

PM

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT



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CLIMATE CHANGE and SUSTAINABILITY

2018 Ohio
River Flood in
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Covington, Ohio
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Navigating Social Media

Why values should guide your approach | BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

A spate of cases involving allegations of improper social media posts by members has ICMA's Committee on Professional Conduct (CPC) considering whether additional guidance or clearer standards are needed. After all, the reputation of the member, their local government organization, and even the profession is at risk when questionable posts occur and then are broadly shared. Perhaps a specific and clear guideline on social media would help members steer clear of inappropriate or unethical comments and posts.

A rule-based standard, like the approach we use to define acceptable political activity, is one way to address how social media is used. However, a deeper dive into the cases that came before the CPC raises a valid question. Is the problem social media? Or is it that regardless of the conduit, it's the conduct that violates a core value of the profession?

Case in point: whether you offer negative comments about a candidate for elected office by standing in the public square, in an interview with a reporter, or via your Twitter feed, you have crossed the line on political activity. It's the words, timing, and approach that matter—not just the communication channel.

To assist members in identifying that ethical line, here is a short recap of some of the conduct using social media that raised an ethical concern.

A city manager posted comments online after reading an article that outlined a candidate's stance on local issues. He ended with a request that his thoughts be shared broadly within the community. That crossed the line because members should not endorse candidates. Offering an assessment of where a candidate stands on an issue would be viewed as indicating support or opposition to the candidate. Timing matters here as well. Opining on an issue of concern to the community is well within the manager's purview. But doing so in the middle of a campaign is drawing you into the realm of candidate politics.

What if you don't say anything but share a link? That depends on what you are sharing. A city manager reposted a link for the incumbent mayor's reelection page to her personal Facebook page. That creates the appearance of an endorsement. Best to refrain from liking or commenting on any candidate for elected office whether local, state, or national. When all is said and done, you will need to work with whomever is elected to advance your community's needs.

An assistant manager used her personal social media account—which had the disclaimer "all posts are my own"—to offer commentary on the policy positions of state and federal elected officials. Members working for a local government share a right and responsibility to voice their opinion on issues of concern,



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ICMA
Creating and Supporting Thriving
Communities

ICMA's vision is to be the leading association of local government professionals dedicated to creating and supporting thriving communities throughout the world. It does this by working with its more than 12,000 members to identify and speed the adoption of leading local government practices and improve the lives of residents. ICMA offers membership, professional development programs, research, publications, data and information, technical assistance, and training to thousands of city, town, and county chief administrative officers, their staffs, and other organizations throughout the world.

Public Management (PM) aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments in creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.



Frustrated by the negative and demoralizing tone of a parody city website created by a resident that mocked the efforts of staff, the manager posted a derogatory comment about the site on a personal social media page. Standing up for your staff is to be applauded, but using derogatory language undermines the effort. Better to be silent, or if compelled to respond, do so respectfully.

Sometimes it is difficult to forget the rearview mirror image. One manager couldn't refrain from posting very critical comments to media articles about the city he once managed. Artfully crafted, they never referenced the colleague who now manages the city. Having served as a manager, this person clearly understood the discord the posts would

whether personal or related to their work. However, in this case, she took a stance that was not in alignment with the local government's position, which undermines the elected officials' right to establish policy. Given her position in the organization, the disclaimer that her expressions are personal is meaningless. There is a time and place to provide input on policy development. But once the policy is approved by the governing body, you have an ethical obligation to support the policy. If you can't do so, then exiting the organization is the better option.

create. Another former manager was far too engaged with city staff who were posting negative comments about the city on Facebook. In one post, he called for the firing of a department director. Relationships with former staff can be ongoing but should not cross the line of criticizing the current management or being disrespectful.

When you find yourself motivated to post on social media in response to a critical or nasty comment made about you or your organization, consider this advice offered by Jason Aten, a technology columnist for Inc. After a post

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he made on Twitter exploded and he landed in the middle of anyone's worst nightmare, he offered sage advice.¹

1. Don't Panic. Before you respond—or even think about responding—consider this: The Twitter mob is a lot like a group of hungry sharks. It's attracted to blood in the water. If you start to thrash around, it only attracts more sharks.

2. Admit When You're Wrong. If you're being criticized, first consider whether it's justified. Let's be honest, we all do dumb stuff sometimes, usually unintentionally. If that's the case, admit it, fix whatever went wrong, and move on.

3. Don't Be Defensive. The worst possible thing you can do is to get defensive, even if the criticism is entirely unwarranted. Fighting back might feel good in the moment, but honestly, that shouldn't be your goal. Your goal should be to identify what part of the criticism is justified and find a way to step offstage as quickly as possible.

4. Ignore the Trolls. Most of the people who pile on when you become the main event are there just for the entertainment. As discouraging as it may be to think that there are people who thrive on the misery or misfortune of others, welcome to social media. Your best bet is to ignore trolls entirely. If you choose to engage, do so with people who are reasonable. As for the rest, I suggest you mute the trolls—especially the ones who keep coming back hoping to get a reaction. If you block them, you just give them the little dopamine fix that comes from thinking they got under your skin.

5. Have a Sense of Humor. No one wants to be the butt of anyone's joke, especially not online. However, if you find yourself there, you might as well laugh. By the way, a sense of humor has a way of humanizing you to others as well. You won't believe how quickly people stop trying to make you into a joke when they see you as a person, especially one who doesn't take themselves too seriously.

For this profession, I would add that those who serve the public have an ethical responsibility to uphold and advance the dignity of public service. When you respond in a respectful and constructive way, you serve to elevate the profession. **PM**



ENDNOTE

¹ "Getting Attacked on Social Media Is Terrifying. But It Doesn't Have to Become a Nightmare," Jason Aten, <https://www.inc.com/jason-aten/getting-attacked-on-social-media-is-terrifying-it-doesnt-have-to-become-a-nightmare.html>



UPCOMING ICMA EVENTS

icma.org/events

December 1: [Webinar] Turning Pandemic Pain Points into Sustainable Solutions

December 2: [Webinar] Live Demo Series: Mental Health Support with Cope Notes

December 6: [ICMA Member Benefit] **Scholarship Opportunity for ICMA Members: Apply for the Harvard Kennedy School Senior Executives in State & Local Government Program!**

Details and application: visit icma.org/Harvard.

Two scholarship opportunities for ICMA members to attend the Harvard Kennedy School Senior Executives in State & Local Government Program. Scholarship applications are being accepted December 6 through January 31, 2022.

December 7: [Webinar] The 21st Century Budget Process: Connecting Budgeting Requests to Community Goals

December 14: [Webinar] Managing City Services: A Guide to Outsourcing

December 17: [Webinar] ICMA Courageous Conversations: Equity Officers in Local Government

Apply now for the 2022–2023 ICMA Leadership Institute on Race, Equity, and Inclusion (in partnership with the Kettering Foundation and the National Civic League)
icma.org/leadership-institute-race-equity-and-inclusion

December 15: Zoom informational session

December 20: Application deadline

January 3: ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Deadline
icma.org/credentialing

January 7: Session 1: Continuing the Conversation: Virtual ICMA Members Dialogue and Feedback on the Effort to Review the ICMA Code of Ethics through the Lens of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Three sessions: January 7, February 25, and April 29 — 12:00–1:00 PM ET

Sign up at icma.org/ethics — space is limited.

ICMA Courageous Conversations Series

Recordings can be viewed at icma.org/living-history

- A Life in Public Service: Three Stories of the Transition from the Military to Local Government
- Creating a Truly Inclusive Culture
- LGBTQIA+ Experience in Local Government
- Asian American Experience in Local Government Part 2: Trailblazers in our Hometowns (Asian-Pacific Heritage Month)
- Coming Out of the Darkness: Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
- Asian-American Experience in Local Government
- Women Pioneer Managers in the Profession
- A Conversation with Marc Ott, ICMA's First Black Executive Director, and Sy Murray, ICMA's First Black President

PERFORMANCE HIGH

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ICMA

Local Leaders Battle Global Climate Change Challenges in Cities, Counties, and Towns

ICMA is dedicated to supporting you in combating climate change | **BY MARC OTT**

There is a great deal of passion around the issue of climate change. So much so that science and data can get lost in the competing rhetoric of politicians and activists. Just this past month, I found myself watching 100,000 people marching after the United Nations COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland, demanding more action. It occurred to me that while world leaders attended the conference, local government managers around the world were at home in their communities actually planning and implementing climate actions.

As our Disaster Resilience and Recovery survey demonstrated, more than 90 percent of responding cities, counties, and towns have plans in place in preparation for natural disasters.¹ It is local leaders who confront the outcomes of the extreme weather that brings about droughts, tropical storms, wildfires, flooding, rising sea levels, and shortened winter recreation seasons. Local leaders must not only act as first responders to these crises, but determine how best or even whether to rebuild in the face of relentless recurrences. It is local leaders who work to mitigate both the causes and effects of our changing climate day in and day out. Cities and counties are increasingly being seen as innovation hubs for sustainability practices where new technologies, policies, and ideas can be tested.

Community sustainability and resilience has long been a priority for ICMA members.² The Sustainable Communities Advisory Committee is a group of dedicated members that has helped guide ICMA's work in this area.³ Since signing our first contract with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the 1970s, ICMA has been working on environmental issues. In those five decades we have developed and featured thousands of resources, offered sessions and conference

tracks, and worked with national and international partners to provide technical assistance to communities throughout the world. Currently, our website features more than 2,000 resources dedicated to resilient and sustainable communities, climate change, and renewable energy. Here are a few recent examples of our leadership in this area.

- A land-use planning tool, produced by our Global Programs team, integrates climate change considerations into the planning process.⁴

It was specifically developed for the Dominican Republic, but the content is universal.⁵ The tool helps in assessing and accounting for climate vulnerabilities in designing land-use policies and practices—and addressing these risks in deciding how and where the community will grow.

- ICMA's work in the Philippines under the SURGE Project is equally impressive.⁶ With funding from USAID, we assisted municipalities in initiatives ranging from reducing greenhouse gas emissions to developing training in climate adaptation and risk reduction to making water infrastructure more resilient to the effects of climate change.
- We have worked with the Department of Energy to advance solar energy most recently through the development of the SolSmart designation program, which helps local governments achieve renewable energy goals.⁷ When I last checked, 416 communities, representing a total of 99 million people in 41 states, D.C., and the Virgin Islands have received the designation. Communities share their experiences and successes in a series of case studies.⁸ In his article on



MARC OTT

is CEO/executive director of ICMA, Washington, D.C.

