

PM

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT



Rethinking Strategic
Planning **10**

Cross-Training and
Collaboration **16**

Reshaping Your
Workforce **20**

Corrin Spiegel, ICMA-CM
City Administrator
Davenport, Iowa

ELEVATING YOUR
ORGANIZATION WITH AN
**EYE TO THE
FUTURE**

NOVEMBER 2022
ICMA.ORG/PM

ICMA Membership Just Got More Affordable and Accessible

WE HAVE REDUCED MEMBERSHIP DUES!



Membership offers benefits to help you with

- Career and Personal Support
- Leadership and Professional Development
- Networking with a worldwide community of 13,000+ local government professionals
- Knowledge and resource sharing

For more information about the dues reduction, visit icma.org/join-faqs

Questions? Contact membership@icma.org

NEW, REDUCED MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR CAOs/ACAOs

- Minimum of 14% savings
- Additional 20% discount for CAOs/ACAOs in smaller communities

Department heads and local government staff—flat rate of \$200

ICMA membership represents leadership at every level

Join/renew your ICMA membership today at icma.org/join

ICMA

FEATURES | »

10

Rethinking Strategic Planning

The importance of using strategy properly to address issues or seize opportunities in your community—and when not to use it at all
Kel Wang

16

The Multi-Functional Manager: Cross-Training and Collaboration for Organizational Success

Developing a bench of management professionals with breadth and depth of knowledge to improve the future operations of your agency
Ben Effinger

20

Same Tool, Different Tactic: Creating Mutually Beneficial Stability in the Era of Uncertainty

Through the development of a retirement incentive program and several career development programs, the city of Davenport, Iowa is reshaping their workforce for the future.
Corrin Spiegel, ICMA-CM, CEcD

24

Stepping Up for the Mental Health of First Responders

The Public Safety Wellness Unit of Irving, Texas, tackles mental health stigma and provides support for its first responders and their families.
Chris Hillman

28

Better Care, Better Health, and a Brighter Future for Employees and Their Families

One community's decade-long battle to win at healthcare.
Eric M. DeMoura, ICMA-CM



DEPARTMENTS | »

2 Ethics Matter!

Why You Can't Rely on Your Attorney to Keep You Out of Ethics Trouble

5 Letter from the CEO/Executive Director

Elevate Your Organization by Prioritizing Mental Health

8 Inside ICMA

Celebrating Veterans in Local Government at the ICMA Annual Conference

32 Members in Transition

Supporting Colleagues During a Transition, Part 2

34 Assistants and Deputies

Local Government Leadership Advice, Courtesy of Tom Hanks

37 Insights

To Centralize or Decentralize, That Is Not the Question

39 Professional Services Directory

41 Member Spotlight

Dr. Mitchell Berg, PhD

ICMA

International City/County Management Association



CORRECTION

The photo on the cover of the October PM should have been labeled as the 2022 ICMA Annual Conference Host Committee.

Why You Can't Rely on Your Attorney to Keep You Out of *Ethics Trouble*

BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

Ultimately, you are the **only** one responsible for your conduct.

It's not unusual when a public official accused of misconduct defends his or her actions by saying that they sought and obtained a green light from their (or their organization's) attorney. While that defense might be helpful in justifying the official's actions and decisions, in many cases it will be inadequate to convince others that the actions were appropriate and ethical.

Often times a public official who is accused of ethical misconduct will respond "I didn't break any laws." This response is often viewed skeptically in that it is not a denial of an ethical misstep, but only a statement of belief that the alleged misconduct did not rise to the level of illegality. This is hardly the standard we will be held to as public officials.

Focusing exclusively on "what is legal" and relying heavily on your attorney's legal opinion can cause serious problems for public officials wishing to be viewed in a positive ethical light.

Sources of Problems

Legal does not always mean ethical. The ethical bar for those in the public arena is much higher than

"what is legal." There are many types of conduct that don't actually violate the law that is deemed unacceptable conduct from an ethical perspective. In addition to laws, you can be subject to other criteria for conduct, including regulations, codes of ethics/conduct, policies and public and community perception. Attorneys are trained to discern what is legal. While they may also have a broader perspective, you must assume that they will be focusing on evaluating the "legality" of a proposed action.

Your attorney may not fully appreciate your ethical obligations. Each profession has its own ethical obligations and expectations. While your attorney, hopefully, fully understands their ethical obligations as an attorney, they may not understand all of your expectations/obligations as a manager. They may or may not have a clear understanding of the various expectations you are subject to as a local government professional manager (including your obligations under the ICMA Code of Ethics).

Your attorney may be inclined to tell you what you want to hear. It is not unusual for a city/county attorney to value having a positive and mutually supportive relationship with the chief administrator of the organization



MARTHA PEREGO,
ICMA-CM, is

director of member services and ethics director, ICMA, Washington, D.C.
(mperegó@icma.org).

ICMA

International City/County
Management Association

icma.org

November 2022

Public Management (PM) (USPS: 449-300) is published monthly by ICMA (the International City/County Management Association) at 777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-4201. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. The opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ICMA.

COPYRIGHT 2022 by the International City/County Management Association. All rights reserved. Material may not be reproduced or translated without written permission.

REPRINTS: To order article reprints or request reprint permission, contact pm@icma.org.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: U.S. subscription rate, \$50 per year; other countries subscription rate, \$155 per year. Printed in the United States. Contact: 202/289-4262; subscriptions@icma.org.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Public Management, ICMA, 777 N. Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20002-4201.

ARTICLE PROPOSALS: Visit icma.org/writeforus to see editorial guidelines for contributors.

For more information on local government leadership and management topics, visit icma.org.

Public Management (PM)

icma.org/pm

ICMA
777 North Capitol Street, N.E.
Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20002-4201

EDITORIAL OFFICE:
pm@icma.org

ADVERTISING SALES:
Ben Anderson, MCI USA
410.316.9866
ben.anderson@mci-group.com
Learn more at
<https://icma-mediakit.com/>

ICMA MEMBER SERVICES:
800.745.8780 | 202.962.3680
membership@icma.org

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.



they advise. While this is certainly a good thing, this can also influence the type of advice offered. An attorney may be motivated to find a rationale to support what the manager would like to do. This could cause the attorney to “stretch” to provide legal advice supportive of the manager’s proposed actions. In particular, if they don’t determine a specific legal barrier to the conduct, they could underestimate/understate the other potential pitfalls associated with the proposed action.

You can be part of the problem if you succumb to “selective listening.”

It is a natural tendency to “hear what you want to hear.” Your attorney may offer you a variety of thoughts on the ethical question you raise. It can be tempting to focus on the observations or opinions that best match what you want to hear.

How to Address These Challenges

Give your attorney “permission” to tell you something you may not want to hear. While hopefully most attorneys don’t need such “permission” to give you their best advice, make it clear that you always want their frank opinion regardless of whether it is favorable to your proposed action. Make it clear to them that you need to rely on their unvarnished opinion and that telling you “what you want to hear” will not be helpful to either of you. Having a history of “shooting the messenger” when given advice that you find disappointing is not useful when attempting to get the best possible advice from your attorney and your staff. Make it clear to your attorney that you want their best legal advice as well as their assessment of other potential impacts that could come from your action.

Make your attorney aware of all your ethical obligations. It can often be helpful for the attorney to understand your professional obligations relating to ethical conduct that goes beyond the law. For example, while the attorney may not provide you advice on how to conform to the requirements of the ICMA Code of Ethics, familiarity with the Code can help create context as they provide you advice on your proposed actions.

Making it clear to your attorney that you view your obligations to extend beyond the “floor” of the action being legal can make it clear that simply passing that test is not sufficient. Informing them of the requirements of the ICMA Code of Ethics and other criteria can help them understand the broader context of your obligations.

Listen carefully and ask probing questions. It is critical to avoid “selective listening.” Listen to and think about all that your attorney has to offer, even those opinions or observations you would rather not hear. Ask probing questions and provide feedback to the attorney to make sure that there is no misunderstanding regarding his or her opinion. Give as much weight to the points raised that are not supportive of a proposed action as you do to those supportive of what you would like to do. You shouldn’t take much comfort from a superficial conversation with your

2022–2023 ICMA Executive Board

PRESIDENT

Jeffrey Towery, ICMA-CM
City Manager
McMinnville, Oregon

PRESIDENT-ELECT

Lon Pluckhahn, ICMA-CM
Deputy City Manager
Vancouver, Washington

PAST PRESIDENT

Troy Brown, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Moorpark, California

VICE PRESIDENTS

International Region
Chris MacPherson
Former Chief Administrative Officer
Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

Rebecca Ryan
General Manager
Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional
Council, New South Wales, Australia

Colin Beheydt
City Manager
Bruges, Belgium

Midwest Region

Victor Cardenas, ICMA-CM
Assistant City Manager
Novi, Michigan

Corri Spiegel, ICMA-CM
City Administrator
Davenport, Iowa

Michael Sable, ICMA-CM
Assistant City Manager
Bloomington, Minnesota

Mountain Plains Region

Diane Stoddard, ICMA-CM
Assistant City Manager
Lawrence, Kansas

Kenneth Williams,
ICMA-CM candidate
City Manager
Beaumont, Texas

Dave Slezickey, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Kingfisher, Oklahoma

Northeast Region

William Fraser, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Montpelier, Vermont

Scott W. Colby Jr.
Assistant Town Manager
Windsor, Connecticut

Dennis Enslinger, ICMA-CM
Deputy City Manager
Gaithersburg, Maryland

Southeast Region

Nate Pagan, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Owensboro, Kentucky

Valmarie Turner, ICMA-CM
Assistant County Administrator
Loudoun County, Virginia

Jorge Gonzalez, ICMA-CM
Village Manager
Village of Bal Harbour, Florida

West Coast Region

Roxanne Murphy
Operations Department Administrator
Nooksack Indian Tribal Government,
Bellingham, Washington

Pamela Antil, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Encinitas, California

Jessi Bon
City Manager
Mercer Island, Washington



ICMA CEO/Executive Director

Marc Ott

Director, Equity & Social Justice and Membership Marketing

Lynne Scott lscott@icma.org

Managing Editor

Kerry Hansen khansen@icma.org

Newsletter Editor

Kathleen Karas kkaras@icma.org

Graphics Manager

Delia Jones djones@icma.org

Design & Production

picantecreative.com

Focusing exclusively on “what is legal” and relying heavily on your attorney’s legal opinion can cause serious problems for public officials wishing to be viewed in a positive ethical light.

attorney on an ethical question. Make sure you fully understand the attorney’s opinion. And if his or her rationale is not clear or compelling, dig deeper. In addition, confirm that your attorney feels comfortable

with their position, even if they needed to explain it publicly, including to the press and/or at a public meeting.

Get objective perspectives. It is often very useful to obtain the advice of other professionals who have no direct involvement in the issue. Additionally, it would not be unusual for one or more of your professional peers to have dealt with the same (or similar) question previously. Getting an opinion from someone who does not have a direct interest in the outcome of the matter can provide a valuable perspective. This type of “nothing to lose or gain” advice can help supplement your assessment and the opinion of your attorney.

Conclusion

The advice of your or your agency’s attorney can be a critical component in your ethical decision making. However, it is not always the final answer. There may be times when we really would like to be given “permission” (or at least justification) for an action we are considering. We can seek legal justification in order to feel better regarding a decision we are contemplating. While it is obviously important to obtain legal advice regarding issues of law, it is very risky to take undue assurance in the fact you have been given a legal green light.

Ultimately, you are responsible for your conduct. As a public official, stating that someone else said it was OK (even if that someone else is an attorney) is not good enough. So while it may be a good start to have your attorney advise that what you have done or plan to do is legal, that is not sufficient. You must determine what it is appropriate, ethical, and reasonable from other’s perspectives in order to feel confident about your actions.

While I had the good fortune in my public management career to work with excellent city attorneys who not only were well informed regarding laws, regulations, rules, and policies affecting our work, but had a similar sense of what was the “right thing to do” in regard to ethical questions. We shared a similar set of values on this topic. They were my partners in helping keep our organizational ethical missteps to a minimum. However, no two individuals will always view complex and “gray area” challenges in the same fashion.

