

# Preparing the Next Generation

*A Guide for Current and Future Local Government Managers*



The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) is the professional and educational organization for appointed administrators and assistant administrators in local government. The mission of ICMA is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide. To further this mission, ICMA develops and disseminates new approaches to management through training programs, information services, and publications.

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# Preface

Local government management is in the midst of a quiet crisis: Baby-boomer managers are nearing the age of retirement, and there are fewer Generation X professionals (those born between 1964 and 1977) prepared to fill their roles. Put simply, it is a matter of demographics. Once considered a noble calling, government service is now regarded as bureaucratic, second-rate work that unfortunately does not attract our best and brightest. Subsequently, fewer members of Generation X have pursued professions in the public sector. Moreover, many local government managers define their primary roles as administrators, problem solvers, community leaders, or catalysts. Few consider the critical job of developing talent. If we in local government management do not immediately confront this replacement gap, our long-term legacy and contribution to the profession will be in serious jeopardy.

This resource book aims to help senior managers prepare the next generation. It compiles data, research, and best practices identified by a working group of the City Managers Department of the League of California Cities in partnership with the California City Management Foundation and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Our aim is to promote the developmental role of local government managers as they mentor and otherwise support aspiring managers who seek higher levels of responsibility in local government.

This resource book summarizes certain demographic, political, and value trends that have contributed to this quiet crisis. It presents a number of themes based on a survey of city managers, assistant city managers, and municipal management assistants, as well as several focus groups of municipal management assistants conducted by the working group.

To further make the case for action, the resource book provides a series of articles that highlight the essence of public service, the rewards of the top job in local government, the role of elected officials in attracting young people to local government, the perspectives of executive recruiters who evaluate up-and-comers desiring senior manager positions, and strategies for assistants in developing powerful partnerships with their managers.

At the core of the resource book are the chapters, “Self Development Strategies for Aspiring Managers” and “39 Best Practices for Preparing the Next Generation.” This guide then concludes with a section of case studies and additional resources.

## Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the following members of the working group on *Preparing the Next Generation* for their commitment and hard work:

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# 1

## A Call to Action

*Frank Benest*

City Manager, Palo Alto, California

### Replacing Seasoned Managers: A Business Necessity

Grooming replacement talent has for many decades been considered simply a “nice thing” for local government executives to do. But today’s demographic, political, and value trends make preparing the next generation a business necessity.

The lack of ready and willing young people to replace retiring city and county managers is causing a quiet crisis:

- **Fewer numbers of midcareer professionals** Demographics show that, as baby-boomer chief executives retire, fewer young professionals are available to take their places. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a replacement gap: by 2006 there will be 151 million jobs in the U.S. economy but only 141 million people in the workforce to fill them.<sup>1</sup> Across all sectors, but especially in the public sector, the greatest turnover in aging workers will be in executive, administrative, and managerial occupations. The General Accounting Office—the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of the U.S. Congress—reports that 53 percent of the middle managers in the federal workforce will qualify for retirement by 2004.<sup>2</sup> And, because five out of eight public sector employees work in local government, city and county governments are particularly at risk.<sup>3</sup>

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As baby-boomer chief executives retire,  
fewer young professionals are available to  
take their places.

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- **An antigovernment bias** In the 1960s and early 1970s, many baby boomers were brought up to consider public service an honorable calling. Over the past two decades, however, national leaders have denigrated public service and exhibited an antigovernment bias. Local elected officials have followed suit and have run against city hall and against public

<sup>1</sup> Roger Selbert, “The New Workforce,” *Growth Strategies* No. 954 (June 2003): 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Federal Employee Retirements: Expected Increase over the Next 5 Years Illustrates Need for Workforce Planning*, report no. GAO-01-509 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, April 2001), 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel M. Ehrenhalt, *Government Employment Report 6* (June 1999): 19–22, quoted in Marnie E. Green, “Beware and Prepare: The Government Workforce of the Future,” [www.managementeducationgroup.com/frames/articles/beware.html](http://www.managementeducationgroup.com/frames/articles/beware.html).

employees (the much maligned bureaucrats). As a result, government work now is perceived as little more than a mind-numbing, red-tape occupation fit only for the second rate. Recently our best and brightest have not been encouraged to select public service as a chosen field.

- **Different values** Young people in Generation X (born 1964–1977) and Generation Y (born 1977–1997) exhibit values different from older, baby-boomer managers. The younger generations emphasize a balanced life and are less willing to sacrifice family and other personal activities in the interest of career advancement. Focus groups report that current Generation X local government employees often perceive chief executives to be singularly focused on work and overwhelmed, abused, and attacked. To exacerbate matters, city and county managers have done a poor job of promoting the benefits and rewards of their work.
- **Lack of succession planning** Unlike many private sector corporations, local governments rarely develop succession plans to replenish senior management. Succession planning involves identifying bright, energetic, talented employees and then formally providing them the training and the experiences so they, as aspiring managers, are ready to move up in the organization when opportunities arise. The lack of succession planning in local governments clearly exacerbates the other forces at work.

## **A Development Role for Managers**

Most city and county managers as well as other senior managers see their primary roles as administering their organizations or their departments (for example, budgets, personnel management, contracts administration, labor relations), problem solving, and championing community development and other community improvements. Few managers invest significant energy in developing talent. To make matters worse, managers sometimes whine about coworkers,

councils, communities, and the challenge of leading; and they often leave an impression that senior management is an undesirable responsibility with few benefits. At a time of a serious replacement gap and a talent shortage, senior managers need to focus more on their role as developer of talent and emphasize the rewards of their profession and the joys of public service. If they do not, city and county managers will retire and leave their organizations and their communities without talented leadership.