While the U.S. federal government is working through how best to regulate the use of funds from the bipartisan infrastructure bill, you have time to think about the highest impact and most efficient way to deploy these resources at the local level.

page 26 of this issue, ICMA staff expert Gabriel Rusk takes a look at local governments who are involved in implementing large-scale solar projects.

- For 25 years we have partnered with the EPA to bring together communities, developers, and others focused on cleaning up and repurposing defunct industrial properties through the Brownfields Conference.⁹ We have recently been named a new provider with the EPA for the Technical Assistance for Brownfields (TAB) program in the southeastern United States.
- ICMA offers several resources on planning for green infrastructure, which is increasingly being identified as a crucial building block in climate change mitigation strategies.¹⁰
- The ICMA Report, “Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities,” is an older, but still extremely popular tool that describes proven smart growth strategies for rural communities.¹¹

Globally, over 10,000 local governments have committed to create climate action plans (CAP).¹² City Manager Jens Peter Hegelund Jensen of Ringkøbing-Skjern in Denmark describes how his community began 12 years ago to work toward their target of 100-percent renewable energy, which will be realized in 2023.¹³ In the United States, more than 600 cities, counties, and towns have developed and posted their climate action plans.¹⁴

More recently, communities have updated their plans to incorporate equity strategies and measures,¹⁵ recognizing that poor communities, including communities of color, are more likely to be adversely impacted by climate change, according to the EPA and the Centers for Disease Control.¹⁶

While local governments— together with community groups, local nonprofits, and universities— have set aggressive goals in moving their communities to clean energy, they struggle to find ways to cover the capital and operating costs of implementing the changes. Fortunately for state and local governments in the United States, the bipartisan infrastructure bill, among other things, includes \$47 billion in climate resilience measures, \$65 billion in investments in clean energy, and additional funds for electric vehicle charging infrastructure.¹⁷

While the U.S. federal government is working through how best to regulate the use of those funds, you

Since signing our first contract with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the 1970s, ICMA has been working on environmental issues.

have time to think about the highest impact and most efficient way to deploy these resources at the local level. As we did with pandemic-related funding, ICMA is committed to advocating for you in gaining clarity and flexibility on the use of those funds. We will continue to research and share best practices, and, in that vein, we will continue to count on you to tell your stories, share your successes (and more importantly, failures) to help us all make the best decisions possible for future generations. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ <https://icma.org/documents/disaster-resilience-recovery-survey>

² <https://icma.org/topics/resilient-and-sustainable-communities>

³ <https://members.icma.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?webcode=sustaincommittee&>

⁴ <https://icma.org/documents/resilient-land-use-and-development-planning-dominican-republic-municipalities>

⁵ <https://icma.org/articles/article/climate-adaptation-program-final-report-published>

⁶ <https://icma.org/programs-and-projects/strengthening-urban-resilience-growth-equity-surge-project>

⁷ <https://icma.org/articles/article/encourage-solar-development-new-solmart-designation-criteria>

⁸ <https://icma.org/documents/bring-solar-your-community-themes-summaries-and-insights-27-case-studies>

⁹ <https://icma.org/programs-and-projects/national-brownfields-training-conference>

¹⁰ <https://icma.org/blog-posts/planning-our-green-infrastructure>

¹¹ <https://icma.org/documents/putting-smart-growth-work-rural-communities>

¹² <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/>

¹³ <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/impressive-climate-strategy-small-danish-municipality>

¹⁴ <https://zeroenergyproject.org/all-cities-with-climate-action-plans/>

¹⁵ <https://icma.org/blog-posts/equity-and-climate-action-planning>

¹⁶ <https://icma.org/blog-posts/sustainability-through-equity-lens-introduction>

¹⁷ <https://icma.org/articles/article/icma-and-big-7-commend-bipartisan-infrastructure-vote>

Form of Government *Challenges* on the Rise

ICMA continues to conduct research and provide guidance to communities across the globe in support of the council-manager system | **BY JASON GRANT**

ICMA is currently engaged with several cities across the country that are looking into ways in which they can improve the quality of life of their residents through transformational changes to their form of government.

The Northeastern Region has been particularly active this year with ICMA providing expert testimony to cities like East Hartford, Connecticut; Ithaca, New York; and Buffalo, New York, which all operate under a mayor-

council system. In the Southeast, Burnsville, North Carolina, recently adopted the council-manager form of government to replace the mayor-council form. We are also in dialogue with the county of Maui, Hawaii, which currently operates under a mayor-council system without a professional administrator. From Portland, Maine, which is considering the possibility of changing from council-manager to mayor-council, to Portland, Oregon, which is looking to transition from



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ICMA advocates for the council-manager form specifically because it is designed to make certain the people have an equal voice in both the establishment of policy and the operation of government.

their current commission form of government, ICMA serves as a leading voice on form of government and the value of professional management and administration of government.

The two most common factors in form of government challenges in all of these cities are an increased complexity of government administration or an increase in political partisanship at the local level. Whereas local government historically focused on issues agreed upon across any political party ideology—such as providing public utilities, quality parkland and open space, and equitable access to government programs

and services—today, issues such as policing, housing, and public health have been taken up in widely divergent ways and largely along political lines. This has moved some cities to consider the mayor-council form of government as a better alternative to ensure that a political candidate sharing their ideological views can be put in power to advance a specific policy agenda. Yet those looking to address the challenges in operating local government effectively tend to lean toward council-manager systems or the addition of a professional administrator within the mayor-council structure to make certain there is professional expertise necessary to manage the operation of government.

Ultimately, the people want their government to engage with the community, address their needs, and be transparent in their daily operation. They want easy and equitable access to the programs and services available to them, and they want their government to be trustworthy stewards of their tax dollars as they work to enhance the community. Certainly, any form of government has the potential to be effective toward these ends. To make certain government is efficient, effective, and equitable requires professional expertise devoted to the daily administration of government.

Likewise, it requires elected leaders who are engaged with the public to make certain that policy decisions truly reflect the will of the people. The council-manager form combines the powers of administration and legislation within the council (including the mayor) to ensure that the government delivers on the policies adopted by the elected body. And so, ICMA advocates for the council-manager form specifically because it is designed to make certain the people have an equal voice in both the establishment of policy and the operation of government.

As municipalities and counties look to address the variety of complex issues of our time, they will certainly look to the ways in which the form of government and the roles of public officials (both elected and appointed) can be changed. They will look to examples from other local governments to identify what works and what does not. ICMA continues to conduct research and provide guidance to communities across the globe to create effective change in local government. And we rely on members like you to share your expertise and knowledge as others begin to consider how best to shape their government to meet the needs of their community. If ICMA may be of assistance with any challenges or questions regarding form of government or professional management in your area, please reach out anytime! **PM**

A special “thank you” to our members and allies who were especially helpful in our discussions with the City Charter Commission of Portland, Oregon. Thank you for taking time out of your busy conference schedule to help inform the commission’s thoughts regarding form of government, professional management, and election processes. Our sincere appreciation to:

- Martha Bennett (Lake Oswego, OR)
- Jenny Haruyama (Beaverton, OR)
- Steve Lazenby (Portland State University)
- Doug Linkhart (National Civic League)
- Kim Nelson (UNC-Chapel Hill)
- Steve Powers (Salem, OR)
- Jim Svava (UNC-Chapel Hill)

Your testimony, experience, and insights were critical to the commission’s ongoing efforts to develop recommended changes to the Portland city charter.

Readers Respond to our September Issue on Equity and Inclusion

We appreciate hearing your feedback on *PM* magazine

Peter T. Burchard

*MPA adjunct instructor, Northern Illinois University
Former city manager, Naperville, Illinois
Former village manager, Hoffman Estates, Illinois
30 years of service to the profession*

Writing in the September issue of *Public Management* (“The Arc of the Moral Universe Bends when Ethical Public Managers Act,”) Dr. Kurt Thurmaier stated that ICMA members, numbering close to 12,000, “have lost confidence of the public” because we are not a diverse, inclusive, and equitable profession. The accusation is serious and begs for a response.

I’ve known and worked (e.g., adjunct faculty, on one of his selection committees, sat on the MPA Board of Advisors) with Dr. Thurmaier since 2009. Without offering any specific examples to justify his opinion, Thurmaier states that the most urgent problem facing the profession today is “the disturbing truth that the experiences of many people of color with their local governments have undermined their confidence in the professional administrators who run the place.” Drawing from his article, I will provide a few examples of why Dr. Thurmaier’s opinion is erroneous.

First, Dr. Thurmaier referenced a seminal work by Dr. Irene Rubin¹ to justify his sweeping belief that ICMA and its members remain tainted by the work of Progressives (circa 1890 to 1920s) who sought to depoliticize local government but primarily for their own elitist benefit. Dr. Rubin’s book focuses on historical budgetary trends in large cities including Boston, Chicago, New York, Baltimore, and San Francisco—all known as havens for political bias and non-equitable public service delivery. Thurmaier’s use of

Rubin’s book is a misapplication of her research. Modern day local government professionals were not the subject of Rubin’s book. City managers and their teams stand in contrast to Dr. Rubin’s research, not in correlation as Dr. Thurmaier insists.

Second, in his effort to place local government professionals in a bad light, Thurmaier connects municipal managers to redlining—a policy created by academics and FDR’s administration. Redlining, a highly racist government housing policy, was created by academics (e.g., Richard T. Ely) in collusion with officials in the federal government, banking, and real estate.² In the same sense, Thurmaier blames ICMA members for ongoing problems of homelessness and kids

drinking water served from lead pipes. Thurmaier’s rickety argument, created to dispossess local government managers of ethical credibility, means that historical facts still wane at some schools of public administration.

Third, in critiquing the ICMA Code of Ethics, Dr. Thurmaier offers this assessment: “The ICMA Code of Ethics

commandment to “refrain from all political activities which undermine public confidence in professional administrators” does not restrict the definition of “public” to white male professionals.” Dr. Thurmaier goes on to suggest that the ICMA Code of Ethics is inferior to the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) because ICMA’s Code of Ethics “omits ASPA’s commitment to social justice, equity, and inclusion.” In this regard, and in this specific tenant, ASPA is a paper tiger. The author offers no evidence that ASPA’s choice of words has bent the arc of the moral universe in a better direction than ICMA’s commitments. The author’s slap at “white male professionals,” many of whom he employees as professors



and adjunct instructors, is inconsistent with the expectations of the leader of a nationally recognized MPA program.

Fourth, Dr. Thurmaier states that the “profession needs to come to grips with its empirical history of very low levels of diversity and inclusion in the local government profession.” In his rush to brand local government professionals as racists, Thurmaier fails to mention a core principle taught in his and other MPA programs regarding the “politics-administrative dichotomy” as presented by President Woodrow Wilson and others. Critically, the empirical history of low levels of diversity and inclusion in government were championed by President Wilson’s goal of racially segregating the federal workforce. This culture of racism was embedded into federal policies before and after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and previously by the stench of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Wilson was an academic and a racist.