Regardless of how good a working relationship you may have with your legal counsel, never forget that there is only one person ultimately responsible for your ethical decision making—you. **PM**



UPCOMING ICMA EVENTS

icma.org/events

**FREE COACHING WEBINAR!
EVERYONE HAS PERSONAL
CHALLENGES: HOW TO
BALANCE PERSONAL
REQUIREMENTS AND
ORGANIZATIONAL
DEMANDS**



November 17, 1:30pm–3:00pm EST

We all want to support our teammates; however, it can be difficult when that teammate is never there to help carry the load. We all struggle to ensure that our personal life does not impact our professional life, but it seems consistently more difficult to separate the two. Caregivers get calls to pick up a sick child; an employee that owns rental properties gets a call about a pipe bursting; the boss needs to have knee surgery and is out for two weeks. These challenges are a part of life; we must accept them and determine how to best work through them if we are to maintain a successful team.

Register for this **FREE** coaching webinar on **November 17** to learn about different perspectives and how to best manage team members based on their unique situations. Can't make the live webinar? Register anyway to receive a copy of the recorded presentation.

DIDN'T MAKE IT TO COLUMBUS? GO DIGITAL!

Register for ICMA Digital for live streaming of all keynotes and selected educational breakout sessions, on-demand access to all livestreamed content, and live tech support. Team/group discounts available for 5 or more attendees. Register at conference.icma.org/2022-icma-digital/

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Real talks providing insight about the experiences of marginalized and underrepresented persons in local government leadership. [Access Recordings at icma.org/living-history](https://icma.org/living-history).

VOICES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT PODCAST

ICMA's Voices in Local Government podcast tells stories, inspires ideas, celebrates progress, and acknowledges challenges faced by local government managers and staff in **serving the public**. icma.org/podcasts

WANT TO BE SPOTLIGHTED BY ICMA?

If you are an ICMA member, we want to hear what's new in your career or organization. All members are welcome to submit, from CAOs to students. Please complete the form at icma.org/spotlight-members. Check out the November Member Spotlight with Dr. Mitchell Berg, associate director for the University of Minnesota Crookston Veden Center for Rural Development and former city administrator for Mahanomen, Minnesota, on the inside back cover of this issue.

Elevate Your Organization by Prioritizing Mental Health

It's time to make lasting and much-needed changes in the way we support our team members. | BY MARC A. OTT

At this year's ICMA Annual Conference, I had the privilege of co-hosting the panel discussion "Emotional Exhaustion and Its Effect on the Chief Administrative Officer." The discussion was one of eight sessions in the mental health track. While we focused on CAOs and assistants, it strikes me that this topic belongs front and center in this issue of *PM*, which is dedicated to "elevating your organization with an eye to the future."

In fact, it is impossible to "elevate" an organization that is suffering. One of my panel co-hosts, Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD,

CEO and executive vice president of the American Psychological Association (APA), shared some startling statistics. The APA has been studying stress in the workplace for decades, but in their 2022 poll they found that close to two-thirds of adults said their life had been forever changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many reported worsened mental health, decreased physical activity, disrupted sleep, and increased reliance on unhealthy habits.

Though it is the pandemic that has brought these issues into the foreground, we can leverage this moment to bring

about much-needed permanent changes to the way our organizations deal with mental health. While at the conference, it was heartening to hear the many examples from cities, counties, and towns of all sizes who are working to equip their employees to manage daily stress and handle the challenges that affect their mental health. In this issue of *PM*, Chris Hillman, city manager of Irving, Texas, outlines what his city is doing to support the mental health of first responders and their families. Across the board, however, the most challenging obstacle to making



Marc Ott, A. C. Gonzalez Jr., and Arthur Evans Jr. present the session, "Emotional Exhaustion and Its Effect on the Chief Administrative Officer," at the 2022 ICMA Annual Conference.

significant progress is erasing the stigma attached to mental health treatment.

That is where CAOs can step up and help to change the narrative; to demonstrate that it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help but in fact a sign of strength. You're better for the organization when you are able to acknowledge the need for emotional and psychological support given that the very nature of your jobs requires you to be responsible and accountable for the well-being of your community. That is a tremendous amount of pressure.

A Tragedy Spawns a Mission

Another one of my co-hosts on the conference panel was A. C. Gonzalez, an ICMA senior advisor and retired city manager of Dallas. He shared his personal journey as a catalyst for change. Recently, A. C. was devastated by the suicide of his friend and colleague, who was also in city management in Texas. As anyone in this situation would do, he asked himself what he could have done to help. How could he have intervened to prevent such a tragic loss?

As he puts it, "Our conversations were always kidding each other. We joked about the challenges of our councils and problems we were facing. We kept it light. We sought comfort by finding the humor in our trials. But, as it turned out, I never knew the extent of what he was going through because we did not feel comfortable sharing those feelings. At his funeral, I promised his widow that his death would make a difference."

That tragedy set A. C. on his current mission. He has been working with the Texas

City Management Association (TCMA) to help make changes that would encourage managers to get an annual mental/brain health checkup, no different than annual physical exams. The TCMA board has recently added a new condition to maintaining membership in good standing: all TCMA members must commit to two hours of session time with a counselor or two hours of mental health training every two years. To facilitate accomplishing this commitment, TCMA added a partnership with mental health provider Deer Oaks. Members can attend educational sessions and webinars focused on mental health and access resources on the TCMA website.

A. C. likes to say that if anyone asks why you went to talk to a counselor you can say you *must* do it to stay in good standing with the guidelines set forth in your profession. It becomes normalized like ethics and other professional standards. He adds that you can also tell your organization about it, letting them know you are a responsible manager taking care of your whole well-being, and that you want them to do the same. That's leading by example. Here are a few other ideas A. C. shared:

- Include a mental health assessment or an annual visit with a counselor as part of your employment contract, which can be shared with your team.
- Use a similar evaluation process for staff, helping them to see that talking with a counselor can help them be the best version of themselves.
- Talk with insurance providers to include a mechanism to lower premiums if the employee takes advantage of counseling; make it a financial benefit.
- Get staff involved with setting the guidelines—form a committee, for example.
- In the aftermath of a crisis, we often secure intervention services. Turn that into an ongoing program of mental health support for staff.
- COVID is one way to get the message out that even high-profile athletes and celebrities have suffered and need support. We can use this crisis to institutionalize or routinize mental/brain health services for our organizations.
- Help others recognize that this initiative is about being a responsible steward of all of our organizations' assets, including the most important one—our mental health.
- Help others recognize that there is a compelling business case for making this commitment to ourselves and our teams: most of our medical claims, problems with poor performance, and absenteeism are rooted in unattended brain/mental health issues.
- Use this as a new opportunity to see how we can improve our overall thinking and emotional stability so that we can better tap into this "above the neck" resource that we all carry around with us. Treat mental fitness like we do physical fitness by having a plan and a program of activities.

Additional ICMA Resources

During the pandemic, ICMA added a member benefit called Equilibrium that offers help with personal and work-related issues. Equilibrium provides professionally trained advisors available 24/7 365 days a year to help with family problems, marital concerns, financial and legal matters, stress, depression, and other issues affecting the personal or work life of our members. And while it's important that it's confidential, we want to get to the point where we feel comfortable saying, "Heck yeah, I reached out for help. You should, too." That is far better than losing so many of our outstanding managers who see leaving the profession as the solution to preserving their mental health. It boils down to creating an environment where it is safe to ask for help.

You can also access additional resources at icma.org/topics/mental-health.

The Bottom Line

One of our keynote presenters at the conference, Col. DeDe Halfhill, shared a powerful story about how she left the car running in a closed garage for a few seconds

A 2022 poll from the American Psychological Association found that close to two-thirds of adults said their life had been forever changed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cities, counties, and towns of all sizes are working to equip their employees to manage daily stress and handle the challenges that affect their mental health.

before coming back to grips on things, and then most importantly, getting real help. Instead of hiding her “humanness” as she called it, she chose to share this with her airmen to show others that they’re not alone. Many of her airmen came forward and talked about their need for support as well.

At the root of driving this cultural shift is the health of your employees. When you have a healthy organization, people hear about it and that positively affects your ability to recruit. It does cost money, time, and energy to bring about these changes. Some of our members shared examples of labor contracts with police and fire that make it a requirement to get an annual psychological/emotional assessment and the infrastructure to support the follow-up required. It may necessitate changes to your healthcare provisions and additional training and programs for staff. But evidence shows that the cost of failing to support employee psychological well-being is often far higher.

Dr. Evans and I are part of a group of CEOs working to advance health equity that we formed last year with a focus on vaccines. The data from the 2022 APA poll demand a shift in workplace culture to destigmatize mental health support. The following is a list of actions that organizations can take to support employee mental health and facilitate this much-needed cultural shift:

- Training managers to promote health and well-being.
- Increasing employee options for where, when, and how they work.
- Examining health insurance policies with a focus on employee mental health.
- Taking a critical look at equity, diversity, and inclusion policies.
- Listening to what employees need and then taking action.
- Developing programs and policies that support employee mental health.

You are invited to show your commitment to changing the culture around mental health in the workplace. We’re grateful to the two dozen communities who already have. Learn more at icma.org/apa.

While the pandemic demanded so much from us and our organizations in terms of meeting the needs of our residents while often putting our own needs on hold, it offers an opportunity as well. We can make lasting and much-needed changes in the way we support the mental and emotional health of our team members. And that will elevate our organizations in a way that nothing else can. **PM**



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



Financial Analysis & Management System

Stantec.io

Optimize your infrastructure funding with FAMS, our industry-leading financial forecasting and scenario planning system.



Celebrating **Veterans** in Local Government at the ICMA Annual Conference

A toast to those who **served** our country | BY LYNN PHILLIPS AND MYLES TUCKER
and are now serving their community

The ICMA Veterans Advisory Committee

has a simple mission: enhance local government through the inclusion of veterans who share the passion, heart, skills, and knowledge to succeed in public service.

You might be thinking, “I get the ‘passion’ and ‘heart for public service,’ but do veterans really have the ‘skills and knowledge’ to succeed in local government?” The answer is a resounding “YES”!

With more than 200,000 service members returning to civilian life every year—not including those already living in your communities—this talent pool is second in number only to college graduates. The ICMA Veterans Advisory Committee advocates to all our members the value of the veteran talent pool, and the Saturday Night Reception at the 2022 ICMA Annual Conference in Columbus showcased this goal.

Tom Hogan and Charlotte Colley, co-chairs of the 2022 Conference Planning Committee, are strong supporters of service members and veterans, and through their leadership, the committee selected the National Veterans Memorial and Museum as the ideal location for our reception. At this fantastic location, and through the support of the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation, alongside Dana McDaniel and the volunteer team from the



city of Dublin, the event was a celebratory and moving way to kick off the conference.

A truly unique national museum, it honors military veterans from all eras and all six branches of the United States Armed Forces: Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, and Space Force. In addition to the museum’s permanent exhibits, the reception included an international digital display of ICMA members who once served their countries and are now serving their communities. According to museum staff member Lauren Hayes Schirtzinger, the idea for the museum came from the late Ohio Senator John Glenn. Senator Glenn was a decorated Marine Corps aviator and NASA astronaut who had a view of the previous veterans building from his downtown apartment, which was evidently nothing to brag about. He knew that the city of Columbus could do more to honor veterans, and used his influence and network to design the museum as a national memorial.



With more than 200,000 service members returning to civilian life every year, this talent pool is second in number only to college graduates.



The memorial was a splendid place for catching up with colleagues old and new, while the rooftop provided a perfect venue for a jazz band performing in front of the Columbus skyline. A champagne toast to all public servants was given by new ICMA Veterans Advisory Committee chair Peter Troedsson. Major General (retired) Debbie Ashenhurst, Ohio director of the Department of Veterans Services, gave inspiring comments about how military skillsets seamlessly translate into local government careers. This rang especially true for the ICMA Veteran Local Government Management Fellows (VLGMFs), alumni, and prospective applicants in attendance. The VLGMF—a six month, DoD Skillbridge-approved program—

provides transitioning servicemembers and veterans the opportunity to embed with a local government at no cost, all while providing service to their sponsor employer.

