

The logo for Public Management (PM) is displayed in a large, bold, orange font. The letters 'P' and 'M' are stylized and connected. The background of the entire cover is a vibrant, abstract digital illustration featuring a network of glowing blue and orange lines, resembling data paths or circuitry, set against a dark blue background with various digital icons and light effects.

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

105 YEARS

+

Navigating Data in
Decision Making **14**

Five Ways to Become
Data-Driven **18**

Reducing Pollution
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Policy **20**

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FEBRUARY 2024
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Unlocking the Benefits of AI Requires Strong Partnerships Between Municipal Leaders and CIOs

ICMA's own CIO offers advice for working together to map out your organization's AI roadmap

BY MARC A. OTT

Whether in the private or public sector,

artificial intelligence (AI) has been touted as a technology with the power to transform virtually every operational activity. And it seems to be happening at warp speed.

There are many examples of AI altering everything from council meeting minutes (available 10 minutes after the meeting) to allowing planning engineers to review and comment on development plans in a day versus weeks. The question for local government leaders is how best to harness the power of AI to improve the quality of life in their communities, increase the productivity and performance of local government staff, and establish guardrails to mitigate risks that come with the adoption of any new technology.

A key to moving forward quickly and effectively is the partnership between the CAO and the chief information/technology officer (CIO). Because the ultimate goal is to leverage AI to drive innovation and deliver value to

residents, those local government managers who have taken the time to build a strong relationship with their CIOs will see success. While the CAO and the leadership team can set an ambitious vision for how the organization might potentially deploy AI, there is typically a significant discrepancy between these aspirations and the readiness of the organization to move forward.

ICMA is fortunate to have a CIO who joined the organization from local government, Hemant Desai. He has developed an initial roadmap for the use of AI and generative AI at ICMA and also has engaged with ICMA members to gather feedback on how the association can best support the membership. Here are some steps that he recommends and in fact has initiated at ICMA:

Conduct a Staff Survey

It's a good bet that a percentage of your staff may be aware and even already use AI tools. Having a baseline from which



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February 2024

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

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS: U.S. subscription rate, \$60 per year; other countries subscription rate, \$155 per year. Printed in the United States. Contact: 202/289-4262; subscriptions@icma.org.

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

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

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

Public Management (PM)

icma.org/pm

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Washington, D.C. 20002-4201

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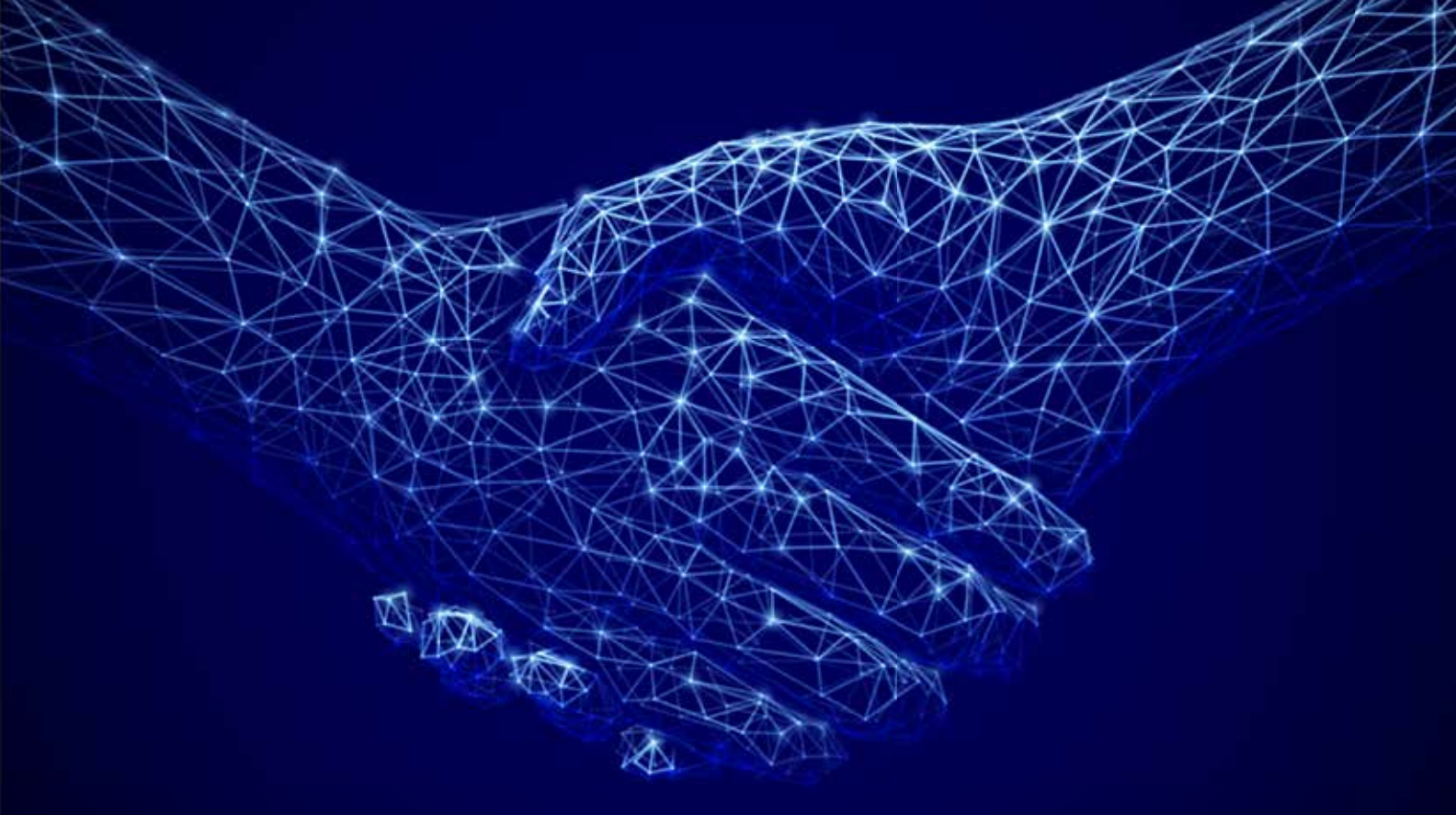
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Public Management (PM) aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments in creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.



to evaluate staff readiness is a great starting point rather than “diving into the deep end.”

Establish an Initial Set of Guidelines

Prior to training and usage, set guidelines that are flexible yet protect both the organization and individuals as AI technology is deployed. In this phase it's also important to establish metrics you will use to evaluate your efforts.

Upskill Data Specialists and/or Hire AI Engineers

Few organizations have the budget to go out and hire a

whole new IT department. At ICMA we are repurposing one of our open IT positions to gain an individual with AI experience. Many IT professionals are eager to gain AI skills so it's important to add budgeting for this type of training into the AI roadmap.

Provide Initial Training for Staff

It's important to have a base level of common understanding and skills across most staff positions.

A key to moving forward with AI quickly and effectively is the partnership between the CAO and CIO.

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Encourage Staff to Experiment

Once you have set guidelines and provided basic training, determine which tools you will begin to experiment with. ChatGPT, Google Bard, and Microsoft Copilot are all readily available. Hemant also suggests caution in purchasing applications or out-of-the-box solutions that may be called AI, but have actually been in the marketplace for years and may be outdated.

Gather Feedback and Validate Use Cases

An outcome of the experimentation process will be new ways of working—whether it is taking an existing task and automating it or uncovering a whole new solution to a vexing problem. Sharing these outcomes and the steps along the way present new opportunities for staff communication. Key aspects in this area are assessing business areas (finance, HR, purchasing, contracts, legal, etc.) and using outcomes of the assessment in creating a roadmap for AI architecture.

Moving forward in the exciting yet not fully explored and vetted world of AI will draw on all of the leadership attributes demanded by the job of CAO.

Review and Update Your Roadmap

When you begin your AI journey, you may have one set of expectations for training, budgeting, and staffing. As you gain more experience and uncover more opportunities you will need to continuously update your AI roadmap, incorporating it into your broader operational planning. Your initial metrics will most likely need to be updated as well.

Learn from Your Peers

One benefit of belonging to ICMA and other professional organizations is the ability to join others in formal workshops and training or simply to network

informally. AI will feature prominently in ICMA's upcoming regional Local Government Reimagined conferences (lgr.icma.org) this spring. Participants can expect a combination of discussion, hands-on experiences, and resources, including how to develop an AI strategy along with ethical considerations. Multiple sessions on AI will also be included in the ICMA Annual Conference in Pittsburgh (conference.icma.org) in September.

Moving forward in the exciting yet not fully explored and vetted world of AI will draw on all of the leadership attributes demanded by the job of city, county, and town manager. This includes the ability to see beyond today and to inspire the rest of the team to embrace the journey toward an undefined future. That ambiguity will create excitement for some and anxiety for others. As CAO, it's important to reinforce with team members that they will be part of defining that future; one that will create new and different opportunities for staff and more efficient and innovative experiences for residents. **PM**

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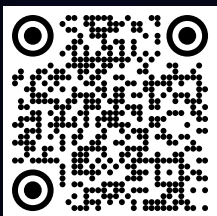
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Asked and Answered on Conflicts of Interest, Part 1 | BY JESSICA COWLES

Member questions about political neutrality and vendor relationships

In my role as ICMA ethics director, I hear about the good, the bad, and sometimes the very ugly conflicts of interest in the local government management profession. By far, members conduct themselves ethically and there are lots of daily examples of small victories that are never heralded with fanfare—simply those in local government management and staff identifying conflicts, resolving them, and carrying out their roles with excellence.

How do members get there? They take advantage of every resource available, whether that is asking me for ethics advice, talking with an ICMA regional director or senior advisor, or reaching out to a trusted colleague. One of the ways this profession is different from others is that the work we do is always in the public eye and can enhance public trust or conversely tear it down.

By its definition, a conflict of interest occurs when personal interests or loyalties compete with professional obligations. This is why the Code of Ethics mentions conflicts of interest or the appearance of one over 10 times and includes guidelines to address conflicts that may stem from working in your official capacity, vendor dealings, giving policy advice, advocating for your personal cause, personal relationships, running for office, investments, private employment, and confidential information, just to name a few examples.

This month's column will center on questions and answers regarding Tenet 7 with its focus on political neutrality and Tenet 12 on endorsements. The following reflect the substance of questions asked and how staff answered them with the ICMA Executive Board's Committee on Professional Conduct providing oversight of the ethics program.

The Importance of the Emphasis on Political Neutrality in Tenet 7

As a refresher, the language of Tenet 7 reads: "Refrain from all political activities which undermine public confidence in professional administrators. Refrain from participation in the election of the members of the employing legislative body."

