

Working paper 2014-01

Coordinating Land Use Planning In the Context of Multiple Plans *Web-based Survey Summary Report*

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Funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Insight Grants Program. Partners in the research are the Canadian Institute of Planners and DalTRAC. The team is also grateful to ICURR for assistance in disseminating the survey.



15 September 2014

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Executive Summary

This report discusses research that examines how Canadian communities coordinate their land use planning activities in the context of rapidly proliferating plans and policies. The three-year research project involves Jill Grant (Principal Investigator), Ahsan Habib, Patricia Manuel, and Eric Rapaport of the Dalhousie University School of Planning, and Pierre Filion of the University of Waterloo School of Planning. Research is being conducted in partnership with the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and the Dalhousie Transportation Collaboratory (DalTRAC). Funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Insight Grant program supports the work.

In early 2014 we administered a survey to planners across Canada to gather data on the extent of coordination as a problem, factors affecting plan proliferation, coordination challenges, and coordination strategies. A sample of 468 responses was analyzed. Most respondents, 97%, identified as some type of planner, with nearly 60% working as municipal planners. The largest group of respondents resided in Ontario, followed by British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec. Over 40% of respondents worked in communities with populations less than 10,000, while only 16% worked in cities of over 500,000.

Survey responses indicated that policy and plan coordination are for the most part perceived as important priorities in Canadian land use planning. Over 71% of respondents agreed that coordinating conflicting policies and priorities has always been an issue in planning. However, we did not find a consistent level of confidence among Canadian planners in the ability of their communities to coordinate implementation across plans effectively. Respondents generally rated the importance placed on coordination in the communities where they worked as slightly less than the national average. Planners from larger cities were more likely to express dissatisfaction with their communities' ability to coordinate effectively. Most respondents, especially those from larger cities, agreed that communities today have many more plans than ten years ago. Respondents from smaller communities were more likely to agree that they were better able to coordinate activities because they had few plans.

Responses helped to determine the importance of various factors associated with the proliferation of plans. Responding to current issues was rated as the most significant factor by far, with 88% of respondents seeing it as important. This may reflect a general attitude that many plans are being adopted in response to rapidly changing circumstances. Strategic priorities of agencies or departments and good planning practice were also perceived as highly important factors leading to plan proliferation. Participants identified responding to local risks, allowing communities to drive plan development, and responding to political pressure as other important factors. Respondents perceived the availability of funding programs, budget availability, and innovation as less important but still significant. Developer pressure was perceived as the least important factor generating new plans.

Survey respondents rated 'insufficient staff time' as the most significant challenge to coordinating plans and policies. More than 87% agreed it was significant. Political priorities were rated as a challenge by 83% of respondents. Almost three-quarters thought it difficult to

change past practices. Nearly as many believed that changing needs in the community represented a challenge. Having too many plans, insufficient staff expertise, no established hierarchy of priorities, or competing interests among departments were each seen as significant challenges by about two-thirds of respondents. Almost 58% agreed that coordination depends on market conditions while just over half agreed that data insufficiency was a challenge. Roughly 45% of respondents agreed that it was challenging when plans did not apply to outside agencies. The only proposed challenge to elicit more disagreement than agreement was the statement “professional rivalries affect outcomes”, with which nearly 40% of respondents disagreed.

The survey collected responses related to strategies and approaches currently being used to coordinate plans. Some 79% of respondents agreed that interdepartmental meetings provide opportunities to coordinate priorities; agreement was nearly as strong with the statement “legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making” (78%). Respondents indicated that planners most commonly use these two strategies to coordinate plans. Agreement was weakest on the statement “communities have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices”. Agreement was also weak respecting the notions that “processes or organizations are created to deal with particular coordination challenges” (44%) and that “champions are appointed to facilitate coordination around critical issues” (46%). Responses were more varied in these three questions than in others, with nearly a third of respondents selecting the neutral option for each.

Respondents evaluated the effectiveness of potential coordination strategies. “Collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others...” was identified by respondents as the most effective strategy (82% response) from among the list provided. Other strategies perceived to have high potential for coordinating plans and policies were allowing legal frameworks set out in planning acts to guide decision making and coordinating policies when the comprehensive plan is revised. Designing plans to be flexible due to the political nature of planning was rated as a relatively weak strategy. Allowing plans to lapse due to changing conditions and priorities was seen as ineffective by 46% of respondents.

The survey results offer useful insights into the current state of plan production and implementation and will guide further qualitative research in selected Canadian cities.

Introduction

Given financial, temporal, and other constraints, policy-makers may not always coordinate new plans with existing policies. Policies created at different times and with diverse objectives may sometimes be overlapping, inconsistent, untimely, or even contradictory (Grant, 2013). This research explores how Canadian communities are dealing with planning and policy challenges that arise as the number of plans that planners must manage increases.

The research responds to several research questions (Grant, et al., 2013, p. 2):

1. How are Canadian communities coordinating their land use planning activities in the context of rapidly proliferating plans and policies?
2. How do Canadian cities develop, coordinate, and implement plans and policies that affect land use?
3. To what extent do planners develop overarching principles, special processes, or institutional alliances or mechanisms to lend coherence to policies and practices affecting land use outcomes?
4. How are municipalities encountering and addressing the challenges of coordinating land use and transportation effects from the disparate plans and policies various agents have produced?
5. What strategies are proving effective for local governments in setting and coordinating land use planning policies?

In the first phase of the research, Burns (2013a) conducted a literature review of plans and scholarly articles on the subject of plan coordination. He identified examples of plans and policy efforts designed to promote coordination from a sample of 35 cities across English-speaking Canada. Burns (2013b) performed an inventory of all types of plans being produced across English-speaking Canada, compiling a sample of over 350 plans drawn from 33 cities. He found that master plans, transportation plans, environmental plans, and green space plans were the most common types found. The commonness of corporate plans, recreation plans, cultural plans, downtown plans, housing plans, economic plans, resource plans, heritage plans, and growth plans varied regionally. Least common were waste plans, waterfront plans, and urban design plans. Most current plans had been prepared recently, with about half produced in 2010 or later.

This paper reports on the second phase of the research project, in which we administered a web-based survey to planners across Canada. The survey collected information concerning the extent of coordination as a problem, the prioritization of coordination in Canadian municipalities, identification of coordination challenges as well as their perceived factors, and effective strategies for improving coordination. The data collected will help guide the next phases of the research project.

Methods

Early in 2014, we administered a web-based survey to Canadian planning practitioners. We recruited survey respondents in several stages. The first stage involved the insertion of a link to the survey web page in several online newsletters distributed to CIP members in February and March 2014. Second, we sent direct emails to planners and other professionals involved in planning: these individuals had been identified in a search of municipal government websites. Additional invitations were sent to those receiving the newsletter of the Intergovernmental Committee on Urban and Regional Research (ICURR), and to an alumni list for the Dalhousie University School of Planning. Invitees were asked to share the survey with coworkers or colleagues. Although the sampling strategy was not random, we designed it to reach a large cohort of practicing planners.

We conducted the survey using ObjectPlanet's Opinio™ software. It was first activated on January 22, 2014 and was left open to responses until March 22, 2014. See *Appendix 1* for the survey invitation script and *Appendix 2* for the complete list of questions. Once the survey was closed, we downloaded the raw data into a Microsoft Excel workbook. Before any analysis could take place, we “cleaned” the data by removing incomplete and duplicate responses from the dataset (see *Survey Completion*). We then produced data summaries with tables and bar graphs. Finally, we performed two sets of cross tabulations in an attempt to identify differences in response patterns based on community size and on province (see *Appendix 3*). The results of the cross tabulations are discussed throughout the report.

