Assessing Discipline Policies in Medium-Sized North Carolina Cities

By

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Executive Summary

Employee performance is critical to the success of local governments. Discipline policies and practices contribute to ensuring that employee conduct and performance remain high. To gain a better understanding of how municipal governments structure and implement discipline this research examines discipline policies across North Carolina municipalities. Results reveal variation in policy clarity, progressive discipline use and level of policy specification. Most disciplinary actions occur in response to conduct violations; however, very few municipalities include any procedure for disciplining conduct violations.
Background
Designing, interpreting, and implementing a discipline policy in an effective and equitable manner continues to be a challenging task; this can be especially complex in today’s litigious society. Many employers lose cases pertaining to contested terminations because of poorly defined or administered disciplinary policies and procedures. Policies strive to strike a balance between providing employees mechanisms and opportunities for improvement while protecting the employer’s interest. Managers and department heads often look to human resource professionals to help design and implement appropriate and innovative discipline practices. Discipline policies form the foundation for how, who, and what is subject to disciplinary action and as such it is important that discipline policies provide clear guidelines and procedures.

Human resource management scholars highlight management aspects and recommendations for discipline, such as progressive discipline, while legal requirements guide necessary practices such as due process for public employees. While there are required elements and recommended practices, there is not a universally accepted model or template for a disciplinary policy. This capstone examines municipal discipline policies and illustrates how policies vary and how this variation compares to practices and reactions as reported by human resource directors. Additionally, human resource intermediate outcomes, such as the number of grievances filed, are examined in relation to policy characteristics.

Method
The research was conducted in two phases: content analysis and survey methods. The sample includes all 41 North Carolina (NC) municipalities with populations between 10,000 and 25,000. Cities of this size provide a unique unit of analysis because while they often have at least one position dedicated to the human resource function, they may not have the ability to re-assess policy on a regular basis. Cities face unique challenges and all North Carolina cities function under the same federal and state regulations providing a unique unit of study, especially when looking at how these cities structure and implement discipline.

Phase One: Content Analysis
Content analysis of municipal discipline policies was conducted to gain a picture of current discipline policy practices across municipalities. The content analysis identified and reviewed variation and similarities in policies. A set of pre-identified categories (determined from the HR literature) were used to analyze the policies. These categories include structure, specification of violations, procedures and definition of responsibilities. Additional inductively created categories of variation were added based on the analysis; these include use of progressive discipline and clarity of procedure. Trend analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyze results. Of the 41 municipalities in the sample population, 27 agreed to provide their policies resulting in a response rate of 65.8 percent (see Appendix A for more information on the sample).

Phase Two: Survey
In addition to content analysis survey methodology was used to collect additional data for this research. The primary goal of phase two was to examine outcomes that in turn could be analyzed in combination with the content analysis results. The survey was designed to gather information on policy implementation practices, problems, and procedures. Questions focused on ease of use, practicality and effectiveness, and perceived shortfalls of the policy as well as incidents of grievances and complaint associated with policy implementation.

A web-based survey was administered. Invitations for participation were sent to HR directors via email. All 41 cities that have between 10,000 and 25,000 population were invited to participate in the survey. 19 municipalities completed the survey for a response rate of 46.3 percent. Survey responses were combined
with data from the content analysis and were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics, including frequencies and crosstabs that explored the links and initial relationships between policies and practices.

**Limitations**
There are a number of limitations associated with this exploratory research. The sample size for both phase one (27) and phase two (19) limited the statistical analysis techniques that were appropriate. The combined sample from both phases was 37 percent. Findings represent emerging trends and connections, but do not indicate statistically significant relationships, in part because of the small sample and limited data. These initial findings would benefit from additional future testing.

**Findings and Discussion**
Findings will be presented around a set of themes that emerged from the research: common trends seen in policies, the importance of policy clarity for municipal discipline policies, use of progressive discipline and patterns seen in specification of violations. Each section then highlights links found between the content analysis and survey reports.

