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ICMA-CM
County Manager
Johnson County, Kansas
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Share your thoughts on PM magazine by emailing us at pm@icma.org. Submit an article proposal to pm@icma.org or learn more at icma.org/writeforus.

Strong Bonds Forged in Service

BY MARC A. OTT

Together local government, the military, veterans, and military families make excellent partners.

At the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference in Austin, Texas, Joseph D'Arco of Verona, New Jersey, stepped onto the stage. He was being honored for 55 years in the profession and he started his brief remarks by saying he began his life of service in the military in Vietnam before joining local government. He also mentioned how pleased he was to see so many of the more than 5,500 attendees with Veteran ribbons on their badges.

It felt like we all sat up a little taller in our seats at that moment, proud of those many veterans sitting among us. Some of the most rewarding partnerships I have been fortunate enough to cultivate in my years in local government have been with the military—both at the garrison/base level and on a personal level. And I know that most of ICMA's city, county, and town managers would say the same thing.



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

Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

For example, when I was city manager of Austin, we formed a relationship with Fort Cavazos, now named Fort Hood.

**To our members
who have served
in the military
and those who
are still serving,
a heartfelt
thank you!**

I spotted potential synergy with the city's Zero Waste initiative and a plan by the garrison to divert 85% of the construction debris from a major building project away from the landfill. That connection led to the discovery of the many similarities between the post's departments and processes and Austin's, where almost every one of my department heads had a counterpart at Fort Cavazos. We also worked with the post on helping to transition retiring military personnel to a second career with the city. Austin's manager of fleet services

especially benefited from the expertise of mechanics transitioning out of the military. Because military mechanics leave the service without equipment, we offered several benefits, including a "tool allowance" as a bonus for signing on with the city.

These types of partnerships with our military installations are often longstanding and offer cost savings and infrastructure resiliency. At this year's conference, we held a session on intergovernmental collaboration for mutual success. The city of Schertz, Texas, shared that it had reduced costs



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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.



Veteran Joseph D'Arco of Verona, New Jersey, honored at the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference for 55 years in the profession.

and created efficiencies through their EMS partnership with Joint Base San Antonio.

Hiring Veterans—ICMA Support

On a personal level, I formed a solid relationship during my time in Austin with Fort Cavazos Garrison Commander Mark Freitag. Mark is now the city manager of Westminster, Colorado, and as he was retiring from his years of military

service, we talked about how to best position his skill set to move into a leadership role in local government. My experience is not unique. This video (youtube.com/watch?v=63e3rSIwomo) describes how one local government leader, Scott Trainor of Fountain, Colorado, helped mentor transitioning veteran Darrin Tangeman of Truro, Massachusetts. Darrin has also served as a past chair and current member of the ICMA Veterans Committee.

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Darrin and Scott worked together to create the flagship of what has grown into ICMA's Veterans Local Government Management Fellowship (VLGMF). The VLGMF is a DOD SkillBridge program that places separating servicemembers with local government organizations where they work full time for up to four months, at no cost to the organization. With more than 200,000 members of the military transitioning to the civilian workforce every year, the VLGMF program is a great way to bring trained leaders with diverse skillsets into local government teams. Dean Huard, a retired Army lieutenant colonel, is one of our most recent success stories. Dean performed his fellowship with Georgetown, Texas, and went directly into a city manager position with the Village of the Hills, Texas.

The Veterans Committee and ICMA's Lynn Philips, who leads our veterans programs and is a veteran herself, are outstanding resources for all that ICMA can offer to both communities and transitioning veterans.

Some of the most rewarding partnerships I have been fortunate enough to cultivate in my years in local government have been with the military—both at the garrison/ base level and on a personal level.

Lynn points out that 70% of military families and 16.2 million veterans are residents of our communities and are an important resource. Lynn suggests watching this video (youtube.com/watch?v=4BPXtaWcku0), which covers resources and several key topics through the eyes of our members.

Celebrating Veterans and their Families

Two years ago, ICMA established the Veterans Recognition Award as a way for members to say thank you to a local government professional who has served or is still serving. The application opens every year in the fall. Countless small towns and large cities and counties will celebrate the sacrifices and service of our troops, our veterans, and their families on Veterans Day on November 11. After the parades, festivals, and other events have faded, ICMA will keep that spirit of gratitude alive through its many veterans initiatives. To our members who have served and those who are still serving, a heartfelt thank you! **RM**

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Honesty and Integrity: The Core of the Public Service Calling | BY JESSICA COWLES

Tenet 3 offers guidance to merit trust and confidence placed in local government professionals.

As we look forward to celebrating

the 100th anniversary of the adoption of the ICMA Code of Ethics by members at the 1924 Annual Conference in Montreal, it is important to take a moment to appreciate how the Code guides our professional and personal lives. Tenet 3 of the Code advises members to “Demonstrate by word and action the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity in all public, professional, and personal relationships in order that the member may merit the trust and respect of the elected and appointed officials, employees, and the public.”

Every Member Must Adhere to Tenet 3

Because of its importance, this tenet applies to all in ICMA regardless of whether the member is actively in service to a local government, supporting the profession as a consultant, or permanently retired. You can read Tenet 3, along with the entire ICMA Code of Ethics, at icma.org/page/icma-code-ethics.

Kevin Woodhouse’s article in the March 2020 edition of *PM*, “Strengthening Your Moral Compass to Overcome Ethical Roadblocks,” is a great starting point for consideration of this issue and is worth re-reading.¹

As we gathered in Austin for the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference, the membership was a source of inspiration for how this value is demonstrated in the profession. Just a few examples:

1. Standing up to elected officials because they are asking a manager to do something unethical, even if it means the manager pays the ultimate price in getting fired.
2. Doing the right thing when no one is watching as those that occupy the top of the organization chart with little immediate oversight can attest.
3. Demonstrating strength, humility, and character in helping a community heal from tragedy.

The In Memoriam portion of the opening ceremony in Austin always sparks meaningful reflection on our moral compass that guides the way we approach each situation, and indeed our lives. This moral compass for me means digging deeper than you ever have before to persevere through personally difficult circumstances with the assistance of family, friends, and colleagues.

In late November 2022, I suffered a hemorrhagic stroke, then underwent brain surgery. My life hung in the balance in the ICU, but I was unaware of this reality at the time. As hard as those few weeks were for my body, the work of recovering my mind began at once and in earnest. Learning to eat, walk, talk, and drive again followed. Bless the creators of spell check these days! I experience victories and setbacks along the way and perhaps always will.



JESSICA COWLES

is ethics director
at ICMA
(jcowles@icma.org).



Perspective has become poignant for me because when everything else is stripped away, your moral compass remains. It is one of the characteristics that define us as human beings. Parents, guardians, education, religion, and work culture silently guide us as we address our struggles. What is right? What is wrong? How should I proceed?

Tenet 3 Guides a Public Servant's Heart

A quick Google search illustrates that most codes of ethics or codes of conduct stress how critical it is to demonstrate honesty and integrity since these characteristics define any personal or professional approach. Examples from other associations include the American Society for Public Administration, American Planning Association's Code for the American Institute of Certified Planners, American Library Association, and National Association of Social Workers.

Perspective has become poignant for me because when everything else is stripped away, your moral compass remains.

Going a step further, I would say the commitment to honesty and integrity guides our life as public servants. I'm guessing most members do not choose this profession to see their name on a building or for the paycheck; a life in public service means doing what is right for the community and Tenet 3 is how we carry out that vision.

I have always liked the Warren Buffet quote, "Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." Last week I saw this quotation painted in one of the rooms at my local library and now I know why it resonates! It is what we do in public service: we work toward the

greater good for all. We are drawn to this hard work—such as offering solutions to thorny problems—and we engage with employees, elected officials, and the community to make it all happen. We use our moral compass as embodied in the principles of the ICMA Code of Ethics to perform this important work.

What does Tenet 3 mean to you? How does it shape your professional and personal conduct? Write me at jcowles@icma.org and share your perspective. I look forward to it! **PM**

ENDNOTE

¹ <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/strengthening-your-moral-compass-overcome-ethical-roadblocks>

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The Value of Employee Retention: The Case for Staying with One Community

BY SCOTT TRUJILLO
AND PAOLO BELTRAN

Staying in one organization is highly unusual nowadays, but committing to a lifelong career within a single municipal government organization offers profound mutual benefits.

In the ever-evolving landscape of career mobility, committing to a lifelong career with a single municipal government organization might seem unconventional and unusual. A closer examination of the benefits associated with staying with that employer reveals a host of advantages that contribute to the employee, employer, and the community. Moreover, in an era where discussions about employee retention are pervasive, there exists a compelling parallel that often goes unnoticed: the benefits of committing one's career to a single city or county.

We have a combined 37 years of service in our respective cities where our careers first blossomed and where we continue to work to this day. In our roles as deputy city managers, we are eager to highlight the wealth of advantages that have naturally emerged due to our service to a single agency over the years.

Deep Community Engagement and Investment

Being a fixture of our cities for as long as we have been, we have established profound and lasting connections with the community and its stakeholders. Our longstanding involvement has allowed us to earn the trust of our community,



Working in one city for our entire local government career has instilled a deep-rooted sense of ownership and responsibility in the community's success and well-being.

and our level of familiarity has enabled us to put forth recommendations to the governing body that resonate with our communities' unique traits and characteristics. For example, knowing that Lakewood residents' priorities were public safety, recreation programming, and infrastructure maintenance, a recently adopted sales tax measure focused its messaging on those essential items, resulting in the measure's successful passage.