Thurmaier forgets an inescapable truth—managers don’t hire managers. Thurmaier’s opinion means he doesn’t follow the fundamentals of the council-manager form of government.

In summary, I’m proud to say that the local government professionals and teams I’ve known for over 40 years are leaders in engaging citizens, champions of diverse hiring, and providers of equitable services. With rare exception, these professionals have dedicated their careers to the core principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, long before it was fashionable for some professors to write about.

Local government professionals have made great strides in moving their organizations out from under the ugly and historical cloud of discriminatory practices engendered by many academics, the federal government, big-city politicians, and even religious institutions. Yes, the journey to improve continues but the commitment to these standards is the essence of ICMA and its members.

Professional managers are not reluctant to have difficult conversations about these matters. What they resist is having conversations that start with an assumption of their guilt.

ENDNOTES

¹ Rubin Irene S. *Class, Tax and Power: Municipal Budgeting in the United States*. CQ Press, 1998.

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As someone who is brand-new to municipal government, I was pleasantly surprised by the content of the September 2021 issue of *Public Management* magazine. From empathy to DEI to embracing queerness to increase inclusivity, this issue reflected from cover-to-cover the important conversations that need to be had and the values that we can and should be embracing to make our organizations and communities stronger. I wondered, stepping into this new realm, “Where will I fit? Is there a place for me? Will my ideas be too bold?”

After reading this issue I can confidently say that I’ve found my home in ICMA. I can already feel the camaraderie from a group of professionals across the country and across the globe that I have not yet met.

While I have studied local government and have worked closely with local government during my time as a BID and main street director, I can see that being intimately involved with local government on a day-to-day basis will allow me to grow professionally while also enabling me to contribute to the evolution of the profession.

Please keep leaning in to these difficult but important topics. It is essential for our profession and for our communities. Thank you.



We appreciate hearing from our readers. Submit your feedback to pm@icma.org. ICMA reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity, and to use them in all ICMA print and electronic media. We reserve the right to decline publication.



“When Are You Ever Going to Fix This?!”:

Flooding, Sustainability, Resiliency, and Equity



Climate change—better described as climate catastrophe—will have tremendous and growing implications for local government managers

Just as the summer rain let up, the emails and phone calls poured in. Once again, a late afternoon storm caused street, yard, and even structure flooding on South Berkeley Circle (also called “South Berkley Circle”) in the village of Silverton, Ohio. The residents on this otherwise tranquil street demanded a solution. The street’s stormwater system had failed once again.



BY ELISHEBA HAWKINS
AND TOM CARROLL



2018 Ohio River
Flood in Cincinnati
& Covington

One resident posted on Facebook, “When are you ever going to fix this?!?! This is the third or fourth time this has happened to this magnitude this year alone!”

Built right after World War II, South Berkeley Circle has two catch basins to feed a small, vitrified clay stormwater pipe. As the water travels south to other streets where it collects



Photo taken from 3825 South Berkeley Circle in the 1980s by Nancy Niemeyer, whose family has owned the house for more than 50 years.

even more runoff, the pipe becomes 18 inches, then a 24-inch pipe before dumping into a large gully. The village televised the entire length of this storm system. It is not broken or blocked. The pipes are just too small to handle large volumes of rain common today.

A long-time resident of South Berkeley provided a photo from the 1980s when the street flooded. At that time, this was so unheard of that it was a kind of neighborhood event. Kids put on bathing suits and waded into the water. One resident even launched a canoe into “Lake Berkeley” as a novelty. The street flood in the 1980s was a celebration of sorts.

But today, nobody is celebrating. Fifty-year storms are happening every other year now, and the residents are fed up.

This type of flooding is happening in many other communities, too. Infrastructure built decades ago can no longer keep up. ICMA members are now routinely dealing with extreme weather, and while the severe weather varies by region, these events are becoming far more frequent and much more severe.

Climate Catastrophe Is Here

Almost one out of every three Americans “live in a county that was hit by weather disaster” in the summer of 2021 alone. Almost two thirds of Americans “live in places that experienced a multi-day heat wave” in 2021.¹ Hurricanes predictably flood New Orleans every 15 years or so. German and Belgian cities unexpectedly flooded in 2021, and hundreds died. The American West and large parts of Greece endured Homeric wildfires this year. Storm surges flooded subways in New York City, and people drowned in illegal basement apartments submerged under flood waters. And this list could go on and on. We no longer have the time to entertain debates about whether our earth’s climate is changing and what is causing it.

Climate change—really better described as *climate catastrophe*—will have tremendous and growing implications for local government managers going forward. World and national leaders have not done enough to stop this catastrophe even though the evidence has been mounting for more

than a generation. The sixth Assessment Report from the International Panel on Climate Change, realized over the summer of 2021, lays out clearly that the window to act to limit global temperature rise is closing rapidly.²

How is it possible that so many leaders around the world have failed to act despite the science, despite the evidence in front of all of us? Social scientists will have to answer that question for us looking backward. But the more pressing question is this: what will it take for us as professional local government managers to act going forward? We can only answer that question for ourselves.

As local government leaders and managers, we can take actions within our organizations and communities even in the absence of adequate leadership at the state or province, national, or international levels of governance. Climate change and severe weather demand it. We as local government managers can and must take actions now to fill the leadership vacuum.

While some ICMA members and local government leaders have done a great deal of sustainability work already,



July 30, 2019 – backyard of
3823 South Berkeley



March 14, 2019 – from
3825 North Berkeley



July 30, 2019 – in front of
3823 South Berkeley

many of our organizations and communities have not yet begun to combat climate catastrophe and prepare for its consequences.

We propose three specific areas in which ICMA members can and should take independent action starting in 2022. These include:

- Building resiliency and hardening our community's infrastructure.
- Decarbonizing our organizations and communities.
- Solving sustainability and equity together.

Broader national and international policy discussions will continue, but local government leadership through action is vital in 2022.

Building Resiliency

In our plans to reconstruct South Berkeley Circle in 2022, the village will add oversized storm pipes under the curb line, essentially creating additional stormwater storage under the street. This will be engineered in such a way so as not to create additional downstream pressure

on the system as it proceeds toward other streets. We don't want to simply move the flooding problem from South Berkeley Circle to another street downstream.

This type of infrastructure upgrade is necessary for many parts of our built environment. ICMA members will have to work with civil engineers to rebuild existing infrastructure to prepare it for more severe weather. We will need to develop capital plans and financing structures that go well beyond five years for this type of infrastructure hardening.

And we will need emergency plans ready to go for wildfires, droughts, flash flooding, heat

waves, and high wind events such as hurricanes and tropical storms. Different types of infrastructure hardening will be necessary depending on the type of severe weather your community is likely to experience.

Severe weather events hundreds of miles away will cause mass evacuations, so we need to develop gameplans for how our communities will accommodate hundreds or even thousands of refugees. Evacuations might be short in duration, but they might also lead to lasting dislocations, even migration. Housing, feeding, educating, and employing weather refugees may seem

unlikely to many of us today, but this will happen in the years ahead in ways that we cannot foresee now.

The sooner we start rebuilding our infrastructure for more severe weather and planning for major disruptions to populations, the better off our communities will be. How much of your organization's 2022 budget is dedicated to this growing challenge?

Decarbonize

All municipal procurement decisions going forward need to be put through the lens of carbon impact.

Every vehicle purchase needs to be examined to find workable

lower carbon or electric alternatives. The automotive industry has a lot of work to do to accelerate electrification, but local governments can spur demand by insisting on green fleet options. Do not just buy a new gas-powered police cruiser. Buy a hybrid or even consider a Tesla for patrol cars. Staff cars can be 100-percent electric. Ford is coming out with an electric F-150 in 2022.

And develop a plan to replace all of your vehicles and rolling stock with electric equipment in the next decade or less. Delay replacing a car or truck if there is not a hybrid or electric option, but one is on the horizon in the next few years. By 2030, a gasoline car purchased in 2022 is going to be a dinosaur and a liability, so don't buy anymore from the earliest moment you can.

Similarly, as you build new buildings or replace systems in existing facilities, invest in energy efficiency. Put solar panels on public building rooftops. These investments have an acceptable rate of return even giving zero weight to pollution prevention benefits, and will prove popular with more residents than you think. If upfront funding is a problem, cities and counties can explore power purchase agreements to accelerate solar deployment.

And use your municipality's buying power to procure green energy. If your state allows you to select your energy supplier, only buy from a 100-percent renewable source. This ensures a market for renewable energy suppliers and will spur companies to build more renewable power generation.

Local governments have to spend money on fleets, buildings, and electricity supply. We must leverage these

expenditures strategically to reduce our carbon footprints and accelerate renewable energy production. How much of your organization's 2022 budget is dedicated to this lower carbon? How much of it continues to spend public funds on carbon-emitting fuels?

Equity and Sustainability

Conversations around sustainability and equity have forced communities to focus on how our actions today can improve the social and environmental climate of tomorrow. However, these conversations often exclude low-income communities and community members that are just trying to get through the day fed and housed? In order to truly impact sustainability and equity, local governments must shape policies that simultaneously address these issues sooner rather than later.

Communities with lower-income residents or a large portion of rental properties often discover that sustainability and equity are set in opposition to each other, making us select between being green or fair. There are no overnight solutions to this issue. In 2018, the village of Silverton devised an energy plan that addressed the need for a 100-percent renewable energy source by implementing an aggregate energy program. Under this plan, homeowners and renters alike benefit from lower energy bills and help to reduce the village's carbon footprint. This is equity and sustainability in action.

However, we can and should do much more. The window of opportunity will pass us by if we do not act quickly. As leaders we must find ways to better engage our communities in the planning process. As new



development plans arise, they should be "green" and have equity and sustainability at the forefront.

Urban studies theorist Richard Florida notes "more than 60 percent of the urban infrastructure that humans will need in the next half-century is yet to be built."³ This is more relevant in parts of the world that are rapidly developing, but a great deal of already-built urban infrastructure will have to be rebuilt, too. Since we have to build and rebuild so much, we have the chance to make sure it is both sustainable and equitable. What are your community's 2022 plans to simultaneously invest in sustainability and racial equity?

Imagine the Next Generation's Judgment

ICMA has correctly called on members to cultivate the next generation of leaders for many years. Graduate students just entering city management today will spend the rest of their careers facing climate catastrophe challenges and grappling with racial and social equity.

