



PUBLIC MANAGEMENT



**Top 10 Things to Know
About Leadership 10**

**Introducing Local
Government Reimagined 16**

**Ultimate Guide to
Interview Preparation 20**

Frank Benest, ICMA-CM (Retired)
Author of "Career Compass"

YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAREER

JANUARY 2023
ICMA.ORG/PM



THANK YOU FROM MARC OTT TO THE ICMA STRATEGIC PARTNERS



ICMA CEO and Executive Director Marc Ott wishes to thank those organizations that have partnered with ICMA at the Strategic Partner level.

ICMA is the leading organization for change makers, those committed to creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world—and seeking the right solutions to make it happen. Learn more at icma.org/strategic-partners.



FEATURES | »

10

Career Compass #100: Leadership Lessons from 99 Career Compass Columns

To celebrate the milestone of 100 Career Compass columns, Frank Benest has culled his "top 10" list of leadership lessons from the first 99 in hopes that these lessons provoke your leadership thinking and action.
Dr. Frank Benest, ICMA-CM (Retired)

16

Introducing Local Government Reimagined

ICMA's long-term commitment to helping public administrators innovate and adapt to meet the challenges of today and those beyond the horizon

Marc A. Ott with Laura Goddeeris, AICP

20

The Ultimate Guide to Preparing for an Interview in Local Government

Whether you've had dozens of job interviews throughout your career or you're preparing for your first one, read through these guidelines beforehand to help you prepare.

24

Engaging Student Chapters: Helping to Build the Leadership Pipeline

Now more than ever, it's crucial that we engage with students, especially at HBCUs, to connect them with opportunities for their future in local government.

Erika Cooper and Joseph D. Fleming III

28

Life-Changing Career Development—The Harvard Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program

Hailed as "far more than just another continuing education opportunity," this three-week program has helped many local government leaders grow in their career. And a scholarship from ICMA makes it more accessible.

Jessi Atcheson and Duane Holder

32

Let's Think Differently About Local Government

Introducing a new series of articles challenging local government leaders to be bold, creative, and willing to think differently about the status quo.

Ed Everett, ICMA-CM (Retired)

34

Creating a "Life at Night" Plan for Your Community: A Three-Step Guide

Effective nighttime planning, tailored to both local challenges and opportunities, is key.

Sarah Hannah-Spurlock



24

DEPARTMENTS | »

2 Ethics Matter!

Showing Professional Courtesy and Respect When You're No Longer in Charge

6 Letter from the CEO/Executive Director

Partner with ICMA to Achieve Your Career Resolutions

8 Assistants and Deputies

Making the Leap from ACAO to CAO

38 Members in Transition

Supporting Colleagues During a Transition, Part 3

43 Professional Services Directory

45 Member Spotlight

Greg Schulte



20



28

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Share your thoughts on *PM* magazine by emailing us at pm@icma.org. Submit an article proposal to pm@icma.org or learn more at icma.org/writeforus.

ICMA

International City/County
Management Association

Showing Professional *Courtesy and Respect* When You're No Longer in Charge

What are the ethical boundaries in your former life? | BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

Whether by choice or force, we all share the experience and journey of advancing to what's next in our professional lives. What we are moving on to—and why—no doubt affects how receptive and adaptive we will be to the change.

The sheer exhilaration of landing your dream job in a new organization makes it very easy to see your old position entirely through the rearview mirror. Friends and colleagues remain, but making a clean break is easy.

But for others, leaving an organization for which you have expended great energy, passion, and commitment is tough to do even if you are leaving of your own volition. The evidence of your contribution, after all, is everywhere. Whether it is a department you rebuilt with talented staff, a new neighborhood park, a renovated town hall, or an economic strategy that revitalized main street, your contributions are tangible and physically evident. Let's face it: It's hard to just close the door and walk away from the community you create through that work.

Adding to the complexity of the transition, imagine if you plan to live in the community you once managed. How do you balance your reputation and status as a “former” with the new role of being just a “resident”? How do you exercise your civic duties and rights as a resident

in a way that does not undermine the colleague who now holds your former position? If you think the current manager is not making good decisions, based on your professional expertise and knowledge of the operations, what should you do?

To be clear, there are no hard and fast rules of engagement here for a member who wants to participate in their former community, whether they reside there or not. Members who no longer work for a local government must follow these two tenets from the ICMA Code of Ethics:

Tenet 1. *We believe professional management is essential to efficient and democratic local government by elected officials.*

Tenet 3. *Demonstrate by word and action the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity in all public, professional, and personal relationships in order that the member may merit the trust and respect of the elected and appointed officials, employees, and the public.*

Of the many guidelines under Tenet 3, the one on public confidence is most relevant to this discussion: *Members should conduct themselves so as to maintain public confidence in their position and profession, the integrity of their local government, and in their responsibility to uphold the public trust.*

And then consider that long-held rule of engagement that seems most on point here: If you have a discussion



MARTHA PEREGÓ,

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

January 2023

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 2023 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.



with a colleague's elected officials, that colleague needs to hear about it. And the preferred method of interaction is peer to peer. Don't go around your colleague to talk with their elected officials.

Here are two real scenarios that serve to highlight why this is a very gray ethical issue.

Giving Back to the Community

A former city manager, who served the city in that role for over a decade, applied to serve on the citizens commission that provides advice on housing policy issues and funding allocations. Affordable housing has always been a challenge in the city and the now-retired manager felt that she has the time and expertise to devote to the issue.

As a courtesy, she stopped by city hall to give the current manager a head's up. The news was received with great unease by the current manager. At first, he thought this might violate ICMA's Code of Ethics. It does not. A member,

especially one who is no longer working for a local government, can serve on an appointed board or commission even for their former employer.

He remained concerned that her involvement might impede efforts to shift the city's approach to solving this intractable issue. Not to lay blame, but the strategies used under her watch didn't seem to make much progress.

This seems like two sides of the same coin. Some local government organizations benefit from having former practitioners

on their committees as they bring a level of knowledge that others may not have. On the flipside, it can create a situation of competing perspectives. Whose perspective and advice do you follow? The current city manager (and his or her staff) or the former, who (depending on their tenure) may carry a lot of influence in the community.

Assuming positive intent, the manager opted for a follow-up conversation where he successfully persuaded the former manager not to advance her interest in this cause from a city-related perch.

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR A FORMER MANAGER IN THEIR FORMER COMMUNITY ARE NOT ETCHED IN STONE.

Running for Office

After serving the community for 15 years, a city manager announced his retirement, and the city commenced the search for a suitable replacement. The new city manager was approved by a unanimous vote. A month later, the former city manager entered the campaign to fill an unexpected open seat on city council.

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

Though rare, this is not the first time a former city or county manager sought elected public office. When it happens, generally it is not in the community they once managed, but if so, certainly not on the heels of their retirement. The ICMA Code of Ethics doesn't require a retired member to adhere to the principle of political neutrality and is silent on the issue of what would be a suitable waiting period, if any.

The desire to continue public service in a beloved community doesn't outweigh the impact of that decision on the organization, profession, and the new city manager. Whether good or not so, the reputation and perceived influence of anyone who holds the title of manager doesn't evaporate when they walk out the door. Regardless of whether they leverage their former position in the campaign, will that former title garner campaign support from donors who presume an inside advantage should this candidate prevail? And if they win, what will be the impact on staff who may be challenged to support the candidate's donors as they officially engage with the city?

After years of serving as a nonpartisan, politically neutral professional, what impact does the campaign have on the image of the profession? Imagine being the new city manager only to have the former occupant now be one of your supervisors.

Things to Consider

As noted, the rules of engagement for the former manager in their former community are not etched in stone. There is similar ambiguity when a former manager engages in their new hometown. If you find yourself in that role or dealing with someone in that role, here are some considerations:

1. **Before volunteering to serve in an official capacity in the community where you live or worked, check in with the current manager.** Listen to discern whether your participation will be helpful and not an impediment.
2. **No two will lead and manage an organization the same way, yet both may be successful in the end.** Consider that if former staff reach out to talk about the new leadership. Keep your conversations focused on personal, not professional, topics.
3. **Keep your counsel private.** If you think your colleague is making poor decisions or seems off track, offer your professional expertise in private. Once offered, step back. Even as a former practitioner and resident, you may not have the insider perspective and all the facts. Also, differences of opinion or approach are not cause for going around your colleague. Standing at the dais at a public meeting or talking with the elected officials should be the very last resort held for ethical or legal matters.
4. **The right to do something doesn't mean it is the right thing to do.** Think about that as you weigh your engagement in your former or current community.

Returning to Tenet 1, if we believe that professional management is essential to efficient and democratic local government, then it is incumbent on all of us to do our best to respect and, in a constructive way, support our colleagues. **PM**



UPCOMING ICMA EVENTS

icma.org/events

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REIMAGINED CONFERENCES

In 2023, ICMA will host four conferences inviting those who heed the call for public service and strive to improve the quality of life for all those in their community. Help us build a better future and seek to engage in dialogue, training, and thought leadership that will guide ICMA and your local government for the next 100 years. Learn more and register at lgr.icma.org/registration.

Local Government
REIMAGINED
CONFERENCES

- **The Call of Public Service |**
Oklahoma City, OK | February 22-24
- **Innovations in Program & Service Delivery |**
Burlington, VT | April 12-14
- **Public Engagement, Political Discourse & Civic Education |**
Louisville, KY | May 10-12
- **Placemaking at the Local Level: Livable Communities, Thriving Economies |**
Long Beach, CA | June 7-9

January 18: Micro-Certification Program

21st Century Budgeting: From Line Items to Greater Alignment with Priority-Based Budgeting (PBB)

January 24: ICMA University Workshop

The Future of Work – Session 1

January 25: Webinar

How Can the New Congressional District Health Dashboard Fuel Policy Efforts to Improve Health?

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 January Member Spotlight with Greg Schulte, ICMA and CCCMA Senior Advisor, on the inside back cover of this issue.



2023 ICMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXCELLENCE AWARDS

CELEBRATING



OF EXCELLENCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Have you or a colleague

- + made a significant difference in your community or to the profession?
- + implemented an innovative program that addressed a critical community need?

Nominate a U.S. and/or international peer or program

5 Professional Award categories

Career Excellence
Development of New Talent
Excellence in Leadership as an Assistant
Early Career Leadership
Academic Contributions to the Profession

5 Program Award categories

Community Equity and Inclusion
Community Health and Safety
Community Partnerships
Community Sustainability
Strategic Local Governance

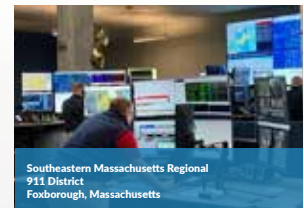
How To Submit

1. Visit icma.org/awards
2. Watch the video for step-by-step instructions.



2022 Local Government Excellence Award Recipients

View all 2022 award recipients at icma.org/sept2022pm



Southeastern Massachusetts Regional 911 District
Foxborough, Massachusetts



Storm Lake Community Outreach
Storm Lake, Iowa



COVID-19 Vaccination Site for Vulnerable Seniors
Oakland Park, Florida



Homeless Strategic Plan
Vista, California



Recycled Asphalt Pavement Project
Richmond, British Columbia, Canada

Important Dates

Award Submissions Opens: **January 10, 2023**
Submission Deadline: **March 9, 2023**



Partner with ICMA to Achieve Your *Career Resolutions*

BY MARC A. OTT

The new edition of *The Effective Local Government Manager* is your go-to resource for achieving your **professional development goals**.

It's typical, at the beginning of a new year, to establish goals that will give you a clear sense of direction right from the start. Career objectives probably top the resolutions list for most of us.

One of the keys to successfully achieving your goals is to have a partner—someone to whom you can be accountable and can count on for support and affirmation. It is our sincere intention that ICMA be that partner. We do this in many ways—by convening virtual or in-person gatherings of like-minded professionals, by offering ethics advice, by researching and highlighting best practices, and by publishing essential resources to advance the profession.

Many ICMA members contributed to the creation of this book and we are especially grateful to them for their time and thought leadership.

Later this month, our Research and Publications team will release the fourth edition of *The Effective Local Government Manager*. The original publication was released in 1983, around the same time I was beginning my career in municipal management. It was recommended to me by a mentor who was a member of

the International City/County Management Association.

It quickly became my go-to resource as I progressed in my career, truly becoming a reliable professional development partner. Because the publication covered such a broad range of topics from building the public trust to infrastructure management, I would often reach for it when confronting a new area that I had been assigned to manage or a new issue I previously had not faced.

This new edition of the book—edited by Bob Lee, DPA, ICMA-CM and Michael Abels, DPA, ICMA-CM—builds on prior editions (the second was released in 1993 and the third in 2004). While the book's title remains *The Effective Local Government Manager*, it is equally focused on leadership. The entirely new first chapter was co-authored by John Nalbandian, who served as a professor at the University of Kansas School of Public Affairs for several decades, and Bob O'Neill, former executive director at ICMA. Their insights into the leadership and management skills required to succeed in

the increasingly complex and volatile environments of the twenty-first century come from interviews with current city, county, and town managers.

I especially appreciated the list of “qualities of leadership in a disruptive environment,” which appears at the end of this first chapter. The list includes courage, a characteristic I have often spoken of as being desperately needed in today's era of rapid change, partisan politics, and incivility.

