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Continuing the Mental Health Conversation

BY MARC A. OTT

ICMA members and their communities are making progress in prioritizing mental health awareness, and for those who need assistance, we're here for you with resources to help.

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

It is noteworthy that in an issue of *PM* magazine focused on public safety, mental health themes are so prominent. I have written about the importance of this topic in this column multiple times over the past several years because I believe that only by normalizing conversations about mental health can we create the healthy organizations we all strive for.

Local government leaders have made progress in pulling back the curtain on mental health by prioritizing important measures such as incorporating it into employee insurance policies and creating safe spaces for staff to share their struggles. Many local government leaders have joined their private and nonprofit sector counterparts in publicly committing to prioritizing mental health.[1] You can visit icma.org/apa to learn more about this initiative and how your city, town, or county can make the commitment to strive for mental health and excellence.

Pandemic Adds to Employee Stress

There is no doubt that for CAOs the mental health and wellness of public safety professionals looms large among local government human resource concerns. It has been five years since the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act has been signed into law.[2] The act recognizes that good mental and psychological health is just as essential as good physical health in order for law enforcement officers to be effective in keeping our communities safe from crime and violence. In 2021, the International Association of Fire Chiefs updated its best practices in behavioral wellness for first responders.[3] The pandemic added an additional layer of stress to an already mentally and emotionally challenging environment.

It is equally important that city, town, and county managers focus on their own mental hygiene. ICMA resources, such as the report, "Leadership Before, During, and After a Crisis," have drawn attention to the tendency of CAOs to ignore their own needs in order to attend to those of their residents and staff.[4] But the prolonged COVID crisis led millions of workers around the globe, including those in local government, to quit their jobs.

What did not get as much attention is how this affected the "C-Suite." According to a McKinsey and Company

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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 13,000 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.

survey in Forbes Magazine, 70% of CEOs consider leaving for a role that would better support their well-being.[5] Local government leaders may be more mission driven than their corporate counterparts, but I know we have lost many outstanding city and county managers, assistants, and department directors in the past two years. As typical in any crisis, they have summoned all of their energy to keep their communities on track, to fill important slots left open due to resignations, and to simply reassure everyone that things are under control.

Normalizing Mental Health Conversations

The traditional leadership attributes—strong, focused, fearless—have not necessarily served us well as many of our peers and colleagues suffer in silence. Leaders wonder, "Who the heck do I talk with about this? I might be viewed as weak if I'm seen taking advantage of EAP or other counseling services." ICMA has had conference sessions on this topic, and we wondered if anyone would attend. We have gone so far as to schedule them in the late afternoon and in out-of-the-way conference rooms.

Only by normalizing conversations about mental health can we create the healthy organizations we all strive for.

What we found is that among peers and in a safe space, people are willing to open up and share their experiences. It's safe because you're talking to people who know what you're going through and feeling the same things at the same time that you are. It's safe because it's away from the prying eyes of the media and even elected officials. So while I sympathize with corporate CEOs as they deal with the pressures to meet shareholder and board expectations, they are not performing their duties in a fish bowl as city and county managers must do day in and day out.

Yes, it is vital to fight for resources to support your employee family, especially those public safety professionals who put their lives on the line every day to keep our community safe. But it is equally important to maintain an awareness of your own mental health; to think of it as a wellness check like your annual physical. Normalizing these conversations and observations about our mental wellness will go a long way toward reducing burnout, coping with stress, and ultimately thriving rather than merely surviving. PM

ENDNOTES

[1] https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/mental-health/who-made-commitment#government

[2] https://cops.usdoj.gov/lemhwaresources

[3] https://www.iafc.org/about-iafc/sections/vcos/vcos-resource-detail/vcos-yellow-ribbon-report-update

[4] https://icma.org/page/leadership-during-and-after-crisis

[5] https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2022/11/12/ceos-resigning-in-droves-amid-mental-health-crisis-3-leaders-explain-why/?sh=12139e3d2d32

Empowering *Asian* Public Administrators

I-NAPA's 2023 "Advancing Your Leadership" Virtual Symposium

BY VICKI SUN

The International Network of Asian Public Administrators (I-NAPA) is proud to announce its first-ever virtual symposium taking place October 20, 2023, from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. PST. The theme of the symposium is "Advancing Your Leadership," with a focus on helping participants at all levels of professional experience further develop their leadership and management skills. *PM* readers are invited to register for free at i-napa.org/symposium, as well as help spread the word.

U.S. Congressman Ted W. Lieu of California's Congressional 36th District (CA-36) will kick off the event as the keynote speaker. The program features a range of speakers across many roles spanning city executives, managers, and recruiters. For program details, see the symposium agenda.

Despite being virtual, there will be several opportunities for networking. Participants will also be able to select from various breakout rooms that are organized by topic and/or level of experience. The symposium will include discussions around leadership styles, career development, communications, and public engagement.

Elaine Wang, I-NAPA president-elect and city manager of Winooski, Vermont, is excited to welcome attendees to the symposium. "This event will provide a range of experiences for the virtual participants, from an inspirational keynote for all to career-stage guidance to thematic networking and learning for smaller groups of attendees. There will even be a guided mindfulness break to help us practice self-care. We know attendees will find value in the carefully selected group of presenters as seasoned, mid-career, and early career public administrators of Asian heritage."

I-NAPA is an affiliate of ICMA. According to Anil Comelo, chair of the Symposium Planning Committee and city manager of St. Helena, California, "I-NAPA was formed in response to the dearth of Asian members in ICMA and to provide aspiring city managers with mentorship, networking opportunities, and mutual support." The relatively new group currently has over 350 active members around the country representing a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, professions, and seniority levels.

As part of its core mission to support the advancement of administrators of Asian heritage, I-NAPA holds regular events, including monthly Boba Breaks to allow for informal professional networking. I-NAPA also hosts an annual mentoring program, regular lunch-and-learn programs, and various in-person and virtual events, among other activities.

On October 1, 2023, I-NAPA will be hosting an in-person mixer in Austin, Texas, during the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference. If you are interested in joining any of I-NAPA's events, you can find more information at i-napa.org/events or email questions to intl.napa@gmail.com. PM

I-NAPA provides public administrators of Asian heritage with mentorship, networking opportunities, and mutual support.

I-NAPA is honored to have United States Congressman Ted W. Lieu (CA-36) as the keynote speaker for this year's symposium. Learn more at i-napa.org.

VICKI SUN is a senior consultant in the public sector advisory practice at the consulting firm Baker Tilly. She has previously served as a program performance auditor with the San José City Auditor's Office, and was the community engagement manager and a policy advisor for the San José Mayor's Office.

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There's Always an Election *Somewhere!*

The ethical obligation to be **politically neutral** in the era of the perpetual election cycle | BY JESSICA COWLES

Next year, ICMA's Code of Ethics turns 100 years old! The principles in the first Code are timeless, and political neutrality has been central to the Code since its inception. This key commitment ensures a member is seen as objective, fair, and the source of unbiased information essential to building and maintaining public trust. This was critical at ICMA's founding and remains so today.

In recent years, the election cycle seems never ending with elections perpetually ramping up, finishing, or somewhere in the middle. All this points to the need for an enhanced level of awareness of this issue and a member's ethical obligation outlined in Tenet 7: "Refrain from all political activities which undermine public confidence in professional administrators. Refrain from participation in the election of the members of the employing legislative body."

A member has the right and responsibility to vote, but a member cannot support or endorse candidates for local, state, or federal office.

Tenet 7's Guidelines Provide Counsel

Tenet 7 generates many questions from members seeking advice about what is permitted and what is not. It is worth mentioning the Code applies to those that are ICMA members, not to their family members. However, it's important to be proactive about engaging in a conversation with family so they understand the impact of their actions. Any campaign contributions they wish to make to the candidate of their choice, including the posting of political signs in their front yard or placing a candidate's bumper sticker on their personal vehicle, should be done in a way that respects concerns from the ICMA member's fellow employees, the governing body, or the public about this type of political activity.

On the enforcement side, ethics complaints that come to ICMA cite possible violations of Tenet 7

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as well. ICMA's Committee on Professional Conduct—the ICMA Executive Board subcommittee that determines whether a member's conduct has violated the Code—has consistently concluded that a member cannot effectively serve the organization when the member engages in political activity such as endorsing or making campaign contributions to candidates, or even running for office themselves.

As a result, this tenet was the first to be reviewed with the ICMA membership when the association began the process of updating the Code 10 years ago. Members retained the value of refraining from political activities in the tenet language and the board adopted revised guidelines at that time. This gives members a framework for how to engage while maintaining the commitment to the highest ethical standards expected of individuals working in service to a local government.

Zooming In on the Elections Guideline

What used to be a defined election season is now a constant cycle for those in local government to manage. As the election guideline provides, a member has the right and responsibility to vote. If a member lives in a state with closed primaries, that member is permitted by the Code to register with a political party to exercise that right.

A member cannot support candidates for local, state, or federal office. Support can take many forms, including block walking for a candidate or financially contributing or endorsing their campaign. Keep in mind that a financial contribution is a matter of public record and lists one's name and occupation, so the election guideline does not allow this. Endorsing candidates is also not permitted. This endorsement may involve a candidate on a member's governing body, or perhaps local school board or a special district, to name just a few elected offices. The election guideline does not have a distinction based on the type of elected office, so just say no to endorsing!

Declining to endorse a candidate is actually a great opportunity for members to explain more about the Code of Ethics they abide by. Candidates or elected officials may be unaware that the ICMA Code of Ethics exists and what it means. While it may be a difficult conversation, it will reflect the importance of the issue and how it affects the member's ability to lead and serve. No doubt some elected officials may need to be reminded repeatedly of the importance of the Code of Ethics. The election guideline can be a good starting point for this important discussion. PM

Guidelines under Tenet 7

Elections of the Governing Body. Members should maintain a reputation for serving equally and impartially all members of the governing body of the local government they serve, regardless of party. To this end, they should not participate in an election campaign on behalf of or in opposition to candidates for the governing body.

Elections of Elected Executives. Members shall not participate in the election campaign of any candidate for mayor or elected county executive.

Running for Office. Members shall not run for elected office or become involved in political activities related to running for elected office, or accept appointment to an elected office. They shall not seek political endorsements, financial contributions or engage in other campaign activities.

Elections. Members share with their fellow citizens the right and responsibility to vote. However, in order not to impair their effectiveness on behalf of the local governments they serve, they shall not participate in political activities to support the candidacy of individuals running for any city, county, special district, school, state or federal offices. Specifically, they shall not endorse candidates, make financial contributions, sign or circulate petitions, or participate in fund-raising activities for individuals seeking or holding elected office.

Elections relating to the Form of Government. Members may assist in preparing and presenting materials that explain the form of government to the public prior to a form of government election. If assistance is required by another community, members may respond.

Presentation of Issues. Members may assist their governing body in the presentation of issues involved in referenda such as bond issues, annexations, and other matters that affect the government entity's operations and/or fiscal capacity.

Personal Advocacy of Issues. Members share with their fellow citizens the right and responsibility to voice their opinion on public issues. Members may advocate for issues of personal interest only when doing so does not conflict with the performance of their official duties.

How to Create a Women-Focused Session at Your Next Conference

BY JEANNETTA MAXENA

A groundbreaking women-focused conference session helps set the stage for change.

The Florida City and County Management Association

(FCCMA) held their first women-focused session at their annual conference in June in Orlando, Florida. The session was titled, "Recruiting, Retaining, and Empowering Women in the Profession."

I am so proud to have created, organized, and moderated this incredible session and to have been a part of this historic event that brought together city and county managers, students, and women just beginning their local government career. We had the opportunity to hear invaluable advice from our panel and hear stories of resilience from our engaged audience. This session was needed as was evident from the excitement of the crowd. Creating inclusive sessions will have the potential to produce an overall sense of belonging at a conference and improve engagement. So, how did we create this session?

Building Your Session

First, we established a session theme and title. One of local government's most pressing issues is our ability to recruit and retain talent. We lost droves of workers in the Great Resignation and women were disproportionately displaced after the pandemic, some never returning to the workplace. We thought it was fitting to name the session, "Recruiting, Retaining, and Empowering Women in the Profession."

