

2019

Performance Report

Advancing Assessment in Saskatchewan



sama

SASKATCHEWAN ASSESSMENT
MANAGEMENT AGENCY

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Agency Profile

Governing Legislation: Established by *The Assessment Management Agency Act* in 1987 to manage Saskatchewan's property assessment system for the Province, municipalities and the education sector.

Corporate Structure: Corporation with Board of Directors appointed by Order in Council.

Services Provided to the Province: Property assessment research and policy development, central database of assessment information, assessment information for programs administered by the provincial government, and assessment quality assurance.

Services Provided to Client Municipalities and the Education Sector: Property assessment valuation services – annual maintenance property inspections, targeted property re-inspections, revaluations every four years, support of value (management of property assessment appeals) and public education.

Accountable to: Minister of Government Relations, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, client municipalities, the education sector and the public.

Annual operating budget: \$21.542 million for fiscal year ending December 31, 2019.

Permanent staff: 163.25 Full Time Equivalents (FTE's). 156.25 budgeted FTE's. 7 positions were added in 2019 due to increase provincial funding. The positions are focused on increasing property inspection capacity.

Client Municipalities and Property Accounts

	Urban Municipalities	Rural Municipalities	Total	Change from 2018 Accounts %	
No. of Client Municipalities	462	296	758		
No. of Land Accounts:					
Agricultural Land - Arable	1,876	311,780	313,656	-1,516	-0.5%
Agricultural Land - Non-Arable	1,119	119,583	120,702	711	0.6%
Agricultural Land - Improved	175	45,777	45,952	1,552	3.5%
Residential - Improved	143,056	19,558	162,614	771	0.5%
Residential - Vacant	30,280	16,760	47,040	-627	-1.3%
Seasonal - Improved	10,237	12,039	22,276	9	0.0%
Seasonal - Vacant	3,334	6,585	9,919	25	0.3%
Commercial & Industrial	32,931	15,230	48,161	499	1.0%
Resource Property	343	97,826	98,169	4,160	4.4%
Total Land Accounts	223,351	645,138	868,489	5,584	0.65%

Maintaining Quality Service on the Road to a 12-Year Reinspection Cycle

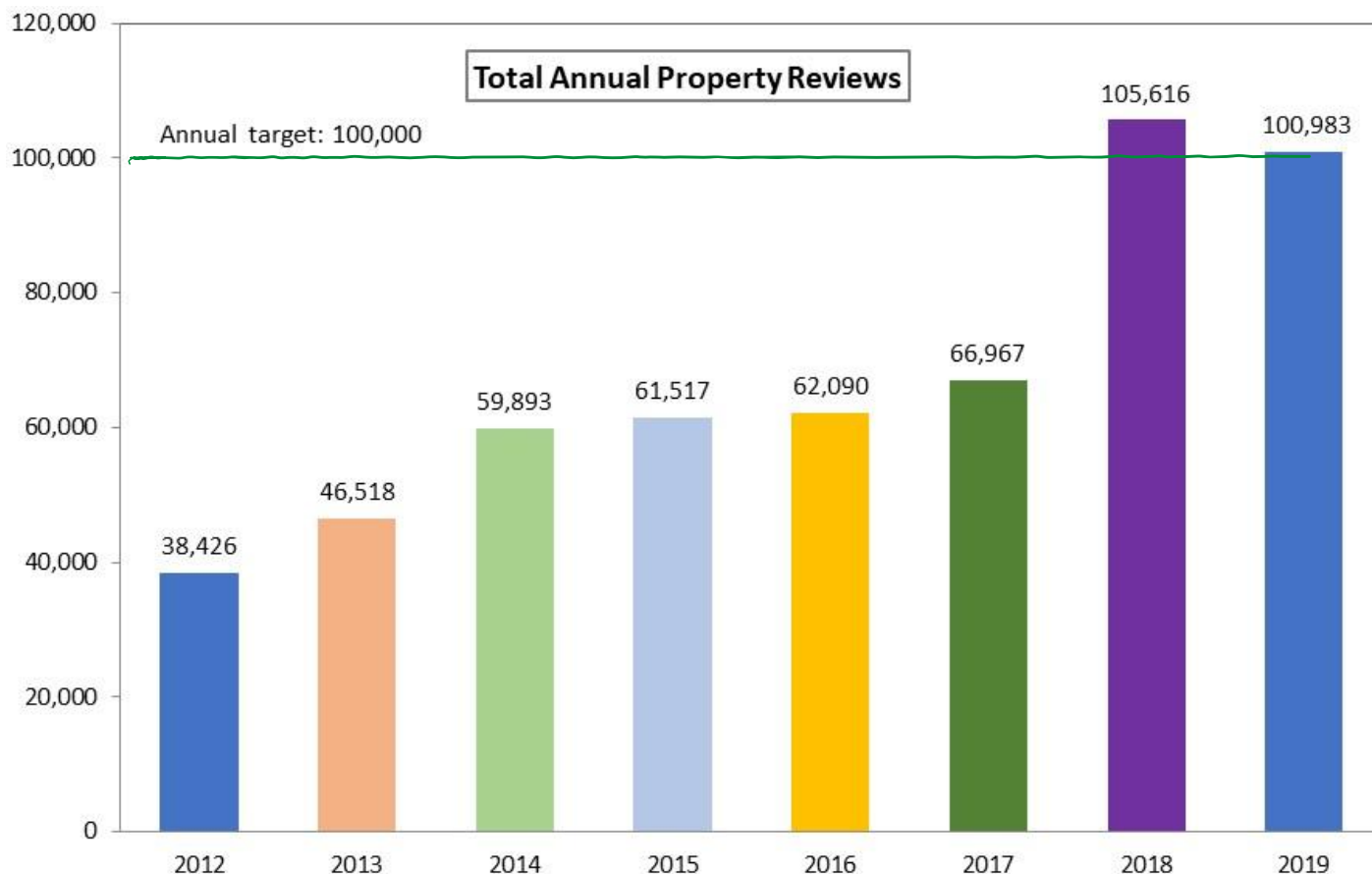
In 2019 the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency (SAMA) continued to leverage the process and technological improvements made over the last few years. The agency met its goal of 100,000 annual property reviews for the second consecutive year while, at the same time, developing new technologies. With both construction and property sales decreasing over what has been seen in recent years, demand for property maintenance dropped in 2019 and SAMA was able to assign more resources to property reinspections – conducting more reinspection reviews in this calendar year than ever before. 2019 also saw a significant increase in funding from the Province – funds marked to further increase the inspection capacity of SAMA in 2020 and beyond.

SAMA launched an updated and more robust website in the beginning of 2019 that has improved communication with stakeholders. In the latter part of 2019 SAMA rolled out two new major initiatives: a brand-new web portal and an updated SAMAVIEW application. Remote Data Collection (RDC) devices, implemented in 2018, continued to provide efficiency gains to appraisal staff as processes and best practices continued to be improved during the year. Enhancements to the central database were also added on an ongoing basis in 2019.