When this next generation approaches their own retirement and reflects back on their mentors—those of us in current local government leadership positions—don't we want them to be able to say that we did our part to prepare for climate change? We think all of us will want to be able to answer "yes."

How will the graduate students of today who will be tomorrow's city managers remember us? Did we shift our organizations and communities in the 2020s or did we ignore science and the Weather Channel, and continue to buy gasoline and diesel? Or did we start leading where we can, in our own organizations and communities? If you can't already answer it in the affirmative, let 2022 be the year you start. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

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In Arizona, Collaboration Averts Water Disaster

Working hard in the **Colorado River Basin**
to avoid a water crisis through
planning, innovation, and collaboration

BY TED
COOKE



I was asked to contribute an article about approaches to managing disaster response in the water management sector. I want to first acknowledge that we, my water management colleagues across the west and myself, work in a dynamic and challenging environment. We grapple with climate impacts to our water resources, plus regulatory and financial constraints. We serve vital and vibrant communities with a broad spectrum of resources,

ranging from small Native American communities to huge urban centers. We serve these communities a critical resource: a reliable water supply to meet the health, safety, and economic needs for more than 40 million people in the Colorado River Basin. I want to be clear—the work that I and the other water management professionals involved in Colorado River issues do on a daily basis is not disaster management. My colleagues and I strive to

As we're finishing the third worst year of hydrology in recorded history, the first-ever Colorado River shortage is on our doorstep.

avoid a water crisis through planning, innovation, and collaboration.

Throughout the past number of months, you may have seen headlines in the media citing the “West’s water woes” as a crisis. To me, a crisis is in large part defined by the inability or failure to adequately plan or adapt. I often use personal health as an example. It’s one thing to opt for a minimally invasive elective procedure in order to avoid a possible emergency





surgery in the future. It doesn't mean the pain of surgery will be any less severe, but at least you have time to plan for it.

Conversely, the drought and Colorado River water issues we're experiencing in the West—especially here in Arizona—have been unfolding since the early 2000s. We have had time to prepare and respond, implementing proactive measures to build resiliency in our system so we can continue to provide water for the health, safety, and economic benefit of the communities we serve.

And these issues are ever-changing. Even from last May when I agreed to contribute an article to now when you are

reading it, circumstances related to the Colorado River are quite different, and I would expect that level of change to continue into the future. This is why adaptability and flexibility—the very definition of resiliency—are vital to the future of water management in the West.

The Colorado River: Serving 40 Million People

To help put our situation into context, here is some key information you need to understand about the source of our water. The Colorado River serves seven states, 29 tribal nations, and the Republic of Mexico. It supplies water to 40 million people, irrigates approximately five

**We expect a
new normal, with
climate change
and drought
playing a role in
how we manage
our systems and
supplies.**

million acres of farmland, and provides millions of megawatt hours of clean hydropower annually. This hard-working river also supports essential environmental resources, including national parks, wildlife refuges, and critical habitats.

Notably, the Colorado River system includes an enormous amount of water storage capacity in Lake Powell and Lake Mead—the nation's two largest man-made reservoirs. Lake Powell serves the Upper Colorado River Basin, which is Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming; and Lake Mead serves the Lower Colorado River Basin, which is Arizona, California, Nevada,



and by treaty, the Republic of Mexico.

In Arizona, water is used by some of the most senior water rights holders in the system along the state's western border, and the Central Arizona Project (CAP) canal carries water 336 miles across the desert into the central and southern regions where 80 percent of the state's population lives. The water that CAP delivers is then used by cities, industry, agricultural districts, and tribal communities.

Today we find ourselves at a critical point in the Colorado River's history. We are experiencing two decades of drought and increasing demands for its supply.

The projections for snowpack and runoff in the Colorado River system have been on the decline, and the reservoirs are getting progressively lower. We have less water to work with than we did before. As a result, in August, the U.S. secretary of the interior declared the first-ever shortage on the Colorado River to start on January 1, 2022. Let me explain how we got here.

Decades of Drought: Treading Water above the Shortage Line

The current drought we're experiencing began around 2000. Recognizing the change in hydrology, parties from throughout the Colorado River Basin and the federal government (and later, Mexico) came together to develop the "Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead," what is now referred to as the 2007 Guidelines. These guidelines detail how the system would be operated in a way that would help protect it from shortage over the next 20 years. Procedures were put in place that require the two major reservoirs be managed conjunctively. Tiers of shortage reductions were established based on the elevation, as measure of water storage, in Lake Mead, requiring water uses to be curtailed as the water level drops in the lake. The concept is relatively simple: as supplies dwindle, uses are reduced.

But as the drought persisted, we realized that shortages under the 2007 Guidelines might be triggered earlier than originally

anticipated and might not be sufficient to protect the system to the degree expected.

In the 1900s, droughts were punctuated by high inflow years to replenish storage in the reservoirs. This drought is different because of the sustained low inflows to reservoirs over two decades. In addition, water users in the three Lower Basin states (Arizona, California, and Nevada) have expanded into their full contract amounts over the same period of time. Water managers began to acknowledge that a structural deficit existed, meaning there is an imbalance between how much water is available for use in the system and how much has been allocated, even without a drought. The drought had amplified the impacts of the imbalance by further reducing the amount of water available.

That was a critical point in time for water users. We openly recognized that the Colorado River was heading for a crisis absent innovation, additional planning, and a spirit of cooperation.

So, our collective mission was to create new agreements and projects to reduce water uses in order to prop up the level of Lake Mead.

Easier said than done, but we came together in 2014, and took collective action along with our partners—the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Arizona Department of Water Resources, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, Denver Water, and other agencies in the Colorado River Basin. We jointly initiated and funded large-scale, voluntary water conservation efforts

throughout the Colorado River Basin. These steps were innovative and helped protect the Colorado River system by giving us new water conservation programs and tools.

While there are many complex mechanisms and technical terms involved, the simple explanation is that the Central Arizona Project and its Arizona and interstate partners provided incentives and tools for leaving water behind in Lake Mead rather than taking our full allocations. By working together in Arizona and throughout the Basin, we helped to stabilize the lake level, creating a more resilient system and buying us time to develop better protections against declining reservoirs. Collaboration kept us treading water to avoid shortage for as long as we did.

Drought Contingency Plan: Planning for the Specifics of Shortage

During these years we could see that despite our best efforts the drought continued unabated, the decline in the lake level was accelerating, and voluntary actions would not be enough. It was time to do more, and that led to the development of the Drought Contingency Plan (DCP).

The DCP, passed by Congress in 2019, was an overlay to the 2007 Guidelines and further defined the process for how shortages on the Colorado River works. It's actually made up of several agreements:

- One set of agreements for the Lower Basin defining new levels of cuts and contributions to protect the elevation of Lake Mead. These agreements



increased the elevation at which reductions would occur and increased the amount of the reductions for the tiers established in the 2007 Guidelines. In addition, the DCP included an adaptive measure called the 1030' Consultation that requires a new collaboration when Lake Mead's projected elevation hits a new low. That provision has recently been triggered, to be developed and implemented concurrently with the established tier reductions.

- Another set of agreements for the Upper Basin concentrating on how to operate the infrastructure, including demand management and augmentation.

- An overarching agreement that ties them all together.
- A companion agreement with Mexico.

Within Arizona, specifically, I can tell you that this effort—jointly led by the Central Arizona Project and the Arizona Department of Water Resources—represented the best of Arizona water management, collaboration, cooperation, and innovation. Arizona's DCP Steering Committee included about 40 representatives of tribes, cities, agriculture, developers, environmental organizations, and elected officials, working together in a transparent environment. Our meetings were open to the public and livestreamed, and the presentations and videos reside on our website to this day.

Arizona's Drought Contingency Implementation Plan put in place agreements that resulted in collective action by our state's water users to share resources and mitigate the impacts of shortage within Arizona. Some committed to leave extra water in Lake Mead to reduce future risks, while others shared water with those most severely impacted by shortage.

The DCP is a remarkable achievement demonstrating how parties—including the broad water community of water users, the federal government, states, tribal communities, and Mexico—can come together to develop a collaborative solution.

Shortage Is Now Here, But We're Prepared

The rationale of these efforts was to keep us out

of a Colorado River crisis. And it worked. Whereas we thought we might have been in shortage as early as 2016, we managed to push it out to 2022. As we're finishing the third worst year of hydrology in recorded history, the first-ever Colorado River shortage is on our doorstep.

While the actions to reduce water uses are painful, they were and are necessary to manage the available supply to meet our core mission of delivering water to meet health and safety needs and support the economic vitality of our communities. Managing reductions through proactive engagement is a success, not a crisis.

Throughout this time, we have been building regional relationships, resiliency, and capacity, so we were

able to adapt in real time to circumstances as they unfolded. This involved trust, participation, and engagement so that by the time shortage was declared, the implementation—while still painful—is expected to be relatively seamless.

What is the plan now that we're officially heading into this shortage? Arizona will face a reduction of 512,000 acre-feet to our Colorado River supply, borne almost entirely by the CAP system. The Tier 1 reductions constitute about 30 percent of CAP's normal supply; about 18 percent of Arizona's Colorado River supply; and just under 8 percent of Arizona's total water use. The result will be less available Colorado River water for central Arizona agricultural users. Water supplies for cities, tribes, and industrial users will not be affected in 2022. Thanks to the efforts of the DCP, agriculture will have some water at a point when they otherwise would have had none.

Learning from the Past, Looking toward the Future

As I mentioned early on, we expect a new normal, with climate change and drought playing a role in how we manage our systems and supplies. We are seeing projections that our major Colorado River reservoirs may dip to record low levels now and potentially even lower over the next five years, so we may experience deeper levels of shortage and stay there. Fortunately, the DCP is adaptive to respond to worsening conditions. We intentionally provided requirements to identify

While the actions to reduce water uses are painful, they are necessary to manage the available supply to meet our core mission of delivering water to meet health and safety needs and support the economic vitality of our communities.

and implement additional collective actions as needs dictate.

And, as we've done all along, we're in a continual state of planning, preparation, and collaboration. Shortage is a standing topic on our Central Arizona Project Board of Directors agenda. We've held workshops with our stakeholders. We've talked with virtually every local, regional, and national media outlet. We've given countless presentations to community groups, with many more to come.

We are deploying all that we've learned along the way and keeping the DCP process intact as we work on the next major step. Before the end of 2026, the U.S. secretary of the interior will develop new guidelines for the long-term management of the

Colorado River system. The Colorado River Basin states will play a leading role in the process to develop those new guidelines. The process will take many years and require multiple levels of discussion, negotiation, and coordination within Arizona and among the basin states.