Next, we put together a subcommittee of passionate professionals who would all like to see more equity and inclusion in local government: Sarah Campbell (city manager, Orange Park); Rebecca Flora (supervisor, Lee County); Sally Sherman (assistant county administrator, Pasco County); and myself.

We also worked together to craft the perfect panel:

- Gillian Barth, director of people and culture, Palm Beach.
- Treasa Brown-Stubbs, city manager, Lauderdale Lakes.
- Laura Savage, senior program manager of equity and inclusion, ICMA.
- Heidi Voorhees, president and co-owner, GovHR USA.

The session focused on the challenges that women face in the workplace. We delved into the intersections of women in leadership, including the unique challenges of women of color, the steps women could take to become CAO if they so choose, and ways in which the profession must adapt to recruit and retain women in local government. Most importantly, we explored ways we could foster the next generation of women leaders.

Motivating Your Crowd

To get the crowd motivated, we put together a snowball challenge. Audience members were asked to write three things about themselves on a piece of paper, crumble the paper, and throw it across the room. We asked that the three things be something that could be shared with the others. Then, participants had the opportunity to pick up a "snowball" and share what another audience member wrote. It brought me immense joy to see the excitement of our audience during the challenge. In addition, our panel members were authentic and personable, and they were well-received by our audience.

Lessons Learned

What stood out to me the most was the eagerness of audience members to stand and share their experiences. We heard from MPA students at my alma alter, the University of Central Florida; we heard from ACAOs; and we heard from the few men who were brave enough to attend our session. One of the students brought up an interesting question: Why aren't we asking Gen Z what they want in the workplace or their expectations for the profession? I learned that we must adapt and find new ways to reach Gen Z and younger millennials. Half of the U.S. workforce is made up of millennials and the generational differences in organizations have caused a rift. Public service employees are leaving local government for the private sector in search of higher-paying jobs, promotional opportunities, and organizations that are committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA).

The next generation is watching how we treat women in the profession. They are interested in organizations that are equitable, sustainable, and focused on innovation. Municipalities all over the United States are finding difficulty in recruiting and retaining talent, but these organizations are not asking their employees what they need. People need an employer they can trust so they feel psychologically safe to share their ideas. These new ideas will create opportunities for growth and ingenuity. Organizations must focus on the culture of their workplace first before recruiting new people. A public organization with an inequitable culture will suffer the consequences of losing its talent to the private sector. Building programs that foster a sense of belonging will create inclusive environments and truly empower women and the rest of your employees.

Hopefully, we can keep up this momentum of having inclusive sessions at local government-related conferences all over the country. PM

JEANNETTA MAXENA is a Local Government 2030 delegate and a local government professional in the South Florida region.

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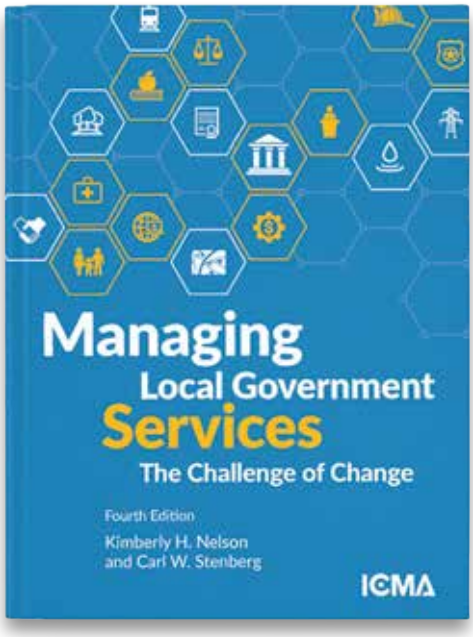

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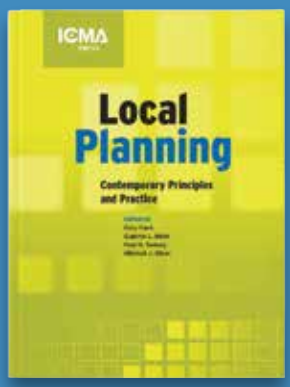

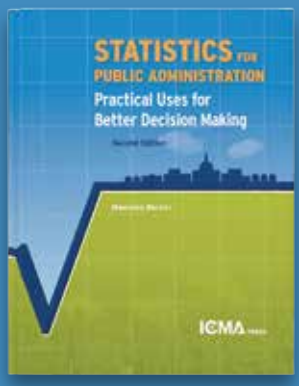

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What Municipal CAOs Need to Know, Part 1: Tech Fitness and Cyber Hygiene

The introduction to our new series on cybersecurity. | BY MARC PFEIFFER

There are two basic elements of technology that every municipality must have. Most places already do this, but it doesn't hurt to highlight them.

The first is an expert to advise you and your governing body on technology issues. As with other experts you hire—a police chief to advise you on law enforcement concerns or an engineer to advise you on infrastructure issues—you must be able to trust the expert you hire in this case to give you their best advice based on a clear understanding of your municipality and its use of technology.

The second is data and system backups: to have sound and regularly tested procedures for data and system recovery. It is critical that you establish and execute policies that fit your organization's level of technological complexity; not doing so is gross mismanagement.

You must routinely test your backup procedures to make sure they are working properly. That will give you confidence they will work when you experience a cybersecurity breach, ransomware, or a disaster incident. Your expert should decide what your backup regimen should be.

By now, every municipality should have those in place. If not, you're late! Get that done, then come back to the rest of this article.

For the rest of you, now what? The answer: develop *tech fitness.* A technologically fit agency has sound technology management policies; its employees are regularly trained in cyber hygiene (security awareness) practices; and it competently manages delivery of its technology services, including cybersecurity prevention and incident mitigation.

Over the years various technology organizations have developed frameworks that organize and structure cybersecurity practices. The Center for Internet Security's Critical Security Controls is the most well-known of these standards.[1] While their details may be challenging for smaller organizations to implement, the concepts of tech fitness track the main points of the CIS and other frameworks very well.

Each municipality needs to decide the best approach for their community based on their technology profile and risks. The link in this endnote will give you a head start on the other elements if you want to get ahead.[2] This rest of this article focuses on ensuring a critical element; that your staff is trained to avoid creating a cyber incident.

MARC PFEIFFER, an ICMA Life Member, is a marginally retired New Jersey town administrator and state agency manager. He is currently a senior policy fellow and assistant director at Bloustein Local, a unit of the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University. (marc.pfeiffer@rutgers.edu)

Cyber Hygiene/Security Awareness

Whatever you call it, employees need to be trained and periodically reminded how to act responsibly when opening emails, clicking on attachments and links, constructing passwords, and avoiding fake websites. Your tech expert should help assess your needs and develop the best way to approach training.

The best approach is to enroll employees in an online program that provides video training modules with monthly quizzes and periodic penetration testing using test phishing emails. Keep in mind that the best services may also be the most expensive. Municipalities will need to sift through providers and the wide range of services they offer to meet local needs.

Make sure the training includes the use of mobile devices as well as desktop, laptop, and handheld devices. Don't forget to involve non-office workers as well: public works, police, fire, and inspections personnel all use computers in some way and need to be trained.

There are also low-cost alternatives. These include the following:

- Subscribe to the SANS Institute monthly OUCH newsletter and send them to staff. SANS is an internationally known cybersecurity training and education organization. OUCH is free; sign up for it at sans.org/newsletters/ouch/.
- Take advantage of resources from your cyber insurance carrier. Today, every organization needs cybersecurity insurance protection. Most insurers, especially those that provide cybersecurity coverage, provide training and educational materials for employees.
- Use online training videos (i.e., search YouTube). Many organizations (including local governments) have posted training programs online. Do a web search for "cyber security awareness employee training videos" to find videos that might meet your needs.
- Use employee-led in-service training at staff meetings. Ask staff members to take turns developing short presentations each month or quarter. Reinforce the content of the latest OUCH newsletters. Discuss cybersecurity in the news and how it could affect your organization.
- Stopthinkconnect.org is a U.S. government cybersecurity resource with a wide range of cyber security resources (printed, website, video).

- Partner with your local board of education, county colleges, and other area agencies. Everyone needs training. Leverage staff, volume, and consistency.
- A cybersecurity vendor, Total Defense, maintains a Security Tips of the Day website.[3] Not every entry may be relevant for your organization, but it can serve as a useful source of information to disseminate to your staff.

Establish formal cybersecurity training policies, put someone in charge of them, and include them in routine risk management training. Keep training records; you may need to provide documentation of employee training when filing an insurance claim in response to a successful cyber attack. Many local government self/joint insurance funds and insurance companies provide portals or online systems to track employee training. Take advantage of them.

Don't forget new employees; they should take some form of cyber hygiene training as part of their onboarding.

Ongoing training doesn't have to be just organization related; you can include guidance for parents of K-12 students, how security affects families and nonprofit groups, etc. Since most employees and their families encounter online technology outside of work, developing their understanding of the risks and responsibilities of using their devices has value. It will help protect the entire community and may lead to increased awareness in related areas as well. It may also provide some good use case discussions for your organization. The stopthinkconnent.org site has resources for specialized groups.

Finally, take advantage of your local library. Most libraries are involved in technology training in some way. They may be a resource you can leverage. And if yours doesn't do tech training, encourage them to. Most state (and national) library associations can provide guidance on how to approach this.

This series continues next month with a discussion of tech management fitness. PM

ENDNOTES

[1] https://www.cisecurity.org/controls

[2] https://cupr.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Managing-Tech-Cybersecurity-Risk-Proficiency.pdf

[3] https://www.totaldefense.com/security-blog/category/security-tip-of-the-day/

[4] https://cupr.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Managing-Tech-Cybersecurity-Risk-Proficiency.pdf

About Tech Fitness

The concept of Tech Fitness evolved from one of the country's first local government joint insurance funds: the New Jersey Municipal Excess Liability Joint Insurance Fund (MEL). In 2017, the author led a small group of municipal CIOs (part of the NJ chapter of GMIS, a national association of local government technology managers) and developed a cyber risk management plan (CRMP) for the 500+ MEL local government agency members.

In 2020, the CRMP evolved into Tech Fitness, based on the author's 2020 report that recommended a set of minimum technological proficiency standards for local government technology management practices.[4] That is now the current core of Tech Fitness. The report provides guidance on technology standards, understanding risks, and proficiency standards for small to medium-sized government agencies. While it maintains basic consistency with comprehensive cybersecurity frameworks, it goes beyond security and addresses broader issues of technology management.

The series starts with this introduction and comments on cyber hygiene/security awareness. Future articles will cover the key elements of Tech Fitness and high-level briefings on the cloud, contracting with third-party service providers, procurement of tech goods and services, HR and budgeting, and a bit of artificial intelligence. Send questions for the author to marc.pfeiffer@rutgers.edu.

The EMS Economic and Staffing Crisis Creates an Opportunity for Improved System Design

Using data to evaluate your community's EMS costs, ambulance staffing levels, and response time expectations to help prevent your EMS systems from collapsing.

BY MATT ZAVADSKY

Fifty-five. That's how many communities lost their ambulance provider in the past two years, according to local and national media reports tracked by the American Ambulance Association (AAA) and the Academy of International Mobile Healthcare Integration (AIMHI). That media tracking system has identified 1,089 local and national media stories focused on emergency medical services (EMS). Of these, 641 (59%) highlighted the EMS staffing crisis and 363 (33%) highlighted the EMS economic crisis. Common sense tells us those two themes are likely linked.

This article will articulate the extent of the root causes of the EMS delivery crisis, as well as the steps many communities are taking to help prevent their EMS systems from collapsing.

