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City Planner
Clark County, Nevada
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Observations from the Balcony

Ways to **strengthen** your ethical core | BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

If you've read *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* by Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky, you are familiar with their observation that leaders benefit by dividing their time between the dance floor and the balcony. On the dance floor, you are part of the action with an up close and personal view of what's happening in the organization. It's where you spend large parts of your day doing the work. Up on the balcony and out of the fray, you benefit from the broader view of what is happening across the dance floor (your team, department, or organization). The authors encourage leaders to develop the ability to move fluidly between the two venues to clearly understand what's going on so that they can better react and intervene as needed.

This concept resonates with me in thinking about how people deal with ethical situations. Depending on the intensity, immediacy, and proximity to the unfolding situation, a person may be stuck on the dance floor. Unable to move to the balcony, they miss out on the opportunity to see the big picture. That larger perspective is so valuable to understanding the totality of the issue. And without the right intel, how do they develop and execute the right response? In fact, overwhelmed by the chaos on the dance floor and without the perspective that the balcony view offers, they may not even recognize that the problem in front of them is indeed an ethical dilemma.

Here is where ICMA ethics advice can be of assistance. From our vantage point on the balcony, we offer members the broader perspective. Impartial, objective, and well versed in dealing with all sorts of ethical dilemmas, we can assist members in dissecting the problem and thinking through strategies to resolve it the right way. You can even say that we invite them to get off the dance floor to join us on the balcony.

Having done this work for ICMA for over 24 years, I believe that ethics advice, always confidential, is the most valuable service we provide for our members. Everyone working in local government will encounter an ethical issue at some point in their career. No one is immune. It may be an unexpected personal conflict of interest, an elected official who goes off the rails, or an issue with a staff member.

Having done this work for ICMA for over 24 years, I believe that ethics advice, always confidential, is the most valuable service we provide for our members.

My other takeaway is that the learning journey is mutual. Many members correctly and quickly recognize that the situation they are

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ICMA

International City/County Management Association

icma.org

June 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.

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)

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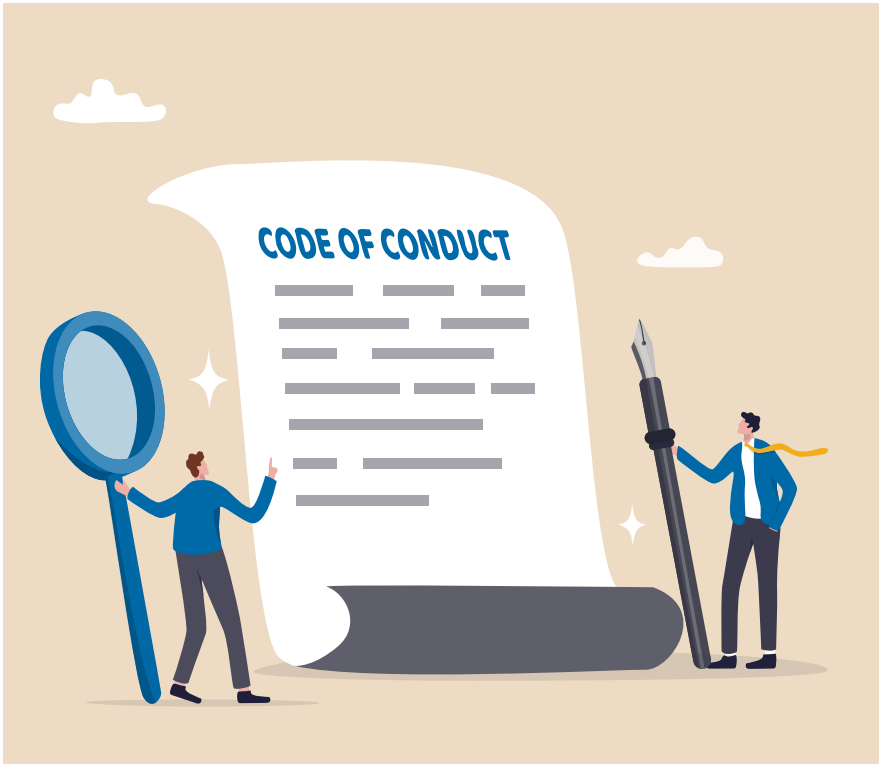
ICMA
Creating and Supporting Thriving Communities
ICMA's vision is to be the leading association of local government professionals dedicated to creating and supporting thriving communities throughout the world. It does this by working with its more than 12,000 members to identify and speed the adoption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

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



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facing is an ethics issue. By the time they reach out to ICMA, they have analyzed the issue, gathered the facts, and given thought to possible solutions. I've gained incredibly valuable insight on leadership and approaches to solving complex ethical issues through these discussions. I've also observed that there are practices and behaviors that will help leaders at all levels of the organization build and strengthen their ethical core.

Be crystal clear about your personal values. Whether those values were developed in your home, by faith, through participation in social organizations, or through lived experiences, you should be able to clearly articulate the core values that matter most to you. After all, they guide your conduct and travel with you in all aspects of your life, even work. Being clear about your values will help you avoid working for an organization or individual whose values are incompatible with yours. If you find yourself in that situation, understand that it is better to exit with your integrity intact than to risk sacrificing your values. Being clear about those values will also help you understand how those values align with your profession's ethical standards.

Understand what you signed on for. The public sector offers an incredible opportunity to improve the lives of residents in very tangible ways. Yet the democracy in which it functions is messy. You may not always agree with the outcome of the elections. But once elected, you must respect the right of the governing body to set policy. Do your best work to advise the governing body but once the policy is set, your role is to implement, not impede.

If you have the urge to get involved in campaigns to elect candidates aligned with your values, be warned that it's easy to draw a straight line from your political engagement to the local government that employs you. Regardless of who gets elected at whatever level, local governments rely on those elected officials for support. Your political activity could jeopardize that support. If you want to get into politics to make things better or to use your voice to influence outcomes,

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you need to make a choice. It's ethically incompatible to work for a local government and serve as an elected official.

Maintain a healthy ego. Managers often joke that they are just one council meeting away from being terminated. It's hard to live with the fact that your employment can be jeopardized by factors that have no relationship to your professional competency, contribution, and achievements. For senior professional staff who run public meetings or attend council sessions, the comments from the public can be brutal and demoralizing. It takes a strong personality and lots of self-confidence to thrive in this profession.

While a strong ego helps, make sure you are cultivating a healthy one. Don't take yourself too seriously. Be open to feedback and critique of your work. Acknowledge that regardless of your tenure, you may not always be right. Find effective ways to manage your stress.

Regarding your colleagues in the profession, refrain from sitting in judgment. You most likely don't have a clear understanding of their situation since you aren't in their seat. Rather than offering a public comment, reach out and offer support. Especially if it turns out that they made a mistake. This profession is tough enough without being undermined by a colleague.

Impartial, objective, and well versed in dealing with ethical dilemmas, we can assist members in dissecting the problem and thinking through strategies to resolve it the right way.

Have the courage to do what's right. Although this happened over a decade ago, I vividly recall a particular conversation with a county manager. He had uncovered serious corruption among a few of his commissioners. He had enough proof that he consulted with the county attorney. The county attorney, not willing to risk his position, was totally unhelpful. The county manager sought advice from ICMA. In the discussion, he acknowledged his obligation to report this to the district attorney. And he knew as well that once he did that, the county board would fire him. I confirmed that he had an ethical obligation to report it, knowing full well that he risked his job in doing so. He reported it and was terminated. Yet in the end, the corrupt county commissioners were convicted. At times, you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. Better to risk your livelihood by doing the right thing than your reputation or that of your organization.

Be an ethical leader. Whether you are leading the entire organization, a department, or team, you have a moral obligation to act ethically. Do the hard work to establish the organization's core values. Set the tone by complying with those values. Hold yourself and your staff to the highest of ethical standards. Talk to your staff about ethics and ethical issues. Create a safe environment to encourage everyone to talk about ethical concerns. Be open to feedback about your conduct. Train up those who work for you to help them be ethical leaders. The small everyday things matter. Don't tarnish your reputation by taking shortcuts or doing things on the margin. People want to work for a leader they can trust.

In conducting research for his book, *Built to Last,* Jim Collins noted that companies and organizations have all manner of core values and there isn't any right set. But defining them and sticking to them was the key to success. Which of the core public service values are you using to guide the work of your organization? As Collins reminds us, "It doesn't matter what core values you have. It matters that you have core values, that you preserve them over time, that you are passionately committed to them, and that you align your behaviors and your organizational practices and structures and strategies with those core values."

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Farewell

At the end of June, I will be leaving ICMA after 24 years. It's been a true privilege to serve members who have such dedication and passion for their work and the profession. I wish you all the best and remember that ethics matter! PM

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Reimagination Process Helps Dispel Uncertainty and Restore Sense of Community and Safety

BY MARC A. OTT

If there were ever a time to begin the work of **reimagining community,** it is now.

There are probably as many definitions for livable communities as there are residents. Some define *livable* as having affordable housing, great schools, walkable streets, services for seniors, easy access to healthy foods, or a wide range of employment opportunities, to name a few. One thing is for certain, livability is inextricably tied to safety.

Without feeling safe and secure, our residents cannot thrive. Many approach everyday living tentatively afraid to accidentally knock on the wrong door at the wrong time, anxious as they send their children off to school, or to even to spend an afternoon shopping at the mall. Yet to create livable communities, local government leaders face the daunting challenge of engaging residents at a time when they may feel there is no such thing as a safe space. Why attend a council meeting or a planning session and risk being threatened for expressing a point of view or suggesting alternatives to the status quo? This is further complicated by the fact that improving the quality of life for all requires that all segments of the community, especially those that feel most disenfranchised, be represented.

Livability is inextricably tied to safety. Without feeling safe and secure, our residents cannot thrive.

There is no doubt that it is hard and sometimes may even seem impossible to move the needle on a "wicked" problem like this. And yet that's what local government leaders do every day. They work with their staff to incrementally achieve the outcomes that create the kinds of communities that people want—livable and safe. The relentless march of daily headlines describing senseless acts of violence resulting in multiple deaths has brought us to a tipping point. If there were ever a time to begin the work of reimagining community, it is now. To be certain, every community is unique and will have different starting points, distinct processes for engagement, and various ways of setting and measuring outcomes. However, there are a few elements that I believe would be helpful in every reimagination effort:

Tap into the energy of recent graduates joining your local government staff for the first time. From new hires into the public works department to management analysts in the city manager's office, pairing new hires with experienced veterans and making them part of the resident

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MARC A. OTT
is CEO/Executive Director of ICMA, Washington, D.C.

engagement process can offer new ways of looking at persistent issues.

Establish innovative partnerships with universities. I was fortunate over the course of my career to work with some amazing institutions, including the University of Texas and the University of Michigan. Often though, we can get bogged down in the day-to-day challenges of what may seem like the city within a city nature of these relationships. In this issue of *PM,* the feature article, "Cultivating University and Community Partnerships," explores four creative examples of the benefits that this type of engagement can bring to your city or county. If you do not live in a town and gown community, you could explore online universities who are always open to getting their students hands-on experience.

Connect with your peers. This is definitely not the time to "go it alone." In every corner of the world, you can find local government pioneers who are trying new things. Share your challenges with your ICMA and state association networks to spark discussions of both successful and failed programs and build relationships around specific issues that your community may be facing. The Local Government 2030 Initiative (see page 36) is one such cohort whose work promises to benefit our profession, as well as our communities.

Local government leaders face the daunting challenge of engaging residents at a time when they may feel there is no such thing as a safe space.

As our partner, the National Research Center, points out, while safety is always a top priority in terms of what matters most to residents, trust in police has declined in recent years. Including public safety professionals in the reimagination process provides the best opportunity for transparency and a holistic approach to reaching safe community goals. (See page 12.)

The level of uncertainty facing our residents today makes it clear that we all need to join together to redefine community. As local government leaders, you have seen the power that comes from engaging our residents. Groups of people—including parents, businesses, nonprofit and spiritual organizations, people at the margins, our local government team members, and most especially our young people—hold the promise of arriving at the values, principles, and goals of a reimagined community. The questions they will ask are far-reaching—what does it look like, how do we sustain it, how do we transition from where we are to where we want to be. This work is of paramount importance because it feels as if we are standing on a precipice, and in the absence of communication at this moment, what thrives is fear.

