

# Leading Your Community

A GUIDE FOR LOCAL ELECTED LEADERS



*Leaders at the Core of Better Communities*



National League of Cities

ICMA advances professional local government worldwide. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advancing professional management of local government. ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 9,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect 185 million individuals living in thousands of communities, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the oldest and largest national organization representing municipal governments throughout the United States. Its mission is to strengthen and promote cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance. Working in partnership with the forty-nine state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource to and an advocate for the more than 19,000 cities, villages, and towns it represents.



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Dear Local Official:

It has been more than thirty years since ICMA and NLC worked together to produce a handbook series to help local elected and appointed officials carry out their roles in leading America's communities. While ICMA updated those resources several times over the years, this handbook again brings together the shared expertise of ICMA and NLC with input from many local elected and appointed leaders from communities throughout the country.

Much has changed about local government in the last few decades, but the role of leading America's communities to ensure a good quality of life for every citizen remains the same.

We thank the many elected officials, local government managers, state league directors, and staff of both ICMA and NLC who helped shape this handbook, both by their direct contributions and through their ongoing work on behalf of America's cities, towns, and counties.

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Most important, we thank all of you for your commitment to public service and for all that you do every day to strengthen America's hometowns. We hope this handbook provides valuable information, ideas, examples, and support in your ongoing efforts to lead your communities.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Borut  
Executive Director  
National League of Cities

Robert J. O'Neill Jr.  
Executive Director  
International City/County  
Management Association

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# Leading Your Community: The Challenges

*Keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground.*

—Theodore Roosevelt

Your decision to run for public office changed your role in the community.

You moved from citizen to candidate to local elected official. As a result of your electoral success, you are now part of a leadership team responsible for preserving and improving the quality of life in your community.

And that's a big responsibility.

This handbook was written for you as you assume your new role and the many responsibilities ahead.

## The “Givens” of Local Government

Several assumptions guided development of this handbook:

- **The issues are complex.** From global competitiveness to telecommunications, to changing demographics, to new economic and fiscal challenges, local leaders must grapple with increasingly complex issues while keeping an eye on the basics: safe and secure neighborhoods, clean streets, filled potholes, dependable waste collection and recycling, and on, and on.
- **The demands and expectations are high.** Complex issues and relationships mean intense demands on your time. Citizens expect you to solve problems and ensure a bright future for your community. The increased demands on your time mean less time for other professional responsibilities, your family, and personal interests.
- **Technology has changed the governing environment.** A local government Web site with up-to-the-minute information about issues and actions, along with online government services, is a must for every local government. Many residents are comfortable interacting regularly through online information and services, but you still need to ensure that no citizens are left out.
- **Feedback is instant.** Community blogs, e-mail, and public access television mean that you are constantly connected to your constituents. Your work is more visible than ever before, subject to instant, round-the-clock scrutiny and feedback.
- **National and local politics are tightly connected.** Many national policy issues play out on the local stage, putting extra pressure on hometown leaders. High-profile national issues, such as eminent domain, federal immigration reform,

### The Athenian Oath

The Athenian Oath was recited by the citizens of Athens, Greece, more than 2,000 years ago. It is frequently referenced by civic leaders in modern times as a timeless code of civic responsibility. Many students today take this oath as they enter public service careers.

*We will never bring disgrace on this our city by an act of dishonesty or cowardice. We will fight for the ideals and sacred things of the city both alone and with many. We will revere and obey the city's laws, and will do our best to incite a like reverence and respect in those above us who are prone to annul them or set them at naught. We will strive increasingly to quicken the public's sense of civic duty. Thus in all these ways, we will transmit this city, not only not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us.*

and the impact of subprime mortgages on the economy, are contentious local issues. State and federal mandates, limitations on local authority, and cuts in once-reliable financial support strain the federal-state-local partnership.

- **Resources are often scarce to meet increasing needs.** Once-reliable federal and state funds have become unpredictable and scarce. Local leaders must find new ways to raise revenue in an increasingly antitax and sometimes antigovernment environment. Shifts in the national economy also have a significant impact on local economies and local revenue.
- **Teamwork is essential.** While you ran as an individual and got elected on your own, you are now a member of a team. Whether you are a mayor of a large city, a council member elected at large or by district, or a county commissioner in a small rural area, you cannot govern, make policy, or lead your community alone. The ideal way to achieve your goals and serve your constituents is to work in partnership with other members of the governing body.
- **Governing is messy.** Your success as a local elected official depends on your ability to balance your ideas with others' views. You must know when to compromise, when to go to the mat, and how to lose gracefully—for the good of the community.
- **You can't please everyone.** Being a leader means making tough and sometimes unpopular choices. Tight budgets, high expectations, increasing demands, antigovernment movements, and unforeseen conflicts make the job of leading today's local governments very difficult. It requires a tough skin, a commitment to learning about the issues, a willingness to compromise, an ethical center, and, above all, a commitment to doing what's best for your community.



- **There are no right answers or perfect solutions.** Governing is an ongoing process of weighing options, sharing ideas, seeking feedback and input, assessing facts and data, and making the best possible decision on the basis of the information and resources you have.

## **This Handbook Is for You**

This handbook provides an overview of roles, responsibilities, and relationships to help local elected officials navigate the opportunities and challenges of leading America's hometowns. Whether you are newly elected to office or a member of a governing body with several new members, the handbook provides a framework for discussion, for examining processes and directions in your community, and for strengthening your effectiveness as an individual leader and a member of a local leadership team.

The handbook generally does not make distinctions by population, government structure, or geographic region. State municipal leagues and state county associations offer programs and resources for elected officials that address those unique aspects of structure and geography that affect how you successfully lead your community.

Part I of this handbook comprises five chapters that focus on the basics of local leadership:

- The Local Leadership Team
- Policy Making and Strategic Planning
- Making Meetings Work
- Connecting with the Public
- Working with the Chief Administrative Officer

Part II comprises four chapters that address the bigger picture of leading in the twenty-first century:

- Democratic Governance
- Ethical Leadership
- Working with Other Governments
- The Learning Leader

Each section offers guidance on local processes and provides examples of approaches in communities of all sizes. A resource section highlights Web sites and publications for more information.



# Part I

## Local Leadership: The Basics

*You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things,  
so that all the small things go in the right direction.*

—Alvin Toffler

Being a local elected official involves meeting, connecting, communicating, preparing, listening, responding, and being available to do the public's business. On a typical day, you might attend a neighborhood forum, meet with a local reporter, respond to e-mails from citizens, talk with the chief administrator about a neighborhood concern, review a proposed green building policy, make decisions at a regularly scheduled governing body meeting on land use, and talk to an unhappy constituent at the grocery store.

And there are atypical days: the day a severe storm damages your community, leaving citizens without power or a safe place to spend the night, or the day seven children are sent home from school with symptoms of a dangerous illness. That's the public's business, and your constituents will look to you to guide the community's response.

As an elected leader, you must be prepared to do the public's business every-day—from the routine, to the challenging, to the heart wrenching, to the almost impossible.

Like most local leaders, you face a constant pull between the tyranny of the immediate—problems, challenges, questions, demands that need attention NOW—and the desire to focus on the long-term well-being of your community. As an elected official, you play a fundamental role in the evolving goals, purposes, and direction of your community as you ensure that the needs of your community's residents are met every day.



## Fast Fact

**A recent National League of Cities (NLC) survey found that local elected officials spend 35 percent of their public service time doing services for people—providing information, handling complaints, and coordinating contacts between citizens with a problem and city staff.**

Source: NLC, *Two Decades of Continuity and Change in American City Councils* (September 2004). Unless otherwise attributed, all statistics cited in "Fast Facts" are from this source.

The chapters in Part I focus on

- Building an effective leadership team within the local legal framework
- Setting policy goals and developing plans to support them
- Using meetings to support good decision making
- Communicating and connecting with your constituents
- Working with the chief administrator.

# The Local Leadership Team

*You can accomplish anything in life, provided you do not mind who gets the credit.*

—Harry S Truman

Successful local leadership depends on working within the basic legal framework for your government, understanding key roles and responsibilities, and forging strong relationships with members of the local leadership team.

## The Legal Framework

The legal framework under which your local government operates starts with your state law and delegated local powers, duties, and responsibilities.

Since the United States Constitution doesn't mention local governments, these entities are created and regulated by the states—which means that there are fifty different legal and political frameworks. Most state laws outline the powers of their local governments in a “charter.”

If your local government has a charter, it is your community's constitution. Generally, a charter can be adopted, amended, or repealed only by a majority vote of a city's voters. Most charters cover a range of issues, including form of government, all aspects of elections and service as an elected official, legislative authority, powers of the governing body, responsibilities of the executive, financing and taxing, human resource policies, bonding, and more.

### Preamble to the City of Dearborn Charter

*We, the people of the City of Dearborn (Michigan), in order to provide a government which recognizes that human life and talent is our most important resource, and the development and enrichment of these our most important tasks, do adopt this charter. We acknowledge that political power is inherent in the people. We desire a framework of government in which all people can participate, by which policy objectives reflecting the people's goals can be fashioned and through which officials can be chosen in a democratic manner and held accountable for their actions.*

While the success of your leadership team depends in large measure on the people who serve on it, the legal framework is an important guide to who does what and how you get your community's business done.

As a local elected leader, you should be familiar with the legal structure under which your government operates. Your state municipal league, chief administrative officer, and local government attorney are good resources for learning about your local government's legal framework.

## A Word about Structure

A local government leadership team brings together elected local officials who are chosen individually by the public in the voting booth and full-time appointed professionals who are hired to do specific government jobs. The makeup of the leadership team can vary according to form of government. There are four forms of local government in the United States:

- **Mayor-council:** A directly elected mayor is the chief executive officer, and an elected council is the legislative body. The council is led by an elected council chair.
- **Council-manager:** An elected council serves as the legislative body, a directly elected mayor or someone elected from the council serves as the council chair, and a professional city manager hired by the council oversees day-to-day operations.
- **Commission:** Voters elect commissioners to a small governing body, and the commissioners handle both executive and legislative functions.
- **Representative town meeting:** Citizens serve as the policy-making body, and a small elected board of selectmen oversees implementation of the policies.



### Fast Fact

According to NLC's recent survey, more than 96 percent of local governments use either the mayor-council (38 percent) or council-manager (58 percent) form of government. The average length of service for governing body members in mayor-council cities is 7.9 years, and in council-manager cities, 7.2 years. Nearly 30 percent of local elected officials are elected by districts, 45 percent at-large, and the remainder by a combination of district and at-large.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Official roles are defined in charters, statutes, ordinances, and job descriptions. Practical roles evolve depending on community needs, the style of the mayor and chief administrative officer, and working relationships among elected officials.

Elected local officials are the **policy leaders**. In the mayor-council form, the elected mayor is both a policy leader and an executive leader for the community.

The chief administrative officer or city manager is the local government **management leader**.

Together, the elected leaders and chief administrative officer ensure that the local government works. They set the vision, provide the services, and guarantee a good quality of life in the community.

### **A Local Policy Leadership Team**

Specific responsibilities of a local policy leadership team include

- Establish a community vision
- Develop long-term goals, priorities, and objectives
- Adopt policies to guide local programs and services
- Enact ordinances (local laws)
- Communicate with citizens about vision, priorities, programs, services, and community challenges
- Review and approve a comprehensive annual budget and capital improvement plan
- Oversee the effectiveness of the local government's programs
- Oversee management performance, including fiscal responsibility
- Respond to citizen complaints and requests, and coordinate responses with local staff
- Hire and evaluate the chief administrative officer
- Represent the local government and the community.

### **The City Manager or Chief Administrative Officer**

Specific responsibilities of the city manager or chief administrative officer include

- Carry out the policies adopted by the elected officials
- Oversee enforcement of city ordinances
- Provide policy alternatives to support governing body action
- Manage all local services, including but not limited to public works, public safety, planning and economic development, parks and recreation, libraries, senior citizen and youth services, and human resources
- Adhere to national, state, and local requirements for financial management, purchasing, public meetings, public records, and ethical conduct
- Prepare the annual operating budget and capital improvement plan for governing body action
- Ensure fiscal responsibility and modern accounting practices
- Recruit, hire, train, and supervise the local workforce

- Prepare materials for the governing body meeting agenda
- Develop long-range operating plans with guidance from elected officials
- Oversee local economic development, including negotiation of development and revenue deals
- Coordinate information sharing and action among elected officials, employees, and citizens.

### **The Mayor in a Council-Manager Government**

Specific responsibilities of the mayor in a council-manager government include

- Chair governing body meetings, which includes paying attention to parliamentary procedures, and ensure the accomplishment of desired outcomes
- Serve as a primary contact between the management staff and the governing body to keep the community agenda moving
- Encourage good communication with the citizens, the media, other members of the governing body, and the chief administrator
- Represent the local government in many settings in the community, with other local governments, and at the state and national levels
- Facilitate action during meetings, between meetings, and throughout the community
- Help to create, maintain, and strengthen the effectiveness of the local leadership team
- Encourage and support the community during a crisis.

In the mayor-council form of government, the mayor is both the elected political leader and the chief executive, working in partnership with the governing body but not as a member of it. The governing body chair is the leader of the elected team, responsible for ensuring productive meetings and effective group action. Together, the elected mayor and council president/chair carry out the administrative and policy-making roles that are divided between the mayor and the chief administrative officer in the council-manager form.

### **Emerging Roles**

The challenges facing today's communities and the changing expectations of local leaders have led to some new roles. Perhaps the most dynamic aspect of your leadership is your relationship with the people who elected you to lead the community. In a study of how to connect citizens and their government, the National League of Cities Advisory Council identified these roles for local elected officials:

- **Models of civility and cooperation** to set the tone for civil discourse and productive problem solving



- **Messengers** using the “bully pulpit” to encourage citizens, businesses, the media, community organizations, and others to play an active role in community building
- **Shapers of processes** that connect citizens and their government in productive ways
- **Leaders** who bring people together and build trust.



### Fast Fact

The amount of time elected officials spend on council-related business varies according to community size, nature of position (i.e., full time or part time), and other employment commitments. According to NLC’s survey, elected officials in small cities spend an average of 20 hours per week on council business; in medium cities, 25 hours; and in large cities (more than 200,000 in population), 42 hours.

## Relationships: It Takes a Team

*Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.*

—Henry Ford

Charters and municipal codes document how a local government is supposed to work by defining roles and responsibilities. The foundation for effective action is another R: relationships.

A successful team is more effective than its individual parts—creating synergy, stronger collective ideas, and a shared sense of accomplishment. One good idea leads to a better idea. Disagreements lead to productive discussion, an understanding of and respect for differences, and a better shared solution.

What makes a group of people a team?

- A shared and explicit vision
- A well-defined and accepted mission
- Clear goals to which everyone is committed
- Energy and enthusiasm
- Commitment to work together
- Professional respect for one another
- A commitment to understanding each other’s perspectives and to resolving conflicts

- Ability to communicate comfortably
- Ability to disagree openly and productively
- Effective decision-making procedures
- Distributed participation: everyone engages and handles different responsibilities
- Motivation to get the job done
- High levels of trust, acceptance, and support among members
- Cohesion: a sense of belonging and a desire to stick together.

The more success a group has in carrying out its mission, the more it grows as a team. In sports, winning teams keep winning—not always because they have the most talented players, but because individuals learn to trust each other and play to each other’s strengths.

What gets in the way of effective teamwork?

- Lack of commitment
- Misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about group processes and rules
- Destructive competition
- Poor communication
- Poor interpersonal skills
- Personal conflicts
- External pressures and/or new demands that stretch the team’s capacity
- Political grandstanding
- Unwillingness to see/consider different perspectives or to compromise
- Representation of only one perspective or one group regardless of the issue.



### Fast Fact

**Conflict among members of the governing body is the most frequently mentioned source of frustration for local elected officials, cited by 43 percent in NLC’s survey. The next most frequently mentioned source of frustration is pressure from interest groups, at 31 percent.**

When the team doesn’t work well together, there can be consequences:

- Public embarrassment
- Inability to act
- Delays and gridlock
- Long meetings without results
- Lost opportunities for the community

- A stressful and unproductive environment
- Personal conflicts that interfere with productivity
- Turnover among both staff and elected officials.

Trust and cohesion are foundations of successful teamwork but are often the hardest team attributes to achieve. The constant pressures of public service—tight budgets, citizen demands, media inquiries, limited time, tough issues, the next election—strain team relations. But the bottom line is, you were elected as an individual to serve on a group that makes decisions together on behalf of the community you serve. If you want to be on a winning team, help the team win!