While the new edition does a great job of looking at the changing nature of all that is required to deliver services and lead an increasingly specialized staff, Martha Perego, ICMA's director of membership and ethics, provides a chapter on ethics. She concisely differentiates the role of local government manager from the private sector:

Like the CEO of any organization, the successful manager must be an effective leader with a comprehensive knowledge of the field; the skill and expertise to manage a complex organization; and strong interpersonal skills to work with diverse, disparate stakeholders.... (They must) do all of the above in a way that builds trust and confidence with the public they serve.

The chapter demonstrates how the Code of Ethics serves as the foundation for decision making and gives real-world examples of its application.

Beyond leadership and ethics, the other chapters in the book provide a “how-to” approach across the traditional managerial functions of city and county management, always through the lens of building the public trust.

Many ICMA members contributed to the creation of this book and we are

The authors' insights into the leadership and management skills required to succeed in the increasingly complex and volatile environments of the twenty-first century come from interviews with current city, county, and town managers.



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



especially grateful to them for their time and thought leadership. Their experiences are what make this resource a true partner in helping everyone from students to seasoned managers achieve their professional development goals.

This fourth edition of *The Effective Local Government Manager* could not be more timely or more essential and I am excited to build even further on this body of knowledge with a new generation of leaders who will lean on this publication as I did in charting their own course in this rewarding profession. **PM**

PROFILES OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN ACTION



"The ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program causes me to be more deliberate in my professional development planning and choices. Time is a valuable commodity and training budgets are tight. The credentialing program makes me mindful of what areas I want to focus on each year and the 40-hour target helps me make better decisions about where to allocate my time and training budget."

Paula D. Schumacher
Village Administrator
Village of Bartlett, IL
Credentialed since September 2002

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

Making the Leap from ACAO to CAO

BY JEFF WECKBACH

Whether sudden or expected, the transition to the top spot can go more **smoothly** if you start planning now.

It's 2pm on a Friday before a holiday weekend. You are at a local chamber of commerce event when your boss, the chief administrative officer (CAO), pulls you aside for a walk and talk. Your head starts to sift through the various personnel issues and complaints that the community is dealing with, thinking that this talk is going to somehow be related to one of those items. Instead, you are hit with a curve ball as you quickly learn that your boss has taken a job in the private sector and their last day is less than a month away.

I wish I could say that the coming months would be easy. In my case, I was the only assistant chief administrative officer (ACAO) for our community. My contract with our elected board stated that I would be appointed as the interim administrator in the event of a vacancy in the CAO role. Thankfully that meant that I had the clarity to know I would be an interim for some time while our elected board determined a course of action. However, I still had to figure out if I would want to apply for the CAO role, and if so, what would I do differently? How would I manage the work in the interim capacity knowing that there are only so many hours in the day?

As I sit here today, I am fortunate to have been promoted to the CAO role and found excellent individuals to serve as the ACAO for my organization. However, as I reflect on the past several months, I realize that I learned a lot during the transition. While all of these points may not translate to every transition, some of these might be helpful to someone who is just having an unexpected walk and talk.



going to call the other members of the leadership team to get their perspective on your abilities, and their opinion will influence the decision on hiring you as the CAO.

2. Make a Plan

Start building your plan now as an ACAO for how you would act as the CAO. For me, I kept a notebook with ideas and thoughts on approaches that I would do differently if ever afforded the opportunity to become a CAO. This isn't a knock on your boss, but rather an opportunity to recognize that we all have different styles when it comes to leadership. For me, it was extremely helpful to have these items written down so I could share my vision with my elected body and employees.

3. Talk with Your Family

Early on in the transition, have a conversation with family or your support network about what you want to do. With two small boys at home, it was important that I was able to ensure that I had the full support of my family, as their support was critical during the transition period and time after the transition.

1. Strengthen Your Relationship with Department Directors

First and foremost, work to earn the respect of department directors now. If you haven't spent a great deal of time working directly with your department directors or if you have some friction with them, use the time as the ACAO to mend fences and build connections. Elected officials are



JEFF WECKBACH

is administrator of Colerain Township, Ohio.

4. Prepare for an Awkward Interview

I was not ready for some of the questions that our elected board asked, such as “What did the prior CAO do wrong?” and “What did you learn from the prior CAO?” Most of the interview seemed to be questions related to my style compared to the former CAO. I had a great relationship with the prior CAO, which made this line of questioning extremely difficult.

5. Consider the Elected Officials

I also learned that the elected officials will act differently, and you must navigate the early uncertainty. Even if they know you, they will still be trying to figure out how far they can push you on certain issues. For that reason, celebrate the wins with them early and often, even if their involvement in the project is minor. This will help to build your rapport with them.

6. Be Ready to Delegate

The hardest thing I had to learn through the transition was how to let things go. As the ACAO, I was often the person responsible for a high level of execution of tasks and projects. After several weeks of 60–80 hours of work, I finally came to the conclusion that I needed to move some issues off of my plate. I started to keep a log of tasks that I would perform as the ACAO as well. Thankfully, this

served as a great document to help our new ACAO have a workplan and I did not need to recreate the wheel, as I built the wheel spoke by spoke over time.

Probably one of my proudest moments in my early tenure wasn't even a project that I completed. We needed to work an issue with our elected board to increase police officer pay through a memo of understanding. I had recently recognized that I did not have the bandwidth to accomplish this task so I passed this directive to one of our police lieutenants. I could see the initial panic in his eyes so I assured him that I would not have asked him to do this if I didn't trust that he could. About three hours later, I had a three-page memo on my desk that served as the justification for increasing officer salary. This far exceeded my expectations, as I was only expecting an excel spreadsheet comparing salaries.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, turnover in the CAO role is all too common in our field. As politics change and board dynamics shift, the CAO may decide to leave or be forced to leave on a moment's notice. As an ACAO, you are likely insulated from these trade winds and will likely survive a temporary shift in the CAO. With that in mind, my advice to anyone that is currently serving as an ACAO, start planning now. **PM**

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

CAREER COMPASS #100: Leadership Lessons from 99 Career Compass Columns

To celebrate the milestone of 100 Career Compass columns, **Frank Benest** has culled his “top 10” list of leadership lessons from the first 99 in hopes that these lessons provoke your leadership thinking and action.

**BY DR. FRANK BENEST, ICMA-CM
(RETIRED)**



#1 Leadership starts with self-awareness.

To exert positive influence, a leader must strive to be self-aware and self-critical. Self-awareness includes understanding your own values, strengths, and areas for growth and development. It also includes awareness of your “gifts” that you as a leader are compelled to give away. >

Reflecting on my life story, I have come to understand that my gift is courage. People tend to follow me because I am willing to take risks in pursuit of worthy ends. I know that I can leverage this gift and attract followers. However, when I over-do this gift, my risk-taking becomes recklessness. Given this tendency, I endeavor to surround myself with trusted and truth-telling coaches and colleagues who can help me avoid unwarranted gambles.

Strong leaders leverage their strengths instead of focusing on their weaknesses. To minimize the impact of their weaknesses, good leaders “flex” their behavior. For instance, those of us who tend to talk too much and dominate meetings may structure team meetings so that we first ask for ideas from others, acknowledge different perspectives, and speak last. If you are not good at conducting large community meetings, you may partner with a colleague who knows how to facilitate large gatherings of people.

(See *Career Compass* #19 “Why Should Anyone Follow Me?” and #22 “Overcoming Your Blind Spots.”)

#2 People choose to follow.

Even if you are a chief executive of a local government agency, your positional or formal authority can only force a minimal level of compliance on the part of employees or others. To create followers,

A LEADER PRODUCES RESULTS THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS.

IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LEADERSHIP IS EXERTED IN A MESSY AND UNCERTAIN WORLD.

formal authority is helpful but completely insufficient. People decide to follow (or not) because of a leader’s interpersonal (even moral or spiritual) attributes.

Given that leadership is based on your people skills, you can lead from any place. Leadership has nothing to do with position. Leadership is all about exerting positive influence.

(See *Career Compass* #41 “The Post-Heroic Leader,” #92 “Leveraging Six Sources of Influence,” and #5 “Developing Leadership Skills When You Have No Formal Authority.”)

#3 Relationships facilitate results.

For most of my career as a city manager, I was more results-oriented than relationship-oriented. Only when I became more seasoned did I realize that a leader produces results through relationships.

People tend to follow you if they have a positive relationship with you and feel connected to you.

(See *Career Compass* #79 “Leading by Connecting.”)

#4 Leadership is all about engaging others in conversation.

Leading is often about connecting with others through conversation. Conducting authentic conversations can help you:

- Glean critical information from others, especially “soft” data (their values, interests, concerns, and fears).
- Address those concerns.
- Incorporate the ideas of others into any proposed actions.
- Create relationship and connection.

It is not an authentic conversation if you as the leader are not truly open to the conversation and different perspectives and ideas. The key questions for leaders are: “Am I truly open to be changed by this conversation?” and “Am I willing to constructively respond based on the conversation?”

Conducting authentic conversations requires humility. Humility is a modest view of our own importance. Humility acknowledges that leaders are dependent on others to generate good ideas and different perspectives as well as to achieve good results. Humility is a critical leadership competency.

(See *Career Compass* #61 “Leadership is the Art of Conversation,” #76 “Humble Leaders Get Results,” and #89 “Avoiding the Arrogance of Expertise.”)

#5 Empathy is a superpower.

Empathy is defined as seeing the world through the eyes of

the other person. It is the ability to understand, acknowledge, and consider (and hopefully respond to) the unique hopes, fears, ideas, and perspectives of the other person.

Why is empathy so critical in the uncertain environment of local government? First, empathy allows you to create relationship and connection. Second, in times of adversity, organizations need employees and other stakeholders to adapt. A leader cannot exert influence and promote adaptation without acknowledging the hopes, values, and fears of others and then tying positive change to those values and concerns.

Leaders need data from employees and other stakeholders. This includes not just facts and figures but also their beliefs and values based on their life experiences and their current feelings and emotions.

The best way to promote empathy is to engage in authentic conversation and ask questions, such as:

- Why is this issue important to you?
- If we figure out how to address this issue or problem, what is your hope?
- What would success look like?
- What are your concerns?
- What are we missing?
- Who are we missing?
- How might we address this issue or problem?
- If you were to join the effort to address this issue, how could I support you?

Leadership is as much about asking questions than providing



answers. Of course, after generating this “soft” data, it is critical to respond to the data in some concrete fashion.

(See *Career Compass* #86 “Empathy Is a Superpower.”)

#6 Effective leaders avoid seeking buy-in.

Even if you are trying to secure buy-in for a worthy idea or project, you will ultimately fail. Elected officials, employees, and outside stakeholders can smell the search for buy-in a mile away. Seeking buy-in is often manipulative. You are trying to “sell” your idea or program and therefore people will resist.

Instead of buy-in, leaders should engage decision-makers and other stakeholders, including employees, in a series of conversations and identify their interests, concerns, and ideas. You can then work to incorporate their ideas and address their concerns so that they get their “fingerprints” on

the proposal (so the proposal becomes “our” proposal, not “my” proposal). Your original idea that is reshaped with the input of others is typically a better and more realistic proposal.

Once you identify a stakeholder’s interests, it is helpful to “frame” the proposal in terms of those interests. By properly framing an issue or idea, others will be able to consider the positive possibilities of the proposed action. After providing the basic information to all stakeholders, you frame an issue differently for different groups. For example, if you want to pursue a clean energy project, you may want to frame the project either as a “save the planet” effort or a “jobs” program, depending on the interests of the key players.

You may also want to call the project a pilot or an experiment. With pilot projects, you expect and learn from mistakes. Decision-makers are often

open to pilots since they are “reversible.” In pursuing your agenda as a leader, it is often important to “think big but start small.”

(See *Career Compass* #47 “Leadership Myths Debunked” and #18 “Taking Smart Risks.”)

#7 Leaders must remember “why” they exert leadership.

When facing a challenge, we often run into staff meetings and focus the discussion on “what” we need to do and “how” we need to do it. It is important that we start with the “why” for ourselves and others.

Everyone has their own “why” based on their values and passions. My “why” may be promoting social justice or building community. Others may value environmental sustainability.

There are no easy technical solutions to the big adaptive challenges, such as homelessness or climate protection. It is hard to sustain your leadership efforts when you are continually criticized or blocked in trying to move forward on a worthy initiative. Therefore, it is essential to remind yourself of your “why” and engage others in their “why” or purpose.

Exerting leadership is difficult but our contributions expand our lives and who we are.

(See *Career Compass* #57 “Leading by Living Your Values.”)

#8 Successful leaders are storytellers.

In local government, you certainly need data and sound analysis to persuade





Disneyland Paris



Barcelona



Italian Riviera



Clearwater Beach



Kissimmee FL



Ennis TX

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

Undergroundrefuse.com

SEEKING BUY-IN IS OFTEN MANIPULATIVE.

decision-makers. While data is necessary, it is completely insufficient. Storytelling is the most powerful way to communicate and lead.

While professionals and administrators are driven by “what I know,” elected officials are often driven by “what I believe.” The narrative (or story) is key to persuading elected officials and community stakeholders.

To be authentic, stories must be aligned with the data. Stories put a human face on the data, make the data come alive, and move people to action. Data does not change behavior—stories do. Stories are “data with a soul.”