As the community engages around its shared future, fear will be eclipsed by curiosity, understanding, trust, and finally excitement at the prospect of a new beginning. PM

"We Have Your Data. Pay Up Now"—*Is Ransomware Trolling for You?*

Ninety percent of all data breaches and compromises are the result of **human error.** Now is the time to train your staff. | **BY RICH MORAHAN**

***Ransomware Attack on City Of Dallas Knocks Police Website Offline* (CNN Online, May 3, 2023)**

***Cyberattack Disrupts Lowell City Government, Shuts Down Computers* (CBS News, Boston, April 25)**

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These were the two most recent cybercrime stories when this article was submitted for publication. You can probably add two more as you read it. Dallas appears to be lucky, with the reported attack confined to the court system. This isn't the first time that a big American city's police department has been impacted by ransomware. The most prominent attack on law enforcement was perhaps when a Russian-speaking criminal group leaked online a trove of data stolen from the Washington, DC, Police Department in 2021.

Lowell, Massachusetts is a smaller city, so the crooks had the power to knock out more of its systems, shutting down the city for days. City Manager Tom Golden is reassuring, if a little vague. "The other professionals in law enforcement have looked at this, and we're all comfortable, but it's going to take us a little bit of time."

The CBS News article quotes Boston College cybersecurity expert Brian Powers, asserting that "it's not a matter of if but when local governments will be attacked by cybercriminals." The article goes on to say that "Lowell officials have alerted law enforcement to the attack, and Golden says it could be days before the city's system is fully up and running."

Ransomware and data theft are a constant threat to businesses and government agencies. These attacks typically lock computer files so hackers can demand a ransom and access valuable data for dark web auction or worse. A 2019 attack on the city of Baltimore halted the city's ability to process water-billing payments for three months, according to *The Baltimore Sun*. Baltimore officials estimated at the time that the ransomware attack would cost the city at least $18 million.

Quentin Rhoads-Herrera, a Dallas-based cybersecurity executive, told CNN that when he is hired to test the cybersecurity of state and local governments, "we commonly find their security posture to be weaker than that of the average corporate company." Herrera added, "This is not due to a lack of concern, but rather a lack of resources and manpower to address the ever-growing challenges of cybersecurity."

Why the Attacks on City Government?

Simply put, municipal systems are low-hanging fruit. Unlike businesses, which have budget and staffing flexibility, most municipal information systems are underfunded, although many wind up eventually paying more than they can handle when they're hijacked.

New Orleans was hit with ransomware in late 2019, and it took 10 days to get some of their computers running again, and a full 20 days to get everything restored. It ended up costing the city over $5 million. Information Manager Kimberly LaGue reminds us that, in today's tech world, a cyberattack can happen to anyone.

Spotting the Weak Points and Building and Strengthening Defenses

With limits on spending and people, what's the best path to follow? Focus on what Peter Thermos of Palindrome Technologies points out: Ninety percent of all data breaches and compromises are the result of human error. TeachPrivacy, a cybersecurity company, jests that the best way to protect data security is to get rid of all the humans, and Plan B is to train them. Training and motivating your staff is your best, most cost-effective defense. You have neither the time nor the money to replace your existing computer systems or to perform major updates. PalindromeTech identifies three non-tech employee areas to address for cybersecurity:

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Awareness and Culture. As Palindrome CEO Peter Thermos pointed out, the weak link is human error. Management must commit to initial security training, then constant reinforcement and follow-up. You can't just give a perfunctory lecture and consider the problem solved. There needs to be continual follow up, for example, by delivering a cybersecurity message prominently in every employee newsletter or periodic email. We've probably all seen movies or TV shows where the mighty fortress is breached by someone leaving a door open. That's how computer systems are taken down—through a figurative open door or window.

The guidelines are pretty clear: Don't open an attachment from an unknown email sender. Don't download kitty videos or place your bets on company time, which could provide an opening for the enemy. Promote a culture of compliance. Don't encourage lax behavior, and sanction it when it happens.

Policy and Procedures. Develop consistent policies and guidelines to enforce company policy. Allow no exceptions and promote the expectation that it's everyone's job to protect the organization. Prohibit the downloading of unauthorized software, even if it's a test file for a tech manager. Prohibit copying text from an unauthorized site.

Training and motivating your staff is your best, most cost-effective defense.

Governance and Compliance. The organization needs to broadcast its commitment to security and back that up with periodic training and refresher courses. There are many resources that won't cost a lot of money. Most states have programs to help communities protect their data. And unlike businesses that compete with each other, municipalities can cooperate and learn from their neighbors, sharing best practices and broadcasting alerts and new approaches.

The Bottom Line

There are additional cost-effective resources, such as state and local conferences and organizations. They can provide the latest strategies and best practices, but this knowledge must be communicated and implemented, down to the individual employee. Cybersecurity starts at the top, but it must reach every level of the organization.

Cybercrime is a constant threat to municipalities. You can't spend your way to protection. You protect your systems by building organization-wide compliance with clearly defined security requirements. The key to maintaining security is to work to strengthen the weakest link. Take low-cost steps to protect yourself now and plan long term for the next attack. PM

ICMA and APWA—A Valuable Partnership

BY DAVE SLEZICKEY, ICMA-CM AND JIM PROCE, ICMA-CM

City/county management and public works come together with a new partnership agreement.

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Having been a member of both the American Public Works Association (APWA) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) for a couple of decades, and having gone to their respective conferences, serving both organizations on various committees and task forces, and having read all of the articles in the *APWA Reporter* and *Public Management* magazine each month, we began to consider the "what-ifs" should members from both organizations come together.

Initially, you may think, "What do engineers and city/county managers have in common?" In many smaller communities, the same individual may wear both hats of chief administrative officer and public works director. There are many current city/county managers who have a background and history in public works. "Having been both a public works director and city manager, I found that I argue with myself some days!" says Jim Proce, currently the assistant city manager of Lewisville, Texas. We are on the same team of serving communities, so why wouldn't we want to take advantage of any synergies that we can identify and share best practices globally? There are many local government issues and concerns that we could team up on for the betterment of the organizations and communities we collectively serve.

APWA and ICMA have signed an agreement for a formal collaboration, and we think it's important to get the word out. What does this mean to you as a member of one or both organizations? Simply put, this collaboration agreement between ICMA and APWA adds value for local government professionals in both organizations. The sharing of knowledge, resources, and programs expands services for all members to grow stronger, balanced communities. It's our hope that this partnership will build better counties, cities, and towns while enhancing future growth and development.

In communities of varying sizes across the globe, the relationship between public works leadership and city/county management must be balanced and in harmony for success. The committed and dedicated team members of public works departments operate and maintain infrastructure and critical services that enhance quality of life and provide for economic growth and development. A strong public works department enhances the ability to forecast and plan future needs of the community (while occasionally making the CAO look good, too.) City management supports the providing of services, working with public works to manage the greatest financial asset the city has—its infrastructure.

Public works leaders need the support, capacities, and resources from the CAO's office to provide quality, responsive services. Many communities have emerged from the past few years stronger and more resilient, recognizing new ways to provide services to meet community needs. CARES Act and ARPA funds provided needed financial relief for new programs and projects, and many communities are in the budget cycle of exploring how to sustain some of these without the continued federal funding. Cooperating relationships between all local government leaders is of utmost importance in navigating this challenge, and additional resources provided by both APWA and ICMA are beneficial.

APWA and ICMA members can expand their network and resource base through the new partnering agreement. Both APWA and ICMA are member-driven organizations and governed by a board of directors comprised of

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professional peers in the industry. The organizational leadership and staff understand the challenges faced in local government and are committed to sharing viable options to overcome obstacles.

There is not a one-size-fits-all solution for anything in local government, but the more that we share what we learn with others, the greater our chances of success. The APWA and ICMA partnership expands our opportunities to learn from professionals in our industries.

Both disciplines of public works and city management in the local government profession are interrelated and integrated. The partnerships and relationships between these two are important for quality planning and operations to grow a successful community. Challenges are shared and obstacles can be overcome, solving today's problems for tomorrow's future by continuing collaboration between administration and operations. The partnership with APWA and ICMA extends resources and opportunities to both disciplines in the local government profession.

Although we tend to focus on trends occurring in big cities, there are many more smaller communities than larger cities served in the memberships of both APWA and ICMA. Many of these smaller cities and towns have a public works director or CAO that oversees more than one local government function. The APWA and ICMA partnership will extend resources, programs, training, and solutions to these valued members.

Having had the opportunity to work in several capacities as a city manager/public works director, public works director, as a city manager with an amazing public works director, or the many variations we see in our communities, one can see that such a partnership could be tremendously helpful to those in similar positions. Sharing ICMA information with our public works teams has proven to be fruitful, as they reciprocate and share APWA resources in return. The partnership in our communities is yielding great success, so a partnership with an even greater reach could facilitate knowledge sharing and understanding for even more communities and their public servants.

The partnership between APWA and ICMA is a winning solution for all members in local government leadership. As both organizations have a shared vision and mission, the extension of resources, programs, and training to more members in different areas of local government will enhance solution approaches to the many challenges we overcome on a regular basis to build our communities for the future.

When we start digging into the realm of possibilities, it's true: bigger is better, more is marvelous, now is the time, and working together will certainly yield greater opportunities for our associations, our members, and our communities. Let's put our heads together and do this!

What ideas do you have as a member and public servant? Reach out to us via the email addresses listed in our bios on the opposite page. PM

New Research Reveals What Americans Really Want in Their Communities

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When you align your actions with the desires of your residents, you build trust and make the most effective change.

BY JESSIE O'BRIEN

There are dozens of competing goals that local government leaders have to manage. Knowing what's most important can be difficult to recognize. But a recent analysis boils down the top 10 most important community priorities according to residents. Officials who understand these prime concerns can achieve greater success in planning and decision-making by knowing exactly what community members want.

The findings come from National Research Center (NRC), the proprietary laboratory of survey and data scientists at Polco, a community engagement and civic analytics company.[1] Researchers analyzed a nationwide, 30-year database of resident opinions alongside public community data to pinpoint what matters most to Americans today. Life has been unpredictable in recent years, which has influenced what people think is important. Some results are surprising.

10. Aging in Place

The older demographic will soon become the majority in the United States. The US Census Bureau estimates people over 65 will outnumber children under 18 by 2034.[2] The unprecedented population shift will restructure what communities look like.

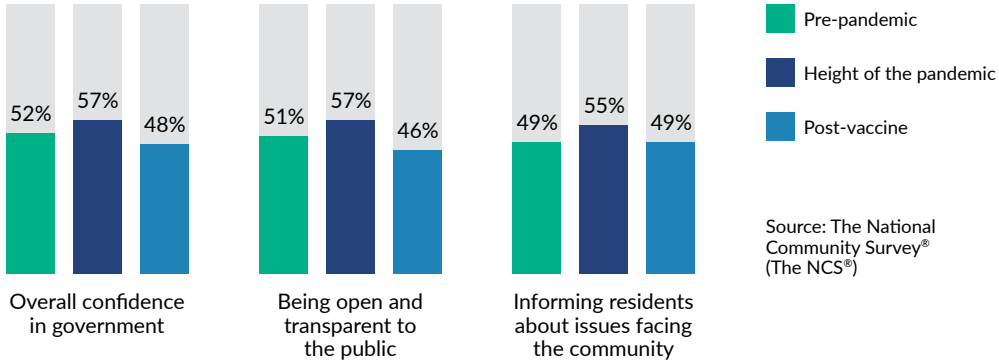
As we age, we require quality access to health care, suitable housing, activities, transportation, and other necessities. These resources allow us to stay home without relying on others for help. Data show just how important it is to maintain independence with aging.

The Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults (CASOA) by NRC at Polco captures older adults' opinions on livability.[3] Results reveal that 84% of residents plan to remain in their community throughout retirement, highlighting that the majority of people plan to stay put as they age.

Unfortunately, many older adults are forced into long-term care or have to move from cities where services are unavailable. Governments that don't facilitate aging in place now are already behind as Baby Boomers, the second-largest generation, move into their older years.

"This is a population [that governments] never intentionally planned for. But as our communities are aging, it's now a very important group to pay attention to," said Michelle Kobayashi, principal research strategist for Polco.

Resident Opinions on Local Government Throughout the Pandemic



Source: The National Community Survey® (The NCS®)

American residents and businesses both say economic health is the top priority for their communities.

9. Health and Wellness

Health will always be a key concern for community members—but even more so today.

"If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that the health and wellness of our residents is a major factor in community livability," Kobayashi said.

The National Community Survey (The NCS) by NRC at Polco asks residents their opinions about their city or town where they live.[4] The NCS results say most people rate their communities positively for fitness and recreation opportunities. However, results also display a need for better access to healthy food, affordable quality health care, mental health care, and preventative services. Ratings in all these categories declined significantly from 2021 to 2022.

Kobayashi says even though medical and food needs are not directly part of local government's role, it's important to be proactive in ensuring health-related resources are available.