EMS Economics 101

EMS agencies are funded typically from two sources: fees for services provided and public funding (i.e., tax subsidy). If the cost of operating the system is greater than the fees generated from service delivery, a tax subsidy will most likely be required. Fee for service reimbursement for EMS comes from several sources: Medicare, Medicaid, commercial insurance, or the patient. The percentage of patients in your community covered by insurance, and the insurance type, is referred to as the "payer mix." Medicare generally reimburses less than the cost of providing the service, and Medicaid reimburses even less than Medicare. Commercial insurers are generally required to pay a percentage of the usual and customary rate

The most expensive part of EMS service delivery is the cost of readiness, that is, having enough resources available to meet the community's desired 911 EMS response time.

(UCR), typically 80%, but the determination of the UCR is left up to the insurer, resulting in a classic "fox watching the hen house" scenario. When an insurer underpays the cost of ambulance service, the patient is often sent a "balance bill," the balance of the ambulance bill remaining after insurance pays what they want to pay. Balance billing has been a point of consternation for consumer advocacy groups for years. Often called a "surprise bill," perhaps the term could be more appropriately called a "surprise payment." Oh, and patients without health insurance (about 20% of the payer mix in most communities) generally do not pay their ambulance bill at all.

Here's an example of how this works. Anytown, USA, has a fire-based ambulance service. The community of 10,000 people generates 1,100 EMS calls and 825 transports annually. (Not all responses result in a patient being transported to the hospital.) To effectively respond to those 1,100 EMS calls, the fire department staffs one ambulance 24 hours per day. This ambulance costs $850,000 a year to staff and operate. Simple math reveals that the *cost per call* for Anytown Fire Department (FD) is $772.73 ($850,000 divided by 1,100 calls) and the *cost per transport* is $1,030.30 ($850,000 divided by 825 transports). Since EMS is only paid for transport, to break even, Anytown FD would need to generate, on average, $1,030.30 of revenue per transport. Anything less than that amount would require a tax subsidy to cover costs. For point of reference, the average Medicare reimbursement for an emergency ambulance call is $480, and Medicare typically represents about 40% of an EMS agency's payer mix.

EMS Workforce and Economic Crisis—Connected!

The most expensive part of EMS service delivery is the cost of readiness, that is, having enough resources *available* (i.e., not committed to a response) to meet the community's desired 911 EMS response time. Personnel costs are the largest investment for an EMS agency, regardless of the

agency type (fire-based, third governmental service, private, etc.) The shorter the desired response time, the more "ready" units that are required to be standing by waiting for a call, meaning higher cost. The longer the desired response time, the fewer units that will need to be ready to respond, meaning lower cost.

ICMA members are aware of what's been happening to wages prior to, but more significantly after, the pandemic. The national workforce shortage is affecting virtually every profession, and EMS is no exception. However, the demand for EMTs and paramedics has grown dramatically, which has resulted in wages for EMS workers skyrocketing much faster than the general market. The demand increase is rooted in two main factors. First, volunteer agencies are less able to attract and retain volunteers, and as result, they are hiring EMTs and paramedics. Second, hospitals, saddled with their own nurse staffing crisis, are alternatively hiring EMTs and paramedics to work in hospitals and other healthcare settings. In Fort Worth, Texas, the average wage for a paramedic is $30/hour. A local hospital recently advertised for paramedics to work in their emergency department at $48/hour to start, with an $8,000 sign-on bonus. A local fire department recently advertised for paramedics to staff their ambulances at a starting annual salary of $90,000 ($31/hour) with a $10,000 sign-on bonus. This is what is driving up 70% of the cost of providing EMS.

To make matters worse, the pipeline for certified EMTs and paramedics is drying up. Many training programs shut down during the pandemic, decreasing the number of people able to become certified. And many people making career choices weigh the work-life balance of a 24/7, nights and weekends EMS schedule, time away from family and friends at holidays and life events, plus the risk of death. A career in EMS is not favorable to a work-life and personal safety balance, especially when compared with the frequent utilization of work-from-home hours in other industries.

Very, very few 911 calls for EMS are for life-threatening emergencies that require a fast response and advanced life support care—generally less than 10%.

The EMS staffing crisis is across all types of agencies.

Baltimore, Maryland's fire department was recently the subject of media reports regarding poor EMS response performance, and they cited staffing as the major cause.

To attract people to EMS, the wages must be significantly higher than they can get paid working at Amazon or Walmart. That drives up costs.

Additionally, costs are dramatically increasing for ambulances, equipment, supplies, medications, and everything else it takes to run an EMS agency. A recent survey by the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians revealed cost increases for these essential items of over 12% since 2019. Despite skyrocketing expenses, the reimbursement rates for EMS from Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial insurers have been essentially unchanged for years.

Approaches to EMS Redesign for Sustainability

Necessity is the mother of invention, and crisis makes the previously unthinkable acceptable. Many innovative EMS systems are making logical, evidence-based system design changes to help mitigate the economic and workforce crisis.

Tiered Deployment

Many systems put a paramedic on every ambulance, sometimes even two. The reality is that most EMS calls do not require Advanced Life Support (ALS) care, and even fewer calls are truly life-threatening. The Metropolitan Area EMS Authority, the public EMS agency better known as MedStar Mobile Healthcare, in Fort Worth, Texas, recently reviewed over 400,000 911 EMS responses and found that only 2.05% of the patients received potentially life-saving medical interventions, and only about 30% received ALS care. This means that for most EMS responses, a Basic Life Support (BLS) response, comprised of two EMTs on the ambulance, would be more than fine. Since EMTs are more available for hire than paramedics, you can increase your staffing by hiring and deploying BLS units with EMTs to respond to calls not likely to require ALS care (most of the calls).

Houston Fire Department staffs 56 of its 103 daily staffed ambulances (54%) at the EMT/BLS level. The Colorado Springs Fire Department recently won an Excellence in EMS Award from the Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI) for the innovative practice of sending a community paramedic only to low-acuity 911 calls and not sending an ambulance unless the community paramedic requests the ambulance

response. This preserves ambulance resources for higher acuity calls.

MedStar implemented a tiered deployment model in 2022. Since then, the average daily staffing of ambulance unit hours (a "unit hour" is one ambulance on duty for one hour) covering MedStar's 430 square mile, 1.1 million population service area jumped from 752 in 2021 to 871 in 2023. This has reduced personnel workload and helped mitigate a rising cost per unit hour. A recent benchmark survey of AIMHI members revealed that 36% of the member systems have transitioned from an all-ALS ambulance deployment to a tiered deployment (ALS/BLS) to better match resources with EMS response needs and enhance ALS provider utilization and experience.

Right-Sizing Response Times

The vast majority of 911 EMS responses are for patients not experiencing life threatening medical issues, and, as we know, the biggest cost driver for EMS delivery is response times. In recent months, some innovative, data-driven EMS systems have changed response time goals based on the acuity of the patient, with life-threatening calls still getting the shortest response times (10 minutes or less) and very low-acuity calls having longer response time goals. In October 2021, the response time goal for a subset of low-acuity 911 EMS calls in Charlotte, North Carolina, was changed to 60 minutes. According to John Peterson, executive director of MEDIC, the Mecklenburg County public EMS agency, they've responded to 21,000 EMS calls over the past 20 months that met criteria for the 60-minute response time goal with no adverse patient outcomes. And, they have received minimal complaints about the response time. Peterson credits the low complaint rate with the practice their 911 call takers use when taking a call that is determined to be low priority. They inform the caller that their call is important to them, and they will be there within the hour, and that if anything changes, to call 911 back. This practice sets the caller's expectations to the response time goal.

To further focus on maximizing response times for high-acuity calls, in April 2023, MEDIC implemented widespread response configuration changes based on the initial learning to include low-acuity response time goals ranging from 15 minutes up to 90 minutes depending on the Emergency Medical Dispatch Pro-QA determinant.

In Richmond, Virginia, to control rising public expenses for the public EMS agency, the Richmond Ambulance Authority is implementing a similar plan, with low-acuity 911 EMS responses having a response time goal of 60 minutes.

Balancing Service Level with Economics

The EMS economic crisis leaves communities with a tough decision to make: maintain current service levels and increase (or initiate) public funding or use evidence-based processes to modify service levels based on actual data from the community. With response times being the largest cost driver for EMS, this will likely mean changing response time expectations for some low-acuity calls and using the right response plans based on patient need.

Community leaders should keep two important things in mind when engaging in discussions regarding EMS performance goals. First, very, very few 911 calls for EMS are for life-threatening emergencies that require a fast response and advanced life support care—generally less than 10%. Prioritizing patients based on clinical need has been done in hospital emergency rooms for decades. In the ER, patients with low-acuity conditions wait, sometimes for quite a while, while higher-acuity patients are treated. Twenty-seven percent of the patients MedStar brings to their large public hospital by ambulance following a 911 call are brought directly to the waiting room to wait, just like those who walked into the ER.

Second, most studies that have been done comparing ambulance response times to patient outcomes have found no difference for any response time greater than five minutes, and the five minutes only matters on about 2% of EMS responses. A frank, transparent, and data-driven community conversation regarding things like costs, ambulance staffing levels (ALS vs. BLS), and response time expectations can help build support for logical EMS system redesign.

We often say that the community expectation regarding EMS service levels, especially response times, is the intersection of what your wallet can withstand and your stomach can bear. Be strong, be bold, and lead! PM

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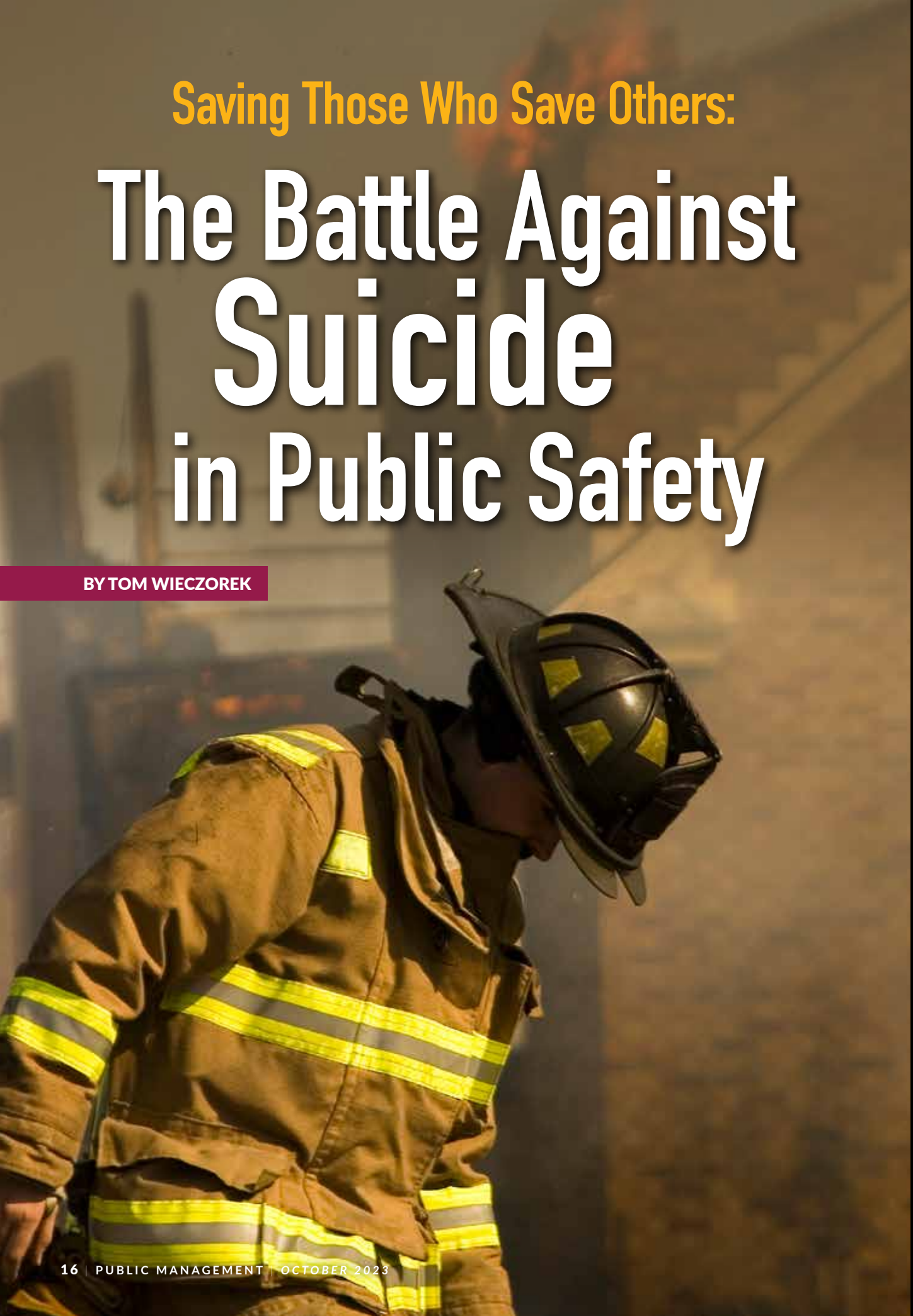
Saving Those Who Save Others:

The Battle Against Suicide in Public Safety

BY TOM WIECZOREK



The last few years have been eventful to say the least. Social unrest. Mass shootings. A financial meltdown. A pandemic that forced many first responders to sleep in their cars or at hotels for fear of infecting their children or others in their home. The same pandemic that would kill friends, colleagues, and others in their community or that filled the emergency room and hospital beds to a breaking point. And a belief that our first responders must somehow perform above it all and without intervention. Our message to them is often "It is *not* okay to *not* be okay."

