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Sustainability: The Issue of Our Age, and a Concern for Local Government

by Michael Willis

With each passing day, the issue of sustainability becomes more prominent in debates on the future of our planet. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the example of climate change. The wide and divisive debate of a few years ago is now rapidly narrowing, according to Dr. R.K. Pachuri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

At Pachuri's presentation, made in Montreal in December 2005 at the 11th conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, he showed how the earth's climate system has demonstrably changed on both global and regional scales since pre-industrial times. He noted that strong evidence exists that most of the warming observed over the past 50 years is attributable to human activities.

The past 20 years have seen record surface temperatures across the world. For people living in the Northern Hemisphere, 2005 was the hottest year on record since 1880.¹ A consensus is emerging that global warming is going to have a dramatic effect environmentally, economically, and socially on future generations and, in such cases as low-lying cities and islands, it will be doing this soon.

"Global warming" refers to increases in global temperatures resulting from an accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. These gases, including carbon dioxide, methane, and chlorofluorocarbons, trap the sun's heat as it is radiated from the earth and prevent it from going back into space.

Fifth Annual Swimming Pool Issue

The December 2006 issue of PM magazine will mark the fifth anniversary of the special section on swimming pools that are owned and operated by local governments.

If you serve in a community that provides a public pool for its citizens that has not already been featured in the magazine—or has been updated since it was featured—and if the pool is distinctive in style, structure, operation, location, cost, or other management aspect, share this information in PM.

Send a 250- to 500-word description telling why the pool is distinctive to PM Editor, ICMA, 777 N. Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 2002-4201; e-mail is preferred, at bpayne@icma.org. Electronic photo files in high-resolution PDF format are welcome. The deadline for information is September 15, 2006.

You may be thinking, "What's all this have to do with local government management?" A simple answer is at hand. Many years ago, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives famously declared: "All politics is local." Assume for the moment that he was right. This also suggests that the answers to the issues of our age do not come solely from the global political arena but also from the very things we do at the local level. For nowhere is change more achievable than at the individual and local levels. In so many ways, it's the things we do locally that really count.

No one would idly pretend that global warming will be solved by neighborhood environmental programs. But equally, social attitudes and values are often forged in the heat of the projects and ideals that neighborhoods passionately commit themselves to in their own communities. It doesn't require a large leap of faith to see that the greater the awareness of environmental issues on the local level, the greater the awareness and readiness for action on the national and international levels.

Think of the "broken windows" analogy. It's the little tasks we do at the "micro" level, like fixing a broken window, that influence how we value our neighborhoods.

So what are we, as local government managers and as a professional body, doing to address issues of environmental sustainability in our own communities? After all, we are very much in the legacy business, that is, the business of creating and nurturing things that can be used and enjoyed by generations to come.

Shouldn't sustainable communities be among these legacies? Are we doing enough to get sustainability onto our local agendas? This article explores some of these issues and briefly considers what local governments are doing to address sustainability.

THE MEANING OF SUSTAINABILITY

One of the goals is to engage appointed and elected officials on the issue of sustainability. So, what do we mean by the term "sustainability"? I once heard it described as "a vortex for woolly thinking" (as someone originally hailing from a land renowned for its sheep, this author finds that this definition does have a certain appeal). Sustainability certainly is a term that is capable of widely disparate meanings, so it's worth taking space to describe it.

Sustainability is most often considered in the context of improving the health and welfare of the planet and its people into the future. There are numerous definitions, but the following notions capture the essence of the word:

- Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Improving the quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of the supporting environment.

In local government terms, this concept has been described by one commentator as involving creating sustainable cities and counties, where we reduce the use of local natural resources and the production of waste while also improving human livability.² The idea of sustainability is generally viewed as having environmental, social, and economic components.

Current thinking on sustainability recognizes that human society is totally dependent on the natural environment. Thus, it follows that the integration of ecological thinking into all social and economic decision making is required.

"THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY"

The motto "Think globally, act locally" is well known and closely linked to the notion of sustainability. Its importance was highlighted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where 179 governments took stock of the state of the world and decided to adopt the global action plan for sustainable development that we now know as Agenda 21.

Agenda 21 called on local authorities in every country to undertake a consultative process with their populations to achieve consensus on action plans for their communities. It recognized the need to work out local agendas (and ways of doing things) to achieve sustainable living in the 21st century.

In many ways, local government can be viewed as the glue that sticks together the "Think globally" component with the "Act locally" element. The call to action made by Agenda 21 in 1992 is still relevant today because it is about meeting the three most pressing needs of our times:

- The need for environmental protection of the air, water, soil, and biodiversity upon which life depends.
- The need for economic development to overcome poverty.
- The need for social justice and cultural diversity to enable local communities to express their values in addressing issues.

There is, however, an inherent contradiction in addressing these needs, as there is in the term "sustainable development" itself. As author W. Rees, in his 1995 *Journal of Planning Literature* article "Achieving Sustainability: Reform or Transformation?" put it: "How can we produce the growth necessary to 'improve living standards for all' and provide a 'more prosperous future' while at the same time protecting the environment, particularly when historic patterns of economic and material growth appear responsible for much environmental degradation?"

How can we foster economic and social growth (a major driver in many, if not most, of our communities) while also protecting and enhancing the environment? How can we promote and achieve community expectations and at the same time protect individual property rights? Our profession is very much at the interface of these apparently divergent concerns.

You see, in all of these things, managers are called upon to manage apparent opposites. And managing opposites is about more than finding a balance between them. It's about being able to achieve both objectives.

What is it that we can do, as citizens and local leaders, to address the environmental challenges that clearly confront us? How can we help local people and communities exercise power over what they can control, in the face of so many forces that seem beyond both control and comprehension itself?

These are important questions because, as much as sustainability is about making things better environmentally, it's also about intensifying the process of civic engagement, which is surely at the heart of the local governing process and at the heart of our profession.

There are no easy answers to these questions; indeed, different answers will be required for different localities. The following section outlines briefly how some local governments have taken the initiative in responding to sustainability issues in their local areas.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

A growing number of local governments have decided to take a leadership role in addressing sustainability issues in their local areas. Some, including my own council in the city of Blue Mountains, New South Wales, Australia, have worked in partnership with the community and its citizens to develop long-term visions and action plans that will guide the achievement of more sustainable outcomes, not only in the future but also now.³

Such community-owned visions and plans can build frameworks for helping citizens and local leaders to understand these values, chart a way forward, and reconcile seemingly competing needs. In the case of Blue Mountains, having a sustainability vision and action plan has also given us a platform for launching a range of related initiatives in partnership with other stakeholders, as outlined below.

Blue Mountains City is enclosed within a World Heritage Park on the edge of the Sydney metropolitan area. Serving 75,000 residents, it has placed sustainability at the core of its planning and operational programs. We have undertaken a number of programs that we hope will bring this ideal to our local government doorstep. More information on these programs is available on the Web site at www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au.

