

2018 STATE OF THE CLERK

Survey and
analysis report of
the modern clerk





INTRODUCTION

Clerks serve a humble but powerful role in the public sector. They help file and manage important records, ensure elections are conducted fairly and accurately, and record public meetings for the sake of transparency. Government literally couldn't function without them.

Because the entire public sector depends on them, it's important to regularly find out what clerks do, how their role is evolving and what challenges they face. Granicus does this annually in the form of a State of the Clerk survey. This report pulls from that data to provide a snapshot of a clerk's job.

The modern clerk works in jurisdictions with populations of fewer than 10,000 to those exceeding 1 million. They're employed by all manner of townships, cities, counties,

special districts and states. And yet, despite those differences, they share a remarkable amount in common. Many spend a significant period of time conducting records management and agenda prep — and they wish they had more time for those tasks. But today's clerks are strained for resources and stuck using clunky technology that slows them down. A plurality works in organizations that have implemented a paper reduction strategy.

Demographically, the average clerk is graying, and an overwhelming majority plan to retire in the next five to 10 years. Despite this, few of their offices seem to be planning for their departures, portending a potentially difficult period ahead as Baby Boomers retire en masse and job openings swell.

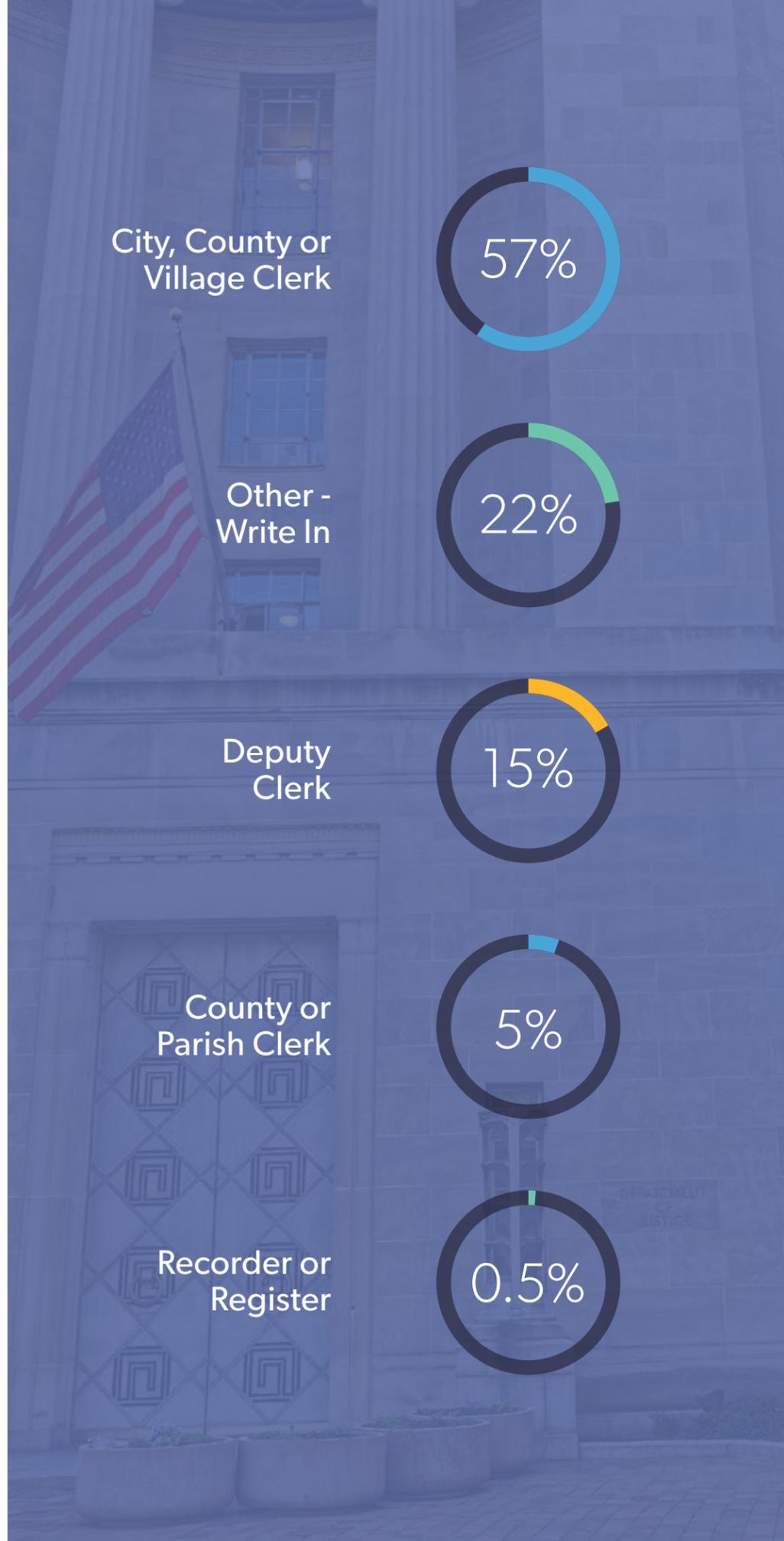
METHODOLOGY

Granicus identified 9,874 people who work as clerks. They included Granicus clients and non-clients in the United States and Canada. A series of emails sent in December 2017 invited clerks to participate in the

survey. Surveys that were partially completed were eliminated from the results. A total of 392 people completed the survey in its entirety — a response rate of 4 percent.