(See *Career Compass* #50 “Story-Telling: A Powerful Way to Lead and Communicate.”)

#9 Amid turbulence, great leaders point the way and serve as multipliers.

In this era of great uncertainty and turbulence of all kinds, an effective leader provides “clarity” of where their team is going and “flexibility” on how to get there. In turbulence, long-term planning is useless. Within certain guiderails, people must have the autonomy to “figure it out.”

With the end-goal in mind, successful teams take a few steps forward, pivot as necessary, and learn as they go. The role of the team leader is to help the team figure out the direction; send the team on its way; support team members;

and promote learning, shared accountability, and adaptation.

As they help their teams adapt, effective leaders are “multipliers” (not “diminishers”). They amplify the smarts and capabilities of those around them. They help people stretch, learn, and grow.

In contrast, diminishers tell people what to do and then test them to see if they did it the “right” way. (With adaptive challenges, there is no right way.) By “telling and testing,” these kinds of managers diminish the capabilities of those around them. They are know-it-alls, not learn-it-alls.

(See *Career Compass* #94 “10 Principles for Leading in Turbulency,” #84 “We Need Adaptive Leaders Now,” and #41 “The Post-Heroic Leader.”)

#10 Effective leaders are culture-builders.

Leaders are ineffectual without great followers. Therefore, to become an effective leader, you must attract, retain, and grow your organizational talent.

You cannot win the war for talent on salary and benefits. Competitive compensation is necessary but will not carry the day. A leader attracts and retains talent based on organizational culture.

Culture is “the way we do things around here.” Values, beliefs, and behaviors create and sustain organizational culture, whether it is at the organization-wide level, at the department or division level, or at the team level.

In an enriched culture, employees conclude that:

- I have a sense of purpose in my work.
- I belong here.
- People care about me.
- I have some flexibility in how I do my work.
- I feel appreciated.

Formal and informal leaders are culture-builders every day. Their values and most importantly their behaviors build and sustain a positive culture. They “model the way.” (See *Career Compass* #51 “Building a World-Class Culture” and #85 “To Thrive in Post-Pandemic, Enhance Employee Experience.”)

Conclusion: Leadership Is an Art

Leadership is an art, not a science. In local government, leadership is exerted in a messy and uncertain world. You achieve artistic mastery amid uncertainty by being guided by your purpose and values. However, you may not have the right answer and anybody can block you. The key challenge for leaders is “how do I get to ‘yes’ when anybody can say ‘no’?”

Given this political reality, you need to engage in authentic conversations with decision-makers, employees, and other stakeholders. In these conversations, you must ask questions and collect soft as well as hard data, incorporate the ideas of others, figure out a direction, take a few steps, pivot as necessary, and learn as you go.

Good leaders are agile learners. They are always asking themselves and others:

- As we proceed, what is going well?
- What is not going so well?
- What are we learning to apply as we continue the journey?

- How can I better support you on our journey?

To be a good leader, you obviously must give a lot of yourself. But as you give a lot, you get a lot.

I plan to continue writing *Career Compass* columns for the ICMA Coaching Program (at least for a while). I hope that these advice columns are worthy of your consideration as you continue on your leadership adventure.

Remember, through leading in pursuit of noble goals, you make a positive contribution to the lives of community members and those who serve with you. **FM**

DR. FRANK BENEST, ICMA-CM (RETIRED),

is ICMA's liaison for Next Generation Initiatives and resides in Palo Alto, California. If you have a leadership or career question you would like addressed in a future *Career Compass*, e-mail careers@icma.org or contact Frank directly at frank@frankbenest.com.



Sponsored by the ICMA Coaching Program, *Career Compass* is a monthly column focused on leadership and career development issues for local government professional staff.

To view and access any of the first 99 *Career Compass* columns, visit icma.org/career-compass.

Subscribe to the *Career Compass* columns and receive each new column in your inbox at icma.org/career-compass-archives.

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

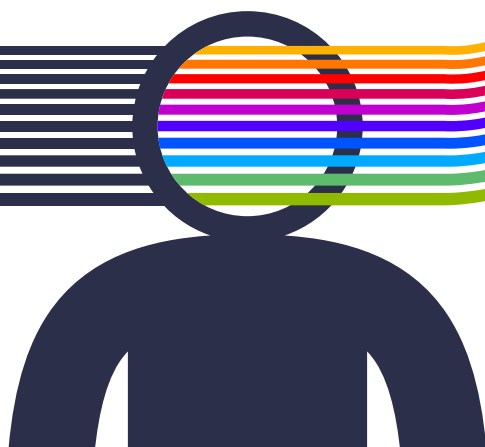
Join/renew your ICMA membership today at icma.org/join

ICMA

INTRODUCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT REIMAGINED

ICMA's long-term commitment to helping public administrators innovate and adapt to meet the challenges of today and those beyond the horizon

BY MARC A. OTT WITH
LAURA GODDEERIS, AICP



Local government leadership has always involved managing the so-called “challenge of change.” But transformations over the past half-century and especially the past several years—exponentially

advancing technology, the most significant global pandemic in modern lifetimes, a warming planet and threats to finite natural resources, and political and social instability at scales from international to local, to name just a few—have

dramatically and forever altered the conditions in which local governments operate.

As we’ve come to terms with this new landscape, we’ve heard a growing desire from members for a return to the basics about fundamental aspects of their responsibilities as public administrators—information that will make them better leaders and managers. But what does that look like in the context of all that has changed already, and the challenges lurking over the horizon?

We’re committing to exploring this with and for you through a new initiative we’re calling Local Government Reimagined.

Local Government Reimagined (LGR) is ICMA’s long-term commitment to helping public administrators innovate and adapt their leadership practices, management strategies, and operations in the name of more resilient and equitable outcomes for their work and their communities. LGR is about helping local government leaders anticipate and understand the challenges impacting their work and communities, recognize opportunities for and target improved outcomes, and figure out how to get there.

Local Government **REIMAGINED** CONFERENCES



Reimagination Lenses

Several core principles are driving this effort. Think of these as our reimagination lenses.

Innovation

In the book *No Easy Disruption*, the authors observe that “Technology—from the printing press to the steam engine and the internet—has always been a great force in overturning the status quo. The difference today is the sheer ubiquity of technology in our lives and the speed of change.”¹ Roughly a decade ago about one in three Americans owned a smartphone; by 2021 that figure had reached 85

percent.² In 2011, only one in four local governments responding to an ICMA survey reported using any sort of cloud computing.³ By mid-2020, 94% of local governments reported increased shifts to virtual public meetings made possible by Zoom and other Software-as-a-Service products; other tools made it possible for a majority to adopt broader telework policies, increase information sharing through social media platforms, and/or operate processes remotely.⁴ We also recognize the tremendous potential—and need—for innovation independent of technology: discovering ways to, as Stenberg writes, “operate more nimbly, act entrepreneurially, and work collaboratively.” Regardless of form, LGR is about proactively identifying adaptations and innovations appropriate for today and the near-term tomorrow, as well as those that may be necessary for the next generation of public administrators.

Resilience

The compounding events of the past several years have tested all facets of our individual and collective ability to endure and bounce back from challenging situations. What once seemed like a distant health threat has now logged more than half a billion cases worldwide and called into question the design of facilities and communities; the virtualization of processes; the fragility of workforces, budgets, and local economies; and the fact that we might face another pandemic of similar magnitude in our lifetimes. Meanwhile, communities across the country continue to deal with the consequences of climate-related change in the form of more frequent, extreme weather events from floods to wildfires to droughts. Others have faced high-profile crises related to clean water and massive power failures. Geopolitical conflicts are felt close to home through disruptions in supply chains, inflated prices, and population migration. And as local governments continue employing information and communications technology to achieve economic development or cost savings, increase resiliency of critical operations, provide enhanced services to residents, and for their safety and security features, their benefits must be weighed against

cybersecurity, data ethics, and accessibility concerns.

Equity

ICMA’s Code of Ethics and Declaration of Ideals speak to the profession’s obligation to serve the best interests of all people and to achieve equity and social justice. “To ensure that all the people within their jurisdiction have the ability to actively engage with their local government, members should strive to eliminate barriers to public involvement in decisions, programs, and services.” While these statements were adopted decades ago, we have both data and lived experiences that attest to persistent disparities in both access to opportunities and outcomes across different population demographics. And while these did not manifest overnight, local administrators have the ability to shape conversations about this information and to implement policies that break down barriers that may have been difficult to see—from where and when you hold a meeting, to where you invest in parks or streetlights, to revising your approach to fines and fees. With regard to internal operations and your team, we also recognize the complexities in modernizing policies and processes for today’s dynamic environment while maintaining fairness and impartiality.

We’ve heard a growing desire from members for a return to the basics about fundamental aspects of their responsibilities as public administrators.



Themes

As we launch Local Government Reimagined, we are developing research, content, and programming to explore and highlight several broad, interconnected themes.

Leadership

ICMA's timeless definition of leadership is engaging with and inspiring others to participate in developing, achieving, articulating, and embodying a shared set of values, shared sense of purpose, and shared vision of the desired community outcome. Today's local government leaders must do all of this on a constantly shifting playing field and in an increasingly transparent and accessible fishbowl. The intense pressure on and scrutiny of public officials would seem to discourage risk-taking and threaten personal resiliency and work-life balance. The political climate has propelled new board members into policymaking positions, sometimes with less experience in traditional governmental processes, and previously mundane discussions with them and the community can quickly escalate into values-based debates. These threaten to distract, if not actively undermine, the work of professional administrators, their governing bodies, and staff.

But therein lies an opportunity for bold, courageous leadership; for chief administrators to be willing to review and reimagine their organizations' core values, vision, and decision-making processes to ensure they serve the full community today and long into the future. To be willing to acknowledge and work to address past blind

spots or misconceptions, and to support governing bodies in developing policy agendas for the community around potentially thorny or polarizing issues. To champion the importance of mental health and wellness for themselves and their whole team, including being open to new ways of working and evaluating success. And ultimately, still providing the professional leadership excellence expected of ICMA managers through their adapted approaches and adjusted priorities.

ICMA members are already modeling this mindset, leveraging timeless leadership principles and flexing strategies where needed to effectively address the most urgent concerns in their communities and workforces. We'll lift up these examples and lessons learned, honoring perspectives across the profession, from the most seasoned managers to those just beginning their public service careers.

Management

ICMA and the local government management profession have built a 100+ year history around ethical, efficient, transparent, and results-oriented oversight of local government operations. To ensure leaders and the local government workforce continue to meet those obligations, we'll focus on the challenges and opportunities in future-proofing processes, systems, and policies. How are local governments adapting budgeting and strategic planning processes to incorporate more meaningful public input and better deal with uncertainty? What must a Continuity of Operations strategy and hazard mitigation

planning account for given what we've learned about health, cyber, and climate-related threats? What are leading strategies for using data and evidence-based decision making in conjunction with these and other tools to adjust approaches in a more agile, iterative cadence?

In the wake of the Great Resignation, we also know systemic workforce issues remain top of mind for local government leaders. As managers Jim Malloy (Lexington, Massachusetts) and Tanisha Briley (Gaithersburg, Maryland) discussed at the 2022 ICMA Annual Conference, vacant positions in competitive markets that once attracted dozens of applications can go for months or even longer unfilled. What can be done to attract and retain more talent, including young people, to the local government profession? Compensation is an obvious but not the only solution (nor feasible for all communities), so how are places getting creative with reconfiguring job responsibilities, hybrid or remote work environments, or other incentives? How must public agencies expedite and modernize their recruitment processes and benefits to remain competitive in current and anticipated labor markets? And how to do this while maintaining equity across the organization and without alienating long-term employees?

Service Delivery

Across the range of local government service areas, current expectations, systems, and delivery models often look vastly different than when many managers entered the

profession. How, where, when, and by whom the work gets done present opportunities for reimagination to make the best use of resources and meet needs of the public.

The year 2020 piqued widespread interest in rethinking service delivery, as processes rapidly pivoted to virtual and public demonstrations worldwide called for public safety reform. But ICMA has long championed the use of performance measurement and management to guide improvements and offered research on alternative service delivery models and partnerships. Several years ago, we explored innovations in public libraries—many of which have continued their transformation into even more dynamic, digital, and inclusive hubs of community service and programming. And just prior to the pandemic, we took a deep dive with our partners at the Center for Public Safety Excellence to develop a framework for 21st Century Fire and Emergency Services, offering research-based strategies for local governments to address critical concerns.

We'll do more of this through Local Government Reimagined. A similarly in-depth process is underway looking at the evolution of public safety and law enforcement management. We'll explore intersections of our work on cybersecurity and digital governance, resilient infrastructure, and disaster preparedness. We will help local governments find ways to collaborate and realize efficiencies and win-win opportunities in regional partnerships such as broadband development, affordable housing, or childcare services. As was done recently

We welcome your input on questions to explore, what's working (or not) in your community, and other ideas for helping to shape this long-term initiative.



in McMinnville, Oregon, we'll unpack questions about core services and expectations of the public.