Within Arizona, the DCP implementation worked so well that we're using the same strategy—reconvening the DCP stakeholders as the Arizona Reconsultation Committee. We will incorporate our lessons learned as we build a new plan that is adaptable to an uncertain future.

Planning for an Uncertain Future: Our Path Forward

Our path forward will continue to consider an array of possible future conditions and adaptive cooperative measures by all stakeholders. We will continue to leverage innovation and planning so that we are managing our future rather than responding to crisis or disaster. To play on the health analogy again, the "solution" might have been foreseen, but now it will involve a deeper commitment to healthy habits and in some cases significant lifestyle changes.

We will come together locally and regionally to do more. We are eager to develop new partnerships and deepen existing ones. The keys will be resilience—providing flexibility and adaptive responses to a broad range of possible future risks.

In the short term, while we are dealing with reductions to our Colorado River supply, we must continue to focus on conservation.

Concurrently, we must work on supplementing our supplies through reuse and augmentation. In the foreseeable future, that will mean intrastate and interstate partnerships to develop new supplies that might include recycled water and investing in water-saving technologies. And in the long-term, it may even mean broader solutions like ocean desalination and importation.

But most of all, the path to the future will be built on thoughtful collaboration. I, for one, remain optimistic because Colorado River water users have a long, successful history of building consensus around shared solutions to our collective challenges. Combined with the vast infrastructure that is a result of billions of dollars of careful investment to protect our water supplies for the communities we serve—including cities, tribes, irrigated agriculture, and the environment—it's clear to me we have the tools and resources we need to protect our shared water future.

We will work through this together, as Arizona and water interests from throughout the Colorado River Basin have done time and time again, standing on our history of cooperation and conservation. On January 1, 2022, we'll officially be in a Tier 1 shortage, but we'll enter the year feeling prepared to meet this challenge and the challenges that lie ahead. **PM**

TED COOKE is general manager of the Central Arizona Project.





How To Leverage Data to Balance Urgent Infrastructure Needs with Sustainability

BY ASHAY PRABHU

Strategic asset management is the solution to ensuring data is at the center of all infrastructure maintenance and futureproofing decisions

With the passing of President Biden's infrastructure bill and \$1.2 trillion in stimulus funds incoming over the next five years, governments are faced with the challenge of utilizing these incoming funds in the most effective and impactful way possible to fulfill their communities' urgent needs while still preparing for the future.

Two significant infrastructure priorities—which will likely be found on most municipalities' agendas—include incorporating sustainability-focused initiatives and addressing degrading infrastructure. Striking this balance will present a precarious challenge for local governments,



AMERICA'S AGING INFRASTRUCTURE IS BEING PUT TO THE TEST WITH INCREASINGLY SEVERE WEATHER PATTERNS AND NATURAL DISASTERS.

with both initiatives requiring strategic planning and careful spending.

Further intensifying this challenge is the fact that there is a notable generational divide in America around what to prioritize. According to a recent two-part study, 47 percent of Generation Z—which makes up 27 percent of the U.S. population and is the most socially minded, environmentally aware generation yet—want their local governments to prioritize sustainability.¹ On the other hand, 59 percent of baby boomers want to prioritize

cost-effective upgrades to infrastructure like improving road conditions. In any case, the state of America's infrastructure is a C- per the ASCE report card and that, in itself, is a cause for concern.²

American Perception

While the study revealed a difference in opinion by generation, it also found that people of all ages have their doubts about their local government's ability to prioritize infrastructure upgrades. The research displayed that nearly half of the respondents are concerned

about the safety and conditions of school buildings and don't believe their schools are in a better condition, nor safer, than five years ago. Additionally, more than half of Americans don't feel confident that their local governments will make positive and impactful changes to their communities with the incoming stimulus funds. This added challenge of needing to instill community trust in funding decisions heightens the stakes for government leaders. Building trust requires evidence and proof that those we rely on with our assets have the future under control.

Furthermore, 2020 forced leaders to rethink their sustainability strategies after witnessing several organizations save significantly on their electric, natural gas, and water costs by being able to shut down their facilities quickly and strategically. A study from Johnson Controls found that reduced occupancy alone isn't enough to yield significant savings.³ Only 10 percent of participants experienced increased savings of 20 percent or higher from reduced occupancy. Utilizing data to inform preparations will enable more significant energy savings and sustainability efforts across a multitude of scenarios.

Additionally, America's aging infrastructure is being put to the test with increasingly severe weather patterns and natural disasters. This year alone we've experienced the hottest June on





record, back-to-back hurricanes, and dangerous flooding. These severe weather events have cost the United States more than \$1 billion each, according to the NOAA.⁴ This infrastructure bill is the country's largest climate-focused piece of legislation thus far, dedicating \$154 billion to climate programs, including efforts to create more resilient roads, subways, and bridges that can resist weather extremes brought on by the changing climate. The time is ripe for government leaders to innovate and create sustainable change.

Harnessing Asset Data

To address these challenges head on, government leaders will need to turn to data analytics to inform their planning and decision making. Harnessing new and existing data to inform decisions will allow local governments to deliver on notable infrastructure priorities, like maintaining the significant energy savings seen nationwide during the pandemic, as well as addressing urgent infrastructure needs. Having a solid grasp on building operations and asset lifecycles will allow for smarter investments and innovation overall.

For example, if a city plans to implement a new long-term sewer model and land use plan with stimulus funds, it will be important to leverage data to inform what-if funding scenarios with the current and future state of the assets. This will provide visualizations of potential funding's impact on asset conditions, as well as the financial and functionality effects of immediate or prolonged maintenance. This will allow the city to prioritize projects based on location or urgency in order keep the assets at acceptable grade levels. By tackling these city projects from this perspective, governments will see more success with infrastructure projects and a lower overall investment, allowing them to allocate much-needed funds elsewhere, which leads to lower taxpayer burden and increased trust.

The concept of harnessing data to leverage informed decision making is where strategic asset management, or SAM, enters. SAM is the solution to ensuring data is at the center of all infrastructure maintenance and futureproofing decisions. It builds upon current infrastructure planning and provides a view of asset conditions and corresponding

service levels. With SAM, local governments can develop proof points before starting a project and prepare for stimulus funds with data-driven insights, ensuring funds will be distributed to where they will have the most impact. The good news is that it's not rocket science, and it simply starts with collecting data.

SAM in Practice

One notable example of how a city harnessed SAM to inform important infrastructure upgrades is the city of Topeka, Kansas. The city utilized data to maximize the impact and efficiency of a public works project on road infrastructure—a project that's often top-of-mind for residents. In fact, the study on Americans' perception of infrastructure found that most respondents believe the quality of their roads has declined in the last five years, but regardless of how necessary the upgrades may be, the same respondents don't want to pay more in taxes to address these issues. When the city informed its public works department that the half-cent retail sales tax used to fund pavement renewal projects was up for reevaluation, the department needed to ensure it was leveraging data to inform next steps. On top of this, the department had to prove it could increase the quality of roads by improving its Pavement Condition Index (PCI) from 55 to 60 within the next 10 years, as well as demonstrate what PCI could be reached with an annual budget increase to \$31 million.

The Public Works department leaned into data modeling. Leveraging data around existing pavement inventory and conditions, the

department was able to model different funding scenarios and potential PCI ratings over the next 15 years. As a result, they found that a \$31 million budget increase would only result in a three-point overall condition improvement, falling short of the goal. Considering an alternative approach and using different treatments, they were able to simulate that their current funding of \$24 million spent differently to past practice would yield the desired PCI results. With this in mind, city leaders ultimately decided to focus on improving treatment strategies within the same budget constraints, as opposed to increasing the budget by \$7 million. SAM not only allowed the city of Topeka to ensure cost-saving, data-driven strategy was driving its infrastructure upgrades, but also enabled it to increase transparency. The team was able to develop a data map to quickly and impactfully communicate the simulation and its results to constituents, strengthening their partnership and trust.

Data should also be at the center of energy management and sustainability efforts in public schools. For example, Des Moines Public Schools—the largest public school district in Iowa—started with tracking energy across its 70 buildings. These efforts allowed the school district to analyze monthly data and determine where and how they could save energy and measure progress. By monitoring areas of high-energy usage and making necessary adjustments, the school district saved more than \$20.2 million and prevented 40,600 metric tons of CO₂ emissions since 2008.

As evidenced, with data at the helm, government leaders have an opportunity to secure

TWO SIGNIFICANT INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES: incorporating sustainability-focused initiatives and addressing degrading infrastructure.

important stimulus funds—funding that will ultimately help drive sustainable change and urgent infrastructure efforts in their communities. So where should local government agencies start when it comes to creating a data-driven approach to obtaining additional stimulus funding?

1. Start with Allocation

Data: Create data points that demonstrate where stimulus funds will be applied to tell a data story to allow governments to analyze where funds will be most impactful in both the near term and long term.

2. Implement Strategic

Asset Management: SAM is proven to stretch the dollar

further when it comes to infrastructure upgrades. By tracking existing data around the current and future state of assets, governments can make better decisions around how and when to address the concerns and model different funding scenarios, and it does not have to be an expensive data exercise.

3. **Share the Impact:** SAM allows for government leaders to provide clear data-driven scenarios as proof points around how stimulus funding will improve their communities.

4. **Plan for the Future:** When governments leverage SAM, they're not only addressing the urgent

concerns, but are laying the foundation for more accurate and predictive analytics to drive decisions well into the future.

Building a Sustainable Future

SAM is a journey. One that can help secure a sustainable future for our communities. The government leaders who are tasked with future-proofing our communities can address this challenge by utilizing their data sets to implement long-lasting change, instead of relying on quick-fix solutions that will prove more expensive in the long-run. With a solid SAM plan in place ahead of the incoming \$1.2 trillion stimulus

package, governments can increase the impact of stimulus funding and effectively address their communities' infrastructure and sustainability needs, all while saving valuable time and money. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ <https://www.dudesolutions.com/news/study-americans-lack-confidence-infrastructure-stimulus-spending>

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ASHAY PRABHU

is vice president of strategic asset management at Dude Solutions.



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Utility-Scale SOLAR in a Changing Climate

How ICMA's new guidebook can help you plan for the future

BY GABRIEL RUSK





As the impacts of climate change are increasingly felt by communities, a growing number of state and local governments have taken direct action by prioritizing the transition from fossil fuels to clean-energy consumption at the local level.

As of 2020, more than 200 cities have pledged to achieve 100-percent clean electricity—also known as “net zero emissions”—by 2050 or sooner.¹ Utility-scale or large-scale solar is an important tool for many local governments in meeting these ambitious goals. Utility-scale solar is a fast-growing industry that now produces electricity at prices competitive with all other forms of energy generation.² Given that local jurisdictions play an instrumental role in nearly every phase of solar development, local officials need training and resources to ensure that they maximize the benefits of large-scale solar while minimizing potential tradeoffs. ICMA’s new program *Solar@Scale* provides just that.