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**Senior managers need to focus more on their role as developer of talent and emphasize the rewards of their profession and the joys of public service.**

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## **Strategies for Preparing the Next Generation of Managers**

If today's local government managers are to have a professional legacy, they need to...

- Recognize and emphasize talent development and succession planning
- Identify up-and-comers and involve them in a process of self-development
- Stop whining and better promote the rewards and joys of doing the public's work
- Create specific opportunities for young talent to develop both hard and soft skills
- Engage aspiring managers in conversations about the big picture and the politics of local government management
- Challenge aspiring managers to stretch themselves and take on new roles
- Allow aspiring managers to take missteps and reflect afterward to learn from their mistakes
- Introduce aspiring managers to other professionals—both inside and outside the organization—from whom they can learn
- Move up-and-comers around in the organization so that they gain line as well as



staff experience, learn the different disciplines of local government, and appreciate different perspectives

- Motivate by describing to aspiring managers one's own personal journey, and encourage them to create their own experiences

- Develop a broader notion of a professional legacy that not only includes specific community projects but also embraces talent development as a significant contribution.

A detailed description of best practices and other strategies follows in Chapter 10.

# 2

## Sharing Personal Journeys

*Nadine P. Levin*

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City Manager, Redwood City, California

### Introduction

Rachel Naomi Remen, author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom* and *My Grandfather's Blessings*, believes that in our society the art of telling stories that lead, heal, and offer insight has been forgotten. But city managers, who often enjoy sharing stories when they gather together, need to keep their storytelling art alive by offering the next generation their personal stories, stories of what drew them to the profession, why they stay, and—most important—their passion for their chosen profession. Their personal journeys, in other words.

Stories were captured at the 2002 League of California Cities (LCC) City Managers Department annual conference and through the LCC city managers' e-mail discussion group. The number of responses shows that city managers love to tell others about what a great profession city management is. A specific template was used to gather the stories:

- What brought you into local government management?
- Given the challenges of the profession, why have you stayed in it?
- How would you sell the career to a young person (or someone considering a career change)?

Here is a summary of the responses to all three questions. We found that the most compelling issues for a person considering the profession is why the job is interesting, how a person can contribute to the community by being a city manager, how the city manager's profession is a helping profession, and what experiences have kept the city manager in the profession. Statistics of the number of times a related answer was given and summaries alone cannot convey the passion expressed in the stories.

### Story Summaries

Career consultants and advisers note that career anchors or predictors of success and happiness are based on values, talents, and interests. We believe that the story summaries begin to articulate the values, talents, and interests that brought city managers into the profession.

## What brought you into local government management?

The largest number of respondents stated that they knew they wanted to do something good for others, make a difference, do something meaningful, and contribute to society. Several saw this profession as a calling because it matched their skills and interests with a career that would allow them to make a difference in helping others with everyday problems. This group of storytellers closely matched the group that indicated a general interest in public service, a social consciousness, and a desire to serve their community.

## Predictors of success and happiness are based on values, talents, and interests.

The next largest group of responders stated that an internship with a city while in graduate school allowed them to witness both the challenges and diversity the profession offered, and they found themselves hooked on it as a career. A smaller group traced their interest back to their involvement in student government and civics classes in high school and the influence of family and friends who had careers in local government.

A smaller but still significant group entered the city management profession from another municipal position such as police or recreation work.

A few stories suggest that the entry point was by chance, but these respondents noted that, even though it was not an active career selection in the beginning, it became so after they experienced what the profession offered.

## Given the challenges, why have you stayed in it?

A significant number of respondents appeared to answer the question with the question itself: they stated the challenges are what keep them in the profession. The challenges of solving problems and building con-

sensus are what drive a majority of the respondents.

Another group of answers emphasizes the chance to make positive changes and work constructively with others for the common good. One respondent said, “Helping others reach their dreams keeps me in the profession.” Other respondents brought up “soul satisfaction” and how the career provides for psychic satisfaction.

Breadth, diversity, and a sense of the urgency of the work were other reasons given by several respondents. They cited all the different opportunities and challenges every day that are often not predictable. These challenges permit the incumbents to contribute their talents to the betterment of the community and sometimes feel a sense of immediate accomplishment:

- “For just that reason—the challenges.”
- “The secret to a good career choice is finding something that you love to do and figure out a way to get paid for doing it! It is an awesome responsibility, but a magnificent obsession.”
- “I have enjoyed being part of positive change and leaving a mark in the communities where I have served.”
- “As the days, weeks, and years go by, you are clearly able to look back and say, ‘I had a major part in making that happen.’”
- “Making a difference in many ways has kept me in the profession.”

## How would you encourage others to follow in the career?

Answers to this question are likely the most important in attracting the next generation to the profession. Clear threads weave through practitioners’ answers to this question: using one’s skills and abilities, making a difference, being challenged, and enjoying work with the community.

- “I can’t think of another job that has so much variety, welcome difficulty, and psychic rewards, at least for my value system.”
- “Doing the public good is the highest good.”