The year also had challenges for SAMA – there were many complex commercial and industrial assessment appeals, most of which were of a high assessment dollar value and some of which would set precedence over other properties in the province. SAMA worked to keep lines of communication open, conduct the appeals process effectively and use external expertise when needed.

Finally, SAMA kept its obligation of preparing for the upcoming 2021 revaluation. Analysis, research and policy setting was an important part of the agency’s activities as SAMA prepared for the delivery deadlines in 2020.

A Continued Focus on Delivering 100,000 Property Reviews Annually

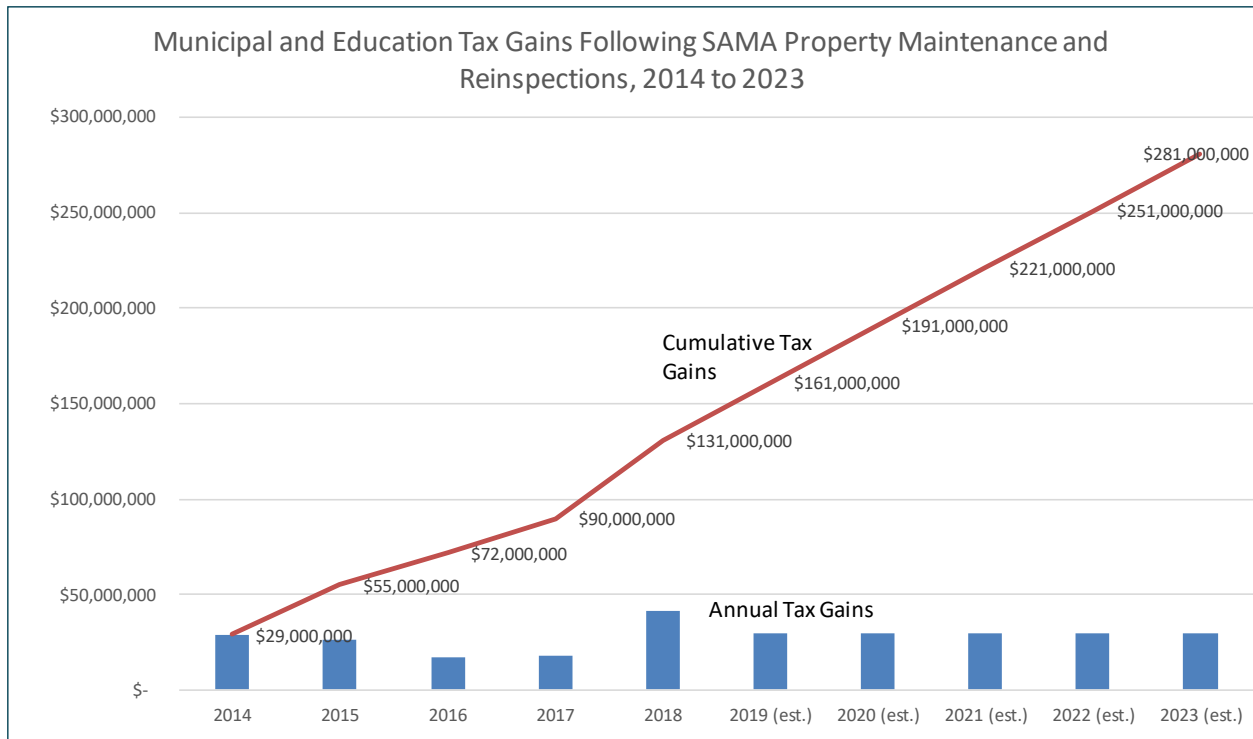


SAMA has been focused on the commitment to deliver 100,000 property reviews annually to client municipalities. In order to meet this target, the appraisal staff must balance this work with the support of value function and revaluation activities. SAMA, working with its funding stakeholders, has made investments in technology and process improvement over the last five years to increase appraiser efficiency and effectiveness.

Support of value during the appeals process is an activity that uses appraisal resources rather than having them concentrate solely on property inspections. 2019 was a year of property market values holding relatively steady and appeal levels were at lower-than-expected levels. Although the number of appeals (1,741) was significantly less than expected, appeals continue to be of an increasing complexity and risk due to their high assessment values.

Although the pace has slowed, economic growth for Saskatchewan in 2019 resulted in continued growth in property assets within Saskatchewan municipalities. Property counts for SAMA clients grew by 5,584 properties or 0.65% to 868,489.

The assessments conducted in the prior year and implemented on 2019 tax rolls provided an additional estimated \$9.8 million in annually recurring tax revenues for the agency's municipal clients and the education sector. Of the \$9.8 million, municipalities received approximately \$6.4 million and the education sector received approximately \$3.4 million (the provincial average municipal mill rate was 8.90 and the education sector mill rate was 4.147 with around \$0.74 billion dollars of taxable assessment added to SAMA's municipal clients in 2019). It is important to note that this is annually recurring revenue (i.e. the \$9.8M annual revenue translates to \$98M over a ten-year span). The following chart uses actual results from 2014-2019 and an estimated increase of \$30M for each of the next five years. By the end of 2023, SAMA property reviews are estimated to result in almost \$1.5B in additional revenue for municipalities and the education sector and then continue on in perpetuity.



All of this work is focused on meeting our client's needs. Municipalities want a stable and predictable revenue source that is delivered inexpensively. Additionally, SAMA's clients want a system that is up-to-date and ratepayers need to be treated fairly and equitably. SAMA strives to deliver all of this to our clients in a transparent and understandable fashion.

SAMA's achievement of 100,000 reviews is now the established target going forward. Additionally, the agency also strives to improve the quality of those assessments. SAMA is now on pace to achieve a 12-year re-inspection cycle and has begun to capture the annual revenue that was being left on the table for municipalities. Prior to the start of the TI Program, SAMA estimated that there would be \$185M return after the first full ten years following completion and that estimate still appears to be accurate.

SAMA's Funding and Workforce

In 2019 the agency had a budgeted workforce of 158.25 and an actual workforce of 165.25 permanent staff. The new positions were added to increase the agency's assessment capacity and are funded by a

Provincial grant increase of \$850,000 in 2019. SAMA's contract with its in-scope staff was renewed for the 2017-2021 period in late 2019.

The total budget (capital and operational) increased \$393K (1.94%) to \$20.297 million. This represents an equal increase to both SAMA's provincial budget request and to the base municipal requisition and is in-line with SAMA's four-year plan, which pledged to keep operational costs to within 2% annual increases.

In terms of actual results, revenues increased by \$711,000 (3.49%). The Province provided an \$850,000 grant increase over the previous year and municipal revenue decreased by \$147,000 (mainly due to a decrease in chargeable property maintenance reviews. The actual funding party shares for 2019 were 56.7% provincial and 43.3% municipal (55.2% and 44.8% in 2018, 56.8% and 43.2% in 2017, respectively). Salaries and benefits make up the majority of SAMA's operating costs (73.4%).