Local government is often said to be the most trusted level of governance as it is the government closest and most impactful to the people. Taking



SCOTT TRUJILLO

is deputy city manager of Indio, California.



PAOLO BELTRAN is

deputy city manager of Lakewood, California.

that further, long-term local government employees are often seen as trusted pillars of the community, having witnessed and contributed to the development and progress of the city over the years. As long-term employees, we have also developed a profound investment in the community beyond “the job.” We are all here to serve the public, but working in one city for our entire local government career has instilled a deep-rooted sense of ownership and responsibility in the community’s success and well-being. Because we can identify systemic issues, we also become catalysts for positive change in our communities.

Institutional Knowledge and Organizational Continuity

Organizations often have a unique history, culture, and institutional memory that cannot be fully understood without spending considerable time within them. Working for a single government agency has allowed us to deeply understand its values, traditions, and history, giving us insight into how the community may react to specific policy decisions. Our tenures are also beneficial concerning projects, as we have seen how much the community has changed over the years and have tailored capital improvement and development projects to the needs and desires of the community. For example, in Indio, California, the residents fully supported the city’s efforts to construct a new



Long-term local government employees are often seen as trusted pillars of the community, having witnessed and contributed to the development and progress of the city over the years.

state-of-the-art public safety campus for our police and fire personnel.

Additionally, our collective experience has instructional value as we advance for the corps of city officials that will follow us. The long-standing staff member is a mentor, a faithful conduit of organizational tradition, and a potential “early warning” system (i.e., “We tried that once, but it failed badly. Here is why it did.”)

Stable Leadership and Deeper Bonds with Coworkers

Our work colleagues see that our climb up the ladder over the years in one organization fosters a sense of loyalty and validation that they, too, can stay in one place and make it a career. As we have steadily progressed to our current executive-level positions, it also signals to our coworkers that our organizations value familiarity and stability in leadership positions. Longevity also deepens bonds with coworkers. Longstanding work relationships improve productivity, higher levels of trust, better job satisfaction, and overall happiness and well-being.

Given the benefits above, how can an organization foster an environment that encourages employees to remain in one organization? Here are some ideas:

- **Cultivate a positive organizational culture.** Foster a culture of trust, respect, and open communication where employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions and ideas. Celebrate achievements, milestones, and employee contributions to create a sense of belonging and recognition.
- **Offer professional development opportunities and advancement milestones.** Allow employees to take on leadership roles, lead projects, or head teams, which gives them a sense of ownership and responsibility within the organization. Establish a clear promotional structure to provide growth opportunities for current employees.

- **Prioritize work-life balance.** If possible, implement flexible work arrangements or telecommuting options to help employees balance their personal and professional lives. Respect employees’ time off.
- **Recognize and celebrate long-term employees.** Acknowledge and celebrate anniversaries and achievements of long-term employees to show that the organization appreciates loyalty and dedication.
- **Foster a sense of ownership and investment by involving employees in decision-making.** Solicit employees’ opinions and involve them in matters directly impacting their work. Consider forming employee advisory

Being a fixture of our cities for as long as we have been, we have established strong, lasting connections with the community and its stakeholders.

groups or committees to encourage collaborative decision-making.

Our similar experiences as long-tenured employees have given us a unique perspective that has broadened over time. Staying in one organization is highly unusual nowadays, as the modern professional landscape encourages career exploration and change. However, committing to a lifelong career within a single municipal government organization offers profound benefits: lasting community relationships, the accumulation of invaluable institutional knowledge, stability, and the creation of a legacy through impactful service. Individuals who opt for this dedicated path in public service find profound satisfaction in the knowledge that their tireless efforts have left an indelible mark on the communities they have faithfully served. **PM**

County Leadership

in Dismantling Barriers to Economic Opportunity

Three counties in ICMA's Economic Mobility and Opportunity Cohort elaborate on their reimagined approaches to boosting the upward mobility of their residents.

BY ANNA MITCHELL, JESSI ATCHESON,
AND LAURA GODDEERIS

Throughout this year, 10 communities have come together to create ICMA's Economic Mobility and Opportunity (EMO) Cohort. Individually and collectively, these local government teams have explored ways to enhance their residents' financial security, sense of power and autonomy, and sense of belonging to their communities.

As participants in the cohort, the teams received

small grants to advance their work in housing, job opportunities and business development, engaging vulnerable populations, support for working families, and more, made possible by ICMA's partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

For *PM's* counties issue, we highlight the three counties participating in the cohort and what they can offer to their peers looking to reimagine

El Paso County, Texas



processes or approaches to enhance upward mobility of their residents.

San Juan County, Utah, is a sparsely populated county consisting mostly of breathtaking national park land. “Our population here is just over 51% Native American. Ideally, that would be reflective in government roles in the county as well, and it currently is not,” said Mack McDonald, county administrator. Through conversations with partners at other levels of government in the region, it became apparent that they were also having difficulty in filling roles that would seem to offer ladders to increased income, benefit, and retirement opportunities, among many other things needed to boost upward mobility for the Native American population. The San Juan County team has since been working to inventory the types of government positions available and assess what barriers may be discouraging their native population from seeking such roles.

El Paso County zeroed in on a specific barrier known to impact their workforce: a lack of childcare options for working households and families.

On the far west side of Texas along the Mexican border, El Paso County zeroed in on a specific barrier known to impact their workforce: a lack of childcare options for working households and families. While this is not a situation unique to El Paso, county chief aide Lorena Rodriguez noted that beyond a general lack of providers, which is especially challenging for single parent families, there is a particular lack of services available to third or overnight shift workers. These types of shifts are common in the area, given job opportunities associated with the U.S. border. Their efforts

have focused on gathering data on the unmet demand for childcare services among the workforce and employers, as well as trying to understand and lessen barriers to expanding the supply of providers. “When we think about the jobs that require round-the-clock employees, our main industries are health care and government and those are some of our highest paying industries,” said county director of strategic development Jose Landeros. “If there’s a barrier to entering those jobs because an individual may not have the childcare that they need, we really wanted to understand and figure out what it would take to evaluate the issue and then come up with tangible solutions.”

Chesterfield County, just south of Richmond in the Commonwealth of Virginia, could readily identify a number of supports critical to segments of their population. “Economic mobility is a priority in Chesterfield County as we work to address issues related to workforce development,



El Paso County EMO Cohort members

financial literacy, affordable housing, and education,” said James Worsley, deputy county administrator. But despite many well-intentioned services offered by the county and its partners, his team recognized an opportunity to enhance how they were promoted and delivered to residents that might not have the time, resources, awareness, or interest needed to take full advantage of the offerings. They worked to develop a wraparound service model offered through “mini conferences,” where residents can access various education and outreach programs in a single day and location. Transportation is provided, as are other incentives such as professional headshots and participation stipends.

Why Counties Are Taking the Lead Role on EMO Initiatives

For San Juan County, they knew that taking the lead role in career development for students and the Native American population was important because no other organization within their community was looking at this problem or trying to come up with solutions to help.

A meeting of the EMO Cohort in Detroit, Michigan



McDonald also noted a concern shared by other communities in the cohort: “Most students grow up here, but then move out to other communities, and even other states. We’ve lost 2% of our population since the census. Our team really must look at what we can do to keep our individuals here, especially our students.” They believe that connecting younger people in particular among their native population with career paths in government will yield multiple benefits to their families and the larger community.

El Paso County knew that taking the lead role in filling childcare gaps was important since their county is the regional unit of government in their community. Rodriguez and Landeros described the scenario as a bi-national, bi-state regional economy given its proximity to both Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. “This is an issue that doesn’t really understand geographic boundaries,” said Landeros. “Even when we compare ourselves to regional economies in our own state of Texas, those

are more homogenous than ours because we have two states, two countries, three distinct communities with a unique culture, but they share a lot of the same issues because we have cross-border movement not just across state lines but international boundaries.”

In the case of Chesterfield County, it was about elevating an already strong but necessary role in addressing their county’s needs in the areas of affordable housing, workforce development, education, and financial literacy. “Chesterfield County traditionally is a place where people of our community have come to seek information and resources and

this initiative really allowed us the opportunity to offer new and innovative economic mobility opportunities for those that live here in Chesterfield County,” said Worsley. “Our team members are on the front lines every day, seeing the needs that exist in our community in every way possible.”

While each is focusing on unique needs, several key themes have emerged from the cohort’s work addressing specific service gaps or barriers to catalyze systemic change.

Use of Data to Understand Conditions

El Paso County identified a local organization, Workforce

Solutions Borderplex, to be their biggest partner on this, with additional support from industry partners, including childcare providers. Landeros also emphasized that “a lot of our research is going to be based on survey data collection and direct engagement with industries. For these industry partners to be willing to share their insights and share their challenges in a candid way is going to be critical to this effort.”

For other communities interested in exploring local or regional data on evidence based predictors of mobility from poverty, the Urban Institute’s Mobility Metrics cover all U.S. counties and communities of over 75,000.¹

Intentional Community Engagement

For San Juan County, their approach is now giving them opportunity to establish a stronger relationship with the Native American community. Elaine Gizler, economic development/visitor services director, shared excitement for the “opportunity for us to get to know these students in the schools, talk to them, meet with them, show them the opportunities, and encourage them. Hopefully we’ll be able to encourage these young students to think about what their path forward is. Maybe



El Paso County



Chesterfield County EMO Cohort members

they'll find that these education and job opportunities might be something that they're interested in and will be able to stay in their community with access to even more resources."