In commemoration of Veterans Day and Armistice Day this month, please take a moment to honor those who served or are still serving in the military. Just like our ICMA members, these individuals have a heart for service and want to make their communities a better place for all residents.

If you would like to hear more about hiring veterans or becoming a host for a Veterans Local Government Management Fellow, please reach out to Lynn Phillips, ICMA military programs manager, at lphillips@icma.org or (202) 962-3551. **PM**



LYNN PHILLIPS is senior program manager of veterans, coaching, and scholarships programs for ICMA (lphillips@icma.org).



MYLES TUCKER is support services manager for Needham, Massachusetts; is an officer in the Massachusetts Air National Guard; and is communications team leader of the ICMA Veterans Advisory Committee (mtucker@needhamma.gov).



M

any of you know that I am a big proponent and advocate for strategy because it is the tool for building a better, sustainable community. But it may not be a good investment in certain circumstances.

BY KEL WANG

Strategy is an expensive endeavor, not just because of the resources associated with key actions, but also because of people's time and attention, particularly for the leadership and elected officials. There are times when the cost of strategy outweighs its benefits. In addition, while a successful strategy can make a difference in the community, a not-so-successful strategy (such as the ones not reaching their potential) can also leave people exhausted, frustrated, and possibly angry. This article is dedicated to those moments when you feel your strategy is becoming expensive and not so successful.

RETHINKING STRATEGIC PLANNING

The importance of using strategy properly to address issues or seize opportunities in your community—and when not to use it at all

Why Am I Writing this Article?

If strategy is the tool for building a better, sustainable community, why am I asking for limiting its use? As public servants, we are proud of our work and we want to build our communities. In many cases, we act on community issues, poor press, political fallout, or changes from other orders of government. We may jump on developing a strategy without understanding if the strategy is the right tool, as well as the associated key success factors. The underlying assumption is that the earlier we start addressing the issue, the sooner the community could be better off, and the sooner we could build (or restore) trust and demonstrate accountability. But poorly conceived strategy would not only not help with the issue, but could cause other issues, such as an unproductive routine between elected officials and administration, a bad tone for culture and staff burnout, or staff disengagement.

The work of public strategy includes a series of activities: scanning the environment, setting the vision and goals, and formulating the strategy. Scanning involves a broad range of people both within and outside of an organization to understand what is occurring in the environment. Setting goals requires elected officials and leadership's direction and the input from the frontline. To identify key actions, you have to engage subject matter experts. So, for strategists to be successful in their roles, they have to have excellent communication, coordination, and time management skills—in short, great people skills.¹ But what is often not emphasized enough and maybe sometimes overlooked is the technical and subject matter expertise of strategists: what to look for in the broader environment, what makes an implementation-friendly direction, how to leverage the process to engage and build culture, and how to facilitate and identify outcome-based measures while showing the line of sight to our actions. There is generally a

lack of understanding and recognition of strategists as a profession and a value-add.

According to a recent survey done by Deloitte Center for Government Insights,² trust scores for governments are lower amongst respondents than scores for all commercial industries in the survey. From the COVID-19 misinformation to more calls for equity, there is a heightened expectation for transparency and accountability. The trend toward using strategy to address many of the issues is mostly positive, but the push to demonstrate transparency and accountability has contributed to a rise of not-so-successful strategy. For example, there are organizations that think of strategy as a collection of mission and vision statements and a set of values, and that's it—with no measure, no key action, and no budget consideration. There are also organizations that use strategy as a way to justify existing work and that think of strategy as mainly developed by facilitation.

Defining Strategy

What is behind the issues is the overuse of the term *strategy*. Given its origin³ and activities, it is quite understandable that the perception of strategy is a sign of leadership and the expectations that leaders are supposed to know strategy and use it to manage organizations and issues. But strategy has its own definition. My personal favorite: strategy is a choice about the broad approach an organization is going to take toward executing its mission and, in doing so, achieving its vision. It is actionable, intentional, and results-oriented. Understanding this term matters a great deal. Because only then would you pay attention to these questions, whether you sponsor, develop, or approve a strategy:

- How are we going to implement our strategy (actionable)?
- What community outcomes are we expecting (intentional)?
- How do we know we actually made a difference (results-oriented)?

So what I hope to do through this article is to demystify strategy and promote proper strategy literacy. Generally speaking, there are two circumstances you may want to avoid or pause when developing a strategy: first, when strategy is not the right tool; and second, when the organization isn't ready.

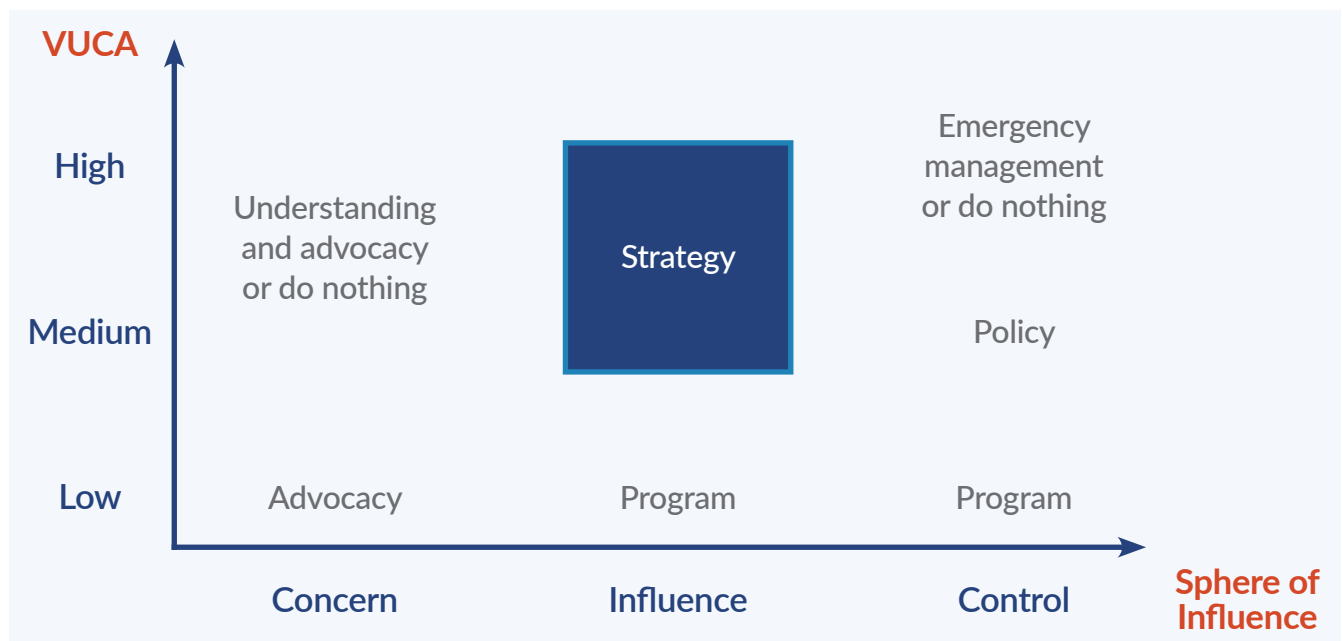
1. When Strategy Is Not the Right Tool

So, what are the “right” problems for strategy to undertake? To answer this question, first let's go over two concepts: VUCA is a term to cover the various dimensions of a changing environment (or the context of the issue). It is an acronym for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Volatility speaks to the changes that are frequent, rapid, and significant. Uncertainty refers to the lack of predictability as resulting events and outcomes are not known. Complexity involves a multiplicity of issues and factors, some of which may be intricately interconnected. Ambiguity is manifested in a lack of clarity and difficulty understanding the situation. The second term is sphere of influence,⁴ which speaks to the organization's ability to deliver desired results:

- When an organization is in control, it can make direct decisions and acting alone is possible.
- When an organization is at the influence level, the organization has shared responsibility and action is possible in collaboration with others.
- Your organization's concern is delivering the desired results and involves a wide range of issues, so having a clear understanding would be step one.

Now let's bring the two concepts together. There isn't an absolute standard or measure for VUCA. It depends on your analysis, perception, risk appetite, and tolerance. For simplicity, let's just broadly categorize it as high, medium, and low. Take a look at Figure 1.

Figure 1



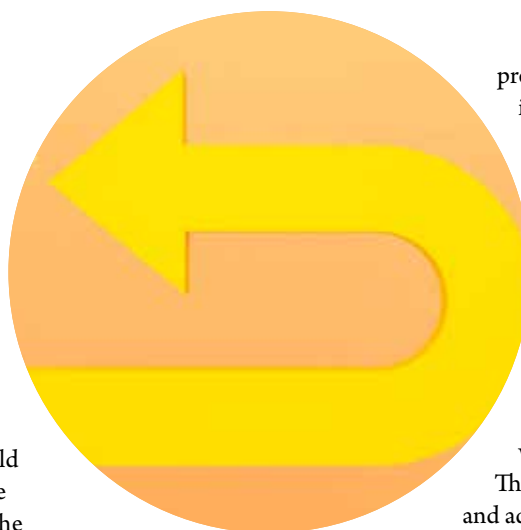
Start with “control” on the right. In a low VUCA state, the environment and the conditions of the issue are predictable, clear, and understandable. As a result, direct actions through an organizational program⁵ would be the best way to address the issue. In a medium VUCA state, we start to see variations in the environment and the issues. Due to the varying conditions, leveraging policy⁶ in terms of the principles of actions would be the best course of action. Of course in a high VUCA state, depending on the stake of the issues, the organization can either choose to do nothing or act quickly by entering in a state of emergency to stabilize the situation in the short term. A good example would be how we dealt with the pandemic at the very beginning.

Concern is where the organization has the least influence on the issue. Basically, it is a question of if the organization should be involved directly in this space or not. In the public sector, advocacy will be the best course of action regardless of the situation, but the organization can also choose to do nothing in a high VUCA state.

Now let’s take a look at influence. Here the organization has shared responsibility and action is possible in collaboration with others. In a low VUCA state, the environment and the conditions of the issue are predictable, clear, and understandable but because of the limited influence, the organization can either choose to partner with others to increase the organization’s influence, act alone to address part of the issue, or do both.

A medium VUCA state is where strategy works best in the sense that it takes time and effort to understand the environment and the issue, and then identify the role of the organization and the best course of action. Again, due to limited influence, the course of action will need to involve others. In a high VUCA state, understanding the environment, the evolving nature of issues, and also bringing the organization together will be critical and it takes time but the organization can also choose to do nothing if the effort outweighs the benefits.

The implication of the aforementioned theory is that understanding the external environment and where the organization is going to position in the context of the issue matters a lot in terms of addressing the issue. Inappropriately choosing strategy over policy or program means it could be a costly solution. Inappropriately choosing strategy over emergency management or advocacy means it may not



THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE COST OF STRATEGY OUTWEIGHS ITS BENEFITS.



produce the expected results. This is why it is important to leverage an evidence-based approach to initiate your strategy. I have already explained it in my previous article, “Reasoning While Imagining,”⁷ so I am not repeating myself here.

2. Your Organization Isn’t Ready.

Elected officials set the direction while administration follows and makes things happen. It is the setting we have all seen before and it works!

The varied roles between elected officials and administration works well for policy and programs. But not so well for strategy. There are a couple reasons we just can’t take the ball and run with it for strategy. There is a need for intentional, ongoing, and evolving development of the organization.

Your Organization Lacks Understanding and Skills

Together, knowledge and motivation are one of the four factors that define public strategy.⁸ It is about staff

not necessarily having the required understanding and skills to do what they are expected to do. When an organization lacks strategy and performance literacy, there is a decreased understanding of the importance of strategy work in elevating community outcomes. Instead, strategy could be seen as “just another project from the top.” When staff treat strategy as operational work (and not just another project), they focus on individual or department perception and performance, rather than community outcomes. They focus on getting things done, rather than doing the right things. They focus on showing alignment rather than on

making an impact. This can also lead to poor measurement, unreliable data and ambiguous reporting, and consequently, poor information for decision-making.