- “If you want to make a difference where it really counts—in local communities—then become a city manager.”
- “Let them know there are a variety of issues and challenges.”
- “There is a sense of personal growth and satisfaction.”
- “This is a career that is never boring and will require that you use every skill, knowledge, and ability you possess.”
- “I think you have to fundamentally love the concept of community to enjoy the work.”
- “I would strongly recommend city management to anyone who has a sense of passion and mission about public service at the community level.”
- “You will get more responsibilities and opportunities quicker than in the private sector.”
- “You will make a good living and make a difference at the same time.”

The next five personal statements are powerful clarifications of the core values of the city management profession:

- “If you want to make a difference with your life, this is the place that you need to be. You will be challenged for a lifetime. Enjoy the ride.”
- “The joy and rewards of making a major difference in the quality of the life in the community in which you live is beyond description. The satisfaction runs to the depth of one’s soul. Young people, don’t miss the opportunity for making a city greater than it ever could have been if not for you.”
- “One of my life goals is to leave this world a little better than I found it. Being a city manager allows me to do that. It is a great job, and I would encourage anyone who feels called to make a difference in this world to go into the profession.”
- “I have never enjoyed anything more in my whole life.”

- “City managers can leave a small part of the world a little better; isn’t that what makes our lives worthwhile?”

These comments come from the hearts and souls of people who do city management work. They show what is in store for those considering a career in city management.

## **Sharing Our Stories with the Next Generation**

We captured the stories of only a limited number of city managers. Hundreds more stories are out there. We hope that every city manager reading this will tell their stories to others—in an organized way to one another and, most important, to young people in college and in high school. Young people cannot know that they might want to pursue city management as an initial career or as a career change unless they have been told that the profession exists and what one can accomplish in it. Stories can and will educate and, when told from the heart, will encourage others to look at city management as a challenging, rewarding, honorable, and important career.

### **One city manager’s story**

I entered the profession by chance, but I got hooked on the problem solving and the desire to contribute. I liked working on substantive issues in an ethical environment.

I stay in this line of work because of the people. This is a career that is never boring and that will require that you use every skill, bit of knowledge, and ability you possess. You will face disasters and you learn where your hidden reserves live. You will be part of something terrific, and it will have a positive outcome because you were involved. Public service will encompass all your strengths and weaknesses, and you will learn.

# 3

## **What Aspiring Managers and Chief Executives Say: Themes from Focus Groups and E-Mail Surveys**

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*Bill Garrett*

City Manager, El Cajon, California

### **Overview and Survey Methods**

To help attract young professionals into local government and especially into city management, the “Preparing the Next Generation” working group—made up of members of the City Managers Department of the League of California Cities—conducted several surveys and focus groups between July and October 2002.

The purpose of the surveys was to identify when and why local government professionals selected a career in local government. We surveyed staff who are not yet city managers because we wanted to learn the target ages for recruitment of prospective local government managers. We also gathered data about what these aspiring managers perceived as obstacles to becoming city managers.

Next we surveyed city managers to hear their opinions on which skills and what kinds of training are necessary for becoming a city manager. We also asked them to enumerate the rewards of being a city manager. Finally, both target groups were asked which experiences they believe were most helpful to them and would be most helpful to others on the road to becoming city managers.

The surveys were developed, administered, summarized, and analyzed by members of the “Preparing the Next Generation” working group. To gather the data, we used several survey techniques but did not follow any formal statistical sampling process. The recipients of the surveys included city managers, assistant city managers, assistants to city managers, and management/administrative analysts.

Survey techniques included placing an e-mail survey to city managers and assistant city managers on the electronic discussion list of the City Managers Department, publishing

mail-in surveys in the August 2002 newsletters of the Municipal Management Association of Southern California (MMASC) and Municipal Management Association of Northern California (MMANC), and conducting focus groups at the annual conferences of the MMASC and the MMANC.

The survey for the city managers and assistant city managers distributed via e-mail on the electronic discussion list resulted in 25 responses. This survey focused on the rewards, obstacles, and most helpful experiences in becoming a city manager.

The survey published in the MMASC and MMANC newsletters generated 60 responses and focused on gaining a more general perspective on how to be successful in the profession as well as identifying the perceived rewards of being a city manager.

The focus groups were conducted on July 12, 2002, at the MMASC annual conference in Oxnard, California, and on October 17, 2002, at the MMANC annual conference in Santa Rosa, California. Approximately 40 assistants attended the MMASC focus group session and approximately 25 assistants attended the MMANC focus group session, and they responded to the following questions:

- When did you make your decision to join local government?
- Why did you decide to join public service?
- What are obstacles to becoming a city manager?
- What are the rewards of becoming a city manager?
- What are some strategies to market local government to young people?
- What can city managers do to better prepare you for a senior management position?

## **Survey and Focus Group Results—Assistants**

The surveys completed by the assistants provided the following information related to selecting local government as a career.

### **When did they decide?**

- A majority of assistants selected a career in local government during their undergraduate and graduate years. Only a few stated they made the decision in high school.

### **What made them decide?**

- Assistants most often selected public service because they wanted to make a difference. Other common reasons included influence by a family member involved in local government and timing (in other words, jobs were available in the public sector).

### **What was the first exposure to local government?**

- Many assistants began their careers in local government as interns or part-time employees in parks and recreation departments. Also, several stated their first exposure was through a family member's involvement in local government.