WHO IS THE MODERN CLERK?

One cannot get a complete snapshot of the day in the life of a clerk without first knowing who they are demographically.

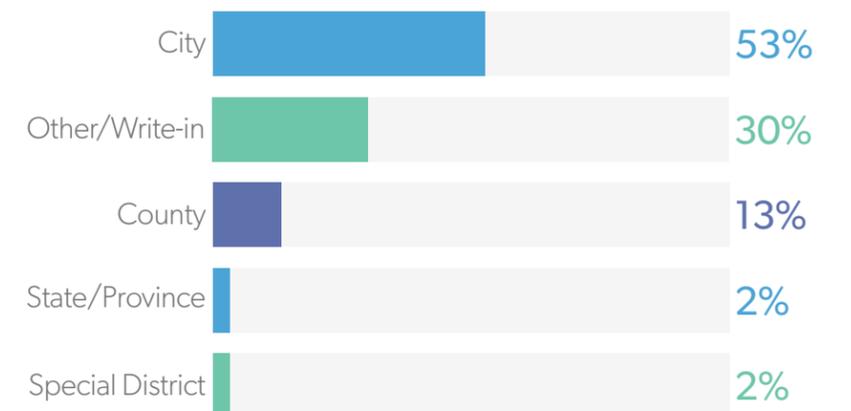


What's in a name?

First things first: What title do most clerks hold? It's perhaps no surprise that most (57 percent) are simply "city clerk" or "town/village clerk." But a sizeable number identified as "deputy clerk" or "county/parish clerk."

The vast majority of clerks work in cities, towns and villages, while fewer than 20 percent work at the county, special district, state or federal levels.

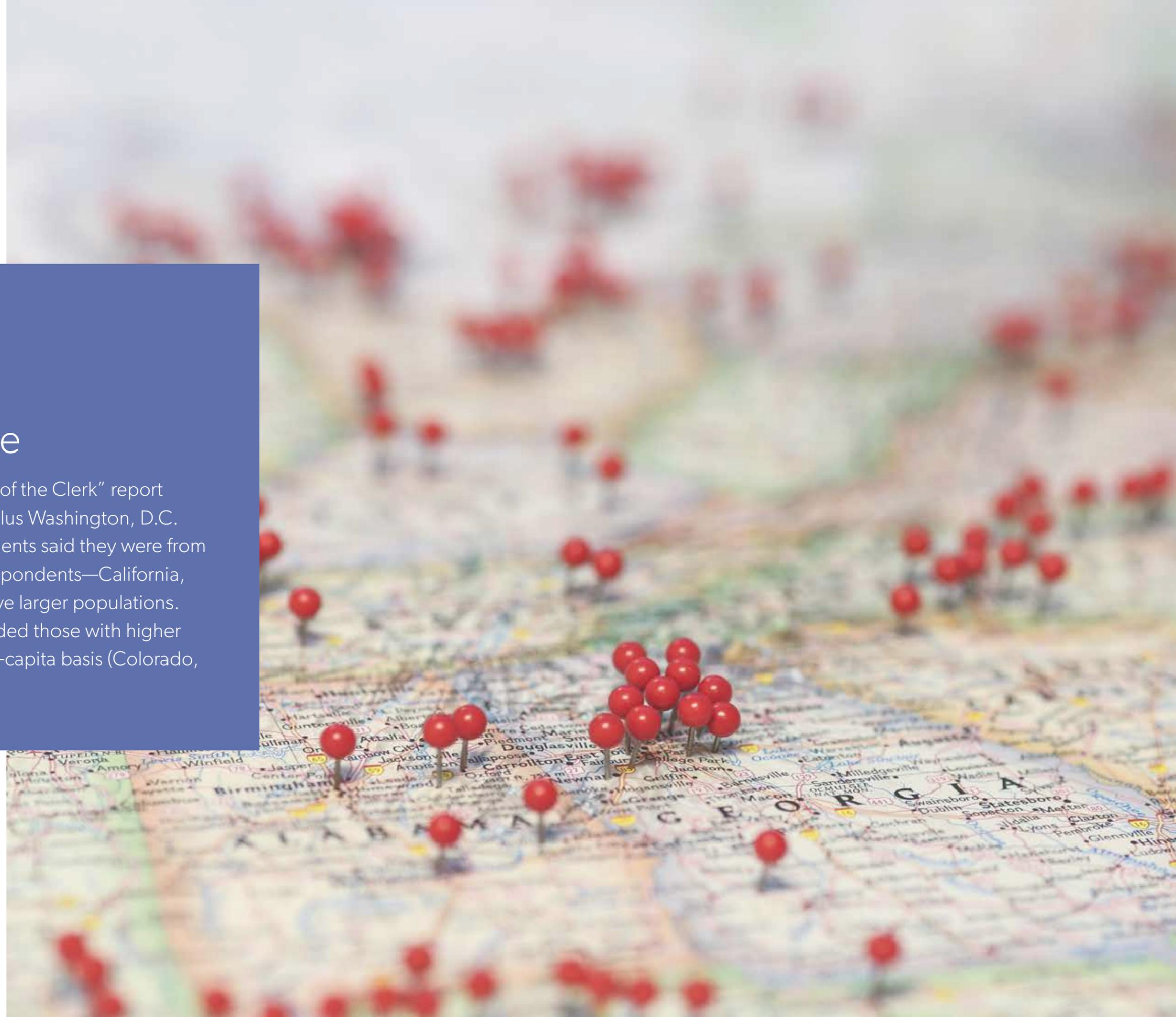
HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE YOUR ORGANIZATION?