Based on 2014 research conducted by the National Center for Public Performance at the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University–Newark of a network of U.S. professionals in public organizations,⁹ lack of experience and knowledge is one of the three main barriers for sustainable performance management systems, which are essential for implementing strategy. ICMA’s Certificates in Performance Management has a long history of recognizing staff training and support as an effective way of implementing strategies and sustaining performance management effort. But it is not just the measurement and data collection that require training. Evaluation, decision-making, scanning, and strategy literacy in general can also benefit from training and development. It takes time and

effort to develop organizational competencies in all of the aforementioned skill areas.

Your Organization Lacks Resources

If your goal is to develop a strategy and implement it, then contemplating and including a resourcing plan during the strategy development process would help you go a long way. A resourcing plan is a critical component of public strategy because it helps outline the required financial and human resources (at least at a high level). If the budget implication is not considered, elected officials and the public may be surprised by the proposed tax increase. As a result, long-term fiscal sustainability would be questionable and

any council gets to make. In many places, the discussion is very much focused on the incremental piece, which is easy to explain and understand. But in my opinion, the incremental budgeting exercise sabotages employee morale and kills innovation as it encourages status quo thinking. An earlier article of mine, “What You May Not Know About Strategy,”¹¹ talked about how to leverage strategy to consider what not to do.

Your Organization Lacks the Commitment of Key Decision-makers

According to James Clawson and his book, *Level Three Leadership*, there are three levels of human activities. Level one is about

Strategy is a choice about the broad approach an organization is going to take toward executing its mission and, in doing so, achieving its vision.

what is worse is that the key actions may be delayed or cancelled, and as a result, the associated community outcomes would be compromised.

According to the research done by Bert George and Richard Walker,¹⁰ “practitioners should not expect relevant strategic plans to emerge from ill-funded strategic planning processes.” If there isn’t much interest in raising taxes or effective means to reallocate funds from within, this may suggest a need to rethink what the goals are or if the organization can actually make a difference.

What can we do in the face of financial constraint? There are a couple options for your consideration: First, stay ahead. Leverage a scanning process to monitor the environment and identify opportunities and challenges in advance. It is also an effective way to initiate your strategy. Second, build an agile organization. Much of what we have accomplished during COVID would have been considered impossible, but we made it. How we pivot and reallocate matters a lot. Third, make your budget work for you, not the other way around. Much of our work and process are centered around budget. Approving a budget is one of the most important decisions

observable behaviors, level two is about conscious thoughts, while level three is about values and belief. Well, in plain language we can think of it as body, mind, and heart.

To lead effectively, level one leaders learn new ideas from various sources: research, industry literature, or directly from subject matter experts. They implement them without considering how it affects behaviors in the organization. They are not being intentional. Level two leaders have conscious thoughts. They are mindful and make intentional changes. So, you tend to see different types of organizational changes that are purposeful. This is what is known as the talk. Level three leaders recognize and create a set of values and expectations of how the people in the organization should behave, which is also known as organizational culture or values. More importantly, they are consistent—they walk the talk.

The intricacy in developing and implementing strategy in the public sector requires work in collaboration and leading without power or authority. When we talk about the commitments, conscious thoughts and intentions alone would not be enough. Leaders must believe the strategy and act upon the values identified in the strategy.

Figure 2. Organizational Examples of Level Three Leadership

LEVEL	Personal Activity	Organizational Example
One	Observable behaviour	
Two	Conscious thoughts “The talk”	Structural and system design Public announcement
Three	Values and beliefs “Walk the talk”	Organizational culture and values



that is responsible for facilitating strategy work. It helps get things done, retain corporate knowledge, and gather staff support. Second, leverage a strategy maturity model. It helps capture where the organization is at in the spectrum and can also be a roadmap for next steps and further development. Third, leverage orientation. A good orientation with organizational and elected leaders can not only share the necessary community and organizational context, but also introduce the “help” that is needed from them so commitments could be secured. Last but not the least, value conversations and learning over the process. Getting the strategy developed and approved timely is important. What is equally important is to leverage the same process to converse, to learn, to share, and to build partnerships and relationships, all of which are key to bringing the strategy to life.

Conclusion

Our work is never easy. Using strategy adds another layer of complexity to it. According to the Association for Strategic Planning, more than half of strategies are not reaching their potential. But when used properly, strategy can make a difference. According to Bert George and Richard Walker,¹² public strategy “has a positive, moderate, and significant impact on organizational performance” and “should be part of the standard managerial approaches in contemporary organizations.”

The purpose of this article is not to discourage or dissuade you from using strategy. In fact, it argues for the conditions of using strategy properly to address issues or seize opportunities. Only actionable, intentional, and results-oriented strategy can make a difference in the communities we serve. **PM**

Specifically, the commitment can be manifested in four behaviors:

1. It is about being a visible champion of strategy: providing necessary resources and support and removing any obstacles that could put the strategy at risk.
2. Being a spokesperson actively communicates your personal understanding and commitments to others in the organization and even outside your organization. It also means you seek opportunities to collaborate, to support, and to enable by focusing on shared outcomes.
3. Being holistic. Whether you are a councillor or a department manager, by nature you represent your own district or are responsible for your department. But you also make decisions that affect the entire community or organization. Being holistic means wearing two hats and knowing which one is the right one at the right moment. You can only truly commit to the strategy by taking on the holistic perspective.
4. Lastly, being disciplined. Having the courage to say “yes” to projects, services, or programs that are unpopular; and say “no” to those that are inconsistent with the directions of strategy. The core of this behavior is to continue to ask the question: how does this work contribute to our strategy?

In fact, our organizations will never be completely ready. It would not make sense to wait when duty calls. We’ve got to do what we’ve got to do. Rome was not built in a day. But there are a couple of things that could be helpful: create a dedicated position (or team)

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ For more information, please read “The Evolving Role of Strategists,” Kel Wang, *PM* magazine, June 2021, <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/evolving-role-strategists>.

² Source: Deloitte Trust in Government Survey, March 2021.

³ For more information, please read “Strategy Management: An Evolving Discipline,” Kel Wang, *PM* magazine, November 2020

⁴ Source: City of Sydney’s spheres of influence

⁵ A program is a series of actions conducted in a certain order or manner. It is often known as day-to-day operations or services.

⁶ A policy is a principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization. Elected officials play an essential role in policy-making providing direction for program and administration. The staff or administration plays an essential role in programs or operations.

⁷ “Reasoning While Imagining,” Kel Wang, *PM* magazine, April 2022, <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/reasoning-while-imagining>

⁸ For more information, please read “What Is Different About Strategy In The Public Sector And Why You Should Know?” Kel Wang, *PM* magazine, November 2021.

⁹ Source: Obstacles and opportunities for sustaining performance management systems by Marc Holzer and others, 2017.

¹⁰ Source: Does Strategic Planning Improve Organizational Performance? A Meta-Analysis, *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 79, Iss. 6, pp. 810–819.

¹¹ *PM* magazine, April 2021

¹² Source: Does Strategic Planning Improve Organizational Performance? A Meta-Analysis, *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 79, Iss. 6, pp. 810–819.

KEL WANG is the founder and CEO of fioh Strategy—we innovate strategy and build capacity for the public sector. He teaches at the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University, and also serves on the ICMA Performance Management Advisory Committee. kel.wang@fiohstrategy.com







The Multi-Functional Manager: Cross-Training and Collaboration for Organizational Success

| BY BEN EFFINGER

Developing a bench of management professionals with breadth and depth of knowledge to improve the future operations of your agency

Within the current climate of local government—where we are being asked to do so much more with so many less resources—encouraging, cultivating, and creating well-rounded managers is an essential mission of local government agencies to ensure their continued success.

How do we as local government agencies ensure that our managers are multi-faceted and promoting cross-functional leadership to be able to do more with less? The key to this question is cross-training and collaboration within your agency, and the best way to achieve this is not by bringing it in from the outside, but through organic implementation and promotion to have it become part of your organizational culture from the inside. You may be asking yourself, “Great idea, but where do I start?” Let’s break down cross-training and collaboration to see how you can best implement organic and unforced change within your organization, not only by securing buy-in through change management, but also by creating a blueprint for the future success of your organization.

Cross-Training

Most local government managers understand the importance of cross-training at the staff level. If there is a critical absence within any area of the local government operation, we need to be able to plug in an alternate staff member to ensure continued program delivery or service to constituents. However, cross-training is even more critically important at the management level within an agency because managers understand the larger organizational goals and how each department or component of the agency fits together to accomplish the mission of the organization. Having well-rounded local government managers makes an organization more effective and efficient, with the ability to think big picture and identify issues upstream and intercept them before they can potentially impact and disrupt organizational operations.

Managers who are cross-trained and exposed to various operations within

the local government agency become assets and champions for organizational success. One of the critical benefits of cross-training is the elimination of organizational silos. Silos can be detrimental to operations and impact service delivery to the constituents of any community. Silos represent an organizational struggle over resources, power, and politics that distract managers from the larger organizational mission and goals. When we intentionally eliminate silos within our organization, we are agreeing to the concept of multiplying our subject matter experts (SMEs).

When we have SMEs that have knowledge, skills, and abilities in several different functional and operational areas of an organization, they can analyze and interpret issues on a much larger scale, diagnosing operational impacts well before they occur and maximizing efficiencies within operational areas.

Managers who have been effectively cross-trained can advise their executives on how to fluidly maneuver resources between programs and services to avoid operational interruptions and emphasize effective and efficient service delivery. This also allows for managers to look at operational and functional areas through different lenses of expertise, enabling them to identify opportunities for process improvements that can potentially save the local government agency time, energy, and resources. Cross-trained managers also set the example for the organization. Staff members that see well-rounded leaders within their organization will be eager and hungry to learn



new functions outside of their area of expertise, creating a well-rounded organization from bottom to top—an organization that can be agile and pivot to meet the dynamic needs of their community.

Collaboration

Cross-training your local government management team leads to many more opportunities for collaboration on larger-scale projects and cross-functional operations that impact several departments or areas of your agency. Through the understanding gained by cross-training, managers are more equipped to lead their teams in these collaborative environments, which opens the lines of communication and can assist when compromise is needed to ensure programmatic or service delivery success. Cross-trained managers also set the example for their teams on how to be nimble, flexible, and quickly adapt to change in the ever-fluid local government landscape.

Collaborative approaches to leadership within your local government organization

can also promote healthy environments for different perspectives and hard questions to be brought to the table. For example, when forming a team to work on a request for proposals (RFP) for a local government contract award, SMEs are critical to the success of creating an all-encompassing RFP. But the use of non-SMEs can bring alternative perspectives to the project, ask the hard questions that SMEs may steer clear of, or be the bridge to compromise when SMEs disagree on the path forward for the project. In addition, managers operating in this collaborative environment typically do not have a stake in the project at hand, so they are much more unbiased toward the outcome of the project. This can help them assist the team in identifying and addressing unanticipated outcomes early in the project plan, versus later in the project timeline where changes may be more costly and time-consuming to deploy.

Collaboration also reinforces the cross-training of managers among various departments of the local government agency.

This allows each member of your management team to represent your department in any setting, equipping them with the ability to answer questions at a very high level and then identify the SME to answer the technical details if necessary. Think about community outreach events, where you may not have one of your critical SMEs available to attend. An effectively cross-trained and collaborative teammate—another manager within your organization—can step in, represent your department to the constituents, answer questions, and present your organization in a positive light. You will never need a plan “B” because you will always have a pool of competent and capable professionals in your organization to answer the call.

How Los Angeles County Employs This Strategy

Los Angeles County is the largest municipal government organization in the United States, covering a land size of 4,753 square miles and serving a population of more

than 10 million residents. The county has more than 38 departments and commissions responsible for all the programs and services provided to the constituents within its jurisdiction. Several departments have adopted the model of cross-training and collaboration into their operations and have been successful in connecting with their constituents to educate, problem-solve, and enhance local government service delivery. Here are a few specific examples of how Los Angeles County makes this work.

Property Taxes

The county's secured property tax roll contains more 2.4 million properties and certifies at over \$20 billion annually. Within the county, there are four distinct property tax departments involved in the process. These county departments are the Office of the Assessor, the County Auditor-Controller, the Treasurer and Tax Collector, and the Executive Office of the Board of Supervisors, Assessment Appeals Board.