- **Catchment restoration.** We have launched partnership programs among residents, agencies, community groups, and schools to carry out local works to restore catchment facilities (reservoirs, dams, stormwater channels, and so on) that have suffered degradation.
- **Bushcare programs.** A bushcare group will go out into its patch of bush each month and carry out bush regeneration, removing exotic weeds to allow native plants to germinate and flourish. Other activities include stormwater control and erosion control works in the patch, track maintenance and improvement, seed collection, plant propagation, public education, and other bushland management projects.
There are more than 50 groups in action and more than 400 active volunteers. The council has four bushcare officers employed to supply, train, and coordinate the groups. For every hour that the council puts into this program, the community puts in more than three. Each year, 6,000+ volunteer hours have been worked on bushcare projects.
- **Energy use reduction.** Since 2004, the Blue Mountains Council has significantly reduced energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions in its buildings by implementing an innovative energy performance contract. We have joined the Cities for Climate Protection(tm) program and completed an audit of our energy consumption. Currently, an action plan is being developed to reduce the city's energy consumption.
- **Curbside chipping of garden waste.** In 2001, the city began a curbside chipping service to process garden waste on-site at residents' homes. Each year, 22,000 services are provided that result in the chipping of 46,000 cubic meters of garden waste for reuse on residents' properties; otherwise, this material would be disposed into landfill. Significantly, as a result of this and other initiatives, since 2004 there has been a 20 percent reduction in the volume of waste being delivered to the council's two waste management facilities.
- **Teaching our children.** In partnership with local schools, the city has established a Blue Mountain School Environment Network, which supports teachers in their efforts to engage children and the community in learning about the environment and developing sustainable schools.
- **Earthworks courses.** The city is implementing earthworks courses to support residents in gaining such skills in sustainable living as composting, worm farming, "no-dig" gardening, and recycling. Through community workshops, more than 400 residents have enrolled in these courses.
- **Sustainable tourism.** The city has entered into partnerships with the state government to develop sustainable tourism destinations and other facilities.
- **Business sustainability.** The Blue Mountains Business Advantage Program offers local businesses the opportunity to become accredited in sustainable business practices through attendance at a training course at a local educational institution. More than 120 businesses have participated in the program.
- **Sustainability research.** In 2004, the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute was founded with the support of the Blue Mountains City Council. The institute is a nonprofit organization promoting the conservation of the cultural and natural heritage of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Park. It has attracted about \$1 million in research funding for a range of such sustainable research projects as sustainable options for business and industry in a Blue Mountains town, Mapping Country (an indigenous cultural heritage project), and fire and climate change research.

Quite apart from the great good that such programs achieve for the environment, taken collectively they also arguably have a significant impact in shaping values and beliefs about environmental issues beyond the local level. They cannot help but make people think about sustainability issues on the national and international stage. Thus, not only are we doing good things for our local environment, but we are also giving expression to a set of values that will be played out as more people come to grips with such larger issues as climate change.

Obviously, what we do at the Blue Mountains City Council is by no means unique or unusual. Similar programs go on in many local governments around the world. In the area of climate change alone, substantial progress is being made at the local level, particularly through the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) campaign, mentioned above under "Energy use reduction." This campaign enlists cities to adopt policies and measures that achieve quantifiable reductions in local greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and enhance urban livability and sustainability.⁴

This campaign is run by the International Centre for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability) in Australia, Canada, Europe, Japan, Latin America, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the United States. More than 650 local governments currently participate in CCP, including 160 in

the United States and more than 200 in Australia.

Action around environmental sustainability is clearly gaining national traction in the United States. For example, Portland, Oregon, continues to be a leader in a range of sustainability initiatives, as the first local government in the States to adopt a plan to address global warming.^{5,6}

Last June in California, Governor Schwarzenegger declared the debate on climate change over and directed a "Climate Action Team," made up of representatives of various state agencies, to devise a plan to cut the state's greenhouse gas emissions. According to this plan, emissions need to be cut to 2000 levels by 2010, to 1990 levels by 2020, and to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. Also in June of last year, 166 U.S. mayors signed up to approve a U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement.

Kent Portney's 2005 *Public Administration Review* article "Civic Engagement and Sustainable Cities in the United States" shows that, over the past decade, at least 42 U.S. cities have elected to pursue sustainable-cities programs to improve their livability.

ICMA, as a local government organization, has also been active in supporting sustainability activities, although that term has not always been used. Such activities have comprised a focus on best-practice environmental management, planning, smart growth, and brownfields redevelopment. The ICMA University offered its first formal workshop with a focus on sustainability at ICMA's 2005 annual conference.