McDonald agreed that the most important relationships for the government to foster are with their native population. He encourages other communities to "take the time to learn about and understand the people that you are working with, including their culture. Know your population, know the cultural sensitivities, get to know the people so you have a relationship already built if any concerns or problems arise."

Leveraging Community Partners

While local governments are uniquely positioned to implement policies and effect conditions that promote overall well-being and upward mobility for their residents, identifying and leveraging partnerships is essential to this work. Chesterfield County realized the importance of breaking county partners out of the silos they typically work in for a more unified effort than ever before.

Emily Ashley, director of community engagement and resources, shared that this work "really gave us the opportunity to make everything come together and to offer these opportunities for our young people and the underserved in our community. We have combined all of our experiences between the administrative office, community development office, and local organizations to provide an experience for our community that is comprehensive and helpful rather than provided in pieces that may be missed."

Outside of county government, she noted, "The YMCA was a critical partner, as well as a few Latino-led organizations. We've also been working with some of our business partners and our credit unions, which became crucial when providing financial literacy training. We have also worked with local educational institutions, such as Bright Point, Bryant & Stratton,



and Virginia State University. Bringing these partners together to get their viewpoint and share their lens is what has made this program stronger than what we have tried to accomplish in the past."

Small Changes Can Make Big Impacts

Landeros stresses that "you are not alone, and we all have the same or similar issues. When looking at long-term issues and long-term solutions, it's better to invest in an additional year of early childhood education than it is to have to invest in some of the social issues that come with a lack of sufficient education as the population ages, in terms of public health or increased criminal justice costs. You hate to look at it in dollars and cents, but sometimes that's kind of the argument that you need



in order to go out and garner resources, but really this is a long-term people issue."

Tina Shreve, managing director of workforce development for Chesterfield County, shares that "it seems overwhelming trying to tackle all of the issues associated with upward mobility, like you can't boil the ocean. I think we all wanted to miraculously do something really grand, but I think it's those baby steps that really matter. Even that one little workshop affected someone's life, hopefully for the better. We don't expect ourselves to go out and build a program without having input from the people that are going to be receiving the services. Sometimes in communities that is a strong miss, thinking that we know what is best without actually talking with the community."

ICMA has curated open-access, evidence-driven resources to help local governments in identifying, refining, and advancing local priorities for increasing upward mobility and decreasing inequities—from data sources to planning guidance to intervention examples and implementation support.² Visit icma.org/emo to access these resources and to learn more about archived and upcoming ICMA programming aimed at boosting upward mobility in communities. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ <https://upward-mobility.urban.org/metrics-and-evidence>

² <https://icma.org/local-government-leadership-economic-mobility-opportunity>

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The UNIQUE DIVERSITY of Counties

BY MICHAEL HULING



Geographic, cultural, and political diversity bring character to our counties, but also present challenges for local governments.

Growing up in San Diego, I was always captivated by the incredible diversity of the region. A common reflection of locals and tourists alike is how unique it is to be able to visit the beach, mountains, and desert all in the same day—or even in the same hour, depending on traffic. Even as a child, I could intuitively understand why this is something that we take pride in as San Diegans. Besides the vast range of possible activities and exploration, this geographic diversity is one of the things that makes San Diego *ours*, and we have no issue saying as much.

As I've gotten older, I have learned that the regional diversity of San Diego County goes far beyond its topography. Different parts of the county have different cultural and political values, which are a reflection of the history and people who have lived there. Instead of one consistent



“San Diego culture,” there are a multitude of cultures and subcultures present throughout the county. Likewise, the political sentiments that are dominant in some parts of the region are largely absent in others. Cities like Chula Vista, Carlsbad, and Santee have notably divergent geography, cultures, and politics, yet all belong to the same county. The same is true of my beloved hometown, Poway.

Now, as a resident and city planner in Clark County, Nevada, I am realizing that while San Diego’s diversity is certainly unique, there are plenty of other places that have similar heterogeneity. Clark County encompasses plenty of desert (believe me), but also robust urban areas, including The Strip, rural communities around the county, plenty of suburban neighborhoods, and even the

Mount Charleston community, which has a population of approximately 400 people. Not only are all these places within the geographic boundaries of Clark County, they are in unincorporated areas that are under the jurisdiction of the Clark County government, as opposed to incorporated city governments like Las Vegas and Henderson. And much like San Diego, many of these areas have their own unique history, culture, and politics.



Geographic Diversity

While not all counties may be as geographically diverse as San Diego or Clark County, many have some degree of variation that is relevant to the daily lives of residents, as well as the operations of government. Whether it’s utility connections or emergency services such as police and fire, topographical changes across a county’s landscape are essential to consider. In San Diego, the more central and eastern portions of the county, which are those further away from the coast, are much more prone to wildfires due to the local vegetation and ecosystems that are more susceptible to dry conditions. Recent rainstorms

Clark County, Nevada



A single city has only its political system to manage, but a county is tasked with overseeing the politics of every city and town within its jurisdiction.

in Clark County impacted some areas much more than others for several reasons, including their steep slopes, which significantly affect drainage capacity. In Mount Charleston, specifically, this destroyed major roads and prevented residents from being able to access or exit the area.¹

Sometimes these events simply cannot be foreseen or prevented, but in other cases, we fail to prepare adequately and suffer the consequences. A big part of such failure is not understanding—or, more accurately, not respecting—the disparate conditions in some areas of our counties. Governing in the context of geographic diversity means that we must have plans—both preventative and responsive—that reflect this diversity and the corresponding challenges. In more practical terms, the emergency flood plan for The Strip should look quite different than that of Mount Charleston, which is about 50 miles east and several thousand feet higher in elevation.

Cultural Diversity

Historically, geography has shaped culture in countless ways that are both explicit and subtle, and that's still the case today. Topography, climate, vegetation proximity to water,

and other geographical factors lead to a variety of traditions, mores, and sentiments that are embodied in everything from food and clothing to language and religion.² We may be able to escape our geography, but we

San Diego County



cannot dismiss how it impacts culture, which is true even at the county level.

In San Diego, the cultural diversity is evident as one drives from one side of the region to another. In Imperial Beach, which shares a border with Mexico, a majority of residents are Hispanic, and a similar percentage is primarily Spanish-speaking.³ Alpine, by contrast, is a small, rural community nested around the mountains of eastern San Diego with a population that is about 83 percent white.⁴ We can imagine how different the schools, businesses, and churches look and function in these places, but we can't really understand without experiencing it firsthand. Institutions like the San Diego County Board of Education or Clark County School District, which have jurisdiction over nearly all schools in their respective counties, must tread carefully when making decisions

regarding budgets, curriculum, and testing standards because the same policy will impact specific schools *very differently*. This should be reason for caution and humility for county governments—and perhaps even more so for the state and federal governments—because blindly imposing laws and ordinances without understanding how they may be received and implemented in different towns with different cultures is governmental malpractice. The traditions and customs of places within counties can be very different, and county leaders ignore or dismiss these differences at their own peril and those whom they have been trusted to govern.

Political Diversity

Geography shapes culture, which in turn shapes our political sentiments, systems, and institutions. Put another way, politics exist within the context of history, geography, and culture, rather than around or outside of them. Counties are particularly impacted by such political diversity because it manifests itself in the kind of local government that exists in cities and towns. Unincorporated cities are under county jurisdiction, but have citizen boards and commissions that express the concerns and priorities of their community to the county government. Incorporated cities also have distinct political organization, including mayor-council and council-manager arrangements which differ dramatically in terms of how a city operates. These are the formal elements, but there are, of course, the informal politics that are represented in conversations, interactions,

When county governments contemplate policies with countywide impacts, they are well served to consider how the political operations in different cities will influence the implementation of these policies.

and events that channel into tangible government action. A single city has only its political system to manage, but a county is tasked with overseeing the politics of every city and town within its jurisdiction.

When county governments contemplate policies with countywide impacts, they are well served to consider how the political operations in different cities will influence the implementation of these policies. This is a crucial point because so much of governing comes down to successful implementation—the best policy ideas can fail miserably

if they are not thoughtfully and prudently implemented. As my former professor and current Los Angeles Chief Deputy Controller Rick Cole likes to say, “Policy is one percent inspiration and 99 percent implementation.” For this reason, among plenty of others, it’s incumbent on county governments to work closely with cities and towns to ensure that policies have the institutional support necessary to be implemented properly, or they risk losing political legitimacy.

Geographic, cultural, and political diversity are emblematic of many counties, and certainly for America as a nation. The challenge for counties, and specifically county leadership, is to govern in such a way that understands and respects these differences, while facilitating policies and partnerships that promote regional prosperity. After all, this is the idealistic theme of E pluribus unum: out of our distinct histories, cultures, and political institutions, we commit to being united within our counties, and within our country. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ <https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/no-water-poor-roads-daily-life-is-now-a-hassle-on-mount-charleston-2898526/>

² <https://sciencing.com/desert-biome-environmental-problems-7729257.html>

³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/imperialbeachcitycalifornia/PST045222>

⁴ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/alpine-ca-population>

MICHAEL HULING is a city planner for Clark County, Nevada, and an advisory councilmember at the Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership.



“So, You Work for the County. What Do You Do?”