Livable Communities

ICMA recognizes the leadership role of local government managers in creating and maintaining livable communities. Rather than create yet another definition of a nebulous term, Local Government Reimagined embraces the concept broadly to include activities that promote healthy, thriving, resilient places and people. "Livability can encompass everything from planting street trees to revolutionizing public transportation. A livable community can be one that cultivates leadership everywhere, creates a sense of community, connects people and resources, practices ongoing dialogue, embraces diversity, operationalizes racial justices and shapes its future."⁵

Local governments continue to confront "wicked problems" related to housing, food security, climate, poverty, crime, community relations, and many other complex issues exacerbated by the compounding crises of the last several years. But as

illustrated in our recent guide, *Problem Solving Through Arts and Cultural Strategies*, these can lead to opportunities for open-minded government staff and local stakeholders to communicate, build trust, and collaborate in new ways. Like in Alameda County, California, where public safety officers hosted pop up events activating vacant spaces where kids, families and small businesses could interact—spurring construction of a permanent plaza, providing opportunities for nearly 30 entrepreneurs, and fostering positive relations. Or in Fargo, North Dakota, where stormwater infrastructure that historically divided the community was reimagined through a public-driven process to cultivate the social fabric along with ecological benefits.

We will draw on ICMA's foundation of work in areas such as sustainability, community engagement, planning across generations, local food systems, arts and culture, and more in exploring innovative approaches that are making a difference in community resilience and quality of life. And we'll focus on strategies to meet people where they are, to find common ground and facilitate civic cohesion.

Thriving Economies

We began thinking internally about Local Government Reimagined fairly early in the pandemic, as local governments and their communities were still absorbing shocks of revenue loss and questioning how to support their vulnerable households and businesses. Since those initial conversations, we've seen some relief of financial stress via commitments of

the American Rescue Plan Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act. As local governments continue to strategize about implementation of these programs, it remains critical to consider long-term resilience and equity implications of these investments.

ICMA has offered several recent and ongoing programs to assist local governments in making strategic, future-oriented decisions impacting economic recovery and growth in their communities. Focus areas include positioning your community to more quickly rebound from natural or other disaster events, free technical assistance for redeveloping brownfield sites in your community, examples of budgeting tools and strategies that incorporate equity concepts, and guidance on incentivizing and streamlining solar infrastructure development. Looking ahead, a recent \$1 million investment from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will support a yearlong effort to build capacity for local decision-makers to help increase economic mobility and inclusive economic development in their communities.

Of course, there are broader factors at issue as well, including persistent inflation and recessionary concerns; changes in the long-term outlook for property, sales, and other tax streams; and a perpetual cycle of disruptive industries. To that end, we're partnering with the Government Finance Officers Association in their Rethinking Revenue and Rethinking Budgeting initiatives, which have already produced a series of reports on trends impacting

local government finances and highlighting innovative practices to recalibrate local systems with the modern economic climate.

Conclusion

As we develop our Local Government Reimagined agenda for this first year, we welcome your input on questions to explore, what's working (or not) in your community, and other ideas for helping to shape this long-term initiative. In the short term, our Local Government Reimagined Conferences series offered this February through June will provide opportunities for you to engage with ICMA, your peers, and other partners in the global local government ecosystem on these issues. **RM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/the-four-global-forces-breaking-all-the-trends>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>

³ https://icma.org/sites/default/files/302947_E-Government%202011%20Survey%20Summary.pdf

⁴ <https://icma.org/sites/default/files/COVID-19%20July%202020%20Survey%20Summary%20with%20Key%20Findings%20FINAL%20web.pdf>

⁵ https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/LivableCommunities_Report.pdf

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



LAURA GODDEERIS, AICP, is ICMA's director of research and will oversee the Local Government Reimagined initiative.



The ULTIMATE GUIDE

to Preparing for an Interview in Local Government

Whether you've had dozens of job interviews throughout your career or you're preparing for your first one, read through these guidelines beforehand to help you prepare.

Congratulations! Your resume or application has passed muster, and you have been asked for an interview. Give yourself a pat on the back because that can be the biggest hurdle. But be aware that this is the stage where things really begin to get interesting!

An interview—whether it's conducted over the phone, via Zoom, or in person—will make or break your chances of being offered the job, so it pays to be prepared. Following are some recommendations to keep in mind as you ready yourself for the big event.

Research the Local Government

- Get to know the issues the host local government is dealing with. Local governments often post this information on their website. Read the past few council agendas.
- Read through the archives of the local newspaper or local bloggers to get a different perspective on the issues. If there is a local chamber of commerce, review its website as well.
- Find out who the key staff members are for the host

government (such as the city/county manager, assistants, department heads, etc.). Visit the city/county manager's website as well as their LinkedIn pages. Learn some details about the city/county manager's approach to local governance, if possible.

- If you're a member of ICMA, you can learn more about the manager's work history using ICMA's Who's Who (icma.org/whoswho), the largest database of local government professionals with over 85,000 listings). Contact managers and members in neighboring communities. You could also contact ICMA senior advisors in the area (icma.org/icma-senior-advisor-program).
- Familiarize yourself with the key functions, roles, and responsibilities of the government in general and the city/county manager's office in particular.
- Learn as much about the government's financial status as possible (from audits, annual reports, most recent budget, and so on). If available on the website, read through their most recent

budget and strategic plan. (If not available online, ask the host government if they can provide you with a hard copy).

- Get to know which industries/companies contribute to the local economy.
- Check the council meeting minutes for the past 24 months.
- Arrive in town before the interview to look around and meet with people who are familiar with the area, even residents and shop owners.

Anticipate and Prepare for Questions Most Likely to Be Asked

While there are no perfect answers, some thought and discussion about potentially tricky interview subjects can help you avoid disaster. The following list of interview questions that tend to trip up job candidates has been taken from the most-read article on icma.org, "25 Tricky Interview Questions and How to Answer Them," by Peter Studner.

- **What salary are you looking for?** Whenever possible, do not provide

a specific answer to this question until the negotiations phase, *after* a position has already been offered. To defer the discussion, try returning the focus back to the interviewer and noting: "It's hard to discuss salary without knowing more about the job or responsibilities." Or, if you are discussing a specific job: "What is your range?" Then relate your experience to the salary range without being precise: "I think my experience would put me near the high end of your range, don't you?"

- **What were you making in your last job?** If at all possible, do not volunteer information about your past salary. A diplomatic way to put the salary question aside is to reply, "I was well compensated in my previous position, but really do not wish to prejudice myself here by being too high or low. Can we delay this until after we've looked at all the aspects of your current needs? What is your range for this job?"

- **Have you ever been fired?** If the answer is yes, have a good explanation worked out and test it with friends. For instance: “We had a change in general managers, and although I had been doing a great job as you can see from my accomplishments, I was let go for one of his former associates.” Or: “We would like to relocate to this area, so that’s why I’m looking around.”
- **Can you work under pressure?** Indicate that you can and ask the interviewer how much pressure is involved in the position.

Learn what the interviewer means by pressure. The definition can vary significantly from person to person and local government to local government. If you are a pro at pressure jobs, describe a few accomplishments or high-pressure situations you’ve found yourself in and how you’ve successfully handled them.

- **What did you think of your last supervisor?**

Whatever your true feelings might be, stay positive. This is not the time

or place to list your boss’s shortcomings or frustrating behaviors. Suggested responses include “She was

the kind of person I could learn from.” Or: “We were able to communicate well and things got done quickly.”



- **What is your greatest strength?** Before interviewing, reflect on your personal strengths and make a list of them (e.g., “natural number sense,” “able to multitask,” “good with people,” “able to teach others,” etc.). Then tie each of them to a professional accomplishment. When asked this question in an interview, answer with the strength you feel best fits the position being discussed, and be sure to offer the anecdote that goes with it. Conclude your response by asking the interviewer if this is the kind of quality that would help the organization.
- **What is your greatest weakness?** As with your strengths, prepare a list of weaknesses beforehand. This time, tie each weakness back to what could also be considered a strength. Your answer can be, for example, “I like to get things done. Sometimes I get impatient, but I’m getting a handle on it.” Or maybe you have actually come up with a way to mitigate your weakness: “I’m a stickler for details, but I do not want to be a micromanager. So at my last job, I asked each staff member to devise their own checklist of weekly tasks. It gave them some autonomy and satisfied my desire for quality control.”
- **You’ve moved around a lot; how long would you stay with us?** Make sure that your answer doesn’t make you seem indecisive, fickle, or uncommitted. A good answer might be, “I’m seeking a long-term opportunity where I can learn and grow. Does this

come with the position we are discussing?”

- **What motivates you?** Resist the temptation to joke, “A steady paycheck!” Try to tie your motivation to the organization. In addition, you could mention things like the opportunity to learn and grow, to work with smart people who are passionate about their jobs, to innovate, and to contribute to the success of an organization.
 - **What do you not like to do?** This is a loaded question. A positive reply might be, “I’m the kind of person who does whatever is necessary to get the job done. When I do run into something disagreeable, I try to do it first and get it behind me. I have no particular dislikes.”
 - **How would your boss, coworkers, and subordinates describe you?** Be ready to give some examples of the kind of team player you represent. If you are not into office politics and have harbored good relationships at work, mention it. And remember that the interviewer may ask your references the same question. I strongly suggest meeting with your references before the interview stage in order to talk through your career goals and how they can best support them.
 - **What is the toughest part of being a manager?** A good reply is: “Taking the time to surround myself with people who are better than I am in their individual specialties.”
 - **Why do you want to work for us?** Your reply could be based on various aspects of the community.
- The most important thing is to avoid generic answers. Familiarize yourself with the city/county/town and be able to speak to its potential for you.
- **Why should we hire you?** If you know the job requirements and can match them with some accomplishments, briefly share those anecdotes. Then say, “If there are opportunities to do that and more here, then this is a great fit. What do you think?”
 - **What has been your biggest failure?** Discuss this question with friends, mentors, and possibly your references before the interview. If at all possible, think of something you were later able to correct. Then the story isn’t just about a failure, but also about a learning experience.
 - **What kind of day-to-day schedule did you have in your last job?** The interviewer isn’t looking for a minute-by-minute breakdown of a typical day. Emphasize action, performance, and results rather than administrative work.
 - **How do you feel about the progress you made in your last position?** Rather than discuss your feelings, per se, stress your accomplishments so that you communicate your value as an employee while conveying positive feelings about your progress.
 - **Did you have any frustrations in your past job?** Frustrations are a normal part of any job, and interviewers know this, so don’t claim you didn’t have any. Relate some of the

bottlenecks you experienced, but more important, indicate what you did to overcome them.

- **Do you like to compete?** Competition is great as long as it does not sacrifice the rest of the team. If you are competitive, I suggest relating that quality to the total organizational effort and not to your personal ambitions.
- **How long do you think it would be before you could make a contribution in this community?** Don’t be in a hurry when providing an answer to this question. There normally is a period of transition before a new hire learns the ropes. You might say, “If the transition goes according to plan, I would guess relatively soon. What would you expect?”
- **What was the last book you read?** You do read. Saying that you don’t in this setting is a misstep. But be careful not to fib. Your interviewer may have read the same book!
- **Don’t you feel that you are overqualified for the position?** Ouch! If you have a lot of experience and the city/town/county is thinking of hiring a younger person, you may get this kind of query. A good answer is: “I imagine my experience would make me more valuable sooner!”
- **Do you mind working for someone younger than you?** It’s the job that counts. Stick to the job specification and don’t get sidetracked on implications.
- **How do you take criticism?** Most people have problems taking



criticism. If the criticism is part of a formal evaluation program where you can learn and improve, that is fine. “I would welcome the opportunity to learn how to do my job better. Do you have a formal program for employee evaluation?”

- **How do you spend your free time?** Be reasonable. Relay something that you could also pursue in this new community. This is not the time to mention that you like jumping out of planes, even if it is true.

You may not be asked these specific questions in your interview, but knowing how you want to answer them will ensure that you’re prepared to discuss a wide variety of topics that might come up. You don’t want to have to formulate a complicated answer in the midst of an already nerve-wracking situation.

Expect Some Curveballs

- Be prepared for panel interviews, generally consisting of the city/county

manager, an assistant or department head, and HR person.

- Some host governments may require you to participate in a role-playing exercise (e.g., dealing with an angry constituent).
- It’s possible that you will take part in a written/analytical exercise. The exercise will test your communication and analytical abilities, generally dealing with the host government’s budget or divisive issue.

Overall Strategies for Success

- Come prepared. Read between the lines of the job description and really ascertain which skills are being sought. Do the homework on the host government and be prepared to show verbal or written evidence of what you have learned. Make a cheat sheet that lists the top personal qualities you want to convey, the most difficult work/school-related situations you’ve dealt with

in the past, and projects that would relate back to those primary job skills the employer is seeking.

- Rehearse your interview. It’s good to practice either in front of a mirror or a friend.
- Be confident. Look how far you have come; you’re a semi-finalist in a nationwide job search. You clearly have the requisite skills to earn the job—you must believe that and show it during the interview.
- First impressions are critical. Show up on time. Wear your best formal business attire. Greet the interviewers with a smile, look them in the eye, and give them a firm handshake.
- Be excited! This is a big deal. Your level of excitement will signal to the interviewers how interested you are in the job.
- Answer each question directly. Speak slowly and clearly so you can be heard. When asked a difficult question, take your time and think about your response before giving your answer.

Make sure to maintain eye contact with the individual asking each question.

- Remember to be yourself; you want your personality to come through during the interview.
- Before ending the interview, ask the interviewer(s) questions regarding the jurisdiction, the position, development and mentoring opportunities, etc. You are interviewing them just as much as they are interviewing you. These questions will help you ascertain whether or not the host government is a good fit for you.
- Thank each and every one of the interviewers for the opportunity.

