current educational programs; 2) members’ preferred types of educational programs; 3) desired program content; and 4) logistical concerns. All the questions developed as part of the assessment would aim to provide information in each of these four areas.

The Work Group then determined the target audience for the assessment would be county commissioners, administrators/coordinators, and department heads. Input from this group was seen as potentially the most valuable, as these individuals are the most frequent participants in AMC educational programs.

Next, the Committee identified a five-step process for the assessment which would take place over several months in the Spring and Fall of 2023:

1) **Initial Survey (April 2023)**
   An electronic survey was distributed to targeted AMC members asking questions about 1) the types and format of educational programs that appeal to them; and 2) the content areas they find the most relevant. The rationale behind using an electronic survey was it provided the simplest way of reaching all of AMC’s members. Upon receipt of the survey respondents were given approximately two weeks to complete.

2) **Survey Data Analysis (May-June 2023)**
   Once the data was compiled from the membership-wide survey, the results were analyzed for trends. This analysis informed the development of follow-up questions which will delve deeper into the identified trends.

3) **Follow-Up Evaluations (July 2023)**
   Survey recipients sent a request for volunteers to participate in one of three focus groups, where they were asked a series of follow-up questions. Focus groups were held on July 7, 13, and 20 (an additional session was held for the first focus group participants who wanted to continue the conversation).
4) **Analyze Data (August 2023)**
   The data collected during the Follow-Up phase was analyzed and the results will be presented to the Education & Training Committee for review.

5) **Report Out (September 2023)**
   The Education & Training Committee will draft a report of its findings and share with AMC membership, potentially at the Fall Policy Conference. The Education & Training Committee will debrief on the project and identify areas of improvement for future assessments.

Once the assessment was completed, the Committee would use the results to plan its work for the upcoming year. It was also determined that this type of assessment of AMC’s educational offerings should be done regularly, but as of the writing of this report no interval was decided.

**Initial Survey**

The survey was created in the online program Survey Monkey, and distributed via email on April 25, 2023, to 531 commissioners and administrators and 690 county staff. The online survey remained open through May 12, and a total of 255 surveys were completed for a response rate of 21%. This is below the typical requirement of 30% for the sample to be considered “representative”, but the Work Group felt it was adequate to continue with the assessment.

The Project Manager compiled the data and performed an initial review to look for trends or ideas that emerged. The results were then passed on to the Work Group for review, and a presentation of the data was given to the Committee.

**Focus Groups**

The Work Group then crafted follow-up questions to be asked during the upcoming focus groups. Three main categories of questions were identified: 1) Value; 2) Content; and 3) Logistics. To recruit participants, an invitation was sent to all individuals who completed a survey. Three 30-minute focus groups were then scheduled for July 7, 13, and 20, and a total of 14 individuals volunteered. The first group asked to have a follow-up meeting scheduled as they were unable to answer all the questions in the time permitted, so this group met for a second time on July 28.

During the focus groups, the Project Manager facilitated the discussion and took notes. Additionally, the virtual sessions were recorded for future reference. Information gathered from the focus groups was then compiled and reviewed by the Project Manager. Overall take-aways from each of the three groups were then identified by the Work Group and shared with the Committee for review.

**Final Report**

The results of both the survey and focus groups were then compiled by the Project Manager, who wrote a draft final report. A Final Report was then written which includes recommendations for the development of future AMC educational programs.
Results

I. Survey Results

A. Overall Satisfaction

The survey opened with questions about overall satisfaction with current educational offerings. A large majority of respondents (85.2%) indicated that they were “Satisfied” (61.9%) or “Extremely Satisfied” (23.3%) with the educational programming AMC currently delivers (see Figure 1 below).

![Figure 1. Overall satisfaction with AMC educational programs.](image)

When asked how likely they would be to recommend AMC programs and trainings to others, 50.75% stated they were “Likely” and 22.4% responded that they were “Extremely Likely” (see Figure 2 below). This suggests that, at its current level, AMC educational programming is meeting much of the needs of a majority of its membership. Of note is that of the 130 respondents who provided their current position or title, 85 individuals (65%) listed “county commissioner”, “county administrator”, or “county coordinator”, while 45 individuals (35%) listed some other county position.
Interestingly, nearly 13% of respondents indicated they are “Extremely Unlikely” to recommend AMC’s educational resources to others. One failing of the survey as designed was that it did not provide a follow-up question for those respondents who chose this option, so there is no data to help explain this finding. One theory is that these respondents may have never attended an AMC educational program, and therefore felt unable to recommend them. This tracks with the data showing that nearly 16% of respondents had never participated in any AMC educational program. In the future, assessment surveys should be designed to allow respondents to give more information should they chose one of the “Unlikely” responses.