"We contract with the county for law enforcement services. Up until recently, the sheriff's position was not elected, and this is changing soon. I expect my municipality will contract with the newly

established Sheriff's Office for law enforcement services. Can I contribute to a candidate for sheriff?"

You should not make a campaign contribution because the Code does not permit doing so. The manager should be politically neutral and making any campaign contribution puts you on record through public financial disclosures as providing your monetary support for this candidate, even if this person is not on your employing governing body.

Tenet 7 and its associated guideline on elections reads: "Members share with their fellow citizens the right and responsibility to vote. However, in order not to impair their effectiveness on behalf of the local governments they serve, they shall not participate in political activities to support the candidacy of individuals running for any city, county, special district, school, state or federal offices. Specifically, they shall not endorse candidates, make financial contributions, sign or circulate petitions, or participate in fund-raising activities for individuals seeking or holding elected office."

"Our local library serves the surrounding area, including the community where I work, and operates as an independent body with its own elected board and a standalone budget. It has limited dealings with my community. One of their elected board members is resigning and my spouse was asked to consider applying for the seat. My spouse has longstanding ties to the community.

If my spouse were to proceed, I see the following issues. Is there anything else I should pay attention to in advance?

- **I would need to disclose the candidacy to my elected officials and someone else from my community would need to handle any official interactions (they are very limited) with the library board.**
- **I cannot support the campaign financially or via endorsement. No yard signs, etc. Essentially, I would treat my spouse like any other candidate who approaches me while running for office."**

You are correct: you should disclose your spouse's candidacy to your elected officials. You have the opportunity to talk about the value of political neutrality and your commitment to it to your elected officials,



JESSICA COWLES
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at ICMA
(jcowles@icma.org).

and that you have a Code of Ethics that governs your personal and professional conduct. You are thinking about how to handle interactions with the library board, and I would encourage you to think about where there may be any overlap between the entities, such as shared service agreements, etc., to avoid any conflicts of interest in appearance or actuality.

Your spouse's candidacy for library board should not receive any special

treatment from you, and your spouse should be treated like any other candidate that approaches you while running for office. As you explain the Code to your elected officials, you may pay particular attention to Tenet 7, especially the guideline on elections that prohibits endorsing candidates, making financial contributions, signing or circulating petitions, or participating in fundraising activities for individuals seeking or holding elected office.

"We have a local sales tax election. Can a city manager put a 'yes' campaign sign in the yard? Is the expectation that staff will do the same? Our state does not allow this. Does the Code and personal advocacy of issues guideline allow this action?"

While the guideline on advocating for issues directly related to your organization references "assisting" the governing body, members can advocate a position on a ballot measure as well. If it is an issue the organization has worked to advance because it will benefit the city, then the manager can be an advocate for the issue by talking about it with residents, putting up a yard sign, donating to a PAC that supports the issue, etc. All those activities must comply with the law.

Before members decide to actively engage, consider how the engagement will be perceived and tailor the approach accordingly. For example, if the issue is divisive in the community or if the governing body is divided, the member might want to limit the engagement to just providing information.

As it relates to staff, it is not wise for the manager to ask or encourage staff to get involved in the issue beyond the scope of the staff members' responsibility. Even a suggestion coming from the manager can be awkward for staff. They may not really want to get involved but feel they lack a choice if the suggestion comes from the manager.

"A U.S. senator's office asked me as the county administrator to provide a quote of support for introduced bipartisan legislation. I am checking that this quote will not cause an ethics violation. I will also ask my governing body to approve it."

You should decline to provide this quote. Tenet 7 advises members not to engage when activities may undermine public confidence in political neutrality as an administrator and member. The elected governing body and county stakeholders likely have many viewpoints of their own and on this bipartisan legislation.

The draft quote is static regardless of how this legislation unfolds and would likely be





in a media release and/or online offering your support. The ability to engage with all stakeholders and make decisions for the organization and recommendations to the governing body that come from a place of political neutrality distinguishes managers from other professions. In declining to offer this quote, you may have an opportunity to explain you are committed to the principles outlined in the Code of Ethics.

An option would be for your board president or chief elected body official to provide a quote on this legislation instead of you as an administrator. In this approach, communication would be elected official to another elected official instead of administrator to elected official.

"I have an interest in possibly serving the community where I live (not where I work) in the capacity as a parks and recreation committee member. This is an elected position, but not enough people are candidates for the open seats, so I was considering a write-in campaign or possibly being appointed."

There is certainly an understanding of the wish to give back to the community where you live as an expert in local government and public servant. The charter governs the roles and responsibilities where the town manager is named. There are two issues involved: Tenet 7 has a guideline that prohibits members from running for office

so you should not do this. Second, there is this issue of professional respect for the town manager. There is not a guarantee you would see things the same way, especially finances and personnel. Not running for office prevents future conflicts with the manager that can damage the reputation of the profession and cause residents to lack confidence in the manager.

"The county executive is retiring, and the current county manager has been informed that their services will not be retained beyond the election. The candidate expected to win the county executive seat has gauged my interest in that position or that of the deputy. I have kept my current council well informed on the subject and several recommended me. I have played no role in any election activity, have never donated to a campaign, nor spoken about candidates in any way. The candidate personally invited me to their election night party. I believe the event is part of the 'campaign,' but it does not take place until after polling has ended."

Election night parties are campaign events and often paid for with campaign and donor funds—everything from the rental space to food and beverage to entertainment. You are correct to interpret this as a campaign event and the invitation to attend should be

declined. In doing so, you should explain your commitment to political neutrality means you need to decline the invitation.

This demonstrates a commitment to ethical principles in ICMA's Code of Ethics. While the county executive may not agree with this approach, this individual will understand your parameters, especially as you lay out an ethical foundation for the future with this person.

Tenet 12 Offers Guidance on Vendor Relations

As background, Tenet 12 reads: "Public office is a public trust. A member shall not leverage his or her position for personal gain or benefit." The guideline on endorsements contains advice for vendor relationships: "Members should not endorse commercial products or services by agreeing to use their photograph, endorsement, or quotation in paid or other commercial advertisements, marketing materials, social media, or other documents, whether the member is compensated or not for the member's support. Members may, however, provide verbal professional references as part of the due diligence phase of a competitive process or in response to a direct inquiry.

Members may agree to endorse the following, provided they do not receive any compensation: (1) books or other publications; (2) professional development or educational services provided by nonprofit membership organizations or recognized educational institutions; (3) products and/or services in which the local government has a direct economic interest.

Members' observations, opinions, and analyses of commercial products used or tested by their local governments are appropriate and useful to the profession when included as part of professional articles and reports."

"I host a podcast on local government issues and have a great sponsor for one of my episodes. Can I include a clip in an episode of a manager talking about what the sponsor did for their municipality? I see endorsements/testimonials on the website of the sponsoring company and wonder if this would be

treated the same way. Does it make a difference if it is an elected official or staff person rather than a manager making the endorsement?"

A member should not appear in a video or endorse this business in any way. This is not permitted under ICMA's Code of Ethics in Tenet 12 where you included the guideline on endorsements. The elected official is not part of ICMA, so ICMA does not have jurisdiction over the person's conduct. Since this is the situation, the elected official could factually and professionally appear in a video discussing how the jurisdiction is using the vendor's product or service. Even if the staff member is not a member of ICMA, I would advise against this route because there may be personnel guidelines that govern this conduct as well.

"A vendor designed a seal for the city. We were pleased and the vendor asked me to promote this work."

This would be endorsing this vendor's services and the guideline to Tenet 12

offers guidance in this situation. You should not promote this work on social or other media.

"I've been asked by an employee from my previous jurisdiction for a reference letter regarding a promotion opportunity in that same community. This employee's service was consistently exemplary, and it would be from my official capacity (i.e., not personal). Is this acceptable to do so on my current jurisdiction's letterhead?"

You should not write a reference letter for this former employee in a professional capacity on your current jurisdiction's letterhead because it would be considered an endorsement. You can serve as a professional reference during a recruitment process. Tenet 12 is applicable with the guideline on endorsement copied below.

As background, there are very limited circumstances when it would

be acceptable for a member to offer an endorsement. Provided the member does not receive any compensation, a member may endorse books or other publications; professional development or educational services a recognized educational institution or nonprofit membership organization like ICMA provides; or products and/or services where the local government has a direct economic interest such as in the case of a city-owned convention center. Members are free to provide a verbal reference for vendors during a competitive procurement process or in response to a direct inquiry, as well as serve as a professional reference during a recruitment process.

As we celebrate the Code's 100-year anniversary of "A Century Strong: Shaping Leaders, Transforming Communities," we will highlight additional questions from members, guest articles, and much more to commemorate this milestone! **PM**



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ICMA

“A Woman as City Manager? It Will Never Work”

BY ANN M. MITCHELL

Despite how far we’ve come, sexism continues to rear its ugly head.

I believe that women tend to lead differently, and diversity of all types is badly needed in local government.

At a forum in 2017, a panel asked a female CAO the question, “Why is it an issue that women are underrepresented in local government?” She responded, “Females have a unique perspective. Females are under more scrutiny, especially in senior government roles. We need to equal out the balance in government and all workplaces.”¹ The panel

was made up of CAOs, councillors, and department heads—all women.

It’s been said that around 75% of women are caregivers, and therefore they lead differently, can build consensus, and can see the big picture. We need this balance in the public sector. As a woman at the end of my working career, I was one of the few women in the role of city manager when I began. I found assistance from both female and male colleagues who were supportive of my success.

Going on my twentieth year as a city manager, women leaders in all areas of local government are becoming more prevalent; however, the stereotype of women not being tough enough for the role still exists.

As the title of this article alludes to, the words, “A woman? It will never work,” were spoken to a recruiter somewhat recently when he put my name forward as a candidate for CAO of a large urban county in Alberta. The more disturbing piece of the story is that it was uttered by a female member of council. Unfortunately, this stereotype persists, though we do see the tide turning as more and more women are taking up the position as the head of organizations.

I have found that as a woman my interpersonal skill set has assisted me greatly. However, I do attribute these skills as being handed down from my father (also a CAO), where my mother passed on to me her organizational skill set. I believe that women tend to lead differently, and diversity of all



types is badly needed in local government. In a recent *Harvard Business Review* article on the changing landscape of executive presence, the author stated, “Women and people of color no longer have to fit into a mold not fashioned for them. But they must still cultivate a confident, decisive, polished, and commanding persona.”² As a leader in local government, we are continually on display and every decision we make is public. We are judged and examined. We must set the tone at the top; this means working in an ethical and thoughtful manner in everything we do.

Am I a better leader because I am a woman? I don’t know the answer to this question; however, I know I am different than the majority that came before me (a woman in a male-dominated field). A variety in leadership in local government leads to innovation in the organization and that’s a good thing. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ *Municipal World*. December 2017. “Empowering women in local government.” <https://www.municipalworld.com/feature-story/empowering-women-in-local-government/>

² Hewlett, S. A. (2024). “The new rules of executive presence: How leaders need to think and act now.” *Harvard Business Review*, p. 134-139.