A day in the life of county government administration

BY BENJAMIN M. EFFINGER AND
DR. IAN M. COYLE, ICMA-CM

You could say we are a pair of government enthusiasts with a penchant for all things public administration. Between the two of us, we have service to our country (thank you, Ben), a city, a town, a village, multiple colleges and universities, a nonprofit, and a

state government department; and we both presently serve in leadership positions at our respective county governments, one urban and large (Ben) and one more rural and small (Ian).

A colleague of ours just recently started in county government, after years of work

in cities, and the comment was made jokingly, “Welcome to the dark side.” Counties tend to be thought of a touch differently. Professional management came a little later to counties, and even ICMA took decades to add “county” officially to the association’s name. Colleagues even joke, “Shouldn’t it be ‘ICCMA’ if you *really* want to include the counties?” There are also fewer of us numbers wise, with about 3,140 county governments to approximately 20,000 municipalities.

Fast forward to 2023. Full-service county government in the United States has the most robust, diverse breadth of service provision in all of local government. You see, counties have the traditional core elements of any local government—public works, public safety, administrative and financial divisions, and the like—yet have dozens of

other departments replete with scores of services that municipal governments do not. These range from administering and covering the costs of burials for those who cannot afford to do so, hospice programs through public health departments, full-spectrum mental health services, regional planning and sustainability services, investing pooled public funds through public financial services, operations of skilled nursing facilities, and elections administration.

The theme of this article, “A day in the life,” is a riff on a story that Ian was sharing with his son. As Ian tells the story:

My son asks me at the dinner table, “How was work?” (We have dinner as a family every

night—something I would recommend to everyone.) I said, “Well, I was amazed at the diversity and scope of what I was involved with today. I think I need to write about this.” And here’s what I went on to say:

What is most exciting to me in doing this work of local government management is there are just so many areas of responsibility, service, programming, and interest. Just today, I was involved with:

- Discussions around bringing broadband to thousands of addresses

Counties tend to be thought of a touch differently. Professional management came a little later to counties.

in the county through a county-spurred public-private partnership.

- Approving public information releases.
- Discussing shared services governance matters with the elected officials.
- Working through emergency housing issues with social services.
- Preparing for negotiations with a union.
- Finalizing draft figures for the budget.
- Discussing staffing, ambulance purchases, response times, and sustainability with EMS.

My work makes the days fly by. It makes the days enjoyable. And it makes me appreciative of the days, as these tasks are focused on improving community well-being and that is why we are in this business!

We thought it might be of interest to the readership of *PM* to review just a handful of snippets of a recent workday for each of us, some context on the responsibility/task areas, and why the specific subject matter is important to our county government as a provider of core public services.

Ben in Los Angeles County, California

The following are a few aspects of Ben's day-to-day operations that demonstrate the various roles of the county-level public servant:

Investments and Revenue Maximization:

Each day, Ben oversees the operation of his cash management team, which is responsible for the daily incoming revenue, outgoing disbursements, and daily cash position of the county. The team analyzes all incoming and outgoing funds, ensures the correct balance of liquidity necessary to satisfy county

debts, and positions excess funds to be invested within the county treasury pool.

These functions are performed on behalf of all county departments, treasury pool participants (which can be cities or other municipal agencies), and specifically, the county Office of Education, which utilizes the county treasury for its funds. All of these functions are performed in adherence with the county investment policy, ensuring safety, liquidity, and yield, in that specific order. The goal is to have little to no residual funds left in the county bank account at the end of the day because idle cash is not earning for the county treasury pool. In the end, these sets of activities maximize dollars for the county and reduce the reliance on other forms of taxation for revenues.

Human Resource Management: Currently, Ben's team has vacant positions at three different levels of his



cash management operation. This hampers the team's productivity on a day-to-day basis, placing higher workloads on other analysts and forcing the supervisory staff to wear several different hats throughout the course of the workday. In total, there are 12 budgeted full-time employees that work in the division, and with three vacancies, the

team is operating at a 25% workforce deficit for day-to-day-operations.

The challenge focuses on both *recruitment strategy* and *succession planning*. In actively working with his departmental human resources manager, Ben has defined a recruitment strategy that will allow him to present open recruitments for entry-level positions within his division and departmental promotional opportunities for team members that may be ready for increased roles and responsibilities within the division. The most important factor in the hiring process is ensuring that you are not just hiring to meet the current need, but hiring for future potential that can be factored into the division succession plan.

Procurement: An additional aspect of Ben's daily routine is ensuring that his team has the tools and resources necessary to perform their functions at the highest level possible. Part of the responsibility is drafting, collaborating, releasing, and evaluating requests for proposals (RFPs) for goods or services that his team

Los Angeles County Courthouse





Hemlock Lake in
Livingston County,
New York

needs to perform their duties. Currently, Ben is evaluating treasury management systems (TMSs) through the RFP process to determine a contract award for the needed and desired services.

This contract is critical for county operations because the fiscal administration of county funds is the heartbeat of local government. Without the funds, incoming or outgoing, the county cannot provide its constituents with critical services like public health, social services, emergency response, and disaster management and mitigation. Ben, although not a contract management specialist, serves in the role of a subject matter expert and will serve as the county contract manager for the awarded contract to ensure that the county receives the goods and services outlined in the contract and remediates any contract deficiencies under the awarded contract.

Ian in Livingston County, New York

On any given day, Ian finds himself in a variety of situations where county government is

“at work” for the residents of Livingston County.

Nursing Homes: One of the jewels of Livingston County’s suite of services is the Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation. While many skilled nursing facilities are privately run, counties across the United States run, operate, or directly support around 750 nursing homes. In Livingston County, this is a “home” for over 215 of our area residents. Running and operating a nursing home is perhaps one of the more unique departmental offerings in the spectrum of local government service, providing 24/7, round-the-clock specialized care and support for residents and families. The county home provides dialysis, therapy, memory care, and a host of other quality-of-life amenities for our older population.

Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention: While not a technical county department, county staff lead, participate, support, and chair the Suicide Awareness and Prevention Taskforce through a local nonprofit health partnership. County personnel volunteer their time to support the community and focus on prevention mechanisms, awareness campaigns, and mental health destigmatization efforts. Their work culminates annually in a series of events in September for Suicide Awareness Prevention Month in the county. A candlelight vigil is held to honor and remember those whose lives were lost tragically to suicide. These same county staff see the effects of lives cut short, from social services to the youth department to probation and mental health. They

therefore commit even more passionately to the cause and to prevention, and these efforts are a source of immense pride in Livingston County.

Public Defense: When someone commits a crime in the United States, through the landmark Supreme Court decision in the *Gideon v. Wainwright* case, they have right to legal representation. Therefore, this is a federal-oriented right, but the federal government in turn makes the states provide this service. In some states, the state government in turn continues to downward mandate shift to county government, and in New York, this is the case. Every day, a team of dedicated attorneys performs legal defense work for residents of Livingston County. While at times these crimes are heinous and headline-worthy, the constitutional duty to provide representation is upheld and carried out by county employees.

Conclusion

As you can see, a day in the life of a local government administrator can take you in several different directions, involve many diverse departments, and cause you to “wear numerous hats” throughout the course of the workday. There are many benefits of working for county government, including abundant opportunities for collaboration with other agencies and exposure to unique challenges that can only be experienced at county-level government because they are beyond the scope of responsibility of most municipal agencies.

In addition to the operational components that

differentiate municipalities from county governments, there is also the political aspect that makes counties unique. County supervisors or commissioners and city councils operate within their respective areas and often need to find balance and symbiosis with their counterparts in order to provide the best level of public service to their respective communities.

Despite the differences between city and county government operations, the ultimate goal is to be of service to the communities they represent, and the benefit to the public servant is being a part of the change that is happening in their own backyard. **PM**

DR. IAN M. COYLE, ICMA-CM,

is the county administrator in Livingston County, New York. Ian also consults regularly with other local governments on executive search and leadership coaching through his firm, Pracademic Partners. He is on the board of directors of the National Association of County Administrators.



BENJAMIN M. EFFINGER, MPA,

is operations chief of the cash management division of the Los Angeles County Treasurer and Tax Collector. He serves on the communications team of the ICMA Veterans Advisory Committee and is president of the University of La Verne’s College of Law and Public Service Student Public Administration Association, where he is currently pursuing his doctorate in public administration.



Feeling the “VIBE” at Johnson County Government

BY PENNY POSTOAK
FERGUSON, ICMA-CM

From the top down, the Voices of Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity (VIBE) efforts in Johnson County, Kansas, are a shining example of a serious commitment to their people.



Located in Northeast Kansas, Johnson County Government strives to foster a workplace and a community where everyone has equal opportunities, no matter their age, gender, race, religion, or sexual identity. This philosophy strongly emerges as one of our organization's five behavioral values.

Respect: We actively recognize the dignity and worth of every individual, extending to them kindness

and courtesy. We listen and seek to understand intolerance, seeking acceptance and inclusion for all.

How We Found Our VIBE

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) efforts had been taking place within our organization for several years, but were more formalized in 2020, shortly after the killing of George Floyd. That summer, the assistant managers and I conducted 30

listening sessions throughout our departments. We had widespread participation from our workforce and heard the experiences of Black employees, along with others. This meaningful input helped us on our path to continue to ensure the equitable and fair treatment of our staff and residents.

The listening sessions overwhelmingly confirmed that the issues within our organization are deep-rooted and complex. While teams had worked on DEIB issues prior to the listening sessions, these sessions elevated our plans to

create a 15-member diversity and inclusion team made up of employees to focus on DEIB education, communications, and more. Today, that team is called the Voices of Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity (VIBE) Advisory Team and our efforts to make a workplace inclusive of everyone are referred to as “VIBE.”