Post-Interview Tactics

- Go out and celebrate. Interviews are tough work.
- Send personal emails of thanks to all those who took part in the interview process, including any administrative assistants that helped along the way.
- Don’t be afraid to ask when you might hear about next steps. Sometimes showing enthusiasm for the position can tip you over the edge.

Conclusion

Go in there with enthusiasm, a great attitude, and believe in yourself. Good luck!

Learn more about careers in local government and professional management at icma.org/careers. **PM**

RESOURCES

- <https://icma.org/documents/preparing-interview>
- <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/25-tricky-interview-questions-and-how-answer-them>



ENGAGING STUDENT CHAPTERS

Helping to Build the Leadership Pipeline

Now more than ever, it's crucial that we engage with students, especially at HBCUs, to connect them with opportunities for their future in local government.

BY ERIKA COOPER
AND JOSEPH D.
FLEMING III



Downtown Walking Tour
of Muskegon, Michigan

In January 2010, ICMA Student Chapters were created as part of the ICMA Next Generation strategies.

The program's initial goal was to expand ICMA's long-standing student membership and connect students with a shared interest in the local government profession. ICMA board members, state partners, general membership, and teams within ICMA have helped establish chapters, market the program, and engage with students nationally and internationally.



Student chapter members at the 2019 ICMA Annual Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

"I am very proud to be one of the founding supporters of the ICMA Student Chapter at University of South Florida (USF). The USF chapter was Florida's first when chartered in 2013. It remains one of the top honors in my career that the chapter bears my name. In addition to my personal contributions to the USF Foundation, the city of Auburndale has allocated \$1,000 annually since 2013."
—Robert "Bobby" Green, ICMA Life Member and former city manager of Auburndale, Florida

Today, ICMA has 135 student chapters, including 18 international chapters, made up of more than 1,000 student members. Student chapters are student-focused and student-led. They develop their charter, hold regular meetings, engage guest presenters, produce an annual report, and engage with other chapters.

Student chapters help build the leadership pipeline by engaging and developing the next generation of local government professionals. They introduce and integrate students into the local government management profession by familiarizing them with members, resources, and the ICMA Code of Ethics. Student chapters establish strong connections among ICMA, schools, students, state associations, and managers.

Being a student member of ICMA has provided me a community, which has allowed me to gain confidence as I enter local government and public administration. From conversations with city/county administrators and student members at conferences to the educational training provided, these opportunities have helped further my knowledge and skills tremendously.
—Khamani "Gigi" Williamson, vice president of Tulane University ICMA Student Chapter

Student chapters are truly a talent pool within ICMA that hasn't been fully tapped. The profession is experiencing a talent crisis brought on by a retirement tidal wave and years without "building the pipeline." Statistics indicate that the greatest numbers of retirees come from the managerial ranks, creating significant growth opportunities within the profession.

The workforce retention and recruitment issues that many local communities are facing were made worse by the pandemic shifting our work styles and expectations. Many career candidates are unaware of or choose to ignore the potential career satisfaction that can come from leading a local government through times of innovation and change. At the same time, not enough current public managers consider that they are also responsible for developing young and mid-career talent.

As members of ICMA, we have an obligation to help sustain and grow the profession, and engaging with our student chapters is not only critical to that growth and awareness, but easy and fulfilling. ICMA student



Student chapter members from Arizona State University



Millennium Park Trail Clean-up

chapters have scores of students finishing their MPA/MPP ready to work for your local government, but would benefit from inspiration from seasoned local government professionals—a person that can guide them and provide knowledge to jump start their career in local government. Undergraduate students can also be a member of a chapter or even create their own.

Following are three major ways you can engage with student chapters as an ICMA member:



City Manager Lunch and Learn Event

1. Support a Local Chapter

Consider being the advisor/practitioner for your local student chapter or offer to speak at their meetings. Student chapters face attrition just like local governments. Our network of schools and students is only beneficial in growing the profession if they are active and sustaining. With MPA/MPP programs lasting at most two years, the students that comprise student chapters are continually changing; therefore, the leadership is constantly different. Having a strong and consistent faculty advisor and practitioner to guide the students each year is crucial. This local leadership of the student chapter is

important in guiding each class of graduate students and introducing them to the profession and the community in which the school belongs.

2. Connect with Student Chapters

Connect with student chapters through ICMA's online platforms, at ICMA conferences, or through your state association. Connections are critical to the local government profession—help a student start building their network!

Whether you are connecting with a student chapter or a student individually, ICMA has a few online platforms that allow you to foster these

connections, including ICMA Connect, Who's Who, and CoachConnect. Technology has allowed us to connect throughout the year, but there is nothing like gathering in person at the ICMA Annual Conference. ICMA provides student-focused events at the conference each year, such as a happy hour, an academic case study presentation, an ethics session, or speed coaching, to name a few.

We encourage you to review the conference schedule when it is released and attend a student-focused session or find an attendee wearing a student ribbon and introduce yourself. These are opportunities to connect with the profession's

future and build that pipeline!

Lastly, connect with students at your state association events. Or, if you notice there is a gap in student representation at your state association, speak up and take action. Student representation at every level is essential!

3. Start a Local Student Chapter

Take charge and reach out to your local university to start their first-ever student chapter. Do you manage a university town? Or does your neighboring community have a university with a well-known MPA program? This is an excellent opportunity to engage the student body with ICMA

Strengthening the HBCU Pipeline

Joseph D. Fleming III
2022 Local Government Management Fellow
Pinellas County, Florida

There have only been three historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) with an ICMA chapter: Clark Atlanta University, North Carolina Central University, and Tennessee State University. I learned about ICMA after being invited to a South Carolina City County Management Association (SCCMA) winter conference that was held near my hometown. I was invited to the conference as a kind gesture to follow up my participation in my first municipal internship the summer before I began at Savannah State. I became familiar with the Municipal Association of South Carolina, SCCMA, and ICMA. I learned about scholarship opportunities, memberships, job opportunities/job boards, and the fellowship.

The underrepresentation of HBCUs actively engaged with ICMA can be attributed to simply not being aware and an issue of proximity. I would define proximity as the positioning to resources, leaders, or advocates. Proximity leads to awareness. It is often said that success is where preparation meets opportunity. But imagine not having access to an opportunity, because it's not tangible to you. There are a host of challenges and probabilities in pursuing success, but the greatest hurdle may lie in actualization.

Keturah Barnett was introduced to the local government profession through a professor at Tennessee State University who at the time was starting the ICMA student chapter there. Keturah eventually became the president of the chapter, and upon graduation she was selected as an ICMA Fellow for Lancaster, Texas, where she now serves as the assistant to the city manager. Keturah's story illustrates the importance of the ICMA Student Chapters and the power of proximity. I and others can actualize a career trajectory in local government by seeing her example and what can be achieved when programming, internships, interactions, and mentors are in place.

ICMA is a wonderful organization that is committed to diversity. Proximity calls for mentors and coaches to call or send an email to HBCU faculty explaining the great benefits of ICMA engagement. Proximity calls for state affiliate organizations to contact their area universities, including HBCUs, to establish a relationship. Connecting students with opportunity is of the utmost importance and is beneficial to all involved.



Student chapter members at the 2022 ICMA Annual Conference in Columbus, Ohio.

and introduce them to the local government profession. You can see if the school has a chapter from our online roster of ICMA Student Chapters at [ICMA.org/student-chapters](https://icma.org/student-chapters).

To start a chapter, you must complete a student chapter agreement and submit a charter. Student chapters need the following items listed on the chapter agreement to form officially:

- A student leader who will serve as the main contact for the chapter (usually a chapter president).
- A faculty advisor (usually a professor in the program, the program director, or another school official).
- A practitioner in the profession, a local government professional in the area (ideally an ICMA member, international member, or affiliate member interested in shared responsibility for the success of the chapter).

There are no fees to start a chapter, and every chapter gets unlimited student chapter memberships. Once the agreement has been submitted, the student chapter has been created and the chapter can begin its work! To learn more about starting a chapter,

download our Starting a Student Chapter Toolkit at icma.org/start-student-chapter.

Conclusion

We encourage you to engage with students when you have the chance: start a chapter, support a local chapter, connect as an alumnus with your alma mater, or connect with a student where you see an opportunity. We were all students at one point, and we all remember the mentors that helped us along the way. For more information about ICMA Student Chapters, visit icma.org/student-chapters. **PM**

Thank you to the schools and chapter faculty advisors for their continued efforts to teach local government management and the managers who mentor and advise chapters and students and engage them with the profession and local governments!

ERIKA COOPER is program manager of career advancement at ICMA (ecooper@icma.org).



JOSEPH D. FLEMING III is a 2022 Local Government Management Fellow with Pinellas County, Florida.



Life-Changing Career Development—The Harvard Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program



Hailed as “far more than just another continuing education opportunity,” this three-week program has helped many local government leaders grow in their career. And a scholarship from ICMA makes it more accessible.

BY JESSI ATCHESON AND DUANE HOLDER



At the 2022 ICMA Annual Conference in Columbus, Ohio, attendees got the chance to learn more about a very unique career development opportunity, the Harvard Kennedy School Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program. Past program participants, along with past ICMA scholarship recipients, took part in a roundtable session to discuss the program’s leadership lessons and personal and professional value this program provides.

With the scholarship deadline looming—January 31, 2023—prospective participants should read on to learn more about this exciting opportunity.

About the Program

Senior Executives in State and Local Government, a flagship program of the Kennedy School, delivers a healthy balance of both traditional and hands-on learning experiences to help even the most seasoned of public officials better address the concerns of their constituents and communities.

This three-week program for senior executives in local government mimics a city ecosystem that allows participants to test solutions to various issues in real-time, enabling the participants to:

- Challenge their assumptions about how to exercise leadership in the public sector.
- Develop new conceptual frameworks for addressing policy issues.
- Examine innovative partnerships and new models of collaborative governance.
- Explore the relationship between citizens and their government.
- Understand the behavioral dimensions of decision making.
- Exchange ideas with experienced faculty and a diverse group of colleagues.

The program operates as an interactive classroom, in which participants, peers, and faculty work together on real-life case studies, and learn from each other along the way. This classroom setting transforms into an interactive environment that serves as a forum for raising difficult issues, which creates and maintains conversations that lead to change.

Scholarship Opportunities Available

While this program offers an invaluable, once-in-a-lifetime experience, the tuition fee is still a factor that can influence one’s decision to apply for the program. For those who are reluctant to apply because of the price

Far More Than Just Another Continuing Education Opportunity

Duane Holder
Deputy County Manager
Wake County, North Carolina

As an experienced local government administrator and ICMA Credentialed Manager, I have been fortunate to attend numerous continuing education conferences, workshops, and sessions. Through the years I have found some to be more interesting than others, but all contributing to my professional and personal growth. As a self-avowed lifelong learner, I have been committed to increasing my knowledge with the goal of being a better manager and helping to better serve my community.

The Senior Executives in State and Local Government program at the Harvard Kennedy School was far more than just another continuing education opportunity. This life-changing three-week, intensive program placed me in the midst of the most dynamic, diverse, and dedicated group of public servants of which I have ever been a part.

Harvard was able to create a unique “ecosystem” reflective of the many personalities, voices, and opinions existent in the local communities we serve. In an age where partisan divide and the lack of civil discourse at the federal level have trickled down to local government, it is critical for local government administrators to be armed with the tools to be able to effectively manage the resources and lead the people that provide those public services that our communities so desperately need.

While this program provided a variety of academic theories, strategies, and models, the most valuable takeaways for me had to do with the work of “self.” The program brought me face to face with my own biases, suppositions, and belief system. I was able to take a deep dive into my own personal and professional motivations for serving. The controlled environment enabled me to take risks and to stretch myself by challenging myself in a way that is uncharacteristic for me.

In classic Harvard style, faculty utilized a collection of case studies to provoke thought and discussion. Group discussions and assignments provided opportunities for collective learning and growth. Classmates were encouraged to spend as much time together as possible, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Not only did this result in spirited discourse and intellectual debate, but it also helped to create friendships and bonds that, in some cases, will undoubtedly last a lifetime.