B. Program Types

This section of the survey explored the types of educational programs members prefer. Respondents were asked about their preferred program format, and the results are illustrated by Figure 3 below:

Most respondents indicated a preference for in-person training, but there was a general acknowledgement of the utility of different formats and the benefits they offer, such as:
• In-person training is best for building relationships, connecting with people, and networking.
• Some interactive training elements work best in-person.
• Virtual programming allows for increased accessibility.

“I prefer the experience of meeting in person and getting to talk with folks from other counties, but because I’m in Cook County, it frequently is not feasible to attend meetings in person. I appreciate having a virtual option because it allows me to participate in meetings/trainings that I would otherwise miss.” – Survey Respondent

“All of the above have their place. It’s great to get together and some interactive trainings really do best in person. There are times when virtual &/or video/webinar work best – and reduce time/travel costs. Hybrid is tough, but for some it may be better than not participating at all.” – Survey Respondent

Ultimately, the data indicated that format preference depends on a multitude of factors:
• Subject matter
• Length of training (virtual better for shorter sessions)
• What formats are offered (in-person, virtual, hybrid)
• Location of training (distance from participant)
• Time of year/weather

Much of this information was confirmed during the subsequent focus groups.

C. Style of Instruction

Respondents were asked for their preferences in terms of style of instruction. The majority (68.56%) selected “Facilitated by an instructor” as their preferred style of training (see Figure 3 below).
What was surprising about this data set was that “Self-directed, at your own pace” ranked lowest in preference (1.75%). As it is inherently flexible, this option was expected to rank higher. However, regardless of format, there is a clear preference for conversational-style experiences where participants have the option to share experiences with each other and learn together.

“[I prefer when trainings are] facilitated by an instructor, where the instructor leaves plenty of time for the class to talk and learn through processing information.

“[I want] to learn from county commissioner colleagues in a conversation/sharing format.”

“The strength of AMC is relationships and learning from one another...”

This preference for facilitated trainings and programs which provide opportunities to connect with and learn from colleagues ran through the focus groups as well.

D. Likelihood of Attending Different Programs

Respondents were presented with several program options, ranging from a multi-day conference to webinars and videos, and asked to indicate the likelihood that they would attend each.

The program option with the highest percentage of responses of “Likely” (28%) or “Extremely Likely” (57.78%) was the single day, in person course. This suggests that respondents are more likely to commit to shorter timeframes for trainings or workshops, especially if they are in person and provide the types of opportunities they are looking for (e.g., connecting with and learning from their colleagues).

What is striking about the data is that the second most likely program option was the webinar, since that was the least popular choice for preferred program format (see Figure 3). It is possible this suggests that, while it may not be their preferred choice, members are more likely to attend webinars due to factors such as travel required, cost, inconvenient timing, etc. limiting their attendance at in person programs.
E. Program Content
In this section respondents answered questions about the type of content in which they were most interested. The Work Group first created a long list of potential training topics, which were then grouped into five overarching categories. These categories were then listed in the survey and respondents were asked to indicate how likely they would be to attend a training session in each category. Below is the ranking from most likely to be attended to the least likely. The percentages below include those who ranked each option as “Extremely Likely” and “Likely”.

1. **Leadership** – 83.63%
   Foundational skills, creating vision and purpose, change management, etc.

2. **Workplace Culture** – 82.38%
   Collaboration, team building, navigating change, etc.

3. **Management** – 81.33%
   Supervisory skills, staff development, conflict management, Human Resources, etc.

4. **Personal Development** – 73.22%
   Strengths assessment, work/life balance, mental health, etc.

5. **Community Engagement** – 63.67%
   Best practices, diversity, and inclusion, etc.