Quantitative Data Summary and Analysis

Survey Completion

Table 1 below shows the responses collected for the survey. We received a total of 736 responses. These included 471 complete responses and 265 incomplete or partial responses. Of a total of 2546 known invitees (i.e., those emailed directly), 358 responded to the survey either completely or partially. This represents an invitee response rate of 14.06%. The remainder of the collected responses, 378, came from respondents who received a request from a listserv.

Table 1: Survey responses

Response category	Count
Total responses	736
Complete responses	471
Incomplete responses	265
Analyzed responses	468 ¹

This document selectively reports on the data collected through the survey. Partial responses that did not include answers to key questions considered necessary to assess the usefulness of the data were not included for analysis. Question 16 concerning community size was deemed essential in this way. After eliminating survey responses that did not include answers to Question 16, only complete responses remained. The final “cleaned” sample reported here thus consisted of 468 complete responses.¹

Profile of Respondents

Most respondents had a significant amount of experience in planning. Almost 53% had at least ten years of experience, while about a quarter indicated that they had 5-10 years of experience. Nearly 70% stated that they were either “Very involved” or “Often involved” in producing plans in their communities, and almost 80% indicated that they were either “Very involved” or “Often involved” in implementing plans.

Occupation

Table 2 shows that most respondents (97%) identified as some type of planner, with nearly 60% working as municipal planners. Regional planners, planning consultants, other types of planners, and development officers also made up large groups of respondents. We added the categories “Administrative officer” and “Building inspector” for analysis because a large number

¹ While 471 responses were counted as “completed” by the software, three of these respondents had merely clicked the “Finish” button after choosing “Decline” in response to Question 1 regarding consent. These were thus counted as “completed” responses by the software even though the respondents had not answered any questions.

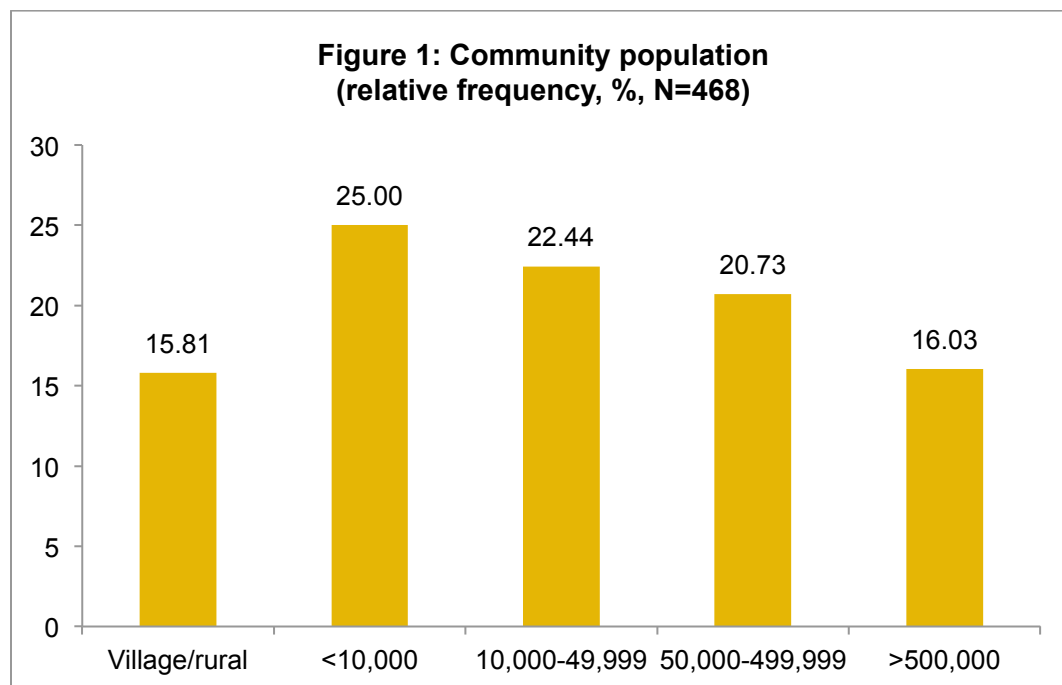
of respondents had answered “Other”, listing one of these two occupations in their comments. In addition, some respondents who selected “Other” and named an occupation with “planner” or “planning” in the title were grouped with the “Other planner” category. The “Other” category included responses from politicians, architects, and a mix of other professionals involved in planning decision-making. Because the question allowed multiple selections, respondents could select more than one role.

Table 2: Respondent occupation by group

Choice	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency by choice (% , N=468)	Percent of respondents (% , N=468)
Planner	454	70.83	97.01
Non planner	187	29.17	39.96
Sum	641	1000	136.97

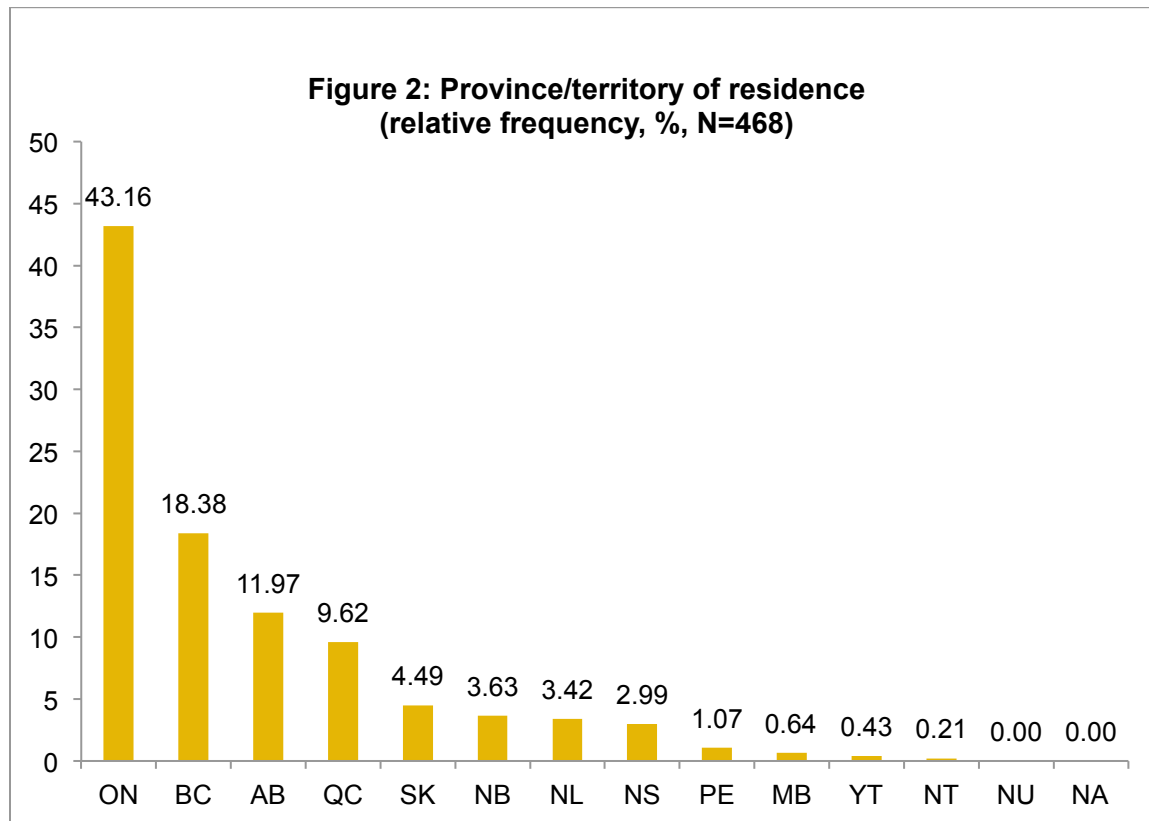
Community Population

Over 40% of respondents worked in communities with populations less than 10,000, and only 16% worked in cities of over 500,000 (see *Figure 1*). Respondents from smaller communities may be over-represented in the sample. During the recruitment phase, we found that staff email addresses were more often accessible on the websites of small municipalities than on those of large cities: thus they were more likely to receive a personal invitation. It is also possible that there was a higher response rate from planners in smaller communities.