### Building a Successful Team

Paying attention to how your group works together is an important part of building a high-performance governing body. Ways to pay attention range from informal action reviews after a governing body meeting to a formal team-building process using an outside facilitator. Right after an election when the team changes is the best time to focus on how your group will work together.

You can tell your team-building efforts are successful when you have

- Open and honest discussion and feedback among team members
- Frank conversation about cooperation, expectations, and team problems or challenges

#### Key Players on the Local Leadership Team

- The **elected governing body** meets regularly to make collective decisions, set policies, enact laws, and establish broad directions for the community.
- The **chief administrative officer** is the primary staff contact for the elected governing body. The chief administrative officer is hired and evaluated by the governing body, interacts regularly with the governing body and its individual members, brings management expertise to the local government, and provides information and resources for decision making.
- The **professional staff/department heads** work directly for the chief administrative officer; support the chief administrative officer and the governing body by providing expertise, information, and resources; and carry out policies passed by the governing body through programs and services delivered by their departments.

How these elected and appointed leaders work together varies from community to community, but they all play vital roles in carrying out the local government's mission, delivering services, and meeting citizen needs.

### Team-Building Skills Checklist

After a governing body meeting, assess your teamwork skills by giving yourself a score from 1 (rarely) to 5 (always) on each of the teamwork dimensions:

- ☐ Did I create a relaxed, collegial atmosphere that supported and encouraged collaboration?
- ☐ Did I participate actively in the discussions?
- ☐ Did I help keep the discussion on track?
- ☐ Did I understand and accept the task(s) the team was working on?
- ☐ Did I listen to others?
- ☐ Did I feel comfortable disagreeing with others?
- ☐ Did I feel comfortable when others disagreed with me?
- ☐ Did I seek consensus/help the group move toward a shared conclusion?
- ☐ Did I use my knowledge and skills during the session to help the group get its work done?

- Increased awareness of the impact of individual behavior on team performance.

Informal team-building sessions give the group a chance to look at how it is working and to identify obstacles to effectiveness. Consider these options:

- **Newcomers' orientation.** Shortly after an election, incumbent elected officials, working in partnership with the chief administrator, plan an orientation for the new members. The discussion might include veterans' recollections of their own first few weeks in office. Sample reports, agendas, minutes, and other materials will help newcomers get up to speed.
- **Informal team assessment.** The team-building skills checklist above provides a tool for starting a conversation about how each individual rates his or her own performance as a team member.
- **Work sessions on working together.** Your governing body can spend extra time together beyond official meetings to build team rapport using this handbook as a resource.

### Hiring a Facilitator

While the chief administrative officer and mayor can successfully lead team work sessions and orientations for new members, an experienced facilitator is better equipped to lead an intensive team-building process.

The facilitator makes it possible for all members of the team—including the mayor and chief administrative officer—to participate fully in the learning process. A facilitator also brings expertise in managing a group process.

### **Team-Building Challenges in the Public Sector**

Conducting a team-building session in the public sector poses special challenges.

- **Open meeting laws:** All fifty states and the District of Columbia have laws that define boundaries for public meetings. Generally, a public meeting is not the best setting for team building—but violating your state open meeting law is not a reasonable alternative. Most open meeting laws have exceptions that allow private session. Check with your legal counsel to decide on your best course of action.
- **Media interest:** Even if your state open meeting law permits a closed team-building session, a private governing body meeting will draw media attention. To avoid speculation, inform your media about the meeting—who will be there, what you hope to accomplish, and what information will be available after the session.

#### **The Facilitator's Role**

The facilitator is a “process person” who guides the group through productive discussions and keeps track of agreements. The facilitator also helps the group focus on the issues that are most important: what’s happening in the group right now, how do team members interact, what’s interfering with the team’s effectiveness, and what actions does the team need to take. The facilitator helps the group solve its problems.

#### **How do we know if we need a facilitator?**

A highly motivated group may be able to conduct its own team-building session. But a group that has had major disagreements or political conflicts could benefit from a facilitator’s help. If a team-building process is threatening because it implies criticism of the entire group or of specific members, an experienced facilitator who is not a team member can provide impartial direction, ease the tensions, and create an environment for open discussion.

#### **How can we find a good facilitator?**

Check with nearby colleges, organizational development consulting firms, national associations, your state municipal league or state county association, and other local governments that have conducted team-building sessions. Hiring a facilitator is like filling an important vacancy in your government. You should review résumés, assess the person’s experience with the public sector, and talk with references.

- **Post-session interviews and feedback:** Be sure that your team agrees on what information about the session will be released to the media, and on how individuals will handle follow-up discussions with the media and others who might ask.

### Team Building and Politics

Creating a strong team in a political environment is tough. The stress of a campaign and the competition for votes make an already difficult process even more challenging. Ideological differences around major issues like growth, immigration, and taxes can further strain the capacity of individual elected officials to work together as a team.

Governing bodies that become successful teams rely on

- Shared commitment to making good decisions on behalf of the community
- Willingness to focus on building a team
- Protocols for working together to try to minimize personal conflicts and maximize productive decision making, including consequences for violating the protocols
- Respect for each other as individuals who share a commitment to public service
- Respect for different perspectives as a way to improve decision making
- Knowledge of how to balance strongly held views with the need for compromise to reach a conclusion.

### Recap

- State law, legal documents, and form of government provide a basic legal framework for official roles and responsibilities.
- Elected officials are the policy leaders in the community, and the chief administrative officer is the management/administrative leader—but the roles overlap and work best when the distinctions aren't hard and fast.
- It takes a team to lead a government, and it takes hard work to create a successful team.

### Some Words about Human Relations

The Six Most Important Words

*"I admit I made a mistake"*

The Five Most Important Words

*"You did a good job"*

The Four Most Important Words

*"What do you think?"*

The Three Most Important Words

*"If you please"*

The Two Most Important Words

*"Thank You"*

The One Most Important Word

*"We"*

The Least Most Important Word

*"I"*

—Author Unknown

### **Habits of Highly Effective Governing Bodies**

- Clearly define roles and relationships
- Think and act strategically, focusing on key policy issues
- Operate in a culture of values and ethics
- Regularly evaluate policy implementation
- Work together as a team
- Master small-group decision making
- Develop and follow protocols for governing body behavior and governing body–staff relations
- Allocate time and energy appropriately
- Set clear rules and procedures for meetings
- Get regular assessments of citizen concerns and governing body performance
- Recognize their position in the intergovernmental system and build productive partnerships
- Focus on personal learning and development as leaders
- Look to the future

Adapted from Carl H. Neu Jr., 10 Habits of Highly Effective Councils

### **Recommended Local Reading**

- State law governing local authority and responsibilities
- Your local government charter and municipal code





# Policy Making and Strategic Planning

*I get up every morning determined to both change  
the world and have one hell of a good time. Sometimes this  
makes planning the day difficult.*

—E. B. White

So you're a member of a local leadership team, committed to ensuring that the team works effectively.

And you're also a local policy maker, committed to making good policy decisions as a member of the local leadership team.

What exactly does that mean? What is policy?

You ran for office with ideas about what's important for your community—the issues that matter most, changes you'd like to see, your vision for the community. As part of your transition from citizen to elected official to team member to policy maker, you'll begin to mesh your personal ideas with those of others to define desirable directions for the community.

This chapter examines the process of local policy making, including

- Understanding policy
- Setting goals and strategic priorities
- Linking policies and money through the annual budget
- Evaluating policy effectiveness.

## A Vision and a Sense of Mission

As an elected official, you are responsible for making decisions about the scope of services that your government will provide and about how to pay for those services. You are also responsible for establishing policies that affect every dimension of your community—local economic growth, cultural change, the environment, new residents, regional collaboration, long-term financial management, and more. Your decisions are guided by a clearly defined mission.

A mission is the reason that your local government exists, and it is usually defined in terms of the community's vision of its future. And your job as an elected official is to put in place policies, programs, and facilities that will carry out the mission to make your community's vision come true.

**Thornton, Colorado** ([www.cityofthornton.net](http://www.cityofthornton.net)), started its visioning process with this question: *is there more we should be doing to ensure a quality future for our community?* That led to a yearlong effort to engage citizens through public workshops, three geographic focus subcommittees, and an ongoing steering committee that helped the governing body produce a comprehensive plan and a vision for a city. The vision defines Thornton as a city that strives for *quality and diverse neighborhoods, plentiful quality jobs, great amenities, and active and engaged partners.*

Some local governments create both a broad vision statement for the community and a specific mission for the government. Some also develop core value statements that define how the government serves and guides the community. Others use slogans to convey what the community is or expects to be. The specific form your “sense of mission” takes is secondary to ensuring that your governing body operates from a shared foundation that defines an overall direction and your team’s commitment to the community. (For more on creating a community vision, see Chapter 6.)

## Understanding Policy

Policy is a plan of action agreed to by a group of people with the power to carry it out and enforce it. Policy can be as specific as adopting an ordinance—a local law—requiring dogs to be kept on leashes in public areas, or requiring all residents to recycle specific materials, or requiring developers to build sidewalks in residential neighborhoods. Or it can be a declaration of a broad government commitment, such as providing affordable housing or attracting new businesses to broaden the tax base and create new jobs. Generally, policy making means

### Sample Mission Statements

#### **Riverside, California**

*The City of Riverside is committed to providing high quality municipal services to ensure a safe, inclusive, and livable community.*

#### **Georgetown, Texas**

*To preserve and enhance the quality of life and unique character of Georgetown by preserving the rich heritage and natural resources; promoting well-planned development, cost-effective professional management, and competent, friendly services; and protecting its citizens, the environment, and all other assets.*

deciding *what* you are going to do in your community, not *how* you are going to do it.

Your annual budget, capital improvement plan, land use master plan, and housing strategy are all policy statements that define a course for your community.

Good public policy is

- **Beneficial** to the community
- **Necessary** to move the community forward or to respond to a specific emerging need
- **Consistent** with the government's overall mission
- **Easily understood** by the community in general and by those who will be most affected by it
- **Well-informed and rigorous** based on an analysis of policy alternatives and implementation costs and consequences
- **Open to change or improvement** as circumstances change or evaluation suggests a new direction
- **Responsive** to urgent needs, emerging challenges, or needed changes of direction
- **Able to be enacted** on the basis of clear input from the chief administrative officer.<sup>1</sup>

Policy making can be passive as well as active. Deciding not to act (or not deciding), deciding to do something the way you did it last year, or making a special exception to a rule are policy decisions.

Adopted policies are usually summarized—or codified—in the local government code. To understand your government's mission, it is important to become familiar with adopted policies. Begin your service as a policy maker by reviewing the most recent annual budget; the capital improvement plan, the comprehensive, general, or master plan; and the local government code.

## Strategic Planning: Setting Goals and Priorities

While all policy that supports your mission is important, it's the big issues that merit most of your time. Action demands, such as fixing potholes in certain neighborhoods, replacing trees in public areas, or adding stop signs, are important but should not be allowed to consume all your time.

Today's local governments generally use strategic plans to set clear policy goals and priorities for action.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Department of Education and Children Services, Government of South Australia, January 2008.

A strategic planning or goal-setting process

- Moves the organization and the community toward a desired future
- Provides a framework for action to guide the leadership team
- Gets everyone pulling in the same direction by helping the team share different ideas and then agree on which goals will get attention
- Helps you manage your time more effectively by deciding what the governing body will focus on
- Establishes clear guidelines for the chief administrative officer and professional staff
- Provides guidelines and priorities for budgeting, particularly if you're facing financial constraints
- Strengthens your team by giving it experience working together to make tough choices.

A strategic plan defines broad policy goals that span several years. Priorities, objectives, and strategies narrow the timeframe and describe how the organization will achieve the long-term goals. The strategic plan serves as a framework for setting annual priorities, defining action strategies, and allocating resources to carry out the actions needed to reach the goals.

Some plans begin with broad strategic priorities or themes that carry over from year to year with annual targets under each priority. The language may vary but the purpose is the same: to agree on broad directions for the community that will guide governance action during a specified period of time.

Many local leadership teams use retreats to develop strategic plans and review and update policy goals.

### **Strategic Planning Steps**

A strategic planning or goal-setting process follows these general steps.

**Step 1: Identify issues and needs.** Challenges to be pursued, needs to be met, or problems to be solved are identified by the governing body and chief administrator, and often emerge from citizen surveys or from a broad citizen involvement process.

**Step 2: Define goals.** Goals define the desired outcome in response to a challenge, need, or problem. Goals often identify a point or outcome to work toward beyond what the governing body can accomplish in one year or even one term of office.

**Step 3: Establish action strategies/objectives.** Strategies, objectives, targets, or milestones define steps you intend to take within a specified timeframe to move toward your goals. Strategies are usually tied to the annual budget and define measurable achievements so that the team can assess progress.

### Talking Strategic Planning

**Columbia, South Carolina** ([www.columbiasc.net](http://www.columbiasc.net)), includes these definitions as part of its operational strategic plan:

**Vision** is a statement of a possible and desirable future state of the organization.

**Mission** is the reason for an organization's existence, or what it does and what the organization will do to make the vision a reality.

**Values** are the basic beliefs that reflect what an organization is, what it stands for, and how it provides service.

**Strategic Issues** are concerns that must be addressed in order to achieve the vision, fulfill the mission, and be true to the values. Strategic issues may arise from gaps between expectations and performance and may be identified from an analysis of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

**Goals** are statements of desired outcomes that explain what the organization is trying to achieve.

**Strategies** describe how the organization will accomplish the goals.

**Measures** provide quantitative or qualitative indications of the extent to which goals are being met.

**Step 4: Choose priorities.** Priorities define what will be done first based on both need and available resources. Money is often the key factor in determining priorities. But to ensure that you pay attention to the most important challenges, needs, or problems—not just to the affordable ones—you may want to leave the money issue off the table in initial discussions of priorities.

**Step 5: Provide resources for action.** Translating goals and strategies into programs is generally a staff role, but the governing body monitors progress on the priorities it has set. The annual budget is the operating framework for accomplishing the work that the leadership team has agreed to. The next section of this handbook focuses on linking policy goals and money.

**Step 6: Evaluate progress.** Unsolicited feedback gives the governing body one way to assess progress toward its goals; it is also an important indicator of how well government priorities are connecting with citizen's needs and interests. Regular and rigorous measures of performance are important as well. Performance measures can include surveys to assess how residents view services and overall government performance.

**Little Rock, Arkansas** ([www.littlerock.org](http://www.littlerock.org)), used a planning retreat to identify goals and set priorities. Governing body members listed their interest areas and then rated the interests as “must do,” “should do,” and “nice to do.” The group agreed that anything in the “nice to do” category would be delayed to focus limited resources on the most important priorities. Four “must do” policy priorities emerged in these broad categories: **public safety**, **economic development**, **basic city services**, and **infrastructure**. One “should do” priority addressed **quality of life**, defined as recreational, creative, and educational experiences. After the initial retreat, the governing body adopted five policy statements that were crafted by the staff from the broad categories. During the annual budget process each year, the governing body reviews the five policy statements and develops budget priorities around updated information.

## Linking Policies and Money: The Annual Budget

The municipal budget is your most important annual policy statement. It defines how the local government team will implement its priorities for the next fiscal year, and where the money will come from to carry out that work plan. The late Henry Maier, former mayor of Milwaukee, once called budgeting “the world series of municipal government,” because it is the government’s most important annual action.

The annual budget is much more than a one-year spending plan. It is

- A statement of priorities for the community
- A management blueprint for providing services
- The document that translates policies into action
- A tool for protecting the government’s long-term financial health
- A communication document for the public.

The process of developing and monitoring the annual budget requires the cooperation of citizens, the governing body, the chief administrator, and department heads.

Developing a municipal budget is challenging for many reasons:

- The population of your community has diverse needs and preferences, and not everyone has the same ability to pay for services.
- State and federal regulations mandate some activities and affect others.
- Many local governments services are difficult to plan and evaluate.
- Budget decisions are made in a political environment with pressure to address short-term problems and respond to special needs—sometimes at the expense of long-term planning.

A facilitator helped the **Village of Indian Hill, Ohio** ([www.ci.indian-hill.oh.us](http://www.ci.indian-hill.oh.us)), agree on goals and set priorities. The facilitator interviewed elected officials to identify major program categories and goals, and then compiled a matrix, which each official used to rate each goal's priority as high, medium, or low. The officials then held a retreat to identify and focus on shared high priorities. In addition to the city manager and current mayor and city council, a former mayor and council member were included in the retreat to provide a broader perspective.