Comments suggested a strong interest in a range of technical skills training (e.g., Microsoft Office, Excel, state drainage statutes, public finance basics), policy and government (open/serial meeting laws, general policy areas, County Veterans Service policies, tribal/county relations, etc.), and “soft skills” (e.g., finding consensus, addressing difficult conversations/issues, staff development, oversight w/o micromanaging). These suggestions are organized by Category and Subcategory in Fig. 6 below.

Further, respondents were asked that, if they were a supervisor or manager, what development did they feel is most needed by their direct reports. Below is a breakdown of the various suggestions for educational topics, organized into categories. The topics are first broken down into “soft skills” and “technical skills”, and from there organized into subcategories – including the five original categories listed above – as well as an additional “technical skills” category.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Specific Topic</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>“Soft” Skills</td>
<td>Workplace Culture</td>
<td>Having Difficult Conversations</td>
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<td>Culture of Personal Accountability</td>
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<td>Post-pandemic reenergizing</td>
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<td>Relating to younger workers effectively</td>
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<td>Appreciation of others</td>
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<td>Professionalism</td>
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<td>Fostering a Positive Work Culture</td>
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<td>Empowered Work</td>
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<td>Leadership Skills</td>
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<td>Positive Leadership</td>
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<td>Hybrid work environments</td>
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<td>Building Trust</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Communication</td>
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<td>Technical Skills</td>
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<td>New regulations/functions</td>
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<td>Governmental Processes</td>
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<td>Legislative Updates</td>
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<td>On-the-Job detailed training</td>
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<td>Basic Internal Family Systems (IFS) training</td>
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<td>Growth Mindset</td>
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<td>Ability to Change</td>
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Figure 6. Suggested Topics by Category
While there was wide interest in the five suggested content categories, respondents also showed a strong interest in more technically-focus training. Some respondents commented that, previously, trainings through AMC were mostly focused on serving the needs of county commissioners, and that there are other county staff who would benefit from trainings if they were more focused on their needs. Examples given fit within the technical skills category. This is a potential growth area for AMC’s educational offerings in the future.

F. Logistics

This section focused on logistical factors which impact members’ participation in educational programs and training. The highest percentage (42.22%) of respondents indicated that they have between 0 and 5 days to spend on professional development in a year. The second highest percentage (36.44%) indicated that they have from 6-10 days to devote on professional development (see Figure 7 below).

![Figure 7. Days available for professional development.](image)

Those who selected “other” were asked to add a comment to explain further. In the comments, most respondents stated that professional development is at their personal discretion, or that they didn’t have any specific limitations on their professional development, provided the training is of value. This suggests there’s a degree of flexibility in how much professional development in which members can participate annually. However, one comment stated that the respondent has extremely limited ability to take advantage of these programs as they are working 12+ hour days to simply accomplish their required work. This suggests that those counties with fewer staff and resources are less likely to participate in professional development, and we should consider how we might be able to reach them.

Respondents were asked about what factors limit their participation in AMC educational programs, and a list of potential answers provided:

- Cost
- Time constraints
- Travel Required
- Programs don’t seem applicable to me
- Held at inconvenient times
- Other

Just over half (54.05%) of respondents indicated that a lack of time is the biggest obstacle to attending educational problems. The second most common response (15.32%) was that the programs did not feel applicable to the respondent. This is surprising, as it was expected that the travel required to attend programs would be a greater barrier, but only 8.11% of respondents indicated that as the greatest barrier to participation (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8. Factors preventing participation in AMC programs.](image)

“I am a rural commissioner with a full time job. Programs are almost always offered during the week which is harder for me to attend and many hours away from where I live.” – Survey Respondent

“Generally if the travel causes time constraints, when you are a small county you don’t have people to fill the roles so you have to determine if the program is worth it and if it falls when a board meeting packet or budget is due. So its all of the above truly!” – Survey Respondent

“Too many other issues needing attention. It is a matter of prioritization.” – Survey Respondent

The data suggests it would be prudent to explore ways to increase access to educational programs or make them more flexible in delivery (offered virtually, asynchronous, on-demand) to encourage more participation. This would hopefully address the issues of lack of time and the travel required as obstacles to attendance. When scheduling trainings, considering holding them in outstate venue locations, when possible, would increase accessibility to members beyond the Twin Cities metro.
Additionally, more frequent assessment of educational offerings would help address the barrier of irrelevant subject matter, as we could gain a better understanding of the types of trainings that our members are interested in, and which would be the most useful to their daily work.