Province or Territory of Residence

The largest group of respondents resided in Ontario, followed by British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec (see *Figure 2*). No respondents participated from Nunavut or from outside of Canada. For the most part the share of respondents from each province proved consistent with relative population levels.



Perceptions of Coordination in Planning

Respondents, especially those from large cities, generally agreed that coordinating conflicting policies and priorities has always been an issue in planning. In total, over 71% of respondents agreed. Those from larger cities were slightly more likely to agree. Quebec was the only province from which most respondents did not agree; nearly one-quarter selected “Disagree” and almost 29% remained neutral. Over 68% of respondents indicated that policy and plan coordination were priorities in Canadian land use planning. A slightly lower percentage of respondents (66%) thought that coordination was a priority in their own communities.

Confidence varied among Canadian planners in the ability of their communities to coordinate implementation across plans effectively. Responses were nearly evenly split into thirds among agreement, disagreement, and neutrality on whether coordination was not a problem in respondents’ communities because they could coordinate implementation across plans effectively. Respondents working for areas with small populations were more confident in their communities’ abilities to coordinate effectively. Nearly 59% of respondents from New Brunswick were neutral. Quebec was the only province where respondents demonstrated an overall tendency toward confidence. Most respondents from Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan expressed lower than average confidence in their communities’ capacities to coordinate effectively.

Almost 90% of respondents agreed that communities have many more plans to coordinate than they had ten years ago. This suggests a pervasive perception among planning professionals that the number of plans within communities has been on the rise. Respondents from larger communities were more likely to express agreement.

Most respondents (over 58%) did not agree that having a limited number of plans eased coordination efforts in their communities. However, respondents from smaller communities were much more likely to agree, while those from larger cities disagreed more than average. There was generally consensus among planners from different provinces, with most respondents selecting “Disagree” or “Strongly disagree”. Responses from New Brunswick practitioners were less extreme, with 41% selecting “Neutral”. A large number of respondents from Newfoundland and Labrador and from Quebec agreed with the statement.

Factors Explaining the Growing Number of Plans in Canada

This section provides an overview of survey data respecting factors related to plan proliferation. Question 5 asked, “What factors explain the growing number of plans that Canadian communities are producing?” Respondents rated the importance of ten potential factors. See *Table 3*, *Table 4*, and *Figure 3* for the ratings.

Participants generally agreed that responding to current issues (88%) or local risks (73%) contribute to plan proliferation while over 79% believed that new plans reflect “good planning practice”. Respondents from all provinces generally rated “Good planning practice” as important, with the largest majority occurring in New Brunswick. Despite the coordination challenges associated with the growing number of plans, new plans are usually perceived as worthwhile. Strategic priorities of agencies or departments were seen as important, particularly among respondents from larger communities. Being innovative was important to about 56% of respondents, with those from the smallest communities more likely to rate it as important. Respondents from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were the only groups from which most did not rate this factor as important. Responses from among these two groups tended more toward neutrality.

Political pressure (68%) and pressure from communities (70%) were perceived as somewhat significant factors in the growing number of plans. Developer pressure was perceived as the least important factor overall, with less than half of respondents rating it as “Important” or “Very important”. Respondents from Nova Scotia were most likely to rate this factor as unimportant. Respondents from larger communities more commonly rated developer pressure as important. Developers in larger cities may have, or be perceived to have, more influence over the development of plans; alternatively greater economic activity in large cities may translate into greater pressure from developers.

About 59% of respondents perceived budget availability as important, with those from smaller communities significantly more likely to rate it as important. Respondents from New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan were more likely to rate this factor as important. Funding programs availability, rated important by about 60% of respondents overall, was similarly rated more highly among participants from small communities. Respondents from Prince Edward Island were most likely to rate funding program availability as important.

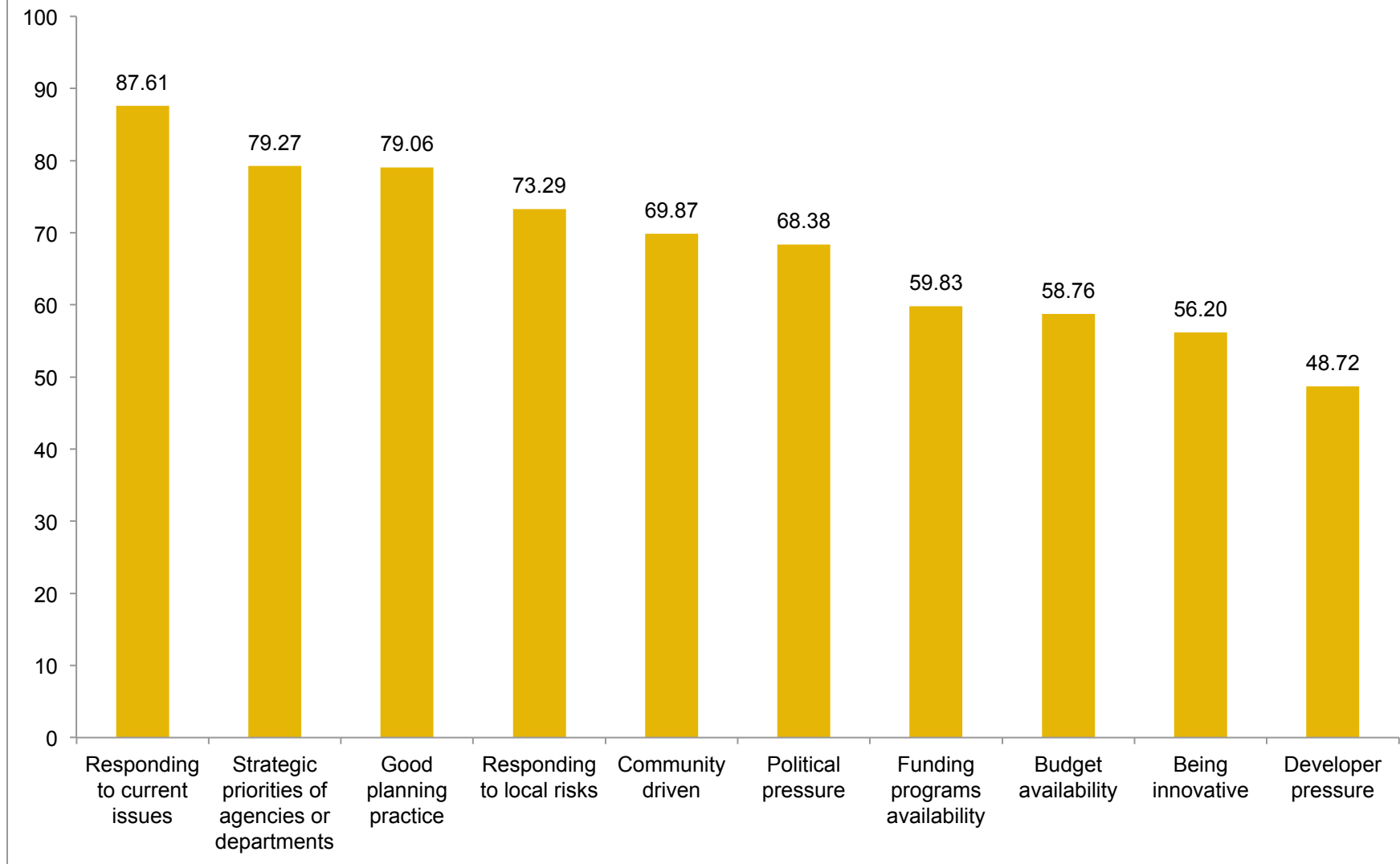
Table 3: Factors related to the growing number of plans in Canada