- Engaging citizens in the budget process is important and highly recommended, but it is also enormously challenging.
- Local elected officials have different ideas about priorities for spending and raising money.
- Citizens' desire for public services generally exceeds their willingness to pay taxes or fees.
- There's never enough money.

Adding to the challenge of municipal budgeting are local antitax movements, state actions that limit local revenue-raising authority, national economic challenges that affect local revenue, and reductions in federal and state financial support.

To succeed, it's important to be **well-prepared, well-informed, and willing to work as a team** for the good of your community.

The following sections provide a snapshot of the local budget process. They focus on what you, as an elected official, need to know to make good decisions

**Albany, Oregon** ([www.cityofalbany.net](http://www.cityofalbany.net)), adopted a strategic plan to carry out its mission and vision. The strategic plan, which is updated annually, is built around these four themes:

- Great neighborhoods
- A safe city
- A healthy economy
- An effective government.

For each theme, the plan identifies broad goals, measurable objectives, and strategies and actions to meet the benchmarks. The themes and goals generally remain constant over time, while the objectives and strategies and actions are reviewed and refined.

about your community's annual financial plan. Your chief administrative officer is the best resource for providing details on your community's approach to budgeting. Reviewing recent operating budgets is required homework if you're new to elected office or facing your first budget process.

### **The Operating Budget**

The operating budget lays out your government's financial plan for the upcoming fiscal year. Generally, the chief administrative officer will prepare a budget for the governing body to review, revise, and adopt. Budget preparation and review are based on guidelines and priorities established by the leadership team. In a strong mayor form of government, the mayor prepares the budget for governing body review.

Typical components of a local budget include

- A message from the chief executive/chief administrative officer highlighting major program and service priorities, changes from previous years, and key challenges for the current year, and summarizing revenue and expenditures
- A summary of program priorities, and a breakdown of how money is allocated to carry out those priorities and produce specific outcomes
- Details on revenue—where the money will come from, how sources of revenue have changed, and issues for further study
- Details on expenditures organized by program and department, including operating expenses for the specific fiscal year and capital expenses that can be spread over multiple years for public improvements and acquisitions
- Quantitative performance measures that show results that will be achieved by spending the money as proposed
- Comparative data showing how spending has changed over several years, including, in some cases, projections for the following year.

### **The Capital Budget**

The capital budget is the other major part of your local government budget. Capital items include the construction, acquisition, or improvement of public facilities such as libraries, sewers, jails, bridges, and roads. Capital projects usually span multiple years and are expensive. As a result, most local governments develop separate budgets and plans for capital needs, and then include the one-year annual costs for the capital budget in the operating budget.

Key components of the capital budget are

- A comprehensive capital improvement plan that lists all the capital project activities that the government is undertaking within the coming fiscal year
- Proposed funding for capital projects, including any state or federal funding and whether the project will be funded by local revenues—usually called pay-as-you-go—or will require borrowing that will produce long-term debt



- Annual operating costs for capital projects such as staffing, utilities, and equipment. Because most capital projects create ongoing increases in operating expenses, the two budgets must be connected.

### Analyzing and Interpreting the Budget: Questions to Ask

The governing body can assess the proposed budget by asking the following questions:

- **Does the budget reflect local priorities?** Review the budget against your leadership team’s policy goals and priorities to make sure that it allocates money appropriately. If something is missing, ask why.
- **Is the budget balanced, and was it balanced in prior years?** Under state law, local governments must adopt “balanced” budgets. Your job is to make sure the financial assumptions for revenues and expenditures that produce the balanced budget proposal are sound.
- **How is your revenue structure changing?** Examine revenue trends to assess how reliable the revenue projections are, and what any changes in your revenue structure will mean for this budget and the community’s longer-term financial health.
- **How is the program expenditure plan changing?** In looking at expenditure requests, which are usually organized by programs, departments, or cost centers, focus on areas where significant changes are proposed and ask why.
- **How do proposed capital projects support local priorities, and how does long-term spending affect long-term financial health?** Make sure that proposed capital spending projects are consistent with agreed-upon priorities, and take some time to review and discuss funding for capital projects. Funding may come from multiple sources, such as bond issues (which must be approved in a referendum), grants, tax increment financing revenue, and private contributions.
- **Does the budget include reserves for emergencies?** Is the budget just balanced or does it include money for emergencies? If your local government is not appropriating money to a reserve account, you may be living on the edge. Reserve funds help municipal governments meet future fiscal challenges. In addition, bond underwriters look at reserves as an indicator of fiscal responsibility, so a healthy reserve can increase credit ratings and decrease costs of local debt.



#### Fast Fact

The NLC report *City Fiscal Conditions in 2007* found that cities’ ending balances or “reserves” were continuing to grow despite economic and fiscal challenges. In 2006, ending balances as a percentage of general fund expenditures averaged nearly 26 percent, which was an all-time high for the NLC survey.

## Participatory Budgeting

The residents of your community are the primary customers for the services you fund in your annual budget. Engaging citizens in shaping the budget increases their trust and strengthens their connection with government. You can connect citizens to your budget development process in various ways:

- **Hold public hearings on the proposed budget.** Governing bodies generally convene hearings after they've analyzed and revised the chief executive's proposed budget, but well before they adopt it. You want to ensure that the budget the public is commenting on reflects the governing body's input, but you also want to allow time for further revisions.
- **Engage citizen advisory groups and neighborhood associations.** Organized groups that are familiar with government operations are great resources for soliciting input on your spending plan. Some citizen groups analyze the proposed budget in detail, focusing on areas of interest or expertise.
- **Regularly publicize information about your budgeting process and schedule.** Your government Web site can keep residents up-to-date on the budget process, and newsletters and other communication tools can raise its visibility. Media coverage of the budget can also be productive, so it is in your best interests to keep the media informed about the budget process.

Participatory budgeting goes beyond the traditional budget hearing to get citizen input. The success of participatory budget depends on

- **Early and open involvement:** To ensure meaningful input, engage residents early, provide broad access to budget information, and sustain the connections from start to finish. Make sure your budget calendar allows time for seeking and incorporating citizen input so that the engagement is genuine.
- **In-depth connections:** Establish budget advisory groups made up of knowledgeable citizens who understand community needs and can commit significant time to the review process. Single-interest or highly political picks can derail or discredit the entire process. By seeking participants who have a broad perspective and are willing to represent the entire community rather than a special interest, you are more likely to obtain high-quality input.
- **Accessible tools:** Understandable and easily accessible budget documents help citizens make useful contributions. An orientation session for volunteer committee members before they dive into budget review is helpful. Technology also enables you to provide up-to-the-minute information that can help encourage participation in your budget process.
- **Willingness to accept input:** Whether you're seeking input from traditional strategies such as surveys and public hearings, or from more in-depth connections such as budget advisory groups, it is important to weigh the input seriously and demonstrate that it has been considered.

**Portland, Oregon** ([www.portlandonline.com](http://www.portlandonline.com)), has five community budget advisers who work with elected officials and city staff throughout the process to ensure that the budget reflects community interests. The community advisers serve on budget teams that review sections of the budget in depth and make recommendations for revisions. In addition, the city has a community budget Web site to keep residents up-to-date on the budget process, invite them to upcoming meetings and forums, and let them see online the proposed budget and suggested amendments throughout the process.

## Evaluating the Effectiveness of Your Policies

Three valuable tools for evaluating policy effectiveness are

- Regular data collection from citizens
- Data analysis and comparison with established performance indicators
- Public reporting.

### Data Collection

The first and last measure of good government is citizen satisfaction. Regular citizen surveys will help you assess policy effectiveness. Local governments can use regular written surveys as well as periodic telephone surveys to get data for assessing policy effectiveness, measuring results on agreed-upon priorities, and setting new program and spending priorities.

The National Citizen Survey™, developed by ICMA and the National Research Center, Inc., is a low-cost, tested, flexible, and efficient tool for surveying citizens to obtain their opinions on program planning, budgeting, goal setting,

**Little Rock, Arkansas** ([www.littlerock.org](http://www.littlerock.org)), conducted a telephone survey to measure citizens' use of services and opinions about those services, as well as citizens' perceptions of the problems facing the city. The survey included questions about street conditions, garbage collection, sidewalks, street lighting, and other basic services. The Arkansas Institute of Government Survey Research conducted the survey and analyzed the results for the city.

**Austin, Texas** ([www.ci.austin.tx.us](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us)), uses a comprehensive citizen survey that measures accomplishments on four major priorities: public safety; youth, family, and neighborhood vitality; sustainable community; and affordability. City departments develop the questions to measure the degree of importance that citizens assign to the priority areas, and to determine how well services in these priority areas are being delivered.

**Bloomington, Minnesota** ([www.ci.bloomington.mn.us](http://www.ci.bloomington.mn.us)), annually publishes its *Corporate Report to the Community* focusing on the taxpayers' investment in the community and showing how well the government is performing. With charts and graphs, it provides detailed data on financial performance.

**Coral Springs, Florida** ([www.coralsprings.org](http://www.coralsprings.org)), incorporates performance measures into its state-of-the-city report. The report gives citizens an easy-to-read summary of strategic priorities, accomplishments, surveys results, and techniques for collecting the data that will be used to develop new policies and programs.

**Sterling Heights, Michigan** ([www.ci.sterling-heights.mi.us](http://www.ci.sterling-heights.mi.us)), developed a community calendar that provides information on sixty-five key performance measures. The calendar format provides performance highlights throughout the year, and compares results with those of other jurisdictions.

and performance measurement. Visit [www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org) for more information about The National Citizen Survey™.

While a formal survey may be conducted annually as part of your policy development and budgeting cycles, ongoing feedback tools, such as complaint tracking systems, focus groups on new programs, and community meetings, are also helpful.

### **Data Analysis and Benchmarking**

The chief administrative officer and professional staff analyze data collected in annual surveys and other feedback systems, and report the results to the governing body. Benchmarking—comparing trends over time, or comparing locally collected data with indicators from similar cities—helps the leadership team identify emerging problems and find ways to solve them. The ICMA Center for Performance Measurement provides a variety of tools to support collection, analysis, and comparison of performance data.

### **Public Feedback**

It is important to keep citizens in the loop on policy and program effectiveness. Written annual reports, state-of-the-city reports, and access to performance data let citizens know that their feedback is taken seriously and keep them informed about government effectiveness in carrying out priorities.

## Recap

- A vision—a broad statement about what your community is or expects to be—defines your government’s mission and provides a foundation for your team’s policy work.
- Policy making means deciding what actions your government is going to take to carry out its mission.
- Setting goals and strategic priorities to guide policy decisions will keep you focused on the big picture and help the governing body manage its time more successfully.
- The annual budget is your most important annual policy statement.
- Involving citizens in the budget process through work sessions, public hearings, and citizen budget committees will increase trust, provide useful input, and produce a better budget.
- Evaluating policy effectiveness using both qualitative and quantitative measures will enhance future policy making.

## Recommended Local Reading

- Current strategic plan
- Existing vision and mission statements
- Local government code
- Current priorities and strategies
- Most recent annual budget and capital improvement plan
- The comprehensive or master plan
- Local financial statements



# Making Meetings Work

*Democracy must mean more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for lunch.*

—Benjamin Franklin

Much of the business of governing is carried out in meetings, including regular governing body meetings, work sessions, committee meetings, and public hearings.

Your local charter provides the framework for regular governing body meetings, including requirements for public announcements, voting quorums, minutes, and state laws that must be observed, such as open meeting laws and freedom of information laws.



## Fast Fact

**The first open records law was passed in Wisconsin shortly after Wisconsin became a state in 1848. The first open meeting law was passed in Florida in 1967. All states and the District of Columbia now have both open records laws that govern access to public documents and open meeting laws that define public meeting requirements and sanctions.**

The rapid rise of open meeting laws in the 1970s—led by Florida’s “sunshine law”—initially caused anxiety, but open government has become a positive way of life for today’s public officials. Knowing what’s in your state open meeting law is an important part of your information tool kit.

Beyond the legal requirements, factors contributing to successful meetings include

- Rules of procedure and protocols
- A well-planned agenda
- Committees and work sessions.

**Open E-mail**

When members of a leadership team communicate by e-mail, they must observe open records and open meeting laws. A California legal opinion concluded that members of a governing body who e-mail each other to develop a collective agreement on a scheduled action are violating the state open meeting law. E-mails sent by public officials are generally considered public communications and are covered under freedom of information laws. Many public officials include a statement at the bottom of their e-mails confirming that their e-mail communication is part of the public record.

**Rules of Procedure and Protocols**

Rules of procedure help you conduct public business in an orderly way. Protocols provide guidelines for governing body behavior and interaction in public settings. Combined, well-written rules of procedure and clear protocols that everyone agrees to follow provide a framework for successful governing body meetings.

One of the first acts that some new councils take after an election is to adopt existing rules and protocols to reestablish standards for working together. One of your first acts when you join the leadership team as a new member of the governing body should be to review all rules and protocols carefully and ask questions so that you become comfortable with the governing body's way of carrying out its business.

**Rules of Procedure**

Topics covered in governing body rules include

- The regular schedule for meetings, and provisions for calling special meetings
- Order of business, who prepares the agenda, and the deadline for delivery of materials to governing body members
- Procedures for modifying the published agenda for new or emergency items or for making any other post-publication changes
- Debate and voting procedures, such as how to resolve tie votes, when to use roll call votes, and how to record silent votes and abstentions
- Procedures for public participation in governing body meetings, including when public input is accepted, time limits for speaking, when and how to register to speak, whether advance notice is required, and opportunities to submit written statements
- Exceptions to the rules
- Parliamentary procedures that will be followed, and procedures for resolving any challenges to rulings by the chair.



### Guiding Principles for Streamlined Parliamentary Rules

1. **Rules should establish order.** The first purpose of parliamentary procedure is to establish a framework for orderly meetings.
2. **Rules should be clear.** Simple rules lead to wider understanding and participation.
3. **Rules should be user-friendly.** The rules must be simple enough that citizens feel they have been able to participate in the process.
4. **Rules should enforce the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority.** The ultimate purpose of the rules is to encourage discussion and facilitate decision making. The rules must enable the majority to express itself and fashion a result, while permitting the minority to express itself (but not dominate) and fully participate in the process.

*Adapted from Rosenberg's Rules of Order: Simple Parliamentary Procedures for the 21st Century*

Many governing bodies rely on *Robert's Rules of Order* for parliamentary procedure. But *Robert's Rules* is complicated, detailed, and intended primarily for large legislative bodies. It can be frustrating to use. A governing body that gets tangled in parliamentary process doesn't make good decisions, which can undermine public confidence in government.

Adopting your own simpler parliamentary rules is fine—as long as those rules are clear, used consistently, and contribute to productive debate and action. It is useful to have streamlined parliamentary procedures reviewed by your local government attorney.

### Sample Governing Body Code of Conduct

- Seek to understand one another's perspective.
- Seek diversity of ideas.
- Honor one another in public, and protect each other in their absence.
- Be tough on issues, soft on people.
- Focus on the issues, not on personalities.
- Seek honesty and integrity in all deliberations and interactions.
- Governing body direction to staff should be by consensus rather than by individual action.
- Once a decision is made, move on, bury disagreements, and expect staff to follow through as defined.

## Protocols

Protocols focus on civility, courtesy, and decorum. Some governing bodies develop informal protocols to guide how they'll work together as a team and what constitutes acceptable behavior in public settings. Protocols may also cover the governing body's expectations for the behavior of local government staff and the public at meetings.

Formal protocols define both acceptable behavior and consequences for violations. For example, a governing body member who regularly violates the rules may be reprimanded or formally censured, or a citizen whose behavior is unacceptable may be barred from further testimony.

While it is difficult to legislate behavior, written, adopted, published, and accepted protocols provide a framework for positive and productive meetings.

Sometimes, the biggest challenge for the mayor or governing body chair is keeping discussion focused on the issue rather than on the person. That's why

**Sunnyvale, California** ([www.sunnyvale.ca.gov](http://www.sunnyvale.ca.gov)), developed this checklist as part of its *Code of Conduct for Elected Officials* to help individual council members assess their behavior at public meetings.