8. Natural Environment

Many residents desire access to green space and nature. For instance, some "amenity migrants" move to places with better access to the outdoors. But The NCS results show only around 60% of residents approve of natural land preservation, cleanliness, and open space in their communities.

Getting on board with natural environment trends can make your community more desirable to residents. The blue and green infrastructure movement, for example, incorporates water, plants, grass, and trees into urban areas. The 15-minute city movement ensures communities have access to necessities within that short drive timespan.

7. Education

Education has always been a top priority for American residents. But students and teachers alike struggled with remote learning throughout the pandemic. One study discovered students lost one-third of the school year during the height of Covid.[5]

"The pandemic really did a doozy on education," Kobayashi said.

Residents' approval of education in the United States hovered around 70% on The NCS for many years. Then satisfaction rates plummeted after 2020. Many initially thought the drop in satisfaction with education might have been temporary, but the trend continued into 2022.

To turn things around, Kobayashi suggests an emphasis on teaching twenty-first century skills. "The day of working on conveyor belts and construction lines is over," she said.

Training kids and adults in critical thinking, cultural competency, communication, technical literacy, collaboration, and creativity will help align skills in modern day jobs and improve the decline in satisfaction in education.

6. Land Use

Land use deeply influences the quality of a community. How land is utilized impacts economic development, affects transportation, and determines the types of housing and population density, among many other effects. It can change the activities and the look of a place. For example, reducing agricultural lands for more urbanization will change the view and the type of work available.

Land use is also where governments have the most power to affect outcomes with

regulations and policy changes. "Land use always has to be on this list because governments have so much control over the quality of livability through how you design a community and land use policy," Kobayashi said.

That said, The NCS ratings for land use often score low. About 50% of residents say growth is well-planned in their neighborhoods. About 40% feel positive about residential and commercial growth, as well as the variety of housing options. And only about 30% approve of the availability of quality affordable housing.

5. Public Trust

"Local government operates based on trust between residents and public servants. It's difficult to build and so easy to lose," said Matt Fulton, senior advisor of national engagement for Polco and a former city manager for over 30 years.

Unfortunately, Americans are losing faith in local government.

Trust in local government went up during the pandemic; residents gained more appreciation for public services during the crisis. That changed over the last two years partially due to misinformation and polarization.[6] Overall confidence in local government decreased from around 56% to 48% on The NCS from 2020 to 2022.

Residents want and expect inclusion in improving their community. Engaging community members in decision-making to reach a shared solution will start to rebuild lost trust.

4. Infrastructure

Residents and businesses are highly concerned with infrastructure. Infrastructure affects the big and little things in our daily lives, the quality of our internet access, the safety of our roads, and the water we drink.

"It's one of the most important aspects of building a strong community," Fulton said.

Polco's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Engagement Package is a series of surveys that ask residents and businesses where to put relief funds to best use. Both the ARPA Package and The NCS say the top three infrastructure priorities include drinking water, roads and bridges, and road safety. Access to reliable broadband has also become important post-pandemic.

"If your infrastructure needs are not met, then you will find that all other aspects of the community will be impacted, as well," Fulton said.

3. Safety

Safety will always be a top need and is often the number one priority for many people. But residents' priorities have shifted with other stressors, such as inflation and other day-to-day life needs.

Trust in police has also declined post-2020. Fulton says a lot of outside forces influence public opinion of police services. "It's a really trying time for law enforcement," he said.

But the decline in trust hasn't taken away the essential need for safety services, which is why it still ranks at the top of the list.

The National Law Enforcement Survey (The NLES) by NRC at Polco measures resident opinions toward police and sheriff services.[7] Top public safety concerns include drug abuse, DUIs, traffic problems, burglaries, theft and robberies, and domestic violence.

2. Community

The pandemic deepened isolation and now more people are craving time with their friends and family. This coupled with more polarization and racial tensions has more people valuing a sense of community.

"A lot of cities are struggling with building communities that are strong, that are unified, and have solidarity," Kobayashi said.

Humans are social creatures and community creates a sense of belonging and connects us to others. It fosters resiliency and is also linked to better mental and physical wellbeing. Local governments can improve a sense of community by throwing events and engaging residents in decision-making.

"We have seen a lot of movement in local government, with citizen academies, community liaisons, and forming diversity, equity, and inclusion task forces," Kobayashi says.

1. Economic Health

American residents and businesses both say economic health is the top priority for their communities. People are uncertain about their own economic futures, taking care of their families, and affording their homes with so many broader economic unknowns.

Traditionally, residents are often less satisfied with employment opportunities, cost of living, well-planned growth, and downtown vibrancy in their communities, according to The NCS.

Sometimes local government practitioners express that they don't have power over the health of their local economy. But Kobayashi says governance and economy are deeply entangled, especially with a sales tax that helps fund local governments.

She says public-private partnerships and building stronger relationships with chambers of commerce can help local governments influence economic health.

Americans' top priorities reflect the changes and stressors of today. Tuning into residents' needs helps narrow your focus on the most pressing concerns. The knowledge brings clarity to goal setting when so many other distractions pull at your attention. In the end, understanding what your community members want improves problem-solving. When you align your actions with what residents want, you build trust and make the most effective change.

"Given all of the complex and evolving challenges facing all communities, understanding resident priorities, needs, and expectations to help inform important local decisions is key to building a place where people want to invest," Fulton said. PM

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Making Cities Livable FOR Families

Three key factors are crucial for families to flourish and to improve the quality of life for all residents.

BY MICHAEL HULING

Cities have been at the heart of many of the greatest achievements throughout our history, with the most significant contributions to cultural, economic, and scientific advancements emerging from places rich in human capital. From Athens and Rome to London and New York, great cities inspire and captivate by virtue of their irreplaceable role in our histories—the history of those who have called them home and those who have admired them from afar, in distant lands and in different centuries.

Today, we tend to view our cities through a more practical lens as places with unique economic opportunities, cultural dynamism, public amenities, night life, and so forth. These features are particularly appealing to younger adults who value the ability to live, work, and play in the same area. For many, it's the logical progression following the move away from home, graduating college, and beginning a career. The adage of "moving to the city" reflects the excitement of transitioning to a phase of life characterized by change, novelty, freedom, and opportunity.

Many of the qualities that make cities attractive to young adults also keep cities desirable as people get married and have children. The density of cities means that there are more things in a smaller geographical space: more jobs, parks, restaurants, coffee shops, schools, churches, museums, and just about everything else. Families value these kinds of places as much as anyone, giving cities a competitive advantage over suburban and rural communities. Despite this broad appeal, remaining in the city is infeasible for many families. As much as they would welcome staying in the city—rather than having to move out to the suburbs—our cities are often not welcoming to them and can even be hostile in some cases. The declining percentage of children being born in cities suggests that urban life is becoming less suitable for families.[1] There are numerous ways in which our cities are failing to support families, but three key issues stand out: housing, education, and safety.

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Housing

For most families, housing is not only the largest expense, but the primary factor in determining where to live. It becomes especially important with a growing family that requires additional bedrooms and amenities. Much has been made about the "missing middle" in housing, and for good reason. Our cities are overwhelmingly zoned for single-family housing and high-rise apartments. In Los Angeles, for example, 78 percent of residential land is zoned exclusively for single-family homes.[2] The story is similar in Seattle, Chicago, Charlotte, and countless other cities across the nation.[3] The result is a chronic undersupply of housing, augmented by an even greater undersupply of truly affordable housing. Per capita new housing construction remains near historic lows, pushing perspective buyers and renters alike away from urban areas.

While high-rise apartments utilize space efficiently by building up instead of out, they still have their limits. These units tend to be specifically designed for singles and roommates because of their layout design and amenities. Features like equally sized bedrooms, large walk-in closets and bathrooms, and limited dining space may work for those without children, but are unsuitable for many families. Some have concerns about whether the height of these high-rise buildings prevents them from being "human scale," but the real problem is that they lack units that are family scale. The goal of developers is generally to maximize rent per square foot, which makes studios and one-bedroom units the most profitable. However, this approach ignores the demand from families for alternative layouts that are more conducive to raising children. We can blame restrictive zoning, prohibitive environmental regulations, myopic housing development, rising material costs, and a variety of other causes for these issues, but the overlying point is that poor housing options have made urban life much more difficult for families.

Families are worth prioritizing because they are particularly invested in the success of their community as the place in which they live, work, play, and raise their children.

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Identifying problems is easier than finding and implementing solutions, but there are some policy options that can significantly improve urban housing options for families. Upzoning to accommodate higher density—including single-family residential zoning—is the first necessary step to increasing housing development. Single-family homes offer comfort, stability, and the opportunity for homeownership, but require much more land than higher density options.

Missing middle housing options like townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, and even

mid-rise condos allow for more homes to be built, reduce housing costs, and preserve homeownership as an option for families. Additionally, working with developers to provide more family-oriented floorplans is a less conventional, but crucial way to improve housing options for families. Bobby Fijan, a housing developer and expert in redesigning apartment floorplans to suit families, notes the error of many housing advocates in "fixating on density, setbacks, and facades rather than the interior spaces of where people actually live."[4]

We must see housing from the inside and outside—at both the neighborhood and bedroom level. More bedrooms per square foot, smaller second and third bedrooms, windowless bedrooms, dedicated dining areas, and single-staircase buildings are some of the design reforms that make these units possible and profitable. Cities often require developers to provide a certain number of "affordable" units in new buildings, and there is no reason why the same can't be done with family-oriented units. The current undersupply of family-oriented units presents an immense opportunity for developers, who have an important role to play in mitigating the housing crisis in our cities.

Education

Most of us can agree that quality schools that educate and prepare the next generation for adulthood are an indispensable social good. Horace Mann, the iconic education reformer of the nineteenth century, identified education as "the great equalizer" in conferring opportunities for success to those who would otherwise be excluded from the ladders of social mobility. We all have an interest in the proper education of children, but parents have a unique concern for the education of their children. Limited educational options for students is a major factor that drives families away from cities in hopes of finding higher performing schools. It's a great sacrifice to do so in many cases, but one that parents will readily make if it means their children will be able to attend better schools.

An unfortunate (and somewhat paradoxical) reality is that many of America's most desirable cities have the worst performing school districts. San Diego, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Las Vegas, and other metropolitan areas are struggling to provide educational options that match the desirability of their other urban qualities. When we wonder why a family would abandon an otherwise enjoyable urban life, we need not look much further than the schools. Arguably the biggest issue with urban education is that the schools—and school districts—are simply too large and serve too many students. The Clark County School District in Nevada, for instance, manages 375 public schools and serves over 300,000 students.[5] Accountability, oversight, and responsiveness are much less feasible with an organizational bureaucracy of this size, and it's the students who suffer. Wealthier families can capitalize on private schools and other alternatives when they are unsatisfied with the local public schools, but lower-income families do not have this luxury.

The problem of an inadequate supply of schools is similar to the inadequate supply of housing in that the logical first step is to increase the supply. More schools—and more school districts—allow families to have greater educational options for their children. It also allows schools to serve a more manageable number of students, which seems to have social and educational advantages for children.

Insufficient school funding is a common explanation for poor educational outcomes, but this claim is not well supported by the evidence. Nationally, inflation-adjusted per pupil, education spending increased nearly 50 percent between 1990 and 2019, with little to no improvement to show for it.[6] Some of the worst performing urban school districts are among the highest funded, such as New York City School District, Los Angeles Unified School District, Baltimore City Public Schools, and Atlanta Public Schools. Despite spending much more than the national average per student, these districts continue to underperform.[7]

Parental engagement in education appears to be a much better indicator of student success, which warrants a more concerted effort to involve parents in our schools.[8] Increasing communication between parents and teachers, providing parents with opportunities to volunteer in schools, and scheduling more "open houses" for families to engage faculty are a few options for improving parental engagement, which will allow schools to better

serve their students. While no panacea, these are the kinds of changes necessary for urban areas to remain viable for families as they have children and education becomes a greater priority.

Safety

The third area in which cities must improve to better accommodate families is public safety, which encompasses everything from reducing crime to limiting traffic fatalities. Suffice it to say that no one prefers to live in a high crime area, as violence is detrimental to both economic and cultural vitality. When our streets are unsafe, it affects the entire community. Crime is especially concerning for families, and any sensible parent will do whatever is necessary to protect their children from danger.