Rating of importance (% of respondents, N=468)	Factor									
	Good planning practice	Political pressure	Community driven	Developer pressure	Strategic priorities of agencies or departments	Responding to current issues	Being innovative	Responding to local risks	Budget availability	Funding programs availability
Very important	20.94	21.6	14.32	11.54	24.57	26.92	16.24	15.81	23.3	22.86
Important	58.12	46.8	55.56	37.18	54.70	60.68	39.96	57.48	35.5	36.97
Neutral	15.60	23.7	19.44	28.42	17.95	9.62	29.91	17.52	26.1	26.28
Unimportant	5.13	7.9	9.83	19.02	2.78	2.56	11.75	7.69	13.0	11.97
Very unimportant	0.21	0.0	0.85	3.85	0.00	0.21	2.14	1.50	2.1	1.92

Table 4: Factors related to the growing number of plans in Canada (aggregating 'very important and important' to 'important')

Rating of importance (% of respondents, aggregated, N=468)	Factor									
	Good planning practice	Political pressure	Community driven	Developer pressure	Strategic priorities of agencies or departments	Responding to current issues	Being innovative	Responding to local risks	Budget availability	Funding programs availability
Important	79.06	68.38	69.87	48.72	79.27	87.61	56.20	73.29	58.76	59.83
Neutral	15.60	23.7	19.44	28.42	17.95	9.62	29.91	17.52	26.1	26.28
Unimportant	5.34	7.91	10.68	22.86	2.78	2.78	13.89	9.19	15.17	13.89

**Figure 3: Factors related to the growing number of plans in Canada
(% of respondents who rated factor as important, N=468)**



Challenges to Coordinating Plans and Policies

Question 8 asked respondents “What do you see as some of the challenges to coordinating plans and policies?” Respondents were presented with thirteen statements with which they were asked to indicate their level of agreement. This section presents an overview and interpretation of responses to Question 8 respecting the perceived challenges to coordinating plans and policies. See *Table 5*, *Table 6*, and *Figure 4* for the complete ratings of the challenges discussed in this section.

With 87% of respondents agreeing, insufficient staff time was seen as the most significant challenge to coordinating plans and policies. Respondents from the smallest communities, villages or rural areas, were somewhat less likely to express agreement, suggesting that staff time is perceived as a greater constraint in larger communities. By contrast with respondents from other parts of the country, only half of respondents from Quebec agreed that insufficient staff time was a challenge.

Political priorities were seen as very important, with 83% of respondents agreeing that they were a challenge to coordination. Respondents from communities with populations greater than 10,000 were slightly more likely to agree, suggesting that there may be greater political influence on plan creation and coordination in large cities. This is consistent with results discussed in the next section that hint that planning is perceived as more inherently political in large cities.

Almost three-quarters (72%) of respondents thought it difficult to change past practices. At the same time, nearly as many agreed that changing needs in the community represented a challenge. Almost 95% of respondents from Newfoundland and Labrador agreed: a much higher percentage than among respondents from other provinces. Respondents from British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island were somewhat less likely than average to express agreement. These results are consistent with those discussed earlier, which suggested that plans are often created in response to current issues and local risks.

Having too many plans, insufficient staff expertise, or no established hierarchy of priorities were each seen as significant challenges by about two-thirds of respondents. Respondents from cities with populations of over 500,000 were significantly more likely to agree that having too many plans was a challenge, likely reflecting the number of plans in large cities. Respondents from Quebec were less likely to view insufficient staff expertise as a challenge. Those from Quebec and Saskatchewan were somewhat less likely to agree that the absence of an established hierarchy of priorities was problematic.

Nearly 58% of respondents agreed that coordination depends on market conditions. Participants from Alberta and Quebec were more likely to agree. A possible interpretation is that the planning process is affected by varying levels of development activity in ways that affect coordination. About 62% of respondents agreed that legislative requirements present a challenge to coordination. Respondents from villages or rural areas were significantly more likely to agree, whereas those from large cities with populations over 500,000 were considerably less likely to

agree. Legislative requirements thus may be perceived as more significant in determining coordination outcomes in small communities. Respondents from Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba were less likely to agree than average, and those from Quebec were more likely to agree.

Just over half of respondents agreed that insufficient data availability was a challenge to coordinating plans and policies, with about a quarter each expressing disagreement or remaining neutral. Respondents from smaller communities were less likely to agree. Responses indicated that sharing data is perceived as an effective strategy but the practice is perhaps less common than it could be. This may help explain the perceived challenge of insufficient data availability.

Competing interests among departments were viewed as a challenge by about two-thirds of participants. Those from larger municipalities were more likely to agree than those from smaller communities. Respondents from Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Quebec were more likely to agree, whereas those from Newfoundland and Labrador and from Prince Edward Island were less likely to agree. Interdepartmental meetings may play a role in overcoming these competing interests. Results discussed in the next section suggest that such meetings are commonly used as a means of improving coordination. Roughly 45% of respondents agreed that they experienced challenges because their plans did not apply to outside agencies. Respondents from Newfoundland and Labrador and from Saskatchewan were less likely to agree. The only proposed challenge to elicit more disagreement than agreement was that “professional rivalries affect outcomes”. While responses were fairly evenly split on this statement, nearly 40% of respondents disagreed. Respondents from large cities with populations of over 500,000 were more likely to agree that this presented a challenge while those from small villages or rural areas were less likely to agree. Nearly half of respondents from Newfoundland and Labrador and from Nova Scotia agreed that professional rivalries were a challenge.