CONCLUSION

We hold positions of great importance and influence in community decision making. Is our profession to be leaders or followers in creating more sustainable cities and counties? Should we be working harder to adopt more sustainable practices in the way we manage, following the examples of those who are leading the way?

This article has referred earlier to the dilemma faced by communities in resolving apparent opposites: fostering economic and social growth at the local level while at the same time protecting the environment. Local governance requires attention to such dilemmas. For, in truth, local governments are in the business of allocating community values in making decisions that directly affect the sustainability of our communities-socially, economically, and environmentally. There is no better place to start.

Surely, all administrators have an abiding and unswerving belief in the value and practice of local democracy. And local democracy does have a critical and pivotal role to play in addressing sustainability-the issue of our age. If we adhere to the adage that "all politics is local," then there can be no more powerful force than the democratic process, acting in concert with the community and the people within it, to produce sustainable outcomes.

In a sense, the future resides in the moment. For it is the things we do now that shape the future, for good or ill. If managers believe that we are in the legacy business, we need to think now about the things that must be done to develop more sustainable communities for those who will follow us. What greater calling can there be? PM

¹U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Global Temperature Trends: 2005 Summation (New York: NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies [GISS], 2005). Available on the Web site at <http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/2005/>.

²P. Newman and J. Kenworthy, *Sustainability and Cities: Overcoming Automobile Dependence* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1999). The full quotation is: "The goal of sustainability in a city is the reduction of the city's use of natural resources and production of wastes, while simultaneously improving its livability, so that it can better fit within the capacities of local, regional, and global ecosystems."

³See, for example, *Towards a More Sustainable Blue Mountains: A Map for Action, 2000-2025*, on the Blue Mountains City Council Web site at www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au. Follow the links to "Our Future Blue Mountains."

⁴See the Web site at www.iclei.org. The CCP campaign is based on an innovative performance framework structured around five "milestones" that local governments commit themselves to reaching. The milestones allow local governments to understand how their decisions affect energy use and how these decisions can mitigate global climate change while improving a community's quality of life. The CCP methodology is a simple, standardized way of acting to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and of monitoring, measuring, and reporting performance.

⁵City of Portland, *A Progress Report on the City of Portland and Multnomah County Local Action Plan on Global Warming* (Portland, Ore.: Author, 2005).

⁶Visit www.sustainableportland.com for the range of sustainability initiatives being implemented by Portland, Oregon.

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Ethics

WHEN DOES "YES" MEAN "YES"?

Q. I am a candidate for several city manager positions and told one of the city councils that I would accept that council's offer of employment, subject to successful negotiations over contract terms. Since I am a finalist for two other city manager positions and have interviews scheduled in a few days, I plan to go ahead with the interviews. While I am quite interested in one of those positions, I am not sure whether there is an ethical problem in continuing to pursue them.

I thought that it was technically okay to pursue the other vacancies because I have not signed a contract yet. Upon reflection, I am concerned that there could be problems. What would happen if the new community heard that I am still job hunting after accepting a job there? It could undermine my relationship before I even started to work. What advice does the ICMA Code of Ethics offer on this issue?

A. The advice from ICMA is unequivocal. Your word is your word. An oral commitment to accept a position should be honored. In fact, the wording of the guideline for Tenet 3 on "Appointment Commitment" was changed a few years ago to make this clear:

"Members who accept an appointment to a position should not fail to report for that position. This does not preclude the possibility of a member considering several offers or seeking several positions at the same time but once a bona fide offer of a position has been accepted, that commitment should be honored. Oral acceptance of an employment offer is considered binding unless the employer makes fundamental changes in terms of employment."

In enforcing the ICMA Code of Ethics, the Committee on Professional Conduct usually takes a dim view of a member who accepts a job, then changes his or her mind, even if there is no written agreement. Some members have been privately censured, some have been publicly censured, while others have been able to give reasonable explanations for not reporting for a job they had accepted.