ANN M. MITCHELL is chief administrative officer/city manager of Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada.



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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17

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What Does Your Community Want from Animal Services?

BY VINCENT MEDLEY

New survey data makes the case for a greater focus on **animal welfare**.

“The voters won’t go for it.” “We just don’t have the money.” “The city has other priorities.” “Maybe next year.” Those of us working in animal welfare have heard it all when it comes to seeking the resources needed to do our jobs. When we ask to fund new programs, a playground, library, sidewalk, or street sweeper often gets priority. Historically, we’ve accepted the “common sense” assumption that the public is not interested in funding much of our work. So, instead, we have bake sales, open thrift



come from taxpayer funds, not private donations!

And that is without any fancy marketing or messaging campaigns supporting the cause. So, what exactly should those additional funds pay for?

To determine this, we must understand what the community wants and needs from an animal services program. Among respondents who had relinquished a pet in the last three years, 86% wished they could have kept the pet, a result that would have likely been better for everyone involved.

stores, and produce heart-wrenching videos. It’s not the most efficient way to fund public services.

However, what if that “common sense” assumption was wrong? What if the public overwhelmingly desired robust, publicly funded animal services programs? According to the Human Animal Support Services (HASS) community values survey preliminary results, we can show that those “what-ifs?” are actually what is.¹

The HASS project, an international movement working to unite the human and animal welfare approach, recently completed a community values survey (CVS), which polled 2,500 people across nine communities in the United States. The survey was designed by an experienced

outside researcher and conducted by a professional market research company. The CVS included a representative cross-section of community members and polled people with and without pets. Every effort was made to gain an accurate understanding of the needs and desires of each community. The work undertaken to ensure precise polling makes the results that much more striking.

So far, the CVS has shown that 61–76% of households own pets. A similar percentage of Americans take advantage of public parks,² yet animal services receive a fraction (of a fraction) of the funding that parks receive. When asked if there is a need for additional funding for animal services, 91% of respondents said yes. This result isn’t surprising. Acknowledging a need doesn’t necessarily equate to a willingness to pay. However, when asked how that need should be met, 67% *believed the additional funding should*

The emotional toll of relinquishing a pet weighs on individuals and families; a shelter is not a healthy environment for the pet; and every animal in the shelter carries a significant cost to the government, likely more than the cost to fix whatever led the family to the shelter. The CVS also found that 71% of pet owners wanted but could not afford or could not access care for one or more of their pet’s needs.

The HASS project works to close the gap between what the government currently provides and the community’s unmet needs. Many believe our current punitive and reactive model of “animal control” is ineffective and leaves those we serve without the support system that people and pets require. Thanks to the survey, we now have solid data that shows that the public will support greatly enhanced services, even at the cost of additional tax dollars.

Programs that provide veterinary care and pet food assistance can help preserve families and prevent surrenders. Supporting low-cost spaying and neutering reduces the number of unhoused animals on the streets. Encouraging animal control to focus on reuniting pets and owners and less on writing tickets will reduce pressure on your shelter and help build community bonds.

We’ve known what needs to be done and now know that the people we serve overwhelmingly want us to do it. Animal welfare organizations must work with local political leaders and administrators to push for additional funding and effective policy. City leaders looking for ways to improve the quality of life in their community need to look no further than their animal shelter. **PA**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ <https://www.humananimal-supportservices.org/press-release/human-animal-support-services-hass-releases-community-values-survey-results/>

² 2018 American’s Engagement with Parks Report, National Recreation and Parks Association

The survey shows that 61–76% of households own pets. A similar percentage of Americans take advantage of public parks, yet animal services receive a fraction (of a fraction) of the funding that parks receive.



VINCENT MEDLEY is

Maddie’s® director of human animal support services. Learn more at humananimal-supportservices.org.



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Navigating **DATA** in Local Government Decision Making

BY POOJA BACHANI DI GIOVANNA AND ALMIS UDRYS

Answering the questions of what, why, and how data collection and analysis can best serve your community.



Whether in geographic information systems, excel spreadsheets, or financial accounting systems modern and archaic, the arrival of our collective awareness of the vast abyss of data has generated a spectrum of reaction and response from local governments. This spectrum ranges from fully incorporating data into decision making to being overwhelmed by the great magnitude of data collected, and everything in between.

As data-driven decision making continues to steadily gain traction in local government, we are faced with many questions. Is this too much data? How exactly can this data inform our decision making? Should decisions be data informed or data supplemented? One thing is for certain, we cannot ignore this phenomenon.

Many local governments have already jumped into the data waters to chart their course on how they will be collecting and using data in the decision-making process. As a result, we are seeing a healthy mix of success stories as well as stories of data potentially in conflict with community interests. This leads us to an initial picture of what data in local government looks like. On the one hand, technology can be a great asset to enhancing a local government's ability to be efficient and effective. On the other hand, too much data can lead to data surplus, failing to provide decision makers with the information they need. In both scenarios, local governments must determine the following:

1. How they will collect data.
2. The extent to which data will influence their decision making.
3. How to balance data with community input in the decision-making process.

Determining the "Right" Amount of Data for Your Community, Open Data Portals

The beauty of data is that it can be customized to meet the needs of your community

Collecting data for the sake of data collection can lead to an overwhelming surplus, thereby robbing data of its potential to be useful.

and local government. For example, two cities can both collect data about bus routes in a community and use that data in completely different ways depending on: (1) what they are looking to learn from the data and (2) the extent to which it influences decision making. Determining the "right" amount of data for your community is essential to leveraging data to make more informed decisions. The best way to do this is by first getting to know your community and their level of comfort with technology and data sharing. Good, effective public engagement can help local governments better understand the needs of their communities and assess digital literacy and comfort levels.¹

Collecting data for the sake of data collection can lead to an overwhelming surplus, thereby robbing data of its potential to be useful. The open data movement illuminated this concept to both local governments and communities simultaneously as both groups realized that local governments have plenty of data, much of it inconsistently collected, and not organized in a way that makes it accessible to the



average community member.² In San Diego, for example, the local government found nearly 2,000 datasets around the city,³ but after making it a priority to flag duplicative data or very case-specific data, while also asking the public to vote on which datasets they would be interested in seeing released, the local government prioritized proactively posting only 44 datasets in the initial launch of the portal,⁴ which today exceeds 75 datasets.⁵

Cities soon began course correcting by building open data portals to make data more accessible to the curious community member. Cities like New York and Chicago invested in accessible websites to house the collected and sorted data. Innovative governments then doubled down on this trend by creating their own analytics shops and hiring chief data officers.⁶ Open data portals increasingly are becoming the favored means by which local governments are making data accessible

Open data portals increasingly are becoming the favored means by which local governments are making data accessible to their communities.

to their communities, and thereby discerning what amount of data is the “right” amount for their specific needs. This process is crucial in order to ensure that data is properly being used to impact decision making.

How Local Government Uses Data to Make Decisions

While there are varying degrees by which local governments can incorporate data in the decision-making process, the following four frameworks generally capture a majority of approaches.

Local government organizations must determine the following:



- ✓ The various methods by which you will collect data.



- ✓ The extent to which data will influence your decision making.



- ✓ How to balance data with community input in the decision-making process.



Data-Supplemented Decision Making

This framework relies on data to justify an already predetermined outcome. In these cases, the decision is already made based on other factors including community input, survey of stakeholders, etc..., and the data serves to supplement and support the decision.

Data-Enabled Decision Making

In this scenario, a framework for the decision is in place based on other factors, but data and information will help refine the final decision. A decision-to-be-made is known, but the decision-makers are actively considering other inputs and are flexible to make a decision even if only partially supported by the data.

For example, the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, USA, uses data to create site scoring for proposed housing locations based on proximity to transit assets and amenities, income diversity, reasonable access to jobs, and level of neighborhood change.⁷ While developers knew they wanted to build housing, the data enabled the decision to determine the exact location.

Data-Influenced/Informed Decision Making

This framework falls outside of a normal scenario because the catalyst for the decision is data. In this scenario, data is not sought, but is instead discovered or presented to kickstart a decision-making process that might otherwise not have been on the radar.

For example, in the city of San Diego, California, USA, data on the increased use of

The city of Charlotte uses data to create site scoring for proposed housing locations based on proximity to transit assets and amenities, income diversity, reasonable access to jobs, and level of neighborhood change.

electric scooters indicated to the local government that the city needed to take a closer look at how scooters were being incorporated into traffic patterns.⁸ San Diego began collecting data on scooters to inform decision making on scooter parking corral locations and general scooter regulations.

Data-Driven Decision Making

This approach is the most theoretically pure use of data, in which data determines the course of the decision-making process, regardless of other factors. Here the data does all the talking and drives the decision.

Conclusion

Data and its usage continue to be something local governments are grappling with in real time and making adjustments as necessary to determine what works best for their specific organization and community. This process is coupled with a younger, more digitally literate and digitally comfortable generation entering the workforce. As a

result, local governments are well positioned to navigate the waters of determining the “right” amount of data for their communities and the role that data plays in their decision-making process. Ultimately, that right amount is best determined by knowing your community well and working with them to create decision-making processes that have buy-in from all stakeholders. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹<https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/digital-equity-and-public-engagement>

²<https://opendatahandbook.org/glossary/en/terms/open-data/>

³https://datasd.gitbooks.io/council_report/content/index.html

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⁸<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/transportation/story/2019-10-24/e-scooter-ridership-plummets-in-san-diego>

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ALMIS UDRYS

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WAYS TO BECOME A DATA-DRIVEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Five tips from a data scientist
on how to get started
turning data into decisions.

BY JESSIE O'BRIEN

Data-driven decision-making has been integral in the private sector for years, but it's only recently become the expectation for local governments. Basing choices on reason and metrics allows leaders to explain and defend their actions and gain support. Data-based decisions are also more likely to result in the desired outcomes. But not every organization has a dedicated data program or the resources to launch one. How do local governments get started with turning data into decisions?

National Research Center at Polco is an in-house laboratory of data and survey scientists who have spent three decades researching and analyzing public opinion. Michelle Kobayashi, principal research strategist for Polco, shares five tips on how to become a data-driven local government.

1. Understand Your Goals and Vision

There is infinite data out there, and mostly everything is measurable. Without a mission, it's easy to get bogged down or confused with the sheer amount of information available.

Understanding what you want to achieve is a good first step in getting started. Do you want a baseline for your community's performance? Maybe the goal is to reduce homelessness. Knowing your intention allows you to focus energy in the right direction and ensure all stakeholders understand the intended results.