Scope of the Problem

Two years ago, I stood on the National Mall in Washington, DC, as names were read of police officers who died in the line of duty and that will now be added to the National Police Memorial Wall. Their families were escorted in, many with tears in their eyes as hundreds of officers were saluted. Candlelight would eventually light the mall as a thin blue laser shot into the night. »

It is a sad fact that police officers are more likely to die from suicide than in the line of duty. In 2020, 116 police officers died by suicide while 113 died in the line of duty (Stanton, 2022). In 2021, that number rose to 150 officers dying by suicide. Tragically, law enforcement officers have a 54% increase in suicide risk compared to the civilian population.

No department is immune. The problem seems to be even worse in smaller departments, which may not have an extensive support system or peer support resources. A 2012 study published in the *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health* found that departments with fewer than 50 full-time officers had a suicide rate over triple that of departments that had over 500 full-time officers. This is concerning, as 49% of the police departments in the United States employ less than 10 full-time officers.[1]

The number of firefighter suicides is estimated to be at least 100 per year. According to the *Ruderman White Paper on Mental Health and Suicide of First Responders,* the suicide rate for firefighters is 18 per 100,000 compared to 13 per 100,000 for the general public. The Ruderman research showed an increasing number of firefighters are dying by suicide as a result of suffering from behavioral health issues—including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—from exposures that they have suffered while delivering emergency services to the public. The paper concluded, "There is a lack of culturally competent behavioral health specialists to assist firefighters and local employee assistance programs are ill-equipped to assist first responders.

Personal Story

Suicide and mental health issues have become a significant crusade for me since I returned home in May 2016 to find my husband dead by suicide. At the time, friends, family, and I saw no warning signs that indicated he had contemplated taking his life. He was the life of every event, the sought-after stylist for pageants and events. People sought his counsel when planning productions, thus he found himself actively engaged throughout the Washington, DC area and even outside the United States.

It is a sad fact that police officers are more likely to die from suicide than in the line of duty.

It was only after his death that I began to look at his personal journals and emails that he had sent to me and various friends and began to notice a pattern. This was the same pattern demonstrated by others that we have lost to suicide, such as Robin Williams, Kate Spade, and Anthony Bourdain. Undiagnosed depression hidden by a façade had led others to believe there was no possibility of such a demon hiding within.

I was lucky in many ways because of professional friends, acquaintances, and national efforts at preventing suicide being located nearby in the Washington, DC area. A good friend called me about three weeks after Barry's funeral and invited me to a group of survivors of suicide. It was through that involvement that I became active with the DC Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

You can imagine my shock when I attended classes that described warning signs that repeated nearly word for word what my husband had expressed in journals, in emails, and even that he would laugh and exclaim to me. As a stylist, he spent hours making sure every hair was perfect in his look, adding various potions and lotions to ensure a healthy head. But in the weeks leading up to his death, he abandoned both—one of the signs we talked about with experts.

Warning Signs

The following warning signs do not necessarily mean someone has decided to take their own life, but may be indicative of mental health problems that could build up to that point.

Something to look out for when concerned that a person may be suicidal is a change in behavior or the presence of entirely new behaviors. This is of most concern if the new or changed behavior is related to a painful event, loss, or change. Most people who take their own lives exhibit one or more warning signs, either through what they say or what they do. See Figure 1 for the full list of warnings signs, such as those found in one's way of speaking, behavior, and mood.

FIGURE 1

Suicide Warning Signs

Talk

If a person talks about:

- Killing themselves.
- Feeling hopeless.
- Having no reason to live.
- Being a burden to others.
- Feeling trapped.
- Unbearable pain.

Behavior

Behaviors that may signal risk, especially if related to a painful event, loss, or change:

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs.
- Looking for a way to end their lives, such as searching online for methods.
- Withdrawing from activities.
- Isolating from family and friends.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Aggression.
- Fatigue.

Mood

People who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following moods:

- Depression.
- Anxiety.
- Loss of interest.
- Irritability.
- Humiliation or shame.
- Agitation or anger.
- Relief or sudden improvement.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Firefighters and other rescue personnel develop PTSD at a similar rate to military service members returning from combat, according to a 2016 study from the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology.* The report reveals that approximately 20% of firefighters and paramedics meet the criteria for PTSD at some point during their career.[2] This compares to a 6.8% lifetime risk for the general population. The connection between PTSD and traumatizing rescue work is clear. In fact, the FBI launched the Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection in 2022 to help improve understanding and prevent suicide among law enforcement officers.[3]

What Is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Fear is a part of the body's "fight-or-flight" response, which helps us avoid or respond to potential danger. People may experience a range of reactions after trauma, and most people recover from initial symptoms over time. Those who continue to experience problems may be diagnosed with PTSD.

Who Gets PTSD?

Anyone can develop PTSD at any age. This includes combat veterans and people who have experienced or witnessed a physical or sexual assault, abuse, an accident, a disaster, or other serious events. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened, even when they are not in danger.

Not everyone with PTSD has been through a dangerous event. Sometimes, learning that a friend or family member experienced trauma can cause PTSD.

According to the National Center for PTSD, a program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, about six out of every 100 people will experience PTSD at some

point in their lives. Women are more likely to develop PTSD than men. Certain aspects of the traumatic event and some biological factors (such as genes) may make some people more likely to develop PTSD.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of PTSD?

Symptoms of PTSD usually begin within three months of the traumatic event, but they sometimes emerge later. To meet the criteria for PTSD, a person must have symptoms for longer than one month, and the symptoms must be severe enough to interfere with aspects of daily life, such as relationships or work. The symptoms also must be unrelated to medication, substance use, or other illness.

A mental health professional who has experience helping people with PTSD, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker, can determine whether symptoms meet the criteria for PTSD. Cognition and mood symptoms include:

- Having trouble remembering key features of the traumatic event.
- Having negative thoughts about oneself or the world.
- Having exaggerated feelings of blame directed toward oneself or others.
- Having ongoing negative emotions, such as fear, anger, guilt, or shame.
- Losing interest in enjoyable activities.
- Having feelings of social isolation.
- Having difficulty feeling positive emotions, such as happiness or satisfaction.

Cognition and mood symptoms can begin or worsen after the traumatic event. They can lead a person to feel detached from friends or family members.

The Gorilla in the Room

Police, fire, and EMS employees have faced and continue to face unprecedented situations. Gun violence and death have reached epidemic proportions in many of our cities and communities. School shootings involving multiple victims are not limited to urban areas but have been shown to occur in rural, urban, and suburban areas with an ever-increasing frequency.

Dealing with communities that have experienced gun violence at shopping centers, synagogues, religious places of worship, or even parades challenges anyone. First responders have to witness firsthand the carnage that has taken place. Talking to a responder at one of these events, they explained they were totally unprepared to see a young victim that was rendered unidentifiable, and it was made worse because their own child had an outfit like that worn by the victim.

As a former chief, it brought back memories of when we were called to a scene in which two beautiful children and a mother died in a house fire that was of suspicious origin. Two of my paid-on-call firefighters came in the following day and turned in their gear, tears in their eyes, as they explained what it was like to recover one of the bodies, which had been wearing a sleeper like their own child.

And what did we usually do in those cases or other traumatic events? Often we told people it was not okay to not be okay and to just get back to work.

If someone expressed emotional or mental health problems, they often feared (and were) labeled as unfit for duty or certainly for promotion. It reminds me of the trauma many World War II veterans may talk about but that they stuffed inside for the last 70 years.

We must make our workplaces a safe space to say *I'm not okay.*

We should also have the expectation of grief in many situations and help our teams work through that grief process. The stages are not always linear; people will often regress, move ahead, take several steps back, and often get locked into an area. It is important to have policy, process, and experts identified that can help your team and staff during and after traumatic events.

And those events do not have to include death. Communities in Florida remain traumatized by the damage and destruction caused by last year's hurricane. I have a good friend who was a manager on the Florida coast that can tell you the struggles

FIGURE 2

Suicide Risk Factors

Health

- Mental health conditions
  - Depression.
  - Substance use problems.
  - Bipolar disorder.
  - Schizophrenia.
  - Personality traits of aggression, mood changes, and poor relationships.
  - Conduct disorder.
  - Anxiety disorders.
- Serious physical health conditions, including pain.
- Traumatic brain injury.

Environmental

- Access to lethal means, including firearms and drugs.
- Prolonged stress, such as harassment, bullying, relationship problems, or unemployment.
- Stressful life events, like rejection, divorce, financial crisis, other life transitions, or loss.
- Exposure to another person's suicide or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of suicide.

Historical

- Previous suicide attempts.
- Family history of suicide.
- Childhood abuse, neglect, or trauma.

he and his team had following Hurricane Katrina.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

What are the risk factors that may increase the chance that a person's mental health crisis will lead to death by suicide? Risk factors are characteristics or conditions that increase the chance that a person may try to take their life. See Figure 2 for the full list of suicide risk factors, including environmental, historical, and those related to one's health.

While risk factors increase the chance of suicide, protective factors help to decrease that risk. Protective factors include the following:

- Access to mental health care and being proactive about mental health.
- Feeling connected to family and community support.
- Problem-solving and coping skills.
- Limited access to lethal means.
- Cultural and religious beliefs that encourage connecting and help-seeking, discourage suicidal behavior, or create a strong sense of purpose or self-esteem.

Resources

There are many resources that can aid your team; many that are no cost:

- Every state has at least one chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. You'll find various classes that are offered in person or online and deal with looking for symptoms, assisting survivors, dealing with youth and teens, working with a military community, LGBTQIA+ community, schools, etc.[4]
- The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) is working with researchers at Texas A&M College of Medicine and Baylor Scott & White Healthcare to offer new resources for IAFF members dealing with the tragic loss of a fellow brother or sister to suicide.[5]
- The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) created The National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide, a group of multidisciplinary experts with a common goal of preventing officer suicide. Convened by the IACP, the consortium focuses on solutions to emerging challenges and successes of the field in addressing mental health and preventing officer suicide.[6]
- The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices.[7]

Conclusion

First responders, along with all of our public safety personnel, need to know that their organization is behind them and ready to assist in all aspects of their mental health. The stigma of mental health in this profession is no longer tolerable, but this message must come from leadership. We owe it to our employees to educate ourselves and each other on the warning signs and risk factors of suicide ideation, the signs and symptoms of PTSD, the stages of grief, and most importantly, the mental health resources available to those in need. PM

ENDNOTES

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The Importance of Local Government and Police Leadership Relations

BY TRAVIS PARRISH

In an enlightening conversation, city managers and police chiefs sit down to discuss the dynamics of their partnership, along with community engagement, transparency, and law enforcement agency accreditation.