While the difference in crime rates between urban and suburban areas is often exaggerated, the perception of an unsafe neighborhood is more than enough to deter a family from living there. Cities that are able to reduce and prevent crime are, by definition, better places for families to live. New York City's success in reducing crime in recent decades is an intriguing case study that goes beyond the scope of this article, but what is particularly interesting is that the city has a relatively high population of minors. About 21 percent of residents are under 18 years old, which mirrors the national average and is much higher than other big cities. San Francisco, by contrast, has one of the lowest minor populations at just 13 percent. Unsurprisingly, New York is a much safer city than San Francisco, which partially explains why this population discrepancy exists.[9]

Perhaps the best indication of a thriving city is the desire of parents to raise their children within it.

Reducing crime is easier said than done, of course, but we have seen effective policy solutions that more cities should consider. It may be controversial, but the data overwhelmingly show that hiring more police officers leads to less crime. The simple reasoning is twofold: (1) the presence of police deters criminal activity and (2) more arrests means that there are fewer criminals on the streets. A 2019 study in the American Law and Economics Review examined data from 7,000 U.S. municipalities, finding that a "10% increase in police employment rates reduces violent crime rates by 13% and property crime rates by 7%."[10] New York's crime spike in the 1980s and early 1990s quickly reversed after the New York Police Department dramatically expanded hiring beginning in 1990.[11] Setting aside complex debates about criminal justice reform and police misconduct, it's difficult to deny that our cities become safer by having more police officers on duty. Another way to improve safety is with greater urban street lighting, an idea proposed over six decades ago by Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs argued that good street lighting creates the perception and reality of safety; it's more comforting to walk where you can see and where others can also see you. When onlookers can easily see the streets, whether from the sidewalk or their balcony, the sense of safety for pedestrians grows. The University of Chicago Crime Lab conducted a randomized control trial featuring 40 public housing developments, half of which received new and improved streetlights. The result was a significant reduction in "index crimes," including murder, robbery, and aggravated assault.[12] There are many other policy options that may reduce crime and make cities safer for families, but more policing and greater street lighting are two proven solutions that any city can implement.

Prioritizing Families in Our Cities

Cities represent the greatest achievements of our past and the best hope for our future, but the trends pushing families away from urban areas should be concerning. Quality housing, better education, and safer neighborhoods are necessary for families to flourish, and also improve the quality of life for all residents. Our cities should be livable for people of all ages—and their prosperity in the long term depends on it.

Families are worth prioritizing because they are particularly invested in the success of their community as the place in which they live, work, play, *and* raise their children. This generational commitment to the city is indispensable because it builds a form of social capital that is nearly impossible to replicate otherwise. Perhaps the best indication of a thriving city is the desire of parents to raise their children within it. Edmund Burke famously wrote that "to make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely," and the same can be said for our cities. Families should have great cities to call home, and cities should have loving families to call residents. PM

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Cultivating University and Community Partnerships

When local governments partner with universities in their area, it's a win-win for all involved.

BY MITCHELL BERG, PH.D.; MIKE GRECO, AICP; SALEHA KHUMAWALA, PH.D.; AND MADDI MENICH

University of Houston

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During the pandemic, universities and colleges were shutting down their campuses and focusing on remote learning to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. For many communities that were host to or near to an institution of higher learning, the move to remote learning created a negative economic ripple effect on the localized economy. Additionally, the move toward online learning also altered the type of engagement those institutions of higher learning offered to the broader community.

According to an article published in *Inside Higher Education,* the pandemic forced many academics to rethink "their approaches to teaching and learning, as well as how key campus and community partners contribute to those processes."[1] As the pandemic recedes, our institutions of higher learning are focusing once again on the value of community-engaged partnerships. Creating programs geared toward civic engagement, these partnerships are viewed as a "win-win" by providing students with valuable "real world" and hands-on learning, while helping communities solve complex and difficult societal issues, both contributing to the greater public good.

The purpose of this article is to provide examples of a variety of different partnerships with cities and counties. It will also focus on how to develop a partnership and explain what factors and conditions can lead to a more successful and mutually reciprocal partnership.

What is University–Community Engagement?

According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and American Council on Education (ACE), both organizations worked to develop a classification system to recognize institutions of higher learning that were institutionalizing community engagement.

Their definition of community engagement is described as the partnering of "college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good."

The following are four examples of different engaged community partnerships between an institution of higher learning and city and/or county. Some of these partnerships were showcased by the University Economic Development Association (UEDA). UEDA's mission is to "bring together higher education institutions, private sector businesses, nonprofits, government organizations, and community economic development stakeholders to create local and regional economic opportunity." These examples highlight the efforts of universities and colleges to promote community livability through diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); workforce development and entrepreneurialism; community development; community vitality; and placemaking.

University of Houston Stimulated Urban Renewal Through Entrepreneurship Program

The Stimulated Urban Renewal Through Entrepreneurship (SURE℠) program is an innovative educational platform that forges a value-added partnership between University of Houston (UH) students, under-resourced entrepreneurs, and the Houston business community.[2] The local government of Houston is a committed community partner to the program, which was founded by Dr. Saleha Khumawala, a professor and executive director of the Dakri Center for Economic Inclusion. The program's mission is to provide an experiential, impactful, and innovative educational program by creating a partnership between UH students, business thought leaders, and aspiring local entrepreneurs from underserved and disadvantaged communities.

The term "under-resourced" used in the SURE program is borrowed from Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner's *Complete Communities* initiative. This term acknowledges that, despite Houston's robust local economy, prosperity is not evenly distributed, and the resources needed to create it are unevenly distributed. The SURE Program empowers passionate, intellectual, and hardworking people in underserved communities by connecting them to the resources that will expedite their success in achieving financial success, particularly in launching or growing their own businesses.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and economic empowerment are the foundation of the SURE

Program. Entrepreneurs apply to the program before the semester begins, and those selected are invited to campus to learn how to put together a business plan. This includes lessons in accounting, marketing, personal finance, and other relevant topics. Each student leads a team of three to four entrepreneurs to mentor, guide, and help develop their individual business plans and make a pitch for funding. The students receive guidance from the previous cohort of students, and business leaders, and the program culminates in a graduation and Pitch Day at the end of the semester.

During Pitch Day, entrepreneurs pitch their ideas to bankers, and, while in another room, they hear presentations from Business Support Organizations that provide services they might need. The SURE Program has made an undeniable impact on Houston, educating over 1,790 current and aspiring entrepreneurs, training more than 400 UH Bauer College of Business students, and playing an instrumental role in launching or expanding more than 700 local businesses.

The program is replicating this success across campuses and cities through partnerships and collaborations with other universities. SURE is an outstanding demonstration of how partnering with underserved communities can expand economic opportunity and sharpen students' professional and human-centered skills.

University of Minnesota Crookston Veden Center for Rural Development and NXT Gen Ag

University of Minnesota (UMN) Crookston is one of five campuses of the University of Minnesota system and is located in northwest Minnesota. This region is known for its fertile soils and is home to several large agricultural farms, processors, and businesses. These businesses employ a significant number of people. However, a Minnesota demographic report projects that over two-thirds of Minnesota's counties, all within rural Minnesota, will see a decline in population between 2018 and 2053. Understanding that our agricultural sector is dependent on labor to fill jobs, UMN Crookston held a series of focus groups to learn how the university could better address the state's rural agricultural workforce shortage.

After convening a series of focus group sessions with several of the region's top agricultural leaders, there was an identified need to create a certificate program

Graduates of the University of Houston Stimulated Urban Renewal Through Entrepreneurship (SURE) Program

Students touring Historic Eidem Farm in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota

to develop the leadership, personal development, and communication skills of the next generation of rural professionals. Students will have to complete a community engaged project as part of the program.

Recognizing that a skilled and educated workforce also leads to a vibrant community, Polk County, where UMN Crookston resides, formed a unique partnership with the Crookston Rotary Club to provide a scholarship to cover 75% of the tuition for a first cohort of the program.

With the first cohort of 15 students still underway, the desired outcome of the program is to retain more rural professionals within Polk County, while enabling them to gain leadership and personal development skills to climb the ladder toward greater economic mobility.[3]

Students from the Reimagining Rural Regions Program at Bowling Green State University

Bowling Green State University Reimagining Rural Regions

The Reimagining Rural Regions (R3) Program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) is designed to provide capacity to rural communities in northwest Ohio through community engagement and strategic planning for placemaking projects.[4] BGSU staff and students work with stakeholders from three communities each year to drive a public engagement process with the goal of outlining ways to improve the community's sense of place and workforce retention strategies. In the first year, the three communities were Van Wert, Gibsonburg, and Marysville, Ohio. The second year cohort includes Mansfield, Bowling Green, and Paulding, Ohio.

At the beginning of the process, representative steering committees are established in each community to ensure that the direction of the work is in line with the values and needs of the residents. As a "public university for the public good," the BGSU Center for Regional Development is committed to being a neutral convener in these processes and never wants to "tell the community what to do." Public engagement sessions, surveys, and focus groups are held to establish community input for the projects and help the steering committee decide on projects to move the needle on placemaking.

During the spring, six undergraduate students are trained in concepts such as economic development, community engagement, and grant writing to prepare to be assigned to each of the three communities in the summer. Students participate in the program through a paid fellowship (not-for-credit) program.

In the past, these students have worked on projects that addressed inconvenient business hours, multi-use spaces, reimagining a county fairground, and developing ideas for a vacant lot in the middle of town. Many of the students have reflected that after their time as Placemaking and Community Engagement (PaCE) fellows, they now want to work in public administration or community development in small towns throughout Ohio.

As the pandemic recedes, our institutions of higher learning are focusing once again on the value of community-engaged partnerships.

University of Minnesota Resilient Communities Project

The Resilient Communities Project (RCP) is a program of the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA).[5] CURA's broad mission is to connect key stakeholders to develop new knowledge to improve public decision-making, "resulting in smarter investments, stronger communities, and a better quality of life for Minnesota and the nation." As one of CURA's government-focused programs, RCP contributes to this mission by offering student-engaged learning opportunities across the University of Minnesota system, in partnership with local units of government in the state.

Local government agencies apply for assistance and propose anywhere from one to 15 projects on which they would like to collaborate with students. Projects must be designed to broadly advance community sustainability, equity, and resilience. RCP then selects one or more

A nature-based play area, which is part of the Resilient Communities Project, a program of the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

local units of government to participate in a 12–18 month partnership focused on these projects. Projects are matched with graduate and professional students in three ways:

- Through a for-credit course where RCP has worked with the course instructor to incorporate the project as an experiential-learning opportunity.
- With individual students through a directed (independent) study or to fulfill an applied-learning requirement of their degree program such as field experience, applied practice, or a capstone.
- Through an RCP Scholars team, in which RCP assembles an interdisciplinary group of students to complete the project for credit under the guidance of a faculty mentor.

Regardless of how projects are matched, faculty and students work collaboratively with local government staff and community stakeholders to identify the problem or opportunity, collect data, analyze options, and provide actionable recommendations in a final written report and an oral presentation of findings.

These partnerships are viewed as a "win-win" by providing students with valuable real world experience and hands-on learning, while helping communities solve complex societal issues.

The local government of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, was one city that reached out to the RCP for assistance. As a first-ring suburb of Minneapolis, the city asked how to incorporate nature-based recreation into the city park system, both to foster physical health and to develop the leadership and problem-solving skills that nature-based play can instill.

Over two semesters, RCP paired the city's parks and recreation manager with several dozen students from courses across two University of Minnesota campuses. In a physical education and recreation course in risk management, students analyzed the potential risks and liabilities associated with nature play areas, as well as how to design guidelines and safer facilities to reduce these risks. Five teams of students in a recreation administration course assessed each park in the city and recommended strategies for integrating nature play into existing programming and facilities, providing a wealth of ideas for city staff to consider. Focusing on a large and centrally located park in the city, an environmental education course created detailed site design and programming recommendations.

Brooklyn Park has incorporated elements of the student designs in several of the city's parks over the last few years, and the collaboration has impacted the city's approach to everything from parks planning and design to programming and maintenance.

How Do I Connect with a University to Learn What Services They Can Provide?

It can be a daunting task to figure out the services an institute of higher learning can provide, or even to know who to reach out to for assistance. If you have identified a clear need,

the easiest approach may be to reach out to the chair of the department related to the help you are seeking. For example, if you are in a city without a geographic information system (GIS) program and you need help in making a map, you can simply reach out to a college within your area that offers a GIS program.

If you have some knowledge of what you're seeking but are unsure, some institutions of higher learning have a person dedicated to public and/or community engagement. They often work across departments to connect you with faculty, students, and staff who might be interested in working with you.

If you are simply unfamiliar with what resources may exist, an initial starting point may be to reach out to your land grant institution's extension program. According to the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), there is at least one land-grant institution in each state. Extension offices are the cornerstone of a land-grant institution's mission, and although all have an agricultural component, many have expanded their services to support community development and local governments. For example, the University of Wisconsin has an active community development program, of which one of their activities is to provide technical assistance to municipalities that are seeking to revitalize their downtowns. The University of Wisconsin Extension Program, through their community development program, also provides local government education and community facilitation training to convene community conversations.