### **What are the obstacles to becoming city manager?**

- Aspiring city managers most frequently noted that gaining adequate experience was a major obstacle. Additional obstacles include limited mobility caused by family objections to moving, the constraints of a spouse's career, the difficulty of obtaining that first city manager job, a lack of direct supervisory experience, career assistant city managers who block advancement opportunities, a lack of mentors, personal unwillingness to commit to an around-the-clock job, politics and difficult councils, and public criticism.

### **What was the most helpful experience in becoming a city manager?**

- Many assistants mentioned mentorship as a desirable and helpful experience in preparation for becoming a city manager. Other comments included multidepartmental experiences; project management; direct supervisory experiences; outside training; attending city manager meetings; and exposure to areas such as budgeting, labor negotiations, personnel management, and meeting facilitation.

### **What are perceived as the rewards of being a city manager and having a career in local government?**

- A majority of assistants stated that making a difference in the community was a major reward. Respect within the community, dynamic responsibilities, and shaping and influencing a community also were noted.

### **Survey Results— City Managers**

The surveys completed by the city managers provided the following information related to their opinions on being and becoming a city manager.

#### **Rewards for serving as a city manager**

- Overwhelmingly, city managers listed making a difference and bringing value to the community as a reward. Additional comments included implementing positive change, professionalism in an organization, leadership, and salary.

#### **Most helpful experience for assistants to acquire**

- City managers recommended experiences—such as outside training programs, attending city manager meetings and council meetings, and networking/establishing relationships with colleagues—that focus more on soft skills. However, they advised that assistants should also gain experience in budgeting, labor negotiations, personnel management, line responsibility, citizen participation, project management, working with boards/commissions, and serving as a department head.

### **Findings and Themes**

Both the city managers and the assistants highlighted several consistent themes:

#### **Entering the field**

Although a majority of assistants decided on a public service career in college—during either their undergraduate or graduate

years—many were also heavily influenced by some contact with government employees, either family or friends, who provided insider knowledge about the positive and attractive aspects of a local government career.

Recruitment efforts that focus on personal involvement by current employees could pay big dividends in times when few qualified people seek local government management positions. Local governments should also consider incentive programs for employees who refer qualified applicants for jobs.

Although a positive, personal experience with someone in government is a powerful motivator, it also appears that the respondents were strongly attracted by the nature of local government work and the prospect of adding tangible value to a community through individual efforts. This value-of-work idea was reflected strongly by aspiring city managers as well as serving city managers. A majority of both groups stated that they selected a career in public service to make a difference. Recruitment efforts need to declare and demonstrate clearly the make-a-difference aspect of local government jobs and point out the value-based elements of the work.

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**Respondents were strongly attracted by the prospect of adding tangible value to a community through individual efforts.**

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One inescapable conclusion from the data suggests that we should spend much more time and effort discussing local government careers with part-time seasonal employees. Many first exposures to local government are the result of summer jobs as recreation leaders or lifeguards. Students who return to work summer after summer during their college years may be prime candidates for recruitment. Marketing a local government career need not focus on a job in that jurisdiction at that time, but the idea of a local government career should be introduced as a part of the part-time work experience.

## Obstacles to becoming a city manager

The major obstacles to becoming a city manager can be summarized into three themes:

- **Lack of experience and opportunities**

Assistants feel that they do not get all the opportunities they need to experience aspects of work that are key to being a successful city manager candidate.

Experiences they feel are critical include having primary responsibility for projects, directly supervising other employees, and playing lead roles in budgeting processes and in labor negotiations. Organizations that are serious about succession planning should deliberately find opportunities to give aspiring managers these experiences. City managers recommend that aspiring city managers avail themselves as much as possible of outside training programs, regional and statewide city manager meetings, and council meetings. They also believe it is important to establish networks and maintain other relationships with colleagues.

- **Lack of mentorship** Many assistants believe having a mentor is a desirable and a helpful experience and assists them in becoming city managers. They also believe that not enough managers are willing to mentor. It is noteworthy that city managers also strongly believe in the value of

mentoring and often point to that experience in their own careers as being significantly helpful. The assistants' perception that this is not important to managers is a bit of a disconnect. It may suggest that managers do not put into practice what they believe to have been important in their own career development.

- **Demands of family and choices for oneself outweigh the job**

Work values may be changing. Most city managers chose to be managers knowing and accepting the time requirements and the around-the-clock nature of the work.

Many aspiring managers (or career assistants who used to be aspiring managers) have made conscious decisions to place family and/or personal time above being the number-one person in the organization. Open for debate is whether the time requirements of the position are perception or reality. Most probably the answer depends on the situation. But if that perception is driving the behaviors of aspiring city managers, we should take it seriously. Perhaps it has become a cultural norm for city managers to complain about how hard they have it, how many hours they work, and how nobody really understands. If that is true, city managers should understand the impact that this attitude will naturally have on aspiring city managers and, as a succession-planning strategy, rethink their display of those attitudes.



# 4

## The Ultimate Community Service

*Elizabeth K. Kellar*

Deputy Executive Director, ICMA

“When students hear the words ‘public service,’ they think of the kind of work they see in the nonprofit sector,” wrote Paul C. Light, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, describing the results of a 2003 survey of 1,002 college seniors majoring in the humanities, social sciences, social work, and education. Only 28 percent of the students said that working for government was “completely public service,” but 58 percent saw nonprofit organizations in that light.<sup>1</sup>

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**Managers have made a difference to the communities they served.**

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City and county managers have awakened to this societal challenge and are beginning to tell their stories to young people so that they can learn about opportunities in what could be characterized as the ultimate community service. Whether these managers tackled problems like youth violence, resolved a complex infrastructure problem that had divided a community for years, or made services more accessible to an increasingly diverse community, they have made a difference to the communities they have served.