Solar@Scale is a collaborative effort between ICMA and the American Planning Association that offers resources designed to help local

government officials familiarize themselves not only with the landscape of the large-scale solar market, but also the many tools and strategies available to them. The recently released guidebook, *Solar@Scale: A Local Government Guidebook for Improving Large-Scale Solar Development Outcomes*, is informed by both private and public stakeholder input and designed for local government practitioners that perhaps

A utility-scale solar facility connects to the electricity transmission network. Most utility-scale solar energy systems require more than 20 acres and have rated capacities of more than five megawatts. “Solar farm” is a common but outdated term for utility-scale solar facilities.



lack the resources or capacity to hire renewable experts of their own. The guidebook outlines scalable procedures and tools for planners and local officials to take advantage of opportunities in context-sensitive ways. It addresses topics such as increasing demand, community planning, reducing land-use conflicts, and much more. Included here are some examples of what you can find in the guidebook and how these practices can work for your community.

Utility Solar Is Cost-Competitive, and Local Governments Can Enhance the Competition
Understanding the landscape of the solar market is essential to

local government practitioners interested in utility-scale solar. The solar industry has experienced tremendous growth over the past several years. Between 2014 and 2020, the estimated total installed capacity of grid-connected photovoltaic (PV) and concentrating solar power (CSP) systems went from 17.6 gigawatts (GW) to 75.6 GW.³ During that same period, the total number of grid-connected solar facilities with capacities of at least one megawatt (capable of powering an average of 190 homes⁴) grew from 1,249 to 4,538.⁵

The rapid expansion of solar is partially a result of declining costs. From 2010 to 2019, median lifetime costs of PV systems with capacities of at



least five megawatts (MW) have decreased by 84 percent.⁶ Today, utility-scale solar produces electricity at prices competitive with all other forms of energy generation.⁷ Competitive production has been made possible by several factors, including advances in panel efficiency and technology, as well as an increase in manufacturing efficiency. However, another contributing factor is the reduction of soft costs, such as permitting, inspection, and interconnection; sales tax; engineering, procurement, and construction; and developer overhead and profit. Costs to cover these activities have remained at about the same proportion of total costs, between 32 to 44 percent, for utility-scale PV.⁸

Local governments that are new to solar or are still developing processes for the first time can have high soft costs due to inefficiencies in their permitting, inspection,

and interconnection practices. Unfortunately, these inefficiencies can reduce demand. ICMA's *Solar@Scale Guidebook* outlines a number of paths to demonstrate how local government officials can improve local demand for large-scale solar development through the policy development and implementation. Strategies include the following:

Implementing zoning updates that explicitly permit large scale solar development in one or more areas in the jurisdiction.

- Removes unintentional barriers to solar development, and establishes incentives for projects that align with community goals.
- *Example:* Sweden, New York, offers relaxed development standards to “solar farms” that provide specific community benefits.⁹

Process improvements that optimize discretionary land-use reviews for large-scale solar projects.

- Can increase demand by shortening the review timeline.
- *Example:* Linn County, Iowa, provides an informational webpage about the application and review process for large-scale solar.¹⁰

Development partnerships that bring large-scale solar energy systems to local, government-owned sites.

- Increase demand by providing pre-approved locations for projects and potentially customers for the power produced.

Technical or financial assistance programs for solar developers.

- Can increase demand for projects that meet program and location criteria.

- *Example:* The city of Orlando, Florida, serves as an anchor subscriber by supporting a shared solar project through subscriptions to municipal buildings.¹¹

These activities can help reduce soft costs and stimulate demand. Should renewable energy incentives and low costs continue, both the demand for and growth of utility-scale solar is expected to increase at such a rate that the U.S. Energy Information Administration projects installed capacity of larger PV systems could grow to 390.4 GW by 2030.¹² To effectively handle these changes, local government officials and developers will need to work together to strategically disperse this demand. One way to prepare for this is through establishing effective community planning processes.

Community Planning

An effective community planning process can help identify, reduce, and eliminate potential barriers to utility-scale solar development. The *Solar@Scale Guidebook* outlines what steps local jurisdictions can take to equitably develop or update a community plan. These steps include establishing a shared vision and high-level goals for solar development that reflect the shared values and priorities of the community. These may include topics such as clean energy transitions, low-impact siting and design, equitable development, and community resilience. Examples include Stearns County, Minnesota's 2040 Comprehensive Plan that not only encourages solar development throughout the county, but also recommends siting solar projects in ways that reduce land-use conflicts and require habitat friendly ground cover on project sites.¹³

Reducing Land-Use Conflicts

Although the substantial growth of large-scale solar has a number of positive impacts, it is not without tradeoffs. Large-scale solar projects are less land intensive than other forms of new development, but the United States will likely need to devote an additional 1.55 million acres to solar development between 2020 and 2030 to meet the projected demand.¹⁴

While the American Southwest has the best solar resource potential, concentrating solar development there or in any one region would not be cost effective or reliable. Instead, large-scale solar projects are ideally located on the same grid as end users to maximize transmission and distribution

efficiency. Solar developers will therefore need to disperse solar installations (and consequently, the demand for space) where demand for solar exists across the country. This means that the expansion of solar will likely affect every community in some way.

As noted in the *Solar@Scale Guidebook*, there are steps that local governments can take to mitigate the impact of land use. For instance, taking advantage of previously developed sites such as brownfields can help meet some of this demand. If grid interconnection is feasible, large-scale solar development can co-locate on space occupied by other land-intensive uses, such as agriculture, transit corridors, and landfills.¹⁵ Local concerns about losing agricultural land or important ecosystems to solar development are valid. However, these concerns can be mitigated through open community engagement, strategic land analysis, and other ways. In fact, the use of mapping software in the San Joaquin Valley identified over 470,000 acres of non-controversial land, demonstrating how communities can collaborate across stakeholders to reduce land contention for PV development.¹⁶

Conclusion

Local governments play a pivotal role in the development of utility scale solar. Based on current projections, the industry's growth will likely have an impact on a significant number of local governments across the United States. To ensure policy makers are not caught unprepared and that communities can maximize the

potential benefits from these new developments, it is vital that local government officials have the strategies and tools they need available to them. The *Solar@Scale Guidebook* is available for download at <https://icma.org/documents/solarscale-guidebook> at no cost.

Additionally, over the next few years, the *Solar@Scale* team aims to train over 1,000 local government officials to take advantage of opportunities in context-sensitive ways that simplify large-scale solar development on private sites. To learn more about these opportunities, we invite you to visit the links in the Resources box. **PM**

ENDNOTES

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the United States." Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

¹⁶ University of California, UC Berkeley School of Law, et al, "A Path Forward; Identifying Least-Conflict Solar PV Development in California's San Joaquin Valley," May 2016. <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/A-PATH-FORWARD-May-2016.pdf>

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Resources

For updates on the *Solar@Scale Guidebook*, related webinars, and general information about the *Solar@Scale* program, sign up at <https://bit.ly/3mY3XqO>.

To attend ICMA's upcoming *Solar@Scale Virtual Workshop*, sign up at <https://bit.ly/3DoKup5>.

For additional information about *Solar@Scale*, contact Scott Annis at sannis@icma.org or Gabriel Rusk at grusk@icma.org.

GABRIEL RUSK

assists in managing the U.S. Department of Energy-funded program *Solar@Scale*, as well as the SolSmart designation program at ICMA. Gabriel holds a master's degree in Public Interest and Private Good from Xavier University. (grusk@icma.org)





Floodplain Management

FOR THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADER

BY CLAIRE JUBB

Critical changes to the National Flood Insurance Program are on the horizon

In your role as a local government leader, floodplain management probably does not bubble to the top of your list of priorities very often. However, it may be something that you want to be more aware of, especially in the coming months, as there are significant changes on the horizon that will impact your community.



Traditionally, we tried to control water by building structures (levies, canals, dams, etc.) However, water is a powerful force and can overwhelm those structures and cause flooding. Gilbert White suggested that instead of focusing on controlling water, we should encourage construction of more resilient buildings in less hazardous places and incentivize them by providing a National Flood Insurance Program to insure their properties.

The NFIP is essentially an agreement between a participating community and FEMA where the community will agree to enforce regulations to minimize risk to any development in the areas most vulnerable to flooding,

If your community is an NFIP community, these changes will certainly impact your residents.



and in return, FEMA will define those areas on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) and provide flood insurance to those people living in these high-risk areas.

In communities that participate in the NFIP and where FEMA has come in and mapped areas of high risk of flooding (known as Special Flood Hazard Areas), the purchase of flood

insurance through the NFIP is a mandatory requirement of having a federally backed mortgage.

At the time of the NFIP's creation (in the early 1970s), there was very limited availability of private flood insurance, and it came at an extremely high cost. Over the years, more and more private flood insurance providers have emerged, and flood insurance is becoming more affordable, but there are still close to five million structures insured by the NFIP (over 1.7 million in the state of Florida alone).

Although there have been many changes to the NFIP over time, the methodology of assessing premiums has not changed. It is based on the following:



Firstly, though, what is floodplain management and the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)? Back in the early 1970s, a visionary named Gilbert F. White (commonly referred to as the father of modern-day floodplain management) stated that “floods are acts of God; flood losses are acts of man.” What he meant was that flooding events will always occur, but how we choose to control water in our built environment can exacerbate flooding and increase the risk of loss of both life and property.



- Flood zone.
- Time of construction relative to the designation of the flood zone.
- Type of construction (basement, elevated, etc.)
- Height above the flood zone elevation that the structure is built.

Although this worked for some time, the ever-changing nature and complexity of risk analysis, coupled with very large catastrophic losses (beginning with Hurricane Katrina in 2005), created a program that was fiscally unviable, overly simplified, and inequitable.

Efforts to correct this issue began in 2012 with the Biggert-Waters Act (BW-12). Although well intended, this had severe unintended consequences that saw flood insurance premiums rise, in some cases, by thousands of dollars. There was immediate outcry, and it was quickly followed in 2014 by the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act (HFIAA). HFIAA corrected many of the unintended consequences of BW-12, but did not address the fundamental issues surrounding risk and premium assessment.

To attempt to correct this, FEMA has been overhauling the way in which they assess risk and the way in which premiums are assessed. They recognize that every structure is unique and that a generalized assessment of a flood insurance premium based on a small number of factors is not giving a true picture of a structure's risk of flooding. So, the NFIP is changing its methodology to a risk-based model similar to how a private flood insurance company works. This change is commonly known as Risk Rating 2.0 (RR2.0) and will impact all communities participating in the NFIP.