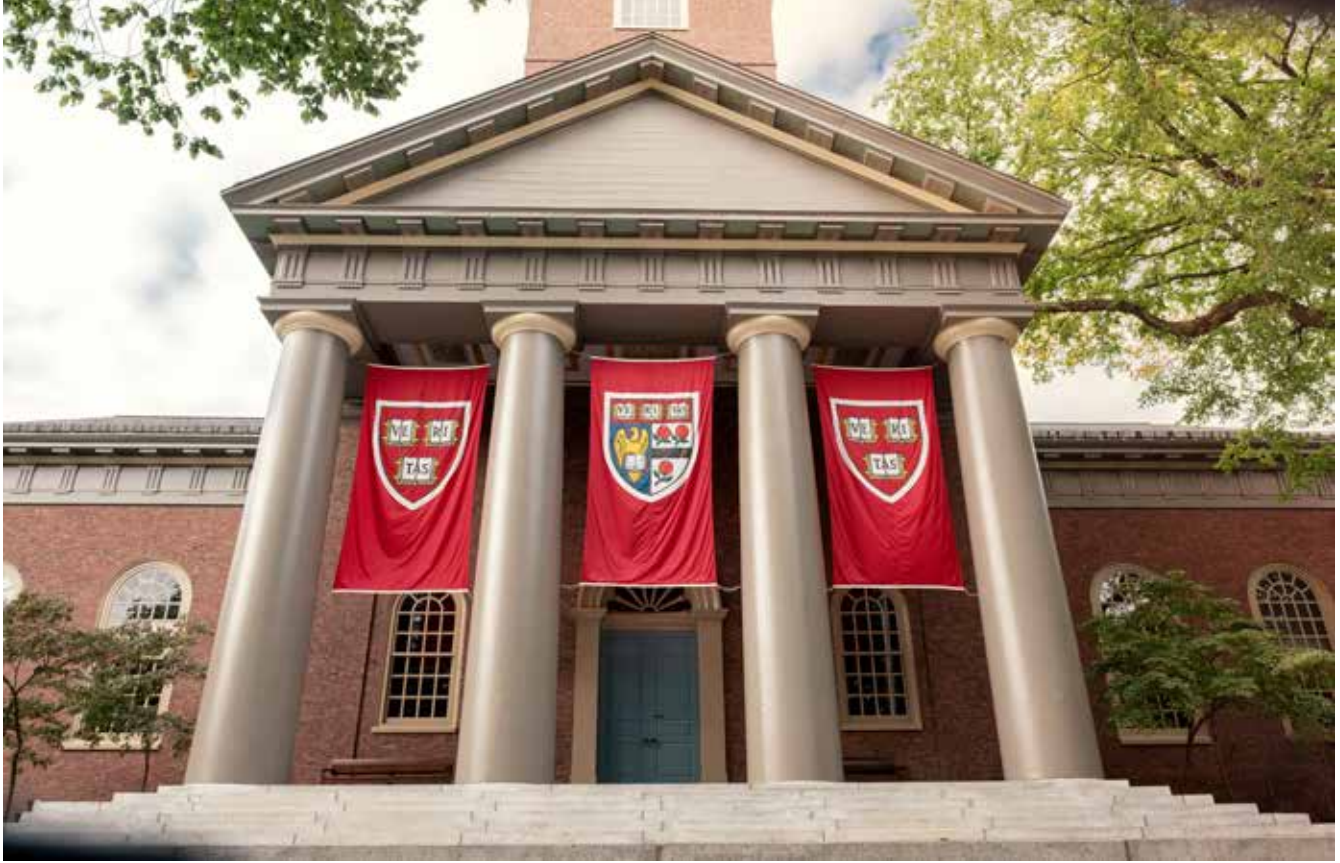
I am honored to have been selected by the ICMA scholarship committee for this scholarship and I am thankful to them, the Harvard staff and faculty, my classmates, and the scholarship sponsors for this life-changing opportunity.

So, if you’re at a point in your career where you are looking for a higher level of professional and personal growth and development, and you’re up to the challenge of being comfortable with being uncomfortable, I encourage you to seek out more information about the program and apply for the scholarship. It will not only change you, but it will also change the way you engage with those around you.

tag, ICMA awards yearly scholarships covering the \$16,900 tuition fee, in which the scholarship recipient will only need to pay their own travel expenses. This generous scholarship is provided by ICMA Strategic Partner, The Ferguson Group. Learn more about the scholarship at icma.org/harvard.

Participants Share Their Thoughts on the Program

At the conference roundtable, Duane Holder, deputy county manager, Wake County, North Carolina, ICMA’s most recent scholarship recipient, shared his experience in the Senior Executives in State and Local Government program. Holder opened his no-holds-barred talk about the “transformative” experience that this program provided by highlighting the intentionally curated, dynamic, diverse, dedicated, and committed group of public servants that made up his group of classmates. This “room of superstars” was intentionally selected to form an ecosystem where open forum group discussions could take place, in which the different personalities and biases of participants mimicked that of ones that participants would typically experience on the job. Holder emphasized that the challenging coursework, in tandem with engaging group discussions, led to a lot of self-discoveries, which forced him and his peers to think differently. He implored the audience to be willing to deviate from their comfort zones if they are interested in this program, emphasizing that they will get out of it what they put into it.



Holder's final key takeaways were rooted in "the management of loss" and that there are truly no win/wins in public service, only tolerable losses; a realization that changed his leadership practices for the better. Holder's wife, Valentina Holder, even shared her thoughts on how the program has changed her husband, both professionally and personally. She knew that he wanted to participate in this program to improve himself, and she was impressed that this experience resulted in her husband becoming a better, more compassionate leader.

Sharon Subadan, ICMA-CM, CEO, Carron Solutions, LLC, another Senior Executives in State and Local Government program participant, echoed Holder's sentiments and shared that it was "110% worth the money and time taken". She highlighted the impressive level of instruction given, and how the program has contributed to her journey of

both loving and developing herself as both a person and a leader.

Nate Rudy, town manager, Readfield, Maine, the final Senior Executives in State and Local Government program participant to share their experience, echoed what his fellow former participants of the program shared, and went on to encourage listeners that this is the ideal program for those who are looking for a second wind in their career and want an experience where they can really push themselves. Rudy emphasized the personal and professional changes that he went through as a result of this program, largely contributing that to learning "the hard things" in a controlled environment in a room full of people who did not look like him.

Key Takeaways

After each past participant shared their personal experience on how this program truly elevated both their careers and lives, they

took the time to answer audience questions and give some final key takeaways; mainly in the areas of making the case to their employers for the time off and financial assistance needed to attend this program, the changes in their leadership philosophy, and how they went about implementing those changes in their organizations.

These participants found that sharing the topic areas that the program will cover and how they can implement lessons learned into their community made a strong case for their organizations to both approve the time off and even offer financial assistance. Participants also dissected the new ways they approach leadership in their organizations, particularly how they have become much more understanding and compassionate leaders. Each participant found that this program afforded them the opportunity to gain a much deeper, broader understanding of why they do what they

do, which allows them to listen more honestly and lead more authentically.

If this sounds like the type of rejuvenation your career needs, we encourage you to visit icma.org/harvard for more information on the program and ICMA's scholarship for the program. **PM**

Scholarship Eligibility Criteria

The scholarship is only available to senior executives defined as municipal and county managers and assistants who have been members of ICMA for at least three years. View the complete eligibility criteria at icma.org/harvard.

JESSI ATCHESON is a marketing coordinator at ICMA, Washington, D.C. (jatcheson@icma.org).



DUANE HOLDER is deputy county manager of Wake County, North Carolina.



Let's Think Differently About Local Government

Introducing a new series of articles challenging local government leaders to be bold, creative, and willing to think differently about the status quo.

BY ED EVERETT,
ICMA-CM (RETIRED)



PM magazine is introducing a series of forthcoming articles that will challenge the profession's traditional thinking, assumptions, and practices. When I proposed this series to ICMA, they enthusiastically endorsed the concept. They saw this series as another way to push our profession forward and to help local government stay ahead of society's ever-changing curve.

Our profession needs your passion, fire, and courage to try bold new approaches.

The purpose of this series is to learn from our past mistakes and to challenge our comfort with the status quo in order to enhance services, build more trust, and improve our communities. To the younger folks in our profession, I implore you to be less bureaucratic, less cautious, and less risk adverse than my generation. Our profession needs your passion, fire, and courage to try bold new approaches.

Our profession must stop “playing it safe” and take more risks. Local government has a real opportunity to capture the trust and imagination of the public. However, we will only do that if we are bold, creative, and willing to think differently about the status quo. The federal and state governments struggle with developing and maintaining trust, so it is incumbent upon local government to establish trust with our residents.

In order to be successful in our efforts to improve services and strengthen communities, I strongly recommend that local governments emulate a successful practice of startup private sector businesses. This practice is commonly referred to as a “beta test,” which is a small experiment to try out ideas in a safe, intelligent, and practical manner without causing havoc. Beta tests allow us to learn from the implementation of a new idea or approach without putting the organization or our elected officials in difficult situations. Beta tests allow us to question

things we do and test better alternatives. (I will provide some additional guidance regarding beta tests in a later article.)

What to Expect

Let me give you a flavor of the type of articles that might appear under this series titled “Let’s Think Differently About...”

- Doing away with traditional performance appraisal systems, which usually don’t work well and are most often ignored.
- Whether cities or counties should be providing the various services and programs that we have traditionally provided.
- Local government’s failure to effectively discipline and/or fire employees who are not performing.

Here are two examples of what such articles might look like.

Opinion: Rethinking the Assistant/Deputy City Manager Position: Published in the January 2020 issue, this article examines the role of assistant and deputy city and county managers in certain size local governments. This article questions our traditional approach and suggests different options to organize, streamline, and manage local government.

Today’s Local Government Management Model: Published in the August 2015 issue, this article advances the argument that our local governmental model, which I labeled “bitch and fix,” is old, outdated, and broken. The old

model does not allow us to utilize the full potential of our organization or our residents. Rather, we should consider a new model, which I describe as a “partnership,” which is an entirely new way of viewing, involving, and having higher expectations of our residents.

How to Contribute

I expect and encourage others, regardless of one’s title or position, to contribute to this series, either by suggesting ideas for topics or by authoring entire articles. Creativity and innovation are not the sole purview of top managers. This is an opportunity for anyone currently in or retired from the profession to challenge us in ways that will enhance the profession. Please distribute this article to your employees and colleagues, and encourage them to express their ideas. You can send your ideas or article submissions to pm@icma.org.

Ideas put forth in this series should motivate others to suggest modifications and changes to enhance the idea. ICMA will publish short follow-up comments so that we can learn how to improve on a suggested idea or approach. I look forward to the dialogue that this series will generate!

Let’s Get Started

We know that not all ideas are ultimately worth pursuing and not all challenges to the status quo are helpful. However, our profession will only move forward if we are willing to experiment with ideas that are more innovative and creative. Neither I nor other contributors to this series will necessarily get it right. Disagreement is crucial in transforming an idea that has potential (but may appear unusual) into an exceptional idea.

Stay tuned to reshape our thinking, challenge assumptions, and struggle with new ideas and concepts. Let’s showcase local government as the institution that can and will continue to make a positive difference in people’s lives. That’s why we signed up to work in local government in the first place. Let’s eliminate forever the belittling phrase, “good enough for government work” and replace it with “striving for excellence.”

Let the different, new, unusual, and even weird ideas begin. Step out of your comfort zone or get out of the way of those who have the courage to do so. I stand ready to collaborate with anyone willing to try out a new idea. **PM**

ED EVERETT, ICMA-CM (RETIRED), is a retired city manager (everetted@comcast.net).





Creating a “Life at Night” Plan for Your Community: A Three-Step Guide

BY SARAH HANNAH-SPURLOCK

Effective nighttime planning, tailored to both local challenges and opportunities, is key.

Most of us are familiar with the adage, “Nothing good happens after midnight.” Traditionally, cities have focused on providing services through a daytime lens because the only activities perceived as happening at night were revelry and mayhem, which traditionally have fallen

squarely in the jurisdiction of law enforcement.

As such, local governance at night has typically been limited to reacting to problems and complaints and shutting down bad behavior. “The urban night has traditionally been a regimented space

characterized by strict policing and surveillance.”¹ This view has shifted in recent years, as cities develop in the dawn of a 24-hour world. Elliott Phear with Forbes Agency Council reported in a 2019 article that approximately 80 percent of Americans live in metro areas, where a more vibrant nightlife plays a significant role in the overall local economy. In addition, the creative, social, and cultural activities of a community are prevalent at night. These activities are what make cities special and

unique and, as such, should be prioritized as communities plan for their future.

With a growing emphasis on what happens after the sun sets, cities, towns, and counties are realizing that reactive management is not an effective way to deal with problems or seize opportunities that may emerge at night. Not only do cities need better ways to address the nuisances at night, but they must also learn to leverage all the night has to offer if they are to survive and thrive in the global marketplace.



Effective nighttime planning, tailored to local challenges and opportunities, is key.

The Nighttime Economy Culture and Policy (NITECAP) Alliance is a network of professionals responsible for nighttime economy advocacy, planning, and management in U.S. cities. NITECAP's mission is to share experiences, policies, and practices; raise awareness about nighttime economy and culture across disciplines; and highlight the value and importance of this role within local government. The goals for each community are as diverse as the cities themselves, but the essential idea is the same—to

protect the quality of life for residents while recognizing the 24-hour nature of the world and nurturing the vibrancy that life at night offers to both residents and visitors.

The objective of this article is to provide guidance to local government managers in making decisions that allow the nighttime to add to, rather than detract from, the value of their destination. NITECAP would like to help cities ask the right questions and identify the right resources as they plan for life at night in their city or region. Not every jurisdiction will have the same solution to a problem or the same strategy to accomplish a goal. Every community's available resources and political dynamic will also vary, requiring a customized approach.

The following is a systematic three-step guide with a list of questions and topics that might be helpful when you articulate your goals and begin to develop a plan.

Step One: Assess Your Community's Life at Night

Local government leaders are encouraged to examine the current conditions and environment in the community as they relate to the jurisdiction's life at night. Conducting an analysis that defines the opportunities, issues, existing resources, and support will help determine the best way to address the concerns and possibilities of the nightlife industry, residents, elected officials, and other community stakeholders.