### **Pushing for an Investment in Youth**

After a series of murders of 13-year-old children in his community, George Carvalho took up the challenge to bring the community together to do something about the problem. Then city manager in Santa Clarita, California, Carvalho knew that this was not a problem that could be solved by schools or the police alone. A much more comprehensive approach was needed.

He pressed for more investment in youth, and the city council became convinced that this strategy was critical to the well-being of the community. Carvalho speaks with pride about the substantial budget the city council approved for parks and recreation programs and other community services. One tangible legacy of this investment in youth is a beautiful sports complex that includes gymnasiums, a teen center, a skateboard park, and swimming pools. Although the motivation for the complex was to provide a safe and healthy environment for young people, residents of all ages enjoy the amenities.

Carvalho’s passion to help society prepare for a multicultural future with no one ethnic group in the majority attracted him to his present job as city manager of Riverside, California.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul C. Light, “In Search of Public Service” (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, Center for Public Service, June 2003), 3, [www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/gscps/search.pdf](http://www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/gscps/search.pdf).



George Carvalho, city manager of Riverside, California, with young city residents.

He is challenged by the sheer number of differences in our communities: young and old, rich and poor, long-time residents and new immigrants. It is not easy to tackle issues like youth violence in our diverse communities, but Carvalho likes the can-do world of city management where he has sometimes found “tail winds” that support the positive changes he advocates.

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### Making a difference one person at a time is something Carvalho likes.

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Making a difference one person at a time is something that Carvalho likes about his career choice of city manager. He repeats the story of the child who, while walking along the beach, periodically picks up a starfish and throws it back into the ocean. An adult tells the child that new waves will bring more starfish back to the beach and suggests that the child’s efforts won’t make much of a difference. “Made a difference to *that* starfish,” observes the child.

### Helping Someone Else Be Successful

“Elected officials have a difficult job,” says Tom Mauk, former city manager of La Habra, California, and Whittier, California. “They hear from neighborhoods that are angry about things like traffic problems, and they demand traffic lights and speed bumps. But the money is not always there to address the needs that citizens have.”

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### Mauk took pride in his role as an advocate for his staff.

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Taxes have never been popular, yet there are times when elected officials conclude that taxes must be raised to provide needed services. When his elected leadership decided to put a tax measure up for a vote, Mauk spoke to citizen groups and helped the mayor prepare talks to give to various organizations. After hearing more about the city’s financial situation and the reason for the tax measure, citizens would sometimes come up to Mauk after the mayor’s presentation and say, “We’re going with the mayor. We’re going to vote for the tax. We understand why it’s needed now.” Mauk would go home that day feeling good about the mayor’s success.

Mauk also took pride in his role as an advocate for his staff, especially in learning about their career successes. One former intern wrote to him recently to let him know that he had just been hired as the director of finance for a city. The former intern thanked Mauk for sending him to a city management seminar where he learned a great deal and was inspired by his conversations with a number of career city managers and assistants.

And he remembers another former staff member whose department director wanted to fire him. Mauk was not convinced that the department director had given the staff member enough time to learn his job, and he counseled the director to be patient. Nine years later the staff member had been promoted and thanked Mauk for saving his job.

Mauk was surprised that the staff member knew about his intervention, but was pleased to hear about his success.

After 32 years in city management, Mauk now works in the private sector. He finds it curious that some of his private sector colleagues do not understand how to relate to people. "It's a myth that the private sector is more competitive than the public sector," observes Mauk. "You find that the talent, energy, drive, and work ethic in the public sector meet and often exceed what you see in the private sector." Mauk thinks the difference is that people who work in city management have more passion for their work. They picture that neighborhood full of frustration and have a sense of urgency about solving a problem before it becomes a crisis.

## Serving the Underserved

"You need to bring a mind-set that dealing with diversity is a joy," advises Charles Cameron, county administrator, Washington County, Oregon, in talking about the opportunity to alter people's lives. "We underestimate what we can accomplish in the public sector."

Cameron noted that the public sector is often the first in society to rise up to the challenges: hiring African Americans and women for all kinds of jobs; overcoming salary differentials among employees; and making sure the employment environment is fair to groups that have faced discrimination. Cameron has found a great sense of accomplishment by exercising all of his authority to ensure that all quarters of the community are served, especially those not used to being served.

His approach in overcoming traditional barriers is to "blow people away with openness and constancy." To reach all parts of the community, "you need to get into the community where the culture is active," Cameron says. "For example, in the Hispanic community, you are likely to find that faith and family are part of the culture. So if you want the Hispanic community to participate, you'd better make room for Grandma and the kids."

Cameron adds that it is important to break down barriers between government and the faith community. As one way to reach people, county staff work together with the county's Interfaith Action Committee and the larger faith community. At local churches and other places of worship, they distribute relevant information about community services. "Not enough is being done to help people," Cameron adds, "so we all need to be doing more." He suggests a new paradigm that city and county managers may adopt. "You work off of a single set of priorities and mobilize all of the sectors and share responsibility." In Washington County the Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, and Evangelical faiths are all working with government on a common set of priorities.