RECIPE FOR A SHORT TENURE

Q. The county administrator was forced to resign under pressure. Now the county is advertising the position at a salary that is lower than the salaries for all of the department heads and the administrative assistant. It is a politically charged environment, with some of the elected officials facing recall elections. In addition, there are rumors that the administrative assistant had been working with these same elected officials in their efforts to force the county administrator's resignation.

Now that the job has been advertised, some retired city managers want to warn applicants about the situation. Can they do that? Or should they remain quiet and let applicants do their homework on the community on their own.

A. It is appropriate for retired members and others to make themselves available to answer questions about the county government and recent events. Offering to provide advice and information is consistent with the ICMA Code of Ethics. It is also appropriate to talk directly with the elected officials to let them know that they may attract a stronger pool of candidates by making changes in the compensation. It does not help that community or the profession to remain silent about a bad situation.

For advice on the ICMA Code of Ethics, or to find out more on ethics training and technical assistance available to local governments, call the Ethics Center at ICMA at 202/962-3521, or visit the Web site at <http://icma.org/ethics>. Calls or e-mails can also be directed to ICMA's ethics advisers Martha Perego, 202/962-3668, mperego@icma.org, and Elizabeth Kellar, 202/962-3611, ekellar@icma.org.

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Red Oak Consulting

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April 18, 2006, marked the 100th anniversary of the great earthquake and fire that nearly destroyed San Francisco. The question many still ask is, in the wake of more recent catastrophes, what have we learned to do better? It is crucial that local governments work toward managing their vulnerabilities and preparing for the unexpected.

PLAN YOUR WORK... WORK YOUR PLAN

Predisaster planning at Red Oak begins by identifying and assessing vulnerabilities and developing emergency response plans that use "rip and run" activity flowcharts to simplify access to crucial information during a crisis. This approach allows agencies to respond more efficiently, which in turn minimizes damage and possibly saves lives. Training exercises highlight and reinforce both an organization's understanding of the plan and the strengths and shortcomings of the plan itself.

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"Developing a water emergency response plan was only part of the objective," stated Joel Wasserman, operations and administrative manager for the Public Works Department, Hollywood, Florida. "It was essential that we train all our personnel in the methods of response, along with the incident command structure, to ensure we could address an incident effectively.

"Many of our lessons were put to the test before, during, and after Hurricane Wilma. Through our experiences in training, we developed stronger relations with the utility community, as well as local law enforcement and fire rescue. Enhancing our communications on a daily basis has only made us better prepared to address the issues presented by a disaster."

THE CLEANUP

The importance of predisaster planning cannot be underscored enough, according to John D. Booth, executive director of the Solid Waste Authority, Palm Beach County. "The Solid Waste Authority, through Palm Beach County, adopted a countywide debris management plan several years ago. While we had hoped to never have to implement this plan, visits from hurricanes Frances and Jeanne made that decision for us.

Following both of these disasters, removal of storm debris from the homes of residents of unincorporated Palm Beach County began almost immediately." The complex strategies involved in rebuilding after a disaster cannot be developed during the chaos that follows. Red Oak Consulting can help with everything from "all hazard" vulnerability assessments, to emergency operation and response planning, to training and exercising, to post-disaster response and recovery.

Most people plan for the futures they want to have; Red Oak also helps organizations be prepared for and respond to whatever comes. Offering comprehensive management and information technology consulting services, Red Oak focuses on helping each organization to develop more efficient pathways to lasting solutions.

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Profile

City Manager Taylor Keeps Politics in Perspective



Dennis Taylor is city manager of Eugene, Oregon. (<http://www.eugene-or.gov/portal/server.pt>)

Dennis Taylor began work as Eugene, Oregon's city manager three years ago, attracted by the city's progressive reputation. Yet it wasn't an easy decision.

Taylor and his wife, Joan, were reluctant to leave Montana, their home for 30 years and where they had made their closest friends. The Taylors enjoyed their time in Helena and Missoula, which they considered relatively progressive communities.