2. Assess Your Current Data Resources

Before you start digging into data, Kobayashi says you must understand your organizational capacity. Do you have the staff and the time? What is the level of data and technological literacy? Do you have the necessary technology? Do you have the financial resources? Is your organizational culture supportive of change and innovation?

"For most local governments, the answer is no," Kobayashi said. Even if this is the case, you can still lead with data. To start, identify your strengths and challenges. Maybe you have a skilled employee with the right acumen and extra time to explore data collection. Or maybe you have the funding to outsource data collection and analysis.

Accessing your resources will help you hone your plan by eliminating unrealistic goals with your current abilities. You might have to prioritize two or three targets to start.

3. Develop an Action Plan to Move Your Organization Forward

From there, determine what actions you can take to achieve your goals. How do you plan to gather your data sources? Develop employee skills? Culture surveys? Community engagement surveys? Online sources?

"Sometimes small steps are the best approach," Kobayashi said. For example, send promising staff members to learn Excel or Python programming. Look for data skills when hiring new employees.

4. Create a Learning Culture

Some officials are hesitant to look at data because they fear negative results. This worry often stifles innovation. Kobayashi says it's important to create a learning environment that is receptive to change and improvement rather than judgment.

Data—positive or negative—are an opportunity to learn. Kobayashi says governments must establish a growth mindset upfront to navigate potentially difficult discussions.

She also suggests including stakeholders and staff in the data collection and evaluation processes. This gives

employees ownership over the data, and educates staff on the tools and methods involved.

5. Measure What Matters

As mentioned, there are a lot of potential indicators to measure. "There is so much data out there, don't just start collecting everything or only low-hanging fruit," Kobayashi said.

Many people who are inexperienced in data collection would naturally measure what's easiest to collect rather than what's most meaningful. Productivity metrics like how many police officer new hires or how many streetlamp repairs are easily accessible, but what do they actually say about your organization's performance?

While it is valuable to know how productive and what your local government has done, it's even more valuable to understand the effects of those actions. Kobayashi says local governments should measure what residents care about.

The wrong metrics can lead decision-makers astray and have negative consequences. If a fire department tracks the number of inspections without measuring the number of fires, how would they know if those inspections are actually preventing fires? What if a planning department tracks the length of time to get a housing permit without measuring housing affordability? Staff may pursue a good score on processes that inadvertently cause worse results in the end.

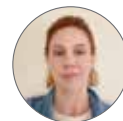
Leaders need to assess the impact of their actions as the

true measure of success. To keep things simple, Kobayashi says, "Be intentional. Start small. Follow your plan."

Tools to Help You Become a Data-Driven Government

Polco gives local government leaders useful community data in convenient dashboards. Kobayashi led the creation of these dashboards by collecting and analyzing public data from authoritative sources like the U.S. Census. Get meaningful metrics specific to your city or town that you can compare to similar communities. The dashboards save an immense amount of staff time and effort on quality government performance measurement efforts. Get a sample of your community's data today at info.polco.us/preview-polco. **PM**

JESSIE O'BRIEN serves as the lead copywriter for Polco (info.polco.us). Polco makes community engagement accurate and reliable. Hundreds of government leaders trust Polco for insights from surveys and data analytics on one easy-to-use online platform.



Learn more with Polco's Data-Driven Decision Making Certificate Program

February 27 – September 25, 2024





Reducing Ocean Plastic Pollution Through **Data-Driven Policy**

How ICMA is helping local governments use data to develop sustainable solid waste systems that effectively reduce, capture, and manage plastics.

BY LORI SCOZZAFAVA

Ocean plastic pollution is a major global problem and ICMA is doing its part to prevent plastic from making its way into waterways where it can damage wildlife, human health, and the environment. As an implementing partner for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Clean Cities, Blue Ocean (CCBO) program,¹ ICMA is giving local governments the guidance and tools they need to prevent plastics from leaking into the ocean.

In 2019, USAID launched CCBO as its global flagship program to combat ocean plastic pollution as part of the Save Our Seas initiative.² The five-year, \$53 million program supports local governments to strengthen land-based waste management practices and work toward establishing sustainable and economically and environmentally sound solid waste management (SWM) and 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle)

programs that reduce pollution and advance the circular economy. CCBO supports over 25 cities in 10 countries (the Dominican Republic, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Indonesia, Maldives, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam). USAID's five building blocks for reducing ocean plastic pollution create the foundation for the program:

1. Data-driven policies for circularity.
2. Effective solid waste services and investment.
3. Green jobs and local innovations.
4. Sustained behavior change to reduce single-use plastics.
5. An inclusive, just, and equitable system.

As a CCBO partner with extensive knowledge and experience concerning good governance practices, ICMA was brought in to lead the first building block with a focus on advancing local capacity

and governance to ensure the development of sustainable solid waste systems that effectively reduce, capture, and manage plastics.

Approach and Impacts

ICMA first established knowledgeable CCBO capacity development and governance managers within select countries, who then in turn established relationships with local government elected officials, staff, and stakeholders to create a platform for dialogue and information exchange. This was then fortified with tools, technical assistance, training, and grants, which supported the capacity development needed for the cities to build up their internal capabilities and knowledge. The primary goal for ICMA's team was to institutionalize enough best practices within the policies, infrastructure, practices, and plans of these cities that they would carry on and progress



CCBO supported this Indonesian company (POPI) so that it could collect, bale, and sell plastic bottles so that they wouldn't become ocean plastic pollution. Source: L. Scozzafava, CCBO.

toward sustainable solid waste systems even after the CCBO program ended.

As CCBO heads into its fifth year, ICMA's impact through its participation in CCBO has been substantial—improving governance practices and management of solid waste (especially plastic) by providing key tools, practices, and approaches that will create benefits for years to come. ICMA has made significant contributions, especially in the following target areas:

- Governance capacity.
- Solid waste legal compliance.
- Revenue funding.
- Policy development.
- Planning.

The following are some of the achievements in the aforementioned target areas and examples of how local communities are benefitting from CCBO's support.

Governance Capacity

Within many local governments, multiple departments are involved in SWM or 3Rs without any one of them having a clear understanding of where the city stands (as a whole) in terms of its ability to maintain a sustainable solid waste system.

Without this knowledge, it is hard for a local government to know how to invest its resources to have the greatest impact on reducing plastic pollution.

To provide guidance on how to navigate through these complexities, ICMA developed an index assessment tool for CCBO known as the Solid Waste Capacity Index for Local Governments—referred to by the acronym SCIL (pronounced “skill”).³ The SCIL is intended to be a practical, self-assessment tool for local governments to improve their 3R/SWM systems by first determining the areas where gaps may exist in their capacity that are limiting their ability to create, expand, and/or sustain these systems. It is a Microsoft® Excel-based assessment tool that poses yes/no questions in six component areas (listed in Figure 1). The “yes” answers that can be supported by documentable evidence tally points. Once completed, SCIL scores are generated (see Figure 1) and can be used by staff to frame recommendations on how to improve the system in the future—and, when repeated and compared over time, can measure progress and track how a local



CCBO Capacity Development and Governance Manager for Vietnam explains the steps involved in the SCIL assessment during the SCIL orientation meeting in Phu Quoc.

Source: L. Scozzafava, CCBO.

government is advancing its 3R/SWM system toward best practices.

To date, over 20 cities have used this practical and methodical approach to identify and discuss the many complex and interrelated issues presented in the six solid waste components. In each city, the assessments resulted in a set of recommendations (developed and prioritized by the staff) that became the foundation for updated SWM plans, future city budget requests, and joint program work plans with each city.

These outputs weren't the only achievement. The SCIL process often exceeded expectations. For example, by simply establishing a 3R/SWM group and bringing together agency representatives with the common goal of assessing the city's 3R/SWM system, it often created a pathway to communication and collaboration where it had not existed previously. Additionally, the recommendations often were ground-breaking and adopted by the cities, leading to achievements in funding,

policies, compliance, and planning, described in more detail later in this article.

One of the more long-lasting benefits was that the process was capacity-building in and of itself. By having to seek answers to such varied questions, each participating member of the group learned what 3R/SWM best practices are, their role in that system, and what their system should be striving toward. A comment made by Taufiq Djabbar, head of the Makassar (Indonesia) Waste Management Division, reflected what many participants felt: "We thought we were doing a good job with our waste but, because of the SCIL, we realized that there is more that we need to work on."

Solid Waste Legal Compliance

All CCBO partner countries have passed national solid waste laws that impose programmatic, policy, and financial requirements on local governments. Following all these standards can be very important—not only to avoid penalties for noncompliance but also to benefit from the related improved environmental and health

practices. Because of the many areas requiring compliance, however, it can be difficult for local governments to know whether they are following each statute. So, a thorough analysis is required.

To support this process, ICMA developed an approach, and provided support, so that each CCBO engagement site could conduct a Solid Waste Compliance Gap Analysis, which starts with the identification of clauses in every national or provincial solid waste law for which a local government is responsible for taking action. These clauses are entered into a spreadsheet and categorized according to the six components of a solid waste system used in the SCIL. A comparison is then made between what these clauses require and the current practice within a jurisdiction and characterized as either compliant, partially compliant, or noncompliant. Some of these clauses are straight-forward instructions, such as "prohibit cows from accessing all landfills." Others establish goals that must be achieved, such as "30% reduction through source segregation by 2030." For those clauses that are determined

by the staff to be not in full compliance, a recommendation is crafted that describes what is needed for the city to achieve compliance. This results in a large spreadsheet that examines as many as 90 different aspects of environmental laws with which the city must comply.

A report is then developed to make sense of all this information and provide a clear path forward. To help organize and present this information, ICMA developed an outline that serves as a template to document the process that was used, the laws examined, and quantify how many partially compliant or noncompliant clauses the city needs to address.

The next step suggested is to present all the recommendations and summarize the recommended actions (by the six categories) that the jurisdiction needs to take to become in compliance with the national or provincial laws. In this way, the report provides a clear checklist of items that the jurisdiction needs to undertake. If there are a significant number of recommendations, it is recommended that an additional step be taken to prioritize them before presenting a schedule of when each item should be completed.

These reports, when presented to the governing bodies, have proven to be quite informative and have effectively become a briefing on what steps need to be taken to be legally in line with national and provincial solid waste priorities.