- ☐ Will my decision/statement/action violate the trust, rights, or goodwill of others?
- ☐ If I have to justify my conduct in public tomorrow, will I do so with pride or shame?
- ☐ How would my conduct be evaluated by people whose integrity and character I respect?
- ☐ Even if my conduct is not illegal or unethical, is it done at someone else's painful expense?
- ☐ Is my conduct fair? Just? Morally right?
- ☐ If I were on the receiving end of my conduct, would I approve and agree, or would I take offense?
- ☐ Does my conduct give others reason to trust or distrust me?
- ☐ Am I willing to take an ethical stand when it is called for?
- ☐ Can I take legitimate pride in the way I conduct myself and the example I set?
- ☐ Do I listen and understand the views of others?
- ☐ Do I question and confront points of view in a constructive manner?
- ☐ Do I work to resolve differences and come to mutual agreement?
- ☐ Do I support others and show respect for their ideas?
- ☐ Will my conduct cause public embarrassment to someone else?

**Palo Alto, California** ([www.cityofpaloalto.org](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org)), provides guidelines for council conduct with one another, with staff, and with other boards and commissions; staff conduct with the city council; and other procedural issues in its adopted *Council Protocols*. Specific protocols related to public meetings include the following:

- Use formal titles.
- Practice civility and decorum in discussions and debate.
- Honor the role of the presiding officer in maintaining order and equity.
- Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches.
- Be respectful of other people's time.

a rule against personal attacks that applies to both the governing body and the public is valuable. Personal attacks among governing body members or from a community activist, protestor, or gadfly interfere with decision making and, over the long run, discourage others from participating productively.

Members of the governing body set the standard for civility and decorum at the meeting by modeling expected behavior. You can't challenge or reprimand a disruptive citizen if disruption and personal attacks are common among governing body members. Written protocols set the framework for behavior. Good judgment and sensitivity to your public role make the difference.

## A Well-Planned Agenda

*If I had eight hours to chop down a tree,  
I'd spend six sharpening my axe.*

—Abraham Lincoln

Generally the chief administrative officer prepares the governing body agenda, working closely with the mayor/council chairman. The agenda usually balances routine items that a governing body must act on with issues related to the governing body's priorities. The more your priorities drive your agenda, the more effective your meetings will be.

To ensure that you are using your time most effectively, it may be useful for the chief administrative officer and the governing body to agree on criteria for organizing the agenda. Criteria to consider include

- **Policy impact/connection to priorities:** Issues that have significant policy implications, are directly related to your established priorities, and may have

a long-term impact on your community should get the most time on your agenda—and usually early in the meeting.

- **Citizen interest:** Particular issues of concern or interest to constituents should be accommodated on the agenda if possible.
- **Relevance to other issues:** Items that are related to or contingent on one another should be listed consecutively or under one heading.
- **Immediacy:** A deadline or crisis should be considered when arranging agenda items. Usually a well-planned approach to public business will cut down on the frequency of crises, but emergencies happen, and your agenda should take that into account.

Chief administrative officers recognize the importance of developing agendas that will support the governing body in carrying out the public's business. A carefully structured agenda and clear, complete, and concise backup materials create an environment for effective decision making.

While governing body agendas vary significantly from community to community, most include the same general information for all items: (1) the issue to be covered; (2) a brief background statement, including a staff recommendation; and (3) the action expected by the governing body. Practical tools such as **consent agendas**, which group routine issues under one action, and **fact sheets**, which summarize the scope of agenda items, can be helpful in managing time and information at a governing body meeting.

Successful meetings start with carefully planned agendas. The chief administrative officer and department staff support governing body decision making by planning agendas and providing both background reports and recommendations for action.

## Committees and Work Sessions

Committees and full-group work sessions give elected officials time to explore complex issues in depth between regular meetings where decisions are made.



### Fast Fact

**More than 80 percent of local governing bodies use committees to examine policy issues, according to NLC's survey, compared with only 61 percent in 1979. Only 70 percent of smaller communities use committees, compared with 91 percent of larger cities (200,000 population or more).**

**Governing body committees** are smaller groups that prepare issues for action by the full body. Ongoing or standing committees are often organized around major government functions—for example, public safety, community and eco-

conomic development, financial management, intergovernmental relations, land use and planning, transportation, energy, and the environment. Ad hoc committees are organized around urgent priorities or emerging challenges.

**Governing body work sessions** allow the entire governing body to study issues in more depth before making a decision.

The advantage of committees and work sessions is a more informal environment. Members can ask clarifying questions, discuss issues at length with expert staff, seek additional information, and prepare for formal decision making. Professional staff with relevant expertise are assigned to work closely with members in committees and work sessions.

Three caveats about committees and work sessions are important to remember:

1. Decisions are not made in committee meetings or work sessions.
2. Committee meetings don't preclude or eliminate public debate at formal meetings.
3. Most open meeting laws apply to committee meetings and governing body work sessions, which means that the public is invited.

## Recap

- Policy making happens in meetings, so working together to make sure meetings enable good decision making is an essential part of your job.
- Open meeting laws guide the process of public decision making.
- Well-written rules of procedure and clear protocols that everyone agrees to follow provide a framework for successful governing body meetings.
- Successful meetings start with carefully planned agendas that help participants address the most important issues in a timely and productive way.

## Recommended Local Reading

- State open meeting and freedom of information laws
- Adopted rules of procedure
- Recent governing body agendas and minutes
- *Roberts Rules of Order* or local parliamentary procedures



# Communicating with the Public

*You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across,  
your ideas won't get anywhere.*

—Lee Iacocca

You were elected by the public to serve the public. Communication encourages informed participation, builds community pride and satisfaction, and improves service. Good communication builds strong connections, and strong connections build a stronger community. In short, communication is a basic government obligation.

The following sections focus on

- Getting your message out
- Listening to the public
- Communicating in times of crisis.

## Getting Your Message Out

A regular, consistent, and proactive communication strategy is the best way to connect citizens and their government. The more proactive you are, the less likely you will be to face inaccurate information that needs correcting or disconnected residents who feel out of the loop. Today's technology resources, supplemented by traditional communication vehicles, make it much easier to get your story out.

*City Council strives to ensure that Danville citizens have complete confidence in their city government. The Council commits itself to providing clear direction, good planning, and stewardship. It works with city employees in a partnership to ensure that clear direction is coupled with high productivity and efficiency. City Council seeks the trust and confidence of its citizens by sharing successes, inviting participation and feedback, and reporting on performance.*

From *Our Leadership Role*, Danville, Virginia ([www.danville-va.gov](http://www.danville-va.gov))

Some widely used and successful tools for getting information out to citizens are

- A local government Web site and other forms of Internet communications
- Public access television
- Community newsletters and billing inserts
- Community or neighborhood meetings
- News releases.

In recent years, the Web has become the “must do” outreach for every community. However, not all residents have access to a computer or are comfortable using the Web to get information. Libraries and recreation centers can provide Internet-ready computers and friendly help to ensure that all residents have equal access to important information.

Equally important is redundancy: the local government should use a variety of methods to send the same message or information out to the public.

### **Communications Strategic Plan**

A communications strategic plan takes a broad look at overall government communication tools and strategies. It can be a component of an overall strategic plan or a separate resource developed in close partnership with the staff who are responsible for carrying it out. Elements include

- Written communications to citizens
- Regular neighborhood interaction

**Georgetown, Texas** ([www.georgetown.org](http://www.georgetown.org)), has a comprehensive media use policy that summarizes the purpose of and appropriate uses for all major communication tools, including city Web sites, a cable access channel, the *City Reporter* newsletter, and utility bill inserts. Identified uses for media tools are to inform Georgetown residents about city-sponsored events, news, programs, and services; city council discussions and decisions; board and commission actions; neighborhood association meetings; health and public safety issues; recreation programs and events; economic development initiatives and issues; and attractions, festivals, and performances.

**Lancaster, California** ([www.cityoflancasterca.org](http://www.cityoflancasterca.org)), developed a communications strategic plan after a resident opinion survey showed that residents did not know what was going on in city government. For each communication vehicle, the plan identifies the purpose and goals, the targets for improvement, the timetable for action, and lead staff.



### Award-Winning Web sites

The Center for Digital Government, a national research and advocacy institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government, annually recognizes city and county Web sites for innovation and user friendliness. For some new ideas, visit these ten award-winning Web sites:

Riverside, California ([www.riversideca.gov](http://www.riversideca.gov))

Fort Collins, Colorado ([www.fcgov.com](http://www.fcgov.com))

Tampa, Florida ([www.tampgov.net](http://www.tampgov.net))

Columbia County, Georgia ([www.columbiacountyga.gov](http://www.columbiacountyga.gov))

Fulton County, Georgia ([www.co.fulton.ga.us](http://www.co.fulton.ga.us))

Louisville, Kentucky ([www.louisvilleky.gov](http://www.louisvilleky.gov))

Oakland County, Michigan ([www.oakgov.com](http://www.oakgov.com))

Las Vegas, Nevada ([www.lasvegasnevada.gov](http://www.lasvegasnevada.gov))

Monroe County, New York ([www.monroecounty.gov](http://www.monroecounty.gov))

Fairfax County, Virginia ([www.fairfaxcounty.gov](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov))

- Emergency communications
- Web site and Internet communications
- Public access television programming
- Customer service communications
- Media relations
- Marketing plans for economic development
- The look and feel of government communications—the local “brand”
- Staffing and resources to carry out the plan.

The ease of communication today and the variety of available tools make an overall strategy valuable. A communications strategic plan will help ensure thoughtful, complementary, and reliable communications.

### Web site

A local government Web site is today’s most important tool for providing up-to-date information and connecting citizens to services. A Web site provides easy access to a range of important resources—for example, the annual operating budget and capital improvement plan; goals and priorities; meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes; and frequently asked questions about the government.

Your Web site can also build strong community connections through **online services**. Citizens in many communities pay water bills and parking tickets, apply for permits, request services, or register for local recreational programs—all online.

Local government staff is responsible for developing and maintaining the Web site with advice and engagement from members of the governing body.

### Internet Communications

The Internet provides a reliable way to get information out regularly. Some Internet tools are extensions of the local government Web site. Others may be used by individual elected officials as ways to communicate regularly with constituents. And still others create opportunities for citizens to connect with each other about community and neighborhood issues.

Understanding the range of resources is a good starting point. You should expect your local government staff to find the right Internet tools to carry out your communications strategy.



#### Fast Fact

**According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 72 percent of Americans aged 12 and older use the Internet. More than 90 percent of Internet users rely on e-mail, and 73 percent get news online. While the extent of use still decreases with age (87 percent of people aged 12–17 are regular Internet users vs. 21 percent of people over age 70), use of online tools for communication, information, and services is growing in all age groups.**

Here are some examples of Internet communication tools.

- **E-newsletters** provide regular updates on specific topics without requiring citizens to go to the local government Web site—except to subscribe. An e-newsletter is usually written around a specific recurring topic or issue and sent only to citizens who register to receive it. Or an e-newsletter can supplement a regularly mailed community newsletter and be distributed to a broad citizen list.
- **Blast e-mails** are like e-newsletters but more spontaneous. A broad community e-mail list is used to get information out quickly to a large audience.

**Lenexa, Kansas** ([www.ci.lenexa.ks.us/subscriptions/e-newsletters.html](http://www.ci.lenexa.ks.us/subscriptions/e-newsletters.html)), offers thirteen e-newsletter options, such as *Neighborhood E-Watch*, *Business Town Talk*, *Planning Commission Agenda*, *Senior Programs*, *Special Events*, and *Clean Streams and Environment*, to help citizens get updates on favorite topics.

**Georgetown, Texas** ([www.georgetown.org](http://www.georgetown.org)), provides RSS feeds from its Web site to connect citizens with regular sources of community news about, for example, tourism, the local school district, pets for adoption, library and recreation information, and the local university. The RSS section of the Georgetown Web site provides information about how to use an RSS feed and a link to a resource to set up an RSS reader.

- **E-mail lists** are discussion groups that allow two-way information exchange among registered participants. When an e-mail is addressed to the list, it goes to everyone on the list. Usually such lists focus on specific topics, and participants choose to subscribe so that they can share ideas with others with similar interests. **Community e-mail lists** provide online information exchange within neighborhoods around a range of issues—from where to take your dog for grooming to concerns about neighborhood traffic. To keep connected to your constituents and their concerns, it's a good idea to join community e-mail lists.
- **RSS (“really simple syndication”)** provides a way to distribute community news broadly from multiple Web sites to anyone who registers on one site. Like e-newsletters, RSS provides automatic access to information so that the reader doesn't have to check the Web site regularly to get the news.
- A **blog (“Web log”)** is an online running commentary on issues and events. “Owned” and written by one person, it may allow two-way communication. The advantage of a blog is that it is informal, somewhat unstructured, and spontaneous. The challenge is maintaining it. If you decide to start a blog, you need to keep it fresh and up-to-date.

The Internet is a great resource for communicating regularly with citizens and providing quick, easily accessible information. However, there are some cautions to keep in mind. All e-mail communications, whether on a personal e-mail

**Santa Paula, California** ([www.ci.santa-paula.ca.us](http://www.ci.santa-paula.ca.us)), has a city blog maintained by the city manager at the request of the city council. The blog includes a **suggestion box** where residents can offer ways to run the city better, and a section for posting questions about city government. A **blog comment policy** defines the parameters for posting citizen comments to “ensure civil discussion while encouraging diverse perspectives.” It prohibits personal attacks, profanity or racial slurs, support of or opposition to an individual official, campaigning, and comments unrelated to the initial blog issue.

account or through a blog or e-mail list, are considered public information. So it is important to approach these tools with the same thoughtful reflection that you use in a public meeting.

Comments and complaints posted on a blog or e-mail list sometimes prompt—or even seem to demand—an instant reaction. But it is usually not a good idea to respond instantly. Stop, think it through, and weigh your options and your words before responding.

### **Government Access Television**

The 1984 Cable Franchise Policy and Communications Act requires all cable television companies to support public, educational, and governmental (PEG) programming. Government access television is a local government resource for a range of uses, such as broadcasting public meetings, providing educational programming, and making emergency announcements.

Technology advances make it possible to broadcast governing body meetings both on your public access channel and through your Web site. While viewership of public access television channels varies, your government channel provides a valuable resource to bring the governing body into living rooms and to provide in-depth information about specific programs and services.

### **Community Newsletters and Billing Inserts**

A newsletter published regularly and distributed in print format through bulk mailing, as well as in electronic format by e-mail blast and on the local government Web site, is a powerful tool for citizen outreach. Whether the newsletter is produced bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly, it gets information and activities in front of residents, and it can direct people to your Web site.

**Bee Cave, Texas** ([www.beecavetexas.gov](http://www.beecavetexas.gov)), publishes a periodic newsletter called *Bee Cave Buzz*. The *Buzz* includes a message from the mayor, highlights of the issues on the council's work agenda, a financial update, news from inside city hall and around the community, and a calendar of upcoming events. It is mailed to city residents and posted on the city Web site. The newsletter encourages residents to visit the Web site regularly for up-to-date news and information about city services.

*Rockville Reports* is published monthly by the city of **Rockville, Maryland** ([www.rockvillemd.gov](http://www.rockvillemd.gov)), and mailed to all city residents. The newspaper-style newsletter is also posted and archived on the city Web site. It includes news about city activities and governing body decisions, in addition to schedules for events during the month and programming on the government access television channel.

Elected officials in **Lakewood, Colorado** ([www.lakewood.org](http://www.lakewood.org)), regularly schedule “morning chats” throughout the community to connect with their constituents. The meetings, which are held in libraries, neighborhood restaurants, and recreation centers, usually on Saturday mornings, offer opportunities for citizens to meet and greet Lakewood council members and discuss neighborhood concerns and citywide issues.

Flyers with important community information inserted with property tax or utility bills can be useful since you know residents open their bills. Time-sensitive information, such as fall leaf collection schedules or winter snow removal plans, work particularly well as billing inserts. A flyer should be very brief and should include your Web site address and a telephone number for more information.

### Community Meetings

Technology will never replace face-to-face contact. When you as an elected official reach out to residents on a regular basis—not just when you’re seeking their input on a new idea or trying to gain their support for a specific solution—you strengthen their connection with their government. Holding meetings in neighborhoods rather than always convening in city hall also builds stronger bonds.

### News Releases

Newspapers, radio, and local television stations are a major source of information for many people. Reporters and editors will generally decide what is “news” in your community, but you can shape that coverage by distributing news releases highlighting important programs, services, and results. Your professional staff will write the news release while you provide quotes and are available for follow-up interviews to strengthen your message.