“The mission of VIBE is to increase and maintain a diverse and inclusive workplace of belonging through innovative strategies and equitable practices,” said Kendra Neal, DEIB program manager for



Johnson County employees displaying their Voices of Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity (VIBE) tshirts

Johnson County Government. “Our VIBE efforts focus on the work environment, the talent pipeline, our services, and our community.”

VIBE Accomplishments Benefiting Our Workforce

Regarding our culture, the employees driving our VIBE efforts have worked on employee identification options. They led the way in allowing employees to identify themselves as non-binary in our employee benefits and payroll system, as well as use their

preferred pronouns in their email signatures and request a pronoun pin or sticker if they want. All of that is optional.

VIBE has led to many types of training and learning opportunities. DEIB training has been woven into our Supervisor Training Institute. In addition, our employees have access to self-paced learning resources, webinars, a program we call “Learning Labs,” a video library, and book recommendations. Topics range from disability inclusion to histories of those who experienced persecution or

discrimination to challenging assumptions and bias, and so much more.

Through the VIBE effort and under the VIBE brand, employees post weekly stories on our intranet and in our employee e-newsletter. These personal stories could be about a holiday, a day of note, or a cultural custom, and they open the door for employees to share their histories, experiences, and perspectives with their colleagues.

Johnson County Government employees

have a one-stop shop to find all of these resources and more. The VIBE Hub on our employee intranet is well branded, easy to navigate, and highly engaging.

Spreading the VIBE Outside Our Organization

Our VIBE efforts are spreading beyond the walls of our organization in many ways. VIBE leads the way in recommending and helping to plan meaningful proclamations at our board of county commissioners

meetings as a way to honor a holiday or celebrate a cultural group. These proclamations are accepted in person by community members, employees, or both, and serve as opportunities for us to honor, learn about, and celebrate each other. In addition, the VIBE Advisory Team plays a major role in planning our annual Juneteenth celebration that invites our community to enjoy music, art, education, and speeches, as well as an opportunity to engage with our programs and services.

Moving forward, the VIBE efforts will continue to grow externally. In developing new board priorities in spring 2023, our board established a priority that

focuses on a safe and healthy community through the lens of sustainability and DEIB to promote a healthier environment and create a sense of belonging and connection throughout Johnson County. Under the

umbrella of that priority, the board recently created a new Diversity Equity, and Inclusion Community Coalition. This 15-member advisory board will work side by side with our VIBE Advisory Team and others in the organization

to promote fair treatment and full participation of all people, including those who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination because of their background, identity, or disability.



County Manager Penny Postoak Ferguson pictured with a class from Johnson County Project SEARCH, an education and employment program for people with disabilities interested in community employment.



Johnson County Innovation Summit in July 2019

Johnson County
Administration Building



istock.com/Matthew Fowler

Is VIBE Working?

One of the ways we have measured VIBE's success is with our DEIB employee survey, the first of which was conducted in summer 2022. Results included 76% of employees agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel accepted and embraced for who they are at work, and nearly 70% said we are making progress toward greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

"Serving on the VIBE Advisory Team for the past three years will forever be one of the things I'm most proud of in my professional career. The work is hard, but it comes with incredible lessons about the county, our community, humanity, society, history, and yourself. The ability to effect positive change in our workplace, an interdisciplinary network that spans all parts of the

We conducted
30 listening
sessions
throughout our
departments.
This meaningful
input helped
us on our path
to continue
to ensure the
equitable and
fair treatment
of our staff
and residents.

county, and creating some great friendships has been transformative," said Mary A. McMurray, Ph.D., director of Johnson County Museum.

The survey results also identified areas where we have room for improvement. Nearly 30% of participants say they have experienced bias in our organization. To help with this, human resources has enhanced existing learning opportunities and created new trainings to foster an inclusive work environment and reduce bias in our organization.

Another way to measure our VIBE efforts is from a recruitment perspective. When someone is looking at our website for career information, they will come across a Johnson County Culture section where we highlight our VIBE efforts. Whether you are applying to be a paramedic, wastewater line repair technician, mental

health clinician, or librarian, just to name a few examples, you will come across our prioritization for diversity, belonging, and inclusion as early in the process as reading our job descriptions.

Mitchell Walker, HR manager of talent acquisition and development said, "When I was considering whether to apply to Johnson County, the way an organization approaches DEIB work was an important factor in my decision since it shows how an organization values its people. To that end, I asked around and found that Johnson County is a regional leader in DEIB work through their VIBE efforts. This wasn't just words on a webpage either. I spoke with current and past employees, other local governments, and practitioners in the field. What I found was that Johnson County's VIBE accomplishments were years ahead of their peers, and it drew me in immediately. During my interview, I got to learn more about how VIBE came to life in Johnson County, and you could see the difference it made to the people in the room. I have said it before, and I will continue to say that VIBE was a huge part of my decision to accept a position with Johnson County." **PM**

**PENNY POSTOAK
FERGUSON, ICMA-CM,**
is county manager of
Johnson County, Kansas.



*Written in collaboration
with Jody Hanson, Tiffany
Hentschel, Kendra Neal, and
Mitchell Walker*

Case Studies in COUNTY INNOVATION

A look at how three counties are making positive change for their residents: a life-changing apprenticeship program for low-income residents, expanding mental health services for county jail inmates, and the launch of a drone program to aid in emergency preparedness, prevention, and response.



Buncombe County Courthouse
in Asheville, North Carolina

Franklin County, Ohio: Building Its Future One Graduate at a Time

BY KENNETH N. WILSON

Franklin County in Central Ohio is growing faster today than at any time in recent memory, with near monthly announcements of new high-tech investments in the region and population growth projections that have to be updated every year because the rate of growth keeps increasing. With all of this growth will come challenges, however, and local government leaders are working hard to plan for the transportation, education, healthcare, and housing systems that their communities will need in the near future. All of those new residents will also need jobs, and all of those digital economy investors will need skilled labor to help build and work in their new facilities.

The gulf between job seekers and well-paid careers can sometimes seem very wide. There's a shortage of qualified construction workers in Central Ohio, but it's a job that not just anyone can step into. Fortunately, the skilled building trades employ an apprenticeship model that allows workers to earn competitive wages and benefits while learning their craft. Unfortunately, there are many hard-working potential workers who are not quite qualified or ready to jump right into apprenticeship. That's



where Franklin County's Building Futures program comes in.

Building Futures is a 12-week pre-apprenticeship program that helps low-income residents advance to the point of being qualified for an apprenticeship in the skilled building trades. The program and its sponsors recognize that candidates could be facing many barriers, so while the students receive classroom and practical instruction, they also get a stipend and wrap-around services to help with other challenges that

could be standing in the way of their success.

The Building Futures program was created by the Franklin County commissioners in 2017, and represents a partnership among the county, the NAACP, a local nonprofit called Creating Central Ohio Futures, and the Columbus Building and Construction Trades Council. Since the first cohort in 2018, more than 250 local residents have graduated from Building Futures and moved on into great middle class careers in the skilled building trades. There's a 100-person waiting list, a graduation rate of about 90%, and the average starting wage for graduates is between \$40,000 and \$50,000.

While enrolled in the program, the students gain numerous tools that will help them to be successful in an apprenticeship. There are skills assessments; classes on conflict management, teamwork, and interpersonal skills; and the students move on to safety certification and

construction-specific math and literacy. Then the students are introduced to the skilled construction trades so that they can determine which career path they would like to pursue. When they graduate, most of the students have a job waiting for them making a good living as an apprentice.

Building Futures has won awards for innovation from the National Association of Counties. In September 2023, former labor secretary and current special advisor to the president, Tom Perez, visited Central Ohio specifically to tour one of Franklin County's Building Futures sites. He later said that it's the kind of program he thinks that communities all over the country would want to emulate. Investing in residents who are receiving government services so that they can become middle class taxpayers not only changes the course of their family's lives, but also pays off for local government in the long run. In fact, Building Futures has been such a success that Franklin County has created several similar programs to set social services clients on the path to the middle class in technology fields, truck driving, and working for the county itself.

The Franklin County commissioners are working to change the lives of many of their residents—one person at a time—while also filling the ranks of much-needed skilled tradespeople. Together, they're building something in Central Ohio that is much greater than the sum of its parts. Learn more about Building Futures at columbusconstruction.org/building-futures. **PM**



KENNETH N. WILSON

is administrator of Franklin County and serves as president of the National Association of County Administrators.



After Six Years of Research, Jail Renovation Begins in Montgomery County, Ohio

BY DEB DECKER

Montgomery County, Ohio, is moving forward with a plan to renovate the county jail. The renovations are expected to cost nearly \$20 million and will be paid for with American Rescue Plan Act funds and opioid settlement dollars.

The Montgomery County Commission president, Debbie Lieberman, said the planning and research took six years and incorporated local community members comprising the Justice Committee and the Behavioral Health Task Force. “The Justice Committee was empowered to review the jail’s policies and procedures to determine what investments were needed to improve safety and ensure a humane environment,” Lieberman said. “Members were local citizens from all walks of life.”

After two years of research and inquiries, the Justice Committee recommended the jail be replaced with a more modern facility that could humanely house offenders, provide programs and space for services, and afford a safe environment for both inmates and staff.