Revenue Funding

Insufficient funding is a major issue in almost every country CCBO supports. The reasons

Figure 1. Sample of Final SCIL Score Dashboard

Component	Total Number of Criteria Questions	Number of Questions Answered as "Yes" Where Documentation Was Found	SCIL Score	Goal
Planning	36	23	64%	100%
Policy and Legal Framework	30	21	70%	100%
Financial Management	24	9	38%	100%
Service Delivery	36	6	17%	100%
Human Resources	23	15	65%	100%
Community Engagement	28	19	68%	100%
OVERALL	177	93	53%	100%



Indonesia's Capacity Development and Governance Manager, Rolan Shihombing, presents the results of the SCIL Assessment for Ambon City. Source: L. Scozzafava, CCBO.

for this varied, but a common issue is that new sources of revenue were needed that could be specifically used to make improvements to solid waste systems. To address this problem, ICMA developed the *Funding Options for Solid Waste Systems in Low- to Middle-Income Countries* report, which provides context and an approach for local governments to explore 3R/SWM funding options.⁴ The report provides examples of different self-generated and third-party options to raise these revenues.



Access the SCIL toolkit, developed by ICMA to give any interested local government the guidance and materials they need to conduct a SCIL assessment.

CCBO also held funding option workshops for each program-supported city, where local stakeholders discussed their funding needs, learned about the options described in the funding options report, examined what opportunities or limitations existed for raising the revenues needed, and identified actions. The results were very positive. Almost every city was able to identify one or more ways to raise revenues. One city, Iloilo in the Philippines, made an immediate decision to simply raise its solid waste fees and fines by 100%. This was approved by the local council and a date was set for the fee changes. A popular funding option that is being explored by multiple CCBO cities is a solid waste fee for tourists (who generate a significant quantity of waste). This may be collected as a charge by room-night at hotels, as a port of entry fee, or at attraction sites. In Indonesia, the city of Makassar determined

it could raise the equivalent of US\$400,000 annually to increase funds for its solid waste system by imposing a US\$1 fee at its tourist destinations.

Policy Development

ICMA has also supported CCBO cities to institutionalize the changes that have been recommended through new policies, laws, and plans that are officially approved and adopted by their governing bodies. These statutes have taken several forms and cover a variety of topics, including changes to environmental codes, solid waste regulations, and tax laws. What is key, though, is that CCBO cities codify fundamental long-term improvements that will remain in place even if government staff or elected officials come and go, bringing much needed stability to programs and services that are often challenged by regular changes in leadership.

Planning

Together with CCBO implementing partners Tetra Tech Solid Waste West,⁵ ICMA has also supported CCBO cities to develop or strengthen SWM plans to be strategic and data-driven—not simply describing aspirations on how to move toward a circular economy, but describing the logistics and costs of what needs to be put in place for goals to be met. For example, in Phu Quoc, Vietnam, the SCIL Implementation Group recommended that a Solid Waste Segregation Plan be developed. The staff completed the plan and it is likely to be one of the more strategic and data-driven plans ever approved by a people's committee in Vietnam. The implementation of this plan, approved in December



Access the *Funding Options for Solid Waste Systems in Low- to Middle-Income Countries* report.

2023, should institutionalize Phu Quoc's waste reduction approach to 3R/SWM for years to come.

Global Impact

While the immediate positive influence of the CCBO program is evident in the cities of the 10 focal countries, the benefits are sure to have a ripple effect. National/provincial governments are encouraging other cities to follow the process and protocols used to improve solid waste systems in the CCBO cities through CCBO's tools, trainings, case studies, and educational materials (available at urban-links.org/ccbo). ICMA expects its impact in these cities, and around the globe, to be sustained and continue beyond its support to CCBO. **RM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹ <https://urban-links.org/project/ccbo/>

² <https://www.usaid.gov/urban/save-our-seas#:~:text=This%20deluge%20of%20plastic%20is,into%20the%20ocean%20by%202040.>

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LORI SCOZZAFAVA is capacity and governance director for the CCBO Program at ICMA.



International Applied Science and Research Partnerships

Supporting U.S. Local Governmental Climate Programs

In support of data-driven, science-backed research, these organizations have worked together to build a model of purposeful, problem-focused, and goal-oriented collaboration concerning sustainable development.

BY DR. DALE MEDEARIS, REBECCA MURPHY, NORA JACKSON, ALLIE WAGNER, JILL KANEFF, DR. JIM KINTER, DR. LUIS ORTIZ, DR. CELSO FERRIERA, DR. LEAH NICHOLS, AND AMANDA O'CONNOR

The urgent and technically complex issue of climate change has introduced new opportunities for local governments to work with their neighboring colleges and universities. Much of this has to do with the scientifically complicated, data-demanding, and often research-intensive efforts needed to create and implement plans that address local-level urban heat islands, flood mitigation, stormwater management, invasive species, and many other urgent climate-related challenges through applied research. As concerns about inadequate federal policies or the devastating local-level effects from climate change move many U.S. local governments to engage internationally, the need for purposeful and strategic collaboration with neighboring colleges, universities, and research institutes will increase.

Formally structured and institutionally supported town-and-gown partnerships that utilize shared priorities, workplans, budgets, and coordination among the staff, faculties, and researchers can meaningfully advance a local government's climate programs. These developments include accelerating the testing and application of policies and technologies through data-driven, science-backed research, as well as creating new opportunities for local governments to serve as living laboratories for social, technological, economic, and ecological innovations.



A green roof on the top of an office building in Vancouver, Canada



In turn, these synergies also create practical and mutually beneficial work-experience and internship opportunities for the partner college or university's students and graduates, which also contributes to the local or regional workforce. Formal, purposeful engagement between local governments and neighboring colleges and universities also enhances the success of local governments' global engagement.

As local governments begin to learn from and apply policy and technical innovations from overseas, they face serious programmatic, financial, staff, and even regulatory limits. Global work by U.S. local governments is very often stigmatized by cynical perceptions of frivolousness, irrelevance, and waste because of a lack of direct outcomes benefitting the particular climate or sustainability programs of a U.S. county, city, or town. However, many U.S. colleges and universities have formal international research, science, and exchange programs that have the potential to be directed and coordinated within these municipal-academic partnerships. Structured and coordinated programming between U.S. local governments and their neighboring academic institutions also has the potential to advance more purposeful and mutually beneficial global cooperation.

A New Form of Strategic/Outcome-Oriented Global Science Collaboration at the Local Level: The Partnership Between GMU and NVRC

For over a decade, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC), a regional council

of governments representing the 13 counties, cities, and towns of Northern Virginia, and faculty and staff at George Mason University ("Mason") have worked together to build a model of purposeful, problem-focused, and goal-oriented collaboration concerning sustainable development. Over that time, the cooperation has grown to include the transfer and application of multiple environmental, social, and economic innovations to support the sustainability programs of local governments across Northern Virginia.

The cooperation fostering local-level sustainability between NVRC and Mason has roots that extend back to 2013. At the time, NVRC hired a Mason graduate student specializing in geo-science for a summer internship. The Mason intern helped NVRC's evolving green infrastructure and climate programs by refining a method for classifying commercial and residential rooftop green roof capacities across Northern Virginia.

Specifically, the intern's classification ranked rooftops with the highest potential for successful green roof installation and the associated mitigation benefits, such as heat absorption and stormwater management. This model has helped to inform further improvements by NVRC in the assessment of green roof potential across the region, as well as broader NVRC-led regional green infrastructure initiatives.

Several elements of the Mason intern's work with green roofs were informed by the unique international collaboration pursued between NVRC and its governmental counterpart from the metropolitan region of Stuttgart,

Germany. Since 1999, NVRC has worked continuously with the Verband Region Stuttgart (VRS) to transfer a range of policy and technical innovations to Northern Virginia, including various green infrastructure policies and designs involving green roofs. The Stuttgart region of Germany is recognized globally as a pioneer in local and regional green infrastructure planning. A distinctive feature of the Verband Region Stuttgart's green infrastructure programs was the development of a Climate Atlas through a town-and-gown partnership between the Verband and the University of Stuttgart.

NVRC's and Mason's interest in working together more closely to transfer and apply sustainability best practices from abroad led both institutions to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2014. The MOU was broadly framed and modestly worded to include work on climate change and sustainability with governmental and research counterparts from Germany, the Netherlands, and South Korea. Gradually, over the past decade and through a consistent engagement process, the cooperation has helped inform several high-priority sustainability programs across Northern Virginia.

The following two examples provide insight into the highly successful products and outcomes of this collaboration between NVRC and Mason, as well as the past and future dynamic for formal cross-national collaboration:

Renewable Energy: Solarize NOVA

In 2014, moved by the inspiring renewable energy programs of cities such

as Bottrop and Stuttgart, Germany, as well as the declared solar objectives of Arlington and Loudoun counties in Virginia (50 MW each by 2050 under their respective Community Energy Plans), NVRC launched the Solarize NOVA program. Solarize NOVA is a nonprofit, community-based outreach initiative sponsored by the NVRC and the Local Energy Alliance Program (LEAP).

A core element of Solarize NOVA is the facilitation of solar photovoltaic (PV) installation through bulk purchasing and free solar site assessments. Another is the Solar Map, an outgrowth of the 2013 internship between NVRC and Mason. The Solar Map was the product of NVRC's provision of geo-spatial data sets and Mason's computing facilities. The first of its kind in Virginia, the Solar Map provides users with information about potential solar energy generation on the rooftops of their homes or businesses with the related electric cost savings and averted CO₂ emissions.

Stormwater Management: Thriving Earth Exchange Stormwater Modeling

Under the umbrella of the American Geophysical Union's Thriving Earth Exchange (TEX), faculty at GMU and staff at NVRC worked to develop a model for improving comprehension of the variability of average and extreme historical precipitation trends and assessing future extreme precipitation changes. The goal is to inform local governments in the region about potential impacts from projected precipitation

changes given land-use trends, population growth, and a warming climate over multiple planning horizons (e.g., a 20-, 40- or 80-year time period). Faculty, researchers, and staff from both organizations used climate model projections to analyze precipitation-related risks to infrastructure and identify the need for additional investments in flood resilient communities.

Strengthening the Cooperation in 2023 and Beyond

The NVRC's and Mason's eagerness to build on this partnership was pursued further in 2022 and 2023. In March 2022, faculty from Mason accompanied an NVRC-led climate technical and policy study tour to Stuttgart and Hamburg. In Stuttgart, the delegation met formally with faculty, researchers, elected officials, and staff from the University of Stuttgart and VRS to assess formal development of a quadrilateral relationship that included NVRC and Mason. Subsequent to returning to Northern Virginia, NVRC and Mason worked together to frame a more formal level of cooperation with their counterparts from the Stuttgart region.

This included a two-day workshop in March 2023 at Mason involving researchers, faculty, staff, and elected officials from NVRC, University of Stuttgart, and VRS to assess and plan more formal applied science and research to support mutually beneficial climate resiliency programs. The workshop led to a formal workplan for joint applied research that included topics such as

urban heat island mitigation, sustainable and socially inclusive urban development, emergency flood alert systems, and micrometeorological models to plan for future precipitation impacts. Other subjects of future cooperation include the assessment of green roofs performance, stormwater runoff modeling, and operationalizing climate planning in policy development.