Define Nightlife

Before you can analyze your nightlife, you need to define what nightlife is. A community's

nightlife encompasses many elements, and it is as varied as the daytime life. The obvious reference for "nightlife" is the bars, nightclubs, and live music venues. But while the entertainment and spaces for socialization are significant parts of a community's nightlife, they are only one component. Life at night also includes amenities and services that are not entertainment-related, such as hospitals, schools, manufacturing plants, call centers, etc. All these businesses, entertainment related and otherwise, provide services to the customers and employment opportunities. Both the customers and the workforce contribute to the existence of a well-developed nightlife. As such, it is imperative that both have access to a variety of services, such as safe transportation, parking, and affordable, dependable childcare.

Understanding what the complete nightlife concept entails will assist you in defining what part or parts your city, town, or county wants to engage in or manage.

Define Goals

Creating a new methodology to address your jurisdiction's nightlife requires properly defining what you want to accomplish.

Have you identified a problem or issue related to the community's nightlife that requires resolution or focused attention? Most nighttime initiatives in the country were created in response to a public and visible issue in the community. Perhaps, the number of noise complaints or violent crime at night is on the rise. Are nightlife venues in your community closing

at a concerning rate? Are the night workers in your community struggling to find safe transportation?

In Arlington, Virginia, there was an increase in alcohol-related crime in addition to quality-of-life concerns such as loud noise, trash, heavy traffic, and unruly crowds. In Pittsburgh, nightlife activity that had historically occurred in a primarily industrial-zoned neighborhood was moving to a residentially dense neighborhood. This shift resulted in quality-of-life impacts and safety concerns for the neighbors. There may not be a problem to be solved, per se, but rather a desire to encourage and nurture a life at night that enhances the quality of life and stimulates economic development. In San Francisco, for example, the city government established nighttime goals that focus on connecting local nightlife businesses to city resources, supporting legislative and policy developments to advance the sector, and advocate for the development and protection of nightlife spaces.

Define the Circumstances that Led to a Desire to Take Formal Action

Identify the conditions and circumstances that sparked the call for action. Who is involved and who is impacted? The impetus in Arlington for a formal initiative was a drain of law enforcement resources. Too many officers were required to work the weekends to mitigate and address the issues; it was unsustainable. The challenging conditions caused the officers not to want to work the police detail that provided special coverage of law enforcement and security services.

In Seattle, Washington, the nightlife community, particularly the nightclubs and live music venues, were organizing in protest to a teen dance ordinance, which prohibited youth under 21 from congregating to dance. The ordinance severely impacted the entertainment venues' ability to hold events for underaged patrons. The ordinance was adopted in 1985, but was eventually repealed in 2002. This repeal launched continued advocacy and the eventual adoption of The Seattle Nightlife Initiative, an eight-point plan for improving nightlife safety and reducing conflicts between venues and residents in the urban neighborhoods.²

Successful initiatives must include programs focused on finding the right balance between safety and vibrancy at night. Cities that have launched effective initiatives report a range of different approaches, from increased or designated staffing, formation of special task forces, development of specialized strategies, and the creation of full-time nighttime teams that actively work on the identified matters.

Once the issue has been defined and the relevant players and stakeholders identified, the next step is to address the issue in partnership with the interested parties.

Step Two: Identify Support to Advance the Goals

Once the goal is established, garnering support—financial, political, and otherwise—is critical for a successful and sustainable implementation. Take time to identify and describe the support that exists in your government

organization and community and the support you need to accomplish the specific goal or goals.

Describe and Quantify Support from Elected Officials and Leadership

Did the elected body or chief administrative officer call for action? Are they willing to support the action financially? While initial support is not critical as an initiative is developed, support is vital for its successful implementation. If you do not yet have support from the whole elected body through a resolution, ordinance, or other approval method, seek “champions” who serve on the elected body and can provide the leverage and political support to carry a plan forward. Gaining support for a nightlife program, as with any new program, is a process. You might have to first gain support from influential stakeholders in the community who will raise the awareness with the elected officials. Depending on the issues identified in the first part of the analysis, finding the right champions to advocate for a solution is key.

To address the issues in Arlington County, the police department created the Arlington Restaurant Initiative accreditation program, which is modeled on the United Kingdom's Best Bar None accreditation initiative. The police department partners “with other county [government] agencies to raise the standards of restaurants that serve alcohol, streamline processes within the county government, and maintain Arlington County as a safe destination for nightlife and entertainment.”³ Venues that voluntarily achieve accreditation

While the entertainment and spaces for socialization are significant parts of a city's nightlife, they are only one component of it.

through the program, which provides “effective practices to increase safety, including responsible alcohol service, public safety expectations, fire code/safety, food safety, and zoning compliance,” are recognized and used as examples for best practices in the community. Earning support from venues was more challenging as they saw the initiative as more punitive than supportive, reports Samantha Brien, Arlington County Police Department restaurant and nightlife liaison. “Once they experienced the benefits of a safer environment, they have been supportive and taken ownership over the community.”

The city of Austin used a task force to advance their nightlife initiative. In 2008, they created a Live Music Task Force to provide more support for the live music industry. “Essentially, the industry and music community asked the city government to create programs and regulatory systems that provided funding and other kinds of support they believe were needed to live up to the moniker, Live Music Capital of the World,” explains Brian Block, the city's entertainment services manager.

Describe and Quantify Support from Community Stakeholders

As noted earlier, elected officials and leadership may not always

fully prioritize the nighttime initiatives initially, making it even more important to build partnerships in the community. Is there a hospitality alliance or organized group of business owners that supports a plan of action? What about neighborhood support in areas with significant concentrations of nighttime businesses?

Identify all the groups, associations, and organizations in the community with interest that support the initiative. Support from elected officials and other leaders is important and critical for sustained implementation, but if they leave office, other community and organizational support provides the necessary foundation and bridge to newly elected officials.

Step Three: Explore Different Nighttime Management Options

Now that the problem or issue has been defined and framed, and support identified, the next step is to develop a plan of action for your jurisdiction.

Do the desires of the policy makers warrant a new position or role within the local government to address the problems or issues? Or perhaps shifting existing resources temporarily or long-term will be effective? Several U.S. cities have created designated nighttime management positions. While it may seem that creating such a role is ideal, it is important to define the scope of the position and ensure that that role has clear direction, political support, and sufficient budget and staff to accomplish the desired outcome.

An important distinction when formulating the nighttime management structure is

to identify whether the local government and the community are interested in abating nuisances or if the interest lies in new approaches to increase the provision of city/county services at night. The former can most likely be addressed by shifting resources. The latter requires focused ongoing strategic planning and additional staff to accomplish it to be successful.

If strategic planning for the future is the goal, then the jurisdiction will benefit from determining what that looks like. In 2012, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors commissioned an economic impact study documenting the nightlife sector's \$4.2 billion impact and 48,000 employees, as well as nightlife businesses' spending in other local industries and nightlife's role in attracting tourism. By defining the nightlife industry and its economic significance in a clear way, this study helped nightlife advocates articulate the value of preserving and growing this industry, paving the way for the city's office of economic and workforce development to create a business development role focused on nightlife in 2013.

In Austin, two themes emerged from the Live Music Task Force's work: one focused on economic development, and the other on nightlife management and regulatory issues, specifically the desire to do the following:

- Create and provide economic development programs for artists and live music venues through a new music office.
- Create a more robust system for sound management with dedicated staff to manage the system with a fair and balanced approach.

- Serve as a liaison to music venues to assist navigating the city's permitting and enforcement protocols and by developing policies that streamline such processes.

In New York City, the director for the Office of Nightlife, which was positioned in the mayor's office by legislation, had the support of the hospitality industry and residents, as well as the city council and mayor. Mayor Bill de Blasio formed the Office of Nightlife "to promote the industry and soothe strained relations between the city's night spots and neighborhoods that complain about their merriment." This mayoral office oversees a 12-person advisory board and consists of a staff of five.

Building Support

Whether the initial goal is to abate nuisances or advocate for a vibrant and active nightlife, the ultimate goal is to accomplish better strategic planning for our cities after dark.

As with any new initiative or project, measurable wins and a consistent drive forward are key to a successful effort and continued support. Accomplishing the goal for the initial problem or issue that has been identified is a great start. Build on that success by continuing to identify opportunities for improvement, assessing the necessary resources to get it done, and advocating for financial, political, and community support. Remember that the process of developing and implementing a nighttime plan is a marathon and not a sprint. While some may resist or oppose your effort to

accomplish the goals, those same opponents become advocates once they see the benefits that your success delivers to them.

Data collection is another important method for gaining support. Several cities have conducted fiscal or economic impact studies to assess the value of their nighttime by looking at sales transactions, employment numbers, tax and other revenue, traffic patterns, etc. These studies serve a couple of purposes:

- They educate the community about what their life after dark is worth in quantifiable metrics.
- They establish a baseline upon which to measure improvement.

Data also justifies allocating funding for additional resources. In Fort Lauderdale, the increase of noise complaints is being used to request additional code compliance officers for the nighttime hours in the next budget year. Currently, existing officers cover nighttime hours with overtime. While adding new positions will increase the budget, the impact is mitigated by the reduction of overtime pay. The improved service and consequential improvement to the quality of life justify the increase.

Determine the Nighttime Initiative's Placement in the Organization

The department or office where the responsibility for the nighttime initiative is situated also affects the success of the effort. Some initiatives lie with enforcement agencies such as police or code, while others are housed within administration, such as the city manager's or mayor's office.

The ideal location is the office where the initiative will receive the most support and resources. While the best location in one city/town/county may be in the chief administrator's office, the better choice in another area may be within public safety or the planning department. Consider the needs of the organization and community when determining the place in the organization. Where are you most likely able to accomplish the goals? Often, the choice may revolve around specific individuals rather than departments. Champions within your organization may exist in unexpected locations. The case for nighttime planning can be made for any office that is coordinating a response to nighttime issues.

What is required is an environment of collaboration, a recognition that the community's nighttime is as relevant as their daytime, and a desire to improve service provision for residents and guests so they may enjoy a safe and vibrant life at night. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ "Governing the night-time city: The rise of night mayors as a new form of urban governance after dark," <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0042098019895224>

² <https://www.seattlepi.com/local/article/Bars-could-serve-after-2-a-m-under-mayor-s-890497.php>

³ <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Departments/Police-Department/Community-Engagement/Business-Outreach-Unit/Arlington-Restaurant-Initiative>

SARAH HANNAH-SPURLOCK is nighttime economy manager of Fort Lauderdale, Florida; and treasurer and founding member of the Nighttime Economy Culture and Policy (NITECAP) Alliance.



Supporting Colleagues During a Transition, *Part 3*

BY J. D. COX, ICMA-CM

When life hands you the worst slings and arrows, don't hesitate in seeking help and guidance.

Prior to the tumultuous time of professional transition in my life, I had enjoyed many years of a very positive career in local government management. I had held chief administrative officer (CAO) positions in a number of cities in several different states. For years, I had been attending ICMA and state association training and conferences. In 2016, I achieved a major milestone in our profession when I attained the ICMA Credentialed Manager designation.

Like so many of my colleagues, I had also experienced my share of challenges: a natural disaster that decimated our community, a massive class-action lawsuit that would be the longest trial in state history, two different hostage crises, as well as a laundry list of issues too long to mention. Yet, despite the challenges, there had also been a similarly long list of wins along the way.

So, when I left a dream job in a charming community for a promising new opportunity, everything seemed very positive. But I couldn't have known then that my next position would mark the start of a series of seemingly unending ethical challenges, life-or-death health scares, and times of fear and uncertainty.

A New Position

The recruiter who contacted me about the role in a new city sold it as being one of stability. And he was right! The former city manager had a storied career of almost 30 years with the city, and the progressive, forward-looking mayor had been in office for a decade. The staff seemed eager for new ideas and new blood. It was all setting up nicely for a transition to a new city manager.

However, the long-serving mayor soon informed me that he would not seek reelection later that year. For the first few months, we were able to build unity of purpose in the organization and morale flourished in my opinion. After the new mayor was sworn in, the positive atmosphere seemed to be continuing. Unfortunately, only a few months later, I found myself in one ethics challenge after another.

As each one of the following incidents with the mayor occurred, I resisted the inappropriate actions and respectfully asked that he stop, but this seemed to only further provoke the mayor. First, the mayor of this council-manager city moved into city hall and began wishing to attend staff meetings and many of the meetings that staff held with members of the public. Next, he would pick up his friend at public works (without telling his supervisor or anyone in the chain of command) and they would leave the jobsite. Next, he wanted me to fire our public relations manager and in turn he wished to contract with his friend to provide live-stream services of council meetings (which he eventually convinced council to allow).

During the course of my tenure at the city, I required that our departments comply with the same rules and regulations as the public with such matters as building permits, etc. The mayor "ordered" me to overturn this

requirement and threatened to have me fired if I did not. He did not take kindly to my reminders that we did not have a strong mayor form of government and that only the council as a whole could establish policy.

The final straw came when the mayor had learned that the department directors had provided me—at my request—a 360-degree evaluation. When I had asked the directors to give me this feedback, I

promised them that I would keep it confidential. The city had no policy or tradition of conducting 360-evaluations of the city manager; it was only for my personal growth and development so that I could be a better manager. The mayor, presumably building a case for my termination, had demanded that I disclose to him and council the results of these evaluations.