The county announced in December 2021, after receiving build options, that it could not afford a new jail



at the anticipated cost of \$200 million. Meanwhile, the county applied for two jail renovation and construction grants through the state, but did not receive any funding from those grants. Despite that, the county continued investing in the jail, with about \$7 million in the past five years funding improvements in the jail security and fire alarm systems and an HVAC unit ventilator replacement.

The county hired an architectural firm to provide initial plans that would allow space in the jail to provide detox and suicide prevention treatment and medical care, as well as space to better manage the intake and booking of juveniles.

“The diverse and evolving needs of our inmate population is a direct reflection of the challenges we observe in our community’s overall health,” said Sheriff Rob Streck. “It’s essential to recognize and address these unique needs, whether they pertain to medical, mental health, or addiction concerns.”

According to Probate Court Judge David Brannon, the next step will be to ensure inmates continue their treatment after they are released from jail with assisted outpatient treatment. “We have seen success in other counties such as Summit, Franklin, and Lorain,” said Brannon. “This also helps us avoid the risk of having a revolving door of care where a person is dropped off at the jail, staff don’t know the person’s medical or behavioral health history, and the process starts over again.”

The Board of County Commissioners established a Behavioral Health Task Force to seek solutions to the growing need for behavioral healthcare in the community. Led by the Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association (GDAHA), the task force was comprised of healthcare providers, leaders, and community partners. They collaborate with “front line” professionals, as well as recipients of behavioral health services, to help guide decision-makers on where resources should be deployed.

Sarah Hackenbracht, president and CEO of GDAHA, said the task force is working to create a county-level dashboard with information that allows courts, law enforcement, and jail staff a better view of the care individuals need.

“Behavioral health requires a multi-system approach that invests in connectivity to serve our most vulnerable citizens—and we are seeing Montgomery County prioritize that investment today,” Hackenbracht said. “Ensuring that the Montgomery County jail and its staff are equipped to address the physical and behavioral health needs of their population is critical to that shared vision.”

With space downtown at a premium, the planned changes to the jail will all be made within the current facility, without any need for additional square footage. “We are cutting 226 general population beds and adding 100 medical and behavioral health needs beds,” said Montgomery County Commissioner Judy Dodge. “So, while we will have fewer total beds (from 911 to 785), the number of medical, mental health, and detox beds will increase from 12 to 112.”

The total cost is well below the \$200 million estimated to build a new jail. “At less than \$20 million, we are meeting the needs of the sheriff, the inmates, and the nurses and corrections officers who care for them while incarcerated,” said Dodge. **RM**

DEB DECKER is communications director of Montgomery County, Ohio.



Fire Marshal Launches Drone Unit to Aid in Disaster Response and Recovery in Buncombe County, North Carolina

BY KEVIN TIPTON

As we see the frequency and severity of natural disasters increase due to climate change, our Buncombe County fire marshals are looking to put an eye in the sky with a new drone program.

This program will aid us in preparedness, fire prevention, and disaster response. Following the approval of the FY24 budget, Emergency Services has procured and will roll out the use of an emergency services drone.

The Mavic 3 Enterprise Thermal Drone will be used in multiple ways to bolster fire investigations, fire service support for lost person searches and wildfires, emergency management support during

floods and other natural disasters; and can be deployed in a post-disaster situation for recovery and damage assessment. The drone capabilities include:

- Forward-looking infrared (FLIR) camera technology.
- Thermal imaging with multiple screens to set heat signatures and ranges.
- Camera technology with zoom and clarity up to 400 feet in altitude.
- Speaker communication technology for communications to someone in distress.
- Live feed video transmission to remote locations and command facilities.
- The capability of all flights being recorded to a cloud. All flights are tracked by cloud-based technology to ensure an invasion of



privacy doesn't occur and can be reviewed by the FAA.

Assistant Fire Marshal Justin Honeycutt, EMS Quality Control Officer Will Key, and Assistant EMS Operations Supervisor Chris Dorsey have all acquired their Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) drone pilot licensure.

Buncombe County fire marshals have also been operating a "Mini-III" drone since early 2023. This drone is primarily for fire investigations and only takes video and photographs. **PM**

KEVIN TIPTON is fire marshal of Buncombe County, North Carolina.



Let's Think **Differently** About **Creativity** and **Innovation**

BY ED EVERETT, ICMA-CM (RETIRED)

For local governments to be creative and innovative, they must have a culture that fosters the freedom to think and the courage to act.

Thesis

Most local governments pay lip service to creativity and innovation, but rarely are they a serious focus in our profession. It is easy to profess support for creativity and innovation, but significantly more challenging to actually implement creative and innovative programs.

Context

Let's define the concepts of creativity and innovation. *Creativity* is the ability or skill—plus the freedom, motivation, and courage—to think differently to develop new programs and processes that differ significantly from the present. *Innovation* is the ability to take creative ideas and successfully implement them within an organization.

A good creative idea that does not get implemented leads to frustration. A bad idea that gets implemented leads to chaos. Innovation is about implementing good, creative ideas.

Too often, innovation is narrowly and mistakenly associated with technology and digital solutions. Technology

may be the only area where many local governments have implemented technological innovations developed by the private sector.

Creativity is the foundation of innovation. Princeton University has attributed the following characteristics to creativity:

- **Fluency:** Ability to generate a large number of ideas.
- **Flexibility:** Ability to see a wide variety of approaches to a problem.
- **Curiosity:** Desire to change or improve things; “child-like” thinking.
- **Persistence and Concentration:** Capacity to face frustration or difficulties; sheer arduous work.
- **Tolerance of Ambiguity:** Fighting our desire for order and precision.

For organizations to be creative and innovative, they need to have a culture that fosters what I call “the freedom to think and the courage to act.”

Myths About Creativity

Unfortunately, most individuals and organizations do not believe they can be creative

since they often fall victim to believing one or more false myths. They believe that creativity is:

- Positively correlated to I.Q.
- Something you either have or don't have and that you can't develop or improve it.
- Mostly relevant to the arts, social sciences, and technology.
- Not relevant or as practical for local government.
- A spontaneous act that does not involve arduous hard work and prolonged thinking.
- Driven only by organizations with money.

None of these myths is true for individuals or organizations. Well-researched studies debunk each of these myths.

Creativity/Innovation Killers

The common culprit that kills creativity and innovation is an organizational culture where:

- No one is allowed to make mistakes.
- There is an aversion to taking risks.
- The “status quo” is the go-to option.

- The organization is driven by phases like “don't rock the boat,” “go along to get along,” or “don't speak truth to power.”
- Too many stupid rules, procedures, and bureaucratic barriers stifle change.
- There is lack of initiative or willingness to put in the hard work.

Without mistakes and failures, creativity and innovation are not possible. Unfortunately, elected officials and city/county managers profess to want innovation but sometimes contradict themselves by letting it be known that mistakes are not acceptable. The way around this contradiction is to use beta testing as a way to test new ideas, allow small smart mistakes, and learn before implementing organization wide. (See my previous article on beta testing, “Let's Think Differently About... How We Implement Almost Everything!”).¹

The Key to Success in Creative and Innovative Organizations

The following are some guiding principles to move forward.



A good creative idea that does not get implemented leads to frustration. A bad idea that gets implemented leads to chaos. Innovation is about implementing good creative ideas.

The Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OCED) surveyed what they defined as innovative governments. They categorize the most important factors that lead these governments to be creative and innovative as follows:

1. Support from top leadership.
2. A culture that fosters innovation.
3. A dedicated innovation team or a position responsible for pushing innovation within the organization.
4. Dedicated funding for innovation teams or money for small beta tests.
5. Partnerships with universities, NGOs, or think tanks, which provide leadership and other support from outside local government.

OCED summarized their work by identifying the three principles that help explain public sector innovation and creativity as follows:

1. **Capacity to Innovate:**
Resources, skills, and knowledge.
2. **Motivation to Innovate:**
Incentives, values, and leadership.
3. **Opportunity to Innovate:**
Creative collaboration with others outside government.

What I Hear from Your Employees about Creativity and Innovation

I have conducted creativity training for years and have trained hundreds of local government employees. The following comments from

Hire and promote employees who have demonstrated or show the potential for creativity and innovation. In interviews, ask candidates for examples of how they have demonstrated creativity and innovation in previous roles.

participants are common and voiced in frustration:

- I am told not to make mistakes.
- People who make mistakes in my organization get crushed or lose credibility.
- Big and bold ideas and approaches are not welcome in my organization.
- Creativity sounds fine to you, but you don't know my organization.
- My organization is too risk averse.
- We seem stuck in status quo thinking.
- No one encourages me to be creative.
- You don't know my boss.

During the training I emphasize that everyone should spend at least 10% of their time trying to improve their job. One training participant responded by saying: "I have worked in local government for more than 15 years in several organizations, and no one has ever told me that part of my job is to improve my job." That is sad to hear and reinforces my belief that local government has a long way to go.

A Case Study of Governments Not Being Creative

The first article I wrote in the *PM* series, "Let's Think Differently About...", dealt with performance evaluations.² The article provided hard data showing that *no one* (not managers, not supervisors, not employees, and not unions) likes performance evaluations in the public or private sectors. Further, most HR professionals don't think that performance

evaluations are accurate. Most critically, the data showed that performance evaluations have a negative impact on organizations.

In that article, I offered free consulting to any local government willing to create a new performance evaluation system focused on employee development. No one has taken me up on this offer.