2019 Operating Budget	2019 Budget	2019 Actual	Variance	
			Amount	%
REVENUES (000s)				
Provincial - Operating	\$10,742	\$11,388	\$646	6.0%
Municipal Requisition	8,861	8,696	-165	-1.9%
Other Revenue	993	991	-2	-0.2%
Total Operating Revenues	\$20,596	\$21,075	\$479	2.3%
EXPENDITURES (000s)				
Salaries and Benefits	\$14,803	\$14,572 *	-\$231	-1.6%
Other Expenses	5,422	5,275	-\$147	-2.7%
Total Operating Expenditures	\$20,225	\$19,847	-\$378	-1.9%
Surplus (Deficit)	\$371	\$1,228		
Inter-fund Transfers to Capital Fund	-\$465	-\$476		
Reserves (Net)	94	-790		
Beginning Surplus	0	185		
Ending Surplus (Deficit)	\$0	\$147		

Key Performance Measures

Delivery of Property Assessment Services

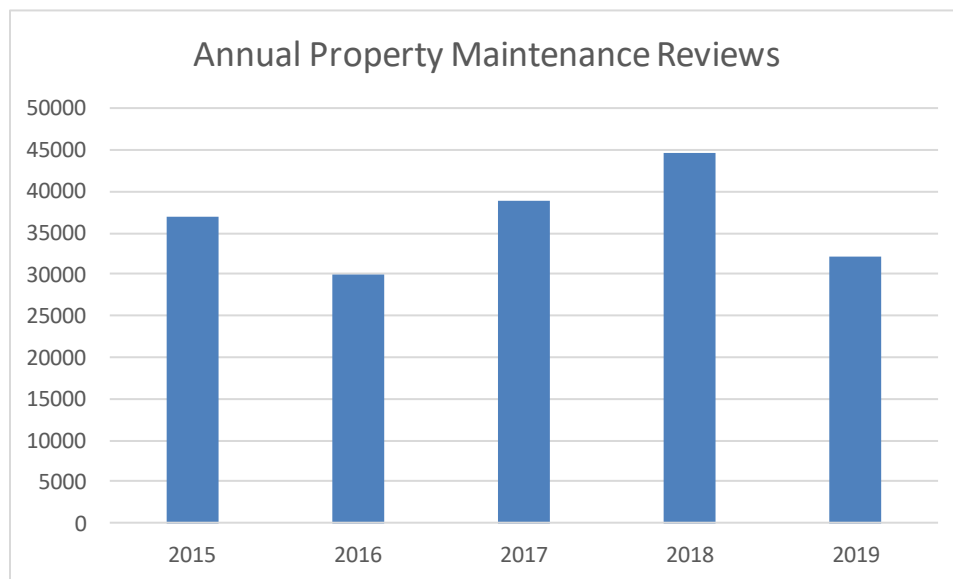
KPM #1: Properties assessed for client municipalities

1. Annual Maintenance Program

The annual maintenance program reviews and updates all properties with developments or changes that may affect the property's assessed value. The municipality submits a list of the properties affected, and the agency reviews each identified property and provides the municipality with an updated assessed value for their assessment roll. Maintenance reviews may also be initiated during the sales verification process.

The Agency's Performance

In 2019, the agency reviewed 32,060 properties (44,668 in 2018). These represents 20,916 inspections that were for use on 2019 municipal assessment rolls and 11,144 that were for use on 2020 municipal assessment rolls.



The agency continues to level out the annual maintenance workload by advancing some maintenance to the preceding year in order to spread the work more evenly over the last months of the calendar year. This helps the agency to provide more timely delivery of the service to client municipalities.

In terms of SAMA's maintenance fee-for-service initiative, the agency invoiced for 20,606 residential, commercial and agricultural maintenance requests (this was work done in 2018 but invoiced for 2019). This was a decrease from the chargeable reviews invoiced in the past three years (24,190 in 2018, 24,700 in 2017 and 25,812 in 2016). This fee came into effect in 2016.

The volume of standardized oil and gas annual maintenance (98,169 properties) tends to overshadow the volume of other industrial property assessments. In 2019, the agency also updated 4,590 properties via renditions received from resource companies and conducted a flow line review of 19,534 properties.

2. Reinspection Program

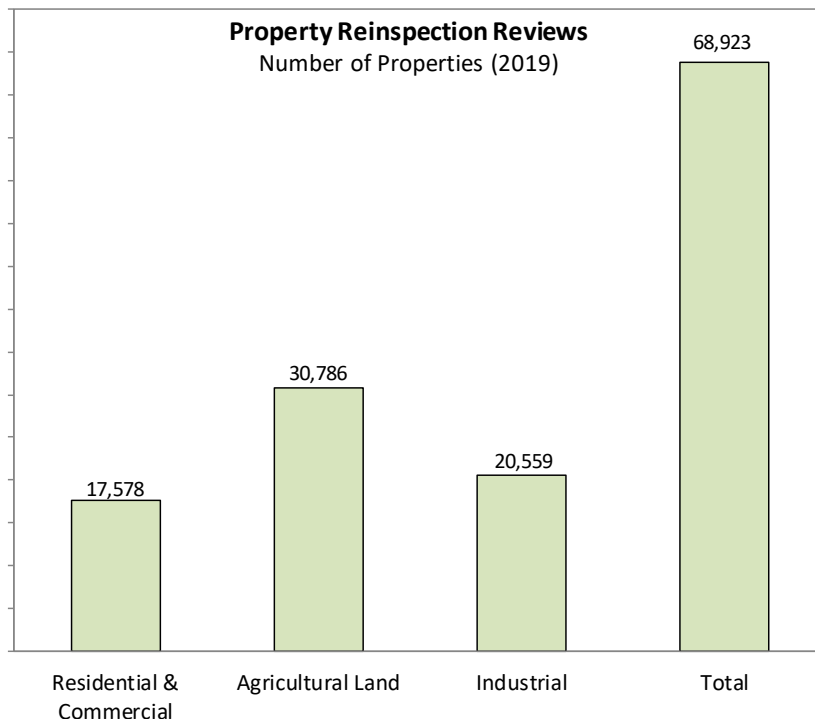
Over time, property assessments become dated because of the cumulative effect of physical attribute and condition changes that are not identified for an annual maintenance review. There is also the risk of assessable properties being absent from a municipality's assessment roll. The general reinspection program undertakes to review each property to re-establish a uniform base of up-to-date property records for the municipality.