When a constituent contacts the county for assistance on a property tax matter, many times they are unaware of where in the process their question or issue lies, which often leads them to contacting a department that needs to refer the inquiry to another department. This is where cross-training and collaboration is key—not only at the staff level, but also at the management level.

Recognizing the need for this strategy, the four county departments initiated the Inter-Departmental Steering Committee (ISC) consisting of senior and executive-level

manager representation from each department responsible for the collaboration among the four departments throughout the property taxation process. The ISC oversees the Property Tax Coordinating Committee—consisting of supervisors and line operation managers—who work together to troubleshoot issues, determine the latest customer service trends, and oversee the education committee who is responsible for the quarterly interdepartmental public service training. This cross-training is critical because it focuses on areas of the property tax process that are confusing or complex for constituents and how to handle and route those inquiries for response and resolution. Often, because of the level of cross-training provided across the four property tax departments, the issues can be resolved even before they get to the department who would be “responsible” for the inquiry under their jurisdiction.

Property Tax Billing, Collection, and Payment Processing

Within the Treasurer and Tax Collector (TTC), there are two branches specifically engaged in the billing, collection, and payment processing aspects of the property tax process: tax collections and banking operations. Historically, there has been loose collaboration and cross-training between these two branches. The perception was that one is a “public-facing” operation and one is a “back-office” operation. This line of thinking reinforced the silos that existed between the two operations, and the collaboration and open lines of communication were less than

satisfactory. Tax collections was the face of the organization and what happened behind the scenes in banking operations was viewed akin to the Wizard of Oz: “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.”

In recent years, changes in personnel, organizational theory, and a collaborative approach have bred an environment where customer experience is now at the forefront of what happens in banking operations. Cross-training and collaboration at all levels—especially at the management level—have contributed to a more fluid functional environment, encouraging problem-solving, troubleshooting, and process improvements. As a result of this collaboration, the TTC is actively researching ways to make property tax payments as effective and efficient as possible without compromising security standards, both with physical payment processing and online commerce transactions. The approach for researching operational efficiencies is much more customer-centric now that cross-training and collaboration have entered the operational arena. In addition, the teams have brought in contributions from other operational and administrative areas of the department—information technology, internal auditors, and administrative services—providing valuable input and perspectives to the project success.

Lastly, the TTC has implemented a process for management rotations, encouraging managers from the seven internal TTC branches to cross-train and collaborate with other branches to create a much more diverse and deep level of

experience and insight from all areas of the department. The proof of concept is evident in recent transfers of managers from tax collections to the banking operations branch, demonstrating the ability of the department to adapt to change and create a much more diverse succession plan, contributing to the future success of the department.

Conclusion

Cross-training your management team leads to enhanced opportunities for collaboration, and collaboration leads to effective and efficient strategies to develop better programs and enhance service delivery throughout your local government agency. This is the way of future success for local government agencies—developing a bench of management professionals with breadth and depth of knowledge to improve the future operations of your agency. These cross-trained and collaborative leaders are the new mold of public administrators that can meet the needs of our diverse communities and enhance the ways in which we meet our constituents where they need us most. **PM**

BENJAMIN M. EFFINGER, MPA, is operations chief of the cash management division of the Los Angeles County Treasurer and Tax Collector. He serves on the communications team of the ICMA Veteran's Advisory Committee, and is currently pursuing his doctorate in public administration from the University of La Verne.



Same Tool, Different Tactic: Creating Mutually Beneficial Stability in the Era of Uncertainty

BY CORRIN SPIEGEL,
ICMA-CM, CECD

Through the development of a retirement incentive program and several career development programs, the city of Davenport, Iowa is reshaping their workforce for the future.



Police and public works personnel share a perspective on “what a strengths-based organization looks like” with their Davenport Strengths Institute cohort, facilitated by the city’s talent and inclusion administrator, Scott VanDeWoestyne.



Davenport, Iowa

Imagine knowing that you would lose eight percent of your full-time workforce and their 1,669 collective years of institutional knowledge and organizational service in the short term. Would you lead with apprehension or inspiration?

For nearly three years, public sector organizations have been navigating the series of twists and turns presented by the pandemic, ever-changing regulations, economic inducements, and a workforce that is rapidly re-evaluating its priorities. The great resignation wasn't a surprise in the making, but rather a looming question

put on hold by the pandemic. After far too many months (or years) of coexisting with non-stop conversations about pivoting and the new normal, the workforce was ready for change.

Two Weeks' Notice

Earlier this year, several tenured employees started expressing interest in retiring. Anecdotally, we knew employees had chosen to postpone potential retirement due to the uncertainty created by the pandemic. And while the stock market has been more volatile of late, the comfort

The VSIIIP created certainty and the ability to plan in a way that had not previously existed. The organization collectively took control of its great resignation/retirement.

of a defined benefit pension lessens the fear of long-term financial instability. Those preliminary explorations caused the executive leadership team to start pondering ways to strategically manage through what was likely to be a significant generational shift that would span the entirety of the organization.

Then an ah-ha moment hit. In response to previous budget instabilities, the city had offered early separation agreements, which had been viewed as mutually beneficial to both the employees and the organization. We knew the



Disneyland Paris



Barcelona



Italian Riviera



Clearwater Beach



Kissimmee FL



Ennis TX

See The Technology Private Haulers Don't Want You To Know About!

NLC Booth#803

Undergroundrefuse.com

model worked, but the motivations were different this time. There was no underlying financial reason, and we were looking to create organizational stability instead of what had traditionally resulted in reasonably rapid departures.

The executive team spent a few weeks outlining program parameters, advised the elected officials of the intent to offer a Voluntary Separation Insurance Incentive Program (VSIIP), and rolled the program out to employees on May 11. It was simple: in exchange for a declared and mutually agreed-to separation date, the eligible full-time employee would receive 12 months of insurance coverage at the current plan level post-employment. Employees had to execute their VSIIP contract no later than Friday, August 5, and the separation date had to occur within the following 18 months. The VSIIP could be amended to move the date forward upon mutual agreement, but cannot be extended.

Like any management team, there were ideas about a prospective

take rate. Those estimations were wrong...very wrong. At the close of business on Friday, August 5, 61 of the 757 eligible full-time employees had executed their VSIIP contracts. It was far more than anyone on the leadership team had expected, and reception from the employees (and managers) was overwhelmingly positive. The VSIIP created certainty and the ability to plan in a way that had not previously existed. The organization collectively took control of its great resignation/retirement.

Like many organizations, the city's largest service areas are public works and public safety. Over the past several years, the strain on law enforcement has already resulted in a shift within the police department, where 46 percent of sworn officers have been with the agency for less than ten years. Fortunately, the VSIIP didn't result in an unanticipated impact on the department. Conversely, the stability within the fire service

resulted in 16 employees, including many in leadership capacities, with and without deferred retirement option plan (DROP) dates, taking advantage of the program. On average, this group of employees started their careers at the age of 30, have worked in the public safety profession for 26 years, and provided 40 weeks' notice.

Public works employees accounted for the largest departing group, with 23 employees taking advantage of the VSIIP. On average, this group joined the city at the age of 36 and has worked within the public works structure for 27 years. Similar to the fire department employees, this group provided 39 weeks of notice on average, with almost a third providing more than a year of notice. While the front-line positions in the streets, sewers, and solid waste divisions were designated as "replace as-is," some positions in other public works divisions are being evaluated with the perspective of how to better serve the department in the future.

When 83 percent of the workforce is governed by civil service and 75 percent represented by collective bargaining units, having adequate time for department heads to partner with human resources on recruitment and promotional processes is essential. Statistically and anecdotally, the VSIIP was successful, and most importantly, it gave the organization far more than two weeks' notice to plan for the future.

Building the Foundation

Long before social media feeds were filled with articles and blogs discussing the impacts of the great resignation and the great

retirement, the leadership team was having meaningful conversations about organizational culture and what it could do to shape it for the next generation of public-sector leaders. Like many communities in the Midwest, the ability to attract out-of-market talent, particularly for management positions, can be challenging. The emphasis became building training and development opportunities that would encourage personal and professional growth while breaking down organizational barriers and growing the organization's own future leaders.

Davenport Strengths Institute

In July 2017, the city launched Davenport Strengths Institute (DSI), a Gallup Strengthsfinder-inspired year-long professional development journey. The horizontally and vertically integrated groups are intentionally eclectic, ensuring that new cross-departmental bonds are forged during each cohort. More than 140 employees have completed the program, cohorts 10 and 11 are currently underway, and employee interest remains high for future sessions.

The start-up cost for this initiative was a \$5,000 training investment, with ongoing expenses including nominal assessment fees and the opportunity cost of staff time.

DSI covers a wide variety of topics, including the growth mindset, strengths-based development and partnership, the influence of unconscious bias in the workplace and life, appreciation in the workplace, positive workplace psychology, and the five traits of great managers.

Davenport Leadership Institute

The success and popularity of DSI inspired the development of the Davenport Leadership

Institute (DLI) in 2020. The city has been a long-standing supporter of ICMA's Local Government Management Fellowship program and formulated DLI to provide the city's two fellows and several newly hired management analysts training across defined competency areas.

The year-long program introduced the group to service-area and financial management, communication and engagement, professional relationships, and ethics and culminated with a group project. The analysts participated in shadowing days with primary front-line services, including police, fire, code enforcement, public works, and water pollution control. They worked as a team to develop the FY2023 staff budget kickoff session and participated in the city council's goal-setting process for the 2022–2023 term. As a group, they were challenged to define an organizational problem, develop a proposed solution, refine the solution based on executive team feedback, and implement the change. This summer, the DLI cohort rolled out an updated financial disclosure policy. It worked collaboratively with human resources and administration to ensure that all employees, appointed, and elected officials completed the new disclosure form in compliance with the policy.

Davenport BLUE (Build, Lead, Unite, Empower)

This fall, the city launched Davenport BLUE as a companion program to DLI. The city's law enforcement professionals are highly trained in their technical proficiencies, but have expressed a growing desire for access to leadership

Figure 1. Davenport BLUE (Build, Lead, Unite, Empower) Session Schedule

Session 1 | Orientation

Program overview & objectives
How do you lead: Review of DiSC profile and 363 assessment

Session 2 | Crash Course in Local Government

City Administrator's work plan
Overview of City Council and governmental processes
Budget process/tax and funding structure
Purchasing policy

Session 3 | Corporate Responsibility

Strategic realignment of problem ownership
Diversity of thought
Emotional intelligence

Session 4 | Human Capital Management

Hiring and promotional practices
Taking care of your team
Effective communication
Discipline process
Conflict management

Session 5 | Resource Management

Building cross-department relationships
Capital improvement program
Fleet replacement strategies
Cartegraph/GIS

Session 6 | Influencing Change

Change management
The art of managing up
Multi-generational workforce
Introduction to the performance development plan

Session 7 | Communication

Communication/media training
Branding guidelines
Outlook/Office suite

Session 8 | Close Out

Performance development plan closeout
Participant presentations

development training. The program was developed specifically for mid-management law enforcement professionals and is internally facilitated with curated external presenters. Eligible sergeants and lieutenants could express their participation interest through an application process, which was evaluated by city administration, human resources, and police administration. The session breakdown can be seen in Figure 1.

Upon completion of the first Davenport BLUE cohort, the organization intends to launch

a companion Davenport RED program for fire department personnel and ultimately offer the three leadership institutes on a rotating basis.

The city's commitment to talent development is not overseen by a single functional area, but is instead an organization-wide priority. DSI was developed in city administration and is delivered by the city's talent and inclusion administrator, who now works within human resources. DLI was created by an assistant city administrator who started her career with the city as an ICMA

local government management fellow and is coordinated by the administrative services manager. The framework for Davenport BLUE was built by an employee as part of her MPA thesis project and will be coordinated by employees within the administrative services function of finance.

The most critical element of organizational development is the commitment to do it. Without an organizational position dedicated to training and development, the city had to make it a universal priority. This commitment also created a variety of professional development growth opportunities for employees looking to stretch beyond their current position in allowing the development of curriculum and the opportunity to present on a variety of different topics.