**Decatur, Georgia** ([www.decaturga.com](http://www.decaturga.com)), offers a five-session course annually to educate up to forty members of the community about how the city works, who is responsible for what, and how citizens can make a difference. Two-hour classes are held once a week in different municipal buildings; in addition, there are special tours such as a recent Smart Growth Walking Tour. Goals of the program are to increase the number of informed and involved citizens and to make local government more accessible to the community. As one recent graduate said, *“It was awesome. It makes it a lot easier to write that tax check.”*

## Listening to the Public

*The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them.*

—Gen. Colin Powell

Accessible, easy-to-use tools for getting information *in* from your constituents are an equally important part of your communications tool kit. Opportunities for both **spontaneous interactions** based on the citizen's agenda and **structured, scheduled input** built around your agenda encourage participation and feedback.

### Spontaneous Interaction

Web sites, 311 nonemergency telephone and e-mail lines, customer service complaint and resolution systems, and personal connections are typical methods for spontaneous interactions. Your input systems will be most useful if they are visible and easy to use, and if members of the leadership team are available and responsive.

Online request systems let citizens ask questions, report problems, and monitor the status of their requests. A comprehensive communications management system helps the government manage and track requests for assistance and

*Ask Arvada* in **Arvada, Colorado** ([www.arvada.org](http://www.arvada.org)), and *Minnetonka Mike* in **Minnetonka, Minnesota** ([www.eminnetonka.com](http://www.eminnetonka.com)), are comprehensive online communication management systems. Citizens in these cities can access city hall 24/7 to get information, request service, and report local problems. *Minnetonka Mike* invites citizens to "let us know how we can better serve you, help us discover areas for improvement, and tell us what you like about the city and its services." *Ask Arvada* invites general questions around government issues and services, and has three special "ask" categories: *Ask the Mayor*, *Ask the City Council*, and *Ask the Traffic Guy*.

**Columbus, Georgia** ([www.columbusga.gov](http://www.columbusga.gov)), has a Citizens Service Center on its Web site that summarizes options for reporting local problems and requesting service by phone, by e-mail, or online. It includes a list of concerns that residents might notice around the community—for instance, a stop sign on the ground, debris in the roadway, tree limbs hanging in the street—and urges citizens to use the 311 nonemergency system to make sure the problem gets fixed. The service center also highlights the difference between 311 and 911 this way: **for a burning question, use 311; a burning building, dial 911.**

comments. The system also supports long-range planning by letting you know which issues and concerns recur most often. Your job as an elected official is to be sure that

- There is a reliable customer service system in place
- You get regular summaries of questions, complaints, and requests for service both to monitor responsiveness and to identify potential policy issues
- The governing body is available to resolve issues that have not been addressed through normal administrative procedures.

The most important component of your citizen reporting system is feedback/closure. Someone needs to take responsibility for ensuring that the complaint or problem is addressed and that the citizen knows the outcome.

### **Structured Input**

Methods of getting structured input include public hearings and public input at regular governing body meetings, community workshops, citizen advisory groups, and surveys.

A **public hearing** is a separate event—sometimes required by law—to get reactions to a specific issue or planned action. For example, most local governments hold public hearings to get citizen comments before adopting the annual budget.

Citizen comment periods at regular meetings allow public comment on a wide range of issues. To increase the value of public comment periods, it is helpful to define and publicize procedures for participation. Some local governments also provide guidelines to help residents make successful presentations at public meetings.

You can use your outgoing communication tools—Web site, community newsletters, billing inserts, and news releases—to announce the dates and purpose for upcoming public hearings, and to encourage participation.

While public hearings are among the most frequently used methods of getting citizen input, many elected officials rate them as one of the least effective approaches. The citizen with an ax to grind is sometimes the most regular presenter, and this common situation creates stress for the governing body and may discourage other citizens from participating. Because public hearings are often required by law and because many citizens expect to have opportunities to provide input at governing body meetings, the challenge is to try to make those opportunities useful and productive.

Some ways to maximize the value of public hearings include

- **Defining and publicizing the purpose of the meeting:** Public hearings are generally used for advice, guidance, and direction from the public. If that is the purpose, let everyone know that the governing body will listen carefully, take notes, accept copies of formal presentations and use that input for a future decision-making session. Other forms of public participation such as

**Fort Collins, Colorado** ([www.fcgov.com](http://www.fcgov.com)), has a section of its Web site called *Your Voice* that invites citizens to participate in governing body decision making. It highlights upcoming governing body decisions, provides information about issues and action to date, and defines when and how citizens can provide comments.

**Mountain View, California** ([www.mountainview.gov](http://www.mountainview.gov)), has a *Council Watchers Guide* that provides information about how citizens can get involved in governing body meetings, including when meetings are scheduled, where to get agendas and staff reports, how the council conducts its business, and how to participate.

**Sunnyvale, California** ([www.sunnyvale.ca.gov](http://www.sunnyvale.ca.gov)), offers *How to Make Your Council Chambers Presentations More Effective*, a guide that provides participation procedures; suggestions on how to make a successful presentation, including recommended materials to use and technology resources that are available to presenters; and a contact in city hall for further guidance.

workshops, community meetings, and special advisory committees are more useful if your primary purpose is to educate, persuade, or engage citizens in joint decision making.

- **Clarifying procedures and time limits:** Setting and enforcing specific boundaries will help the chair manage the process.
- **Anticipating the audience and planning for it:** Advance sign-up will help the chief administrator and governing body prepare for the session. If a large turnout is expected, consider holding multiple hearings to accommodate everyone and manage the participation. Overflow crowds with citizens standing in the hall instantly create tension. If you know your turnout will exceed the capacity of your governing body chambers, move the hearing to a place that can accommodate everyone comfortably.
- **Providing easy-to-understand background information in advance and at the meeting:** Background information prepared by the chief administrator and expert staff helps get participants on the same page—even if they don't agree with the direction.
- **Being prepared together:** The council chair or mayor should make sure that the right substantive experts are available to answer questions, should be personally familiar with the details of the issue, should plan in advance how to manage the meeting, and should make sure that all members of the governing body understand and abide by the agreed-upon procedures.



**Community workshops** that are designed to get information *out* can easily become community workshops to get information *in* on specific issues. The approach is the same: governing body members and expert staff go out to neighborhoods to meet with all interested residents about government business. You can engage and inform the community while getting their reactions, suggestions, guidance, and support before you make a policy decision. A series of well-planned and well-publicized workshops provide two-way education: citizens learn more about a pending policy issue, and the governing body and staff get input on citizen concerns and preferences to guide decision making.

**Invitational meetings** bring together smaller groups for in-depth discussion and guidance. Local governments use advisory committees for invitation-only meetings. As an alternative, a few neighborhood meetings with invited community leaders can provide useful input without creating a specific committee.

**Focus groups** are invitation-only meetings involving fewer than fifteen people; their purpose is to gather reactions to a specific idea or program. Popular for “market research,” focus groups work best with a skilled facilitator who uses a prepared list of questions to guide the discussion. For the most reliable information, it’s good to use multiple focus groups involving different cross-sections of citizens who discuss the same questions with the same facilitator.

**Appointed citizen committees** with a clear mission generate good ideas, encourage productive participation, educate citizens about public policy, and broaden ownership for governing body decisions. Your local government may have both standing committees that have a continuing annual mission and special committees that are created to respond to a specific issue or challenge. The governing body usually appoints members of citizen advisory committees, taking into account

- Expertise in the area that the committee works on
- Balanced community representation
- An expressed interest to serve and willingness to participate actively and fairly.

If you are newly elected to the governing body, be sure to get a list of all existing advisory groups, their current members, and members’ terms of office.

**Neighborhood advisory groups** engage residents where they live and broaden opportunities for communication and connections. Members of the advisory groups are generally elected by the neighborhoods they represent and view themselves as spokespersons for the neighborhoods that elect them. Although connected to the government, the groups tend to operate independently. They provide good venues for workshops on important policy issues. Residents sometimes go to a neighborhood advisory meeting to register a complaint before, or instead of, going to the governing body meeting; doing so can lead to an early resolution of problems.

**Burlington, Vermont** ([www.ci.burlington.vt.us](http://www.ci.burlington.vt.us)), has seven elected neighborhood planning assemblies that were established to encourage citizen participation in local government. Working as neighborhood advocacy groups, the assemblies improve communication between citizens and city government through regular meetings where residents learn about issues that affect them and advise the city about their concerns and needs. Typical assembly topics include ballot questions and candidate forums, development projects in the neighborhood, and updates on street and sidewalk repair projects. Each assembly elects representatives to a citywide board that approves neighborhood grant applications for improvement projects.

The **Columbia Council of Neighborhoods (CCN)** ([www.columbianeighborhoods.org](http://www.columbianeighborhoods.org)) is a volunteer, community-based organization that coordinates the activities of more than eighty neighborhood groups in **Columbia, South Carolina**. The council's mission is to improve communication between diverse neighborhood groups, and to serve as a link between neighborhood groups and city officials. The Columbia Zoning Board, Planning Commission, and city council routinely request input from CCN and its members.

Your community probably has a range of citizen and neighborhood groups with no formal connection to the government—for example, the League of Women Voters, service groups, neighborhood associations, political caucuses, and special-interest groups. These groups can provide valuable connections to residents who might not otherwise get involved in government business but have perspectives worth listening to. As an active community resident before your election, you may already have strong ties to some of these groups.

**Citizen surveys** help assess policy effectiveness and provide reliable feedback on what residents think of current services, what new services they are willing to pay for, and what services they could live without. Citizen surveys also help you refine your public relations program by identifying areas where public perceptions of services are out of sync with the leadership team's perceptions. Perhaps most important, surveys help you connect with a broader audience that may never come to a meeting, serve on a committee, or register a personal complaint.

Your systems and methods for outgoing and incoming communication should be broad and diverse to maximize the connections with the people you serve and contribute to better decisions for the entire community.

## Communicating in Times of Crisis

A community crisis tests your communication skills and processes as well as your leadership team's capacity. Whether it is a natural disaster such as a tornado, a

violent incident such as a school shooting, or a political crisis such as a major financial shortfall, your governing body's ability to work together and speak with one voice will be pushed to the limit. A crisis can lead to confusion, conflict, and controversy. A good communications plan is important to manage and minimize all three.

Your ability to respond depends on having a comprehensive emergency response plan in place—and on being familiar with all aspects of that plan. From a communication perspective, your biggest challenges will be

- Speaking with one voice
- Keeping the public informed
- Managing the media.

### **Speak with One Voice**

In times of crisis, your citizens will look for one familiar and reliable voice that can provide clear and consistent information. Your emergency response plan should define communication roles, including who the primary spokesperson will be.

The mayor is generally the lead spokesperson for the government during a crisis, working in partnership with the chief administrative officer and other experts who provide details as needed. In many cases, the mayor will defer to top staff to answer technical questions and provide detailed guidance. When more than one person uses the microphone, messages should be consistent, clear, and supportive. That means making sure that anyone who might be asked to comment or may fill in as a spokesperson during the crisis is kept up-to-date on the latest news. Regular briefings for key leaders between public statements will help keep everyone on the same page.

In a political crisis, speaking with one voice is tough. The public needs to see a governing body working together to solve problems rather than publicly disagreeing.

### **Keep the Public Informed**

Whether you are the spokesperson or a member of the team relaying the words of the spokesperson, present what you know as soon as you know it. Sometimes announcing that you don't have all the information yet is better than saying nothing at all, which opens the door for even less informed sources to try to fill the gaps.

Think about the many times you have watched other public officials deal with major crises in a national media spotlight. Honesty, confidence, and commitment to get through the crisis generally go over best. That demeanor is hard to sustain when your community has been leveled by a tornado. But that's what residents expect from their local leaders.

### Tips for Working with the Media

- **Coordinate closely with your chief administrative officer or press office if your local government has one.** Generally, the city staff is the primary point of daily contact with the media and can provide support and guidance to elected officials who are dealing with the media.
- **Always be prepared when talking with a reporter.** If a reporter calls you directly, find out what he or she is looking for, and buy some time to coordinate with key staff and prepare yourself for the interview.
- **Focus on a few key points and stay with them.** Three key messages about an important issue with examples of how the issue will affect residents will help get your message across. Even if the questions move in different directions, try to refocus the conversation to your three points.
- **“No comment” is never a good response.** It suggests that you know something that you aren’t sharing. If you don’t have the information or can’t provide a complete answer to the question at that moment, say so.
- **Be responsive to build a positive relationship.** Respect the reporter, the deadlines, and the job of covering a local government. While relations with the media are sometimes contentious, start from the assumption that you can build a positive relationship by being open, responsive, available, and respectful. Never ignore a call from a reporter. If you aren’t the right contact, make sure someone from your local government returns the call.
- **Assume that everything is on the record and that whatever you say will be published.** While many reporters use categories such as not-for-attribution, background, and off-the-record, the best way to talk to a reporter is to assume that nothing is really off the record.
- **Consider using op-eds and letters to the editor to communicate local views.** Op-eds and letters to the editor are good ways to get your message out about a new program, service, or challenge in the community.

### Manage the Media

The media can be a good resource for sharing information during a crisis. A natural disaster involving emotions and shared loss offers a better chance for a positive media relationship than a political crisis. In either case, however, reaching out to the media rather than avoiding it will produce better results.

Press conferences and briefings with local media at regularly scheduled intervals will help you manage the information and your time.

Depending on the magnitude of the crisis, the arrival of national media can have a major impact on your communications strategy. In the aftermath of major

storms, local officials say the onslaught of national media constantly seeking interviews and updates puts enormous pressure on local leaders, particularly in small communities with limited staff resources or media experience. Your emergency communications response plan should anticipate the possibility of national media and establish procedures for managing those resources positively and productively. Designating one senior staff person who has communications experience to serve as the primary media contact, and scheduling specific times for regular media briefings, will help you manage national media presence and get reliable information out.

Political crises present different challenges in dealing with the media because the facts are less clear and the opportunities for speculation, placing blame, and creating conflict are much higher. Aggressive media may nurture and exploit speculation, blame, and leadership conflicts.

As a local leader, you need to keep your eye on your bottom lines—solving the problem, speaking with one voice, and keeping the public informed with whatever facts are available. Use the same tools you use for communicating positive information: carefully worded news releases, briefings that provide factual updates, and thoughtful and timely responses to reporters' questions.

## Recap

- Communicating with the public is a government obligation. Good communication builds strong connections with citizens, and strong connections build a strong community.
- Successful communication goes two ways. It includes regular and diverse approaches to getting your message out, and equally regular and diverse approaches to getting input from the public.
- Technology facilitates local government communication, but it must be balanced with other communication tools to avoid widening the digital divide.

## Recommended Local Reading

- Your local government Web site from your perspective as a local leader
- Recent community newsletters and news releases
- Mandates and membership lists for existing committees that the governing body appoints
- A list of other community groups that interact with the government, including their key leaders



# Working with the Chief Administrative Officer

In communities that use the council-manager form of government, hiring and evaluating the chief administrative officer is the governing body's most important human resources responsibility. The chief administrative officer works for the governing body and hires and supervises the top management staff who carry out policies and programs. Selecting the right person for the chief administrator's job, working closely with that person on a daily basis, and providing clear feedback to enhance performance are essential to carrying out the government's mission.

In a strong mayor form of government, the elected mayor serves as the chief executive and may hire a chief administrative officer who reports directly to and is evaluated by the mayor alone.

In both forms of government, the chief administrative officer serves "at the pleasure" of the group or individual that makes the hiring decision.

The following sections focus on hiring and evaluating a chief administrative officer in a council-manager form of government.

## Hiring the Administrator

A recruitment process begins as soon as it is known that there is or will be a vacancy. Careful planning, a clear understanding of community needs, and astute evaluation of candidates are important.

Plan on up to at least six months from the time you start the recruitment process until a new administrator is on board.

## Interim Management

Usually, the governing body appoints an interim manager from the existing staff on the basis of the skills and background needed to ensure continuity. You may choose to hire an external interim manager if there is no appropriate internal candidate, if the recruitment process is expected to take quite a while, or if there are conflicts or challenges that someone from outside might be better able to handle.

Whether appointed from inside or outside the organization, it should be clear that the interim manager is in charge but does not have an inside track on the permanent position.

## Communicating

Communication with the public, with staff, and with candidates will be important during a recruitment process. Start with a clear and consistent message about why you have a vacancy and how you intend to fill it.

While sharing basic information with staff and citizens is important, confidentiality is also important. Candidates usually prefer that their current employer not know they are seeking a new job unless they become finalists. Consult with legal counsel to define what information can be kept confidential and what information must be disclosed. If public disclosure of applicants' names is likely at any point, make that timetable clear in the recruitment information because it may affect decisions to apply.