Where clerks live

Respondents to our “2018 State of the Clerk” report come from 45 of the 50 states, plus Washington, D.C. Fewer than 3 percent of respondents said they were from Canada. States with the most respondents—California, Texas and Florida—tended to have larger populations. Other high-response areas included those with higher concentrations of clerks on a per-capita basis (Colorado, Illinois, Michigan).



A graying profession

Clerks are typically middle-aged or older. In our survey, 77 percent of respondents said they were at least

46 years old, with a plurality (43 percent) older than 56.



8%

of survey responses were under the age of 35.

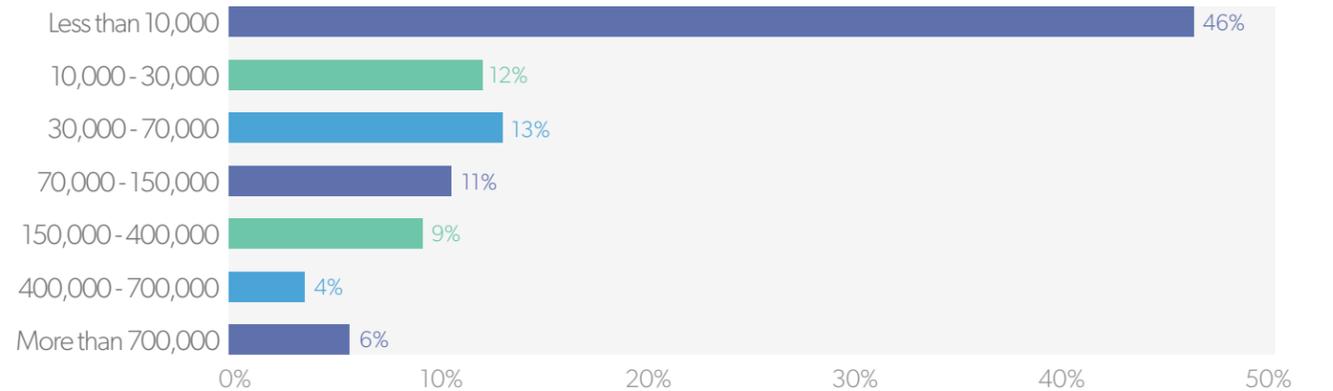
77%

of survey responses were over the age of 45.

How large is their jurisdiction?

Although clerks overwhelmingly work for cities and related organizations, a plurality (46 percent) works in small places of fewer than 10,000 residents, and a majority (58 percent) are in

jurisdictions with fewer than 30,000. This is generally in line with reports that just more than half of Americans live in cities, towns or other organized areas of fewer than 25,000 people.



How much do they earn?

The average clerk in our survey earned \$63,035 annually. This number is inflated somewhat by some well-paid outliers. The survey found median pay to be \$51,000. Although clerks overwhelmingly made what are likely to be considered middle-class

salaries, there was considerable range, going from \$15,000 to \$145,000. Several respondents listed their salary as \$15,000—the lowest amount allowed—indicating the possibility that they made less than that.





IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES CLERKS FACE

They may work in different-sized cities or have a different demographic profile, but clerks' challenges are often more alike than not. Here's what we found.



They're resource-strapped.