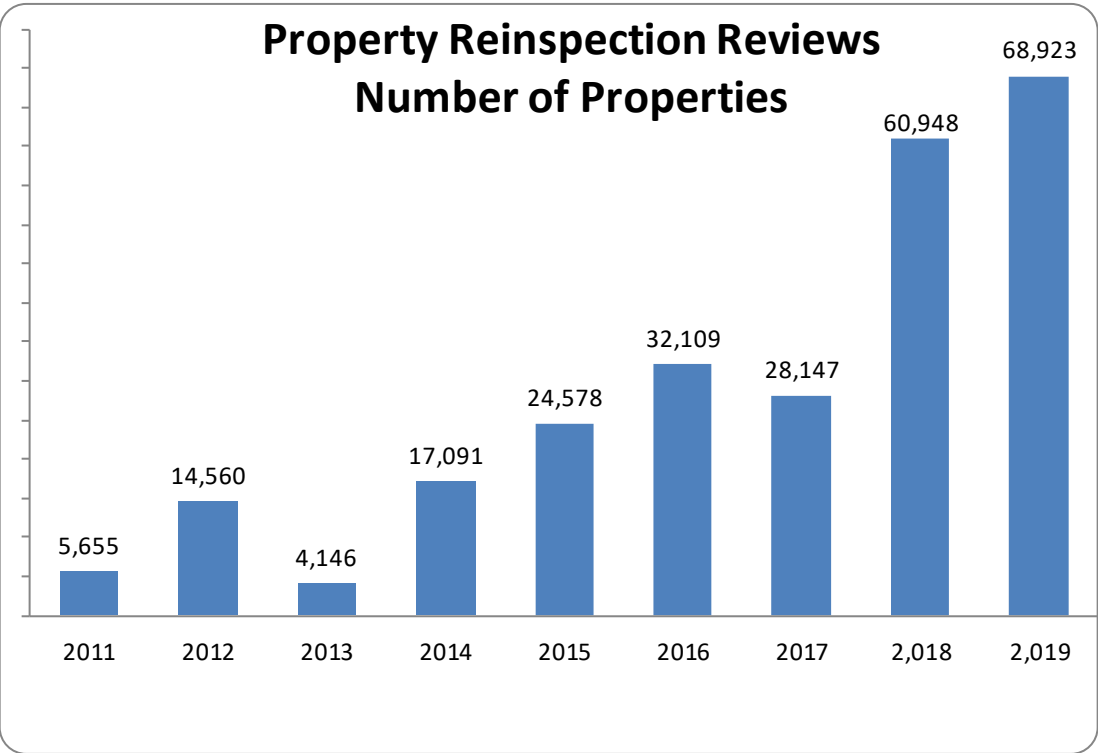
In the most recent two years SAMA has begun to make progress towards the goal of a 12-year reinspection cycle. By conducting reinspections, municipalities may see increases in the taxable assessment base and SAMA estimates that 2-5% of assessable property may be currently left off of assessment rolls.

The Agency's Performance

The agency reinspected 68,923 properties in 2019 (60,498 in 2018, 28,147 in 2017, 32,109 in 2016 and 24,578 in 2015). The agency reinspected 30,786 agricultural properties (20 rural municipalities), 17,578 residential / commercial properties and 20,559 industrial properties, targeting areas and municipalities where the assessments were estimated to be the furthest out-of-date.

SAMA has reached a level of reinspection that, if maintained, will allow the agency to meet its goal of reaching a 12-year re-inspection cycle. 2018 was a turning point for SAMA and the agency was able to conduct a record number of reinspections for a second consecutive year in 2019. The agency is now conducting twice as many annual reinspections when compared to five years ago, before commencement of the Technology Infrastructure (TI) Program.





#2: On-time delivery of client services

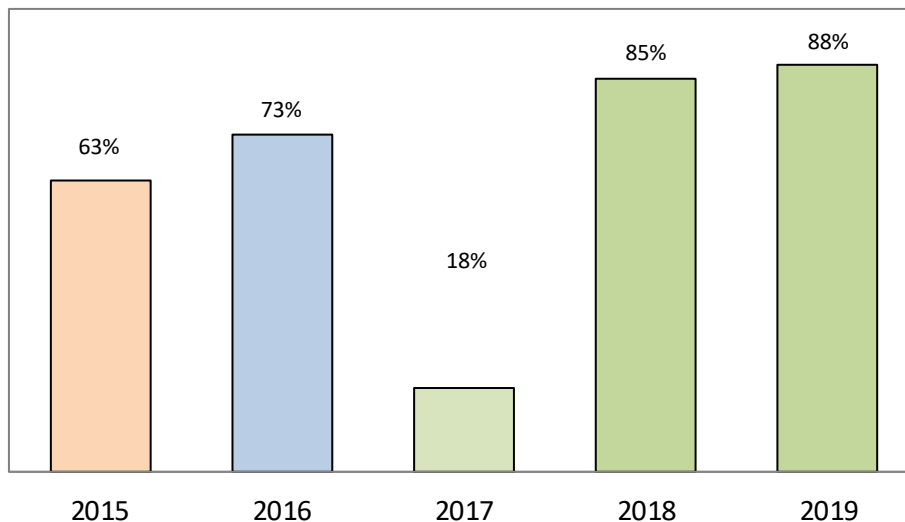
The agency has undertaken to improve the on-time delivery of annual maintenance services to its client municipalities. Since 2008, the objective has been to advance the delivery of annual maintenance in an effort to ensure client municipalities can complete their assessment roll by the May 1st legislated deadline. Advancing maintenance deliveries to clients also carries the benefit of improving program efficiency by balancing out the agency's workload. The agency has also become more responsive to the needs of clients, implementing a system to deliver maintenance lists when desired by municipalities, rather than when convenient for the agency.

The Agency's Performance

SAMA delivered on-time to 88% of municipalities who requested their 2018 maintenance packages by a specific date and by May 1 for municipalities who do not have a preferred delivery date (on-time delivery was 85% in 2018, 18% in 2017, 73% in 2016 and 63% in 2015). 2019 was the highest on-time maintenance delivery rate achieved by SAMA since tracking began.

Maintenance Package Delivery to Municipalities

Percentage of Annual Maintenance Data Packages
Delivered On-Time



KPM #3: Client satisfaction

The agency strives to provide reliable, timely and complete assessment information services to client municipalities, the education sector, the provincial government, commercial clients and property owners. As part of the measurement of the agency's performance, SAMA has contracted Tanka Resource Group Inc. to carry out an anonymous biannual survey of SAMA municipal clients. The feedback received in the survey is used by the agency to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The planning process will then assign resources to areas of weakness. The maintenance of reliable service, positive communications and relationships with clients is essential to the agency's ongoing success.