When selecting finalists for interviews, let the candidates know the process you will use, who will conduct the interviews, how long the interviews and any related meetings will last, and what parts of the process will be public.

## Recruitment Steps

Basic steps in an effective recruitment process include the following:

- **Announce the vacancy and the general plan for filling it.**
- **Decide whether to handle the recruitment internally or to hire an executive search firm to carry out some or all of the steps.** If you handle it all internally, the human resource director or another department head will provide staff support to the governing body throughout the process. If you hire an executive search firm, you will need to define the services you want the firm to provide (the scope of services).
- **Develop a profile of the ideal candidate.** Seek input from community leaders about qualities and skills important in the next chief administrator.
- **Write the job description.** Define the scope of the job based on the profile, confirm the timetable for filling the position, and agree on a salary range and benefits.
- **Advertise the position.** Executive search firms are particularly effective at seeking out candidates because of their recruitment networks. All candidates—whether they are recruited, come from in-house, or apply on their own from outside—should be treated the same way.
- **Review résumés and select candidates to be interviewed.** Some communities use selection committees that include department heads or chief administrative officers from surrounding communities to help winnow down the pile of résumés. If you use a recruitment firm, it will do the initial résumé screening and initial background checks on the strongest candidates.
- **Invite finalists to meet with the governing body.** Provide an information package about your community to all individuals who will be interviewed. Include in the package your government's mission, goals, and current



### Keys to a Successful Recruitment Process

- Strong, consistent, political leadership
- A well-organized recruitment process
- A plan for administering the affairs of the government while the recruitment process is under way
- A timetable that ensures prompt, comprehensive recruitment and guards against impulsive and premature action.

priorities; the most recent budget and financial reports; a recent bond prospectus; an organizational chart; governing body rules of procedure; a list of governing body members with brief bios; and the comprehensive plan and land use map. Many of these items may be available on your government Web site, but providing a package of materials that you feel all candidates should review is an important courtesy.

- **Interview candidates.** Governing body members should agree ahead of time on the interview process in order to manage time carefully and maximize information exchange. Other activities, including a tour of the community and meetings with key staff, can be incorporated into the interview process. Generally you should not discuss compensation during the initial interview except to request information on candidates' expectations.
- **Conduct a thorough background check on any candidate considered for hire.** This step can be as important as the interview process in determining how well a candidate meets the established profile.

Hiring a search firm to help with the recruitment process ensures that someone with significant experience is managing these steps on behalf of the governing body.

### Transition Steps

Once you choose the best candidate and that candidate is interested in the position, you can negotiate a compensation package and transition activities. Compensation usually includes base salary, deferred compensation, severance pay, car allowance or use of a government vehicle, a retirement plan, medical and other insurance, vacation, holidays, sick leave, and professional development support. It is also important to consider transition assistance, including moving expenses, a temporary housing allowance, house-hunting and temporary commuting expenses, and housing finance assistance.

Reviewing the compensation package for your previous administrator and requesting a summary of your finalist's current total compensation will provide a framework for compensation discussions.

**Questions for Evaluating Résumés**

1. Do the cover letter and résumé suggest real interest in the position?
2. Has the applicant worked directly with local government in the past?
3. Has the applicant had experience working in a local government of comparable size and with a similar range of services? With a comparably sized budget and staff?
4. Has the applicant worked in your geographical area? Is the applicant likely to be comfortable in your community setting?
5. Has the applicant had broad management and supervisory authority?
6. Has the applicant worked with citizen groups and boards and commissioners?
7. What are the applicant's major accomplishments in his or her current position? How do those accomplishment mesh with issues and priorities in your community?
8. Does the applicant's employment history suggest a pattern of broad experience, professional stability, and increasing responsibility? Does the applicant have good tenure with most previous employers? Are there any unexplained gaps in the career history?
9. Does the applicant show interest in continuing professional development and advancement?
10. What is the applicant's current salary? How does that fit with your financial parameters?

Negotiating implies a willingness on both sides to consider options and alternatives in order to reach an acceptable package.

Most local governments enter into a formal employment agreement with the chief administrative officer outlining the details of the employment relationship. Because the chief administrator serves at the pleasure of the governing body, most agreements include a provision under which either party may terminate the relationship.

Once the new administrator arrives, a series of introductions to top staff and opportunities to connect with the community will help the new administrator get started. A work session to review current government priorities and challenges, as well as specific performance goals and objectives for the administrator, is essential. The goals and objectives you set up front will contribute to a good working relationship and form the basis for regular performance feedback.

## Your Relationship with the Chief Administrator

The working relationship between the elected governing body and the appointed chief administrative officer demands open communication, clear operating guidance, mutual respect, and a commitment to working together for the good of the community. It is a delicate relationship involving many personalities in a stressful and political environment.

Most **professional administrators** will do the following things:

- Respect the pressures of public office—constituent demands, time demands, professional commitments, and the challenge of the next election.
- Treat all governing body members fairly and equally.
- Know the issues and priorities of individual governing body members and support their interests equally.
- Keep senior staff members informed about governing body issues or concerns that affect their areas of responsibility.
- Provide thorough, reliable, and timely information to support decision making.
- Establish procedures for elected officials' interactions with professional staff.
- Consider appointing a key staff person to be a daily contact for routine business and questions.
- Schedule opportunities for interactions and communication among elected officials and top staff.

### Elements of an Employment Agreement for the Chief Administrator

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ● Term  | ● Resignation                              |
| ● Duties and authority                            | ● Performance evaluation                   |
| ● Compensation                                    | ● Hours of work                            |
| ● Health, disability, and life insurance benefits | ● Outside activities                       |
| ● Vacation, sick, and military leave              | ● Moving and relocation expenses           |
| ● Automobile or car allowance                     | ● Home sale and purchase expenses          |
| ● Retirement                                      | ● Indemnification                          |
| ● General business expenses                       | ● Bonding                                  |
| ● Termination                                     | ● Other terms and conditions of employment |
| ● Severance                                       | ● General provisions                       |

Adapted from ICMA Model Employment Agreement, [www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org)

- Follow through on all requests from government body members—from casual comments, to e-mails, to specific requests for action.
- When bad things happen, make sure that all governing body members hear about it from the chief administrator as quickly as possible.
- Avoid public surprises.
- Give visibility and credit to elected officials for their leadership.

**Elected officials** can help the chief administrator do a good job by

- Respecting his or her position, management expertise, and time pressures
- Learning how the local government works on a daily basis and how setting policy differs from carrying out programs and policies
- Following agreed-upon procedures for dealing with professional staff
- Reading everything the staff provides and then asking questions
- Keeping the chief administrator informed about issues and concerns in the community
- Discussing personnel or performance concerns privately rather than in a public meeting
- Avoiding public surprises
- Valuing the local government staff, thanking them for their work, supporting them in their efforts to carry out policies, and giving public praise when a job is well done.

## Evaluating the Chief Administrator

A performance evaluation is a communications process—an opportunity for frank and personal discussion apart from the day-to-day business and formal decision making. An evaluation strengthens the working partnership by identifying expectations, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. And an evaluation is a responsibility between a hiring authority and an individual who has been charged with carrying out established goals and objectives.

### Evaluation Guidelines

An evaluation works best when it is designed around the governing body's priorities and the administrator's goals and objectives. The following sections provide some general guidelines.

- **Establish the evaluation framework jointly—purpose, expectations, timing, and process.** A discussion between the chief administrator and the governing body about the design and boundaries for the evaluation process will increase the effectiveness of the process.

- **Agree on performance criteria.** Define performance goals, objectives, and targets that are linked to governing body's goals and priorities well before the evaluation. Three additional performance areas are worth discussing: the knowledge that the administrator brings to the job, the way in which he or she interacts with others, and his or her ability to make things happen.
- **Involve the entire governing body.** Because of the press of other duties, it may be tempting to appoint a subcommittee to evaluate the chief administrative officer. Avoid that temptation. An evaluation is an opportunity for open discussion, shared learning, and team building. The entire governing body is part of the team and should be involved in the evaluation process from start to finish.
- **Incorporate the evaluation into ongoing processes.** Make the performance evaluation a regular event in your decision-making cycle. Shortly after the end of the fiscal year is a good time so that you can use budget performance indicators as part of the review.
- **Be open and constructive.** Keep the process open, broad, and honest. Cover pluses and minuses as well as ways to build on strengths and minimize weaknesses.
- **Seek feedback from the administrator on governing body performance.** Since success for your community depends on how well the governing body and administrator work together, it could be useful to ask the administrator for some feedback on how the governing body has helped and hindered his or her effectiveness. A productive evaluation is a two-way process.
- **Agree on action steps.** Conclude the process with agreements on what will happen next. Record specific action steps that the administrator and the governing body will take as a result of the evaluation.

Carrying out a regular evaluation is a responsibility; it is also an opportunity to strengthen the leadership team. If the team is working well together, there will be no surprises in the evaluation. As in any employment relationship, regular communication about how things are going—in addition to an annual official conversation—leads to more productive performance.

## Recap

- Hiring and regularly evaluating the chief administrative officer is the governing body's most important human resources role.
- A successful recruitment process is based on careful planning, a clear understanding of community needs, and astute evaluation of candidates.
- A performance evaluation is a communication process designed to strengthen the partnership between the chief administrative officer and the elected governing body.

- The working relationship between the elected governing body and appointed chief administrative officer demands open communication, clear operating guidance, mutual respect, and a commitment to working together.

### **Recommended Local Reading**

- Position description and contract for the chief administrative officer

## Part II

# Leadership in the Twenty-first Century: The Bigger Picture

*The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.*

—Michelangelo

Leading today's communities means anticipating new challenges while maintaining constant attention to day-to-day service needs. Part II of this handbook is devoted to strategies for broadening your leadership perspective beyond the day-to-day. It focuses on your roles as

- A visionary leader
- A champion of democratic governance
- A values-driven and ethical leader
- A collaborative leader who recognizes the interdependence of governments
- A knowledgeable leader who pays attention to issues that shape public policy decisions.

The four chapters in Part II focus on

- Democratic governance and broad citizen engagement
- The importance of values-driven and ethical leadership
- The role you play in the larger intergovernmental system
- The impact of national trends on local public policy.





# Democratic Governance

Many communities across the country are creating new strategies for bringing cities and government closer together. The focus is on mobilizing citizens to make decisions, manage conflicts, and solve public problems.

## From Communicating to Engaging

While some studies suggest that citizens remain skeptical, detached, isolated, and apathetic, many local governments know a different type of citizen: knowledgeable, highly skilled, and “more interested in governing and less willing to be governed.”<sup>2</sup> That perspective has led to a growing focus on mobilizing citizens to solve problems, make decisions, and become part of the governing process.

This transition from **representative governance**, where citizens make decisions only in the voting booth, to **democratic governance**, where citizens work directly with public officials in participatory, inclusive, deliberative, and collaborative ways, has been gradual.<sup>3</sup>

- Citizen participation has always been a government priority.
- Communication strategies that involve citizens early in decision-making processes so that public opinions and recommendations can influence government choices have created stronger citizen-government connections.
- The use of elected neighborhood advisory groups has provided bridges to connect citizens and government in consistent, recurring, and valued ways.
- Technology tools that give citizens easy access to the same information that government officials use for decision making have opened doors.

And the transition isn’t absolute.

- Citizens still expect government to focus on fundamental services, and they will tell you if those services aren’t satisfactory.
- Local elected officials are still responsible for setting policies that establish direction for the community, working in partnership with full-time professional staff.

2 Matt Leighninger, *Working Productively with 21st Century Citizens*, Municipal Action Guide (NLC, October 2007), 1.

3 NLC, *The Rise of Democratic Governance: How Local Leaders Are Reshaping Politics in the 21st Century* (November 2006).

### Vending Machine and Barnraising

As an elected official, you may encounter two opposing views of local government:

- A **vending machine** approach to governance finds citizens putting in taxes or fees and expecting equal value back in services. Citizens see themselves as “customers” and may become frustrated when government cannot adequately meet their needs. Local government is one of many service providers, and many customers—your citizens—have little interest in the needs of others or the community as a whole.
- The **barnraising** model focuses on what the community can achieve together. Just as large numbers of people would gather in farming communities to raise a neighbor’s barn—with all participants playing roles according to their skills and resources—citizens can make unique contributions to governance, problem solving, and decision making if they are asked.

*Adapted from NLC, *Connecting Citizens and Their Government**

- Local elected officials are ultimately responsible for ensuring the overall success and vitality of the community—with citizen guidance, input, and engagement.

For citizens, meaningful engagement helps them

- Learn more about issues and decision-making processes
- Solve neighborhood and community problems
- Provide real input on policy decisions
- Gain skills and connections that will make them community leaders
- Meet with people who have different views and backgrounds
- Feel like they are part of the community.

Public engagement processes can help you as a local official

- Find out what citizens really think about issues and policy decisions
- Mobilize citizens to take action on neighborhood and community problems
- Diffuse tensions between groups of people and between citizens and government
- Talk with citizens in a supportive, nonconfrontational environment
- Demonstrate that certain public decisions are difficult and complex
- Help citizens understand financial pressures that affect services
- Reach out to people who have felt or been excluded in the past
- Create a strong sense of belonging and community.

From Engagement to Knowledge and Action

Factors that make structured engagement processes different from traditional outreach include

- Depth of information exchanged between the government and the public
- Effective action that brings citizens and government together to solve problems
- Sustained connections that lead to more information, more action, and continued engagement.

Traditional Citizen Involvement vs. Democratic Governance

The table below shows how traditional approaches to citizen involvement differ from a broader democratic governance model.

	Traditional citizen involvement	Democratic governance
Who is responsible for solving public problems?	Governments	Whole community
What are the criteria for “good government”?	Openness and efficiency	Ability to work with the public
How does government recruit citizens?	Public officials call meetings; use media outreach	Proactive, network-based recruitment by governments and other groups
How are issues discussed?	Public officials “sell” the policy they support	Basic background information provided; range of views laid on the table
How does government treat citizen self-interest?	Citizen self-interest is static, can’t be changed	Interests can be changed through information and exposure to other views
What is the civic duty of citizens?	Stay informed, vote, obey the law	Become informed, take part in dialogue, make decisions, take action
When are citizens involved in public life?	Whenever there is a crisis or a big decision to be made	All the time
Who governs?	Public officials in the name of the electorate	Public officials, public employees, citizens—all with roles and responsibilities that are distinct but complementary

NLC, *Changing the Way We Govern: Building Democratic Governance in Your Community* (November 2006)

### Why Use Community-Driven Problem Solving?

The National Civic League, a not-for-profit organization committed to connecting local governments and their constituents, suggests using these criteria for choosing broad, community-driven, collaborative problem-solving efforts:

- The issues are complex or open to negotiation.
- Resources to address the issues are limited.
- A number of interests are involved.
- Individual and community actions are required to address the issues effectively.
- People are interested because of the importance of the issue.
- No single entity has sole jurisdiction over the problem or implementation of the solutions.

National Civic League, *The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook* (Denver, Colorado, 2000)

According to the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, an essential outcome of civic engagement is public knowledge:

Public knowledge is a full and deep understanding of your community. It is a collection of values that people in the community hold—not their attitudes about various choices. It is also about how they rank these values and what trade-offs they are willing to make when the values seem in conflict.<sup>4</sup>

The most successful engagement processes focus on broad, compelling issues that have long-term ramifications. Common examples are developing a community vision and strategic plan, eliminating a major financial shortfall, or shaping a comprehensive sustainability plan to deal with climate change.

Some questions to think about as you explore opportunities for engaging citizens in deeper ways are the following:

- What is the issue you want citizens to address and how do you describe it?
- What do you hope to achieve?
- Why would people want to participate?
- How will you provide the information people need?
- Who are your key partners in dealing with the issue?
- How will you staff this effort?
- What is the best first step?

<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Wood, *Standards of Excellence in Civic Engagement* (Bethesda, Md.: Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, 2005), 4.

To be productive and successful, citizen engagement efforts are best built around an important decision rather than around the idea of engaging citizens. That's why several local governments have started with a budget challenge, believing that a well-designed citizen engagement process will produce a better outcome than public officials working on their own.

Most broad citizen engagement processes involve these four steps:

1. **Set goals and expectations for the process.** Defining what you hope to accomplish at the earliest stage is essential.