While one might gravitate toward a four-year institution for assistance, do not dismiss reaching out to a two-year institution. While a two-year institution may not have an extension component, they are equally committed to community engagement. The same applies to reaching out to a tribal college and university (TCU) or to a historically underserved Hispanic or Black college and university.

In addition, another resource for cities and counties to connect with universities is the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), whose mission is "to unite the human capital of universities with local governments, and communities, to improve the quality of life and social wealth for all involved."[6] This membership-based organization hosts an annual conference and offers resources to support university/local government programs and partnerships in the United States and internationally.

What can Lead to a Successful University and Community Engaged Partnership?

Developing a well-thought-out planning process is essential to ensuring that a partnership will be successful.

- Oftentimes the challenge of creating a partnership with a university is the academic calendar can limit what can be achieved. Specifically, to overcome this barrier, simply consider spreading out the project over multiple semesters or utilizing multiple classes to work on the project.
- Developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a clear understanding of each entity's roles and responsibilities will aid in establishing clear lines of communication between the partners.

According to an article in *Planning, Practice, and Research,* when leading a university and community- engaged partnership with a marginalized community one should:

- Establish trust prior to beginning a project with the community. This includes having the local government evaluate the level of trust it has with the community and start to rebuild the relationship. This also applies with the university, understanding what barriers exist and making an effort beforehand to find ways to build trust with the community.
- Ensure flexibility and adaptability. Understand that trust building takes time, and flexibility and adaptability is essential. In the planning process, understand what situations could occur, and come up with alternative plans if those situations do occur.
- Foster a shared decision-making process. Convene a process where community members are at the table. Including them as an equal in the planning process will also help to build trust.
- Translate short-term actions to long-term change. Especially in a new relationship, where historically there hasn't been an established form of trust, breaking up the tasks into small measurable and achievable wins can also help to build trust.

Key Takeaways

- University and city/county community engagement partnerships are great opportunities for students to obtain "real world" experience while communities solve very complex and wicked problems.
- Community engagement partnerships can take many different forms, such as experiential learning, research, and curriculum development.
- Developing a well-thought-out planning process and building trust with communities that are to be served will help lay the foundation to a better community and university partnership. PM

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

[1]https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/11/18/why-and-how-college-community-engagement-programs-must-change-opinion

[2]www.bauer.uh.edu/cei

[3]https://nxtgenag.umn.edu/

[4]https://www.bgsu.edu/research-economic-development/center-for-regional-development/reimagining-rural-regions--r3--initiative

[5]https://rcp.umn.edu/whats-new/playing-towards-healthier-brooklyn-park

[6]https://www.epicn.org/

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Getting Out *of* Your Own Way

Enabling Community-Driven Policy Change

How one city is addressing economic mobility through reimagined community engagement

BY LINDSAY JACQUES AND LAURA GODDEERIS

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Local governments hear from residents through a wide range of channels, from social media outreach to in-person events. But much of this "engagement" is premised on informing the public of projects or plans pre-identified by government leaders or staff and attracts input from a limited representation of the community, often late enough in the process where potential impact is constrained. This antiquated outcome- or product-based approach is top-down, leading

City Hall of Brownsville, Texas

to "solutions" that may lack resident buy-in and fail to fully account for impacts on the most vulnerable residents.

With Americans' trust in all levels of government hovering around record-low levels, there is a need to reimagine ways for a wider spectrum of residents to provide their perspectives and influence decision-making. A willingness to do so may not only reveal responses to problems you hadn't even considered or understood, but can also foster stronger relationships with the residents you serve and have had trouble reaching.

We've been following a more process-based, bottom-up approach to advancing economic mobility for residents in one Texas border community. We first learned about this story when developing the ICMA resource, *Problem Solving Through Arts and Culture: A Creative Placemaking Wayfinding Guide for Local Government Managers,* and have continued to track an evolving cast of characters and impacts on entrepreneurship opportunities and sense of belonging for low-income residents.

This example effectively turned the typical "community engagement" process on its head—starting with acknowledging a community-defined problem, honoring different types of experience and perspectives, allowing for new partnerships and ways of working, and leading toward policy changes co-created with the residents they intend to impact. What's interesting about this story is that while the local government still plays traditional roles with respect to formalizing policies and administering programs, it has been just as critical to know

when to take risks or to step back and let the community-driven process take the lead.

Setting the Stage: The Brownsville Case Study

The city of Brownsville, Texas, is located along the border of Mexico and the United States. The low-income, tight-knit neighborhood of Buena Vida (Spanish for "good life") has a rich culture of small businesses operating in an informal economy. Families often make a living through unpermitted small operations, like selling traditional foods or farm produce out of homes and vehicles, many of which were illegal under municipal code.

The city was prioritizing the review of its permitting process, but had failed to consider perspectives outside development and business stakeholders. Independently, a socially engaged local art collective called Las Imaginistas ("the imaginists") had begun exploring how changing the permitting process to allow for microeconomies could better serve the needs of low-income residents.

In the project Taller de Permiso ("permit workshop"), they used art as the tool to collaboratively imagine sustainable economic opportunities in a way that celebrated and exemplified the existing assets within the community, decoded municipal permitting, and incubated emerging small local businesses.

This approach, initiated by Las Imaginistas artists in collaboration with Brownsville residents, emphasized empowering those of limited economic mobility to define the problem and explore responses in unexpected ways. It helped the city appreciate that circumstances were much more complex than outdated permitting policies.

Engagement Examples

Phase 1: *Permission to Dream.* The project began with a "dream parade," where residents of Buena Vida held a march, carrying signs depicting their dreams of an equitable, sustainable economy for their community. The dreams collected inspired others to participate and became a community-building resource. Dreams continued to be collected through redesigned Loteria cards and triciculos (traditional tricycles typically used for street vending) where they printed "dreaming permits" on a repurposed tortilla press.

Phase 2: *Permission to Know.* This phase focused on building capacity within the community's youth and entrepreneurs. Youth interviewed community stakeholders, including the city manager and health department, and researched city and media archives on the permitting process. Through this investigative journalism, a vendor guide was created and a video showcasing their findings is in production. Additionally, an entrepreneurship program was created where a cohort of neighborhood residents completed business training through the University of Texas Business Incubator and a cooking class through a local food center.

Phase 3: *Permission to Act.* This phase launched a co-op fellowship program for vendors in partnership with a local nonprofit, Border Workers United. The program is the region's first co-op and includes 10 women advocating for change to municipal regulations for microbusinesses. A community market was created where microbusinesses could sell their wares. The project coincided with another project titled, *Hacemos La Ciudad,* which incorporated different strategies to amplify and build civic capacities and networks within the Buena Vida neighborhood. This phase catalyzed development of a pilot expansion of permitting for small mobile vendors in Buena Vida, a mobile municipal code library, and a mobile negotiation space. The latter will enable residents to speak to a city official about changes to the permitting system, how the changes impacted them,

FIGURE 1

COMMUNITY PROBLEM-SOLVING MODELS

PRODUCT-BASED ORIENTATION (traditionally)	PROCESS-BASED ORIENTATION (Brownsville example)
OUTCOME ↓	QUESTION OR ISSUE ↓
PLAN	APPROACH
TIMELINE	DISCOVERY
TASKS	OUTCOME

Unlike typical problem-solving approaches that begin with assumptions of a desired outcome, Brownsville focused on working with the community through a process to collaboratively define the issue, explore potential responses, and achieve a more equitable solution.

and how they could inform future decisions about this and other topics.

Recent Progress

Since the original writing of the case study, this effort continues to evolve. Through the office of the Brownsville city manager, chief of staff Marina Zolezzi guided the project partners through conversations with many different municipal departments, including planning and redevelopment, public health, police, legal, engineering and public works, and Parks and Recreation. Eventually a home was identified for the proposed pilot program within the Parks and Recreation Department. With funding from Common Futures, ChristinaMaria Patiño Xochitlzihuatl Houle from Las Imaginistas continued work with the local Voce Unidas community organization to ensure that when the pilot study began that there would be a partner organization ready to begin training and supporting project participants.

Complementary activities have grown as well, including an economic development program at ARISE (A Resource in Serving Equality) in Alamo, where approximately fifteen women will go through an arts and meditation-based co-op incubation program beginning in August.

Why a Reimagined Approach Was Important

It built on local context, assets, and aspirations. Fears of deportation, language barriers, historic disinvestment, and systems that penalized their way of life had created a significant disconnect between the local government and the Buena Vida community. The activities designed by Las Imaginistas artists bridged the divide by integrating the engagement process within existing Buena Vida community spaces and such traditions as street marches and eloteros (street corn vendors).

It valued lived experience. Instead of creating convenings that reinforce normal power hierarchies (across job, race, income, education, or position), Las Imaginistas worked to disrupt those systems by making worlds in which all participants and the experience, knowledge, and reflections they contributed had equal value and potential to impact the direction and vision for the project.

Preconditions for City Support

Openness to change. The city was unaware of the issues facing this community and took a leap of faith to trust the artists' process without fully realizing how it could lead to worthwhile outcomes for the community. For the city, there was no ideal outcome when they began working with Las Imaginistas, only a desire to explore residents' needs in a different way to increase their understanding.

Willingness to work differently. The city had recently revised its organizational vision and found staff wanted to be innovative, equitable, and inclusive. They recognized that Las Imaginistas' work embodied those values and was an example of who they hoped to become. They continue to partner with Las Imaginistas to internally develop their skills and learn how to accelerate this work by applying these strategies in other areas of municipal management.

Unconventional, But Worth It

The outcomes of Brownsville's openness to a reimagined, community-driven policy change effort and the power of engagement included:

- **Improving the permitting process for the entire community.** Though this effort expanded the scope of the city's permit process review, it enabled Brownsville to harness the community's collective knowledge and begin to make significant improvements aligned with the entire community's needs.
- **Co-creating engagement strategies with the community.** By partnering with artists, the city was able to build concrete civic engagement skills, increase its capacity for research, and pilot strategies to increase accessibility and transparency. This began with the translation of government documents to Spanish and next steps plan to expand beyond surface-level access to invite community members to influence policy decisions that impacted them directly.
- **Promoting economic opportunity for low-income residents.** Through the unique engagement of traditionally disengaged residents, the project resulted in economic development that actively combats involuntary displacement of longtime residents. By addressing issues in municipal code and practices that disproportionately negatively impacted low-income populations, the city has promoted long-term possibilities for economic equity.
- **Developing the economy in one of their poorest areas.** Buena Vida residents and the Brownsville community saw the value in their artisanal informal economic traditions and utilized them as a pathway to imagine and construct more economic opportunities for the community that aligned with their passion, talent, and ingenuity. The project empowered residents to dream through their own existing talents and the city recognized its responsibility and role in fostering opportunity for all residents.
- **Promoting mutual respect between the community and government in an area where residents felt that the city historically acted like a roadblock to pursuing entrepreneurial dreams.** After this project the city became more aware of how to consider, respond to, and support their needs and better understood their most vulnerable and historically marginalized population. This work deepened relationships and encouraged residents to actively participate with local community partners and in their local government processes. PM

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Participation Is Not Enough: Four Parameters for Evaluating Your Community Engagement Efforts

A helpful, multi-faceted approach for engaging your residents

BY NOAM RABINOVICH

In 2022, one of Zencity's partner communities in Virginia considered constructing a roundabout as a traffic calming measure. Before making the decision, the city organized a town hall meeting to present the plan to residents and get their feedback. The room was packed with residents lining the walls, clamoring for the microphone, and raising their voices in an attempt to be heard. Clearly, there was no shortage of feedback on the roundabout proposal. The city manager and councilmembers were delighted at the turnout and the level of engagement; who knew residents are so passionate about roundabouts? (Just kidding, we knew.)

When it came time to go over the meeting notes and analyze the feedback provided, the city realized that they had little insight into where the community actually stood on this issue; were they more in favor or against the roundabout? This was puzzling, given the participation numbers. How was it possible that with so many people attending and speaking up, there was so little actionable data?

A packed room, hundreds of comments on a city post, thousands of survey responses, a city inbox crammed with resident emails; these appear like hallmarks of successful community engagement efforts, glistening with the promise of rich resident feedback.

However, participation is only one limited parameter of effective and impactful engagement. Sure, the community showed up, but participation levels alone fail to capture the quality of the feedback provided.

What then, aside from sheer participation numbers, can help us evaluate the effectiveness and quality of your community engagement efforts? Here are four parameters you should consider when evaluating a community engagement action: depth, audience, representativeness, and effort—or DARE.