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**Cameron has exercised his authority to ensure that all quarters of the community are served, especially those not used to being served.**

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"Values are a critical factor in Washington County's comprehensive economic development strategy," says Cameron. "There is respect for the physical environment as well as respect for the diversity and differences of the many cultures in the community."

And, while the community outreach work has been deeply rewarding to Cameron, he says he also takes pride in the core services the county provides to its residents. "Taking your family to the new county park and seeing people having fun is satisfying. Seeing how appreciative people are when the police arrive to assist them is another reminder of how important this work is."

Cameron reflects on another intangible benefit about being a county administrator. "You never wonder: What did you do with your life?"

## Negotiating to Heal a Divided City

What do you do if you are the city manager of a community with train tracks that run through the middle of the city, dividing the city and limiting economic development, and you know that the city has not been able to resolve this problem for more than 50 years?

If you are Charles McNeely, city manager of Reno, Nevada, you dive head first into the challenge and look for ways to persuade everyone from the railroad interests, to the downtown merchants, and to the state and federal agencies to find common ground.

The railroads had long resisted change, but a merger between Union Pacific and Southern Pacific finally created a new set of circumstances for Reno. Because the railroads had to deal with environmental impacts generated by the number of trains traveling through Reno, Senator Harry Reid (D-Nev.) persuaded the president of Union Pacific to discuss a possible agreement with the city of Reno to develop acceptable mitigation measures.

The deal required the railroad to make a \$60 million contribution toward lowering the



Charles McNeely, city manager of Reno, Nevada, on Reno's lowered trainbed.

trainbed inside the city. In addition, the city of Reno worked to gain support for lowering the track from the U.S. Department of Transportation, the county government, and the state of Nevada. The state approved enabling legislation to allow Reno to add a room tax to help fund the project. In addition, the properties that gained the most benefit from the project agreed to a special assessment based on the value of their properties.

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**McNeely persevered and discovered that the more information the public got about the project, the more supportive they were.**

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McNeely began working on the framework for a deal when the railroads merged in 1996, but the deal was not completed until 2002. He credits Reno's elected officials with having a long-term vision for this city improvement. "It was not something that would help them in the next election cycle," McNeely notes. "Yet they supported it because they believed it was the direction the city should go. It was controversial and there was stiff opposition to it." McNeely adds that this project was a defining issue in the most recent council elections, and all of the elected officials who supported the project won their seats.

It was a difficult project to communicate to the public because it was so complex. McNeely persevered, along with the Reno elected officials, and they discovered that the more information the public got about the project, the more supportive they were.

## It's All about People

When Peggy Merriss, city manager, Decatur, Georgia, considers her contributions over a 20-year career in the city, her every word reflects her people orientation. "I spent my first six years in Decatur as personnel director and feel very good about the diverse management team that we have been able

to assemble,” she says. “And I don’t mean diversity just in terms of race and gender.”

She describes the sanitation director, who was hired as a code enforcement officer. “He is an African American,” notes Merriss, “who has a B.A. in mathematics and an M.A. in divinity. How many sanitation directors are ordained ministers?”

He became the sanitation director during a difficult time: the previous director had been killed, and there was a 150 percent turnover rate in the department. “He told the staff that he would stay for six months and after that period of time, they would vote on whether or not he should stay. They voted to keep him, and the turnover disappeared. Now the only turnover in the department is due to retirements.”

Merriss likes the fact that the management team has a wide range of perspectives and that some on the team are in nontraditional jobs. “Decatur’s facilities manager is a woman in a public works operation,” says Merriss. “Our personnel director is Asian. The team reflects global diversity and is exceptionally competent.”

Although 2002–2003 was a challenging year for the Decatur management team while Merriss served as ICMA’s president, Merriss had confidence that the city was in good hands when she was away.

Another reason that the timing was good for Merriss to take on the leadership post at ICMA was that Decatur had adopted a 10-year strategic plan in July 2001. “The city council questioned the initial investment of \$300,000,” recalls Merriss. “I went to lunch with each member of the city council to discuss the value of this investment. After thinking about it, they all supported it.”

“We worked hard to ensure that the plan was in everyone’s interests, and that meant that we had a phenomenal public process involving 500 public interactions and meetings with every church and community group we could identify. Once we developed a physical growth plan, a social plan, and the organization strategies to support them, we applied for our first planning grant. When we completed the work on the planning grant, we were successful in obtaining an implementation grant.

“Decatur’s Livable Centers Initiative,” says Merriss, “helped us build up areas near transit centers. We also encourage pedestrians with our public investment in sidewalks in this place-based development strategy. Our initial \$300,000 strategic planning investment has generated \$10 million in grants and private investment in commercial development. We’ve also energized what we call the ‘green-umbrella group’ to positive action, with a focus on environmental cleanup days, streambed protection, and tree planting.

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**“I feel very good about the diverse management team we have been able to assemble,”**  
**Merriss says.**

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“The Decatur City Council is totally behind this effort and now twice a year reviews the action steps to implement the strategic plan.”

## **Golden Opportunities for the Service Generation**

Anyone attending a meeting of city and county managers can see the opportunities that lie ahead for young people seeking a way to make a difference in people’s lives. The gray hair in the crowd of managers reflects the reality that the members of the profession have aged and record numbers of managers soon will be approaching retirement. Who will replace them?