What Next?

Developing a voluntary separation program and various leadership development opportunities is not a silver bullet. Like most other communities, the organization will continue to face challenges in recruiting positions. The generational workforce shift will create additional contraction before the next wave of professionals falls in love with public service. But if history is any indication, the next wave of service-minded professionals will accomplish amazing things. The challenge will be to evolve public sector practices to meet their disruptive technology-adopting values, which involves much more than being comfortable with Zoom meetings. **PM**

CORRIN SPIEGEL,
ICMA-CM, CECD is
city administrator of
Davenport, Iowa.



Stepping Up for the MENTAL HEALTH OF FIRST RESPONDERS

BY CHRIS HILLMAN



The Public Safety Wellness Unit of Irving, Texas, tackles mental health stigma and provides support for its first responders and their families.



In the past few years, there has been an increased awareness of the mental health of first responders. The vast number of stories, documentation, and research indicates that first responders are at risk for developing mental health problems due to the nature and intensity of their jobs, which includes frequent exposure to traumatic incidents. Nonetheless, public safety culture still emphasizes strength and self-reliance as the main coping tools, which hinders the process for accessing mental health services and perpetuates the stigma of receiving mental health services.

First responders may respond to numerous traumatic incidents in the same shift, such as motor vehicle accidents, drownings, suicide attempts, and many others. Exposure to these horrific events can increase the severity of trauma experienced by first responders. At the end of their shifts, public safety professionals return home and are expected to function in daily life as normal.

Many organizations nationwide have recognized the need for research and resources to help address mental health problems more effectively for first responders. Some highlight the need for new models of interventions specific to first responder culture and others emphasize the cost and availability of resources and concern about the stigma.

The stigma associated with mental health conditions is still prevalent among first responders. These concerns may deter individuals from seeking help and are significant barriers to promoting mental health. Tackling these barriers requires a cultural shift in first responder organizations and will only be possible if everyone in the organization is committed to working together to improve mental health.

Public safety culture still emphasizes strength and self-reliance as the main coping tools, which hinders the process for accessing mental health services and perpetuates the stigma of receiving mental health services.

Irving Makes First Responder Mental Health a Priority

After the suicide of a police officer in 2016, the city of Irving, Texas, identified the need to make an organizational shift to support and facilitate mental health services for all first responders in the city. The Irving Police Department developed a peer support program after the loss, which was so well received that it was soon utilized by both police officers and firefighters. The need for mental health support became evident by the number of one-on-one interventions (i.e., peer-to-peer), crisis interventions, inpatient and outpatient referrals, and several successful suicide interventions.



The program's success led to the city council and city manager unequivocally supporting the development and formalization of the Public Safety Wellness Unit (PSWU) in October 2021. The PSWU is now a full-time, stand-alone unit that provides the initial stabilization to mitigate the impact of a traumatic event and accelerate the recovery process.

Through the provision of psychological first aid, the PSWU normalizes reactions to traumatic experiences and facilitates a healthy recovery process that restores Irving first responders to adaptive functioning. The unit reports to the city manager's office and is housed at a non-city facility to safeguard the reality and perception of privacy and confidentiality.

Support Services

PSWU program services are tailored specifically for first responders with culturally informed idiosyncrasies, best practices, interventions, and innovative technology. The overall goal is to provide crisis counseling to help the individual restore some sense of control and understanding after a critical incident. Program objectives include:

1. Provide a comfortable and respectful environment that ensures the individual is safe.
2. Provide stability to ensure the individual is stable and has a short-term plan that includes understanding of self and the situation.
3. Connect the individual to other resources and support.

In day-to-day operations, PSWU staff provide psychoeducational training to new recruits and supervisors, biofeedback/neurofeedback training, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) specific protocols for first responders, yoga for first responders, case management, and consultations. The staff is available 24/7 for crisis intervention.

In addition to direct services, the PSWU developed a family/spouse program to better equip family members on how to support their first responder. The PSWU staff provides training to help family members recognize early signs of emotional and psychological symptoms of trauma and provide referrals and resources. Additionally, the family receives support for themselves as they navigate through the hardship of experiencing secondary traumatic stress.

Figure 1.

Volunteer Peer Support Services

2016 to 2021

Services Provided:

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)	54 groups with 400 attendees
Suicide Interventions	20
Trainings	52 trainings with 535 attendees
Peer-to-Peer	726 contacts

Public Safety Wellness Unit

October 2021 to April 2022

Services Provided:

CISM	9 groups with 17 attendees
Suicide Interventions	3
In-patient/Out-patient	4
Trainings	17 trainings with 215 attendees
Peer-to-Peer	83
EMDR	37
Yoga	2 introductory classes

Normalizing First Responder Mental Health Is Key

In the first five years, the peer support program was embraced by the public safety departments and received full support from both administrations (i.e., fire and police). However, the main challenge was gaining the trust of the first responders. PSWU tackled this hurdle by providing a safe place and normalizing symptoms to facilitate and guide employees in the process of receiving help. The team works to reassure first responders that there are no repercussions to accessing peer support services, which are confidential. To build trust, the clinicians are proactive and intentional about interacting with first responders by going on ride-alongs, participating in department activities such as the Citizens' Police and Fire Academies, attending fundraising events, and visiting briefings.

The city of Irving has made huge strides by investing

in the mental health of first responders. Actively supporting mental health and safety not only increases productivity and attendance, but also improves employee engagement. Mental health programs are known to produce the following results:

- A reduction in absenteeism and turnover.
- Fewer disability claims.
- Less conflict.
- Assistance in resolving performance and/or morale issues.
- An increase in safety by decreasing risk for both the first responder and the community.

There is still a lot of work to be done to minimize the stigma of receiving mental health services. Future plans for PSWU include continued expansion of direct services as well as education and training opportunities to enhance resiliency. Ultimately, the team hopes to turn around the negative stigma among first

responders when it comes to addressing mental health.

In Summary

With the inception of the Public Safety Wellness Unit (PSWU), the city of Irving is addressing the major hurdles for first responders who receive mental health treatment. The city proactively established accessibility of services by providing in-house mental health services and on-call clinicians 24/7. Clinical staff is culturally trained to address the distinctiveness of public safety personnel by working with the first responders' emotional and psychological needs. For example, clinicians are trained to understand first responders' work pace, the high rate and severity of depression, and high incidence of peritraumatic dissociation because of chronic trauma.

The PSWU's unique structure helps minimize the stigma of receiving mental health services, fear of

retaliation, and fear of losing their jobs due to experiencing mental health issues. By positioning the unit under the administrative structure of the city manager's office, it removes the misgivings. Additionally, an advisory committee was developed to ensure the most ethical and innovative best practices are provided. The committee is comprised of two peer support members from police and fire, representatives from finance and risk management, and an external mental health professional from the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute.

The city of Irving began a cooperative effort to establish a work environment that provides adequate services to promote resiliency and health for our first responders. By incorporating the main stakeholders of administration staff and city officials through education and training, Irving is creating a trauma-informed environment for first responders, which is pivotal to reducing the biggest barrier to mental health—the long-standing “stigma.” **PM**

Learn more about the Mental Health Response Team (video):



Learn more about the Public Safety Wellness Unit (video):



CHRIS HILLMAN has more than 20 years of experience in public administration and is city manager of Irving, Texas.





Better Care, Better Health, and a Brighter Future for Employees and Their Families

▲
Mount Pleasant employees enjoy an onsite fitness center complete with treadmills, free weights, bikes, and locker rooms with showers. Complimentary fitness classes taught by professional instructors are offered daily for employees.

BY ERIC M. DEMOURA, ICMA-CM



ONE COMMUNITY'S DECADE-LONG BATTLE TO WIN AT HEALTHCARE

The town of Mount Pleasant is a coastal community in the Low Country of South Carolina with 95,000 residents and around 800 employees. Besides payroll, healthcare is the town's single largest expense at \$10 million per year. In total, 1,403 employees and their family members are covered by the town's health insurance.

Over a decade ago, Mount Pleasant was losing the healthcare battle. Costs were increasing in the double digits per year, similar to the industry. The decline in health of our employees and their family members

was becoming alarming and costly with nearly half of the adults having multiple chronic conditions. We were spending more taxpayer money yet we were not healthier or safer. We were failing at controlling the costs and keeping our employees well.

Some of the alarming statistics from that period of time:

1. Sixty-nine percent of the population had at least one chronic condition and 46 percent had multiple chronic conditions.
2. Total plan costs were increasing by double digits and were on a path to exceed the industry averages and

top out at over \$20,000 per employee per year by 2020.

3. The rate of Mount Pleasant employees missing work due to illness was very high.

The need to change was becoming urgent. We decided to reimagine the entire program. Many options were considered, including different insurance funding methods,

Change can be tough, especially when it comes to a person's healthcare.

the South Carolina state health plan, or moving to a high-deductible health plan. Each option was reviewed based on the benefits to the employees, their families, and to the taxpayers; and we solicited employee feedback as well. In the end, we chose to enhance our current partially self-insured program by unbundling most services (i.e., third-party administrator, pharmacy, network, and reinsurance), negotiating all contracts, and moving to some direct contracting (i.e., opening our own health clinics with in-house doctors).

Implementing these changes was not easy. We faced serious

A photograph showing a man in a light blue polo shirt and glasses using a black massage gun on the back of a person with dreadlocks wearing a bright yellow safety vest. The person is bent over, and the man is focused on the task. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor event space.

More than 50 local wellness and healthcare vendors attended the 2021 Mount Pleasant Wellness Fair, providing information and offering free samples (and in this case, free massages).

challenges internally and externally. Employees were unsure what to expect and some were resistant to any changes. Providers also resisted as they were accustomed to our old program and were used to town employees as repeat customers. Change can be tough, especially when it comes to a person's healthcare. We questioned the direction we had chosen but, in the end, decided to stay the course. We care about our employees and their families and knew we could do better.

We spent more time studying data, reviewing books, and touring other

best-in-class models to refine our program. We pulled together an employee team that met every two weeks to discuss how we could further enhance our programs and our communication with employees, and develop additional innovative options.

Goals of the Program

Our goals were straightforward, but aggressive and ambitious:

1. Deliver a better care model and well-being program that will help us attract and retain employees.
2. Achieve a rate of 80% of employees participating in

Knowing that our work, our persistence, and our determination resulted in positive outcomes that ultimately kept loved ones together has made this the highlight of my career.

our well-being program, seeing one of our primary care doctors, and following their standards of care advice.

3. Achieve a rate of 70% of the individuals at risk with chronic conditions following standards of care, and either improving their clinical values, or at least holding the line and not getting any worse.

Incentivizing Employee Participation

With these goals established, our next priority was to determine how to incentivize our participants into

working with our primary care doctors.

1. We kept our plan extremely competitive to the market and less expensive for those who participate. Employees may choose not to participate, but will pay double the costs on both payroll deductions and co-payments.
2. We built two near-site, direct primary care contract clinics that include a formulary pharmacy. We chose the locations based on a heat map of our employees' home addresses so that the clinics would be conveniently located.
3. We carved out any "fat" from our contracts and sent any rebates from name brand prescriptions back to our bottom line.
4. We built a transparency program to educate and guide individuals on making informed clinical decisions.
5. We built a care coordination program to work with individuals with

risk to help them improve and provide any supplies and medications needed if applicable.

The Results So Far

1. The average annual healthcare cost increase for Mount Pleasant from 2010 to 2022 was 1.65% (19.8% over 12 years). The industry average during that time was 7% (+84% over 15 years). *The cost savings of our plan over the industry average is \$5+ million dollars over the 12-year period.*
2. The town's cost per employee per year is 20% higher than it was 12 years ago, but 60% under the projections and well under the public entity average cost.
3. Participation in the program is 99% with a net promoter score of 80 +/-, pending the year. Engagement studies show that the benefits are exceptional.
4. A total of 83% +/- of the initial at-risk individuals are maintaining their level of health, if not improving.
5. Hundreds of participants

(employees, adult spouses, and dependent children) have noted improved quality of life through better health outcomes.