The work between the NVRC and Mason is also rooted in the university's recently established Virginia Climate Center (VCC). Like the TEX project, the work between NVRC and Mason offers a strong potential for involvement with partners from Stuttgart, such as the project, Flood Response Analysis for Climate Resiliency. Under this work, Mason and NVRC are collecting and assessing data and information concerning flooded road closures and swift water rescues due to pluvial flooding in Northern Virginia.

NVRC staff and Mason researchers are also working together to facilitate the exchange and sharing of information between localities in Northern Virginia about regional safety precautions during flood events. The partnership aims to develop a means for supporting and enhancing local government emergency preparedness and resilience to climate change-driven events such as intense storms. By collecting and displaying road closure and rescue data, researchers hope to demonstrate the increasing risk of flash floods to residents in the region, highlight locations in need

of flood mitigation projects, and support efforts to deploy a real-time flooded road sensor network.

Going forward, the work of the NVRC and VCC looks to further involve VRS and University of Stuttgart through programs equivalent to the Flood Response Analysis for Climate Resiliency. These future efforts also will involve, among other projects, the development of case studies and analysis for (1) climate resiliency planning between Boblingen and Fairfax; and (2) urban heat island and green roof planning. The four institutions have also started working together in the development of multiple grant applications to pursue further funding, data, and research from global, national, and subnational research institutions.

Conclusion

The success of global climate engagement is firmly ensconced in the work of local governments. This message of local engagement has been clearly broadcast and repeated since the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris. In turn, the success of local government efforts on the global climate stage rests on forging the appropriate strategic, problem-focused, and goal-oriented collaboration with neighboring research, scientific and academic institutions. The complexities and scale of climate change—coupled with the imperative for local governments to act—leaves them little choice but to seek out and develop town-and-gown international partnerships like those now embodied in the work between NVRC, Mason, University of Stuttgart, and

VRS. It will be a great day when this type of work is the norm and not the exception across the United States. **PM**

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REBECCA MURPHY, coastal program manager, Northern Virginia Regional Commission

NORA JACKSON, resiliency planner, Northern Virginia Regional Commission

ALLIE WAGNER, water resources planner, Northern Virginia Regional Commission

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DR. JIM KINTER, professor of climate dynamics, George Mason University; director, Center for Ocean-Land-Atmosphere Studies; director, Virginia Climate Center

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DR. LEAH NICHOLS, executive director, Institute for a Sustainable Earth, George Mason University

AMANDA O'CONNOR, Program Manager, Virginia Climate Center, George Mason University

A Blueprint for Inclusive Governance

Frederick County's Roadmap to Community Engagement Excellence

How the county tailored strategies using data, broke through language barriers, and involved the community in decision-making.

BY SAMANTHA WAGNER

Frederick County, Maryland, located just 45 miles from Baltimore, stands as the largest geographic county in the state. Home to a population exceeding 270,000 individuals, the county is a dynamic and diverse community, with over 20% of residents communicating in languages other than English.

In this “blueprint for inclusive governance,” we’ll share Frederick County’s innovative strategies, providing an approach for counties nationwide looking to enhance community engagement

and address the needs and preferences of their residents.

1. Identifying Unique Challenges: The Launchpad for Success

Frederick County, like many other U.S. counties, has encountered distinctive community engagement challenges, especially with a predominantly rural population. Recognizing the need for a customized strategy, county staff initiated a mixed-mode approach, tailoring solutions to address language accessibility needs. Identifying

these unique challenges became the essential launchpad for success.

2. Tailoring Engagement Tactics

Acknowledging that a one-size-fits-all approach falls short, Frederick County boldly embraced a variety of tactics to engage its diverse population. A standout initiative involved leveraging a community engagement platform for an ongoing Spanish-speaking community survey. This approach aimed to assess awareness of county programs and services within the Hispanic community while uncovering barriers to



resource accessibility. Tailoring engagement tactics became the cornerstone of their versatile approach.

3. Breaking Language Barriers in Public Meetings

To ensure multilingual engagement in public meetings, Frederick County harnessed the power of automated multilingual translation features. This solution provides interpretation in over 100 languages, as emphasized by County Executive Jan Gardner, who stressed the importance of giving everyone a voice. The automatic translation of entire project pages ensures residents can actively participate in public meetings in their preferred language. This symphony of voices is further enhanced by live multilingual translation and automated

meeting transcripts, breaking down language barriers and fostering a transparent governance process.

4. Engaging the Community in Decision-Making

In discussions surrounding the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, Frederick County elevated community engagement to new heights. The implementation of a community engagement software facilitated inclusive community investment discussions. Collaborating with the community, county staff ensured a democratic decision-making process by determining top-priority areas for utilizing

federal funds. Engaging the community in decision-making became a cornerstone of their success.

5. Prioritizing Community Values Through Strategic Planning

Upon taking office, County Executive Jessica Fitzwater outlined a visionary path, emphasizing inclusion, sustainability, and accountability. Aligned with these values, county staff collaborated with community members to establish priorities. Planning workgroups and prioritization surveys focused on key priorities, ranging from economic development to government innovation. This commitment to prioritizing community values through strategic planning became a beacon guiding Frederick County's success.

6. Inclusive Budgeting Through Micro-Site Engagement

Engaging residents in the budget prioritization process, county staff created the Frederick County Budgeting micro-site. This digital hub became the epicenter for residents to learn about the budgeting process and provide feedback via email, online platforms, phone, or in-person formats. Complemented by public hearings and town hall meetings, this inclusive budgeting approach ensured engagement options for all residents.

7. Measuring Success: A More Inclusive Governance

The innovative use of a community engagement platform allowed Frederick

County to implement a mixed-mode approach, considering the unique needs of residents and stakeholders. Visible triumphs include translatable closed captioning during live public meetings, breaking down accessibility barriers. The platform's success extended to increased outreach within the Spanish-speaking community, showcasing the county's unwavering commitment to inclusive governance.

8. Centralized Monitoring and Reporting: A Data-Driven Future

With a centralized platform, county staff gained the power to easily monitor and report on engagement. This data-driven approach provides a foundation for confident recommendations grounded in documented public input. Frederick County's success stands as a model for counties nationwide seeking to foster inclusive and participatory governance, leading the way toward a more responsive future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Frederick County's journey unfolds as a comprehensive guide for counties aiming to enhance community engagement and inclusivity. By tailoring strategies, breaking language barriers, and involving the community in decision-making, any county can pave the way toward a more inclusive and responsive form of governance. The blueprint is set; it's time for others to follow Frederick County's lead. **PM**

SAMANTHA WAGNER
is director of marketing
at PublicInput.



Carroll Creek Promenade Park in Frederick, Maryland



Let's Think Differently About Local Government Trying to Solve Big Problems Alone

It takes a community of stakeholders to address our biggest issues.

BY EDWARD
EVERETT, ICMA-CM
(RETIRED)



Thesis

Local government must stop thinking that we can solve big problems alone, like gangs, addiction, homelessness, failing infrastructure, civic divisiveness, and affordable housing, to name a few. By

acknowledging this fact, local government will free itself to create essential and indispensable coalitions and partnerships with multiple stakeholders to effectively begin solving these big problems.

Context

The big problems mentioned in the previous paragraph are complicated and challenging to accurately define. As a result, it is equally difficult to develop holistic solutions. These problems are not and will

never be the responsibility of just one governmental entity or organization. Resolution requires effective collaborative efforts by a multitude of stakeholders. Local government does not have sufficient resources, knowledge, expertise,

or assets to solve these big problems alone.

These problems will not be solved by assigning them to a department or even a team of local government departments. We all know the saying: “It takes a village to raise a child.” We need to apply this same thinking to our big problems: “It takes a community of stakeholders to solve our big problems.”

What Are the Barriers to This Approach?

Getting a large group of stakeholders together takes careful planning to avoid the barriers created by local government and stakeholders alike. Those barriers identified here must be addressed before any serious problem solving can commence.

1. Unfortunately, many city and county leaders, including elected officials, believe and state that they can solve these problems. Accordingly, the public expects local government to assume total responsibility.
2. The silos within and between governments prevent effective solutions to our big problems. Similarly, turfs, egos, and control issues separate government from other important stakeholders who are necessary to solve these problems.
3. Stakeholders may have conflicting needs or objectives, making problem-solving more challenging.
4. Historically, we have done an abysmal job of involving our residents, NGOs, businesses, faith communities, educational institutions, and philanthropic groups. We don’t have a track record of

effectively involving these groups in problem solving, which may make them wary of this approach.

5. We have rarely asked stakeholders to help solve problems. Some may be reluctant or not have experience working in collaboratives.

We Pretend to Involve Stakeholders

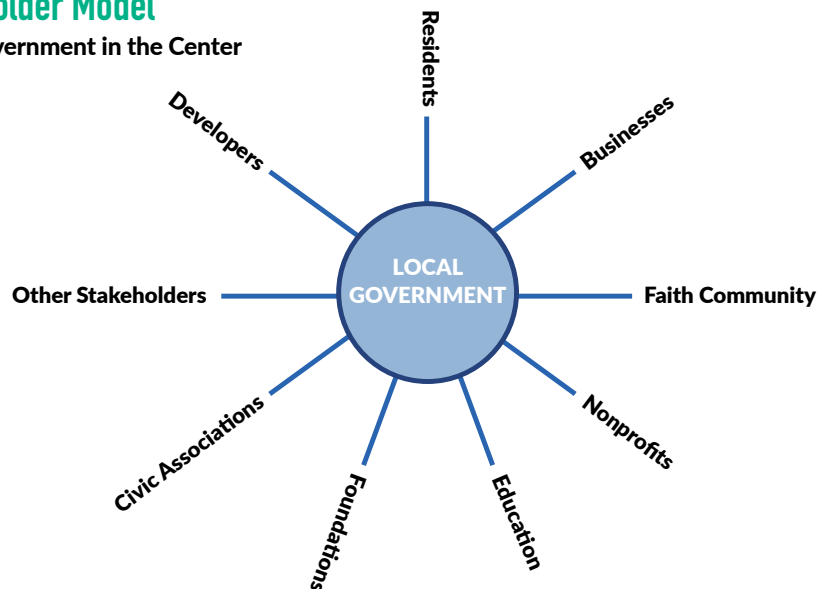
Figure 1, the Stakeholder Model, is a good example of how we see the world and the various stakeholders. We list and acknowledge all of the stakeholders, but do we really involve them as equals?