**Overview of Policies**

*Policy Adoption*
Almost half (48 percent) of the policies are passed by resolution, 20 percent of the policies are passed by ordinance while the remaining policies do not clearly indicate how the policy was adopted. Passing a policy by ordinance requires that all changes go before the board for a vote, limiting the flexibility in changing the policy. In a few cases policies allow for the creation of disciplinary rules and regulations by departments (this was found to occur for both policies adopted by ordinance and resolution). Departmental rules and regulations created as a result of delegation to departments apply only to the department for which they are created. While delegation was not a widely seen practice, the act of delegating is not inconsistent with the broader HR trend towards mixed or decentralized responsibility.

*Striking Similarities in Policies*
While there is variation among discipline policies, there are many common components and trends seen across municipal policies. Seventy-two percent of personnel policies specify the discipline policy in its own section. There were marked similarities across many of the policies with 12 (44 percent) using almost identical structures and language (see the structure in Appendix B).

The content found in these ‘common’ policies appear to be based on the work of Donald Hayman who in a 1976 Institute of Government Publication titled *Model Personnel Policy* provided policy guidance and recommendations. A great many municipal discipline policies today strongly resemble this early policy example with limited changes in the thirty-four years since it was published.

Policy structure differs somewhat for policies that do not use the shared structure discussed above. Variation include those that group possible offenses into levels, others have a bare bones policy, while still others decentralize the policy into different sections throughout the personnel policy.

*The Importance of Policy Clarity*
Williams, 2002, notes “The first step to keeping employee discipline problems to a minimum is to make sure that the ground rules are clearly communicated to your employees.” Communicating ground rules helps employees know what is and is not acceptable. The policy should also clearly communicate what disciplinary actions will apply if an employee violates the policy. Many North Carolina municipal disciplinary policies include procedures pertaining to performance violations, but provide relatively little information regarding procedures for conduct violations. All policies received a clarity rating based on a scale applied systematically by the researcher. Within the sample, it was found that smaller municipalities are more likely to have a lower clarity of procedures rating than larger municipalities (see
Appendix C). This relationship may potentially be the result of larger municipalities taking more disciplinary actions due to larger workforces and as a result having confronted the need to provide more clarity within their policies. The data does not suggest a relationship between policy clarity and how recently a policy was updated. Although clarity levels varied, survey results across all of the respondents reveal limited complaints from employees over the last three years with 33 percent reporting no complaints and no survey respondent selecting a category above the lowest response level (one to five complaints). While municipalities reported low instances of employee complaints, 67 percent of survey participants report that when they do receive them, complaints center around equity and fairness issues. Given the lack of complaints it appears that NC municipalities’ disciplinary policies are functioning at least adequately though room for improvement may still be present.

Survey results compared to content analysis reveal that regardless of the level of policy clarity, the HR department receives regular questions from supervisors about what kind of disciplinary action is most appropriate, how to navigate the disciplinary process, and how to correctly document disciplinary actions and proceedings. Eighty-four percent of survey respondents indicate they receive questions from supervisors regarding the process at least sometimes (See Appendix C Table 3A). The research did not address the nature of these process questions, which limits assessment and evaluation of the appropriateness of this rate. For municipalities that would like to decrease the instance of process questions, regular training sessions with employees and supervisors has the potential to lessen the frequency of these questions; a recommendation that could be tested in future research.

No connection between policy clarity and number of grievances filed or upheld was found (See Appendix C Graphs 2A and 3A). As policy clarity increases, it was expected that the number of grievances filed and upheld would decrease. Though the combined final sample size is extremely small, only ten municipalities, there was no relationship that supports the expected result. While not statistically significant, this unexpected finding raises questions that warrant future research.