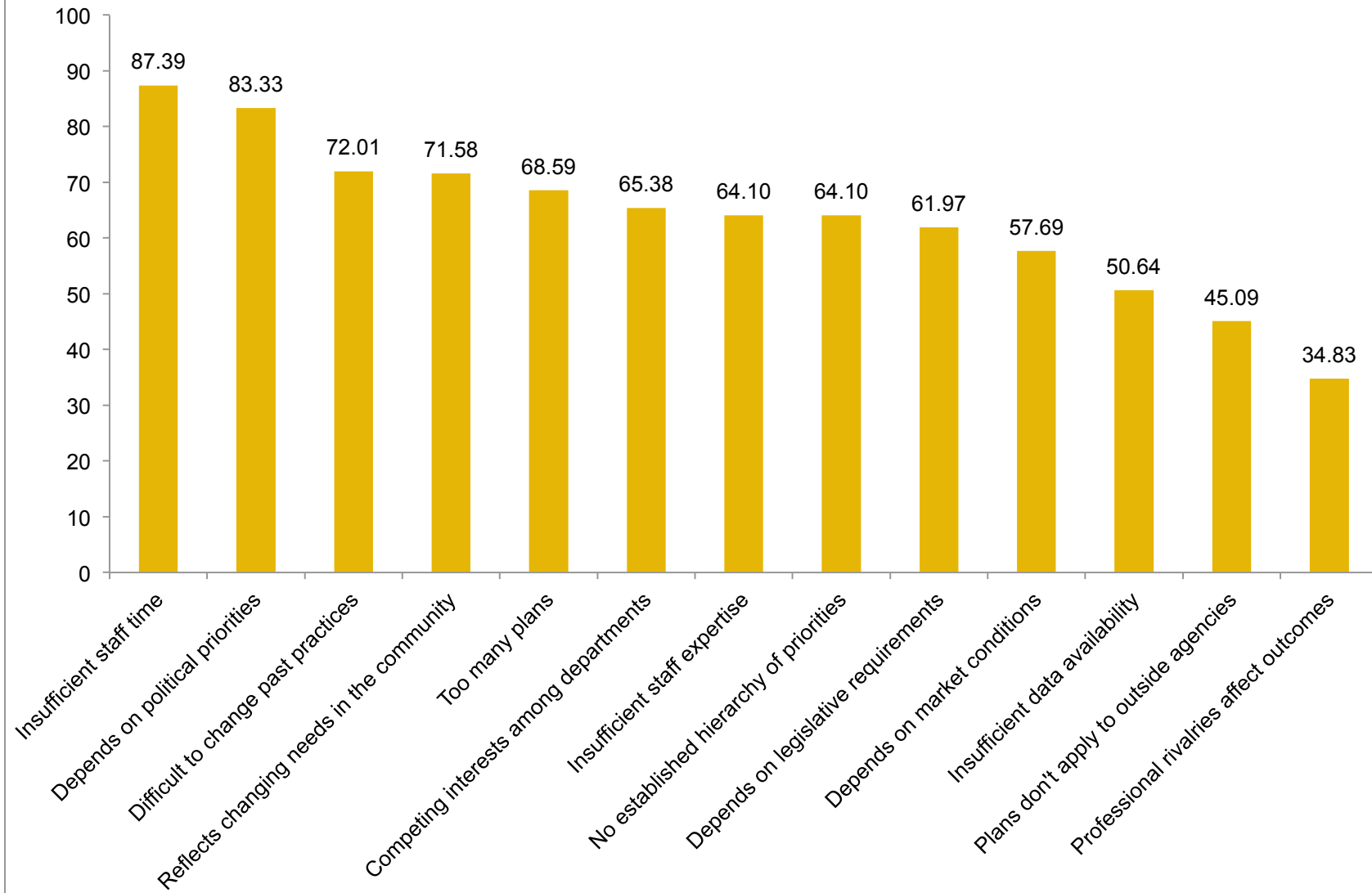
Table 5: Challenges to coordinating plans and policies

Level of agreement (% of respondents, N=468)	Challenge												
	Too many plans	In-sufficient staff time	In-sufficient staff expertise	Depends on political priorities	Depends on market conditions	Reflects changing needs in the community	In-sufficient data availability	Depends on legislative requirements	Competing interests among departments	Professional rivalries affect outcomes	Difficult to change past practices	No established hierarchy of priorities	Plans don't apply to outside agencies
Strongly agree	25.00	48.93	23.93	34.19	12.39	12.82	15.60	16.45	26.92	10.26	27.35	21.37	14.10
Agree	43.59	38.46	40.17	49.15	45.30	58.76	35.04	45.51	38.46	24.57	44.66	42.74	30.98
Neutral	19.44	5.13	18.59	11.97	25.64	18.59	24.79	25.21	17.74	26.28	15.38	18.59	32.05
Disagree	11.11	6.84	16.67	4.27	15.38	9.62	22.01	11.75	16.03	31.41	11.75	15.38	20.30
Strongly disagree	0.85	0.64	0.64	0.43	1.28	0.21	2.56	1.07	0.85	7.48	0.85	1.92	2.56

Table 6: Challenges to coordinating plans and policies (aggregating 'strongly agree' and 'agree' to 'agree')

Level of agreement (% of respondents, aggregated, N=468)	Challenge												
	Too many plans	In-sufficient staff time	In-sufficient staff expertise	Depends on political priorities	Depends on market conditions	Reflects changing needs in the community	In-sufficient data availability	Depends on legislative requirements	Competing interests among departments	Professional rivalries affect outcomes	Difficult to change past practices	No established hierarchy of priorities	Plans don't apply to outside agencies
Agree	68.59	87.39	64.10	83.33	57.69	71.58	50.64	61.97	65.38	34.83	72.01	64.10	45.09
Neutral	19.44	5.13	18.59	11.97	25.64	18.59	24.79	25.21	17.74	26.28	15.38	18.59	32.05
Disagree	11.97	7.48	17.31	4.70	16.67	9.83	24.57	12.82	16.88	38.89	12.61	17.31	22.86

Figure 4: Challenges to coordinating plans and policies
(% of respondents who agreed factor was a challenge, N=468)



Strategies for Coordinating Plans and Policies

Question 6 asked respondents “what strategies or approaches are planners using to coordinate plans?” We asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with several statements, from which we can derive preferences for strategies for coordinating plans and policies. *Table 7* and *Table 8* summarize responses. Question 7 asked respondents to rank the effectiveness of potential strategies for coordinating plans and policies. See *Table 9* and *Table 10* for the full rankings. This section offers an overview and some analysis of responses to Question 6 and Question 7 respecting the strategies and approaches practitioners used to coordinate plans and assess perceived effectiveness. See *Figure 5* for a graphic representation of respondents’ ratings of the strategies in terms of both commonness and effectiveness.

Respondents perceived collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others as the most effective strategy from the list presented. Nearly 82% rated it as effective. About 72% of respondents agreed that this strategy was currently in use. Respondents from the largest communities (500,000 or more) were more likely to agree that planners used the strategy, with over 77% expressing agreement. At the same time, however, respondents from communities smaller than 50,000 were somewhat more likely to rate the strategy as effective. Respondents in smaller communities may perceive greater potential for gains in coordination because collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others may be less common in their communities.

Agreement was strong with the phrase “interdepartmental meetings provide opportunities to coordinate priorities” (79%). Agreement was strongest among respondents from Alberta (over 89%). Nearly 36% of respondents from Alberta selected “Strongly agree”. Agreement was also strong in New Brunswick and in Quebec. The evidence from the responses suggests that interdepartmental meetings play a primary role in achieving coordination.

Agreement was nearly as strong with the statement “Legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making” (78%). Agreement proved consistent across provinces and among communities of different sizes, suggesting that legal frameworks are consistently applied across the country as a means of coordinating plans and policies. Over 50% of respondents rated this strategy as “Effective” with over a quarter rating it as “Very effective”. Respondents from medium sized communities of between 10,000 and 499,999 were less likely to rate the strategy as effective. Participants from Ontario, Quebec, or Saskatchewan were most likely to call it effective, while those from Alberta were least likely to rate it as effective.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents rated coordinating policies when the comprehensive plan is revised as an effective strategy. Responses from Quebec were the exception. While 42% of respondents from that province rated the strategy as effective, nearly as many (38%) rated it as ineffective. Nearly half of respondents agreed that this strategy is currently in use in planning. Planners from Nova Scotia were the most likely to express strong agreement with the statement, with 43% selecting “Strongly agree”. The results suggest that planners endeavour to improve coordination of their various plans and policies when they revise comprehensive plans.

Respondents rated using budgets to provide mechanisms for communities to set policy priorities as somewhat less effective than the strategies discussed above, with less than 59% of respondents rating it as “Effective” or “Very effective”. Respondents from the largest cities were less likely to rate the strategy as effective. Those from New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island were more likely to rate it as effective. Just over 60% of respondents agreed that the strategy is in use. Respondents from medium to large sized cities (50,000 plus) were less likely to agree it was used.