A 2002 report published by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press clarifies generational differences in the civic and political health of Americans and paints an encouraging picture of the values that young people bring to the workplace. The report grew out of a survey of 3,246 U.S. citizens, including 1,001 from the “Tech Generation” (born between 1977 and 1987) and 1,000 from the Generation X age group (born between 1964 and 1976). The Tech Generation (called DotNets in the Pew study)

**Age distribution of appointed managers**

Age	1934	1971	2000
Under 30	7%	26%	2%
31–40	34%	45%	16%
41–50	37%	21%	40%
51–60	19%	5%	37%
Over 60	3%	3%	6%

Source: Michele Frisby, "What Can Be Done: Attracting Young Adults to Careers in Local Government," *Public Management* 85, no. 1 (January/February): 9.  
 Note: Percentages for 2000 exceed 100 percent because of rounding.

includes almost 40 million young adults who have grown up with technology as a central part of their lives.<sup>2</sup>

**The gray hair in the crowd of managers reflects the reality that the members of the profession have aged.**

What is striking about the Tech Generation is that it has a higher rate of volunteering than any other age group. Most of these young people began volunteering because "someone else put us together" (20 percent) or because they were recruited by an organization (39 percent).<sup>3</sup> Many of them began volunteer work because their high schools encouraged or required them to perform a community service.<sup>4</sup> This age group also shows signs of being more trusting of their government. Some 64 percent say that government should do more to solve problems, and 65 percent support government regulation of business as a necessity.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, "The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait" (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University, September 2002), [www.puaf.umd.edu/CIR-CLE/research/products/Civic\\_and\\_Political\\_Health.pdf](http://www.puaf.umd.edu/CIR-CLE/research/products/Civic_and_Political_Health.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

With its focus on college seniors (class of 2003), the Brookings Institution's June 2003 report provides greater insights about how the Tech Generation may apply that volunteer ethic in its career choices. A robust 26 percent of the seniors said they had given serious consideration to public sector work, and 36 percent had given it somewhat serious consideration, whether the jobs were in government, the nonprofit sector, or for a government contractor. Those seniors who were very serious about public service considered opportunities in the federal government (18 percent) and in state or local government (19 percent).<sup>6</sup>

What was disturbing about the survey results was that government was ranked below the nonprofit sector on a variety of questions: 48 percent believed governments' decisions were fair, compared with 74 percent for the nonprofit sector, and 63 percent for a government contractor. In addition, government got the lowest ratings (48 percent) as a place where you could help people.<sup>7</sup>

Government was rated highest in just two areas: serving country (81 percent) and providing better benefits (78 percent). The nonprofit sector ranked highest as a place to go for respect of family and friends and the ability to make a difference.<sup>8</sup>

These results may be not be surprising when one considers the constant messages that these young people have heard throughout their lives. Since the late 1970s, most of the successful presidential campaigns were run on an "anti-Washington" platform that suggested that substantial waste, fraud, and abuse existed in government and that better results in services could be achieved by contracting out more functions. California's 1978 Proposition 13 was the first of many tax-cap initiatives that spread across the country and often passed with a fanfare of negative rhetoric about government. These negative messages were sometimes offset after a major disaster, most

<sup>6</sup> Light, "In Search of Public Service," 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

**Percentage who said nonprofit sector was best at each role**

Role	Preferred public service job		
	Government	Nonprofit	Contractor
Spending money wisely	55%	71%	58%
Being fair in its decisions	48%	74%	63%
Helping people	66%	85%	77%

Source: Paul C. Light, "In Search of Public Service" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, Center for Public Service, June 2003), 12, [www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/gs/cps/search.pdf](http://www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/gs/cps/search.pdf).

Note: N = 1,002

notably after September 11, 2001, when public opinion shifted to a more positive view of government. Citizens were reminded of the many functions that government provides, coordinates, and oversees.

**How Do We Reach the Next Generation?**

There are many clues to follow to tap into the service orientation of the young people who are entering the workplace or working in early stages of their careers. The college seniors who participated in the Brookings Institution survey listed the following as their top five desired job attributes:<sup>9</sup>

- Opportunity to help people . . . . . 67 percent
- Benefits. . . . . 63 percent
- Opportunity to do challenging work. . . . . 63 percent
- Opportunity to learn new skills . . 63 percent
- Job security . . . . . 60 percent

We also know that this Tech Generation responded to the call to community service when they were asked by their high schools. This is a generation that likes to be asked. Reaching out and offering meaningful internships and entry-level jobs where they can learn new skills and help people is far more important than salary to many young people. Only 30 percent of the survey respondents said salary was an important consideration.

Scott Lazenby, city manager of Sandy, Oregon, provides a good illustration of the importance of reaching out to young people. In Sandy, high school students have the opportunity to shadow the city manager, the mayor, or a city council member for one semester. Because it goes on for a full semester and is truly hands-on, students gain significant insights about city government. Lazenby recalls the look on one student's face when the mayor turned to the student at a public meeting and asked, "How would you vote?"

Another student, who shadowed Lazenby, went on to college and graduate school before taking a first job at a nonprofit organization. After getting experience in the nonprofit world, the former student applied for the finance director's job in Sandy and was hired (the former student has since moved on to another community). In an unexpected spin-off, the student's mother, previously uninvolved in the community, decided to run for the city council in Sandy—and won!