**Progressive Discipline**

Progressive discipline is designed to give employees an opportunity to improve performance issues by taking progressive steps and allowing for time between actions for employees to demonstrate improvement. Progressive discipline is generally applied to performance related disciplinary actions. Performance violations deal with quality, quantity, and timeliness of work among other things. A distinction is often made between performance and conduct issues as grounds for discipline. Conduct violations deal with unacceptable behavior, either on or off the job. Disciplinary action for conduct does not need to follow the same progressive steps as employed in responding to performance issues. Two-thirds of the policies clearly separated offenses into categories of performance and conduct violations. When administering a disciplinary action it is important to know the category of the violation in order to progress appropriately in the discipline process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table One: Use of Progressive Discipline in Medium-Sized NC Cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive discipline not articulated in the policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive discipline used for performance violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive discipline used for performance violations and minor conduct violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive discipline applies to all violations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those municipalities that do not differentiate between performance and conduct violations, one common approach was to separate offenses into three or four levels of severity. These policies applied specific disciplinary procedures for each level of offense, regardless of whether the offense was conduct or performance based.

Advocates for progressive discipline argue that it is effective because it ensures that the ‘punishment fits the crime’ with minor corrective action being taken for minor offenses and more serious action being
taken for more serious offenses. A criticism of progressive discipline is that it is limiting because it “requires the employer to progress through each step before proceeding to the next.”

Content analysis of discipline policies indicated that 76% use progressive discipline in some form (see Table One). The remaining 24% do not identify progressive discipline by name or through procedures delineated in their policies; however, they may use progressive discipline in practice. The majority (56%) of policies apply progressive discipline procedures only to performance violations, while others (20%) apply progressive procedures to minor conduct infractions as well. Local governments may be reluctant to apply progressive discipline to conduct violations within the discipline policy as it could restrict their flexibility in terms of actions, such as limiting the severity of actions that can be applied to an employees’ first conduct violation.

Only one city, Asheboro, branched out and incorporated an alternative system of discipline in their progressive discipline policy. This city integrated a ‘discipline without punishment’ system allowing for paid disciplinary suspension of employees. Paid disciplinary suspension is meant to give the employee time to decide whether or not they are willing to fix the problem and to make a commitment to acceptable performance/conduct or quit and look for more satisfying work elsewhere.

Nearly all municipalities report that they often receive questions prior to any disciplinary action being taken by a supervisor. Eleven respondents (58%) indicate that questions focus on procedural issues; most policies offer limited procedural guidance on the application of progressive discipline. While it may be important to consult with human resources before implementing a disciplinary action, it would benefit municipalities to more clearly articulate procedures in writing within the discipline policy. Greater clarity of the procedures not only provide better guidance for supervisors and managers as they navigate the discipline process, but help the human resource department ensure that consistent answers to questions and recommendations for disciplinary action are being given.

**Specification of Violations**
Municipalities involved in writing disciplinary policies must decide whether or not, and to what extent, they want to specify violations in their policies. Results indicate that 74% of municipalities provide specific examples of violations within their policies. Performance specification lists are generally shorter than their conduct counterparts. Table Two demonstrates differences found between conduct and performance specification lists. Eighty-five percent of conduct violation lists have at least 11 violations listed, while only 29% of performance violations lists have this volume of violations listed.

Many municipalities choose to extensively list possible or example violations and do not tie those possible violations to specific procedures and/or disciplinary actions. The major disadvantage to specifying violations is that no list can be comprehensive. Although in all cases the policies clearly state that the list of violations provided is not comprehensive and not all inclusive, employers and employees may attempt to categorize an offense as one of the listed violations even when the offense does not appropriately match the listed violation. Another downside to specifying violations is that it is possible for supervisors to treat unacceptable actions as acceptable if it is not included on the violation lists resulting in a real offense going undisciplined. One advantage to specifying violations is that it aids supervisors and employees in understanding what actions are not acceptable. When making the choice for your organization it is important to consider management style and organizational culture.
Sixty-three percent of survey respondents indicate that the majority of disciplinary actions occur in response to conduct violations; however, disciplinary procedures delineated within policies generally address performance violations. Many policies had no disciplinary procedure listed for conduct violations, while others listed procedure for conduct violations only insofar to say that employees may be terminated or suspended without warning.27

Disciplinary procedure for conduct violations may be limited to allow for more managerial discretion or because conduct violations tend to be more varied or unpredictable than performance violations. High levels of supervisory discretion may lead to complaints if equity in disciplinary actions for the same or like offenses does not occur. Survey responses show that 67% of employee discipline policy concerns, reported to the HR department, relate to fairness, equity, and severity of a disciplinary action. Increased clarity of policy could decrease perceived or real instances of inequity. Clearer procedures for disciplinary actions as they pertain to conduct violations could provide managers and employees with a better blueprint of how to discipline for conduct violations, promote equity, and clarify the process for all parties involved. Additionally, ensuring that managers are clear about how to implement the policy could be addressed through training which could help to respond to some of these perceived concerns.