**San Jose, California** ([www.sanjoseca.gov](http://www.sanjoseca.gov)), created Neighborhood Action Committees in nineteen underserved neighborhoods to decide how to allocate \$120 million of redevelopment money in those areas. Staff worked with existing neighborhood leaders and, in some cases, created new neighborhood organizations. There were two driving goals: deciding how to allocate the money to meet pressing community needs, and creating strong organizations with capable and confident leaders in those neighborhoods for future citizen-government work. Nearly 500 people participated in the neighborhood groups to allocate the redevelopment funding, and new leaders have emerged to sustain the process. Public building in the neighborhoods, from sidewalks to community centers, has been heavily influence by the Neighborhood Action Committees.

**Kuna, Idaho** ([www.cityofkuna.com](http://www.cityofkuna.com)), works through Kuna Alliance for a Cohesive Community Team (Kuna ACT) to bring diverse perspectives together on challenging issues. As the city grew from 600 to 6,000, conflicts over growth and school funding surfaced. The alliance brings citizens together in small-group study circles to discuss policy challenges. On average, six community forums are held annually, engaging about 500 citizens to get broad input for shaping local policies. Outcomes have included a downtown improvement plan, and construction of a high school with input from both young people and adults.

**Menlo Park, California** ([www.menlopark.org](http://www.menlopark.org)), created a comprehensive program called *Your City, Your Decision* to engage community residents in closing a projected \$2.9 million budget gap. Using a comprehensive citizen survey, a series of interactive workshops, and a citizen-driven budget advisory committee, the city brought revenues and expenses back into balance and plotted a path to fiscal health. The advisory committee, which was made up of fifteen community residents and two council liaisons, was responsible for facilitating community input, offering suggestions, and providing feedback to the local leadership team.

2. **Choose meeting formats.** You can use large and small work groups, information-sharing and decision-making groups, and focus groups to examine a specific issue. Large groups work best to provide background, set the stage for discussions, and share information about outcomes. Small work groups with between twelve and fifteen people provide the best structure for in-depth decision making and action.
3. **Project costs and staffing needs.** The scope of your process will help determine cost and staff needs. Most citizen engagement initiatives will require a significant time commitment from city staff and citizens.

More than 1,000 citizens in **Columbia, Missouri** ([www.gocolumbiamo.org](http://www.gocolumbiamo.org)), participated in ***Imagine Columbia's Future***, a multiyear, community-wide visioning process. The process was designed to (1) maximize public involvement; (2) create a positive, safe, creative, and fun process to bridge differences, ease tensions, and discover shared values; (3) ensure that the vision is truly community-driven; and (4) involve key institutions, including city and county government, the media, the business community, and individual property owners and developers.

**Burnsville, Minnesota** ([www.ci.burnsville.mn.us](http://www.ci.burnsville.mn.us)), designed a visioning process to update its comprehensive plan around themes in Jim Collins's book, *Good to Great*. The process started with three questions: ***What are we good at? What are we passionate about? What will bring prosperity?*** The first meeting, led by a facilitator from a nearby university, drew commitments from 120 people to serve on visioning committees around seven themes: youth, transportation, safety, neighborhoods, the environment, development, and city services. Burnsville also created a "CEO focus group" with seven leaders from the city's largest employers. A twenty-six-member advisory board composed of city representatives and one member of each visioning team worked for more than three months to review, refine, and integrate all the recommendations into an updated comprehensive plan.

**Portage 2025 in Portage, Michigan** ([www.portagemi.com](http://www.portagemi.com)), is the result of four visioning forums involving several hundred citizens. Each forum focused on a different theme: (1) Portage Today—Keeping the Best, Eliminating the Worst; (2) Portage 2025—Achieving the Best, Avoiding the Worst; (3) Creating Visions for Each Strategy Area; and (4) Pulling It Together. A recent renewal event convened nearly a hundred citizens back to their work groups to review progress and refine strategies for achieving top priorities. An experienced strategic planning firm facilitated the process.

4. **Recruit for numbers and diversity.** A true citizen engagement process brings together larger cross-sections of the community. Most communities have a solid base of involved people who are always willing to work on public projects. You want to get beyond the regulars to broaden the engagement, increase community knowledge, and build connections to new people. A large, diverse, critical mass of citizens is always more powerful than a small, homogeneous group.

## Community Visioning

Community visioning applies democratic governance principles to strategic planning. It connects your governing body planning and goal-setting processes with your commitment to citizen engagement.

Successful community visioning focuses on defining a future for the community that includes both the big picture and specific details. Typically, a visioning process brings together all sectors of the community to identify problems, evaluate changing conditions, and develop long-term strategies to improve the overall quality of life.

While local leaders have always recognized the value of citizen input through environmental scans, surveys, and public hearings, community visioning goes beyond data collection by connecting people in a sustained way.

## Recap

- If you want to move from communicating with citizens to engaging them in decision making, you must focus on sharing governing responsibilities with them by inviting their deliberate participation in a collaborative process.
- Local governments must keep an eye on both service and engagement.
- Community visioning connects your leadership team's goal setting and strategic planning with your commitment to citizen engagement.

## Recommended Local Reading

- Existing community vision and strategic plan reports





# Ethical Leadership

*It takes many good deeds to build a reputation and  
only one bad one to lose it.*

—Benjamin Franklin

Citizens expect all public officials to govern and behave ethically. The ethical failures of one public official resonate widely and reflect on all. That's why you have to do more than follow the state or local ethics code. You are a model for a high standard of performance and behavior, and that means avoiding even the appearance of ethical misconduct.

Promoting an ethical culture in your local government is an important leadership priority. Values form the foundation for everything your organization does. Many local governments supplement state ethics laws with their own code of ethics to guide individual decisions. Many also agree on values that will shape how the governing body leads the community.

Values statements and ethics codes guide behavior and actions. Individuals make decisions on the basis of those guiding principles and their own best judgment. As a bottom line, it is always important to distinguish your personal interests from the public interest. That doesn't mean you ignore your own interests. Rather, it means that you examine your conscience, consider the needs of others who may be affected by your decisions, and take actions that, to the best of your knowledge, will serve the public interest.

## Values

Values underpin action. Examples of commonly held values include compassion, fairness, honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, respect, and loyalty.

Local government value statements are often developed in conjunction with strategic planning processes to guide government performance and personal behavior.

The Institute for Local Government at the League of California Cities ([www.ca-ilg.org](http://www.ca-ilg.org)) has developed a set of core public values, with examples of what those values mean, as a resource for helping local governments shape value statements. The six core public service values are trustworthiness, fairness, responsibility, respect, compassion, and loyalty.

### Sample Values Included in Municipal Value Statements

**West Palm Beach, Florida** ([www.cityofwpb.com](http://www.cityofwpb.com)): Integrity, respect, leadership, cooperation, collaboration, and customer service.

**Greensboro, North Carolina** ([www.greensboro-nc.gov](http://www.greensboro-nc.gov)): Honesty, integrity, stewardship, and respect.

**Campbell, California** ([www.cityofcampbell.com](http://www.cityofcampbell.com)): Community, honesty, civility, equality, teamwork, and accountability.

**Coral Springs, Florida** ([www.coral springs.org](http://www.coral springs.org)): Leadership by example, empowerment attitude, customer focus, and continuous improvement both personally and in city action.

**Austin, Texas** ([www.ci.austin.tx.us](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us)): Gutsy, green, creative, committed, and collaborative.

Publishing a local government statement of values is an important step in assuring your citizens that their public officials are seriously committed to values-driven behavior. By announcing that you stand for something, you are making a public statement that provides the foundation for confidence and trust.

### Values-Based Ethics

All states have laws that govern the ethical behavior of their state and local officials. While the specifics of those laws vary widely, they general cover four major areas: gifts, financial disclosure, ethics oversight, and conflicts of interest. Your state municipal league is the best resource for details on how the state ethics law applies to local public officials. It is important that all public officials in your community know the details of state ethics laws.

To ensure public confidence in the integrity of local government and elected and appointed officials, voters in **Santa Ana, California** ([www.ci.santa-ana.ca.us](http://www.ci.santa-ana.ca.us)), approved an amendment to the city charter requiring the city to adopt a code of ethics and conduct for elected officials and members of appointed boards, commissions, and committees. The adopted code defines **five core values** and **specific actions** to support those values. All officials covered by the code are required to **affirm in writing** that they have received it, understand it, and pledge to follow it. Ethics training is provided, and the city attorney serves as a resource person to advise covered officials on appropriate actions.

A state ethics law can't guarantee ethical behavior in your local government. Promoting a culture of ethics within the organization that emphasizes the means for accomplishing desired outcomes sets the stage for consistently ethical behavior among both elected official and employees.

Your governing body can take several steps to strengthen your community's confidence in your government. It can

- Work together as a group to define your core values and then publicize them

### Sample Values-Based Ethics

#### Trustworthiness

- I remember that my role is first and foremost to serve the community.
- I am truthful with my fellow elected officials, the public, and others.
- I avoid any actions that would cause the public to question whether my decisions are based on personal interests instead of the public's interests.
- I do not accept gifts or other special considerations because of my public position.
- I do not knowingly use false or inaccurate information to support my position.
- I do not use my public position for personal gain.
- I carefully consider any promises I make (including campaign promises) and then keep them.

#### Fairness

- I make decisions based on the merits of the issues.
- I honor the laws and the public's expectations that government policies will be applied consistently.
- I support the public's right to know and promote meaningful public involvement.
- I support merit-based processes for the award of public employment and public contracts.
- I am impartial and do not favor those who either have helped me or are in the position to do so.
- I promote equality and treat all people equitably.
- I excuse myself from decisions when my or my family's financial interest may be affected by government actions.

Excerpted from Institute for Local Government, *Doing the Right Thing: Putting Ethics Principles into Practice in Public Service* (California, 2006), [www.cacities.org/index.jsp?zone=ilsg](http://www.cacities.org/index.jsp?zone=ilsg)

- Develop a code of ethics that reflects those values, defines coverage, and provides clear guidance to all covered local officials, and publicize that, too
- Provide training for officials and employees to build awareness of ethics issues and strengthen problem-solving skills
- Promote a culture in which all public officials and staff feel comfortable raising questions about what they should and shouldn't do
- Provide a clear, safe mechanism for raising questions about unethical behavior.

Traditional ethics codes, including most state laws, are **rule based**: they provide a list of **don'ts**. A **values-based ethics code** is a list of **do's** that define what those values mean in practice.

### Steps to Consider When Facing a Conflict of Interest

- Respect the legislative institution
- Follow the law
- Seek legal counsel
- Ask advice
- Take a leadership role
- Meet your own standard
- Be aware of the appearance factor
- Prepare to defend your decision

Peggy Kerns, director, National Conference of State Legislatures, Center for Ethics in Government (Winter 2007)

## Hiring for Ethics

Incorporating your local government values and ethics into organizational hiring practices helps build and sustain a culture of ethics. When hiring a chief administrative officer, factor both your local code and the ICMA Code of Ethics into the interview and background check processes by asking specific questions about values and ethics. The ICMA Code of Ethics, adopted in 1924 to guide behavior and action by all professional public managers, emphasizes the social responsibilities of everyone who works in local government. Professional local government managers are expected to abide by the ICMA Code of Ethics throughout their careers.

## But It Is Never Easy

Attention to values and ethics doesn't eliminate the ethical challenges you will face as a local leader. Areas that commonly pose challenges include gifts, traveling and attending events, investments, contract awards, and hiring decisions. Actions and decisions that involve friends, family, or political supporters often raise tough ethical issues.

A useful tool when assessing gray areas is to use the headline test: *How would this situation look as a story on the front page of the local newspaper?* Another practical tool: **When in doubt, don't.**

### Top Seven Things to Know about Ethics Codes

1. **What an ethics code is.** An ethics code reflects the government's shared values in public service, leadership, and decision making. A code gives the public confidence about the government's values and priorities.
2. **The process is as important as the product.** While it makes complete sense to start with a review of other governments' codes, it is important to have your code reflect the unique values and priorities for your community. It is also important for those whose conduct will be guided by the code to have input into the content.
3. **Style matters.** A government's code should be written in simple, direct language. Standards should be stated as much as possible in the positive (what kinds of conduct are desired as opposed to what is prohibited), and examples should be given for greater clarity and understandability. What does a particular standard or value look like in practice? What kinds of behavior are consistent with the particular standard or value? Avoid legalistic language at all costs.
4. **Values-based versus rule-based codes.** Rule-based codes speak in terms of "don'ts." Values-based codes speak more in terms of aspirations and priorities ("do's").
5. **Adoption of the code is just the first step.** For an ethics code to truly make a difference, the values it expresses need to be communicated and applied. The code needs to be made known to all whose behavior it is intended to guide; training/orientation sessions need to cover the code and its importance to the community. This is how officials "walk the talk," and the "walk" needs to start at the uppermost levels of the organization.
6. **Periodic review helps.** Periodically reviewing the principles in the code keeps the code current and in everyone's consciousness—including the public's. This process can include the addition or revision of standards, as well as the expansion of the code's application in the local government.
7. **Accountability.** Self-accountability is the most constructive approach. A helpful question to pose in a situation in which conduct appears to be inconsistent with the code is whether a particular course of action is or isn't (was or wasn't) consistent with the government's ethics code and values. When a heavier hand is necessary, any warning and counseling of individuals about the importance of adhering to the code should be done in a fair, consistent, and even-handed manner.

Adapted from Institute for Local Government, *Developing a Local Agency Ethics Code: A Process-Oriented Guide* (League of California Cities, 2003)

## Recap

- Promoting and supporting a values-driven, ethical culture in your local government is a leadership imperative.
- Values underpin ethics; a code of ethics guides action.
- Codes of ethics do not eliminate ethical challenges. Training, careful thought, and constant attention to the appearance of a conflict of interest will help you sort through the dilemmas.
- Talking openly about your leadership team's commitment to values and ethics will foster and support a culture of ethics. Your efforts and your commitment should not be a secret.
- If you model values-driven and ethical behavior, you will strengthen your local government's culture of ethics, remind citizens where your local government stands, and reinforce expectations among employees and appointed committee members.
- When in doubt, ask the headline question: *How would this situation look as a story on the front page of the local newspaper?*

## Recommended Local Reading

- State ethics law
- Existing local government values statement, if any
- Existing local government code of ethics or conduct, if any
- ICMA Code of Ethics

# Working with Other Governments

*Success will depend on building innovative partnerships based on the understanding that the future prosperity of each of our communities is inherently linked.*

—John Hickenlooper, mayor, Denver, Colorado

Local governments work with each other and with the state and federal government to serve shared constituencies. Historically, local interaction with states and the federal government centered around money. In recent years, federal-state-local relations have been driven more by unfunded mandates and attempts to limit or preempt local authority.

Approaches to collaboration with other local governments vary widely from informal and occasional information sharing to joint service delivery and even government consolidation.

The challenges of leading today's communities demand an increased awareness of intergovernmental connections and a particular emphasis on collaborating regionally.

## Federal-Local Relations

Federalism—the working relationship among the federal, state, and local governments—has changed dramatically since the heyday of federal revenue sharing. The national debt, recurring federal deficits, and growing federal entitlement costs have led to reductions in federal funds for local programs. That situation is unlikely to change—and local governments recognize that federal financial support for local programs will remain a small and highly volatile portion of local budgets.

The federal government also establishes policies and standards, and administers programs in areas that matter to cities and towns, such as environmental standards, transportation, energy, affordable housing, mortgage lending, and emergency preparedness and response.

National advocacy organizations, such as the NLC, National Association of Counties, and U.S. Conference of Mayors, provide a voice for local governments in Washington. A recurring theme among these groups has been the need for a more cooperative intergovernmental system to serve the nation's citizens better.

Elements of a more cooperative federal-local partnership include

- Support for local innovation
- Policies that are tailored to local needs and demands
- Adequate funding to local governments for new mandates
- Avoidance of any proposals that limit local authority or put local resources at risk.

## State-Local Relations

The situation is similar at the state level, although the state-local fiscal relationship is more essential to local economic vitality than the federal-local relationship because states control local revenue-raising authority. When states face tight fiscal conditions, they often respond by cutting their budgets, reducing local funding programs, and limiting local revenue authority. The rise in state-imposed tax and expenditure limits has further constrained local revenue capacity and strained state-local relations.

State-local fiscal relations are generally built around three components:

- Municipal fiscal authority—that is, state authorization for local governments to use general taxes—property, sales, or income—to raise operating revenue
- The amount of state financial aid that a local government receives as a proportion of its total revenue
- State regulation of local taxing and spending, which constrains local fiscal authority.