Far and away, the primary challenge clerks face is a lack of staffing or resources, according to our survey. Forty percent of respondents identified that as the "greatest challenge of the job," an increase from 35 percent last year. This reflects a broad trend in the public sector of asking workers to do more with less, especially since the Great Recession.



They're worried about technology.

Clerks are keenly aware that technology is rapidly changing citizens' expectations of government. Consumers can have items delivered to their doorstep from Amazon within an hour, stream movies instantly from Netflix and pull up information on nearly any topic with a Google search — and they expect government to deliver in the same fashion, with on-demand video, digital access to documents and the ability to file

paperwork online rather than mail it in. As a result, one out of every five respondents said tech adoption was their top concern.

At least some of this worry might also come from within. Clerks who identified tech adoption as a concern were more likely to be in offices that had a paper reduction strategy in place or were planning to implement one.

CHALLENGES FROM THE FIELD

Pinellas County, Florida

Records management and agenda prep can consume so much time in part because many clerks still rely on manual processes. Pinellas County, Florida, for instance, had a process that was described as “tedious, time-consuming [and] expensive.” Items that the county board needed to approve sometimes required dozens of steps, including printing, signing, copying and then moving documents to different offices — occasionally requiring workers to use their own cars to drive a document 15 miles. It could take three months to get an item on the agenda. By then, it had gone through perhaps dozens of revisions and could have reams of paper of supporting documents. It’s no surprise then that clerks and other county staff were strapped for time and stressed out.



They’re spending a lot of time on records — and want more.

At 31 percent, clerks cited records management as the task they spend the most time on. Still, nearly two-thirds — 61 percent — said it was not enough.

Also notable among the results is the 10 percent of clerks who said responding to public questions is

the single most time-consuming task. Freedom of Information Act requests are an important way for the public to understand their government, but filling those requests can swamp clerks, especially if they need to dig through filing cabinets and manually sift through paperwork to find the answers.



The profession is aging

As noted in the demographics section of our report, 77 percent of clerks are 46 years old or older, with 43 percent over 56. This lopsided demographic trend poses a problem. A silver tsunami of retirements is coming: 68 percent of those 46 and up plan to retire within the next 10 years, but that number jumps to more than 90 percent among those 56 or older. Still, few clerks identified it as a top issue. But not preparing for a wave of retirements could compound other

problems, such as increasing records requests and paperwork. And hiring may prove challenging. The average salary for all clerks is solidly middle class, but previous “State of the Clerk” reports have indicated concern that wages can’t compete with private-sector jobs. This could prove especially tricky for smaller towns, which often still have large workloads but may lack the resources to attract talent. Our survey finds that smaller jurisdictions have significantly lower salaries than larger ones.



LOOKING AHEAD

Clerks are worried about technology, but many are prepared to embrace it to effect change within their office.

Asked what their top technology goal was for 2018, 39 percent identified improving internal processes and governance as No. 1. Several other goals followed closely together, including the ability to reach more people, increase transparency and save money.

These goals are often interconnected, and using tech to modernize the clerk's office can pay dividends. For instance, for much of its history, the city of San Jose, California, used a manual, paper- and spreadsheet-based system for tracking everything from City Council meetings to volunteer citizen board memberships. Clerks spent countless hours compiling meetings and agendas, and two full-time employees were assigned to dealing with boards. But a modernization plan from the mayor allowed the clerk's office to update its tools to [Granicus solutions](#).

Now they're saving time and money with digital City Council agenda documents, which reduces paper costs and eases access for the public to view and comment on the plan. Granicus' online [Boards and Commissions](#) tool has increased the number of applicants — and cut staff time spent on it to 0.5 FTE and the amount of physical documentation from 14 filing cabinets' worth to a single drawer. By embracing digital tools, they've also been able to reach clerks who need screen readers, large print and braille.

Clerks face many challenges, but at Granicus, we know that the state of the clerk is strong. Our survey shows that clerks are in tune with citizens' needs. With their hard work — and an assist from technology — government can continue to become more efficient, effective and transparent for the betterment of everyone.

WE CAN HELP

Granicus works with local government organizations to modernize the public meeting experience, streamline cross-departmental workflows, increase board efficiency and make meaningful connections with citizens across platforms and devices.

For more information on Granicus' Meeting and Agenda Solutions visit [granicus.com](https://www.granicus.com) or email us at info@granicus.com.

ABOUT GRANICUS

Granicus provides technology that empowers government organizations to create better lives for the people they serve. By offering the industry's leading cloud-based solutions for communications, meeting and agenda management, and digital services to more than 3,000 public sector organizations, Granicus helps turn government missions into

quantifiable realities. Granicus products connect more than 150 million people, creating a powerful network to enhance government transparency and citizen engagement. By optimizing decision-making processes, Granicus strives to help government realize better outcomes and have a greater impact for the citizens they serve.



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