The Agency's Performance

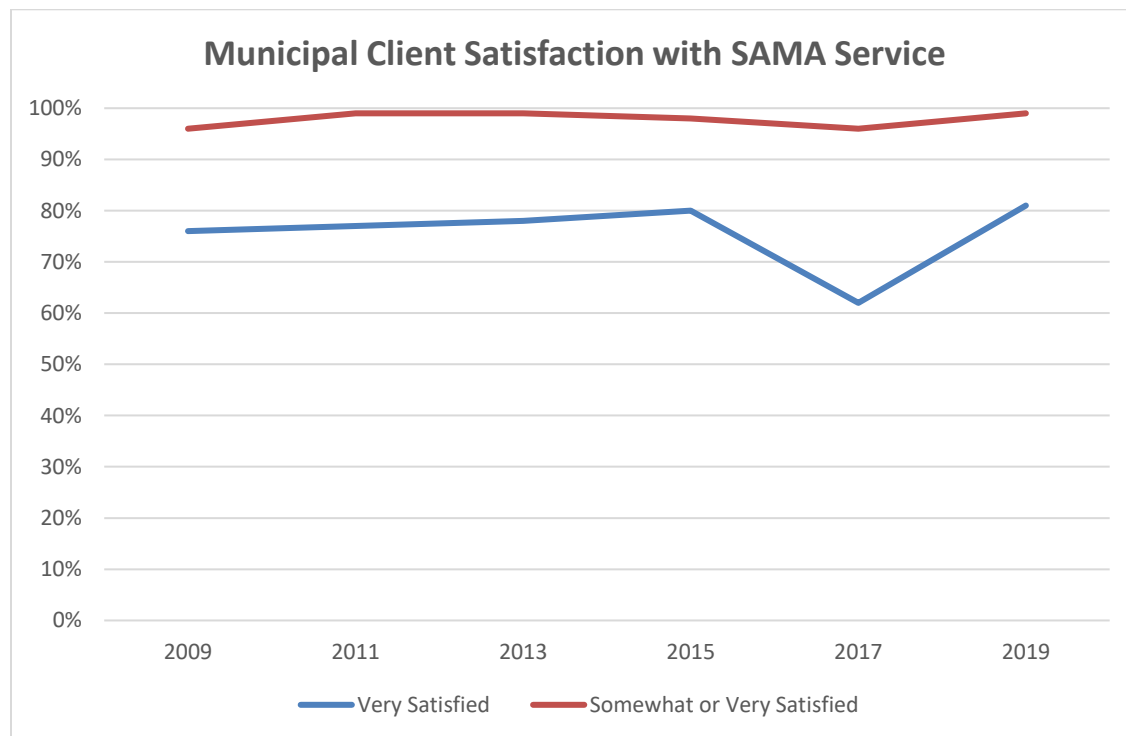
The agency's biannual survey of client municipalities focuses on determining their level of satisfaction with the assessment services received. The results of the 2019 survey were very positive for SAMA, exceeding the already favourable scores received in both 2017 and 2015.

The agency maintained high rating levels from its client municipalities for customer service, annual maintenance services and overall satisfaction with the agency. The agency also maintained a high recommendation rating from its clients.

Client municipalities scored the agency an average of 3.79 out of 4 for customer service, an increase from 2017 (3.57). This represents a very satisfied rating from 81% of respondents and a very or somewhat satisfied response from 99% of respondents.

8% of municipalities reported having a problem in their dealings with SAMA (23% in 2017 and 18% in 2015). The suggestions for improved service that were most commonly mentioned were increased staff continuity/levels, increased maintenance accuracy/turnaround time and quicker communication / response time.

The positive results of the survey align with SAMA's mission and values. Respondents were most happy with the responsiveness, knowledge and professionalism of SAMA staff.



Quality of Property Assessment Services

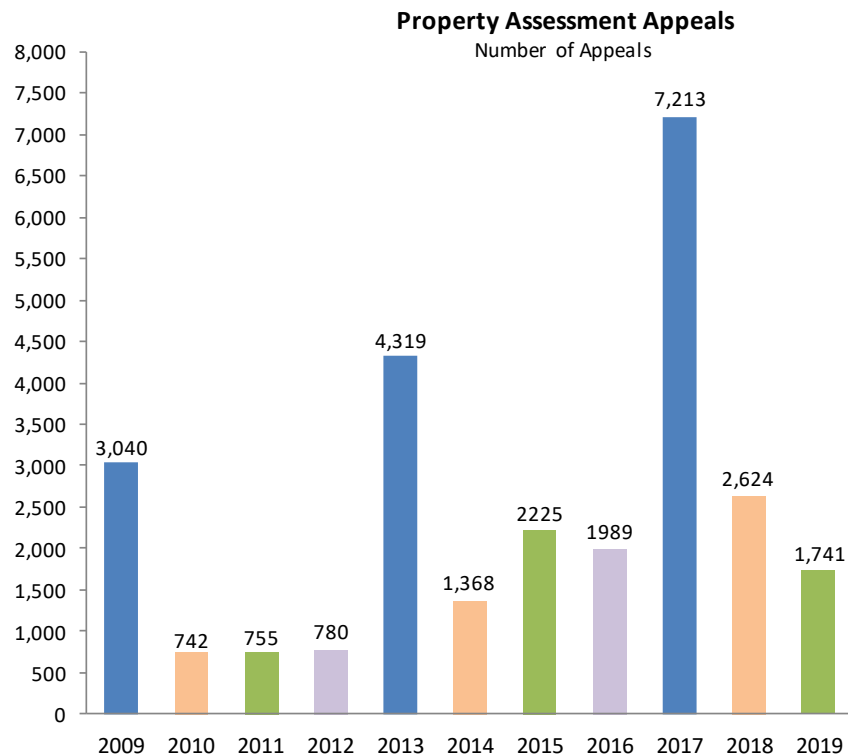
KPM #4: Amount of assessment at risk through appeals

Property owners who believe that their property’s assessed value is not accurate may appeal the assessment to the local board of revision, and subsequently to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board and the Court of Appeal.

The agency’s appraisers will meet with property owners to identify and resolve any valuation errors prior to the formal appeal process. Dealing with property owners directly to swiftly correct assessment errors is a priority for the agency. Quick resolution increases stakeholder confidence in SAMA and reduces support of value costs and efforts for all parties involved. Where there is not an apparent resolution to a property owner’s concerns, the agency provides the municipality with professional appraisal and legal expertise to support the property assessment values through all levels of appeal.

The Agency’s Performance

Once every four years the agency revalues all properties in each of its client municipalities to reflect a more current valuation base date. The highest number of appeals generally occur in the first year of a revaluation, followed by a reduced level in Years two, three and four. 2019 was year three of the revaluation cycle and the number of appeals was slightly lower than has been seen in past year threes. Appeals in 2019 were initiated on 0.20% or 1,741 properties (there were 2,225 appeals in 2015, which was year three of the previous revaluation cycle, 2,624 in 2018, 7,213 in 2017, and 1,989 in 2016). In the previous two revaluation cycles the number of appeals were 5,342 (2009 to 2012) and 11,890 (2013 to 2016). In the first three years of the current cycle SAMA has already had 11,578 appeals.