At first I declined, as I had promised to keep the information confidential. Later, after consulting with the city attorney and ICMA ethics staff, I regretfully turned the evaluations over. It pained me to do this as I had promised the directors confidentiality and was being forced to go against my word. Yet, even this did

I came to embrace those situations that I previously viewed as failures and instead came to view them as character growth.



J. D. COX,
ICMA-CM, is
city administrator
of Douglas,
Wyoming.

not placate the mayor, as I was to learn, because the comments and ratings were quite the opposite of the poor ratings that he said he was expecting.

Beyond the ethical quandaries I've described, there was much more that happened, including attempts at public meetings to embarrass me or staff. And this part did work. I was embarrassed by this behavior and these actions because, after all, I felt "this would never happen to me."

As the poor atmosphere evolved into outright hostility, I reached out to an amazing resource at ICMA: Martha Perego, the director of member services and ethics. I found her experience, thoughtful guidance, and uplifting directness to be refreshing and very helpful. She also helped me navigate the dilemma of having not yet reached my minimum two-year tenure with the city in fulfillment of my ethical obligation as a credentialed manager. To my great relief, ICMA recommended that I start looking for another position. While maintaining my ethical obligations, it felt like a slow-moving meteor headed my way and I was powerless to stop it. I felt like I had tried everything to get things back on the right track, but it also felt that there was nothing that I could do to accomplish a productive atmosphere.

The mayor called a meeting with the city attorney and me and asked for my resignation, presenting a list of what I felt were trumped-up accusations. At first, I refused, wishing to take my case to council. Yet, the more I thought about the caustic atmosphere that had developed, the more I no longer wished to be there. I chose to accept a subsequent offer and resigned. I felt ashamed, embarrassed, and afraid.

I learned that there was quite a bit of pushback that had developed regarding my forced resignation. I received what seemed to be tons of support from the community, staff, and the former mayor and former elected officials. I also heard from other managers. This meant so much

to me as this was the hardest period of my professional career. Regrettably, I was even too embarrassed to be a part of ICMA's Members in Transition (MIT) program at the time. Quite frankly, I just wanted to hurry up and secure a new position.

Following my departure, the city entered into a tumultuous period of dysfunction, finding themselves in fiscal chaos and several lawsuits. A special attorney was hired to investigate the mayor and the city council churned through eight city managers in two years.

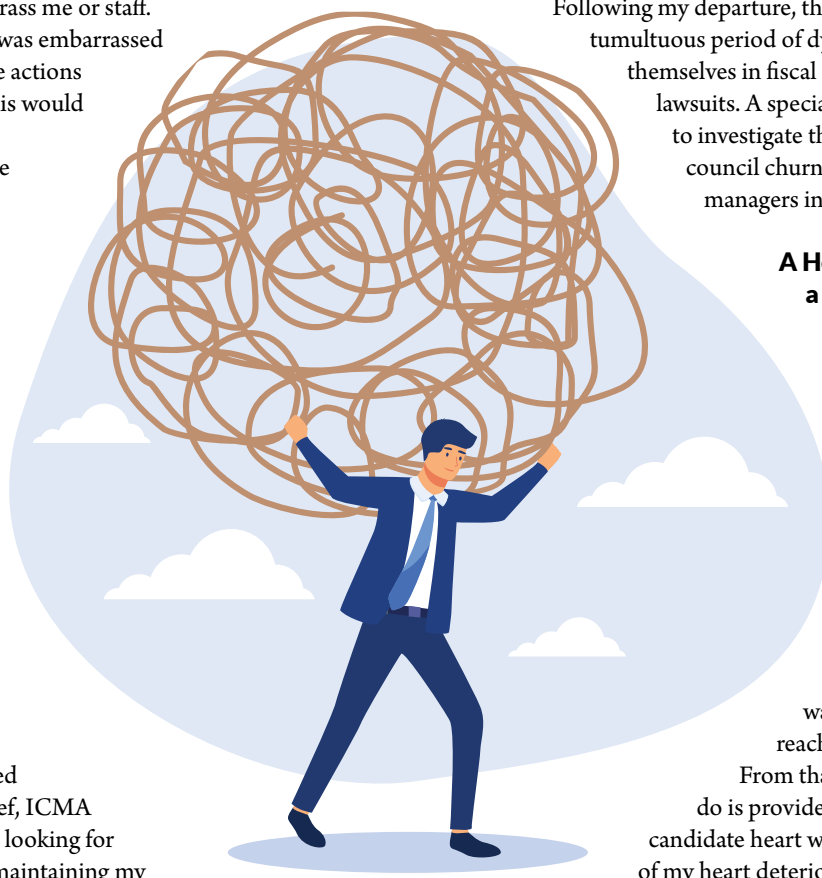
A Health Scare and a New Chapter

I would soon learn that there was life after such a turbulent departure.

I had a tremendous experience in my next position, but after months of continued and worsening heart failure, I collapsed after a meeting and was taken to the hospital. I was told that my heart had reached the end of its life.

From that point on all they could do is provide "bridges" until, and if, a candidate heart was offered. The condition of my heart deteriorated rapidly and other organs became affected. Then, word came of an offer of a heart from an angel donor. We accepted, and after the operation I awoke hooked up to every device imaginable during a successful recovery. From that point on, I have never taken a day for granted.

Following a few months of rehabilitation and time for my immune system to adjust properly to the new organ, I received clearance from my doctor to return to work. Unfortunately, COVID-19 was just then descending upon us, causing cities and counties to shut down their recruiting efforts for an unspecified amount of time. When recruitment efforts finally resumed, and after a prolonged period of not working, I received an offer from a county. I began working but I quickly found that the mood of constituents was notably angrier than I had ever experienced. In the weeks leading up to the 2020 election, many early voters who came into our office refused to wear masks (despite the posted signs), exposing office staff to the spread of the virus. Due to the



istock.com/ Muhammad Chabib alwi

One of the most important things that we as employed managers can do for those who are going through a transition is to listen and let them do the talking.

anti-rejection medication that I was taking for my heart, I was particularly concerned that my body may not be able to fight off a COVID infection. In addition, after having been in the position a short time, I came to feel that because my entire career had been on the city side, this county position was not a good fit. The county board indicated the same and made an offer to buy out my contract. I accepted and resigned.

I again found myself in a quandary: Do I literally have the heart for this any longer? Do I wish to continue my career in city management when so much of the public is angry? After these three short tenures, would there even be a future for me in city management? This time, though, rather than being ashamed, embarrassed, or afraid, I reached out to the ICMA MIT program.

Following my departure from the county, a former city manager reached out to see how I was doing. I ended up working with him as a consultant for an energy services company in the private sector for the next year, but remained an MIT. I had hoped that this would allow me to recharge. When I interacted with city managers during this time as a consultant, I began to find myself increasingly missing having 5,000 balls in the air at the same time and trying to orchestrate the chaos that is our world. I began to believe that I was ready to return to the profession.

As an MIT, I attended the monthly virtual MIT meetings and felt an increasing connectivity with those going through their own difficult journeys. I applied for and received a stipend from ICMA to attend the 2021 Annual Conference in Portland. Attending the conference was invigorating, but the tipping point was when I attended the MIT session where we were invited to share our stories, which was very therapeutic. ICMA

No longer am I ashamed, embarrassed, or afraid. In some ways, I wear my experience almost as a badge of honor.

leadership shared some of their own personal stories of being in transition. Finally, recruiters talked with us about how we could navigate our way back into the mix. I felt so uplifted by this session that I knew I definitely wanted to return to local government management. I began interviewing and eventually landed the perfect job for me. However, during the course of interviewing, I didn't try to sugar coat anything. I told my story exactly as it had happened and I think it resonated. I came to embrace those situations that I previously viewed as failures and instead came to view them as character growth. I find that I am no longer apologetic that these things happened—they just happened and I think that I'm stronger as a result.

My Advice

For those of us who are currently in positions of employment:

1. When you first hear of someone going through a tough time or transition, reach out as soon as possible. The early days are when hearing from someone means the most.
2. Put a reminder in your calendar to touch base with the colleague somewhat regularly. Take them to lunch or get together if you can.
3. One of the most important things that we as employed managers can do for those who are going through a transition is to *listen* and let them do the talking.

For those of us who are in transition:

1. You may feel ashamed, embarrassed, or afraid, but don't give up! Being honest and upfront really is the best way to handle the situation.
2. Don't do what I did initially and shy away from ICMA's MIT program. It is an amazing resource and each member can take part in as much or as little as they would like.
3. One of the programs available through the MIT that I highly recommend is the monthly virtual training. During my participation, they covered such topics as best practices in job hunting, partnering with ICMA on research projects, interim assignments, interviewing tips specifically for MITs, virtual interviewing, and working on your LinkedIn profile.

A Few Final Thoughts

Today, one could say that I "had a change of heart." No longer am I ashamed, embarrassed, or afraid. In some ways, I wear my experience almost as a badge of honor. I went through one dark period after another, but despite all the overwhelming difficulties and anxiety, I got through it!

If I can get through it, so can you. In April 2022, I accepted the position of city administrator in beautiful Douglas, Wyoming. I am thriving in my new position and the adventure continues.

As an aside, each year approximately 8,000 people die awaiting an organ transplant. I encourage everyone to be an organ donor.

One never knows when their time may come, but it does give a sense of well-being to give the gift of life through donation. Being an angel donor, I believe, is in a way a kind of immortality.

In remembering the past six momentous years, I would be remiss if I did not thank the many managers, colleagues, and friends who all gave me uplifting support during my challenging times. You all know who you are. You inspired me and lifted me up when I needed it the most. I am very grateful to each and every one of you! **PM**

LEARN MORE about the ICMA Members in Transition program and the resources available at icma.org/mit.

portland GFOA
2023
May 21-24



Government Finance Officers Association 117th Annual Conference

May 21-24, 2023 • Oregon Convention Center • Portland, Oregon

Go to GFOA.org/conference to learn more and register today!



HARVARD Kennedy School
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

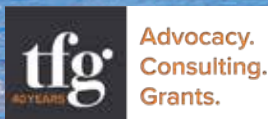
One scholarship will be awarded to an ICMA member to attend the 2023 Harvard School Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program.

Criteria:

- Must be an ICMA member
- Must meet other scholarship criteria.
- Application deadline: January 31, 2023.

Apply at icma.org/harvard

Funded by ICMA Presidential Partner



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



**Seek Innovation.
Improve Performance.
Enhance Services.**

- + Organizational assessment
- + Strategic planning
- + Executive recruitment
- + Communication and outreach
- + Financial analysis and rate studies
- + Technology and data management

www.raftelis.com / info@raftelis.com

RALPH ANDERSEN & ASSOCIATES



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

www.ralphandersen.com
916.630.4900

Budget season is upon us!

Budgeting is one of the most important responsibilities that local government managers undertake every year. The new book, *A Budgeting Guide for Local Government*, Fourth Edition, provides new tools and methodologies to produce effective budgets that yield the desired results.

Learn more at icma.org/budgetingguide.



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



THANK YOU TO OUR STRATEGIC PARTNER



Polco

National Research Center (NRC) at Polco is ICMA's preferred provider of community engagement surveys. ICMA's partnership with NRC provides cost-effective solutions for accurate survey results and civic engagement services. NRC's survey research provides reliable insights to local government leaders to move your communities forward.

**Learn more about ICMA's partnership
with Polco at icma.org/polco.**

ICMA is the leading organization for change makers, those committed to creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world — and seeking the right solutions to make it happen.

Greg Schulte

ICMA/CCCMA Senior Advisor
ICMA Member since 2008

Celebrating National
Mentoring Month

The Highlight of My Career

When I first moved to Colorado, I started out as an interim county administrator for a county with some very significant financial and organizational problems. I really had no idea what I was getting myself into. Through the good teamwork of some newly elected officials and staff, we turned it around and within two years we were able to get everything corrected. We got all the audits done, got the budget right-sized, and we were able to hold our head up. Because of this, I was selected as *Colorado County Administrator of the Year* in 2009. It was an award for me, but it was also an award for the organization because our work had been such a team effort.

The Mental Shift of Retirement

I was very much looking forward to retirement, but it was still a mental shift. I knew it was going to be tough for me to transition from what my life was to what it was going to be. One of the things that was very helpful for me was being nominated and selected to become an ICMA senior advisor just a couple of months after I retired. I was able to stay involved in the profession and help people along in their career. I get to go to the conferences as a senior advisor, I get to stay connected, and I get to stay involved.

Staying Involved, but Enjoying Life

Life is a journey. Your work life is, in most cases, several chapters of that journey, but retirement definitely is the next chapter in life. I have come to fully embrace that. I am still a senior advisor, but I'm also involved in our community. I'm making sure that I take the time to do those things that I was not able to do when I was working.



Local Government **REIMAGINED** CONFERENCES

Discover ideas that will transform the future of local government

ICMA's Local Government Reimagined Conferences will bring together hundreds of solutions-driven local government professionals and stakeholders to engage in robust training and thought-provoking discussions designed to enlighten and challenge your understanding of the evolution of local government.

Oklahoma City, OK
February 22-24, 2023

Louisville, KY
May 10-12, 2023

Burlington, VT
April 12-14, 2023

Long Beach, CA
June 7-9, 2023



LEARN
MORE AND
REGISTER AT
LGR.ICMA.ORG

Website
lgr.icma.org

Questions
conferenceteam@icma.org

Sponsorship Opportunities
msherman@icma.org