But after four years in Billings, Dennis Taylor was ready for a change. The Taylors packed their belongings and headed west. "I had always wanted to be city manager in a progressive community with a progressive city council," Taylor recently told the Eugene Rotary Club. "My wife says I should be careful what I wish for."

Since becoming city manager here, Taylor has grappled with the fallout from the police department scandal and tried to land a new hospital downtown. He's dealt with tax breaks for businesses, the city's changing direction on the West Eugene Parkway, and the Whole Foods downtown development.

As the city's top bureaucrat, Taylor's positions in these and other civic battles often leave him sitting on a hot seat targeted by critical city councilors or unhappy residents. Still, he maintains that he's glad he made the move to Eugene.

Part of his attitude is because of his optimistic, energetic nature. The other part is that Taylor knows what real conflict is all about. That helps him keep city hall politics in perspective.

Taylor served in the U.S. Marine Corps in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. He led a platoon during a three-day battle between 400 Marines and 1,000 North Vietnamese soldiers and was shot in the arm. A bullet severed a major nerve and Taylor describes the battle as "three of the most difficult days of my life."

He was paralyzed in part of his arm and hand, and he eventually recovered. Taylor received a medal for valor, and ended his Marine duty two years later as a captain. Taylor said he learned a lot in the Marines, including the value of teamwork because "no one person has all of the information needed to make a decision in a world of chaos, change, and uncertainty."

"I learned that I would never make any tougher decisions than I made as a U.S.M.C. combat infantry platoon leader at

age 23," he said. "My life of public service now spanning nearly 37 years has never proven me wrong."

Eugene's decision making is often contentious, but Taylor said that's because the city has "engaged and passionate" residents. Take last month's Whole Foods debate, for example, the loudest argument of Taylor's time as city manager.

Thousands of people shared their views about the city plan to pay for an \$8 million parking garage next to the proposed \$14 million store, which will have 200 parking spaces of its own. At a public hearing, speakers opposed to the public garage outnumbered proponents by more than two to one.

Ultimately, the council voted 5-2 to approve the development and a related land swap that will benefit the Shedd Institute for the Arts. Taylor describes the public input as a "great and very recent example of democracy in action." But he acknowledged that the residents who opposed the garage may not believe that democracy worked for them.

Tough decisions, Taylor said, often include trade-offs and don't have "clear cut, right answers. In this case, the (council) majority saw this project as a catalyst for other positive development and redevelopment opportunities in our downtown," he said.

Residents have many reasons to feel good about their city, Taylor said. Eugene has a modern library, new fire stations, a renovated Amtrak station, and new downtown buildings, including the under construction federal courthouse and Tate condominiums, plus proposed apartments on West Eighth Avenue.

And there's the potential redevelopment along West Broadway by Tom Connor, Don Woolley, and Opus Northwest. "Our downtown is on the brink of momentous change that could increase the vibrancy, the attractiveness, and the desirability of downtown as a destination for citizens and visitors to our city," Taylor told the Rotarians. "We need to catch this wave."

Each year, Taylor undergoes a job performance review by his bosses, the city council. His next review is scheduled [in May]. In previous years, councilors have praised Taylor's work ethic, enthusiasm, and managerial skills. However, some councilors knocked him for being resistant to their ideas and not responding promptly to their requests for information.

Last year, he took heat from some councilors who felt they did not get key details from city staff about the proposed west Eugene enterprise zone, where businesses get tax breaks for expanding and hiring employees.

Taylor last year received a cost-of-living adjustment with no controversy. However, he got a \$6,177 merit pay raise only because Mayor Kitty Piercy broke a 4-4 tie among councilors in Taylor's favor.

In July, he will join other first-year baby boomers by turning 60. How is Taylor planning to celebrate? By participating in the grand opening of the RiverPlay playground in Skinner Butte Park. "What better birthday party could any boomer hope for?" he said.