When asked about the distance they would be willing to travel, the top two responses were 100-200 miles (34.22%) and 50-100 miles (32%), which suggests there is a willingness among the majority of or membership to travel to attend an educational program. When taken along with other responses to earlier questions, this data suggests that there is a willingness to travel if the individual believes the training will be worthwhile.

Respondents were then asked to identify the time of year which is most convenient for them to attend AMC educational programs. Respondents ranked their seasonal preference as follows:

![Circle chart showing seasonal preferences]

There does not appear to be an ideal time to schedule trainings and workshops, but the data suggests that Summer and Fall are the least convenient times. Many members take time off in the Summer for vacations, and Fall is when many associations have their conferences, so it seems prudent to avoid scheduling trainings and workshops at those times. Winter poses a challenging situation, because it is typically a slower time for county officials who can make more time for professional development, but poor weather can be a significant barrier to attendance. It would be prudent to consider the type of training (e.g., in-person, virtual, etc.) and the needs of the curriculum (e.g., community building, group work, etc.) when determining the optimal time of year for scheduling.
II. Focus Groups Results

Using the survey data, the Work Group developed open-ended questions intended to delve deeper into the feedback. There were three main categories of questions: 1) Assessing Value; 2) Specific Skills in Content Areas; and 3) Logistics. Additionally, a number of focus group participants gave feedback which did not easily fit into one of those categories, so a fourth category, “Additional Findings”, is included below.

A. Value

These questions focused on what participants believe makes an educational experience valuable. After compiling data from all three focus groups, the key takeaways are listed below (in no particular order):

- The program must have a “county view”. In other words, it should be tailored specifically to an audience of county staff and address issues at the county level.
- The program must be timely with its content and relevant to issues counties are currently facing.
- The program must provide opportunities for participants to connect and learn from each other.
- The program must provide participants with new skills or ideas which have a practical application to daily work of participants.
- Program presenters must be engaging.

B. Content

These questions focused on what specific skills participants felt were important as well as areas where they would like to see more training in specific content areas: Leadership, Management & Supervision, Human Resources, and Conflict Management. The categories were selected based on the frequency with which they were mentioned by survey respondents as areas for potential training. Key takeaways for each category are listed below (in no particular order):

**Leadership**

- Leadership looks different at different levels (ex. Elected as opposed to Staff leadership) and can’t be a cookie cutter approach.
- Effective communication skills are crucial, which includes communicating across different audiences, organizational levels, generations, etc.
- Learning from the experiences of colleagues is an important element of any training.
- County governance is complex, so providing clarity around different roles and responsibilities would be especially helpful for newly elected officials and new staff.
- Team-building and positive leadership are crucial skills for county commissioners and administrators, as well as department heads.
- Change is constant, so leaders should have the skills to lead organizations through change.
- To operate more effectively and best provide services to the public now and in the future, county leadership should be trained in how to do strategic planning.
- Cultivating a “Servant Leadership” attitude – prioritizing the growth and well-being of others.
- To create healthier workplaces, we should consider training in “Situational Leadership” – where the leader adjusts their approach to their followers’ abilities.
Management & Supervision

- It’s crucial for supervisors to be able to communicate with multiple audiences.
- Maintaining a good work/life balance is important, and an area in which many people need to build skills.
- It’s important for county commissioners to understand the lines they cannot cross regarding HR issues, so training in the proper relationship between elected officials and HR is crucial.
- Anyone who supervises staff should, at minimum, receive training in basic supervision skills. This would not have to be limited to current supervisors and could be made available to those individuals who are not yet supervisors but are on that career track.
- Basic performance management skills are essential for supervisors and managers.

Human Resources

- As stated above, training around how commissioners should “stay in their lane” when it comes to HR issues.
- Counties are facing staffing shortages. It’s crucial to learn how to recruit and retain staff.
- Some counties (smaller with fewer staff) have commissioners involved in tasks that others would do if it were a bigger county. Therefore, some counties have need of specific training for their commissioners:
  - Navigating collective bargaining negotiations
  - Managing hybrid work environments
  - New Family Leave Act coming
  - Interviewing skills (question writing, etc.)
- Any skills that would help build morale and a promote a positive work environment.

