Understanding the BoldPath HR Staffing Calculator

A Practical Guide for Local Government Leaders

*Notice: This tool is currently in its **beta phase**. It reflects the best available research and practical insights at the time of release, but it will continue to evolve. Your feedback is encouraged—if you have suggestions, observations, or concerns, please share them. Every effort will be made to incorporate constructive input into the next version of the model.*

Why Some Results May Surprise You

For many smaller local governments, the results from this tool may look higher than what leaders are used to seeing. That's because many HR departments (especially in small to mid-sized governments) are already operating with staffing levels far below what modern workloads require. Outdated benchmarks like "*one HR staff per 150 employees*" remain in circulation, but they don't reflect today's compliance demands, the complexity of unionized environments, the need for data-driven decision-making, or the expanded scope of HR functions.

There is no single formula or tool that works for every organization, not even this one. The BoldPath HR Staffing Calculator is a **decision-support tool** built from published public-sector benchmarks, research, and practical experience. It offers the best-educated estimate that blends data and professional judgment. The point is not to produce an absolute "right" number, but to:

- Show how added responsibilities—such as payroll, safety, or labor relations—increase workload

- Demonstrate how removing or outsourcing functions can reduce staffing needs

- Move the conversation beyond oversimplified ratios toward a more nuanced, evidence-informed discussion

This combination of science and context is why the model asks for multiple inputs rather than relying on a single fixed metric.

The Foundation: Baseline Ratios

The starting point for the model is a **baseline HR-to-employee ratio** derived from a decade of data on local government HR staffing. Industry-wide studies show that public-sector ratios differ from the private sector in three key ways:

1. **Smaller organizations require proportionally more HR staff per 100 employees** because of fixed compliance and administrative demands that don't scale down neatly.

2. **Unionized and civil-service environments increase HR workload** due to bargaining, grievances, arbitration, and procedural rules.

3. **Functional scope matters**—HR departments that also handle payroll, safety/risk, training, or benefits administration require more staff.
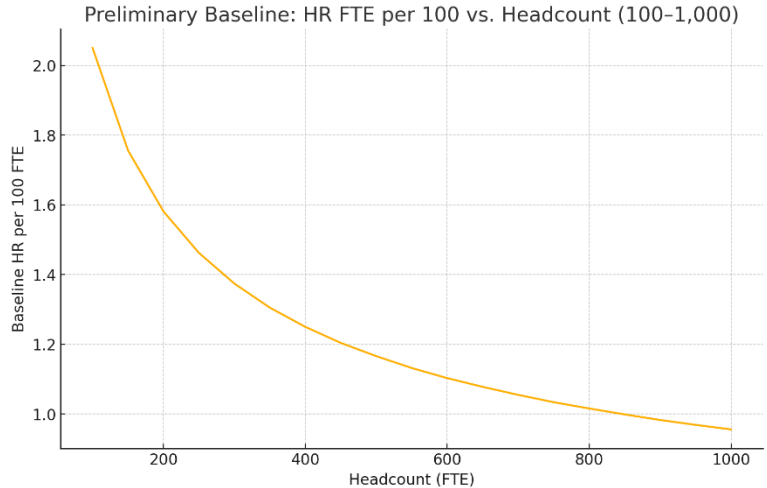
The BoldPath model reflects these realities by setting a baseline ratio that adjusts for **headcount size**—higher ratios for smaller organizations, gradually tapering toward larger employer norms.

Moving Beyond One-Size-Fits-All

A single ratio cannot capture the complexity of HR workload in government. That's why the calculator adds **adjustment factors** that account for an organization's unique environment.

Each factor is scored on a **1–5 scale** (with 0.5 increments) based on observable conditions in the organization. Scores above the mid-range increase the staffing recommendation. At the same time, two factors (**Technology & Analytics Leverage** and **Shared-Services & Outsourcing Offset**) can *reduce* the recommendation if they meaningfully lower internal workload.

The Eleven Factors

Organizational Complexity (OC) – Measures how varied and intricate the workforce is—union contracts, civil-service rules, job structures, specialized roles, and departmental autonomy.

Compliance & Legal Exposure (CR) – Assesses the breadth and depth of laws, regulations, and oversight that HR must manage, from FMLA and ADA to CDL, OSHA, grants, and civil-service testing.

Workforce Volatility (WV) – Reflects turnover, seasonal hiring surges, recruitment cycles, and how often HR must shift into "emergency hiring" mode.

Payroll Responsibility (PR) – Captures how much of the payroll function HR owns—ranging from minimal involvement to full process ownership.

Safety & Risk Responsibility (SR) – Measures HR's role in injury prevention, accident investigations, OSHA compliance, and workers' compensation management.

Training & Organizational Development (TR) – Assesses HR's responsibility for onboarding, compliance training, professional development, leadership programs, and succession planning.

Labor Relations Load (LR) – Accounts for the number of bargaining units, complexity of negotiations, grievance activity, and discipline investigations.

Total Rewards Administration (TRW) – Covers HR's role in benefits administration, compensation system design, pay equity analysis, and vendor negotiations.

Culture & Engagement Leadership (CE) – Measures HR's involvement in employee engagement, retention, recognition programs, and organization-wide cultural initiatives.

Technology & Analytics Leverage (TL) – *Offsetting Factor* – Evaluates how effectively HR uses technology and analytics to automate transactions, generate insights, and reduce manual workload. Higher TL scores can reduce staffing needs.

Shared-Services & Outsourcing Offset (SSO) – *Offsetting Factor* – Assesses the extent to which HR functions are handled externally or through shared services, reducing the internal staffing requirement.

How the Model Works

1. **Baseline Ratio** – The calculator begins with the public-sector HR staffing ratio appropriate for the organization's headcount range.

2. **Factor Scoring** – Each of the eleven factors is scored from 1 to 5 using clear, real-world criteria.

3. **Weighting** – Factors are weighted by their impact on workload. High-labor functions like labor relations, payroll, or high workforce volatility carry greater influence than lower-intensity areas.

4. **Offset Application** – Scores for TL and SSO are applied as negative multipliers to reduce the recommendation where appropriate.

5. **Final Estimate** – The model outputs a recommended HR FTE count, which can be compared against current staffing to identify gaps.

Why This Matters

The calculator is not intended to dictate staffing decisions; it is a **decision-support tool**. Its value lies in:

- **Transparency** – Every adjustment is traceable to a specific, observable condition.

- **Defensibility** – Baseline ratios and factors are grounded in professional research and real-world local government data.

- **Flexibility** – Users can update scores as conditions change, keeping staffing discussions current.

- **Strategic Alignment** – The tool highlights where HR is overextended or underutilized, supporting better prioritization of resources.

Closing Thought

HR capacity is not just about headcount; it's about the alignment of resources with the actual scope and intensity of the work. The BoldPath HR Staffing Calculator gives leaders a structured, evidence-informed way to have that conversation and to ensure that HR can meet both today's demands and tomorrow's challenges.