I now make a different offer. I will fund a young professional to attend a program devoted to innovation and creativity if 10 local governments within the United States have developed a performance evaluation system based on employee development. I used the number 10 as it represents only .04% of all local governments in the United States, which is a low bar to reach. Please let me know if you have done so and I will share your success with others. I am hopeful that local government can at least be innovative enough to change a process that doesn't work and nobody likes.

How to Move Forward: A Six-step Program

Research shows that our brain works hard to develop habits and behavioral patterns in order to operate efficiently. This is good and necessary for daily living. However, the brain's desire for habits and patterns causes us to not question our assumptions or past behaviors or challenge organizational norms. We also know that habits are very difficult to break. We cannot break a pattern or habit until we have acknowledged the habit. This is why most programs

that deal with habits have a first step of someone saying, "Hi, my name is _____ and I..."

Step #1: The first step is to admit what is true: "My organization has developed habits and patterns of status quo, risk aversion, no mistakes, and playing it safe." Until there is a cathartic admission by our profession, we will be unable to change our behaviors and build creative and innovative organizations.

Step #2: Develop a culture that supports and fosters creativity and innovation by:

- Allowing smart mistakes from beta tests so we can learn and innovate.
- Encouraging our employees and incentivizing them to challenge the status quo, attack sacred cows, and speak truth to power.
- Directing our employees to spend at least 10% of their time making their jobs better.
- Encouraging and rewarding beta tests.
- Eliminating stupid and bureaucratic rules.

Top management must lead this effort and have the backs of those who are creative and innovative as they will make some mistakes.

Step #3: Hire and promote employees who have demonstrated or show the potential for creativity and innovation. In interviews, ask candidates for examples of how they have demonstrated creativity and innovation in previous roles.

Step #4: Train your workforce to be more creative. Creativity can be developed and trained.

Step #5: Reward, celebrate, incentivize, and expect creativity and innovation.

Step #6: Research and find resources that support and help your efforts, such as Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation, OCED, universities, think tanks, and others.

Closing Comments

Local governments often do more damage by pretending to support and encourage creativity and innovation than by just admitting they don't do a good job at it. Start at Step 1: "Hi, my name is..." Changing the culture of an organization requires changing long-held beliefs and behaviors. An individual has to admit their weaknesses and flaws first in order to change. The same is true for organizations.

Beta test your creative ideas and learn from your mistakes before implementing your idea organization-wide. Don't wait for someone to give you permission to be creative and innovative. It is easier to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.

I am ready to fund a young professional if I am proven wrong. I am also willing to assist any organization if they want help in being more creative and innovative. Good luck! **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/lets-think-differently-about-how-we-implement-almost-everything>

² <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/lets-think-differently-about-performance-evaluations>

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Cities and Counties Working Together

A crucial partnership, cities and counties can strengthen their relationship using principles of public engagement and elements of collaborative governance theory.

BY POOJA BACHANI DI GIOVANNA

There is a delicate balance between counties and cities as they strive to work together to help foster stronger communities. When the right balance between a county and city is achieved, it can yield great opportunities for success. However, that balance is not always easy to accomplish; competing priorities and funding sources pose challenges to the potential for a healthy working relationship between county and city.

Furthermore, recent challenges, such as the impacts of the great resignation and a changing workforce, have added new stresses on this vital local government relationship. As we navigate the delicate balance between county and city, we can look to principles of public engagement and elements of collaborative governance theory for tools and strategies.

Establishing Strong Partnerships

Partnerships by nature are collaborative and the most successful partnerships in any field rest on a foundation of shared goals and responsibilities. Within county and city government, it can sometimes prove to be



difficult to establish that shared foundation generally and specifically for certain projects. Competing priorities, funding sources, and projects can often be roadblocks for partnerships.

Prioritizing the need for open communication and collaboration between city and county is the first step in establishing a partnership, and it begins

with designating individuals to serve as key points of contact. Unfortunately, local government has faced unique challenges in this area in light of the impacts of the great resignation.¹ Staff shortages led to team members taking on more responsibilities and project timelines being exacerbated. Furthermore, many organizations lost the individual that served as the point person in partnership, thereby leaving a gap in collaborative relationships. As 35% of governments saw workers accelerate retirement, organizations found themselves facing the prospect of entirely new staffs.

One way to anticipate and prepare for a major change in workforce is to support and encourage succession planning for employees. The city of Fredericksburg, Texas, did just that in 2021 by recognizing that several key employees—individuals who were instrumental in establishing partnerships—were facing retirement.² In preparation, Fredericksburg began identifying future leaders and providing them with training opportunities and experiences to prepare them for moving upward in the organization.

Succession planning is a great way to ensure employees play an important role in the future of the organization and have the opportunity to hand off key partnerships.

A Shared Foundation for Success

Establishing a partnership and open line of communication is just the first step in establishing a working relationship between the city and county. In order for that partnership to succeed, both organizations need to come together to agree upon a shared foundation of goals and responsibilities to help build stronger communities. Many areas across the country have been

able to do this successfully in various projects.

In California, the city and county of Sacramento have collaborated to create a five-year agreement on establishing the roles and responsibilities of each entity on how to approach providing services for the homeless.³ Both organizations are planning to send team members to participate in 10 new “encampment engagement teams” dedicated to intensive outreach and delivery to shelters. Behavioral health staff from the county will work with the city’s Department of Community Response to provide comprehensive services to those in need. In the face of a shared challenge,

both the city and county have come together to pool resources and develop a foundation of shared goals and a collaborative project plan.

The city of Austin, Texas, partnered with Travis County on providing support for community members facing mental health challenges.⁴ Travis County approved a new Mental Health Diversion Center to be located in Austin, and in response the city began ramping up mental health services in order to better serve community members who would be coming to the center. The city quickly began expanding its cadre of certified mental health emergency specialists to help ensure the center established by the

county would be properly staffed. The city and county have been working in lock step to help ensure the center is a success and is able to provide support to those in need.

The city of Antigo, Wisconsin, collaborated with Langlade County to help address challenges in childcare.⁵ Antigo has one of the fewest child care resources available in the 10-county North Central Wisconsin region. In an effort to help ameliorate the impact on the community, a local mother decided to open a childcare center and received collaborative support from the city and the county. Both organizations, as well as the local community, worked

Fredericksburg, Texas



closely together to provide resources and guidance to help make the childcare center happen.

Similarly, in the city of Morgan Hill, California, retired educators Ron and Shirley Lociceros saw the need for an inclusive playground in their own city after learning of a similar project in nearby

Salinas.⁶ Supported by the Magical Bridge Foundation, the couple partnered with the city for creative input on the project and worked with both the city and Santa Clara County for funding support. The city of Morgan Hill established an Inclusive Playground Committee made up of city residents

to help guide the project. Additionally, the city was successful in obtaining a significant grant from the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.⁷

These are just a few of the many examples of successful collaborative partnerships between the city and county that rest on a foundation of a shared commitment to help build strong communities. In each of these mentioned cases, the city and county agreed on a shared vision for a project, pooled resources, and worked together to address community needs.

Borrowing Theory from Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance

There are many principles and precepts from public engagement and collaborative governance that we can incorporate in our approaches to establishing a strong partnership between the city and county. At the heart of it all are the community members and the shared goal of helping foster stronger communities. Starting any partnership with the larger goal in mind allows for alignment on a shared vision that can help guide future projects. For specific projects, agreement on purpose and specific goals like in the example from Sacramento, can provide clarity to all organizations involved in the collaborative process. Appointing representative members for joint working teams ensures that all voices are at the table and yields greater transparency and open communication. Succession planning can help ensure there are no gaps in representation

as local governments navigate staffing challenges. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, setting realistic expectations should be a priority in any collaborative process. This applies to expectations for staff members and the project overall.

Conclusion

Challenges exist in any partnership, including the one between city and county, and events such as the great resignation have placed additional stresses on the collaborative process. But, these challenges can be overcome to yield strong, collaborative working relationships that address and meet community needs. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹<https://rockinst.org/blog/the-great-resignations-impact-on-local-government/>

²<https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/preparing-silver-tsunami-succession-planning>

³<https://www.saccounty.gov/news/latest-news/Pages/Board-Approves-New-Agreement-to-Serve-Homeless.aspx>

⁴<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2023/05/county-and-city-collaborate-on-robust-mental-health-program-ahead-of-diversion-facility-launch/>

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⁶<https://morganhilllife.com/2021/06/24/family-magical-bridge-inclusive-playground-set-to-open-later-this-summer/>

⁷<https://morganhilltimes.com/morgan-hill-inclusive-playground-gets-2m-county-grant/>

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Electronic Payment Technology | BY TYLER TECHNOLOGIES

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Five things to keep top of mind

The benefits of electronic bill payment and presentment (EBPP) for local governments and community members are driving efforts to increase and improve EBPP functionality. As paying by cash becomes less popular, EBPP is clearly the future of revenue collection. In fact, according to the Federal Reserve's recent research (2022), "The number of core noncash payments grew by a larger amount from 2018 to 2021 than in any previous Federal Reserve Payments Study measurement period since 2000. Specifically, the number of noncash payments grew by 30.7 billion, increasing to 204.5 billion in 2021."¹

Members of your community expect to be able to pay their bills whenever and wherever they are, whether it's from their home office, while vacationing, or anywhere

in between. They want to conveniently pay utility bills, court fees, property taxes, tax bills, parking tickets, license and permit fees, and more.

To improve payment operations, city and county governments are looking at ways to streamline processes and increase community adoption of these efficient payment methods. Here are five things to keep in mind when engaging with technology providers about simplifying your payments ecosystem to help you meet the needs of your community.