Conflict Management

- There are different kinds of conflict, and each needs to be approached in its own unique way (ex. Inter-board, board vs. staff, w/ constituents). Boards would benefit from building skills around how to manage internal and external conflict.
- Strengthening effective communication skills.
- Skill building around fostering and maintaining trust and empathy with colleagues and constituents.

C. Logistics

This final section focused on logistical issues around participants deciding whether to attend a particular educational program. The key take aways are listed below (in no particular order):

- Participants are willing to travel if they think the training or workshop will be valuable.
- Weather is a major factor in determining if someone will attend.
- A major factor in deciding whether to attend is if the program has opportunities to connect and network with colleagues.
- In general, participants ask themselves a Series of questions asked when considering travelling for a training:
o How long is the training?
o What is the training format? (e.g., lecture, workshop, conference, etc.)
o Do I have the budget to afford it?
o What time of year is it happening? (Strong desire to limit winter travelling)
o Who is the presenter?

• The most common methods for participants to stay connected with their peers outside of trainings includes email, phone calls, Slack, and message boards, but all agreed that their preference is in person.

D. Additional Findings
Additionally, focus group participants shared thoughts and ideas that did not neatly fit into the above categories. Highlights of that information are provided below:

• In general, participants enjoyed the virtual “coffee chats” held by AMC during the COVID-19 pandemic, saying it was an excellent forum for commissioners to share their views and connect with their colleagues. There was a general sense that participants would love to see AMC offer these again.
• There was Interest in trainings around strategic planning and continuous improvement methods.
• A suggestion was made for AMC to investigate partnerships with regional development commissions, as they have additional resources, we could utilize to reach out more broadly (e.g., U of M Extension).
• There is a desire to see more technically focused training (e.g., how taxes are assessed, tax forfeiture, what can/cannot apply to a property’s assessment).

The focus group findings closely align with those of the initial survey, while also providing additional details. As a result, the overarching content categories were revised in consideration of the general feeling that training around human resources topics is not particularly appropriate for county commissioners. Additionally, two new categories were added, “Workplace Culture” and “Technical Skills”, to better reflect the range of training subjects suggested by both the survey and focus groups.

The next step in the assessment is to combine the data from both the focus groups and survey to reach general conclusions about educational programming at AMC as well as make recommendations for their future development.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The following conclusions were drawn from the data, and the project manager identified potential recommendations for each conclusion (in no particular order):

Conclusion A
At its current level, AMC educational programs are meeting the needs of much of its membership, specifically those at the county commissioner and administrator level, who were the majority of respondents.
Recommendation A
Program developers have an opportunity to expand educational programming to include content relevant to other AMC members, including county department staff, or front-line staff. AMC could look to offer more training in technical skills that would benefit these additional audiences.

Conclusion B
There are numerous factors, including logistics, structure, and content-related, which influence a member’s decision whether to attend a program.

Recommendation B
When developing a program or training, or when an opportunity presents itself to collaborate on an educational program, it is important for AMC to clearly identify the target audience so that the following can be specifically tailored to their needs:

- Subject matter
- Program structure
- Length
- Program format (in person or virtual)
- Time of year (members are willing to travel if they feel the program is “worth it”)

Conclusion C
Members place a high value on connecting with and learning from their colleagues.

Recommendation C
When planning educational programs, intentionally look for ways to incorporate opportunities for sharing and conversation.

Conclusion D
Members want flexibility with educational and training programs.

Recommendation D
Explore ways to increase access to programs for more members. This could include offering more flexibility with delivery (e.g. virtual, asynchronous, on-demand, etc.) to encourage participation.

Conclusion E
Comments from survey respondents suggest there are several key areas in which they would like to see more training: 1) Leadership; 2) Workplace Culture, 3) Management & Supervision, 4) Conflict Management; and 5) Technical Skills.

Recommendation E
Aim to provide a mix of “soft” skills and technical skills training in the each of the five key content areas to meet the needs of a wider range of members.
Appendix 1 – 2023 Education Assessment Survey

Welcome!
AMC is always looking to improve its educational and training offerings to members, and we need to hear from YOU to make that happen. Please complete this short survey to let us know your thoughts. Your feedback will help the AMC Education and Training Committee prioritize its efforts by identifying what types of programs members want to attend, what types of formats members prefer, and the content members are seeking.