The relationship between a police chief and a city/county/town manager is a pivotal and intricate partnership at the heart of any well-functioning municipal administration. It serves as the cornerstone of effective law enforcement, community safety, and the overall governance of a community. This dynamic alliance between two key figures—one responsible for law enforcement and public safety, and the other overseeing day-to-day municipal operations—is essential in shaping the direction and priorities of a community.

In this conversation, we will delve into the significance of this relationship, highlighting how it impacts the delivery of public services, fosters community trust, and ultimately plays a critical role in the well-being and prosperity of a community's residents. The synergy, trust, and regular communication between a police chief and a city/county/town manager is not merely administrative; rather, it provides for clear mission, purpose, and values for the broader workforce within the public safety agency and other associated operational and logistical functions of government.

Travis Parrish, director of client services and relations for the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA®), sat down with four local government leaders to discuss topics that continue to top news headlines: community engagement and transparency.

Richard Hickey
Chief of Police
Brentwood, Tennessee
Police Department

Kirk Bednar
City Manager
Brentwood, Tennessee
CALEA Commissioner

Kim Koster
Chief of Police
Wyoming, Michigan
Police Department
CALEA Commissioner

Curtis Holt
Retired City Manager
Wyoming, Michigan
Former CALEA
Commissioner

Both the Wyoming and Brentwood police departments are CALEA accredited law enforcement agencies.

Travis Parrish: Public safety is clearly a critical component of a thriving community, but there are so many other departments under your oversight that play as vital a role in your cities. How do you balance a critical area like public safety with all of the other areas involved in leading a successful city?

• **Kirk Bednar:** Yes, I oversee all departments, so my relationship with each of my department heads is critical. If you don't have a good working relationship that's based on mutual respect and trust with any of those department heads, it has the potential to really negatively impact the entire organization and certainly the leadership team. Now the difference with the police chief is that it's obviously, as you imply, a much more public position, maybe more than a lot of other department heads might be. Most people know who Chief Richard Hickey is in Brentwood. They may not know who serves as water and sewer director or public works director. So, I think it is a little more important that the city manager and the police chief or fire chief in a public safety arena have a good working relationship, because if not, that can be much more visible. The police chief needs to be worrying about fighting crime, not fighting city hall.

I make a special effort not to play departments off each other and certainly make a special effort not to in any way give the impression that one is elevated above the other. In any given situation one department is going to be key to solving that issue better than another one. Overall, we all must be prepared day in and day out. The chief of police is one member of our department head leadership team. He doesn't have special standing with me more than any others. For example, all of our emergency management training is coordinated through the fire department and Chief Hickey and his folks are participants in all those events, but they're an equal participant with every other department. All our leadership department heads truly do work together as a team.

• **Curtis Holt:** I always believe that communication is key, and Chief Koster and I had a very open line of communication. And because of that, we also had a high degree of trust. Now that doesn't mean we agreed on everything and we didn't. But I also was able to know when our chiefs were very passionate about things and Chief Koster is one of those that can be very passionate about the business needs and what's going on in the community. I had to look at how to address those needs and work to support her in addressing those needs. Obviously, we discussed things, we talked about what the need was and why.

More important than anything is that we worked together. When we went in front of the council, we went as a team—a team that was trying to make our community better. It wasn't me going behind her to council saying, "Hey, we don't need to do this." It wasn't her going to councilmembers saying, "Hey, the city manager won't do something." If we disagreed on something, we worked on it until we found agreement. I guess I believe that if we don't trust the people

we work with, then we've got to find a different way to do our job. If I can't trust my police chief, then I probably need a different police chief.

I always thought very highly of our police department and the work we did together. I always trusted our department heads. I trusted Chief Koster. I trusted that we were doing the best job for the city. We have spent a lot of time talking about the team and talking about how one part is no more important than the other. However, there are times when there are priorities depending on what's going on and what the issues are.

Wyoming was unfortunate enough in my tenure to have two different tornado events that went through our city, and during each of those I was out of town. I did rush back, but when I got there, our police department was on the scene taking charge and implementing our established emergency management plan. After the second tornado, by the time I got back, public works was already on the ground, and they were already picking up trees and debris and helping people. We really focused on the fact that if our residents can't depend upon the city to help them in the worst possible time, then what are we there for? What are we working for?

We talked a lot about community safety and stewardship, specifically during budgeting. Our priority is the safety of our people, the safety of our residents, our training, and then everything else comes after that. The department heads knew that when they came to me for budget, the highest priority items were going to be those things that ensured the safety of our officers. I made sure we addressed that first before we addressed other "nice to haves" and other latest and greatest technologies. That's just the way we approached it. We approached everything as a team.

Parrish: As city manager, what do you see as the perfect model for public safety success in a community?

• **Holt:** Well, I think the model that worked in Wyoming (and that Chief Koster and Deputy Chief Snyder really focused on) was a model of integrity. We were a police department that was focused on the integrity of our officers and integrity in how we interacted with the community. Looking back at our police department, I was very proud of the work we did, and it was appreciated by the community. We were out there trying to listen to people, understand their needs, maybe determine what caused them to get into the situation they were in, and work with them closely. As city manager, we talked about community safety and stewardship a lot in Wyoming and that is the expectation I had for our police department.

• **Bednar:** For me, it starts with community trust. We can think we're doing great things within the police department or fire department from a public safety perspective, but if the community doesn't see that, doesn't appreciate that, and doesn't respect that, then obviously I don't think we've been successful in our mission. Whatever we do has to build on the trust we already have and keep it moving forward. Beyond that, my role is to ensure that the chiefs can be successful by being their advocate. I don't approve everything that he asks for, but I think the chief would agree the department is provided the funding to accomplish their mission in serving the community. But for me, being their advocate with the elected officials allows the chief and his officers to focus on the safety and well-being of the community and not the politics. I don't necessarily have to be their advocate with the community because they're well versed and better at doing that than I could ever be. In a city manager form of government, our elected officials are policymakers. They're not involved in the day-to-day operation. So, in addition to being the police department's advocate, sometimes I need to be a blocker or buffer to keep political things off the chief. That's more easily done with other departments. The police department is community facing and it's sometimes difficult to buffer when the department is in such a public position. But for me it's making sure that they have the resources based on our available budget to do what they can do, and then let him do the job.

Parrish: Chiefs, from your perspective, what does a model of success look like for you as it relates to working with city leadership?

• **Koster:** I was very fortunate to have the city manager that I've had. The model for success is based on mutual respect and really all about a trusting relationship. It's truly about trust and mutual respect, honesty and integrity. When you have a relationship that's built on those principles, established goals are more likely to be achievable. I understood the complexity of Curtis's (my city manager's) job. I understood that public safety was just one of his concerns, but I knew that it was my responsibility to communicate with him and make sure that he understood the priorities that I was facing or that I was trying to accomplish and how those fit into the overall goals of the city. He trusted that I saw the big picture and that I supported the overall mission of the city, and he could rely on me to communicate that to my staff and to our officers. As a result, we were able to meet the needs of the community and make sure that we were doing that in a way that was respectful and fair, and our community could truly trust those leading the city's different departments. Curtis understood law enforcement. He made it a point to make sure that we knew he understood the challenges that we faced and that he supported our officers. That was critically important not only to our leadership team but to the officers on the street to know that he understood their challenges and the sacrifices that they were making.

• **Hickey:** It must be about trust and there has to be a relationship. The time to build relationships is not during budget time. You better already have a relationship in place, and you better know your city manager and know that they are doing their best for your department and looking out for the entire city. It's important to have a very open dialogue. I don't think we pull many punches, and we talk very openly, which I think is healthy. I try not to surprise my city manager with anything, and I know he tries not to surprise me.

Parrish: You mentioned informing your officers and keeping your community informed. What are some strategies for communicating to your residents about the work that is happening on their behalf?

• **Koster:** Well, you know, social media is at the forefront of everybody's mind today. That's how we're able to get our messages out much better than previously. We can now tell our story. So, we do have a communications unit and we work really well with them to craft a message that's consistent with the city's message. Again, it's a team approach like Curtis said, and everything that we put out on social media just highlights the good work that we do in the programs that we offer. In addition to social media, we are in the community. Our officers are getting out of their cars. They are attending neighborhood meetings, as well as some of the more traditional programs, like "shop with a cop" and "coffee with a cop," where we can sit down with residents and talk to them about some of their concerns. Community policing is something that we have done as an agency for the 25 years that I've been here, and we just get better and better at it, and being able to utilize social media just helps.

• **Holt:** One of the things that I always emphasized to the police department when we talked about how we react to our community is that we lead by example. Our officers' actions speak loudly about who we are as a city and what we do, and that includes other departments. I'm always amazed when you look at Wyoming social media and you see city staff on the job—whether it's public works, the water department,

police, or fire—how many people react and just say thank you, thank you for the work you do. That goes back to what Chief Koster said about community policing.

Parrish: Unrest between law enforcement and the community can raise questions and concerns, and some folks may stand up and challenge your police department or city officials. What actions can you take to address those issues in a collective manner, instilling public trust and confidence?

• **Holt:** Whenever something like this happened, whether inside or outside of our community, we first addressed it with our staff and made sure they understood what was going on and what our feelings were. Many times, people reached out to members of our community who were leaders. We would immediately have a conversation with them about what the Wyoming Police Department was about, what our community meant to us, and how we operate differently. Just like when we talk about severe storms, critical incidents, or things that happen in our community, again, it was communication, trust, and integrity. It was putting our residents first.

One of the tornadoes that came through Wyoming also went through a neighboring community. That community took the approach of "well, you've got insurance, residents, you clean it up." In our community, police and public works took the approach, "If we don't deal with the issues that are happening now and support our residents, we're going to be dealing with this for six months, a year, or three years." So, when residents had issues, we helped to make contact with FEMA. Team Rubicon was there, and our public works officials worked in concert with them to make sure things got done. It costs us a little money to do it, and it costs us a little time having the police department on the front lines and talking to people and asking what their needs were. But in the end, we dealt with it for a couple months. We didn't deal with it for three or four years and people felt great about the service they got from the city of Wyoming in their time of need.

Parrish: Staffing and budgets have always been an issue in public safety and presenting requests for more staff funding can be a challenge. So as a city manager, can you discuss common challenges?

• **Holt:** We did several staffing studies through ICMA. We really looked at our staffing in terms of active time versus downtime. We didn't use the national averages of two officers per thousand residents or whatever those averages are out there—perhaps 2.4—because we didn't really feel that was representative of what our officers were doing. Wyoming's police department had struggled with staffing and finances for a long time. Probably one of the biggest things was trying to keep enough money in the budget to fund our police department and find that little extra help when we needed it. What we found as we started to ask the council about more officers is that our officers were above that peak for reactionary versus community policing style patrols. In other words, our officers are going from call to call on a regular basis. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that when your officers are doing that, your interactions with the community are probably negative because the engagements are mostly enforcement. So, we knew we had to get back to a position where our officers had time to interact with the community. We came up with what the number was and how that would affect our shift schedule. As city manager, I did a weekly report for the council, and I would send them call data and resource data and what we were able to do or not able to do.

• **Koster:** From my perspective as chief, it became clear we were just going from call to call and were not able

to get out of the car and talk to the business owners or engage in many community policing programs. We needed to talk about some of the proactive activities that were suffering as a result of the call-to-call activity. It was really a lot about outcomes. Curtis (Holt) would always want to know, If we add officers, what is the tangible outcome going to be? If you're talking about community policing, you have to be able to show what that team is going to do and how they're going to build relationships. So that was also a critical part of talking to the council, letting them know that we want to be present in the schools, have officers creating relationships with the kids and having cruisers outside of the school, patrol officers having time to visit the schools in their districts and things like that, that's important to parents. Those are the things that we had to talk about that we would not be able to do if we had to start taking officers off other assignments and putting them into reactive policing. If you're reactive and only reactive, you're going to need more personnel. You're not going to be preventing crime, you're not going to be able to solve crime. I'm a firm believer that preventing crime means solving crime. You have to have enough detectives to work cases to solve them and take some of the people that are perpetrating crimes off the street. One example is computer crimes involving crimes against children. We have this huge caseload, and we were able to show that if we could one more detective, we would be able to make a difference.