Conclusion and Recommendations
The research highlights variations, similarities, and potential issues among municipal disciplinary policies. It appears that while local governments often have strong senses of identity there is limited specification or customization of municipal disciplinarily policies. Municipalities may not perceive a need to customize discipline policies because they receive limited complaints from employees or supervisors.28

Conduct violations are often complex and in responding there is often no ‘right’ answer. In the review of policies there was often a lack of procedural direction provided for conduct violations. With sixty three percent of participants indicated that the majority of disciplinary actions are in response to conduct violations this lack of procedural specification could become potentially problematic.

While to date, very few municipalities have had significant numbers of reported problems, this does not mean that municipalities are safe from complaints, grievances, and law suits. Below are a set of recommendations based on the findings of this study that are aimed at improving discipline policies practices

**Recommendation 1:** Be clear about procedures for conduct violations. Municipalities reported most disciplinary actions in response to conduct violations for which little procedural guidance exists. Creating clearer guidance and procedure for conduct violations may limit manager discretion, but could promote increased equity and fairness.

**Recommendation 2:** Explore other methods of discipline such as discipline without punishment and positive discipline to be sure that the best method of discipline is being used that is consistent with municipal values and objectives.

**Recommendation 3:** Tailor your policy. It appears that many municipalities all use similar or standardized policies that may not account for the values, goals, and culture. Discipline policies, like other HR policies, should act to reinforce the values and cultures of the organization while ensuring that it still acts in a legally defensible manner.

This research sets the stage with emerging relationships and connections, but lacks the statistical significance needed to reveal meaningful correlations or causation. Future research should focus on better connecting outcomes to policies.
Qualtrics survey academic software was used to conduct the survey. A link to the Qualtrics survey site was included in the original emails to each municipality. Reminder emails were sent as well as completion extension emails as necessary.

The remaining 32% of policies do not state or make clear how they are passed.

One city that passed by resolution delegated to departments. This city allows departments to supplement the discipline policy outlined in the personnel policy with regulations and rules. Those rules and regulations are created at the department level and cannot contradict the personnel policy. All department rules and regulations then become subject to the procedures as outlined in the discipline policy. Two cities that passed by resolution delegated to departments. Both cities allow for the creation of supplemental policies at the department level that apply only to that department. In both cases, supplemental rules are subject to approval by the manager before becoming effective and all supplements must be in compliance with the discipline policy.


**Policies were rated on a scale of zero to three with zero representing that a policy does not provide procedure within the policy and three representing a policy that provides clear procedure for implementing the discipline policy.**

**The following passage shows an example of a city that received a 3, the highest researcher created clarity rating for procedure:**

"Section 6: Procedure for disciplinary action for unsatisfactory or grossly inefficient job performance. 1) An employee’s supervisor shall notify the employee of any deficiency in job performance and what is required for satisfactory job performance. 2) An employee whose job performance is unsatisfactory should normally receive progressive warnings before disciplinary action resulting in suspension, demotion or dismissal is taken by the department head or the town manager. However, in cases of grossly inefficient job performance, an employee may receive a level 2 warning, a level 3 warning, or may be dismissed without any prior disciplinary action. When appropriate, progressive warnings should include the following steps: a. Level 1: an initial documented warning from the employee’s supervisor, b. Level 2: A written warning for a repeated offense previously documented in a Level 1 Warning, OR a higher level offense involving job performance and/or conduct, c. Level 3: A final written warning from a supervisor serving notice upon the employee that corrected performance must take place immediately in order to avoid further disciplinary action, including dismissal. 3) A demotion to a lower salary grade or within grade may be imposed no earlier than Level 3. A disciplinary suspension may be imposed at Level 2 or Level 3 or in conjunction with a later warning. (Note: Exempt employees receiving a disciplinary suspension due to unsatisfactory or grossly inefficient job performance, must be suspended in one week increments.) 4) The supervisor shall record the dates of any discussion with the employee, the performance deficiencies discussed, the corrective actions recommended and any time limits set, and submit such information to Human Resources for the employee’s permanent personnel file. **The following passage shows an example of a city that received a 1, the lowest researcher created clarity rating for procedure:**