Overall Satisfaction
These questions will help us understand how satisfied you are with AMC’s educational offerings.

1. Have you ever participated in an educational program offered by AMC? (Conference, workshop, training, etc.)
   - Yes
   - No

2. Please rate your general satisfaction with the educational programs and trainings you have attended.
   - Extremely Unsatisfied
   - Unsatisfied
   - Neutral/No Opinion
   - Satisfied
   - Extremely Satisfied

3. How likely are you to recommend AMC programs and trainings to others as a valuable educational resource?
   - Extremely Likely
   - Likely
   - Neutral
   - Unlikely
   - Extremely Unlikely

Program Types
These questions will help us learn more about the types of educational programs you prefer.

4. What program format do you prefer?
   - In Person
   - Virtual
   - Hybrid (part in person, part remotely)
   - Video/Webinar
   - Other (please specify)
5. **What style of instruction do you prefer?**
   - Facilitated by an instructor
   - Self-directed, at your own pace
   - Hybrid of both
   - Cohort with a facilitator
   - Other (please specify)

6. **How likely are you to attend the following?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Type</th>
<th>Extremely Likely</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Extremely Unlikely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Day Conference</td>
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<td>Single-day Course, In-Person</td>
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<td>Single-day Course, Virtual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-Day Course, In-Person</td>
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<td>Multi-day Course, Virtual</td>
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<td>Webinar</td>
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<td>Video</td>
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Comments (Optional)

**Program Content**

*These questions will help us learn more about the subject matter you are interested in.*

7. **How likely are you to attend educational programs in the following subject areas?**

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<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Extremely Likely</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Extremely Unlikely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership (foundational skills; creating vision and purpose; change management; etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Engagement (best practices; diversity, inclusion, etc.)</td>
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</table>
### Personal Development
(strengths assessment; work/life balance; mental health; etc.)

### Management
(supervisory skills; staff development; conflict management; etc.)

### Workplace Culture
(collaboration; team building; navigating change; etc.)

**Other (please specify)**

8. If you are a supervisor or manager, what development is most needed for your direct reports?

Comment box

**Logistics**

*These questions will help us learn more about the logistics we must consider when planning programs.*

9. In your current position, how much time do you have to devote to professional development in a year?
   - 0 – 5 days
   - 6 – 10 days
   - 11 – 15 days
   - 16 + days
   - Other (please specify)

10. What, if anything, limits your participation in AMC educational programs? (check all that apply)
   - Cost
   - Time constraints
   - Travel required
   - Programs don’t seem applicable to me
   - Held at inconvenient times
   - Other (please specify)

11. How far are you willing to travel to attend an AMC educational program?
   - 0 - 25 miles
   - 25 - 50 miles
   - 50 - 100 miles
100 - 200 miles
• 200+ miles

12. What time of year is it most convenient for you to attend an AMC educational program?
• Winter (Dec - Feb)
• Spring (March - May)
• Summer (June - Aug)
• Fall (Sep - Nov)
• Any time of year could work.

Comments (optional)

13. Please tell us a little more about yourself (optional)
• Name
• Your Current Position/Title
• County/Organization
• How long have you been in your current position?

14. Is there anything else you would like us to know? (Comment box)

THANK YOU!
Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This survey is the first step in our current effort to assess the training and educational needs of AMC members. We will use the data collected by this survey to identify areas to dig deeper with our members. We will keep members informed on our programming opportunities.
Appendix 2 – 2023 Education Assessment Focus Group Questions

1. **Value**

   Q. Think about a training you found extremely valuable. What made it valuable?

   Q. What are 3 things you think are important to take away from a training?

   Q. What would lead you to recommend a particular training to your colleagues?

2. **Program Content**

   Q. What specific skills should AMC focus on in the following areas?
   - Leadership
   - Supervision
   - Change Management
   - Human Resources
   - Conflict Resolution

   Q. Does your county utilize continuous improvement/LEAN? Would training in continuous improvement be something your county would be interested in?

3. **Logistics**

   Q. What would make you willing to drive and spend a day at a training?

   Q. Would you consider attending a training on a Saturday or an evening?

   Q. How do you stay connected to your peers in other counties? (e.g. Slack, listserv, regular meetings, etc.). What value do you find in this connection?