Understanding the BoldPath HR Staffing Calculator

A Practical Guide for Local Government Leaders

Version 1.1 – Updated January 2026

Notice: *This tool 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 future versions.*

Why Some Results May Surprise You

For many smaller local governments, the results from this tool may appear higher than what leaders are accustomed to seeing. This is 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Outdated benchmarks like *one HR staff per 150 employees* remain in circulation, but they fail to reflect today's compliance demands, the complexity of unionized environments, the need for data-driven decision-making, or the expanded scope of HR functions. Research consistently shows that public-sector HR ratios typically range from 0.8 to 2.0 HR staff per 100 employees, depending on organizational size and functional scope.

The BoldPath HR Staffing Calculator is a **decision-support tool** built from published public-sector benchmarks, empirical research, and practical experience. It offers the best-educated estimate that blends data and professional judgment. The purpose 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

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. A town of 50 employees needs at least one HR professional, even though that represents 2% of the workforce.

2. **Unionized and civil-service environments increase HR workload** due to bargaining, grievances, arbitration, and procedural rules that private-sector employers often don't face.

3. **Functional scope matters**—HR departments that also handle payroll, safety/risk management, training, or benefits administration require more staff than those focused on core personnel functions only.

The Baseline Curve

The BoldPath model uses a piecewise-linear baseline curve that gradually tapers as headcount increases, reflecting economies of scale. The current v1.1 implementation uses these anchor points:

Headcount	HR FTE per 100 Employees	Example: Baseline HR FTE
25	1.65	0.41 FTE
50	1.50	0.75 FTE
100	1.35	1.35 FTE
150	1.20	1.80 FTE
300	1.18	3.54 FTE
500	1.10	5.50 FTE
1,000	1.00	10.00 FTE
3,000	0.85	25.50 FTE

The calculator interpolates between these points for any headcount value. For organizations larger than 3,000 employees, the curve continues to extrapolate using the same slope. This approach ensures that recommendations remain grounded in observed public-sector norms while accounting for the fact that very large organizations achieve additional efficiencies.

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 available) based on observable conditions in the organization. A score of **3 represents the baseline**—a typical HR service level. Scores above 3 increase the staffing recommendation; scores below 3 decrease it.

Two factors—**Technology & Analytics Leverage** and **Shared-Services & Outsourcing Offset**—work differently: higher scores in these areas *reduce* the recommendation because they represent efficiency gains that lower internal workload.

The Eleven Factors

Workload Drivers (Nine Factors)

Organizational Complexity (OC) – Measures how varied and intricate the workforce is: union contracts, civil-service rules, job structures, specialized roles, and departmental autonomy. Higher complexity means HR must manage varied policies, job classifications, schedules, and labor rules. *Weight: 1.00*

Compliance & Legal Exposure (CR) – Assesses the breadth and depth of regulatory compliance HR must manage: FMLA, ADA, FLSA, OSHA, CDL/DOT, workers' compensation, grants, and civil-service testing requirements. *Weight: 1.00*

Workforce Volatility (WV) – Reflects turnover rates, seasonal hiring surges, recruitment cycles, and how often HR must shift into "emergency hiring" mode. Higher volatility drives up recruiting, onboarding, and offboarding workload. *Weight: 1.00*

Payroll Responsibility (PR) – Captures how much of the payroll function HR owns— ranging from minimal involvement (Finance handles it) to full process ownership (HR runs payroll end-to-end). This is a deadline-driven, unforgiving function. *Weight: 1.25 (High Impact)*

Safety & Risk Responsibility (SR) – Measures HR's role in injury prevention, accident investigations, OSHA compliance, and workers' compensation management. Safety incidents require immediate response regardless of other priorities. *Weight: 1.25 (High Impact)*

Training & Organizational Development (TR) – Assesses HR's responsibility for onboarding, compliance training, professional development, leadership programs, and succession planning. *Weight: 0.75*

Labor Relations Load (LR) – Accounts for the number of bargaining units, complexity of negotiations, grievance activity, and discipline investigations. *Weight: 0.75*