Participants identified two strategies that may be overused in planning: these were rated much less effective than they were common. Allowing plans to lapse because priorities and conditions change was rated least effective; only 45% of respondents rated the strategy as effective. Respondents from smaller communities were significantly more likely to rate it as effective. Quebec was the only province from which a majority of respondents (53%) rated this strategy as effective. Despite this strategy’s perceived ineffectiveness, 64% of respondents agreed that it is currently used in planning. Respondents from Saskatchewan were significantly more likely to agree than those from other provinces that this strategy was currently in use. Over 90% of respondents from that province selected either “Agree” or “Strongly agree”.

Designing plans to be flexible due to the political nature of planning was rated as the second least effective strategy. Just under 46% of respondents identified that this was an effective strategy. Only about 29% of those from New Brunswick rated this strategy as effective while nearly half remained neutral. Despite designing plans to be flexible being perceived as a relatively ineffective strategy for achieving coordination, nearly two-thirds of respondents agreed that it was currently used by planners. Respondents from the smallest communities were less likely to express agreement than those from larger communities. Planners may perceive a more pervasive political element in the planning process in large communities than in small ones. Planners may feel greater pressure to design plans to be flexible in large cities. We found significant disagreement on the prevalence of this strategy among respondents from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Most respondents from New Brunswick remained neutral, with just over 35% expressing agreement. In contrast, almost 93% of respondents from Nova Scotia agreed that designing plans to be flexible is a common strategy.

The relative commonness of these two strategies—allowing plans to lapse and designing plans to be flexible—despite their perceived ineffectiveness, suggests that they are not strategies chosen freely by practitioners. For example, budget constraints may force planners in many communities, especially smaller ones, to allow plans to lapse as conditions change, while the political environment in which planners work may encourage many plans to be made flexible. Overcoming ineffective strategies may be perceived as another challenge to coordinating plans and policies (see *Figure 5*).

Participants identified three strategies that may be highly effective but are not commonly used in planning. These included setting a clear organizational hierarchy within a community, creating processes or organizations to deal with particular coordination challenges, and appointing champions. Some 65% of respondents agreed that having a clear organizational

hierarchy was an effective strategy. Respondents from towns smaller than 10,000 were most likely to rate this as effective. Respondents from Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, or New Brunswick were most likely to rate the strategy as effective. Yet only 41% of respondents believed that having a clear organizational hierarchy was a common strategy. Respondents from Alberta and Quebec were most likely to say that the strategy was currently in use.

About 63% of respondents rated creating processes or organizations to deal with particular coordination challenges as an effective strategy. Respondents from towns smaller than 10,000 were somewhat less likely to rate it as effective. While the largest proportion of respondents (44%) agreed that this was a strategy that is currently in use, a large number also selected “Neutral” (30%) or indicated disagreement (26%). Respondents from larger communities were somewhat more likely to express disagreement. The results suggest that while communities often create new processes or organizations to deal with particular coordination challenges, this strategy is not consistently utilized.

Nearly 68% of respondents rated appointing champions to facilitate coordination around critical issues as an effective strategy. Respondents from villages or rural areas were somewhat less likely to rate this strategy as effective. As well, respondents from New Brunswick and from Prince Edward Island were more likely to rate it as effective. While responses indicated that appointing champions to facilitate coordination around critical issues may be perceived as effective, the strategy is not judged to be widely used. About 47% of respondents agreed that appointing champions is currently a coordination strategy in planning. Respondents from Quebec were more likely to agree than those from other provinces.

The strategies of setting a clear organizational hierarchy within a community, creating processes or organizations to deal with particular coordination challenges, and appointing champions are perceived to be underutilized strategies with the potential to effectively foster coordination in planning. Practitioners appear to see opportunity for increasing the utilization of these three strategies (see *Figure 5*).

Table 7: Perceived commonness of strategies for coordinating plans and policies

Level of agreement that strategy is currently in use (% of respondents, N=468)	Strategy									
	Communities have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.	Legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making.	Policies are coordinated when the comprehensive plan is revised.	Collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others facilitates consensus based decisions when policies may conflict.	Interdepartmental meetings provide opportunities to coordinate priorities.	Budgets provide mechanisms for communities to set policy priorities.	Communities allow plans to lapse because priorities and conditions change.	Processes or organizations are created to deal with particular coordination challenges.	Champions are appointed to facilitate coordination around critical issues.	Planning is inherently political, so plans have to be flexible.
Strongly agree	4.70	17.09	14.10	17.74	24.57	14.53	17.52	4.70	5.98	19.02
Agree	36.54	60.68	47.44	53.85	54.49	45.73	46.79	39.10	40.60	45.94
Neutral	29.06	14.10	20.30	16.88	13.03	22.86	15.81	30.13	30.13	18.59
Disagree	27.56	7.69	17.09	9.62	7.05	15.17	16.88	23.29	19.44	14.53
Strongly disagree	2.14	0.43	1.07	1.92	0.85	1.71	2.99	2.78	3.85	1.92

Table 8: Perceived commonness of strategies for coordinating plans and policies (aggregated)

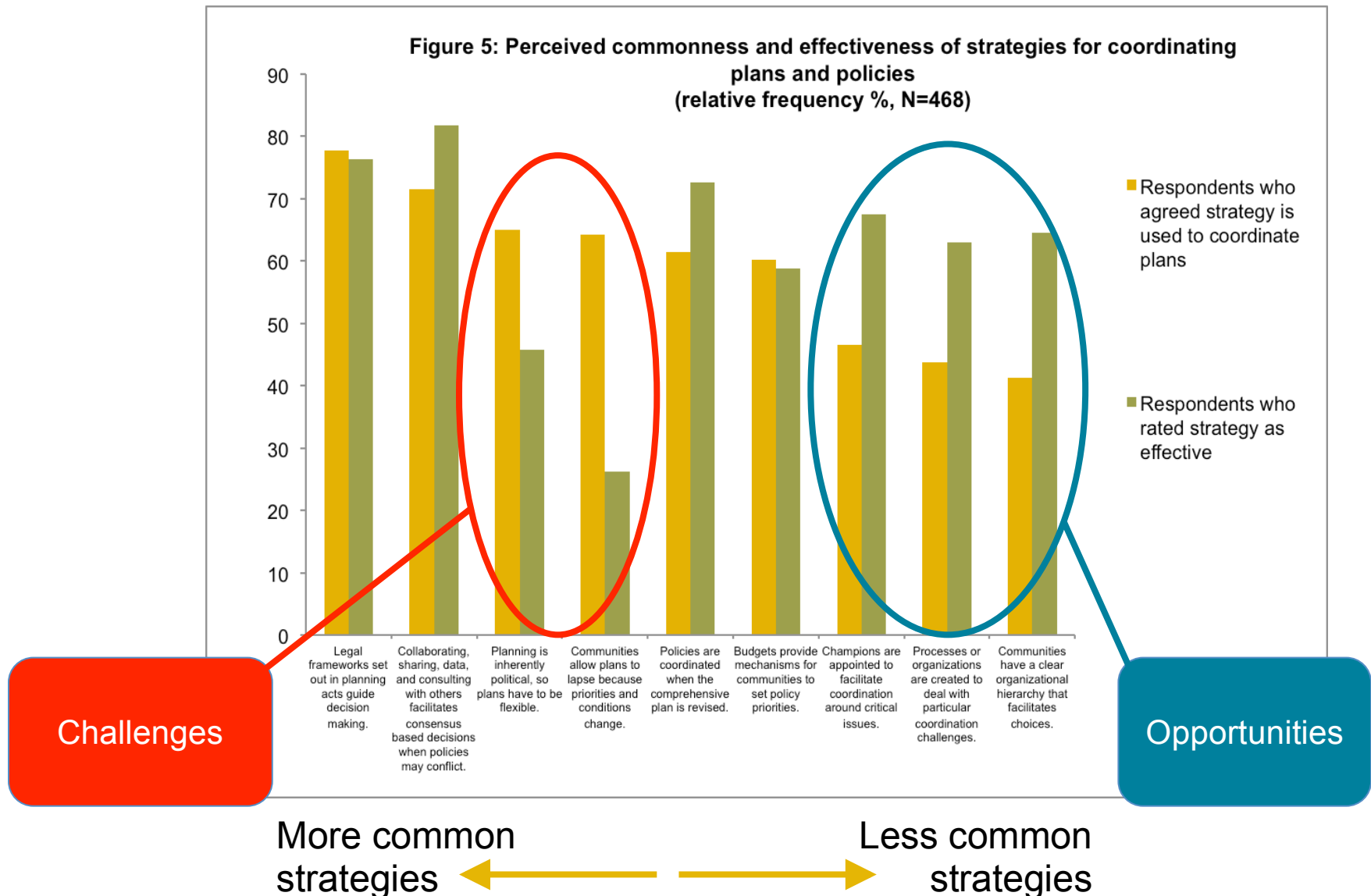
Level of agreement that strategy is currently in use (% of respondents, N=468)	Strategy									
	Communities have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.	Legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making.	Communities have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.	Collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others facilitates consensus based decisions when policies may conflict.	Communities have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.	Budgets provide mechanisms for communities to set policy priorities.	Communities have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.	Processes or organizations are created to deal with particular coordination challenges.	Communities have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.	Planning is inherently political, so plans have to be flexible.
Agree	41.24	77.78	61.54	71.58	79.06	60.26	64.32	43.80	46.58	64.96
Neutral	29.06	14.10	20.30	16.88	13.03	22.86	15.81	30.13	30.13	18.59
Disagree	29.70	8.12	18.16	11.54	7.91	16.88	19.87	26.07	23.29	16.45