Depth

What can the feedback teach you and what can it not?

The first parameter refers to the *depth* of input or level of detail the local government can get out of the data gathered in the engagement process. Feedback comes in many forms: a "like," a "retweet," a meme or a GIF, a long well-reasoned comment detailing reasons for support or objection, a 1-5 scale score on a survey question. Clearly, each one of these provides a different level of insight.

A successful and effective community engagement effort will generate the depth of feedback that is most useful and relevant to you in this particular case: will an average score calculated based on basic-binary data be sufficient, or do you require rich discourse that is generated in social media discussions or in-person meetings to reach a decision?

Remember the town hall meeting concerning the roundabout? The city wanted to get a sense of support versus opposition, but ended up with long tirades about roundabouts and general arguments about road safety, traffic, and of course, potholes. This was not invaluable,

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but it was not the depth of data the city was after. In fact, in this specific case, a survey or a poll sent out to residents would have provided the desired level of data the city needed to make its decision.

Therefore, ask yourself, "is the data I am likely to get through this engagement effort helpful and appropriately nuanced to support decision-making?" If you need a bottom line, an overall score outlining support or satisfaction, yet you have pages upon pages of resident commentary about their perceptions, preferences, and concerns, then this was not an effective community engagement.

Audience

Who are the crucial stakeholders? Whose feedback is essential?

In one Texas partner community, the city wanted to understand the resident sentiment around the possible recall of one councilmember. The city posted on its social media and encouraged residents to voice their opinions on the matter, but the leading comment was that this was not an issue for all residents to decide on, but for the residents of the councilmember's district. "Are you making sure you're listening to the feedback coming from this specific community?" commenters asked the city. "That is your audience."

The second parameter examines the *audience* that participates in the engagement process. It can be a large or a small group, with a mix or a homogeneous representation of stakeholders. However, the crucial factor here is that the audience targeted and included in the engagement effort is relevant to the issue at hand. If this is an issue pertaining to a specific area in the city, the audience has to include residents from that area. For example, if it is an issue affecting communities of color, they are a critical stakeholder and the engagement must be primarily targeted toward them, even at the expense of participation levels.

When you set out to evaluate this parameter, ask yourself whether the audience accurately and fairly reflected the most relevant stakeholders and if the feedback came from the right people.

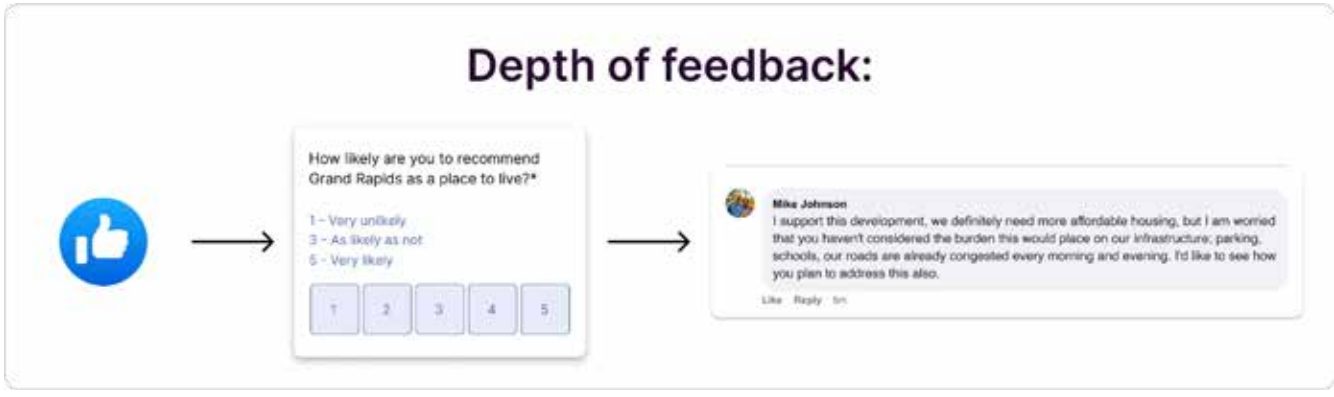
Representativeness

Whose voices are heard and whose voices are marginalized?

Representativeness refers to the question of whether the data shared in the engagement process is representative of the community, either statistically and/or in terms of equity and inclusion. This is a critical question irrespective of the issue at hand, as within every target audience you are likely to have a diverse range of community members, with different perceptions, opinions, and concerns.

An effective and successful community engagement effort will be designed to ensure that the feedback collected reflects a diverse range of voices, either within the general population or a specific group of residents.

Ask yourself: "Is the feedback I collected accurately representative of my community and am I giving an equal voice to all community members?" There are several ways to achieve representativeness: a statistically representative survey, engagement methods in different languages, and distribution and promotion across multiple channels. It is critical to create the necessary infrastructure to ensure that people of all age groups, backgrounds, socio-economic circumstances, racial and ethnic groups, gender groups, and faiths are able to participate and provide input.



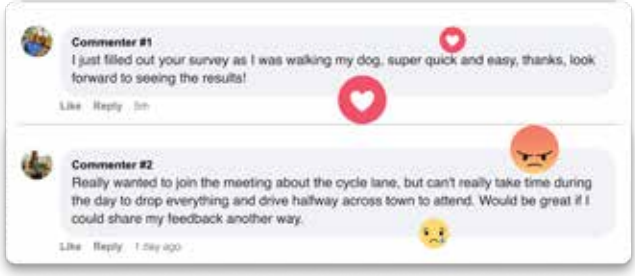
Effort

How difficult (or easy) is it for residents to provide feedback?

This is the easiest parameter to evaluate; it measures the level of effort *participants* had to invest to voice their opinion and provide their feedback. Did they have to find a babysitter, get in their car, drive to the town hall, and wait in line to say their piece? Or did they share their feedback by phone while walking their dog? Obviously, lower effort usually means fewer hurdles and therefore results in more feedback from a more diverse set of voices. This includes people who have less-flexible schedules or can't physically come to the meeting, and whose voices, as a result, are heard less often or become discounted.

By reducing the amount of effort required by the participant, the engagement process is more accessible and makes participation easier for harder-to-reach, marginalized, or vulnerable communities.

Overall, the aim is to lower barriers to participation and make the process as effortless as possible. How? Make sure you offer multiple ways to provide feedback that suits diverse levels of lifestyles, preferences, resources, and capabilities.



Conclusion

By now, you may have realized that community engagement efforts that meet all four of the parameters discussed are difficult to create. Representativeness can be best achieved in a statistically representative survey, but it might mean compromising on the depth of the feedback. Ensuring that you have the appropriate audience might require more effort from participants.

Do not despair. The most effective community engagement effort is one that is designed with the four parameters in mind in a way that answers your specific objectives, but is not necessarily perfect on all four. A variety of community engagement solutions is the best guarantee for a flexible and adaptable engagement strategy that can emphasize each parameter when it is most needed.

And herein lies the twist. These four parameters serve a dual purpose. Yes, they are a helpful prism through which to evaluate the engagement after the fact, but, more importantly, they are a crucial framework with which to design community engagement activities before they are implemented.

This four-parameter approach to designing and evaluating enables local government organizations to identify areas for improvement and design more effective and inclusive engagement processes that reach a wider audience and gather diverse, and actionable, insights from their constituents.

The names that appear in images and social accounts are fabricated for the purpose of an example. PM

Here are the questions you should DARE to ask yourself when designing your community engagement effort:

D - What is the Depth of input I require?
What type of data will be most useful to me moving forward – a bottom-line score or a nuanced overview of resident opinions and concerns?

A - Who is the most relevant Audience?
Given the issue at hand, who are the relevant stakeholders whose feedback is absolutely imperative and how do I make sure they are included?

R - How do I ensure and encourage Representativeness?
What can I do to ensure that my engagement is inclusive and equitable? What are the tools and methodologies that would contribute to a diverse and inclusive session?

E - How much Effort am I asking of participants?
Given the audience, what is the level of effort I can and should expect? How do I make sure that there are adequate and accessible methods for sharing feedback?

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zencity

ZENCITY is a New York- and Tel Aviv-based govtech company that serves more than 300 local government agencies in the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Israel. Founded in 2016, Zencity works with mayors, police chiefs, city managers, and other public sector leaders to build trust between governments and the people that they serve by improving responsiveness. (zencity.io)

Local Government 2030: Reshaping How We Advance Democracy

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A delegation of 51 local government administrators all under the age of 40 have come together to take on the biggest challenges facing local government.

BY LAUREN ROSE, MEGAN CARON, LISA HENTY, CRAIG OWENS, DAVID SWINDELL, TANYA ANGE, AND JULIA NOVAK

The problems facing local governments are wicked. They are pervasive; have numerous causes; cross over many professional, organizational, and jurisdictional boundaries; and cannot be solved with traditional methods. These wicked problems aren't new and have plagued local governments for decades. With social and technical advances, however, these problems have only increased in complexity and placed further demands on local governments to address them.

In 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) identified many of these wicked issues by naming the "12 Grand Challenges" facing public administration.[1] The challenges run the gamut and include modernizing and reinvigorating the public service, "fostering social equity, and building resilient communities, among others. They acknowledge that the challenges exist at every level of government.

With the onset and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 12 Grand Challenges managed to become even more complex for local governments. Suddenly, many weaknesses in our intergovernmental system became apparent and helped accelerate the departure of talent in local government across all service professions. The notion of being able to tackle these challenges was increasingly difficult to imagine. It was clear that there was an imbalance between the challenges that face us and the resources available to address those problems.

In response, NAPA fellow and city manager of Issaquah, Washington, Wally Bobkiewicz, brought together an ad hoc group of experienced local government professionals to develop a plan of action. Their guiding principle recognized that a new and radical approach was needed to "think big" about these problems and devise solutions needed to solve them.

The convening brought together individuals from all facets of local government who are committed to public service, but also firmly believe that we can do and be better.

The result has become the Local Government 2030 initiative (localgov2030.com). This effort began by convening 51 local government administrators, all under the age of 40, as delegates to talk about the future of local government. The motivation was to place the very people who will address these challenges in the future at the very center of building solutions.

This was a unique prospect for the delegates and a once-in-a-career opportunity. As noted by Megan Caron, strategic initiatives analyst for Nashua, New Hampshire, "Often times, there aren't enough hours in the day to really hone in on trying to create effective solutions for the problems we all face. The convening gave us the time and space to do just that. It really felt like we were beginning to shape the future of local government." For the 16 super delegates (coaches), this was a chance to share their wisdom and experiences with the next generation of the profession as they were charged with tackling the biggest challenges.

In early November 2022, the local government delegates and super delegates from cities, counties, tribal, and regional governments from around the nation convened at the University of Nebraska Omaha. In order to encourage thinking outside the departmental, professional, and jurisdictional boundaries, the convening modeled itself on the Minnowbrook Conferences. Raftelis facilitated the event using the "Minnowbrook Charge," which states, "You are not inhibited by cost or difficulty, but what you imagine must be desirable, feasible, and motivating."[2]

(From top left to bottom right): Steve King, Dan Bardzell, Lauren Rose, Megan Caron, Genesis Gavino, Danielle Burke, Craig Owens, Danielle Dulin, and Tanya Ange.

The delegates represented seven general service areas: general administration, public safety, finance, public works, administrative services, community services, and planning/economic development. Given the short time the group would be together in person, members of each service area took a few weeks prior to the convening to evaluate the 12 Grand Challenges and provide examples and context as to how these challenges play out in their specific jurisdictions. Delegates met with their service group virtually and developed white papers on their perspectives ahead of time.

Once in Omaha, the convening unfolded in four stages over two days, beginning with the seven service area teams presenting the highlights of the white papers. In stage two, the facilitation group rearranged the delegates into a second round of teams centered around five themes on future of local government: programmatic, political, structural, financial, and technological. The groups discussed, reported their observations, and reacted to feedback. These exercises laid the foundation for the main task: planning for the future.

In the third stage, the facilitation group again reorganized the teams, this time mixing the service groups into regional groups that included the east coast, the west coast, and big cities. David Swindell, director of the Center for Urban Innovation at Arizona State University, noted, "Shuffling the delegates in different configurations exposed them to peers with perspectives from different service areas, different community contexts, and different personal backgrounds, which had a direct impact on their ideas for the future and the priorities among those ideas."

"Trying to solve new problems with old solutions is no longer a viable option. It is time for local governments to think outside of the box and to try completely new approaches as we modernize the profession."