• **Bednar:** I think another, maybe even bigger, challenge for a city manager and ultimately for the chief is when the city manager, for whatever reason, perceives that the community is not satisfied with how the police department's being operated. So, if the chief and the manager can't get along, can't communicate, can't see each other's perspective, and work their way through that, it's likely a recipe for disaster and infects the entire organization.

• **Hickey:** I agree. A new chief coming in from the outside or a new city manager coming from the outside can really create a difficult dynamic. Having a common vision for what we think policing should be like throughout Brentwood is critical. We know we have a good idea of what the community in Brentwood wants out of its police department, not only because we have been here a long time, but because we ask. We ask our officers. We ask residents. We discuss with other department heads. Knowing where you're going to be at the end of the day is really important.

Parrish: Chiefs, from your perspective, what advice would you give to other public safety leaders who may be looking at taking CALEA accreditation to their county administrator or city administrator?

• **Koster:** I think if you are a progressive department that wants to have a good relationship with the community and you want your officers to have the resources they need to succeed, it's critical. I mean, today an officer on the street has a lot of challenges and is concerned about their safety, but is also concerned about liability. When an officer knows best practice policies and training are in place, they are going in as prepared as they can be. If you want to ensure their safety and make them feel safer, accreditation is the management tool to accomplish that. Our officers know that should they get into a situation where they're being questioned, whether it's in court or by the public, we're going to be able to back them up with the fact that there is a policy in place and that they were acting in accordance with that policy and training. We have documentation. They've been trained. We're going to be able to show that their actions were in compliance. We're going to be able to prove that we investigated a complaint or that we thoroughly followed our investigative policies through internal affairs. And I can tell you that it makes all the difference in the world when they know that they have backing, not only of the city administration, but that of CALEA. They know we are going to be able to stand on the principles that we've been able to maintain through accreditation.

• **Hickey:** It all goes back to community trust. Again, we are not successful unless the community trusts us as a department to do what's right. And to me that trust is founded on fair and consistent application of the law. The way you do that as a law enforcement agency is to have high standards, you train to them, and you apply them, and that's what CALEA accreditation provides to us. Accreditation allows us to make sure we are operating under the gold standard, that we are aware of current trends, and operating under national standards that force us to change if necessary and train appropriately. With a commitment to those standards, holding ourselves accountable, I think the department then operates in a clear, consistent, professional manner, which then leads to a community that trusts the department because they see how we operate.

CALEA is the long-term investment. If you want standards and practices that have been proven over time to be the best way to do policing, then you invest in accreditation. That's what it means to me; I know we've got a long-term plan. We are not reacting to whatever trendy thing happens today; we're looking at the best practices from around the world and figuring out the best way to do the job. Accreditation goes back to accountability. We make sure that we are policing the way our community deserves. The fact that we have standards that we're holding people to and that we do things a certain way, a proven way, is really important to our officers and the community. Accreditation is all about transparency. It's about making sure that we're using the best practices from around the world. We would be incredibly arrogant and sticking our head in the sand if we thought that the Brentwood Police Department already had every experience there is to have in policing.

I know that there are agencies somewhere in America today or somewhere around the world who are doing things we've never done before. We're going to hopefully learn about such things before they ever become a problem in Brentwood and we're going to have a leg up on the best way, and the worst way, to handle them.

Parrish: What does public safety accreditation mean to you and to the community you serve?

• **Bednar:** I think it's vital for us. We take great pride in knowing our police department is the longest continuously accredited agency in the state of Tennessee, and our fire department also became accredited about 10 years ago through a separate organization. Brentwood is a suburban, affluent community with a population that's more of a professional workforce. Our residents have high expectations for how we operate as a department. Having that CALEA seal on our vehicles shows that we live up to the highest public safety standards not only in the United States, but outside the United States as well. We are saying to our officers and to the community they protect that we are willing to hold ourselves accountable to being at the cutting edge of practices and policies.

I think it helps us in a couple of ways. In recent years, social justice protests took place throughout the country. We didn't have a lot here in our community, but certainly others close to us did. At the time, when there was discussion about laws changing, about policies and prohibitions, all we had to do was show our policies and say, We've had this in place for years because we're a CALEA-accredited agency. Transparency is critical and we have that. From that standpoint, the ability to easily open the books and say, Here are our data and policies, made it easy for us to answer those calls for change. Of course, we are always looking for ways to improve—that is another part of maintaining our accreditation—but for those issues that were in the headlines, we didn't have to change. We just had to show what we were doing. We have to train our folks to those standards and policies and hold them accountable, but I think that said a lot and calmed whatever fears there may have been in our community about policing.

• **Koster:** Well, I'm going to kind of go back in history a bit. I've had the privilege of working for an agency pre-CALEA, move through the CALEA accreditation process, and now serve as a chief of police for a CALEA-accredited agency. I've worked for 28 years with the city of Wyoming, and we've been accredited for the last 12. So, for a good portion of my career, we were not accredited.

It really is a credit to our former chief, Chief Carmody, who came in and really utilized CALEA as a way to set the bar for where he wanted our performance to be. He wanted us to be a professional agency that people could trust and build on the relationships we had within the community already. We were a good agency, but I can tell you the entire process really changed the culture of our organization. The focus became continuous improvement. It was ensuring that we were establishing best-in-practice policies and directives in writing, so our officers knew what they were supposed to do and what the expectations were in all situations. Equally important was the transparency this brought to everything about our organization, further improving the relationship with the community. And it's not something that is only seen at the administrative level. At the time, I was a sergeant and I could see the improvement of our agency and how we became so much better at what we were doing. The accreditation process puts a greater focus on analysis, reporting, and statistics,

which allowed for data-driven change. As a chief, this information is critical to my decision making as it relates to policy change, budgeting, staffing, equipment, and so much more.

• **Holt:** CALEA is the foundation for professionalism in policing. Not only are we adhering to the highest standards in law enforcement, but we are also able to make changes based on best practices from around the world through the sharing network within CALEA-accredited agencies. As society changes, we're able to react to that very quickly and adjust those policies when needed. From my perspective as a city manager, I looked at it as a blueprint for building a foundation for an agency that is going to be trustworthy and accountable.

• **Koster:** Being an accredited agency does not mean bad things can't happen, but they are less likely to happen, and if they do, we can quickly and easily recover and we retain the trust of the community. When social unrest was everywhere in the headlines, and communities were asking difficult questions, we already had the answers. We have the data. We have the policies in place. We were already doing things that other communities were having to explain why they weren't doing. Accreditation is a tangible way we can tell our community that we abide by best practices, we're constantly seeking to improve, and we're looking around to see what other agencies are doing.

• **Hickey:** Recruitment and retention across the nation are a huge challenge for law enforcement executives. Being a CALEA-accredited agency gives us an advantage over other agencies who are not accredited. Our officers want to stay with an accredited agency and others want to join an accredited department. The type of officers that we're trying to attract appreciate the fact that as an accredited agency we are going to be professionally managed, have clear policies and directives, and a structured advancement process. To me it's validation that we're ready and willing to be the very best and ensuring that we operate our police department under the highest standards.

• **Holt:** Every government organization I know has their finances audited every year, and they don't do that because they're looking for mistakes. They do that to make sure the message they're conveying about their finances is correct. They're conveying the same messages that an outside auditor would see, so why wouldn't we want to do that with other organizations in the city? It began with the police department, and we now have a few other agencies in the town that are accredited through their respective accrediting body as well. PM

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Exploring Diversity and Meritocracy in the Fire Service

BY DR. HEZEDEAN SMITH

A survey of fire professionals examines potential challenges and opportunities in promoting a more inclusive and equitable environment for all individuals in the fire service.

In today's public safety profession (fire and emergency medical services), fostering inclusivity and equitable practices has become imperative for effective service delivery to the community and organizational development. As part of a professional development cohort, I had the opportunity to conduct a quantitative study that explored the correlation between diversity fatigue and meritocracy within the profession.

The research project was undertaken voluntarily and was not sponsored or obligatory for program completion. As a fire chief and a researcher, my aim was to make a meaningful contribution through this professional development opportunity. »

The study specifically examined how factors such as race, gender, and rank influence this relationship. The findings of this research yielded valuable insights that can guide the development of strategies to continue cultivating inclusivity and equitable practices within our profession.

Uncovering the Relationship

Diversity fatigue refers to the exhaustion experienced by diversity-related initiatives, while meritocracy represents the belief in acknowledging and rewarding performance based on individual abilities. Both factors have significant implications for our emergency services profession's continued growth and development.

The study focused on unraveling the relationship between diversity fatigue and meritocracy, specifically examining how they intersect with race, gender, and rank among fire service professionals. Through this investigation, I aimed to shed light on the important dynamics that may impact inclusion and equity efforts within our profession. By exploring these connections, I sought to understand the potential challenges and opportunities in promoting a more inclusive and equitable environment for all individuals in the fire service.

Methodological Approach

The research adopted a quantitative methodology to investigate the concepts. An online survey tool was used to collect information from the surveys that were sent to 184 fire service professionals throughout the United States. This approach aimed to ensure a wide representation of participants from various fire departments.

The study focused on unraveling the relationship between diversity fatigue and meritocracy, specifically examining how they intersect with race, gender, and rank among fire service professionals.

Valuable insights were derived from the collected data by employing several statistical techniques. These included calculating means (averages) and standard deviations (measures of variability), conducting analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine differences between groups, performing the Mann-Whitney U test to compare two independent groups, and utilizing descriptive statistics to summarize, describe the data, and explore relationships between variables.

The survey used in the study was adapted from a previous work, "Diversity

fatigue: A survey for measuring attitudes towards diversity enhancing efforts in academia," with appropriate permission. The adapted survey was then validated to ensure internal consistency, meaning that the questions within the survey were reliable and consistently measured the intended constructs.

Key Findings

The study revealed that diversity fatigue levels were relatively low, with a mean score of 1.89 (Scale 1–5). The results indicated that fire service professionals exhibit resilience in the face of diversity-related initiatives. The mean score of 2.97 (Scale 1–5) for meritocracy highlighted the significance placed on recognizing individual performance based on talent and ability.

A notable finding was the negative correlation between diversity fatigue and meritocracy ($r_p = -0.61$, $p < .001$). As diversity fatigue increases, the perception of a fair and merit-based system declines, potentially hindering the path to diversity, inclusivity, and equity. This finding may be interpreted that as fire service stakeholders emphasize diversity, the idea that members are hired or promoted may only be provided those opportunities with less emphasis on ability (merit). Race emerged as a significant factor, with variations observed in diversity fatigue. However, there were no significant variations in diversity fatigue based on gender and rank.

Regarding meritocracy, the study found significant disparities related to race and gender. Females and whites/Caucasians exhibited higher levels of belief in meritocracy, underscoring the importance of recognizing talent and ability. In contrast, Blacks/African Americans and non-whites did not report as high levels of diversity fatigue compared to their white/Caucasian counterparts. Gender, race, and rank were identified as influential predictors of both diversity fatigue and meritocracy.

Promoting inclusivity and equity within the fire service is essential for our professional growth, enhancing collaboration, and effectively serving our diverse communities.

Implications

It is important to note that these findings may not apply to the entire fire profession throughout the United States, but they still hold significant implications within our profession. By recognizing the inverse relationship between diversity fatigue and meritocracy, we understand how these factors interconnect and influence diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Identifying the specific opportunities associated with gender, race, and rank enables leaders in different municipalities to develop targeted strategies that foster a more inclusive and equitable environment within the emergency services profession.

Moving Forward

Although the study reveals relatively low levels of diversity fatigue, there remains ample room for further exploration into the dynamics of diversity and meritocracy in the emergency services profession. Future research efforts should offer deeper insights, allowing us to establish policies and practices that promote inclusivity, fairness, and equal opportunities for all firefighters. Moreover, EMS leaders can benefit from understanding the implications of diversity fatigue and meritocracy within their organizations, as it can assist them in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.