By putting ourselves in the center of the diagram, we are indicating to our stakeholders that we are the responsible party. They see us in the center and assume that they have no responsibility or accountability to help resolve or mitigate problems. They assume that it’s the job of local government to

Figure 1

Stakeholder Model

Local Government in the Center

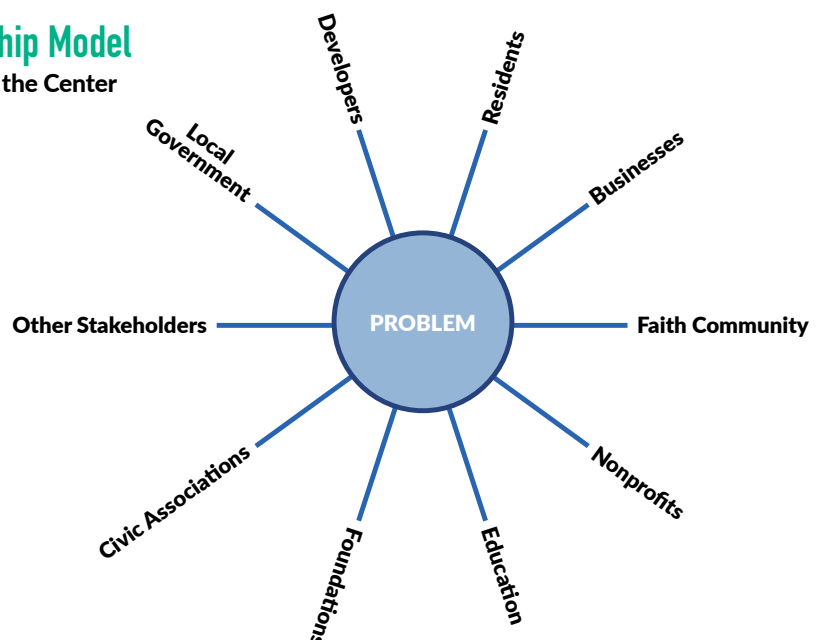


Source: Ray Patchett, ICMA-CM (Retired)

Figure 2

Partnership Model

Problem in the Center



Source: Ray Patchett, ICMA-CM (Retired)

“fix” the problems. This attitude is explored in depth in my August 2015 *PM* article about the “Bitch and Fix” model of local government.¹

Once we have clarified with all stakeholders that we cannot solve these problems without their involvement, only then will they begin to understand that they have a responsibility and role to play in mitigating these problems.

We Need to Embrace the Partnership Model

Figure 2, the Partnership Model, resembles Figure 1, but there is a significant difference. In the Partnership Model, local government is just one of the many stakeholders.² The “problem/issue” is in the middle, not local government. This model shifts the focus of all stakeholders to the problem, not on local government having total responsibility to solve the problem.

This approach requires a significant shift in both attitudes and behaviors by local government and stakeholders. It is the responsibility of local government to start the dialogue to make this shift. The discussion among stakeholders must include the following:

- We must admit that local government is responsible for the current mindset that we are solely responsible for solving all problems.
- We must acknowledge that stakeholders have skills, assets, and perspectives that local government doesn’t have.
- No one group or organization caused these problems; however, our disconnectedness is part of the challenge in mitigating these problems.
- Collectively, we are powerful. Individually, we lack resources.
- Egos, turf, control issues, silos, and past behaviors prevent

us from forming effective collaborations.

- Stakeholders need to acknowledge that they have a role and a responsibility as part of the solution.
- All parties have thought-provoking ideas and theories that need to be explored.
- No stakeholder gets a pass to refuse to participate and own some part of the problem.
- All parties must acknowledge that together we succeed and separately we fail.

Each stakeholder may have a different lens in viewing a problem and how best to mitigate it. Collectively, the best lens will emerge, and it’s this collective lens that is powerful and will lead to effective mitigation of the problem.

Local Government’s Role in the Partnership Model

Local government must change its role from sole problem solver to *facilitator* of problem solving. Our role should be to convene and facilitate a group problem-solving process.

What does that look like?

It involves bringing together a divergent group of stakeholders and facilitating a process that includes:

- Gathering data and current research on the issue.
- Fully and accurately defining the problem and its causes. Problem definition must precede the development of possible solutions.
- Getting agreement on the problem definition, as well as agreement that all parties should play some role in the mitigation efforts.
- Preventing “group think,” old theories, and past practices from dominating the discussions.

- Developing numerous actions that will be needed to mitigate the problem. There is never one “silver bullet” but rather a plethora of “silver actions.”
- Allowing, not controlling, the group to assign the various action steps to different and appropriate stakeholders.
- Securing agreement that the group owns the problem definition and the proposed actions steps if the effort is to succeed.

Facilitating such a process is difficult and time consuming. It takes a skilled facilitator with patience and perseverance to work through the conflicts that will arise. It also takes relinquishing some of our control needs if we are to genuinely involve others. If a local government does not have such facilitation skills, then it needs to hire a professional facilitator.

At times, this process will be complex, frustrating, and arduous; however, big problems are not for the faint of heart and quick solutions almost never work.

A Transformational Approach

Yes, this is a daunting approach for solving our big problems. Without question, it is an approach in which most of us don’t have a lot of experience. Yeah, it is complicated and slower. At first, you may feel uncomfortable and a bit overwhelmed.

Alternatively, we can keep on doing what we do, keep repeating old processes, and keep failing to solve our big problems. This new process will bring community skills, assets, resources, and broader

ownership to the problem. It will yield other significant benefits to government and the community, including:

- Creating the best chance of actually solving the problems that have been negatively affecting your community for years.
- Developing trust and transparency between the community and government.
- Providing a process that can be used in addressing many issues in your community.

I guarantee you will make mistakes, screw up, take a wrong turn, and upset some folks. But, you will learn, get better, and ultimately change the problem-solving culture of your community. That might be the most important thing you do in your entire career and it’s a powerful legacy.

Again, I offer to consult (at no charge) with any local government willing to try this approach. Good luck! **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

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

² This model was first developed by Ray Pachett, retired city manager of Carlsbad, California. I have modified it slightly to apply to this topic.

Author’s Note

An update from my last article: Only one local government (.00003%) contacted me and said they were throwing out their old performance evaluation system and implementing a system focused on employee development. If you would like to learn more, contact Sam Anselm, city administrator of West Plains, Missouri. Way to go, Sam!

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





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



The Local Government Management Fellowship: Making an Impact for 20 Years

For two decades, this groundbreaking ICMA program has boosted the careers of new graduates and helped communities excel.



By Erika Cooper

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Local Government Management Fellowship. Twenty years ago, leaders among the ICMA membership and staff recognized a talent crisis looming in the not-too-distant future. Demographics told a story: we were heading toward a time when a large volume of retirements would clash with a demographic gap (more Baby Boomers, fewer Generation X'ers). There were not enough (and have not been enough) people to pass a baton to. Compounding this timeline were budgets eliminating once-prevalent management internships and training positions with "entry level" analyst positions requiring two to three years of experience. The classic conundrum: you can't get the experience you need to get that first job.

As part of ICMA's Next Generation Initiatives, ICMA partnered with the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), Local Government Hispanic Network (LGHN), and National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA) to design a program to intentionally attract recent (and inexperienced) MPA graduates and promote a diverse candidate pool.

The Local Government Management Fellowship (LGMF) was born as a career development opportunity for graduates in full-time one- to two-year management-track local government positions under direct mentorship of a senior government leader, most frequently the manager or administrator.

Over the past 20 years, the program has generated 425 fellows, more than 35 who have taken on a chief or assistant chief administrative officer role, and alums who have continued a mentorship cycle through hosting fellows. This record demonstrates that the program continues to meet the designed goals, with the added bonus that the fellows themselves have made a substantial impact in the communities they have served and have demonstrated the importance of investing in career development. Featured in this article are some of those fellows and the impact they've made in the community they served, as well as their advice to those looking for a management-track opportunity like the LGMF! More fellow profiles are online at icma.org/fellowstoday.



Scott Pingel

City Manager, Newcastle, Washington
LGMF cohort: 2007; Federal Way, Washington



Scott served in Federal Way, Washington, as its Local Government Management Fellow for two years. He had the opportunity to be mentored by both the city manager and assistant city managers. From those mentorships, he learned local government finance and how to work through details from the assistant who served as chief financial officer, learned more of the operations side of local government, and learned how to confront and deal with conflict from the assistant who served as chief operating officer.

Scott's Advice: Constantly be in learning mode and look for ways to add value to the organizations you work for. Don't be afraid to fail because failure makes you better, and don't be afraid to do hard things. Take on as much responsibility as the organization is willing to give you.

Sarah Alig

Assistant City Administrator,
Eagan, Minnesota
LGMF cohort: 2014; Olathe, Kansas



Sarah served in Olathe, Kansas, as its Local Government Management Fellow in the city manager's office and the budget office. She was the staff liaison to the Olathe Teen Council, organized a "Fresh Air" employee development forum, developed a crisis communications plan and a "Communities That Care" grant application, and presented the city manager's office year-end report to the city council.

Sarah's Advice: Ask questions! Nobody expects you to know more than you do, and this is a great chance to demonstrate humility and curiosity. Pay attention to the context—sometimes it's helpful to ask questions right away in a meeting, but sometimes it's better to pull someone aside afterward and say, "Hey, can you explain what happened in there?"

Crayton Brubaker

Community Development Program
Manager, Salem, New Hampshire
LGMF Cohort: 2021; Concord, New Hampshire



Crayton served as the Local Government Management Fellow in Concord, New Hampshire. He worked on new economic development initiatives to enhance the city's vibrant downtown, including helping the city's

Outdoor Dining and Food Truck Committee draft and pass new innovative policies. Crayton also wrote five state and federal grant applications, coordinated airport public outreach events and development inquiries, and worked on a staff group for the design of a Riverfront Park development project.

Crayton's Advice: Be a self-starter, be intentional about forming relationships with department leaders in your municipality, and join and stay active in civic groups in the area. Be confident in your abilities, and know everyone struggles with imposter syndrome.

Reneé Van Sickle

**Community Development Manager,
Winder, Georgia**

LGMF cohort: 2021; Winder, Georgia

Reneé served as the Local Government Management Fellow in Winder, Georgia. She facilitated the city of Winder's entire land use application process and the Historic Preservation Commission within their planning department. Reneé also wrote and submitted several significant grants, including the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), securing \$1.3 million in total grant funding during her year. The city was awarded \$1 million in CDBG funding and it was the first time the city had received the award.

Reneé's Advice: Embrace the experience that is given to you.



Joseph (Joe) Franco

**Special Assistant to the Public Works
Director, Tacoma, Washington**

LGMF cohort: 2022; Tacoma, Washington

Joe served as the Local Government Management Fellow in Tacoma, Washington. During his fellowship, he served as a council policy analyst to four of eight city councilmembers. He assisted with the budget process, local and national media relations, and constituent relations. He resumed the city of Tacoma's Student Government Day after a two-year hiatus and led a continuous improvement project for onboarding new city councilmembers. Joe also successfully guided the city's environmental services and public works department's American Public Works Association reaccreditation bid.