6. We have saved lives through comprehensive annual prevention screenings.

Healthcare may not be a natural area of expertise for city/county managers, but I encourage any manager struggling with health insurance to take on this project. You can win at healthcare by creating a plan that is better for both employees and taxpayers. What has been most meaningful to me is seeing the positive impact of our program on the lives of our employees. We've collected many stories of how the health of individuals and the quality of their lives has improved dramatically because of this program. Our program has literally saved lives. Knowing that our work, our persistence, and our determination resulted in positive outcomes that ultimately kept loved ones together has made this the highlight of my career.

Life-Changing Examples

An adult male employee had his first real comprehensive physical with our direct primary care doctor and found some very serious heart issues. The employee and the doctor spent a year in coaching and improvement to lower his risk. Although the employee did have to have a procedure, he stated many times, "The town of Mount Pleasant saved my life."

An adult female spouse of an employee was having trouble seeing. She went to our direct primary care doctor and was diagnosed immediately as a Type 2 diabetic in serious danger of losing her eyesight. Our team worked with her and a specialist to save her eyesight and get her diabetes under control. The female is a dependent spouse and the employee had been negative about our new healthcare program and honestly about the town as well. This experience changed his mind about the program and the town, which has made him a better employee.

While this program has been a success, there is more work left to do. Our biggest challenge continues to be communication as we work with employees to ensure they are mindful of the options and benefits of our program. We continue to study the data and consider innovations that could further improve the plan. Going forward, our strategy must be constant, simple, and consistent. I am confident that our continued work will result in even better care, even better health, and even better outcomes. **PM**

ERIC M. DEMOURA,
ICMA-CM, is town
administrator of Mount
Pleasant, South Carolina.



The annual Wellness Fair held at Town Hall is attended by nearly 300 employees. A healthy lunch from a local restaurant is offered and employees are given extra time during the workday to attend.

Supporting Colleagues During a Transition, *Part 2*

BY CATHY SWANSON-RIVENBARK,
ICMA-CM

15 meaningful ways that peers can help members in transition

In any given month, ICMA sponsors roughly 200 members in transition (MITs)—managers or assistant managers that have been fired, forced to resign, or otherwise involuntarily separated from local government service. Most times, this temporary status is due to a change in council direction, council turnover, or some type of town or county tension.

Why should managers receiving favorable reviews, positive press and social media coverage, and glowing evaluations from the majority of their council care about those in transition? Because the number of managers that have been an MIT at least once in their careers is rather large. So, while reaching out to an MIT is in keeping with Tenet 3 of the ICMA Code of Ethics (“Demonstrate by word and action the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity in all public, professional, and personal relationships...”) and reflective of the Golden Rule (“Do unto others...”), take interest in helping MITs if, for no other reason, than you may be next.

When I served on the 2020–2021 Task Force on Members in Transition to update helpful resources for MITs, task force members frequently heard that some of the most helpful assistance and support that MITs had received was from their peers—fellow city/county managers, known and unknown—who understood the dynamics and difficulties of the profession. Reaching out to a colleague when they’ve been fired or forced to resign can be awkward, but it’s a critical time in their professional and personal lives. The following is a list of some of the ways you can help. Peruse the list and choose what works for you and what might be appreciated by an MIT.

- 1 **Introduce yourself.** You don’t have to know an MIT personally to help them. Send an email or card saying that they are in your thoughts and to let you know how you can help. (ICMA’s Who’s Who member directory (icma.org/whoswho) should have their updated contact information. If it still lists their prior job’s email address, check back—it will be updated soon.)
- 2 **Make sure the MIT contacts ICMA** (if they haven’t already) to alert them that their employment status has changed or will change and to update their contact information. Please don’t assume the MIT has already made contact as he or she may be struggling to keep their head above water in a wave that feels more like a typhoon. They should contact Rosalyn Ceasar, senior program manager at ICMA, at rceasar@icma.org.

MITs will be advised that their ICMA membership is with the individual, not the agency, and that ICMA offers several free benefits reserved for professional managers in MIT status. These include a full waiver of ICMA dues for up to three years, a waiver of registration fees for the ICMA Annual Conference (in-person or virtual), and a monthly conference call with dozens of MITs on topics such as interviewing, marketing yourself, personal strategic planning, tips for working with search firms, and more. ICMA has also launched Equilibrium, a free, members-only program to help members, including MITs, manage life’s many personal and professional challenges.

- 3 **Reach out to the MIT** (and put it in your calendar to follow up periodically to see how they are doing). Drop a quick note to say you’re thinking of them or call them to “pick their brain” on an issue. Several MITs have commented about how quiet it got when their phone stopped ringing, yet they were hesitant to reach out so as to not be a burden.
- 4 **Remind the MIT that they are more than a job or a nametag.** They have interests and goals and value far beyond work and they should use this time to take care of themselves and their loved ones.
- 5 **Get the MIT out of the house for some fun** if they don’t live too far away. Meeting up for something like a barbeque, sports game, bike ride, book lecture, or even just a cup of coffee can be helpful, especially when their previous social circles consisted mostly of coworkers. It’s also a good time to remind them to give themselves a well-deserved break. Managers work 24/7, 365 days a year, holidays and vacations included.
- 6 **Invite the MIT to a future lunch meeting with other managers.** It’s important for them to get back in the saddle when they are ready.
- 7 **Introduce the MIT to some of your own resources and networks**, like a city manager in an area where they may be thinking about relocating or an executive search firm you know. This may not get them an interview, but it may move them up in the pile while also opening doors to interim assignments.
- 8 **Connect with the MIT on Zoom if they are out of your area.** Use your typical afternoon coffee break for a quick catch-up. Not sure what to say? Remember, listening can be more helpful than anything.
- 9 **Help the MIT review their updated resume**, assemble and critique their list of accomplishments, prepare for a mock interview (in person or online), or practice a cold call

when they are ready to re-enter the job market. This “readiness” may take time. (Remind them to order their personal business cards to use during their transitional time.)

- 10 **Ask the MIT to sit on a panel**, such as a hiring panel, an RFP selection team, or leadership development group, for their insight and to keep them engaged in the profession.
- 11 **Forward the MIT the link to ICMA's new guide for members in transition.** The guide, *The Member's Guide to a Career That Has Ups, Downs, and Detours: An ICMA Member in Transition Guide* (icma.org/MITguide), was released in March 2022, so it's quite possible they haven't read it yet. Take a look yourself: Page 25 provides additional hints for providing peer support and an important section on prevention.
- 12 **Suggest that the MIT contact an ICMA senior advisor** for free confidential chats and support. These “pro bono” retired city and county managers can provide wise, confidential counsel nearby or across the time zones. They also learn of opportunities “off the radar” for permanent and interim work. The senior advisor page on the ICMA website (icma.org/icma-senior-advisor-program) has contact information for more than 100 volunteer senior advisors in 25 states.

- 13 **Consider the MIT for short-term assignments**, whether in-person or remote, to help you keep some of your important projects moving forward while allowing the MIT to stay engaged in the profession.
- 14 **Share job leads and opportunities with the MIT** as you hear about them.
- 15 **Recruit other managers to “check in”** and assist, but not in an intrusive way. Remember: many of us have been there once (or more than once) and chances are we could be there again.

Nikki Giovanni, winner of the 2017 Maya Angelou Lifetime Achievement Award and seven-time recipient of the NAACP Image Award for her poetry, said “A lot of people resist transition and never allow themselves to enjoy who they are. Embrace the change, no matter what it is; once you do, you can learn about the new world you're in and take advantage of it.”

We must remind the MITs (and ourselves) that transitions in our profession are commonplace and it's up to us to make the best of them. If you have other suggestions how peers can assist MITs, please email rceasar@icma.org and together we will continue to grow the ways that we can support MITs. **PM**



CATHY SWANSON-RIVENBARK, ICMA-CM, AICP, CECID, is currently an MIT and founder of Best Practice Cities, LLC (swansonrivenbark@outlook.com).

PROFILES OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN ACTION



“The Voluntary Credentialing Program has helped me strategically approach professional development. The greatest value in the program is the accountability to continuously learn across the 14 practice areas and the self-improvement that has occurred through including organizational and community stakeholders in assessing my strengths and weaknesses as a leader.”

Matt Allen
City Manager
City of Garden City, KS
Credentialed since March 2003

**Celebrating
20 Years of
the Voluntary
Credentialing
Program!**

Demonstrate your commitment to professional development and lifelong learning. Join the growing number of those who have earned the ICMA-CM designation.

ICMA Credentialed Managers are viewed with growing distinction by local governing bodies and progressive, civically engaged communities. For more information, visit icma.org/credentialedmgr

ICMA

View a list of credentialed managers and candidates at icma.org/credentialed

Local Government Leadership Advice, *Courtesy of Tom Hanks* | BY JENNIFER MAY

Inspiration from the award-winning actor's 2020 Golden Globes acceptance speech

At the beginning of 2020, naïve to all that would happen in the coming weeks, I found myself watching Tom Hanks accept the Cecil B. DeMille award on the televised Golden Globes. Struck by the many lessons he packed into those few minutes, I shared the video of his speech at work, and our group put together a list of “10 Inspirations from Tom Hanks for 2020” through a local government lens.

That year may not have gone as planned, but as we all look to the future—and for me personally, as our organization embarks on major values, culture, and strategic planning efforts in the wake of the world being turned upside down—these reminders still feel just as relevant today:

1. Appreciate your family.

While Tom was clearly talking about his *actual* family in the context of his speech, I can't help but wonder how differently we might approach planning for the future if we “saw” our coworkers and community members the same way their families “see” them. How much bolder would we be in advocating for changes, such as those that would allow them to spend more quality time with their families outside of work? How much more urgently would we make investments in new services and programs to make their lives better in big and small ways?

2. Head full of ideas? Share 'em!

How do we inspire a head full of audacious ideas? We can look to unexpected places for inspiration, from art to articles about industries completely unrelated to local government. We can do the (often hard and painstaking) work of developing a culture where everyone at every level feels empowered and safe to share their ideas. Most importantly, we can say “yes” to new and different ideas and be visible in our celebration of those very ideas, regardless of whether they succeed or fail.

3. Learn from others.

The good news is that we aren't facing the future alone. Whether you're feeling stuck, you're looking for new ideas, or you could just use some advice, consider attending the ICMA Annual Conference or visiting one-on-one with a trusted colleague. We can always

learn from each other, and I've never met anyone who isn't willing to share more about their organization's innovative programs and services. Of course, partnering with private sector professionals—such as futurists, strategic planning facilitators, or even business leaders in your own community—can also prove to be incredibly inspirational for thinking about the future in new ways.

4. We don't have a film unless you do your job.

I love serving in the assistant/deputy city manager role, but it's also one of the weirdest roles I've ever had, especially in the context of strategic planning. It's easy to wonder what is “mine to own” in this process. After all, the big-picture vision belongs to the community, the strategic priorities to the city council, the organizational vision to the city manager, and departmental visions to directors. Where do assistants and deputies fit in? We can write an organizational vision with the city manager; we can ask big-picture questions to help directors as they outline departmental strategies; and we can bring our own unique passions and strengths to the job as we work to inspire a future better than people can even imagine.

5. Everyone has a place—and is as important as the one standing in front of the camera.

As leaders, we get to be the face of a lot of things within the organization, but are we doing enough to think about the future from the perspectives of others? Our organizational visions and strategies will be meaningless if they don't resonate with employees at all levels in a way that inspires them to be advocates and ambassadors themselves.

6. Be on time. Maybe even arrive early.

While today may seem “fine,” we know decline is inevitable if we are not constantly taking aspirational actions. This can be anything from preparing financial plans for funding street rehabilitation, to spending time talking about the future with new employees, to not shying away from hard conversations with the community about changes that are needed. We might even need to question whether or not lengthy planning efforts resulting in detailed, multi-year action plans are still the best way to “arrive early” and keep us on the aspirational path in an increasingly disruptive world.



7. Know your lines—and the context of your lines in the film.

As leaders, we all know how important every single employee within our organization is to our future success and achieving the community's vision, but do they? If we want employees to find fulfillment in their jobs, it is critical that we put even more effort into sharing that vision and connecting the importance and relationship of their day-to-day work to our big-picture strategies and initiatives.