Promoting inclusivity and equity within the fire service is essential for our professional growth, enhancing collaboration, and effectively serving our diverse communities. By acknowledging and tackling the challenges of diversity fatigue while embracing the benefits of a fair and impartial system, we pave the way for a more inclusive fire and emergency medical services profession in the twenty-first century. PM

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PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

Police departments are driving community engagement efforts and prioritizing relationships with the communities they serve.

BY POOJA BACHANI DI GIOVANNA AND PETE PETERSON

An initial consideration of a statement containing public engagement and public safety might beg the question, How are they even related? A close follow-up question might be, What is there to engage the public about when it comes to public safety, and how would you even do it?

These questions speak to a collective assumption that police officers have always existed in our communities and their presence is as ubiquitous as schools or houses of worship. The police force we see now is a relatively modern invention in response to changing ideas about public order.[1] American policing in the 1700s was very informal; community members volunteered for night watch shifts. This system was in

place until industrialization and urbanization in the north warranted a more comprehensive public safety infrastructure. In the south, more organized policing took the form of patrols. During the 1800s, policing varied based on the region and communities. It was not until the early 1900s that policing became the standardized, professional system that served as the foundation for what we see today.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century, and in the last few years we have seen community perspectives toward policing shift significantly, calling attention to a changing paradigm in our neighborhoods. A recent National Community Survey cited in Polco's "Top 10 Community Needs According to U.S. Residents" shows decreasing levels of community trust in local government and public throughout the pandemic.[2] However, according to Polco's research, public safety is third on the list of community needs. Results from The National Law Enforcement Survey show that the top public safety concerns in order in 2022 are drug abuse, DUIs, traffic problems, burglaries/thefts/robberies, and domestic violence.

Recent research reveals two major challenges for public safety: (1) communities are increasingly distrustful of police, and (2) public safety is sometimes forced to be "security" for poorly designed meetings. Both challenges place public safety in a precarious position and prompt a close examination of the relationship between public safety and the communities they serve.

Darryl McAllister is the retired police chief of Union City, California, and an instructor for the California Police Chiefs Association training unit. He is keenly aware of how public trust is interwoven with public safety and the subsequent challenges that connection presents.

In his view, "Public trust is the most resonant social mandate for all of government, but public safety, especially in local municipalities, is the most visceral touchpoint for community constituents' demands of their public services."

Furthermore, "Despite the vision of local councils or governing bodies, or the efficacy of other municipal services like public works, economic development, or even fire services, it is up to the police organization to drive a robust public engagement and relationship-building effort for community trust to be viable at all."

A Changing Paradigm

Whereas historically the determining power rested on public safety to ascertain the kind of police department a community needed, current challenges are shifting that decision-making power toward the communities. This process is opening up space for public safety to drive community engagement efforts and prioritize building relationships with the communities they serve.

In La Mesa, California, the Police Department hosted community input sessions for feedback on how they can improve their services to meet community needs.[3] "The community sessions are part of a comprehensive study that aims to enhance the department's operational efficiency and responsiveness." These sessions provide community members with the opportunity to help shape what public safety looks like in their communities.

Across the country in Travelers Rest, South Carolina, the local police department has initiated a community survey process to develop a better understanding of community perception and needs.[4] The survey asks questions on crime perception, changes in resident activities, priority of issues, and assessment of police department efforts. This comprehensive survey will not only enhance the police department's understanding of the community they serve, but will also help inform future decision-making processes.

While in most cases community input on hiring is primarily in the case of bringing on a new

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police chief, some cities are extending the invitation to other roles as well. Champaign, Illinois, invites community members to be a part of the hiring process for police officers as resident panelists.[5] "Community members on the interview panel will meet with each applicant and participate in structured panel interviews to assess each candidate's qualifications." Following the panel interview, residents provide their feedback to the police chief for consideration in the hiring process.

From the community perspective, these processes allow community members the opportunity to be a part of important aspects of public safety and get to know their public safety officers. From the public safety organization perspective, community engagement processes allow public safety officers to truly get to know the communities they serve and begin building trust.

Community Policing

As many in local government know, successful public engagement rests on trust and it is not something that happens overnight. The first step in becoming acquainted with your community happens months or years before any public engagement process. Within public safety, that first step is community policing or the process by which police officers prioritize getting to know the residents they serve. Community policing is not community engagement, but rather the foundation for public engagement. When done successfully, community policing can yield:

- Strong partnerships with the community.
- Proactive, non-enforcement activities.
- Community-based efforts to address problems.
- Greater cooperation.

Community policing initiates the trust-building process that is pivotal for successful community engagement processes. However, it "cannot be achieved nor sustained through one-off events or clever programs, but rather by instilling an organization-wide culture and philosophy of everyday engagement that embodies humility, procedural justice, a willingness to share and learn, and the pillars of twentieth century policing," according to McAllister.

The Foundation of Collaborative Success

Public engagement, simply put, is the dialogue between local governments and their communities before, during, and after a decision-making process. It is not the local government selling or convincing the community on an idea or a complaints meeting. Instead, public engagement is a process in which communities are invited to provide feedback and input. In public safety this can take many forms, from small, informal conversations between community members and public safety officers, such as "Coffee with a Cop," to larger, focused policy discussions in facilitated town hall meeting formats and participating on hiring panels.

Like few other departments within local government, public engagement by police departments spans the "spectrum" from relationship-building and public information to empowering residents to take a larger role in their community's public safety.[6] This makes it all the more important that public safety leaders (like other municipal officials) define their terms—being very clear about the "why question" when engaging our residents—at the beginning of any public process.

McAllister put it best: "There is no familiarity that would allay the fear of being vulnerable. So, it stands to reason that if public trust is the commodity police desperately seek from their constituents, it makes sense that they truly get to know those from whom they hope to garner trust—and that those constituents have an opportunity to truly get to know their policing providers." PM

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

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[2] https://blog.polco.us/top-ten-things-residents-want-in-their-communities

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Helping First Responders Stay Psychologically Well

Responding to emergencies can take a toll on mental health, but there are science-backed ways to help.

BY ZARA ABRAMS

When it comes to staying psychologically healthy, police, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) face a conundrum. They regularly enter traumatic circumstances: responding to suicides, watching a critically injured patient die, and risking their own lives. At the same time, they are usually the ones providing help—rather than asking for it.

"First responder culture is unique. When the building is on fire or someone's shooting, and everyone else is running away, we're running towards it," said Richard Brown, a retired firefighter, the department chaplain and peer support lead for the Calaveras Consolidated Fire Protection District in Northern California, and California delegate for the National Volunteer Firefighter Council (NVFC).

For that reason, it can take special training and psychological interventions to address the unique challenges they face—and experts say it's critically important to do so. Without science-based support, first responders who experience trauma have an elevated risk for post-traumatic stress (PTS), depression, and even suicide, according to a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration guide for first responders published in 2018.[1]

"This is different than the kind of slow burn stress that can accompany an occupation like being a lawyer or an accountant," said Dennis Stolle,

JD, PhD, senior director of applied psychology at the American Psychological Association. "That makes it very important for first responders to have access to immediate mental health services with providers who are skilled at helping people work through traumatic events."

Stress on the Job

On top of the unexpected, dangerous, and highly traumatic circumstances they encounter on a regular basis, first responders also face ongoing stress due to the nature of their jobs, said Thomas Britt, PhD, a professor of psychology at Clemson University in South Carolina. "First responders have to deal with time pressure, heavy workloads, and shift work that interferes with their circadian rhythms," he said.

Those on-the-job issues are closely tied to clinical concerns such as anxiety, depression, and suicide risk, according to the 2022 National Wellness Survey for Public Safety Personnel.[2] "It's within-the-agency stressors that really seem to have the strongest link to emotional pain," said Colby Mills, PhD, a police psychologist in private practice in Fairfax County, Virginia, who helped administer the survey.

Certain groups of first responders may face additional challenges. Volunteer firefighters, who make up 65% of all firefighters in the United States, often work second jobs to earn a living.[3] Those based in smaller communities may face a high likelihood of encountering a victim they know during a crisis. And other workers who are peripherally involved in emergency response—dispatchers who hear panicked mothers over the phone, tow truck drivers who see the aftermath of deadly car crashes—may also need support, Brown said.

That impact, according to research, can include PTS symptoms, depression, anxiety, and a heightened risk of suicide.[4] It can also lead to problems at home—what psychologists call "spillover"—including conflict with a partner or child.[5]

When these problems arise, police, firefighters, and EMTs may prefer to handle them on their own, Britt said. The highly cohesive culture of emergency response leaves many workers reticent to ask for help for fear of appearing weak or letting a team member down. In Mills's survey of public safety personnel, stigma around mental health concerns was also among the top reasons people chose to suffer in silence.

How to Help

Fortunately, there are research-backed ways to help. Here are some of ICMA's recommendations for caring for the mental health of first responders:

Be ready to respond when a critical incident occurs. Structured interventions, including Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)[6] and Stress First Aid,[7] can help first responders avoid long-term mental harm after a crisis. The programs teach skills that anyone in a department can learn and use—not just a mental health care provider.

In California, Brown relies on the CISM framework for both casual and formal peer-support groups to help volunteer firefighters debrief after particularly stressful incidents. "Getting training is critical because you can have someone well-meaning trying to help, but actually creating more of a problem," he said.

Connect responders with trained and vetted providers. Some individuals may need one-on-one support, in which case it's important to find a mental health care professional with relevant expertise, such as a National Emergency Response and Public Safety Center certification or experience working with first responders.[8] "We can make it easier for people to seek help by having more of us out there who know their culture," Mills said.

Through its Share the Load program, the NVFC offers a directory of approved behavioral health professionals, a helpline, and a toolkit for building psychologically healthy fire departments.[9] The Fraternal Order of Police also interviews and vets providers trained in the culture of law enforcement.[10]

Build a healthy department culture around mental health. Research shows that training programs such as Reach Out,[11] REBOOT,[12] Responder Strong,[13] and other efforts[14] can improve psychological well-being, supportive behaviors, and behavioral health care utilization among first responders. Adding opportunities to recover from work stress,[15] including more downtime during and between intense shifts, can also help.

Departments bear responsibility for making systemic changes rather than simply expecting workers to become more resilient, Britt said. One of the best ways to encourage help-seeking is to start from the top. In Fairfax County, former Police Chief Ed Roessler frequently spoke about his mental health within the department and in the media.[16] "If there's a credible person at the top promoting this message and leading by example, that does more than a provider could ever do to reduce stigma," Mills said. PM

This article was developed in partnership with the American Psychological Association.

ENDNOTES

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ZARA ABRAMS is a freelance science writer based in Los Angeles. She writes about psychology, neuroscience, and health.

Five Tips for Helping Your Organization as an ACAO

BY SHANNA SIMS-BRADISH

As ACAO, you play a **crucial role.** Here's how to make the most of it.

Local government managers face complex issues each and every day. An assistant chief administrative officer (ACAO) can play an important role in not only helping a local government manager serve their community, but also working internally to support and lead key initiatives that result in a more resilient organization. Here are five tips on how an ACAO can help their organization.

Tip #1: Be Prepared

The motto of the Boy Scouts is "be prepared." This same motto can be used for city management.

It is critical for an ACAO to be well versed in how their organization works. This involves not only understanding their community's formal structure such as budget, organizational chart, policies, and procedures. It also involves understanding an organization's informal structure, or how things really get done. An agile ACAO not only has this understanding, they take the time and effort to keep their knowledge and skills ready when needed.

ACAOs should take the opportunity to observe and learn from their managers on a daily basis. Stay up to speed on key projects. Learn how they work with elected officials, leaders in the community, and fellow employees. You never know when something unexpected will occur, and when the local government manager will look to the ACAO for assistance. Make sure you are putting yourself in the best position to provide this assistance by working on preparation on a regular basis.

Tip #2: Serve as a Sounding Board for Your Local Government Manager

Local government can be stressful. It's important that local government managers have a place where they can talk through and brainstorm options for day-to-day challenges. An ACAO often has the ability to understand the dynamics of situations, but they are also able to help the manager work through choices by serving an invaluable role as a sounding board for their ideas in a safe environment.