— Lauren Rose

This is where the groups started to get very specific as they shifted to developing meaningful, viable, and more realistic initiatives in response to the problems. As Lisa Henty, delegate and office of management and budget director of Fauquier County, Virginia, noted, "The most rewarding part of the regional group experience was to see so many passionate peers pitch thoughtful, creative ideas. It doesn't happen enough like that in local government."

The super delegates played a critically important role during this stage of the convening as they challenged the delegates in order help each of the three groups hone their ideas for solutions and move from fuzzy ideals to three concrete actionable goals.

The fourth and final stage saw the groups coming back together as a whole. Each of the three regional groups presented their three initiatives. This allowed participants to see where their ideas overlapped with their colleagues. Lisa Henty again noted, "I was surprised how easy it was to connect with others on topics I am personally passionate about, but was more amazed by how initiatives were generated with great detail in such a short period of time."

The facilitation team combined the overlapping topics. As time was running out for the in-person convening, the energy ramped up as the facilitation team tasked the delegates with prioritizing the now-seven ideas down to the "Big Three Ideas" that would serve as the foundation for Local Government 2030 moving forward. With each winnowing, passions among the delegates rose. Ultimately, the delegates coalesced around these three initiatives:

1. Building resiliency into our local government workforce.
2. Broadening how we use communication strategies and technologies in public service.
3. Embracing the role of government as a role model for social change.

Grow a Resilient Workforce

Governments at all levels have felt the impacts of demographic changes in an aging population, budgetary challenges both fiscal and political, as well as external shocks that have fundamentally forced a re-examination of traditional viewpoints about work habits. Public service is still a popular career objective for many young people, but they are finding government service less appealing and increasingly seeking alternative pathways to fulfill their public service appetites.

The post-COVID-19 surge in retirements and lower numbers than normal of younger people applying has translated into a challenge for local governments that respond by shifting additional workloads onto existing workers (without improved compensation alternatives) and increased contracting out.[3,4] This exacerbates the declining appeal of government service among younger members of the workforce. Currently, this challenge is acute due to the strong labor market drawing more talent away from public service.[5] Technological innovations (e.g., artificial intelligence) will bring additional disruption to *all* employment sectors.

These push and pull factors have created significant turbulence in the local government labor pipeline, among both front-line service professionals as well as those in administration. As a result, one of the primary initiatives to emerge from the delegates seeks to build greater resiliency into the local government workforce in order to weather not only the current turmoil, but also future shocks.

Following the convening, the delegates self-selected different initiatives to work on in the coming months. They are developing an array of strategies to be shared across all governments that can help build a base of administrative talent committed to lifelong career in local government. The strategies focus on employee recruitment, retention, and development.

The Art of Public Service: The Communication Continuum

Communication among public administrators and with the public they serve has long been a challenge for government. Today's combination of technological options, anonymity afforded on many social media platforms, and a heated political environment will only lower trust in government and endanger our ability to govern. This is a significant challenge.

The delegates chose as their second major initiative for Local Government 2030 tackling this complex communication challenge as a central aspect of public service. This initiative reframes the issue and places the starting point for building the new approach on how public servants communicate in meaningful, two-way channels, with an emphasis on the development of soft skills and emotional intelligence. At the end of the day, local governments build and shape communities. The work done at the local level is too important for it to get lost in miscommunication between technocrats and emotional issues. Imagine an environment in which a technical expert could also respond with empathy, understanding, and creativity to a resident's concern.

This group is developing a tool kit of alternative communication approaches with this focus that communities around the nation can adopt, both in terms of technical solutions as well as philosophical orientations and organizational cultures in our local governments.

Promised Pathways

The third initiative the delegates selected focuses on embracing the role of local governments as role models for social change. This emerges from an understanding that the tradition of the "politically neutral" has been misunderstood and is more accurately "partisan neutrality," which is a fundamentally different proposition.[6] As a result, government has often served as the primary vehicle through which social change has been demonstrated for other sectors.

In order to illustrate one example of this, the delegates are developing strategies and action steps designed to expand employment opportunities for individuals in our communities that have been impacted by the justice system. They are working on a "policy playbook" that communities can adapt to their own jurisdictional contexts to help address this justice issue, while also taking steps to attract more people to careers in public service.

The convening brought together individuals from all facets of local government who are committed to public service, but also firmly believe that we can do and be better. Assistant city manager of Sachse, Texas, and delegate Lauren Rose commented, "Trying to solve new problems with old solutions is no longer a viable option. It is time for local governments to think outside of the box and to try completely new approaches as we modernize the profession."

Marc Ott, CEO/Executive Director of ICMA, remarked on the group's efforts: "ICMA has been proud to support the LocalGov2030 initiative. The challenges that local governments are and will continue to face over the next decade will require creative and innovative approaches, and we need to look to the next generation of leaders who will carry the torch to help develop and implement solutions. The dedication of the delegates to developing their initiatives remind us that the future of local government remains bright."

While the delegates continue to work on their initiatives, the planning group is already working on the future phases of the Local Government 2030 effort. Many of the delegates will come back together at Arizona State University's downtown campus in February 2024, though the next convening will integrate a group of local elected officials committed to solving these same grand challenges. We may be enduring a rough time at the moment, but the passion and insights demonstrated by these up-and-coming managers should give us all hope for a very bright future for local governments. They are the local government managers of tomorrow who will be navigating us through the grand challenges as we seek to serve our residents better. PM

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

[1] https://napawash.org/grand-challenges/the-12-grand-challenges

[2] Rosemary O'Leary and David M. Van Slyke. (2010). The Future of Public Administration in 2020. *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 70, Supplement to Volume 70: S5-S11.

[3] O'Brien, J. (June 1, 2022). "Clocking Out for Good: The Great Resignation's Impact on Local Government." *PM*. https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/clocking-out-good-great-resignations-impact-local-government

[4] MissionSquare Research Institute. (January 27, 2022). "More Than Half of State and Local Government Employees Contemplating Leaving Their Jobs Due to Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic."

[5] Weller, C. (February 9, 2023). "Amid Strong Labor Markets, State and Local Governments Struggle to Hire. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/christianweller/2023/02/09/amid-strong-labor-market-state-and-local-governments-struggle-to-hire/?sh=76ad89603975

[6] Portillo, S., Humphrey, N. and Bearfield, D. (2022). *The Myth of Bureaucratic Neutrality: An Examination of Merit and Representation*. New York: Routledge.

LAUREN ROSE is assistant city manager of Sachse, Texas (delegate).

MEGAN CARON is strategic initiatives analyst for Nashua, New Hampshire (delegate).

LISA HENTY is office of management and budget director for Fauquier County, Virginia (delegate).

CRAIG OWENS is city manager of Lawrence, Kansas (super delegate).

DAVID SWINDELL is director of the Center for Urban Innovation at Arizona State University (super delegate).

TANYA ANGE is county administrator of Washington County, Oregon (super delegate).

JULIA NOVAK is executive vice president of Raftelis (facilitator).

Let's Think Differently About What We Expect of Our Residents and Ourselves

It's time to rethink our relationship with our residents and challenge them to help us solve our collective problems.

BY ED EVERETT, ICMA-CM (RETIRED)

Thesis

Local government will never be able to solve our big problems, such as gangs, drugs, affordable housing, failing schools, affordable day care, etc., alone. We will only be able to positively impact these problems on a long-term basis by partnering with stakeholders outside of government, especially with our residents.

As a result of the need to have strong partnerships, we must expect more of our residents and of ourselves. We cannot continue to adhere to the outdated status quo modus operandi.

The Status Quo: The Bitch and Fix Mode of Government

Unfortunately, most local governments see residents only as customers. Yes, residents are customers of local government in many situations: getting a permit; obtaining services such as water, fire, and sewer; and registering for a recreation class. However, residents are also members of their community and, as such, have some responsibility and accountability for the quality of their neighborhoods and community.

The problem with being just a customer is that the natural tendency of customers is to complain if something is not going right and expect others to fix the problem. Being a customer can't be the only role of our residents if we are to be successful.

Unfortunately, most local governments assume their role is to be the "solver" of their residents complaints. As a result, these viewpoints have evolved into a mode of government that I describe as "bitch and fix."[1] Neither local governments nor residents actually like the "bitch and fix" mode, but both parties are afraid to change.

- Managers and staff fear losing control over handling tough problems if they involve residents.
- Likewise, residents do not want to accept some degree of responsibility and accountability for the quality of life in their neighborhood and city/county.

Change Is Imperative for Local Government and for Residents

Local government must change their assumptions and beliefs

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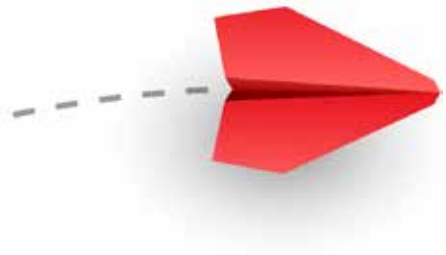

about their residents to break out of the "bitch and fix" mode.

First, I have found that local government staffs often have a very negative image of the public. This negative image is obvious when I conduct training programs on public engagement. In one exercise, I ask staff to shout out the first adjective that comes to mind when they think about "the public." Consistently, eighty percent of the adjectives are negative, including "uninformed," "entitled," "rude," "disinterested," "NIMBY," "hostile," among others. *There is no way local government will ever honestly engage and partner with the public when holding adverse, unhelpful, and incorrect beliefs about our residents.*

Second, local government must let go of its control issues and its assumption that staff always has the best solutions to big problems. Local government needs to realize that residents are smart and can provide valuable contributions to potential solutions. We must understand that residents have knowledge and expertise and are willing to participate if they are engaged in an honest and productive way. They must see that their input is incorporated into recommendations to the governing body.

Third, we must help residents change their attitudes as well. We must show residents that their input is meaningful and necessary. Residents need to understand that solving big problems requires their engagement and willingness to contribute their time and expertise. Residents must see themselves not just as customers but, more importantly, as partners with local government.

Fourth, for residents to want to help solve problems they must feel a part of their community. Cities and counties can assist in building this feeling of community; however, it must start at the neighborhood level. Research shows that residents who have a feeling of community are significantly more likely to understand that they have also some responsibility for the quality of life in their neighborhood and community.[2]

The Alternative: A Partnership Model

Local government must:

- Understand that only a partnership model will allow us to solve tough problems.
- Shift its perceptions and ask more of residents.
- Admit to its residents that it cannot solve big problems without their help.

How does the partnership model compare to the bitch and fix model?

What Needs to Happen

First, local government should have a discussion with their residents. Talk to them about being customers and problem solvers. I have personally led group discussions with residents about the bitch and fix mode of operation. Interestingly, the residents I dealt with did not disagree with my analysis.

Second, local government must better understand and practice the concepts of partnership and collaboration with stakeholders outside of government. A more in-depth discussion of the partnership model and how local government misses the mark in involving stakeholders will be the topic of a future article.

Closing Thoughts

Many of the concepts discussed in this article are engrained in our existing mode of operating. For that reason, change will be difficult. It will not be easy to modify the attitudes of managers, staff, elected officials, and residents. But that is what I hope we all love about this profession: it is complex, messy, and difficult. There is no easy button. That is the challenge that makes our profession great.

Hopefully, some courageous managers will attempt to change this old mode of doing business. I offer free consulting or coaching to anyone making such an effort.

Keep thinking differently! PM

FIGURE 1

Bitch and Fix Model	Partnership Model
Public is necessary evil	Public as partner
Resident as customer	Resident as engaged citizen
Government solves problems	Public engagement develops better solutions
Service delivery focus	Civic engagement + service delivery focus
Manager is the problem solver	Manager facilitates problem solving

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

[1] https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/todays-local-government-management-model

[2] ICMA IQ Report /Vol 41/No. 4 2009

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

Assistants Are an Asset to Any Organization

BY PAM HYLTON

Many CAOs have never served as an assistant or deputy and therefore may not understand how multifaceted the assistant position can be.

When I started my career in local government 27 years ago, the path to becoming a city manager or county administrator was nearly etched in stone: get a masters of public administration degree, intern with a local government, land a job as an assistant to the city manager (or possibly an assistant city manager) or deputy county administrator, get at least two years of experience and then start seeking a CAO position. Flash forward 27 years and my, how times have changed! Managers are coming into this profession from a variety of different backgrounds and career paths. Many CAOs have never served as an assistant or deputy and therefore may not understand how multifaceted the assistant position can be. These managers may struggle to see the value of the assistant/deputy position for their organization.

CAOs should take the time to understand their assistant's career goals, organizational interests, and motivations.