An employee may be suspended, demoted or dismissed by the department head because of failure in performance of duties or failure in personal conduct. The department head shall provide the employee with a written notice including the
recommended effective date, reasons for the action, and appeal rights available to the employee. A copy of the
written notice shall be provided to the Town Manager.

12 The researcher looked at how clarity as rated by the researcher related to how recently a policy had been updated.
Ultimately, no relationship between the two variables surfaced. This lack of relationship may be due to the very
small sample, with only one municipality falling into some categories, and provides a question for future research.

13 Of the 67%, 16.7% say that employee complaints focus on the severity of a disciplinary action such as
termination versus suspension; 41.7% say that employee complaints focus on the overall fairness of the situation
such as an employee believing they should not be disciplined; and 8.3% say that employee complaints focus on
equity in discipline throughout the organization such as giving one employee probation and another a termination
for the same offense.

14 Of survey participants, 33% have not had a compliant in the past three years. No survey participant reported
receiving more than 1-5 complaints in the past three years.

15 Given the significance of disciplinary actions and the small number of cases, frequent questions may simply be a
function of uncertainty due to limited use. This research does not address this possibility directly; however it is
important to note.

16 Allred, Stephen

17 Allred, Stephen.

18 Three of the twenty-seven grouped offense types instead of separating offenses into performance and conduct
categories.


20 Williams, Anne. p5.

21 The following passage shows how this city incorporated other disciplinary systems into their progressive discipline
policy: “During the period after a written warning(s) has been made, management may choose to counsel with the
employee concerning his/her employment status before a decision to demote or dismiss is made. Such counseling
should improve the unsatisfactory performance. As a part of this counseling, management may request the
employee to take up to one day’s leave with pay to consider whether or not the employee wishes to continue his/her
employment with the city. It should be stressed to the employee that a decision to continue employment with the
city will require a commitment to improve performance, and that a lack of improvement will lead to dismissal.”

22 Grote, Dick. Discipline Without Punishment: The Proven Strategy That Turns Problem Employees Into Superior
them. It requires adults to accept the consequences for their actions and to make better workplace choices. One city
uses this method as a part of their overall disciplinary policy.

23 Grote, Dick. P3.

24 Allred, Stephen., p322.

25 Some lists may be category based with few offenses specified, while others extensively specify violations.
Regardless of how long the list is, those items included in the list provide guidelines to supervisors and employees
as to what is and is not tolerated within the organization.

26 Hubbard, William. P287.

27 There is a possible reason for the lack of procedure for conduct violations. Though NC local government
employees are at-will employees, public employees do have property rights in their positions. For performance
violations, public employees have a limited right to due process, a system that generally ends up looking and
behaving like progressive discipline. Employees expect to be warned about unsatisfactory performance and to be
given the opportunity to remedy the issue. Conduct violations do not enjoy this same level of protection.