Table 9: Perceived effectiveness of strategies for coordinating plans and policies

Rating of effectiveness (% of respondents, N=468)	Strategy								
	Communities may have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.	Legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making.	Policies can be coordinated when the comprehensive plan is revised.	Collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others can facilitate consensus based decisions when policies may conflict.	Budgets provide mechanisms for communities to set policy priorities.	Communities may allow plans to lapse because priorities and conditions change.	Processes or organizations may be created to deal with particular coordination challenges.	Champions may be appointed to facilitate coordination around critical issues.	Planning is inherently political, so plans have to be flexible.
Very effective	8.33	25.64	24.36	29.06	14.96	4.06	11.11	19.87	10.47
Effective	56.20	50.64	48.29	52.78	43.80	22.22	51.92	47.65	35.26
Neutral	24.57	16.45	16.03	12.82	24.57	28.21	24.15	22.01	28.63
Ineffective	9.83	6.62	9.62	4.91	14.53	35.90	11.32	9.19	20.09
Very ineffective	1.07	0.64	1.71	0.43	2.14	9.62	1.50	1.28	5.56

Table 10: Perceived effectiveness of strategies for coordinating plans and policies (aggregated)

Rating of effectiveness (% of respondents, aggregated, N=468)	Strategy								
	Communities may have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.	Legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making.	Policies can be coordinated when the comprehensive plan is revised.	Collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others can facilitate consensus based decisions when policies may conflict.	Budgets provide mechanisms for communities to set policy priorities.	Communities may allow plans to lapse because priorities and conditions change.	Processes or organizations may be created to deal with particular coordination challenges.	Champions may be appointed to facilitate coordination around critical issues.	Planning is inherently political, so plans have to be flexible.
Effective	64.53	76.28	72.65	81.84	58.76	26.28	63.03	67.52	45.73
Neutral	24.57	16.45	16.03	12.82	24.57	28.21	24.15	22.01	28.63
Ineffective	10.90	7.26	11.32	5.34	16.67	45.51	12.82	10.47	25.64



Final notes

This research project explores the strategies Canadian planners are using to coordinate the growing number of plans that communities are producing. Canadian communities are producing plans and policies in greater numbers than in the past. Given financial, temporal, and other constraints, policy-makers may not always coordinate new plans with existing policies. Policies created at different times and for diverse purposes may sometimes be overlapping, inconsistent, untimely, or even contradictory (Grant, 2013).

In the early stages of our research we reviewed current coordination efforts in Canadian cities (Burns, 2013a), and produced an inventory of the types of plans being produced across English-speaking Canada (Burns, 2013b). The survey reported here offers useful insights into practitioners' perspectives on some of the challenges of contemporary planning practice. Respondents clearly indicated that they struggled to address demands placed upon them; they evaluated the kinds of strategies being used in practice. Following up on these findings we have initiated the next phase of the project: this involves interviews with planners in the St John's area (Newfoundland and Labrador), Halifax (Nova Scotia), the Greater Toronto Area (Ontario), Edmonton (Alberta) and Metro Vancouver (British Columbia). We hope to report on those findings early in 2015.

Watch for updates at <http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/multiple-plans/index.html>

Sources

Burns, A. (2013a). *Coordinating multiple plans: What Canadian cities are doing*. Retrieved from <http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/multiple-plans/student-research.html>

Burns, A. (2013b). *Plan proliferation and coordination: A study of plans across Canada*. Retrieved from <http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/multiple-plans/working-papers.html>

Grant, J., Filion, P., Habib, A., Manuel, P., and Rapaport, E. (2013). Coordinating land use planning in the context of multiple plans. *SSHRC Insight Grant proposal*. Retrieved from <http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/multiple-plans/working-papers.html>

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Invitation Script

Produced by Jill Grant (2013):

Planning faculty members at Dalhousie University and the University of Waterloo are currently conducting a survey on how Canadian communities are dealing with the significant challenges they face in coordinating their planning and policy activities as the number of plans they have grows. For the research we are contacting planners and other local officials or practitioners who may be familiar with issues related to plan development, policy coordination, and plan implementation. We hope that you will share your knowledge and insights with us. The survey will take about 10 to 12 minutes to complete. Participants will be eligible to win an iPad Mini or one of two \$50 gift certificates.

Your participation in any part of the survey is voluntary. We will keep your information and any of your comments confidential, although we may quote your remarks without linking them to your identity or location.

Because we are interested in long-term trends in Canadian planning, we will retain this data indefinitely for possible future comparative purposes.

We will make the results of our research available online once we analyze the data.

Please feel free to forward our request to others in your organization, as a reply from your community will be very helpful in the research.

If you have any questions about the study please contact the principal investigator, Jill Grant, at Dalhousie University – [redacted]. If you have any concerns about the ethics of the research, please contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics at [redacted], or email [redacted].

If you are willing to participate in the research, please click here:
[survey link omitted]

Thanks for your help.

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Pierre Filion, School of Planning, University of Waterloo
Ahsan Habib, Daltrac, School of Planning, Dalhousie University
Patricia Manuel, School of Planning, Dalhousie University
Eric Rapaport, School of Planning, Dalhousie University
Nathan Hall, Research Assistant, School of Planning, Dalhousie University

Find out more about our research at <http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/multiple-plans/index.html>

Appendix 2: Survey Question Script

From Grant (2013):

We have noticed that many communities today have a growing number of plans they have adopted. Plans may be created in planning departments or by other departments and agencies within local governments. In some situations, policies in various plans may conflict, and competing priorities may challenge those making decisions about land use. It is possible that policies created at different times for diverse purposes may be overlapping, inconsistent, untimely, or even contradictory: for instance, official plans may support greenways and wildlife corridors while hazard plans may recommend removing undergrowth or clearing fire breaks. We are hoping to understand professional perspectives on how communities attempt to coordinate plans and policies.