The 1,741 appeals in 2019 represent a significant drop from 2015. Over the last several years SAMA had been seeing a trend of increasing appeal rates and the drop was unexpected. A leveling off of property values in the Province and decreased levels of property sales may be contributing factors. It is also important to note that the appeals that are being filed by property owners are typically of a higher value than average and base the appeal on factors that are complex by nature. The number resolved by agreement to adjust or that were withdrawn was 1,139 or 65.4% (75.8% in 2018, 73.0% in 2017 and 82.0% in 2016). In 2019 470 appeals were heard by boards of revision, 131 are in progress at year-end and 85 were forwarded to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board. It was also a very busy year for SAMA in dealing with appeals from past years: during 2019 the SMB heard 233 appeals from 2017 and 2018 that involved SAMA municipal clients.

2019's support of value work involved close to 17,000 direct labour hours in 2019 (22,000 in 2018), representing approximately 12.9% of SAMA's assessor resources (16.7% in 2018, 37.9% of resources in 2017, a revaluation year and 7.6% of resources in 2016 – a non-revaluation year). The demand for support of value has and will continue to force SAMA to allocate a large portion of resources and is an area of risk for both the agency and its stakeholders. SAMA has set an appeal completion goal time of 1.10 per day and in 2019 the completes per day average was 1.18. In addition to a general increase, there has also been an increase in appeals to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board when compared to the previous revaluation cycle. SAMA continues to train staff on preparing and presenting assessment appeals in an efficient, professional and effective manner. Furthermore, appeals have also become a more labor-intensive process with appeals becoming more and more detailed and multi-faceted. The agency also uses specialized staff for more complex appeals and contracts lawyers for the most complex and risky appeals (including all appeals that advance to the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal).

SAMA also has formed an appeals support committee. The committee tracks appeal levels and shares information amongst appraisers to help them be more successful in supporting values during the appeal process. During the current revaluation cycle SAMA has been able to deal with a record number of appeals while at the same time doubling the number of property reviews conducted. SAMA's win ratio has substantially improved in 2019, particularly at the Saskatchewan Municipal Board and Court of Appeal levels – not only to recent years but also in comparison to the previous revaluation cycle.

KPM #5: Confirmation of municipal assessment rolls

The SAMA Board is responsible for confirming the assessment roll of all Saskatchewan municipalities after taking steps to ensure that the assessments in the municipality have been completed in accordance with legislation. Municipalities require this confirmation to allow them to enforce the collection of property taxes. The confirmation process is initiated when a municipality submits its annual assessment return.

Both confirmation audits and primary audits are conducted to determine whether a municipality's assessments have been prepared and administered in accordance with the municipal acts.

The Agency's Performance

There were 762 municipalities in Saskatchewan in 2019 – 758 municipalities received their valuation services from the agency and 4 municipalities provided their own valuation services.

For the 2019 assessment roll year, 746 (97.9%) of all municipalities had submitted their assessment return by December 31, 2019.

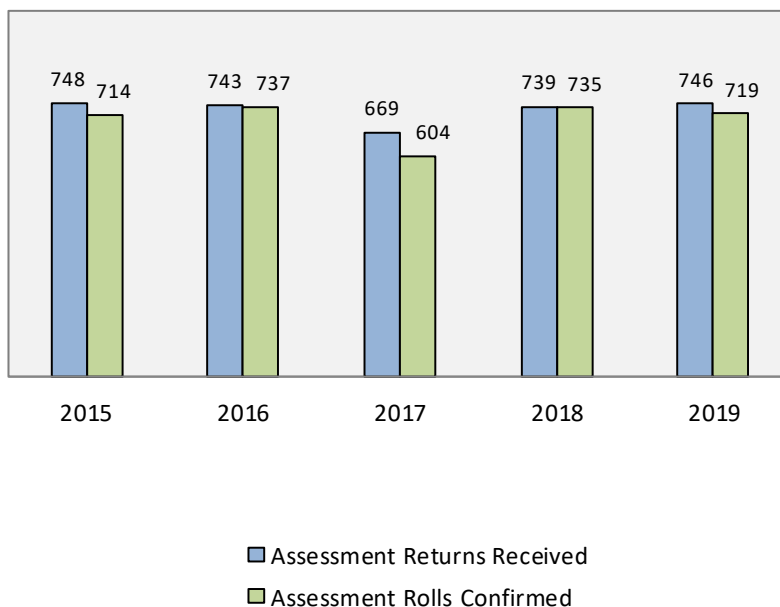
The agency confirmed 719 (96.4%) of the submitted assessment rolls as of December 31, 2019, 11 assessment returns were still being audited, 16 municipalities had not submitted a return for 2019 and 3 municipalities had not submitted a return for 2018.

In addition to the 719 2019 returns, SAMA's QAD division also completed 68 confirmation audits for years 2017 and 2018 for a grand total of 787 confirmation audits.

Primary audits are conducted as part of the confirmation process to ensure that the overall level of appraisal for a municipality falls into the acceptable range prescribed in Provincial regulations. Of the 787 confirmation audits, all were resolved through to compliance (100%).

SAMA has a policy of completing confirmation audits within 90 days of receipt of a municipal assessment roll. In 2019 quality assurance was well within this target. The average turnaround time was 34 days (31 in 2018).

Confirmed Assessment Rolls



Cost of Property Assessment Services

KPM #6: Process Improvement and Use of Technology

In 2014, SAMA implemented a four-year 2014-2017 funding plan, which included a capital project for new technology called the Technology Infrastructure (TI) Program.

SAMA recognized that our inspection capacity was below where it needed to be, and through the use of updated technology and more efficient business practices the Agency sought to double our ability to carry out inspections.

2019 was a year in which SAMA continued to work through its TI Program that began back in 2014. The three large improvement projects that were completed in 2019 are: a new SAMA external website, SAMA's brand-new web portal and an updated SAMAVIEW application. Late 2019 saw the beginning of another project: revaluation reporting automation, which is scheduled for mid-2020 completion.

Continued Benefits of the First 3 Phases of the TI Program

The updated Govern user interface, an updated Govern system (to a .net environment) and the implementation of remote data collection devices all took place prior to 2019. These phases of the TI Program continue to be updated frequently in order to continually improve system performance. By streamlining the assessment process and giving staff current technological devices, SAMA can increase how many properties each appraiser can inspect. The measurement SAMA uses to gauge this is completes-per-day (the number of property reviews done by appraisers divided by the number of days available for property review work). Inspections per appraiser continue to increase as staff become more familiar and efficient using the updated software.

Phase 4 – Web Portal and SAMAVIEW

In 2019 SAMA introduced two new components of the TI Program: a web portal and a new SAMAVIEW application. The web portal allows municipal clients to communicate with and retrieve data from SAMA via a secure channel. The new version of SAMAVIEW offers a more-up-to-date interface and provides more data to stakeholders. Both have been well-received by stakeholders and customers, with the new SAMAVIEW application having several brand-new customers sign up within the first month of its launch.

Future Technology Development

SAMA is currently co-developing a new reporting automation process that will decrease manual work involved with revaluations. Besides the gains in revaluation efficiency, this project is also a training and mentoring opportunity for SAMA's computer programming staff that will help the agency's ability to make technological advancements in-house in the future. The contract was awarded to an external developer in late 2019 and it is expected to be implemented in the fall of 2020.