An ACAO that has a strong relationship with their manager can provide an ideal environment for the manager to step back and look at a situation with a new perspective and a fresh set of eyes. Often, the simple step of listening and providing support can benefit the local government manager and the organization.

Tip #3: Be "Johnny-on-the-Spot"

The phrase *Johnny-on-the-spot* was first recorded in 1896 in the *New York Sun* newspaper. The phrase is often defined as "a person who is at hand whenever needed." As an ACAO, you are in an ideal situation to be Johnny-on-the-spot for your local government leader. Be willing to lead a new initiative that is identified by the governing body or your manager. These types of projects can often be great experience for an ACAO to not only increase their knowledge, but also to work within their organization on important issues.

ACAOs often play an invaluable role in helping wherever there is a need. This can mean everything from serving in an interim position during a vacancy to assisting when there is a complex project. In my career, I have served as an interim department director four times. All of these experiences have benefited the organization by providing continuity during a challenging time, but also allowed me to gain important experience.

Tip #4: Build Strong Relationships Internally

A great ACAO works on a daily basis not only to build strong relationships within your organization, but to also tend

SHANNA SIMS-BRADISH, ICMA-CM is assistant city manager of University Park, Texas.

An ACAO that has a strong relationship with their manager can provide an ideal environment for the manager to step back and look at a situation with a fresh set of eyes.

to these relationships so they become even stronger over time. The relationship with one's coworkers is crucial to one's ability to be effective in their ACAO responsibilities. An ACAO not only realizes the importance of these strong relationships, they also commit to creating and sustaining meaningful connections with employees at all levels within an organization. In addition to providing the foundation for an organization to thrive during challenging times, these relationships can provide the fuel for an ACAO to try new ideas, but also the wisdom to listen to what the organization thinks before acting.

Tip #5: Build Strong Relationships Externally

A community is made up of many different organizations and players, not just the local government. A strong ACAO not only recognizes the importance of creating strong bonds with local organizations and leaders, they also work to strengthen and renew these relationships every day.

Get to know your community through joining these organizations. These partnerships can include relationships with formal organizations such as the local school district or college, but this also includes relationships with more informal partners such as local Rotary clubs and nonprofits that are working in your community. An agile ACAO can help their manager by nurturing strong external connections that result in a higher quality of life for the entire community. PM

The Art of Influence: Converts of Belief into Action

BY GREG MCKENNA AND MEGAN DOAH

The best risk managers and claims professionals use their storytelling skills in requests for authority, claim reviews, and in the creation of plans of action.

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GREG MCKENNA holds a juris doctorate and has over 20 years of experience in claims management, litigation, governmental affairs, and public relations. Greg is a frequent industry speaker and content contributor and ICMA member. (linkedin.com/in/gjmckenna/)

This is the final article in a three-part series about the art of influence in public entities, using Aristotle's definition of the three ingredients necessary to influence others: ethos (trustworthiness), logos (logic), and pathos (empathy). This final article will discuss how risk managers can use pathos—the powerful role emotions play in the art of influence.

Have you ever heard someone in the middle of a debate or negotiation use the phrase, "Change my mind"?

On the surface, the tools we use to influence another person appear to be external. They include cohesively written documents, well-crafted auditory rhetoric, compelling graphical depictions, or engaging experiences. But make no mistake, these external actions carry an underlying biochemical message. In truth, the words, images, and structures we use in our arguments must elicit an internal emotional response within our listeners if we aim to influence another's brain chemistry, beliefs, and, ultimately, behavior.

Stories are the original, and still most effective, means to convey lessons through emotions. Let's take a closer look at the essential elements of storytelling. First, every story must have a "conflict," which is an escalation of emotion that leads to a decision point during the story. Describing conflict not only advances the storyline but induces neurotransmitters within your listener that increase their attention span and raise cognitive processing abilities. These uncomfortable hormones set the stage for changed behavior.

Next, iconic stories show characters who are vulnerable enough to change their ways. Stories that spark this emotion enable your listeners to change their mindset. Stories featuring characters who change their perspectives are like a laboratory for our listeners. They demonstrate that the courage to change is frequently rewarded in the end.

Lastly, effective stories must follow a specific pattern known as the "story arc." We know this from our earliest experiences. Stories describe sequential events over time and contain a setting, rising action, conflict, and resolution. Think about any classic story introduction—

"It was a dark and stormy night"; "In a galaxy far, far away." Introductions like these signal to the listener that the show is about to begin. A storyteller essentially enters a pact with her listener every time she triggers one of these opening lines. The listener pays attention in exchange for the lesson that will be revealed.

Commentators have long chronicled the types of story-based lessons that effective leaders should have in their arsenal. The "origin story" is the kind of story that moves your audience to get started and carries an undertone of dread if no action is taken. It builds suspense and creates a compelling motivation to understand the "why" behind an initiative.

Leaders who have a hero's journey or case study will parallel stories where the listener finds out how the hero adapted their skill set and knowledge to rise against a common enemy. This is effective in the power of persuasion.

Lastly, leaders need to have a collection of stories that demonstrate a triumphant resolution that rewards the listener for paying attention through the end of the story arc.

How does this apply to public risk managers? Those who leverage these storytelling elements typically find it easier to affect change in their organizations.

Building an Origin Story. About six years ago, I was moderating a panel on workplace wellness and risk control at an industry conference. One of my panelists was an esteemed claims manager for a large public school district. She opened her section of the presentation with one of the most compelling project origin story openers I ever heard. "We saved a man's life last week," she said plainly. This industry leader went on to detail how the district offered wellness activities and check-ups for their bus drivers onsite between the hours of drop-off and pick-up. The goal of the initiative was to help improve their health outcomes and employee engagement.

As part of a wellness event, a nurse case manager performed a venous scan that identified a blood clot in the leg of a school bus driver, which was removed through surgery. The medical staff commented that if left untreated, the clot would have caused major systemic damage, potentially while driving his bus route with school children aboard. Since that time, the program has evolved and expanded to include healthy activities, nutritional counseling, and a greater appreciation for the little changes that can make a big difference—perhaps even saving lives.

Follow the Hero's Journey. Public risk managers are often thrust unexpectedly into novel challenges. At these moments, seemingly in the middle of the maelstrom, the risk manager is called to summon a stabilizing force. There is no more appropriate example than the ways public risk managers across North America responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a rich, modern history of stories wherein risk managers found inner strength, mentorship, guidance, trusted partners, and newly acquired skills to help public entities of all sizes navigate uncharted waters.

In one case, I heard a municipal risk manager talk about pivoting one of the nation's largest coastal cities into a work-from-home environment. Before 2020, such a move would not have been possible. But like the hero's journey archetype, she found the resources, the partners, and the methods to change the city's "ordinary world" into a new reality.

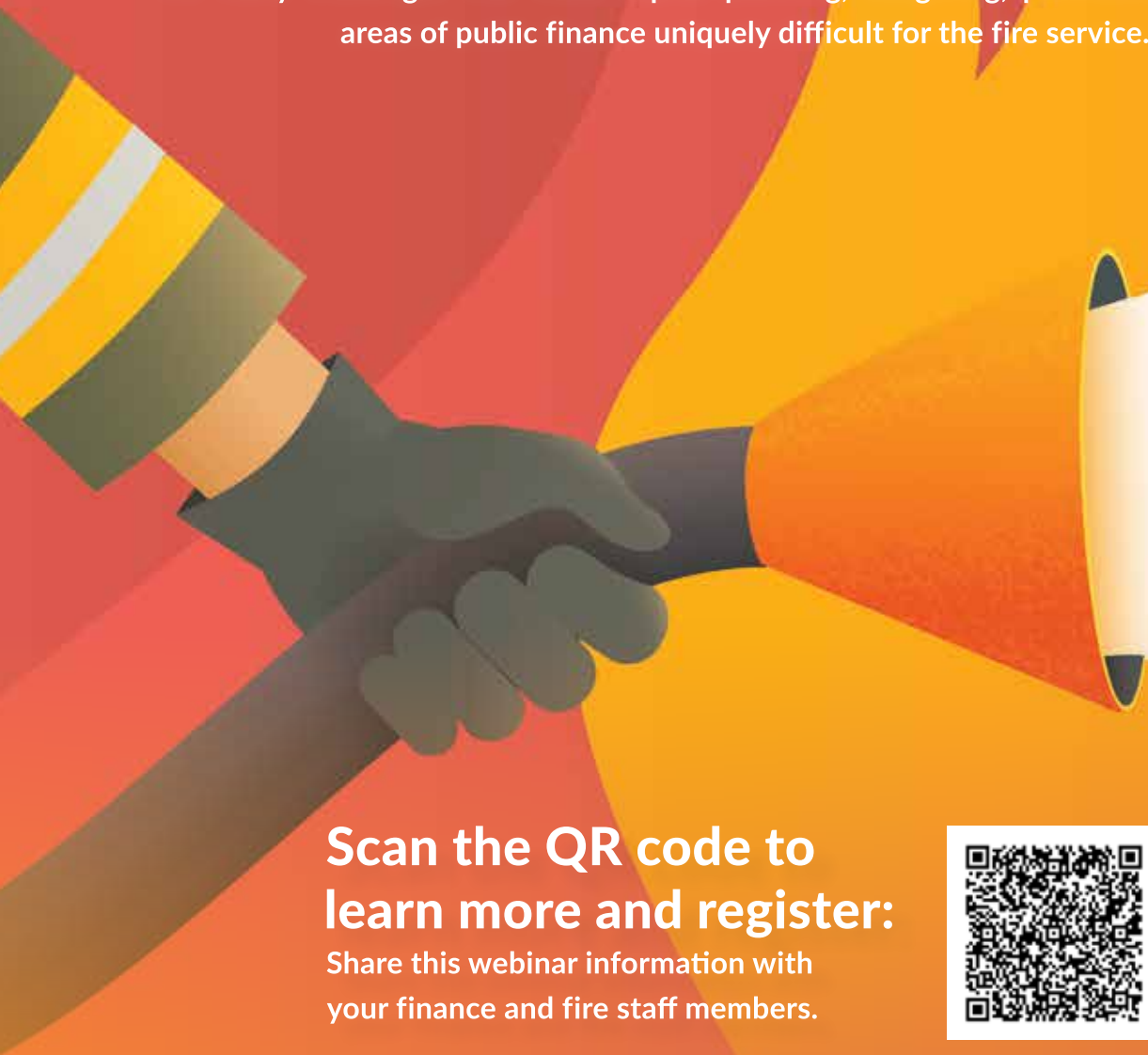
A Triumphant Resolution. In exchange for the listener's attention, the storyteller must close the loop. The ending is the story's reward. Across the value chain of risk and insurance, there are few stories more rewarding than an injured worker who triumphs over adversity. Claims, by definition, are short stories. They are composed of settings, characters, conflict, and, most importantly, resolution.

At our organization's annual recognition day, our top resolution managers take the stage to share their most compelling stories of workers who've overcome tragedy and loss. These vignettes are shining reminders of the lives behind the claims. The best risk managers and claims professionals incorporate these storytelling skills in requests for authority, claim reviews, and in the creation of plans of action. By shifting the perspective from claim details to a composed story arc, with emphasis on the ending, we can better help injured public employees back to service.

We become the stories we tell. We know this because stories transform us, literally influencing our emotional and biochemical makeup. When properly told, stories contain structural elements that will elicit powerful neurotransmitters that can alter the mental state of the listener, thereby facilitating a behavior change. When combined with high levels of creditability and equally sound principles of logic, the emotional impact that comes from effective storytelling will complete the triad and enable public risk managers to optimize their influence within their organizations. PM

Bringing Finance and Fire Together

GFOA and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) are working together to develop resources to promote better collaboration between finance officers and fire chiefs. The upcoming webinar, *10 Steps to Better Collaboration Between Finance and Fire*, on **November 17** will feature both finance officers and fire personnel talking about how to improve communication between these two departments and address the many challenges that make capital planning, budgeting, purchasing, and other areas of public finance uniquely difficult for the fire service.



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