A key intergovernmental challenge for twenty-first-century local leaders is exploring, in partnership with state governments, new ways to structure the state-local fiscal relationship. A 2008 NLC research report urges states to authorize additional local taxing authority, maintain state aid levels, and resist pressures to pass tax and spending limits in response to short-term changes in economic conditions:

To ensure economic vitality, state fiscal systems should provide sufficient fiscal autonomy for localities to fund their share of resident needs. In addition, states should take steps to support local fiscal capacity and minimize fiscal inequities among local governments.<sup>5</sup>

State governments also establish policies, administer programs, and establish regulations and mandates that have a direct impact on local programs and services. Because local governments are established by—and are subsets of—the states, the state-local relationship is essential and often contentious.

State municipal leagues ensure a local voice in state capitols throughout the country. The leagues are particularly important resources in efforts to protect local

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5 NLC, *Cities and State Fiscal Structures* (July 2008).



financial capacity by opposing restrictions on local authority and urging improvements to the state-local fiscal environment. Several state municipal leagues have launched efforts to take a longer view of the state-local financial relationship, and are focusing on broadening local revenue-raising authority—with mixed results.

As a local leader, you can support that work by

- Understanding the specifics of your state-local fiscal relationship
- Supporting state municipal league efforts to protect local authority and explore long-term changes
- Establishing good relationships with your state representatives and reminding them regularly about local challenges and needs.

Visit the membership section of the NLC Web site ([www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org)) for access to Web sites for all state municipal leagues.

## Working Regionally

Many local government issues don't respect jurisdictional boundaries, so regional interaction happens whether or not you choose to work regionally. A proactive approach to regional collaboration, including at least routine information exchange, is essential to effective governance. And as you look for ways to meet growing service needs with limited financial resources, collaborative service delivery is worth exploring.

If you are new to elected office, getting to know the elected officials from adjoining communities is an important first step in working regionally.

The **Denver Metro Mayors Caucus** ([www.metromayors.org](http://www.metromayors.org)) is a cooperative alliance of the mayors of thirty-one cities and towns in the Denver metropolitan region. Its purpose is to serve as a voice for collective action on issues that affect the entire region but cannot be addressed effectively by any one jurisdiction acting alone. The caucus is committed to decision making by consensus, exploring all options, and searching for solutions that reflect the needs and values of each member community. The success of the Denver Metro Mayors Caucus has led to similar efforts in the Albuquerque, Boston, Chicago, and Oklahoma City metropolitan areas.

Elected officials in the city ([www.alpena.mi.us](http://www.alpena.mi.us)) and county ([www.alpenacounty.org](http://www.alpenacounty.org)) of **Alpena, Michigan**, and eight townships in the county meet quarterly as the **Alpena Intergovernmental Council** to identify and examine shared issues and concerns. The group uses subcommittees formed around such topics as planning, communication, and recreation. Local leaders say the regular interaction has strengthened working relationships among the communities.

Two types of regional organizations often support collaboration among local governments:

- A **regional council of governments (COG)** is a member organization for a defined group of local governments. Representatives of the participating local governments serve on the COG board to guide the agenda. Regional councils focus on comprehensive transportation planning, economic development, workforce development, environmental issues, services for the elderly, and clearinghouse functions. Roles of the regional councils may vary widely depending on state law and relations with local governments.
- **Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs)** were created by the Federal Highway Administration to provide local input for urban transportation planning, and to allocate federal transportation funds to cities with populations greater than 50,000. There are nearly 400 authorized MPOs, nearly half of which operate as part of a regional COG.

Learning about these and other informal regional groups is important to building your capacity to work regionally. The National Association of Regional Councils ([www.narc.org](http://www.narc.org)) is a membership organization and information resource on many aspects of regional collaboration, including the roles of COGs and of MPOs.

Beyond collaboration and information sharing, some common approaches to working regionally include working together on a shared priority such as economic development or combining some governmental services. State law generally defines how local entities can share service delivery.

The most common—and usually most successful—type of regional collaboration involves emergency response. Mutual aid agreements across jurisdictions are components of emergency preparedness plans and are fairly standard among police and fire departments in communities of all sizes. Under mutual aid agreements, two or more local governments agree to help each other under special circumstances—for example, during an emergency or when one government is short-staffed. Generally, no money changes hands.

Examples of approaches to collaboration for service delivery include

- **Joint powers agreements**, in which two or more local governments provide shared planning, financing, and service delivery to residents of all jurisdictions around a specific service
- **Contracting** to deliver government services across jurisdictional boundaries
- **Regional purchasing agreements**, which help local governments to achieve cost savings in purchasing equipment and supplies or to coordinate bidding and contracting for services.<sup>6</sup>

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6 NLC and the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, *Guide to Successful Local Government Collaboration in America's Regions* (Washington, D.C.: NLC, October 2006), 1–3.

Regional cooperation for service delivery can offer benefits:

- **Economies of scale:** Through joint acquisitions you can get more benefits for the same level of expenditure, or you can reduce costs and provide a steady level of benefits. This approach is particularly attractive for small communities.
- **Efficiency of service delivery:** Some services can be delivered more cost-effectively if jurisdictional boundaries are ignored. For example, geography may make certain routes more cost-effective than others for garbage pickup, recycling, or water service. If the service is provided cooperatively by several communities, a more cost-effective system can be defined.
- **Part-time needs:** Intergovernmental agreements can let two or more communities share special skills, services, or equipment that no one community needs on a full-time basis.

More complex regional approaches, such as transfer of functions, revenue sharing, annexation, multipurpose districts, and government consolidation, are beyond the scope of this handbook.

Despite the benefits, there are long-standing obstacles to regional service delivery:

- Some citizens may fear losing local identity.

**Marquette and McGregor, Iowa** ([www.magreg-marq.org](http://www.magreg-marq.org), [www.claytoncounty.iowa.com](http://www.claytoncounty.iowa.com)), both with populations below 1,400, share a police department and other emergency services, including fire protection and ambulance. The cities merged their police departments by creating an intergovernmental entity. Marquette contributes 65 percent of the department's budget because it is home to a riverboat casino that requires twenty-four-hour police protection. McGregor contributes the remaining 35 percent. The department is governed by a five-person commission composed of representatives from the two cities.

**Nine cities in King County, Washington** ([www.cityegov.net](http://www.cityegov.net)), created the eGov Alliance, a regional transaction portal for building permitting for which they agreed to share the costs and risks. The combined portal allows residents to apply for permits online, as well as to search for and reserve park and recreation facilities, identify local property for economic development, and register for recreational activities in all member cities.

**Fresno and Clovis, California**, created the **Regional Jobs Initiative** ([www.fresnorji.org](http://www.fresnorji.org)) to generate long-term sustainable economic development in the region by diversifying the industrial and economic base. Hundreds of private and civic organizations have been working together to combat high unemployment by creating significant new jobs in the region with defined salary targets.

### Successful Regional Governance

Two metropolitan areas—Portland, Oregon, and the Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minnesota, region—have successfully operated multijurisdictional regional service systems for many years. **The Portland Metropolitan Service District** ([www.metro-region.org](http://www.metro-region.org)) covers three counties, twenty-four municipalities, and several special-purpose agencies. It is responsible for the operation of the regional zoo and convention center, open space and parks, economic development, solid waste, housing, transportation, recycling, and other environmental services. It has its own charter, elected leadership, employees, and budget.

**The Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities** ([www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org)) is responsible for the regional bus system, wastewater collection and treatment, regional growth, affordable housing, and parks and trails, and it provides a framework for regional decision making. The council has taxing and policy-making authority over certain special districts and local planning processes.

- Political agendas may be in conflict.
- It is sometimes difficult to find opportunities for cooperation that will mobilize a broad base of support and overcome competing goals and political differences.

Working regionally is an increasingly important leadership strategy to keep on the front burner despite long-standing barriers to cooperation. With new fiscal and environmental challenges on the rise, working with partners in the neighborhood who can share ideas and resources and even the service load can benefit your community in the long run.

### Recap

- All local governments are part of a bigger intergovernmental system connected by politics, money, and shared agendas.
- Local governments can no longer rely on the federal and state governments for financial support.
- Building new state-local fiscal partnerships is a key challenge for today's local leaders.
- Federal and state actions affect your community—both positively and negatively—so you need vigilance and advocacy to protect your local interests.

- Regional collaboration—from the informal to the highly structured—is a valuable strategic option that helps local governments respond to immediate needs (such as a natural disaster) and explore longer-term opportunities for more efficient or effective service delivery.

### **Recommended Local Reading**

- Summary of your local taxing structure based on state law
- Existing intergovernmental agreements
- Web sites of neighboring communities
- Information about any collaborative efforts, including the mission and role of the council of governments that serves your region



# The Learning Leader

*An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.*

—Benjamin Franklin

The previous sections of this handbook have focused on processes that help your leadership team deliver effective services to the community. But those processes and the services you deliver are carried out in the context of the problems facing your community. Consider problems like these:

- A major employer leaves the community, and local unemployment jumps.
- Home sales stall and foreclosures increase in your community.
- An influx of new immigrants overwhelms the local service system.

As a local elected leader, it's your job to pay close attention to local, national, and even international trends and issues that may affect the policy choices you make for your community.

## Trends

Economic, demographic, and environmental trends are likely to affect your community. The specifics of those trends change over time, but their impact is sustained. For example,

- **National and international economic trends affect local economic vitality.** When it comes to the economy, local, state, and national boundaries do not matter so much, which offers both opportunities and challenges. Today's economy demands new approaches to economic development, especially regional collaboration.
- **Changing demographics have an impact on service needs, employment, the face of the community, and more.** The growth in the foreign-born population and shifts in settlement patterns have changed the face of many local communities. When this demographic trend is combined with aging of the population and the looming retirement of millions of baby boomers, new challenges related to local services, your local workforce, and the economic vitality of your community rise to the top of your agenda.

- **Sustainability, climate change, smart growth, clean energy, and more are on government, business, and personal agendas throughout the country.** Sustainability really starts in cities and towns rather than in the halls of Congress. And these challenges are likely to shape local policy-making agendas for many years to come.

The issues and trends that drive your policy-making agendas are complex, influenced by factors that go far beyond your community's borders and are likely to change regularly. Today's emerging or urgent issue might be tomorrow's afterthought replaced by something more essential.

## You Are a Knowledge Leader

Being an effective local leader in the twenty-first century means keeping your eye both on the issues and trends of today and on those that are looming just around the corner. It also means working in partnership with community and business leaders to assess what really matters in your community.

Given the breadth and complexity of the issues, you can't expect to be an expert on everything. That's where committee assignments, professional interests, and support from professional staff come in. In addition, local, regional, and state business and civic leaders can be valuable partners in exploring new issues and challenges.

### Food for Thought: Worldwide Drivers

A recent IBM report identified **six worldwide drivers** that are shaping government and society today.

- **Changing demographics**, including rising average age in developed countries and falling average age in developing countries
- **Accelerating globalization**, which is making countries and societies more economically interdependent across social, political, and cultural boundaries
- **Rising environmental concerns** about what the Earth can provide and what it can tolerate
- **Evolving societal relationships** driven by Web-based social movements and networks and the demand for instant action 24/7
- **Growing threats to social stability** and order from terrorism, natural disasters, and potential pandemics
- **Expanding impact of technology**, which changes the way organizations operate and redefines relationships with constituents and customers.

IBM Global Business Services, *Government 2020 and the Perpetual Collaboration Mandate* (New York: IBM Global Services, July 2008)



The **Danville City Council** acts with collective purpose. Because we must provide leadership in a climate of rapid change and conflicting demands, the Council is dedicated to attacking the hard issues, making tough choices, and finding new pathways and solutions. City Council is dedicated to spending its time on change initiatives that will have a fundamental positive impact on the future of the community.

From *Our Leadership Role*, Danville, Virginia ([www.danville-va.gov](http://www.danville-va.gov))

Being a successful knowledge leader is another balancing act—developing your in-depth knowledge in certain areas while maintaining a working knowledge of other areas and relying on colleagues to add the depth.

Learning about new issues and trends is becoming a bigger part of your job, and the demands are likely to increase. National associations, such as NLC and ICMA, can play an important role in your ongoing education. Professional staff are important resources that you can and should turn to for expert guidance.

## Recap

- Local, regional, national, and international issues shape challenges and opportunities in your community.
- Economic, demographic, and environmental trends are likely to have the most impact on communities over the immediate future.
- Balancing your attention to the demands of today with an eye to the risks, opportunities, and challenges of tomorrow is essential to successful local leadership.

## Recommended Reading

- Local, state, and regional media that highlight trends affecting your community
- Resources provided by national organizations such as ICMA and NLC that track trends affecting local government
- The Resources section of this handbook



# Resources

## General Web Sites

International City/County Management Association (ICMA), 777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Washington, D.C., [www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org).

National League of Cities (NLC), 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., [www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org).

Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), 203 North LaSalle Street, Chicago, Illinois, [www.gfoa.com](http://www.gfoa.com).

Institute for Local Government, League of California Cities, 1400 K Street, Sacramento, California, [www.cacities.org](http://www.cacities.org).

National Association of Counties (NACo), 25 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).

State municipal league Web sites may be accessed through NLC at [www.nlc.org/state\\_municipal\\_leagues/index.aspx](http://www.nlc.org/state_municipal_leagues/index.aspx).

The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu).

## Local Leadership: The Basics

*Connecting Citizens and Their Government: Civility, Responsibility, and Local Democracy*, NLC, Washington, D.C., 1996.

*Effective Council Meetings*, IQ Report, ICMA, Washington, D.C., 2005.

*Elected Officials Guides to Local Government Finance*, GFOA, Chicago, Illinois.

*ICMA Model Employment Agreement*, ICMA, Washington, D.C., 2003.

*Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Administrator*, ICMA, Washington, D.C.

*Rosenberg Rules of Order: Simple Parliamentary Procedures for the 21st Century*, League of California Cities, Sacramento, California, 2003.

*Simple Parliamentary Procedure: Guidelines for Better Business Meetings*, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, 2000.

*Working Together: A Guide for Elected and Appointed Officials*, ICMA and NLC, Washington, D.C., 1999.

## **Leadership in the Twenty-first Century: The Bigger Picture**

### ***Democratic Governance and Visioning***

*Building Citizen Involvement: Strategies for Local Government*, ICMA and NLC, Washington, D.C., 1999.

*Building Democratic Governance: Tools and Structures for Engaging Citizens*, NLC, Washington, D.C., 2005.

*Changing the Way We Govern: Building Democratic Governance in Your Community*, NLC, Washington, D.C., 2006.

*The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook*, National Civic League, Denver, Colorado, 2000.

*Good to Great*, Jim Collins, HarperCollins, New York, 2001.

*Good to Great and the Social Sector*, Jim Collins, Boulder, Colorado, 2005.

*Managing Community Meetings*, IQ Report, ICMA, Washington, D.C., April 2002.

*The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule Is Giving Way to Shared Governance and Why Politics Will Never Be the Same*, Matt Leighninger, Vanderbilt University Press, 2006.

*Planning Public Forums: Questions for Local Officials*, Institute for Local Government, Sacramento, California, 2007.

*Public Deliberation: A Manager's Guide to Citizen Engagement*, Carolyn Lukensmeyer and Lars Hasselblad Torres, IBM Center for the Business of Government, 2006.

*Standards of Excellence in Civic Engagement*, Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, Bethesda, Maryland, 2005.

*Working Productively with 21st Century Citizens*, Municipal Action Guide, NLC, October 2007.

### ***Values and Ethics to Lead By***

*Developing a Local Agency Ethics Code: A Process-Oriented Guide*, Institute for Local Government, Sacramento, California, 2003.

*The Ethical GPS: Navigating Everyday Dilemmas*, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, 2008.

*Everyday Ethics for Local Officials, Finding Your Way*, Institute for Local Government, Sacramento, California, 2007.

*ICMA Code of Ethics with Guidelines*, ICMA, Washington, D.C., revised 2004.

### ***Working with Other Governments***

*City and State Fiscal Structure*, Christopher Hoene and Michael A. Pagano, NLC, Washington D.C., July 2008.

*Combining Government Services: Issues to Consider*, League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust, St. Paul, Minnesota, November 2007, [www.lmc.org](http://www.lmc.org).

*Guide to Successful Local Government Collaboration in America's Regions*, NLC, Washington, D.C., October 2006.

*Intergovernmental Cooperation Handbook*, 5th ed., Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 2006.

National Association of Regional Councils, 1666 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., [www.narc.org](http://www.narc.org).

*Regional Excellence*, William Dodge, NLC, Washington, D.C., 1996.

*Ten Things to Watch for When Entering into Joint Powers Agreements*, League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust, St. Paul, Minnesota, June 2007, [www.lmc.org](http://www.lmc.org).