SAMA's Revaluation Program

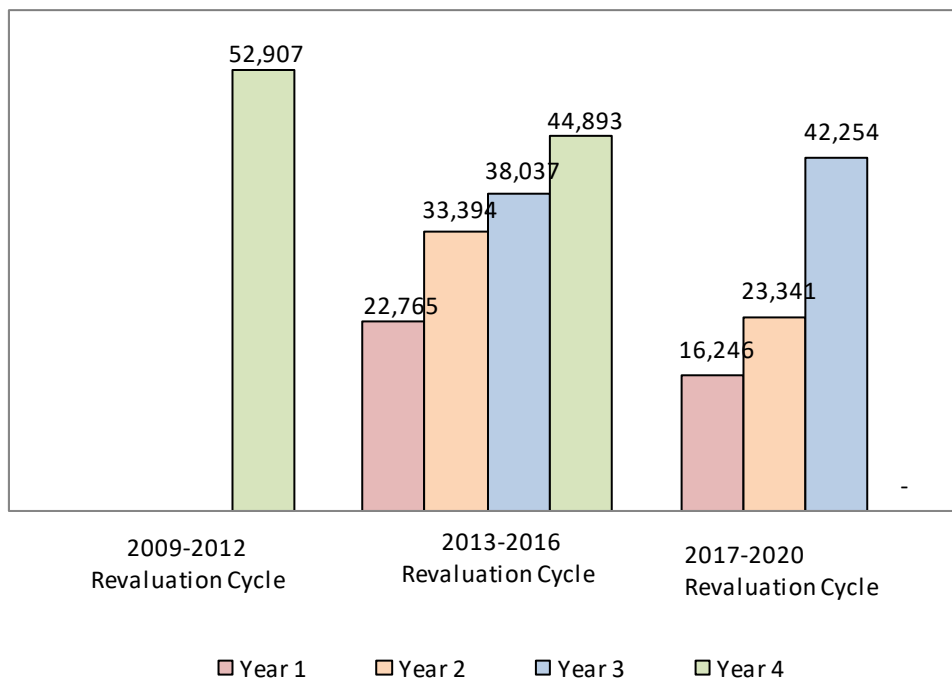
SAMA must conduct a province-wide revaluation every four years and the next revaluation year is 2021. Prior to 2021, many hours of data analysis and policy work must be done in order to create the data and guidelines that will be the basis for the new values. Preliminary numbers are due in 2020 and, in order to deliver not only an accurate revaluation, but also a cost-effective one, the agency has a goal to control the number of hours spent on the quadrennial revaluation while still ensuring a quality product is being delivered.

2019 was the third year of the current cycle of 2017-2020. Revaluation represented 42,254 direct labor hours or 32.4% of the resources of SAMA's appraisal staff. In 2015, year 2 of the 2013-2016 cycle, revaluation efforts represented 28.2% of all direct labour hours. For the first three years of the 2017-2020 cycle, SAMA has spent 81,840 hours on the revaluation. This is a decrease of over 12,000 hours or 13% from the 2013-2016 revaluation cycle.

The agency must also analyze property sales in a timely and thorough manner to create accurate models using the sales approach. The balance of unverified sales at the end of 2018 was 4,786.

SAMA has established a goal of delivering an improved 2021 revaluation (when compared to the 2017 revaluation). In spite of the increased demand on staff time as the 2021 revaluation draws closer, SAMA was still able to meet all of its maintenance, inspection and appeal support targets during 2019 due to the efficiency gains and investments in technology made over the last few years.

Revaluation Appraiser Effort
Direct labor Hours



KPM #7: Agency operating costs

The agency is responsible for providing quality, efficient and cost-effective assessment valuation services to client municipalities and the education sector. The agency served 758 cities, towns, villages, rural municipalities and northern communities in 2019.

The agency's business management model focuses on three areas – program delivery, performance management and accountability. Four-year business and financial plans and annual business and financial plans are developed in consultation with the agency's funding stakeholders, and annual performance reports are provided to the funding stakeholders.

The agency is working to continuously improve the integration of these plans with operational program delivery plans and to improve performance reporting both internally and externally to stakeholders.

The Agency's Performance

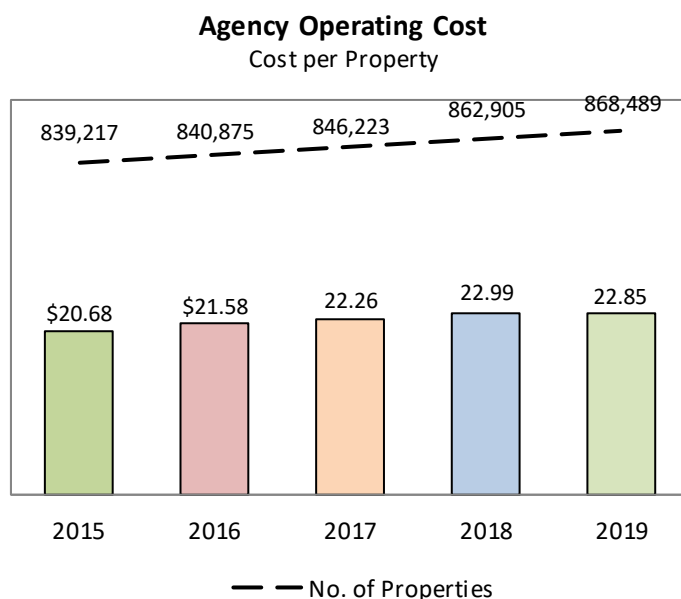
1. Planning and reporting

The agency has expanded the use of program charters throughout all program areas to define all work projects undertaken for each goal and objective set out in the agency's annual business and financial plan. Program charters set out the business need, scope, objectives and deliverables, milestones and key participants for each work project.

2. Operating costs

In 2019 the agency's operating cost per property decreased to \$22.85 (862,905 properties and a total operational spending of \$19.847M). The 2019 operating cost per property represents a less than 1% decrease over the previous year (\$22.99 in 2018, \$22.26 in 2017 and \$21.58 in 2016). The 2019 Inflation Rate for Canada as calculated by Statistics Canada was 1.9% (2.0% in 2018).

Delivery of annual maintenance, revaluation and support of value services remain the agency's main priorities while also continuing to develop and enhance the use of technology and mitigating increases to operating costs.



Workforce Commitment

KPM #8: Workforce Turnover

The agency's success in providing property assessment services within Saskatchewan depends on the knowledge, skills and expertise of our employees and the agency's ability to attract and retain a talented and skilled workforce.