28 Of all survey respondents, no one indicated they received more than five complaints in the past three years, with
33% saying that they have received no complaints in the past five years.
Appendix A: Information about the Sample

Table 1A: Representation of Municipalities by Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Municipalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,000-12,999</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13,000-15,999</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16,000-18,999</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19,000-21,999</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22,000-25,000</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**As expected, the cities with lower populations make up the majority of the sample (n=41) for this capstone.**
Appendix B: Common Policy Language and Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Title:</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory Job Performance and Detrimental Personal Conduct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sections:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Disciplinary Action for Unsatisfactory Job Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unsatisfactory Job Performance Defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communication and Warning Procedures Preceding Disciplinary Action for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unsatisfactory Job Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• D.A. for Detrimental Personal Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Detrimental Personal Conduct Defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pre-Dismissal Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Non-disciplinary Suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Substance Abuse Policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** This policy is not the ideal or best policy, but rather, the most used policy for cities in the sample.
Appendix C: Additional Information on Policy Clarity

### Table 2A: Clarity of Procedures Based on Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,000-12,999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13,000-15,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16,000-18,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19,000-21,999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22,000-25,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Scores are based on, 1. the readability of the policy, 2. the extent to which a reasonable person would have questions about how to implement the policy after reading it, and 3. language, layout, presentation of procedure within the policy.

### Graph 2A: Grievances Filed Relative to Clarity

![Graph 2A: Grievances Filed Relative to Clarity](image-url)
The horizontal axis of both graphs above represents the overall clarity of the policy. The policy clarity rating is based on a scale of 0-3. 0=No policy stated, 1=policy not clear, 2=policy somewhat clear, 3=policy is clear.

The vertical axis shows the number of grievances filed and upheld with the highest instance of grievances being seven.

Table 3A: Clarity and the Occurrence of Process Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarity of Procedure</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Quite Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3A demonstrates the lack of a pattern between the clarity of a procedure and how often people ask about the disciplinary process. This shows that HR departments are likely to get questions no matter how clear a policy is.
APPENDIX F: Survey

Welcome. Thank you so much for participating in this important survey about municipal discipline policies. This research examines the current practice and status of discipline policies across North Carolina municipalities. Your participation and feedback is critical to being able to understand this topic. Results will be used for the preparation of a UNC School of Government graduate student’s thesis that will provide results and recommendations to local governments. All answers will remain confidential and no individual or municipal identities will be reported in this research. Questions are meant to get to the general nature of circumstances dealing with disciplinary policies and do not ask for personal or personnel information. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your response makes my research possible.

SECTION I: The Discipline Policy. The following section asks you to respond to a set of questions about your current discipline policy.

When was the current disciplinary policy written?

☐ Within the last year
☐ Within the last three years
☐ Within the last ten years
☐ More than ten years ago

Is the discipline policy currently being reviewed or has been reviewed within the past three fiscal years (this includes current efforts)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Did the review of the discipline policy result in changes?
Yes (If yes, please specify)  

No  

If known, please indicate the title(s) of the primary author(s) of the disciplinary policy.

SECTION II: Disciplinary Actions. This section asks you to respond to a set of questions about disciplinary actions used in your municipality. Information collected will be kept confidential and is intended to capture the range of disciplinary practices employed by North Carolina municipalities.

Most disciplinary actions are in response to

- Conduct Violations
- Performance Violations

Please estimate how frequently the following disciplinary actions have been employed over the previous 2 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Quite Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral Warnings</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Warnings</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Termination</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many terminations have occurred over the past 3 years?

SECTION III: Policy Implementation. In this section you are asked to reflect on elements of the discipline policy and implementation considerations.
Please indicate how often the person or office handling HR for your municipality receives questions on the items listed in the chart below. Please use the following scale for your response:

**Rarely** - received at least one question on this topic;

**Sometimes** - received questions from more than one person on more than one occasion;

**Quite Often** - generally receive questions on this topic before a person with disciplinary authority implements a disciplinary action;

**Very Often** - receive questions on this topic before any disciplinary action is taken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can be disciplined? (for example questions that relate to if a certain behavior qualifies for disciplinary action)</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Quite Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What kind of discipline is appropriate?</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Quite Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<th>How to deal with the disciplinary process.</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Quite Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions regarding documentation (Written v. verbal, when to document).</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Quite Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
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</table>

Generally how involved is your manager in the disciplinary process? (Mark all that apply.)

- [ ] The manager is never involved
- [ ] The manager is only involved in terminations
- [ ] The manager’s approval is required for terminations and suspensions
- [ ] The manager’s approval is needed for all disciplinary actions other warnings
- [ ] The manager is involved in all disciplinary actions

How is the manager involved in the disciplinary process primarily?