As of October 1, 2021, all new NFIP policies will be subject to the new rating methodology. All remaining policies renewing on or after April 1, 2022, will be subject to the new rating methodology. FEMA have produced a large amount of data surrounding these changes that can be found at fema.gov/flood-insurance/risk-rating. This is a great resource if you want to learn more, even down to a county-



by-county level. The webpage will give you aggregated data on the impact to policy holders in your jurisdictions, what types of premium increases you will see, and in some cases, decreases for your residents.

Although the premium methodology is changing, there are certain things that are not changing. Premium increases are still subject to regulatory increase caps of no more than 18 percent per year. The Flood Insurance Rate Maps are still in effect and are still the parameters by which a community must regulate construction within Special Flood Hazard Areas. The requirement for NFIP flood

insurance for federally backed mortgages is still based on the FIRMS, even though the actual insurance premium is no longer based on the FIRM.

If your community is an NFIP community, these changes will certainly impact your residents. Though floodplain management can be a complicated, it helps to have an understanding of the program, its history, and the changes that are coming our way. **PM**

CLAIRE JUBB, AICP, CFM is assistant county administrator of Charlotte County, Florida.



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IS YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN

A MEANS OR AN END?

Four principles
that will help improve
your strategic
planning process

BY KEL WANG



How long does it take to develop, approve, and start implementing a strategic plan (or a strategy)? Here is the timetable of a recent example:

- May 2015: Public consultation and research began.
 - City internal engagement.
 - Stakeholder engagement.
 - Public engagement.
- June 2016: Report to committee on draft strategy.
- October 2017: Strategy adopted by council.
- January 2020: Implementation plan adopted.
- April 2021: Funding approved.

Six years, really? As unreasonable as it may sound, this timetable and the associated linear development process represent a typical approach adopted by many organizations. In an earlier article, I mentioned that approving the strategic plan is one of the most important decisions any governing body makes, as it leads to better community engagement, prioritization, and employee engagement.¹

But if it has to wait for years, it can also raise many issues, particularly in the face of the pandemic. First, the community feedback and expectations and the local context collected during the process could shift significantly, therefore the formulated strategy may no longer be valid or at least not the best approach forward. Second, there is a high risk of key personnel turnover, and therefore an increased cost of knowledge transfer and project support.

To address those issues, it comes down to the understanding that a strategic plan is also a means, not just an end: the value can come from the way we develop the plan. Based on the Agile values,² I would like to share four principles that help improve your strategic planning process:

1. Conversations and Learning over Process

Imagine two opposite cases: on the one hand, spending too much time in discussions, so the work is delayed and timelines are not met; and on the other hand, being very efficient in managing the time, so every milestone is met, though people are not sufficiently engaged. Considering the latter case for a moment, what is the point of getting the plan approved timely, if it is at the cost of engagement, which is key to bringing a strategic plan to life?

It is crucial that you take time to understand issues and community expectations and to identify key stakeholders and foster partnership. It would be challenging to meet the timeline at first. But if we start treating the strategy as ongoing work and consider multiple plans and strategies, we will be able to leverage previous work. As a result, the required learning and effort will decrease; the efficiency will go up over time.

2. A Working Strategy over a Complex Framework and Thick Documentation

It is not uncommon to find a diagram like Figure 1 in a strategic plan. It is supposed to help communicate the structure of various plans and show how they drive decisions. It may also involve creating multiple documents, such as the implementation plan and business plans. But does it really help? The scopes and meaning are

FIGURE 1. Sample Diagram



often not articulated due to limited space in the plan. It is more for internal use than for public sharing. Do we actually need it, if it is only for internal use?

A working strategy would at least include the following elements:

- Clearly articulated issues and relevant context from the community perspective.
- Good information with sound reasoning, such as the necessary research, but only including the implications with findings in the appendix or in a separate document.
- Creative solutions with alternatives, which helps frame the conversation or debate from a “yes or no” approval exercise to a choice-making exercise.
- Clearly defined consequences to the community and the organization. What is the decision? What does the approval actually mean?
- Implementation with actions and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Commitment will be crucial.

3. Community Collaboration over a Siloed Approach

When was the last time (or ever?) has your organization or team tackled a complex issue on its own? This is what a strategy is supposed to be: coordination and consistency. Local governments play an integral role in building our community. Depending on the issue, the role would vary. It is okay for us to collaborate, to support, and to enable by focusing on shared outcomes and on where we can add the most value. Sometimes, simply understanding the issue takes multiple perspectives.

4. Responding to Change over Sticking to the Plan

The last principle is pretty self-evident. The pandemic has changed how we live, work, and play. It would be impossible for any plan to move forward without considering the pandemic’s impact on the organization and the community. In fact, the world is connected and change is constant; thus, the need to respond to change is ongoing.

To adopt the Agile approach (Figure 2) in your organization, I would like to present three suggestions:

FIGURE 2. An Agile Approach to the Strategic Plan

1. Conversations and learning over process	→ Engagement and buy-in
2. A working strategy over a complex framework and thick documentation	→ Simplicity and clarity
3. Community collaboration over a siloed approach	→ Collaboration and partnership
4. Responding to change over sticking to the plan	→ Flexibility and adaptability

Capacity Building

Your staff is working with community partners to understand and address the complex issues facing your community. They value every opportunity to learn and continue to build on previous conversations. They understand the rigor of a working strategy and leverage an evidence-based approach to address each of the elements. How does this sound to you? How much confidence would the council and the community have on your organization?

Well, Rome wasn't built in a day. It takes time to develop the organization and the staff. This is why capacity building matters. As a manager, it would be essential for you to articulate expectations, delegate ownership of the work and provide resources, and continue to do so over time. Outside the administration, help the council think and act more strategically.³

Ongoing Customer Insight and Environmental Scanning

Let's look again at the example timeline at the beginning of the article. An extraordinary amount of time and effort was spent gathering community input and research (between May 2015 and October 2017) and yet the information can quickly become obsolete in the face of uncertainty and

volatility. This is where being agile can make a difference. Instead of having to conduct a one-time and in-depth engagement and research, ongoing customer insight and environmental scanning can help provide more current and sometimes even more accurate information.⁴ This information can be collected through multiple means:

Satisfaction survey.

Does your or any organization provide services related to the issue that the strategy is set to address? If so, a satisfaction survey may suit your needs. Satisfaction surveys provide a measurement of usage and experience regarding the services provided, and can help uncover opportunities for improvement.⁵

Journey map. A journey map is a complete visual process from a customer's perspective of their engagement related to the issue. Studying their interactions around the engagement points helps understand their behaviours and ultimately their needs and wants.

Focus groups and interviews. This option is more flexible and has richer details. Focus groups and interviews are a particularly useful tool for equity in terms of access to the population that is not reachable through other means, such as the people with lived experience.

Timely Review

One of the worst things you could do to the strategic plan is to get it approved and think the work is done. Sadly, this is why many strategic plans end up sitting on a shelf collecting dust. The strategic plan needs to be revisited regularly to monitor its progress and impact. Based on the criteria of the excellence category of the ICMA Certificates in Performance Management, the highest level award that recognizes best practices in performance management, tracking and consideration of data need to occur on at least a quarterly basis.

It is important for you to continue to show support to the work by voicing its importance, articulating expectations, and dedicating time and resources. Without a strong commitment from leaders, the momentum will be difficult to maintain. You can simply make the first agenda item of your leadership meeting "review progress against the strategic plan" and ask staff about the results, as well as changes in the community and the broad external environment. It sets a tone at the top, then it trickles down to the rest of the organization.

Conclusion

Just to be clear, being agile is not just about a more efficient

way to create a strategic plan or any strategy. It is a community-centric approach that is based on collective impact and is more adaptive to the ever-changing world.

The four Agile values were originally created by a group of software developers to deal with the traditional waterfall software development process (very much like the static and linear strategic planning process in the timetable) that left both developers and their customers frustrated. From the FBI's information management system to healthcare.gov, those values have proven successes to deliver projects on time and under budget.

Strategic planning would be a good example that can benefit from the Agile values in the face of a world of growing complexity at increased velocity. It comes down to your understanding that the strategic plan can also be a means of strengthening your organization and your interactions with the community. Figure 3 highlights the difference between the Agile approach and the traditional approach. Is your strategic plan a means or an end? **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ "Strategic Planning Revisited," Kel Wang, *PM* magazine, August 2019, <https://icma.org/articles/article/strategic-planning-revisited>

FIGURE 3. An Agile Approach vs. a Static and Linear Approach

STATIC AND LINEAR	May 2015: Public consultation and research began. • City internal engagement. • Stakeholder engagement. • Public engagement. June 2016: Report to committee on draft strategy. October 2017: Strategy adopted by council. January 2020: Implementation plan adopted. April 2021: Funding approved.
AGILE	Step 1: Stakeholder engagement and building the context. Step 2: Gathering information and defining and analyzing the issue. Step 3: Developing solutions and alternatives and analyzing consequences. Step 4: Identifying key actions and roles and responsibility. Step 5: Approving the plan and setting up reviews. Ongoing activities: • Relationship and partnership building. • Capacity building. • Customer insight and environmental scanning. • Regular reviews.

² The Agile Manifesto consists of four key values: individuals and interactions over processes and tools, working software over comprehensive documentation, customer collaboration over contract negotiation, and responding to change over following a plan.

³ “Building the Best Relationship with Your Council,” Kel Wang, *PM* magazine, February 2021, <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/building-best-relationship-your-council>

⁴ Community feedback can be influenced by recent events and various media. Using multiple data helps reduce or remove this variation.

⁵ “Satisfying Surveys,” Kel Wang, *PM* magazine, March 2019.

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“What a Long, Strange Trip it’s Been”

Our partnership as manager and assistant manager,
as shaped by the pandemic

BY JEN BREAKER AND STEVE BARTHA

The past 21 months have been long, challenging, and exhausting (a strange trip?), and we are here to tell you it’s not over yet. Between the pandemic, racial justice issues, mental health challenges, and New England weather, it has been a time of struggle, growth, and change for many communities.

During this period, our relationship as manager and assistant manager, boss and subordinate, colleagues, and friends, has grown. We have been pushed to have uncomfortable conversations, to learn how to best support the organization (both individually and as a team), to be willing to say “I don’t know,” to be frustrated with each other, recover, and advance.

For us, an essential factor of our working relationship, for the success of our community and the organization, is good communication—and good communication is built on trust.