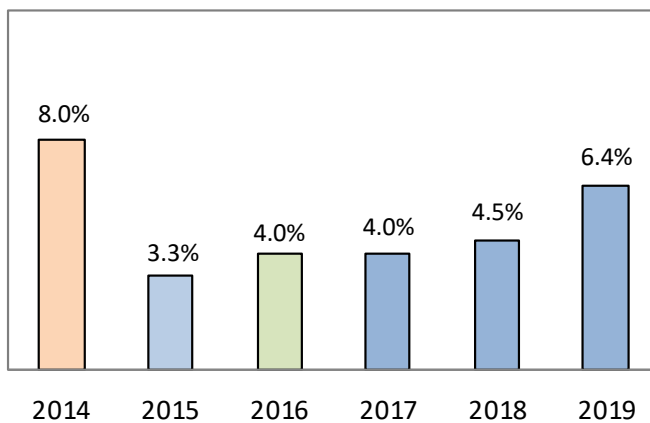
The Agency's Performance

In 2019 the voluntary turnover rate at SAMA climbed to 6.4% (4.5% in both 2018 and 2017). The increase was primarily due to an increase in retirements during the year (5 long-term employees retired in calendar year 2019). For the first time in five years the turnover rate was above the goal of 5%. SAMA operates in a competitive environment as an employer attracting and retaining qualified staff and there continues to be challenges within the assessment field as fewer people complete property assessment educational programs in western Canada.

SAMA continues to provide staff with training opportunities, a comprehensive benefits package and a work/life balance that is conducive with attracting and keeping talented employees. 2019 saw the signing of a new 2017-2021 collective bargaining agreement between SAMA and the local union that received overwhelming support from members and creates a more stable work environment for all parties involved.

Workforce Turnover

Percentage of Permanent FTEs



KPM #9: Employee Engagement

The agency is striving to create a culture of motivated and engaged employees who work together in a productive, continuously improving environment, guided by leadership that is based on a clear and positive vision of the future, using processes that consistently deliver what is expected in order to consistently satisfy our clients' needs.

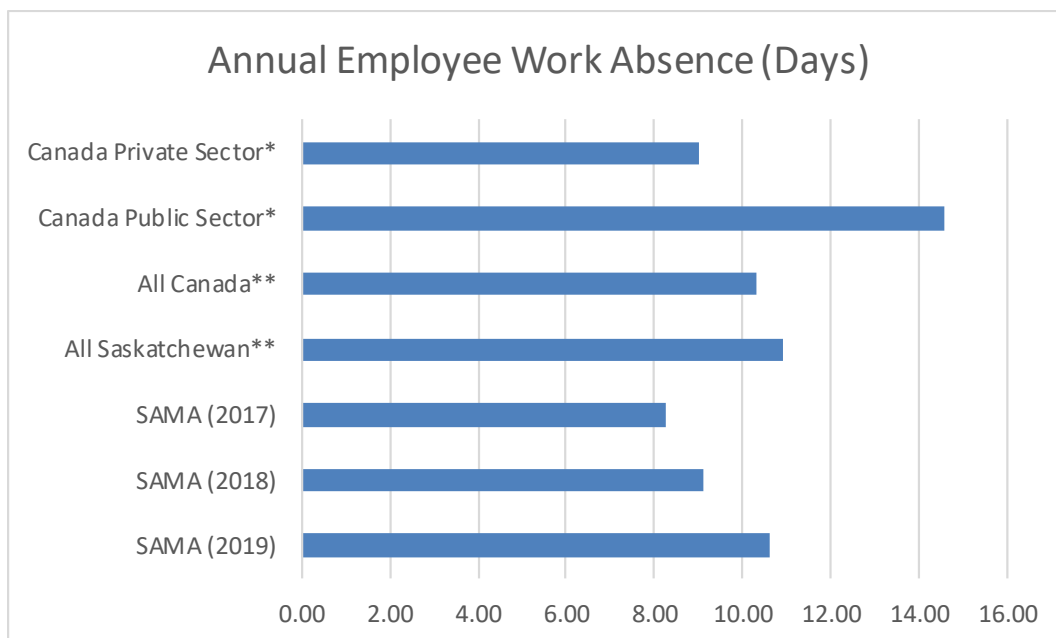
The Agency's Performance

Employee engagement and organizational performance are critically linked and the agency conducts surveys to determine the level of employee engagement, and to assist the agency in developing and implementing new initiatives and programs. SAMA conducted an employee engagement survey in early 2019 to determine the agency's current employee engagement status and to identify possible areas for improvement. Once again, the survey had a very high response rate of 92% for all SAMA employees (83% in 2015 and a public sector benchmark of 61%).

The 2019 survey showed an increase in favourable employee engagement, with a score of 67% (57% in 2015, 51% on the 2014 pulse survey and 46% in 2013). SAMA was pleased to meet, and actually double, its previously set goal of a 5% increase over the 2015 results. Additionally, the employee survey also indicated that employee engagement had increased in all measured survey dimensions, indicating progress in all of the drivers of employee engagement, rather than in isolated areas.

With the current rapid pace of change and SAMA's Technological Infrastructure Program, the agency recognizes that employees are undergoing a major shift in the policies and procedures that affect their work, as well as new technological tools that are an essential part of day-to-day work.

In 2019 SAMA's employee absenteeism rate was 10.60 days per employee (9.13 in 2018, 8.24 in 2017 and 9.28 in 2016). SAMA's rate of 10.60 is just above the Canadian private-sector average of 8.30 days. SAMA's absence rate increased in 2019 primarily due to long-term employee illnesses.



*Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0190-01, *Work absence of full-time employees by geography, annual*

**Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0196-01, *Work absence of full-time employees by public and private sector, annual*

Investing in a Qualified, Experienced, and Continually-Learning Workforce

The agency employs the most comprehensive group of mass appraisal experts in the province of Saskatchewan and, as a provider of professional services, SAMA is committed to employing the most qualified and effective staff available. As such, SAMA encourages its employees to further their personal skill sets via education and training.

At the end of 2019, 63.6% or 56 of SAMA's 88 appraisers (62.4% in 2018, 60.0% in 2017, 61.8% in 2016 and 65.2% in 2015) are fully accredited (have at least four years of assessment experience and have completed the educational requirements of an assessment designation). SAMA continues to be an industry leader in supporting staff while they further their career training – providing full tuition and up to twelve paid professional leave days per annum for staff pursuing a professional appraisal designation.

As an incentive to keep talented staff while operating in a competitive environment, and as a succession planning tool, SAMA implemented a new senior designation program in 2019. The program provides incentives for staff to complete the educational process to obtain senior appraisal designations and provides enhanced training opportunities to the previous policy.

The agency values the years of experience that have been achieved by employees and knows that staff retention is paramount to the long-term success of SAMA. The average SAMA employee has 13.7 years of service with the agency (down from 14.9 years in 2018 due to recent retirements). Employing qualified staff and investing in their training helps to increase engagement and also the quality and efficiency of the province's assessment system over the long term. The agency currently invests just over 2.5% of the operating budget directly into training initiatives (excluding staff wages and benefits while training).

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