- [ ] Signature with little action
- [ ] Signature with substantial review
- [ ] Manager decides disciplinary action
SECTION IV: HR's Role. This section asks you to respond to a set of questions about HR's role in regards to your municipality's discipline policy.

**To what extent do you agree with the following statement:** *The person or office responsible for coordinating HR for our municipality often get questions before a disciplinary action occurs.*

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Neither Agree nor Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly Agree

What is the general nature of questions asked to the HR staff about the disciplinary policy? (Mark all that apply.)

- [ ] What qualifies for disciplinary action
- [ ] Conduct related
- [ ] Performance related
- [ ] Procedure
- [ ] Authority to discipline
- [ ] Other

**To what extent do you agree with the following statement:** *The person or office responsible for coordinating HR for our municipality spends a significant amount of time resolving disciplinary policy confusion/issues when a disciplinary action has been taken.*

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Neither Agree nor Disagree
What is the general nature of issues the HR department spends time resolving related to disciplinary actions? *Keep in mind, this question is not requesting any specific or personal information.*

Section V: Interaction with the policy. This section asks you to answer a set of questions that address how employees and those with disciplinary responsibility interact with your municipality's policy.

Of those individuals that have disciplinary responsibility (such as department heads), what amount have a strong understanding of the policy and how to implement it?

- None
- Some
- About Half
- Most
- All

Please estimate how many formal complaints have been filed in relation to the disciplinary policy or process within the last three years?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- Other

In general, how often do employees voice concerns, complaints, or dissatisfaction regarding the policy?

- Never
Please indicate the general nature of these concerns / complaints. Which are the most prevalent? *Keep in mind, this question is not requesting any specific or personal information, only for the general nature of voiced concerns.*

Estimate how often disciplinary authorities (ie department heads or managers) voice concerns, complaints, or dissatisfaction regarding the policy.

Please indicate the nature of these concerns / complaints. Which are most prevalent? *Keep in mind, this question is not requesting any specific or personal information.*

Has a grievance been filed related to the disciplinary process in the past five years?

Estimate how many grievances have been filed within the past five years.
Estimate what percentage of grievances were upheld?

- 0%
- 25%
- 50%
- 75%
- 100%

Section VI: Training. This section asks you to respond to a set of questions about the training your city provides on the disciplinary policy.

Is training provided on the disciplinary process?

- Yes
- No

Is training provided in-house?

- Yes
- No, if not please indicate who provides the training: [ ]

How often are those individuals with disciplinary authority (such as department heads) provided training on the disciplinary policy or disciplinary process?

- Annually
- About Every 2 Years
- Upon Employment
- Never
- Other [ ]
Please indicate agreement to the following statement: Training on our municipal discipline policy is very comprehensive and helpful to managers.

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Neither Agree nor Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly Agree

SECTION VII: Use of Policy. This section asks you to respond to a series of questions related to how easy it is to understand and use the disciplinary policy.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The discipline policy is easy to implement.

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Neither Agree nor Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly Agree

What are the top three reasons that make the policy difficult to implement?

1. 
2. 
3. 

What are the top three reasons that make the policy easy to implement?

1. 

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The discipline policy is easy to read and understand.

- [ ] Strongly Disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Neither Agree nor Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly Agree

What are the top three reasons that make this policy difficult to understand?

1. 
2. 
3. 

What are the top three reasons that make this policy easy to understand?

1. 
2. 
3. 

If there is any additional information that you would like to share about your disciplinary policy please do so in the text box below.

Section VIII: Respondent Information: This section is for my records only and is strictly
confidential. No individual or municipal identifying information will be included in the report.

Please indicate the name of the city you are responding for. Please note that this answer is solely for my records and will be used to track completion. Thank you so much for your response to this question

What is your position with the municipality?

☐ HR Director or HR Analyst

☐ Clerk

☐ Manager

☐ Finance Officer

☐ Other (Please specify)

How long have you worked with your current municipality?

How many individuals have HR as their primary job?