1. Cost

The good news is that your payments solution vendor should offer you a flexible fee structure with no subscription or licensing costs for software. In turn, you can provide

predictable rates for your electronic bill payers—whether you pass the fees along or absorb them. Keep an eye out for hidden fees such as statement fees, annual fees, gateway fees, or monthly minimums. Ensure you have a full understanding of contract terms and any additional fees. It's important to understand that the subject of fees is complex. For example, local regulations can dictate how fees are assessed. A vendor with experience in the public sector will work with you to develop a fee structure that meets your community's unique needs and budget requirements.

2. Security and Compliance

Data security is top of mind for both consumers and local governments. To prove that industry standards for security are being met, a vendor should be compliant with the Payment Card Industry Level 1 Payment Application Data Security Standard.

Your vendor should be a registered merchant service provider (MSP) or a certified payment facilitator equipped to handle all aspects of the payment process, including onboarding, shopping cart, checkout, fee handling, and receipts. This advantageous bundling of tasks reduces the number of entities required to handle residents' sensitive information and simplifies operations.

3. Technology Scope

It should come as no surprise, but fewer siloed or disparate solutions result in more control for government agencies. Put simply, a single payments solution simplifies your workflow. You only need to work with one vendor, streamlining software integrations and simplifying PCI compliance. Ideally, your vendor offers a proven EBPP hardware/software/compliance solution with native integrations to your core systems. Your provider should handle all aspects of the payment process, including onboarding, payment support, reconciliation, and hardware. An integrated solution means financial data is uniformly updated

Members of your community expect to be able to pay their bills whenever and wherever they are, whether it's from their home office, while vacationing, or anywhere in between.

throughout the organization. Also, an integrated solution powered by Amazon Web Services (AWS) enhances scalability, security, and reliability—vital components of a payments system.

4. In-Person Payment Needs

The preferred vendor will provide cashiering solutions, enabling over-the-counter transactions to further simplify your payment operations. An integrated cashiering solution standardizes your collection process and creates a single entry point for payments, providing greater control of the workflow and making certification reporting easier.

5. Payer Adoption

An ideal vendor will assist you with strategies to let your community know about EBPP options and benefits. From providing tips about email and social messaging to advice on bill inserts, an experienced vendor will work with you to build participation. Of course, customer adoption is ultimately related to convenience and usability. A payment system should include the following for maximum engagement:

- A user-friendly, public-facing portal that makes bill paying easy and convenient.

- Real-time payment processing that reflects updates to payer account balances immediately.
- Options for payers to set recurring payments and schedule payments for a future date.
- Acceptance of various payment methods, including credit cards, e-checks, and digital wallets.
- The option for customers to pay as a guest for quick single payments or as a registered user to access history and streamline account connectivity.

Realizing the Benefits of EBPP

As we've seen, EBPP functionality is playing an increasingly important role in revenue collection. As the Federal Reserve noted in 2022, "The number of card payments grew by 25.9 billion from 2018 to 2021. With 157 billion payments in 2021, card payments accounted for approximately 77 percent of noncash payments by number."²

And the benefits for local government are clear. Cities and counties both large and small are cutting expenses, serving the public more efficiently, and improving resident satisfaction by taking advantage of EBPP functionality.

Choosing the right vendor will help you maximize the benefits of EBPP. A vendor with experience in the public sector will better understand your unique requirements. This vendor can combine proven public sector experience with a payment solution that meets your needs today and in the future. **PM**

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ENDNOTES

¹ Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. (2022) The Federal Reserve Payments Study: 2022 Triennial Initial Data Release. Retrieved from <https://www.federalreserve.gov/paymentsystems/fr-payments-study.htm>

² Ibid.

Five Must-Do's Before Diving Headfirst into Your Next Big Tech Project

BY JANE LANAHAN DECKER

Crucial **questions** that you and your team need to consider

I grew up in South Florida. This means I was in, around, or near a swimming pool at any given time. I had one, my neighbor had one, or my neighbor's neighbor had one. So that means if you were a kid growing up in the Sunshine State, chances are good you should probably know how to swim or you risk being the clown sitting on the edge of the pool in water wings with a floaty donut.

Along with knowing how to swim, there are a few other obvious must-knows about pools. You must know not to go swimming after the pizza, cake, and piñata candy drop of your bestie's birthday party. You know to pee before you get into the pool. Always bring your own towel. And, you must know not to dive headfirst into the shallow end of the pool.

Those all seem like incredibly obvious rebukes. So, what about your next technology project at your city or county?

Have you done all possible due diligence to make sure it is successful? Have you asked all the right questions? Have you hired all the right consultants? Have you assembled the right implementation team? You may think you have, and you may think these are exceptionally discernable project tasks, but I am here to warn you to not dive headfirst into the shallow end of the proverbial tech project pool.

1. You must be willing to ask the right questions, sometimes the tough questions, and sometimes the questions that no one wants to ask.

What is the project need? What is the best way to fill the need—new software or upgrade an existing application? Is it SaaS (software-as-a-service or “hosted”) or on-prem (housed on city servers)? What's the difference and



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why does it matter? Are we on shared servers? What recourse do we have for “down” time?

What are we fixing, or improving or measuring? Are your workflows documented? What’s a workflow?

Will the software integrate with our finance department? What is the upgrade schedule of other city applications? Are there any required plug-ins or third-party applications needed to see the data? Are there any apps being phased out in the next three to five years?

How are we paying for the project? Are there other departments that will contribute to funding this project? Do we need to pass legislation to create a fee or a fund? How will customers pay for the product or service? Do we have a payment portal?

Who are our external stakeholders? Who are our internal stakeholders? Who matters more? Who is sponsoring the project? Who is our customer?

What mandates do we have? What other rules, codes, or statutes do we have to adhere to?

Are we converting or migrating data? Or running services in parallel?

Is it an election year? (Stop here if it’s an election year. You’re under enough stress and shouldn’t add a tech project to your to-do list right now.)

2. You must assemble the right project team. (Expect the worst, hope for the best.)

Who do you need to outsource? How do you supplement the team? Who will manage the project? How do you keep the team happy?

Who speaks the “language” of the project? What special processes are involved? What happens if a team member leaves? What happens if half the team leaves? What if the project lead changes?

The right project team includes everyone from your city administrator down to your system analyst in the IT department to your external users and your city administrator, who will invariably get the phone calls at all hours when a constituent is unable to complete an expected process online.

Expect staffing turnovers. As soon as your project starts, your team becomes incredibly attractive to other cities, and they

will scoop them up in a hot minute. Do you have built-in redundancies on your teams? Who is shadowing who?

Have you considered a “fiduciary” project management team? Yes, they are an added cost, but without them are you still spending money at the end of the project anyway to “fix” what went wrong?

3. You must put out a properly scoped RFQ/RFP project. (If you scope it, they will come.)

It may seem obvious, but scoping the project is important: for the city to have something to measure the success of the respondents, but also so the vendor knows what the city is actually asking for. Technology solutions are vast in the market and capabilities change by the millisecond. Using your project team, know what you are asking for and just as importantly, know what you are *not* asking for.

Does the project include configuration? Who will build it? Do you need a customized solution or is there something “out-of-the-box” that will work for you? What does the upgrade process look like? How often are bugs fixed and new releases released? Is there an online community for information sharing? Is there continuing education available for the product?

Does the project include training? Who conducts the training? Will the vendor be there or is it a train-the-trainer approach? Is it live? Recorded? On-site or virtual?

What about reports? How are you measuring improvement? What process was supposed to be improved?

4. You must negotiate a contract based on the project. (Build in the delays ahead of time.)

Once the points have been tallied and a resolution is taken to your council for the manager’s execution, be sure to check, double check, and triple check the resulting contract.

Does it meet the scope of the project? Does it have deliverables defined and an associated time frame for said deliverables?

What is the support period and process? (See also #5 below.) Are you with the same implementation team during project cutover? How can we ensure that vested knowledge

is passed from configuration through implementation and go-live?

What do I mean by “build in the delays ahead of time”? We can get carried away with unrealistic project timelines. Our rose-colored glasses are never as shiny as at the start of the project. But you have been through a global pandemic at this point, one that crept up on you like a terrifying scene out of a Stephen King novel. So, now you can just *expect* it. Expect another pandemic, but be surprised when the team just collectively comes down with a stomach virus after sharing some late-night Thai food. Or, when you have a replaced your project manager for the third time because the first two went to work for competing municipalities.

Where is the repository of shared documentation, user guides, and testing scripts?

5. You must test, test, test, and test some more.

Do not, I emphatically repeat, *do not* accept the testing phase until your deliverables have been delivered. Duh.

There will be bullying. There will be pressure. Your team is likely exasperated because you have gone past your deadline—twice, maybe, or three times. Everyone just wants the project done already. Don’t do it.

Someone on your team is a wise soul who is bringing up that the XYZ process is not firing correctly. It might not look like something huge even. Go back to the contract. Verify the scope. Look at the project deliverables and make sure your workflows work.

How do you onboard new users? How do they get trained? How do you train external users? What videos, workshops, or seminars can you put together to facilitate learning and reduce questions? What other resources need updating because of the project? Where is this information housed on your website? Is it easy for users to find?

This is not an exhaustive checklist of questions for your specific project, but chances are high that someone on your team has started asking these and other pervasive questions. Are you listening? Don’t be the clown sitting on the edge of the pool in water wings with a floaty donut. **PM**

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