Total Rewards Administration (TRW) – Covers HR's role in benefits administration, compensation system design, pay equity analysis, classification maintenance, and vendor negotiations. *Weight: 1.00*

Culture & Engagement Leadership (CE) – Measures HR's involvement in employee engagement surveys, retention initiatives, recognition programs, and organization-wide cultural initiatives. *Weight: 0.75*

Ownership Gating for PR and SR

The Payroll Responsibility (PR) and Safety & Risk Responsibility (SR) factors include an **ownership gate** to prevent scoring inconsistencies:

- **If HR does not own the function** (e.g., Finance runs payroll, or a separate Risk department handles safety), scoring is limited to 1–3.
- **If HR does own the function**, scoring ranges from 3–5, reflecting the baseline-to-full-ownership spectrum.

This gating mechanism ensures that organizations don't inadvertently claim high workload in areas where HR has minimal responsibility, and conversely, that HR-owned functions are credited appropriately.

Offset Factors (Two Factors)

Technology & Analytics Leverage (TL) – Evaluates how effectively HR uses technology and analytics to automate transactions, generate insights, and reduce manual workload. A score of 5 (leading technology) can reduce the staffing recommendation by up to 15%. Conversely, a score of 1 (minimal technology) increases the recommendation by up to 15%.

Shared-Services & Outsourcing Offset (SSO) – Assesses the extent to which HR functions are handled externally or through shared services, reducing the internal staffing requirement. A score of 5 (extensive outsourcing) can reduce the recommendation by up to 10%.

How the Model Works

The calculator follows a five-step process to produce a recommended HR FTE count:

1. **Baseline Ratio** – The calculator begins with the public-sector HR staffing ratio appropriate for the organization's headcount, using the baseline curve described above.

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

3. **Workload Multiplier Calculation** – The nine workload factors (excluding TL and SSO) are combined using their weights. Each point above or below 3 adds or subtracts 5% per weighted point from the multiplier. The raw workload multiplier is clamped between 0.70 and 1.60.

4. **Offset Application** – Technology (TL) and Shared-Services (SSO) multipliers are calculated separately and applied to the workload multiplier. The combined multiplier is clamped between 0.60 and 1.80.

5. **Final Recommendation** – The baseline HR FTE is multiplied by the combined multiplier. A minimum floor of 1.0 HR FTE is enforced for any organization with employees.

Component	Value / Formula
Factor Weights	PR: 1.25, SR: 1.25, OC/CR/WV/TRW: 1.00, TR/LR/CE: 0.75
Step Increment	5% per weighted point above or below 3
Raw Workload Multiplier Range	0.70 – 1.60
Technology Offset (TL)	(3 – score) × 0.05, clamped to 0.85 – 1.15
Outsourcing Offset (SSO)	(3 – score) × 0.05, clamped to 0.90 – 1.10
Final Multiplier Range	0.60 – 1.80
Minimum HR FTE	1.0 (if any employees exist)

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.

- **Budget Justification** – The narrative output helps HR leaders make evidence-based cases to governing bodies and finance committees.

Research Foundation

The BoldPath HR Staffing Calculator draws on multiple sources to establish its baseline ratios and factor framework:

- **SHRM Human Capital Benchmarking Reports** (2014–2024) documenting HR-to-employee ratios across sectors

- **Bloomberg BNA HR Department Benchmarks** showing median ratios reaching 1.4 per 100 employees by 2022

- **ADP Research Institute** findings linking HR staffing levels to turnover outcomes

- **County and municipal HR audits** from Virginia, Ohio, California, Wisconsin, and other states

- **IPMA-HR/PSHRA benchmarking data** for public-sector HR metrics

- **Academic research** on HR outsourcing, technology adoption, and labor relations impacts

The evidence consistently shows that local government HR ratios typically fall between 0.8 and 2.0 HR staff per 100 employees, with significant variation based on organizational size, functional scope, and operational complexity.

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.

The output (say, 4.2 FTE) still requires human judgment to interpret. You wouldn't hire "0.2 of a person," but you might round to 4 and consider part-time or cross-trained solutions for the remaining capacity. What the model does is arm those decisions with far richer insight than the old rule-of-thumb approach.