1. We are conducting research on how Canadian communities are dealing with significant challenges in coordinating their planning and policy activities as the number of plans they have to manage increases. The research team includes Jill Grant (Principal Investigator), Ahsan Habib, Patricia Manuel, and Eric Rapaport at Dalhousie University School of Planning, and Pierre Filion at the University of Waterloo School of Planning. We are doing this research in partnership with the Canadian Institute of Planners and DalTRAC transportation lab, with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Your participation in any part of the survey is voluntary. We will keep your information and any of your comments confidential, although we may quote your remarks without linking them to your identity or location. Because we are interested in long-term trends in Canadian planning, we will retain this data indefinitely for possible future comparative purposes. We will make the results of our research available online once we analyze the data. Visit our web site at <http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/multipleplans/index.html> for information on the research. As a token of our gratitude we will hold a draw for participants. We will give away one iPad Mini and two \$50 gift certificates. (If you wish to enter the draw please provide your email address when prompted to do so. Your email address will not be linked to other data you provide in the survey.) If you have any questions about the study please contact the principal investigator, Jill Grant, at Dalhousie University at [redacted] or by calling [redacted]. If you have any concerns about the ethics of the research, please contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics at [redacted], or email [redacted]. If you consent to participate in the study, please select "Consent" from the drop-down menu below. Thanks for your interest in the research (respondents selected either "Consent" or "Decline").

2. To what extent do you believe that policy and plan coordination are priorities in Canadian planning?

Very high priority
High priority
Neutral
Low priority
Very low priority

3. To what extent is policy and plan coordination a priority in the community where you most frequently work?

Very high priority
High priority
Neutral
Low priority
Very low priority

4. Based on your experience, do you agree or disagree with the following (respondents selected from “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Neutral”, “Disagree”, or “Strongly disagree” for each statement)?

Coordination is not a problem in our community: we have relatively few plans.
Coordination is not a problem in our community: we can coordinate implementation across multiple plans effectively.
Coordinating conflicting policies and priorities has always been an issue in planning.
Communities have many more plans to coordinate than they had ten years ago.

5. What factors explain the growing number of plans that Canadian communities are producing (respondents selected from “Very important”, “Important”, “Neutral”, “Unimportant”, or “Very unimportant” for each item)?

Good planning practice
Political pressure
Community driven
Developer pressure
Strategic priorities of agencies or departments

Responding to current issues
Being innovative
Responding to local risks
Budget availability
Funding programs availability

6. What strategies or approaches are planners using to coordinate plans (respondents selected from “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Neutral”, “Disagree”, or “Strongly disagree” for each statement)?

Communities have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.
 Legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making.
 Policies are coordinated when the comprehensive plan is revised.
 Collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others facilitate consensus based decisions when policies may conflict.
 Interdepartmental meetings provide opportunities to coordinate priorities.
 Budgets provide mechanisms for communities to set policy priorities.
 Communities allow plans to lapse because priorities and conditions change.
 Processes or organizations are created to deal with particular coordination challenges.
 Champions are appointed to facilitate coordination around critical issues.
 Planning is inherently political, so plans have to be flexible.

7. Please rank the effectiveness of each of these as potential strategies for coordinating plans and policies (respondents selected from “Very effective”, “Effective”, “Neutral”, “Ineffective”, or “Very ineffective” for each item).

Communities may have a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.
 Legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making.
 Policies can be coordinated when the comprehensive plan is revised.
 Collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others can facilitate consensus based decisions when policies may conflict.
 Budgets provide mechanisms for communities to set policy priorities.
 Communities may allow plans to lapse because priorities and conditions change.
 Processes or organizations may be created to deal with particular coordination challenges.
 Champions may be appointed to facilitate coordination around critical issues.
 Planning is inherently political, so plans have to be flexible.

8. What do you see as some of the challenges to coordinating plans and policies (respondents selected from “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Neutral”, “Disagree”, or “Strongly disagree” for each item)?

Too many plans.
 Insufficient staff time.
 Insufficient staff expertise.
 Depends on political priorities.
 Depends on market conditions.
 Reflects changing needs in the community.
 Insufficient data availability.

Depends on legislative requirements.
 Competing interests among departments.
 Professional rivalries affect outcomes.
 Difficult to change past practices.
 No established hierarchy of priorities.
 Plans don’t apply to outside agencies.

9. Can you provide an example of the challenges of coordinating plans and policies you have experienced in your work?
10. Can you suggest any notable examples of effective plan coordination or best practices in coordinating policies?
11. Is there anything about coordinating plans and policies that you would like to add?
12. Would you describe yourself as (check all that apply)?

Municipal planner

Development officer

Planning technician

Transportation planner

Planning consultant

Regional planner

Other planner

Engineer

Designer

Town clerk

Student

Other

13. How many years have you been working in the planning field?

One year or fewer

More than one year but fewer than five years

More than five years but fewer than ten years

Ten years or more

N/A

14. How involved are you in producing plans?

Very involved

Often involved

Sometimes involved

Rarely involved

Not involved

15. How involved are you in implementing plans?

Very involved

Often involved

Sometimes involved

Rarely involved

Not involved

16. Is the community where you most commonly work:

A city over 500,000 people

A city from 50,000 to 499,999 people

A community from 10,000 to 49,999 people

A town smaller than 10,000

A village or rural area

17. In which province/territory do you live?

Alberta
British Columbia
Manitoba
New Brunswick
Newfoundland and Labrador
Nova Scotia
Ontario
Prince Edward Island
Quebec
Saskatchewan
Northwest Territories
Nunavut
Yukon Territory
Outside of Canada

18. In which municipality do you most frequently work?

19. If you would like to enter the draw for an iPad Mini or gift certificates for Future Shop please fill in your email address.

Appendix 3: Cross Tabulation Examples

WE performed cross tabulations using respondents' answers to Question 16, which asked respondents to categorize the community in which they most commonly worked based on population, and to Question 17, which asked respondents to identify their province or territory of residence. The results of the cross tabulations indicate some differences in responses associated with community size and province of residence. The tables below are examples of the cross tabulations performed.

Responses to Q2 by community population (%): "To what extent do you believe that policy and plan coordination are priorities in Canadian planning?"

Ranking of priority (% of respondents)	Community population of respondent				
	A village or rural area	A town smaller than 10,000	A community from 10,000 to 49,999	A city from 50,000 to 499,999	A city over 500,000
Very high priority	10.81	13.68	19.05	21.65	13.33
High priority	55.41	49.57	52.38	50.52	56.00
Neutral	21.62	20.51	17.14	15.46	13.33
Low priority	12.16	15.38	11.43	12.37	17.33
Very low priority	0.00	0.85	0.00	0.00	0.00
Absolute total (N=468)	74	117	105	97	75

Responses to Q2 by province/territory (%): "To what extent do you believe that policy and plan coordination are priorities in Canadian planning?"

Ranking of priority (% of respondents)	Province/territory of residence												
	AB	BC	MB	NB	NL	NT	NS	ON	PE	QC	SK	YT	% of total
Very high priority	14.3	23.3	0.0	11.8	18.8	0.0	7.1	16.8	20.0	8.9	9.5	0.0	16.0
High priority	53.6	48.8	100	29.4	50.0	0.0	64.3	57.4	60.0	46.7	38.1	0.0	52.4
Neutral	19.6	17.4	0.0	29.4	18.8	0.0	7.1	14.4	20.0	28.9	23.8	0.0	17.7
Low priority	10.7	10.5	0.0	29.4	12.5	100	21.4	11.4	0.0	15.6	28.6	100	13.7
Very low priority	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Absolute total (N=468)	56	86	3	17	16	1	14	202	5	45	21	2	468