Steve was hired as town manager in 2014. In 2018, when Jen began in the role of assistant manager, there had been a lot of organizational change driven by the retirement of several long-serving department heads who wore multiple hats within the organization. There were grand plans to re-define the assistant role based on the needs of the organization, but things got in the way. Over the past three years, the position has run point on human resources, our Covid response, and growing the communication director role, in addition to working on changes to the town’s health plan, assisting with collective bargaining, and expanding community engagement. In late 2021, the role of assistant continues to evolve and adapt depending on the *crisis du jour*.

But how did we get to a point of good communication and trust? That’s the million-dollar question. While some of it happens naturally (this is why hiring for fit is as important as hiring the right skill set), some of it comes with time and effort, and trial and error. Although we hadn’t worked with each other for very long before the pandemic began, we invested time and energy into building our working relationship from day one.

This meant creating a space where Jen, in the role of assistant, was comfortable going to Steve, with questions, concerns, ideas, and problems. Steve had to be willing to make the time and invest the effort to support Jen, whether that meant stopping what he

was working on to discuss a topic with Jen, or providing guidance and support on challenging issues. As the assistant, Jen had to understand the goals and direction Steve had for the organization and how she could support and build upon that work.

We also had to have difficult conversations to help our communication and trust grow. Being able to voice concerns or different opinions and have them be heard and valued allowed our mutual trust to develop. While it is important for the assistant to understand the “why” of a decision, it is ultimately the manager’s decision to make. To have a good working relationship, the manager must be willing to listen to the assistant’s opinions and suggestions. Then, in turn, the assistant must be able to recognize when it’s time to support the manager’s decision. Because we share our opinions freely and are open to each other’s perspective and ideas, it is rare that we fundamentally disagree on the path ahead.

Another key to building our trust and communication is relying on the other for guidance and insight. We both need to be able to recognize when we don’t know the right answer or the best way forward. Being able to go to the other person with the problem and get guidance or bounce around ideas is critical. We each bring different insight and experience to the table, and routinely defer to the other’s particular areas of expertise.

We are both procrastinators by nature and work best (or so we think) under pressure, but we also recognize how our skillsets complement one another. Jen is great at developing work plans, assigning tasks, and managing the process; Steve is great at seeing the big picture, developing options, crafting the message, and communicating. When it came to this article (yes, we procrastinated), we both developed ideas, then Jen prepared the draft, and Steve fine-tuned it (and included the hokey Grateful Dead references). Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your teammates is key to a successful team.

We know we are preaching to the choir here, but it feels like we’ve been lurching from one crisis to another for almost two years. While there’s nothing quite like a crisis to get the adrenaline going, we have also in the past few months started working to identify what the role of assistant will look like moving forward in Danvers, when there isn’t a crisis demanding our time and attention. In the meantime, we *just keep truckin’ on*. **PM**



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Diversity Helps the San José Environmental Services Department Thrive

The staff agrees that bringing together people with **diverse backgrounds** leads to a wider range of ideas and better policies. | **BY AARON KINNEY**

When Kerrie Romanow first joined the San José environmental services department (ESD) more than a decade ago, she noticed there were a lot of 7:00 a.m. meetings. As the single parent of a three-year-old daughter,

it was nearly impossible to get to those meetings on time.

“And if I did make it,” she says, “I could in no way put my best foot forward because it was crazy town getting my daughter to daycare and getting to work. And I noticed that all of the women would fly in between 7:00 and 7:05, half of us with wet hair, and the men would be

there, generally, a little bit calmer.”

When she asked the leader of one of these meetings if they had to be at 7:00, he replied, “No one has ever asked me that.” It was no problem moving the meeting, he said.

The timing of a meeting may seem like a small thing, but it’s one of many ways in which gender differences show up in the workplace.

As director of ESD, Romanow has fostered a culture of both gender and ethnic diversity. Eight of the 11 people who comprise ESD’s leadership team, including deputy directors and division managers, are women. Five of that group are people of color and one is LGBTQ. That diversity brings a variety of ideas and perspectives to the department, fueling creativity and helping ESD achieve its mission of protecting public health and the environment.

“Diversity is something I think is a cultural value for me personally and for our department,” says Romanow. “We just want you to genuinely show up as yourself.”

“When employees feel that everyone has the opportunity to succeed based on the merits of their contributions,” Romanow adds, “it creates a sense of optimism that permeates the workplace.”

ESD’s welcoming approach to diversity also informs the department’s philosophy about work-life balance. “We don’t want people to choose their family or their job,” Romanow says. “We think you should be able to do both.”

Having ethnic diversity in leadership positions and throughout the workforce is especially important given the

makeup of San José, where 32 percent of the population is Latino and 36 percent is Asian, according to Census data.

Mariana Chavez-Vazquez leads ESD’s \$2.1 billion Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to upgrade and modernize the San José-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility, the largest advanced wastewater treatment

Chavez-Vazquez has found that diversity in leadership sends a message of inclusivity.



KerrieRomanow



MarianaChavez-Vazquez



The Cogeneration Facility, a milestone in the \$2.1 billion Capital Improvement Program to upgrade and modernize the wastewater facility, won the 2021 Excellence in Innovation and Resiliency Award from the California Association of Sanitation Agencies.



The San José-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility, the largest advanced wastewater treatment facility in the western United States

facility in the western United States.¹ The newly constructed Cogeneration Facility, which powers the plant with a blend of biogas and natural gas, won the 2021 Excellence in Innovation and Resiliency Award from the California Association of Sanitation Agencies.

As an engineer, Chavez-Vazquez works in what has traditionally been a male-dominated field. Early in her career, she attended meetings where she was the only woman among a group of skeptical men. “They would look at you as if thinking, ‘You’re a woman, you don’t know what you’re talking about,’ and to top it all off, here I am, 5’2” and with an accent,” says Chavez-Vazquez, who was born in Mexico City.

Being a female engineer can still be tough, she says, but the work culture at ESD is a big improvement over what she faced years ago as a consultant. Upon joining ESD, she was encouraged by the presence of women in leadership positions and the department’s willingness to hire and promote people of color.

“You can see the potential in people,” she said of ESD. “You can see that if they have an accent that doesn’t change the capability that they have to do the work; if they don’t look exactly like you expect someone to look, that doesn’t change the work that they do.”

Fifty-six percent of ESD staff are non-white, with 21.6 percent identifying as Asian or Pacific Islander and 23.5 percent being Latino.

The CIP team is particularly diverse, with members hailing from Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

Before the pandemic, the team organized an annual “International Day,” when staff would wear outfits and share meals representing their native cultures.

Chavez-Vazquez has found that diversity in leadership sends a message of inclusivity. Just as she found it refreshing to discover that she had female bosses at ESD, she’s heard from people who are inspired to see a Latina in charge of the CIP.

Chavez-Vazquez recalls a touching letter she received from a member of her team, who called her a role model. “Representation matters,” her colleague told her.

Diversity doesn’t just improve the culture of work; it improves the quality of work. Romanow and Chavez-Vazquez agree that bringing together people with diverse backgrounds leads to a wider range of ideas and better policies.

“I don’t know how many times in my tenure at ESD I’ve heard someone say, ‘You know, I’ve never thought of it that way,’” says Romanow. “And, to me, that’s diversity: ‘I’ve never thought of it that way.’” **PM**

Originally published at <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/News/News/3292/308>

ENDNOTE

¹ <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/environmental-services/water-utilities/regional-wastewater-facility/capital-improvement-program>



AARON KINNEY is a senior public information representative in the environmental services department for San José, California.

Watch a video about the department at youtube.com/watch?v=qldEPLNCh_0.

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Empowering Young Women for a Career in the Fire Service

The Fire Camp in Eugene, Oregon, is helping to encourage female firefighting

Eugene, Oregon—2021 Recipient, Program Excellence Award, Community Equity and Inclusion (50,000 and Greater Population)

Eugene Springfield Fire established the Young Women's Fire Camp in 2010, at the urging of Fire Captain Jean Woodrich, who retired after 28 years of service. Recognizing the lack of female firefighters locally and nationally, Woodrich developed a five-day program for young women ages 16–19 that would expose them to firefighting as a career and help develop confidence and leadership skills.

The camp uses hands-on activities to teach life skills such as team building, communication, and problem solving. Activities include extinguishing live fires, learning emergency medical service skills, rappelling, self-defense, and vehicle extrication. Participants also engage in conversations about peer pressure, societal pressures, self-image, and general mental health and wellbeing.

A core tenet of the camp is that it be free of charge and accessible to all young women. Camp leaders ensure diversity of applicants and equal opportunities by reaching out to all local high schools, alternative schools, and community outreach programs. Funding comes from multiple divisions of the fire department and the local chapter of the International Association of Fire Fighters. Local businesses have donated fire extinguishers,

cars for extrication exercises, and internship opportunities.

In addition to empowering young women, the camp provides examples of successful women and career opportunities in the fire service, which has a very low percentage of females. Camp also includes guest speakers who talk about their career experiences. Speakers have included the first female paratrooper in the United States, the first female circuit court judge of Douglas County, and female emergency room doctors, police officers, and leaders from local government—all of them supporting a diverse group of young women as they develop confidence and skills that will serve them in the future.

An additional benefit of the program is creating space for family relationships to grow. During camp graduation, mentors encourage parents to listen more and push back less. Mentors have received letters of appreciation from parents of camp attendees who cite more engagement and communication at home.

Camp mentors say that they learn just as much as those who attend. Through planning and organizing the camp, female facilitators learn to lead by example, communicate, and work as a team, and they have an opportunity to “pay it forward” as mentors. They also



learn to adapt the camp to fit the needs of each group that attends, and they try to offer support that helps attendees have a successful and fulfilling week, whether the support is physical, mental, or emotional.

The camp also shows members of the community the importance of promoting and supporting programs that encourage young women. The relationships that are built with external partners grow each year as other organizations offer time and services that make the camp even more accessible and successful.

The success of the Young Women's Fire Camp will take years to measure, but its impact starts before the camp begins. The application includes an essay prompt that asks the

applicant to write about her hero. By the end of the five-day program, the campers learn that they are more like their heroes than they expected, as they have overcome challenges and encouraged their peers to do the same.

A milestone for the program was reached in 2017, when the department hired its first camp graduate. A second graduate was hired in 2021. Many others have gone on to careers in firefighting, emergency services, and other public services such as military, police, and emergency relief work. Over the years, camp mentors have received numerous emails from graduates noting that they would not have explored these opportunities without the camp experience. **PM**



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Roger Kemp's background and professional skills are highlighted on his website. Dr. Kemp was a city manager in politically, economically, socially, and ethnically diverse communities.

He has written and edited books on these subjects, and can speak on them with knowledge of the national best practices in each field. Call or e-mail Roger for more information.

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