Gone are the days of the assistant or deputy being viewed as a CAO-in-waiting. In my experience, this dynamic could result in some mistrust between CAOs and their ACAOs. The city manager/county administrator could sometimes feel threatened that the assistant was just waiting for them to lose their job so the assistant could move into that position. This resulted in CAOs encouraging assistants/deputies to move on to other positions within a few years so they could "get more experience." This type of churn in the assistant/deputy position could also be viewed as a disservice to the organization as they never got to really settle into their job and gain valuable experience and institutional knowledge.

Many of my colleagues view their assistant/deputy position as their career goal. We all come into this profession with different skill sets. I have served as an interim city manager twice in my career. One thing I took away from both of those experiences was the revelation that I really don't enjoy dealing with politically motivated elected officials. I am fortunate to currently work for a city with incredibly supportive and forward-thinking elected officials who truly want the best for their community. They don't view their time on the city council as a stepping stone to higher political office. I enjoy the internal organizational focus of my assistant city manager position. My city manager encourages me to be her second set of eyes and ears in the organization, building trust with employees and helping to ensure that we are meeting their needs. I manage the day-to-day functions of city hall and other administrative functions, such as HR and IT, that are very important to keeping our organization running smoothly.

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CAOs would also benefit from making sure that the assistant/deputy is kept up to date with most happenings within the organization. Life is very unpredictable. Any number of occurrences could result in a city manager needing to step away from their duties for a short or long period of time. Continuity is important in any organization and vital in local government. My city manager keeps me informed on many issues, large and small, so I am able to almost seamlessly assume her duties if it becomes necessary. This gives her peace of mind and is vital for her to maintain a work/life balance. It's helpful to be aware to prevent missteps or for someone to try to take advantage of a situation and slip something through. A void in leadership for whatever reason can be filled in a positive or negative way.

CAOs should take the time to understand their assistant's career goals, organizational interests, and motivations. Allowing the assistant time to grow in their position and carve out their niche can only serve to strengthen both the organization and the CAO/ACAO relationship. The result is a well-run organization providing the best services for our communities, which is what we all hope to achieve. PM

PAM HYLTON is assistant city manager of Richmond Heights, Missouri.

2023 ICMA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 30–OCTOBER 4 | AUSTIN / TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

Registration and Housing Opens Wednesday, June 14

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A place where local government leaders and professionals from all backgrounds can stand together as a profession.

Most Education Sessions and General Sessions will be recorded.
All recorded sessions will be available On Demand for registered attendees.

For those who are unable to attend the conference in-person,
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- Attendee Lunches and Refreshment Breaks (Mon/Tue)
- On Demand access to recorded Education Sessions and General Sessions
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Unable to Attend the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference but want to experience the education sessions and General Sessions? Visit the Conference website to learn how to purchase On Demand content. **https://conference.icma.org/registration**.

EDUCATION TRACKS

The 2023 ICMA Annual Conference education sessions have been placed into tracks that align with the 14 Practices for Effective Local Government Management and Leadership. Each of the Practices are included within at least one track. In addition, the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference Planning Committee identified several topics that were included in the Conference program.

Tracks include:

DEMOCRACY, CIVICS AND CVILITY — covering civic cohesion and building civic leadership.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PRINCIPLES — covering *personal and professional integrity, *community engagement, *equity and inclusion, *staff effectiveness, *personal resiliency and development, workforce development and management, collaboration, ethics and resiliency.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT TOOLS AND SKILLS — covering *financial management and budgeting, *human resources management and workforce engagement, *communication and information sharing, career development and support, infrastructure and technology.

SERVICE EXCELLENCE — covering *service delivery, building better communities, emergency management and response, public safety, climate and transportation.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP — covering *strategic planning, *policy facilitation and implementation, managing in the current political climate, economic development, climate, sustainability, collaboration, council-manager relations, infrastructure and transportation.

*Included in the 14 Practices for Effective Local Government Management and Leadership.

SCHEDULE

For schedule updates, please visit **conference.icma.org**.
All times are listed in Central Standard Time and are subject to change.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

7:30 am	–	5:30 pm	Registration Open
8:00 am	–	5:00 pm	ICMA Micro-Certification Sessions*
8:00 am	–	5:00 pm	Sporting Events*
12:00 pm	–	5:00 pm	ATX Attendee Lounge Open
12:45 pm	–	4:15 pm	Education Sessions and Discussions
5:00 pm	–	7:00 pm	Saturday Evening Reception at the Austin Public Library*
9:00 pm			Open for Exhibitor/Sponsor/Affiliate Events

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1

6:45 am	–	5:00 pm	Registration Open
7:15 am	–	1:00 pm	Sporting Events*
7:30 am	–	3:30 pm	ATX Attendee Lounge Open
8:00 am	–	12:00 pm	ICMA Micro-Certification Sessions*
8:30 am	–	1:00 pm	Education Sessions and Discussions
9:30 am	–	10:30 am	Regional Meetings
11:30 am	–	1:00 pm	Equity & Inclusion Leaders Luncheon*
1:30 pm	–	3:30 pm	Opening General Session
3:30 pm	–	6:30 pm	Exhibit Hall Grand Opening Reception
6:30 pm			Open for Exhibitor/Sponsor/Affiliate Events

MONDAY, OCTOBER 2

7:00 am	–	5:00 pm	Registration Open
8:00 am	–	5:00 pm	ATX Attendee Lounge Open
8:30 am	–	5:00 pm	Education Sessions, Discussions, and Product Theaters
10:00 am	–	11:30 am	General Session
11:30 am	–	4:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Open
11:30 am	–	1:30 pm	Exhibit Hall Lunch
11:45 am	–	1:15 pm	SheLeadsGov Luncheon*
1:00 pm	–	5:00 pm	Mobile Workshops*
5:00 pm			Open for State/Alumni Receptions/Exhibitor/Sponsor/Affiliate Events

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3

7:00 am	–	5:00 pm	Registration Open
8:00 am	–	5:00 pm	ATX Attendee Lounge Open
8:30 am	–	5:00 pm	Education Sessions, Discussions, and Product Theaters
10:00 am	–	11:30 am	General Session
11:30 am	–	3:00 pm	Exhibit Hall Open
11:30 am	–	1:30 pm	Exhibit Hall Lunch
11:45 am	–	1:15 pm	Assistant Chief Administrative Officers (ACAO) Luncheon*
1:00 pm	–	5:00 pm	Mobile Workshops*
6:00 pm	–	9:00 pm	Tuesday Night Networking Event at The Palmer Events Center*
9:00 pm			Open for Exhibitor/Sponsor/Affiliate Events

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4

7:30 am	–	11:45 am	Registration Open
8:00 am	–	11:45 am	ATX Attendee Lounge Open
8:00 am	–	8:45 am	Grab and Go Breakfast
8:30 am	–	9:30 am	Education Sessions and Roundtables
10:00 am	–	11:30 am	Closing General Session
11:30 am			Open for Exhibitor/Sponsor/Affiliate Events

As of 5/16/2023
*Additional Fee Applies

EXHIBIT HALL

ICMA exhibitors will be eagerly awaiting your arrival in Austin, ready to share the latest products and services that will help you solve organizational challenges, develop leadership skills, advance your career, and find inspiration to create a lasting impact in your community. When planning your schedule, be sure to allow for time in the Exhibit Hall to experience the following:

- Sunday Evening Exhibit Hall Grand Opening Reception (Includes One Drink Ticket and hors d'oeuvres)
- Refreshment Breaks Monday/Tuesday afternoon
- Lunch on Monday/Tuesday
- Product Theater Presentations
- Attendee Relaxation Zone
- Photo Opportunity with a Long Horn
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REGISTRATION

PLEASE NOTE! All attendees **must first register for the conference** before being able to book and reserve an ICMA Annual Conference hotel room. After registering, attendees will have access to securing a hotel room with discounted rates in the ICMA Room Block. Reservations are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis beginning when housing and registration open on Wednesday, June 14. **Please do NOT contact the hotels directly.**

Registration Rates: In-Person

(Includes access to all On Demand content)

	Best Value Rate (By August 16)	Regular Rate (Beginning August 17)
Member	$790	$865
Non-Member	$1,580	$1,730

Group Registration

Team registrations are available for groups of five or more attendees. Each participant will receive 15% off their applicable registration rate.

For more information, please visit **conference.icma.org/registration**.

Registration Rates: On Demand Content Only

(For attendees who will not be attending the event in-person)

	Best Value (By August 16)	Regular (Beginning August 17)
Member	$149	$175
Non-Member	$299	$349

HOTELS

You must first register for the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference before you secure a hotel reservation.

Reservations are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis beginning Wednesday, June 14, when housing and registration open. ICMA will send further information as the date approaches. Please do NOT contact the hotels directly. For a detailed listing and descriptions of all ICMA Conference Hotels and a map of the hotels please visit **conference.icma.org/hotel-and-travel**.

Hotel	**Room Rate Per Night** (tax not included)
Aloft Austin Downtown	$262 single/double
Courtyard Austin Downtown	$249 single/double
Embassy Suites Austin Downtown South Congress	$269 single/double
Fairmont Austin	$299 single/double
Hampton Inn & Suites Austin Downtown Convention Center	$269 single/double
Hilton Austin	$290 single/double
Hilton Garden Inn Austin Downtown/Convention Center	$234 single/double
Hyatt Place Austin Downtown	$245 single/double
JW Marriott Austin Downtown	$290 single/double
Marriott Austin Downtown	$281 single/double
Omni Austin Hotel Downtown	$265 single/double
Residence Inn Austin Downtown	$249 single/double
Stephen F Austin Royal Sonesta Hotel	$287 single/double
The Line Austin	$299 single/double
Westin Austin Downtown	$282 single/double

See you in Austin! September 30 – October 4, 2023

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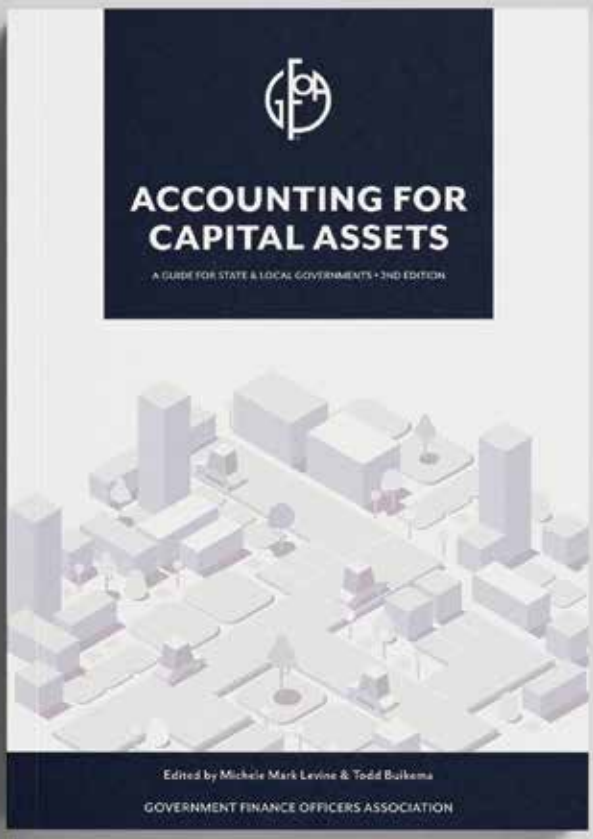

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Livable Communities

Jasmine Chan

Project Manager,
General Plan Update
Tucson, Arizona
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Career Highlight

A big career highlight for me is the historical asset prioritization of Old Fort Lowell. It was great getting the opportunity to work with many different area residents, as well as historic preservation advocates, to understand how to preserve what is left of the fort materials there. We convened a working group over a year and a half to talk about our specific goals, the community's goals, what kind of information we want to provide, and how we move forward with making sure that this area is something that can be maintained for many years to come.

But Also a Challenge

Despite being a major career highlight, the work at Fort Lowell was also a really big challenge for me. I had never worked in historic preservation before, and that was the first time I worked closely with various neighborhoods and our operational parks and recreation staff. Navigating the different priorities and hearing a lot of different opinions through the grapevine made it difficult to approach as a facilitator helping to bring the various perspectives forward. Throughout the whole process, I often experienced imposter syndrome, but it also opened my eyes to the many ways that the staff here at Tucson are willing to jump in and help you learn what to do and support you along the way.

Advice for Making a Positive Impact on Your Residents' Quality of Life

Often, change happens one person at a time. We want to change the way a resident views their relationship with the city of Tucson from one of distrust and skepticism to one of trust and respect. It starts with determining what action points are most important to community members, then determining how we can partner with them or enable that action through the programming or projects we already have in place. Positive impacts on quality of life come from working on those relationships. We can never know what needs to change until we are able to have that honest conversation.

Scan here to check out this video interview and other ICMA member spotlight videos.

ICMA

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