8. Know that we're all going together.

When we look to the future, it can be easy to assume that we have talked enough about the "why" behind our initiatives, which risks jumping straight to focusing way too much on a list of projects instead of a vision. When we do this, it can cause frustration and confusion as people do not fully understand where we are trying to go.

9. Don't be "hungover."

We shouldn't let the past rule the future. For those of us who have worked for an organization for a long time, this is often easier said than done. While we may remember a prior council emphatically giving clear direction on a topic, we need to be willing to test changes to these policies with new governing bodies today. After all, we have to be careful that the things that made our communities successful 10 years ago don't become the very things that hamper success in the future.

10. Check the gate!

Tom explained that back when motion pictures were shot on film, you could not move on to the next scene until the "gate was good." (The gate is the window on the camera where light from the lens passes through to expose the film. After a scene, they would "check the gate" to confirm that all was well and the production crew could move on to the next take.) For me, one of the hardest parts about looking to the future is that it will be decades until we know whether or not the "gate was good"—and it will be the community, not us, making that assessment. Even though this can be hard, what an incredible privilege it is to get to work in a profession where we have the opportunity to contribute to making our communities better not just today, but for years and years to come, long after we are gone.

Here's to looking to the future, giving it our all, and to residents 50 years from now saying the same words with which Tom Hanks ended his speech: "I have checked the gate. The gate is good." (And if anyone knows Tom Hanks, please thank him for his unexpected impact on local government.) **PM**



JENNIFER MAY
is deputy city
manager of Sugar
Land, Texas.

FINE(ance) Fridays



This podcast series from the Government Finance Officers Association takes listeners “beyond the numbers” and dives into how public finance professionals got to where they are today. These are real and honest conversations about **hardship, sacrifice, and triumph.**



Season Two
Streaming Now

Listen and subscribe to GFOA wherever you get your podcasts.

To Centralize or Decentralize, That Is *Not* the Question | BY HALA ALTAMIMI

Approaching the issue differently may help us **break through** this binary thinking.

In times of crisis, local government managers face pressure to implement changes that improve organizational performance. To successfully carry out those changes, is it better to centralize decision making with the chief executive? Or push the decision making down to middle managers and front-line employees? A recent study published in the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* offers insights into this age-old question using data from a national survey of U.S. city governments.¹

Arguments on Centralization and Decentralization

To understand how de/centralization facilitates change implementation, three aspects must be considered: information, coordination, and time management.

- Managers rely on consistent and accurate information to assess the need and type of change.
- Successful change requires coordinating actions and marshaling resources in a unified manner.
- Managers need to consider the decision-making environment—unlike regular times that afford lengthy deliberations, quick decisions are crucial in times of crisis to prevent problems from escalating.

Centralization supporters argue that it provides clear communication channels through which information flows efficiently and gets screened and condensed at various managerial points. Another advantage is that a central authority secures coordination by defining roles, setting directions, and providing maximum control over operations. Assuming that centralization does promote efficiency in communication and coordination, it can help managers reach and implement decisions quickly.

However, a key argument against centralization is the top executive's limitations. It is unrealistic to expect a single individual to process all information needed. Also, employees have power stemming from their expert knowledge. They can choose to delay communication, pass on inaccurate information, or only share the pieces that serve their interests.

Opponents call for decentralizing decision making for more responsiveness. Employee participation also builds trust, reduces information distortion, and limits change resistance. Despite the benefits, managers may not always be able to decentralize every decision. Some situations need a form of central authority, such as when managing a crisis.

When thinking about organizational decision making, it is common to assume that there are two options: to centralize or decentralize.

More a Matter of Degrees than Absolutes

Instead of two opposing structures, managers may view decision making as a continuum. At one end is a highly centralized structure where authority rests typically with the chief executive. At the opposite end is a highly decentralized structure where all employees participate in all major decisions. The upper middle is moderately centralized, where the department or unit heads are involved in decision making. The lower middle is moderately decentralized, where employees can participate in decisions that affect them.

Middle > Extremes

A decision context is important. Times of crisis challenge regular patterns of communication, coordination, and time management. Information flow increases, coordination becomes difficult, and quick



HALA ALTAMIMI
is an assistant professor in the School of Public Affairs and Administration at the University of Kansas (haltamimi1@ku.edu).

action is crucial. Complete centralization may not be possible. If a decision maker has typically limited time and attention span, it only worsens during a crisis. Similarly, employee participation needs times and resources that may not be available during or in the aftermath of a crisis.

Managers can get the best of the two structures by using a balanced decision approach: the efficiency of centralization and the expert knowledge and enhanced decision quality of decentralization. They can strategically adjust the right balance to fit the situations they face.

The Type of Change Matters

Besides context, managers need to consider the type of change. For example, reorganization can include dissolving/merging units and creating new procedures and processes. These initiatives change job descriptions, functional relationships, and all HR functions. Their disruptive nature triggers employee resistance.

For those changes, managers can follow a moderately centralized structure that includes middle managers in decision making. Their influence over subordinates ensures maximum control and speed to direct resources,

resolve conflict, and coordinate action. They can also help the chief executive process more information without compromising timely decision making.

In contrast, when change is less disruptive, moderate levels of employee participation can help implementation; for example, adopting a new IT system arguably has more favorable outcomes than reorganization. It can help employees do their jobs better by facilitating information generation, integration, and sharing. As a result, they are more likely to support its implementation.

Conclusion

When thinking about organizational decision making, it is common to assume that there are two options: to centralize or decentralize. Approaching the issue differently may help us break through this binary thinking. The question should not be whether to centralize or decentralize, but how to find the balance and behave strategically to adapt to environmental and organizational contingencies. **PM**

ENDNOTE

¹ Hala Altamimi, Qiaozhen Liu, Benedict Jimenez. "Not Too Much, Not Too Little: Centralization, Decentralization, and Organizational Change," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, March 2022, <https://academic.oup.com/jpart/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/jopart/muac016/6549741>.

IS EVERYONE AT YOUR ORGANIZATION USING THE SAME PLAYBOOK?

The ICMA Ethics Center provides training and technical assistance services for creating and maintaining an ethical work environment for staff, leadership, elected officials, boards and commissions.

Contact Martha Perego,
Director of Member Services and Ethics,
at mperego@icma.org, 202.962.3668.



ICMA | ethics

ICMA Ethics Center
icma.org/ethics



Roger L. Kemp MPA, MBA, PhD ~ National Speaker ~

Dr. Kemp provides national professional speaking services on current government topics. Some of these topics include state-of-the-art practices in the following dynamic and evolving fields:

- America's Infrastructure
- Budgets and Politics
- Cities and The Arts
- Economic Development
- Financial Management
- Forms of Local Government
- Immigrant Services
- Main Street Renewal
- Model Government Charters
- Municipal Enterprise Funds
- Police-Community Relations
- Privatization
- Elected Officials and Management Staff
- Strategic Planning
- Town-Gown Relations
- Working with Unions

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.

Dr. Roger L. Kemp
421 Brownstone Ridge, Meriden, CT 06451
Phone: (203) 686-0281 • Email: rlkbsr@snet.net
www.rogerkemp.org

Helping local governments *thrive*



IS NOW
RAFTELIS

- Organizational Assessment
- Executive Search
- Strategic Planning/Facilitation
- Financial Planning
- Strategic Communications
- Technology and Data



Learn more at raftelis.com
Info@raftelis.com / 513.221.0500

matrix consulting group

1650 S. Amphlett Blvd., Suite 213
San Mateo, CA 94402

650.858.0507 • www.matrixcg.net

Offices in CA, AK, IL, MA, NC, OR & TX

- Management and operations studies
- Feasibility studies
- User fees and cost allocation

Police • Fire • Public Works • Utilities
Parks & Recreation • Administration
Planning & Building • Fleet

RALPH ANDERSEN & ASSOCIATES



*Providing Executive Search, Consulting,
and Compensation Services Since 1972*

www.ralphandersen.com
916.630.4900

PUBLIC SAFETY & HUMAN RESOURCE CONSULTANTS

- Fire/EMS/Police Department Audits
- Consolidation Studies
- Compensation & Benefit Analysis
- Human Resource Audits
- Employee Handbooks
- Executive Recruitment
- Nationwide Experience



(815) 728-9111
mcgrathconsulting.com



ICMA CAREER GUIDES

ICMA's Career Guides are local government professional toolkits to help you thrive, from finding a position to succeeding as a first-time manager, or how to break into the profession from another field, and preparing the next generation through internships and Fellowships.



icma.org/careerguides

ICMA

THANK YOU TO OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERS



Dr. Mitchell Berg, PhD

Associate Director

Veden Center for Rural Development, University of Minnesota Crookston
ICMA Member since 2015**Celebrating National
Native American
Heritage Month****Building Trust**

One challenge I've encountered was building trust. Especially when unfamiliar with the community and the people, you really have to build a foundation. In my dissertation research, I discovered an interesting statistic: when tribal government headquarters and city/county government centers are located near each other, it leads to those elected leaders not wanting to cooperate. After centuries of racism and trauma, there's a lot of mistrust that still exists in our community today, unfortunately. The greatest challenge has been to overcome those barriers and, in some cases, building relationships on a one-on-one level.

Advice for Managers on Indigenous Communities

The first way to overcome barriers is to listen. So many people just want to be that "savior," but what is really important is to listen to the indigenous community's needs and see if they align with your priorities. If they don't align, you have to ask yourself what you're willing to do. Next is to really understand that tribal community. Each one is very different and unique. You need to be intentional when you build these relationships. It should not be one where you come together for a mutual need and then you end that relationship. You must sustain that relationship. Lastly, understand that tribes have sovereignty and understand what that sovereignty means to that tribe. That will go a long way to help deepen those relationships.

**Transformational
Communities**

Working in Mahanomen, Minnesota, was very fulfilling; the community really wants to see change. They're very proud of where they've been, and they want to keep that momentum moving forward. It has been great to work in a community where you have multiple champions—city council, staff, tribal councilmembers, and elected and non-elected community leaders.

The Power of ICMA

In an ever-changing profession, with the challenge of running a town or county in a very difficult political climate, leaning on our peers has been basically a free and very affordable mental health service. There are so few people that really understand what we do, and to be able to build those networks and lean on them is so helpful. ICMA has enabled me to see that there are other communities out there facing the same issues as mine.





STEP UP TO ICMA EXECUTIVE BOARD SERVICE

Serve your peers. Serve your profession. Serve your association.

ICMA's 21-member executive board provides governance to the association and is responsible for selecting the president, supervising the association's executive director/CEO, providing fiduciary oversight, representing the association, and adopting policies to advance ICMA's mission and vision, thereby exercising a critical leadership role for the local government management profession. The board also enforces the association's Code of Ethics, which governs the professional and personal conduct of the membership.

There are six regions and each region is represented by three regional vice presidents. Every year, each region has one regional vice president position open up in the region's rotation. ICMA Executive Board service demands active participation and a significant commitment of time and effort throughout a board member's three-year term.

NOMINATIONS FOR REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED OCTOBER 18, 2022, THROUGH JANUARY 13, 2023.

Start planning today! ICMA strongly encourages individuals who are interested in pursuing this leadership opportunity to reach out to their state or country association leadership, affiliate organization leadership, current or former ICMA regional vice presidents, ICMA regional directors, or ICMA program staff at icmanominations@icma.org. Access regional nominations and annual election information on ICMA's website: [icma.org/BoardNominations](https://www.icma.org/BoardNominations).

"Being able to represent colleagues in my region was a tremendous honor and responsibility. Throughout my time on the board, I had the privilege of working with some very talented people while making some great friends."



Christopher Coleman, former Northeast Regional Vice President

"I wanted to serve on the board to give back to ICMA and the profession. As a board member, I believe I have been able to have an impact on the important work of the ICMA Strategic Plan."



Diane Stoddard, Mountain Plains Regional Vice President

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my time on the Board. Local governments around the world have never been more challenged than they are right now and it's important that we have organizations like ICMA to help us navigate the difficult waters. I would strongly encourage any ICMA member to put their name forward to run for a board position."



Chris MacPherson, International Regional Vice President