Joe's Advice: Look out for your future self! Try your best to gain the experiences you need to advance your career. Reach out to people in the organization who are open to serving as a mentor, and take advantage of the resources that ICMA has to offer for career development! You are your best advocate.



Kari Furrow

**Budget/Financial Analyst,
Montgomery County, Virginia**

**LGMF cohort: 2022; Sarasota
County, Florida**



Kari served as the Local Government Management Fellow in Sarasota County, Florida. She served as the project manager for amending an interlocal agreement and establishing an agreement between the county, FDOT, and a private-sector partner to delegate roadway landscaping and maintenance responsibility. She also assisted with the fire department accreditation process and served in an emergency role during the response to Category 4 Hurricane Ian. She served as the project coordinator for the *Doing Business in Sarasota County* booklet, which provides new and existing business owners key information for operating within the county.

Kari's Advice: Be flexible and adaptable. Be willing to try new things and be out of your comfort zone.

Hosting a Fellow

Everybody remembers their first local government management position or the mentor that helped advance them in their local government career. As members of ICMA, we must help sustain and grow the profession by mentoring and advancing the next generation of local government leaders. Here are four reasons why you should host a fellow:

Increase your recruitment strategies. Add 10 to 40 top-quality MPA/MPP graduates to your recruiting process. The LGMF program delivers as many finalist files as you would like to review from top graduate schools nationwide. It's a great way to contribute to your organization's succession planning!

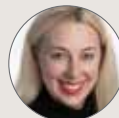
Access top talent from across the nation. LGMF applicants are screened by a panel of alumni fellows, saving your staff time and money by eliminating the first screening process. Finalists are selected based on academic performance, demonstrated potential, and a commitment to public service. With the knowledge that any of our finalists can do the work and will love it, make selecting your fellow as easy as finding the right fit for your team.

Add Innovation and new perspective to your organization. Fellows bring a fresh perspective, valuable skills and experience, and a willingness to take a chance.

Mentor the next generation. The LGMF offers an opportunity for you to build the future of professional management. It offers the fellow the invaluable experience of "that first job" with access to coaching and mentoring from a manager. The first job is the most difficult to obtain without experience, and good early mentoring is the foundation for an entire career.

Thank you to the host communities for continuing to mentor and advance the new generation of local government professionals! To learn more about hosting a fellow, visit icma.org/lgmf. **PM**

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





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ICMA is the reason we exist today. We first partnered with ICMA over 50 years ago to fulfill a vision of providing portable retirement plans to city and county managers. Our commitment to ICMA and the public sector continues to be as strong as ever, and we remain resolute in our mission to help public employees retire well.

We value our partnership and look forward to serving the ICMA family for the next 50 years and beyond.

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How Can AI Chatbots Help Local Government?

Another article by **AI chatbot Claude**, along with input from the human author.

BY MARC PFEIFFER

For this month's column, the author prompted Claude.ai to "write a 750-word article in non-technical, plain language that summarizes how generative AI chatbots can be used in municipal government administration." Claude wrote 746 words.

As with last month's article, the author edited the text to add context, reliability, and style. The edits are shown in red underlines and ~~struck-out~~ text.

Most ~~M~~municipal governments handle a wide huge array of public services from infrastructure to parks, libraries, public ~~transit~~ safety, and more. Serving residents effectively requires clear communication, accessible information, and efficient operations. This is where generative AI-powered chatbots can make a real difference.

Chatbots are software programs that use natural language processing to have conversations with people. Also called conversational agents, they can answer questions, provide recommendations, and complete tasks. Leading companies like Google, Microsoft, and Amazon and many start-ups now offer and continue to develop advanced chatbot services powered by large neural networks trained on massive datasets.

For local governments, chatbots create exciting opportunities to improve customer service, automate tasks and cut costs. Residents routinely need information on topics like garbage collection, parking permits, construction projects, and event schedules. Chatbots can provide 24/7 automated self-service for these frequent citizen inquiries.

How would it work? City departments and agencies would build customized chatbots for their public services based on available platforms and APIs programming tools. Using natural language processing, the chatbot understands questions ~~typed~~ asked by residents and responds with accurate answers in conversational language. In addition, many existing municipal software providers are building AI-driven applications into their current and future products.

If the chatbot cannot confidently answer a question,

it can say "I'm not sure" and smoothly transfer the user to a human agent. The system keeps learning over time as it ingests more training data. With machine learning algorithms, the chatbot continuously improves at responding to diverse resident requests in specific domains areas.

Chatbots can deliver quick, consistent, and high-quality customer service without the need for large call center staffing. Citizens get fast access to information online without having to wait on hold or navigate complex phone menus. Many simple inquiries can be handled fully by the automated chatbot, freeing humans agents to focus on more complex resident needs.

Some example chatbot use cases for city governments:

- Provide parking permit information and process applications.
- Answer questions about waste collection schedules and services.
- Share public transit routes, schedules, and real-time updates.
- Check status of building permit applications and inspections.
- Lookup contact info for specific departments and staff.



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- Provide details about city-sponsored events, classes, and programs.
- Check eligibility and enroll people in social assistance programs.
- Answer frequently asked questions on city websites.

Chatbots are highly scalable, so they can handle surges in demand without getting overwhelmed. During emergencies like natural disasters, chatbots can play a crucial role in keeping information flowing to the public when call volumes spike.

Many municipalities are already piloting chatbots today with good results. In Austin, Texas, a parking chatbot fielded over 100,000 citizen queries in the first year, providing accurate permit info. Las Vegas launched a chatbot that cut customer service call volume by 30%. And in Los Angeles, 80% of resident questions are now handled fully by automated bots.

As AI services continue to advance, smart cities will increasingly adopt chatbots. They allow local governments to improve efficiency, better engage with digitally-savvy residents, and reallocate resources from repetitive tasks to more complex challenges. With responsible design, chatbots can make local public services far more accessible and responsive to community needs.

(End of chat)

Human Author's Note:

AI and the Technology Hype Cycle

We are now at the start of an *AI hype cycle*. This is when a new technology is triggered, and developers and early adopters test, experiment, and evolve new applications that get a lot of public attention. We are on the path where it will soon reach a peak of inflated expectation and endure failures, controversies, and understanding of risks. It will eventually bottom out in a trough of disillusionment. At that point, costs come down, software stabilizes, and it starts up a slope of enlightenment that leads into a plateau of productivity when mainstream adoption takes off.

One catch with this: no one can predict how long it takes to go through the hype cycle. For the moment, however, organizations and individual users will take advantage of chatbots to help write letters, craft press releases, summarize policy information gleaned from the internet, and much more. Municipal leaders should work with tech and operational experts to set policies and watch for opportunities to take advantage of these new tools. And watch out for the hype cycle!

Go ahead and ask your friendly chatbots questions you might otherwise ask a search engine or coworker. Have fun with it, but use outputs carefully. Watch out for hallucinations! **PM**

For more on the hype cycle, see gartner.com/en/research/methodologies/gartner-hype-cycle.

An earlier version of this article appeared in New Jersey Municipalities, the magazine of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities.

Heartfelt Leadership

Cultivating a culture of encouragement in the workplace | BY EMILY LEWIS

Leading from the heart is a profound and impactful approach that can exponentially and positively shape the culture of your organization.

In the realm of leadership, where strategies are devised, decisions are made, and teams are guided, there exists a transformative approach that transcends conventional methods—leading from the heart. While our responsibilities are diverse and challenges are constant, the ability to inspire and uplift those working under our guidance is the true reward of the job. As a deputy or assistant, encouraging from the heart is a profound and impactful approach that can exponentially and positively shape the culture of your organization. This form of encouragement surpasses traditional management techniques, tapping into the emotional and motivational core of individuals.

One of the key aspects of encouraging from the heart is the cultivation of a positive and inclusive work culture. As an assistant or deputy administrator, you play a pivotal role in shaping the environment in which your team operates. Fostering a culture of support, appreciation, and collaboration is not only beneficial for the well-being of your staff but also enhances overall productivity.

Communication lies at the heart of encouragement. Regularly expressing gratitude, acknowledging achievements, and providing constructive feedback are powerful tools in creating a positive atmosphere. Taking the time to personally connect with team members, understanding their challenges, and actively listening to their concerns builds trust and establishes a foundation for effective communication.

Empathy is a cornerstone of encouraging from the heart. Recognizing the individual strengths and challenges of each team member allows you to tailor your approach to their needs. Empathetic leadership involves putting yourself in their shoes, understanding their perspectives, and demonstrating a genuine concern for their professional and personal growth.

Leading by example is another crucial aspect of heartfelt encouragement. Demonstrating a strong work ethic, resilience in the face of challenges, and a commitment to continuous improvement sets a standard for your team to follow. When team members see their leaders embodying the values they promote, it creates a sense of unity and shared purpose.

Effective encouragement goes beyond words; actions speak louder. Providing opportunities for professional development, recognizing outstanding contributions, and actively working to remove obstacles in the way of



your team's success are tangible ways to demonstrate your commitment to their growth and well-being.

As an assistant or deputy, you are responsible for managing a diverse group of individuals with different skill sets and backgrounds. Tailoring your encouragement to the unique needs of each team member requires a nuanced understanding of their aspirations, challenges, and working styles. This personalized approach fosters a sense of individual value and contributes to a more harmonious and productive work environment.

Encouragement is not limited to times of success; it is equally important during moments of difficulty. During challenging periods or when facing setbacks, offering support, reassurance, and guidance can be a source of strength for your team. Emphasizing a growth mindset that views challenges as opportunities for learning and improvement creates resilience and a positive outlook.

Celebrating milestones, both big and small, is an integral part of heartfelt encouragement. Whether it's the completion of a major project, the attainment of professional certifications, or simply reaching a team goal, taking the time to acknowledge and celebrate achievements reinforces a sense of accomplishment and motivates individuals to strive for excellence.

In conclusion, encouraging from the heart as an assistant or deputy administrator is a multifaceted approach that involves creating a positive work culture, effective communication, empathy, leading by example, and personalized support. By embracing these principles, you contribute not only to the professional growth and well-being of your team but also to the overall success of the organization. In the tapestry of public service, the threads of encouragement woven from the heart create a resilient and empowered workforce ready to tackle the challenges of today and tomorrow. **PM**



EMILY LEWIS

is deputy county administrator of the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners of Charlotte County, Florida.



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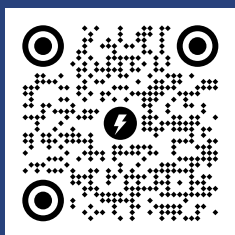
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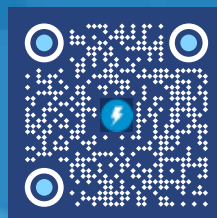
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