—Edward Russo
Reporter
The Register-Guard
Eugene, Oregon

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Performance Matters

Rev Up Performance Measures by Overhauling Employee Training

Are you thinking about implementing performance measurement or looking for ways to rev up your existing program? Although performance measurement is an increasingly popular management tool that helps local governments meet community goals, employees sometimes need extra support to embrace this process.

A local government can boost employee commitment to performance measurement if it gives all employees a chance to take performance measures "out for a spin." The right kind of training can foster buy-in, communicate the purpose, ensure quality results, help overcome initial resistance, and ensure that your program reaches top speed in no time.

Training all staff about performance measures has worked for us in Westminster, Colorado. Before we established a training routine, the city's performance measurement program was not an accepted and integral part of the city's way of doing business. Today, Westminster's training consists of a mandatory class for all employees, small-group work sessions, expert-level exercises, and individualized instruction. The result: everyone benefits, from city employees to their customers.

One of the city's most popular training sessions is "Welcome to Performance Measures: A Tale of a Few Cities." This class gives a fun and creative spin to what is often perceived to be a dry subject, while still communicating the purpose of performance measurement as well as each employee's role in the city's performance measurement program.

During the class, members of the city's performance measurement team define terms, show how performance measurement is the city's way of expressing the organization's values, and encourage goal setting and evaluation. To keep participants interested and involved, we use examples from cities such as Oz and Whoville.

The class highlights the relationship between each individual's work contribution and the organization's ability to achieve the community's vision. Class exercises (you get to be a resident of Whoville!) get employees to think about their customers' needs and how the city might show accountability to its customers.

The "Welcome" session creates an immediate recognition of cause and effect, as employees can see the link between their job duties and the city's mission statement, the organization's values, their departments' performance measures, and the strategic plan. One parks worker noted: "I do a great job keeping the grass mowed in our parks. That shows my commitment to our values of service and pride. It affects our citizen survey results performance measures about the appearance of our parks. And that ultimately affects whether we reach our strategic-plan goal of creating and maintaining a beautiful city."

Before we started this training, individual employees felt less connected to the organization's overall success. In the class, employees not only map the connections between their jobs and the city's goals; they also look for ways to strengthen them.

After attending the "Welcome" session, the city's lead housing inspector decided that the rental-housing inspection program could improve its focus on the city's strategic-plan goal of "a safe and secure city." Today, inspectors direct their resources toward reducing the most serious life-safety violations in the city's rental-housing stock. The inspectors' efforts bring us one step closer to achieving all of the objectives of a safe and secure city.

Other examples abound. During staff meetings, the city's firefighters and paramedics routinely come up with suggestions on how to shave off seconds from their response times and how to improve on-scene performance. They challenge their managers to approach performance measurement from a variety of angles and to commit to continuous improvement. In short, they get it.

But we don't stop there. In addition to the "Welcome" training for all employees, Westminster also offers small-group work sessions that target specific measures for individual groups. In one such session, the city clerk's office met with members of the performance measurement team to discuss the frustration they felt about their lackluster measures

and their struggle to make improvements. To focus the group on the most significant issues, we asked them to first answer what the city calls the "Three Big Performance Measurement Questions":

- What do you need to know to confirm that your operations are running efficiently and effectively?
- What would your customers (city council, the city manager's office, and residents) want to know about your operations?
- How do your measures help the city show attainment of the strategic-plan goals?

After a lively discussion about what customers would like to know, staff in the city clerk's office decided to monitor (among other measures) turnaround times and customer satisfaction ratings for services such as business license applications. As a place of customers' first contact with the city, the clerk's office wanted to meet their expectations for promptness, friendliness, and thoroughness. Today the city clerk's office ensures that the city keeps its promises to its customers by coordinating efforts that cross departmental lines.

For Westminster, employee training is a key to performance measurement success. We make it fun, keep it specific, and show employees how the program can help them succeed in their jobs. Then we hand them the keys and let them head off on their own.

—Emily Moon
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