One reason that young people may be drawn to the nonprofit sector is that they have more experience with it through their volunteer work and internships. In the Brookings survey, more than half of the college seniors had experience with nonprofit organizations, compared with just 11 percent who had experience with either state or local government and 8 percent who had experience with the federal government.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 20.

We can take some of the mystery out of local government by creating some good opportunities for young people to gain experience in our cities and counties. Vancouver, British Columbia, has a cradle-to-age-25 strategy that includes outreach teams. Vancouver's goal is to let young people know that there is a place in the city for their ideas and input. Nancy Largent, public involvement coordinator for Vancouver, explains that activities are geared to the age of the young people. Elementary school children, for example, are encouraged to "draw a vision of your community or neighborhood." The city has also provided teaching modules, including some GIS teaching tools for geography teachers to use.

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**We can create some good opportunities for young people to gain experience in our cities and counties.**

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Debbie Anderson, Vancouver's child and youth social planner, notes:

Vancouver's Civic Youth Strategy has recently developed and implemented a new, face-to-face, peer-based approach for engaging youth more meaningfully in civic government. Through the creation of a Youth Outreach Team, youth have been hired to go out to the community, meet with other youth, and provide education and information on city programs and services.

These young people are also out listening to the issues and needs of youth and bringing that information back to city hall. Through the formation of action-based working groups, issues can be addressed in partnership with city staff, youth-serving agencies, and youth from the community. For example, a number of community partners came together in a local neighborhood to support an innovative approach to involving young people of all ages in a city-community

visioning process led by the planning department. A team of young people was trained in community asset mapping; the team then designed and led a program assessing the child and youth friendliness of local parks. They are now working with city staff to implement the recommendations.

Largent says that the city government still needs to overcome a great deal of cynicism. National conversations about government (often negative) tend to spill over to local government. The city has had success by going to the places, including youth groups, where the young people are. Vancouver's Civic Youth Strategy (CYS), which was connected with the city's successful bid to host the 2010 winter Olympics, involved youths and adults in a day-long workshop to explore ways to engage young members of the community in a meaningful way.<sup>11</sup>

The academic community notes that few city and county managers are involved in recruitment activities on college campuses. Many students simply don't know about opportunities in local government unless their parents have worked in government or they happen to have had an internship opportunity. City and county managers and assistants are welcome on college campuses, especially by career counselors and by professors who like to offer real-world perspectives in their classrooms.

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**Many students simply don't know about opportunities in local government.**

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Yet another asset that city and county managers may not always communicate to young people is the profession's deep commitment to ethical values. Not only can young people make a difference by working in local government, they can also speak with pride about the principles that guide the public service.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information about CYS, see [www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20030626/csb2.htm](http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20030626/csb2.htm).



## Parting Thoughts

My daughter graduated from college in 2003 with a major in sociology and has views much like those reflected in the Brookings Institution study. She wants to make a difference and help people, and she has told her parents many times, "Sorry, but I probably won't make much money." Her first job is with a nonprofit organization. Perhaps, like me, she'll be drawn to a job in city or county government after getting some experience in the nonprofit world.

How many of us with long public service careers feel a responsibility to share our passion for our work with today's young people?

George Wallace, city manager of Hampton, Virginia, remembers that his degree in accounting led to an unfulfilling first job as an auditor. After that uninspiring work experience, Wallace recalls:

I got involved in community action and job training in the early 1970s and immediately felt I was accomplishing something and making a difference . . . . My training contacts were with cities and my board of directors were mayors of the contracted cities.

This relationship led to my being selected as an assistant city manager of Hampton until I became manager six years ago. My son, who is an executive in a Fortune 100 company, talks about how teachers (like his mother) and public administrators (compared with the private sector) are grossly underpaid and questioned why I didn't transition to the private sector. My response was:

- Where else are you going to make an immediate impact on one life or a group of lives?
- Where else are you going to see an idea grow from a vague concept to a living entity that impacts the economic well-being of a community for tens of years?
- Where else are you a living role model for a community, giving young black men a chance to see and touch you?
- Where else are you going to have the wide variety of challenges and experiences?
- Where else are you going to meet such a wide spectrum of people?

# 5

## The Top Job... Who Needs It?

*Jan Perkins*

City Manager, Fremont, California

WANTED: City manager to manage typical California city. Increase your hours by 25 percent and your grief by 40 percent. Give up your ability to delegate up and your choice of the premium work assignments. Report to five community members who will not agree with each other and who know how to do your job better than you. Weekend work includes Little League openings, service club officer installations, and city festivals in the park. Opportunity to hire your own assistant who will get to do all the fun jobs. Pay: For a small bump in pay, get the opportunity to be fired at any city council meeting.

Are you an assistant? Does this want ad fit your perception of the top job? I'll bet you have at least three of your own reasons for staying an assistant:

- "I want more time with my family than my city manager has."
- "I really like doing the inside staff work."
- "I could never deal with the council on a daily basis."

If you have one of these reasons, or one of a plethora of others I've heard, I want to challenge you to not settle for second fiddle. I was an assistant in several cities; I know all the reasons that being an assistant is a great job. But if you never serve a city as city manager, you'll miss out on so much!

You'll never experience the thrill of sitting at a city council meeting surrounded by a hundred people demanding the council not do away with the annual 4th of July fireworks display in the park, while you, the police chief, and the fire chief calmly tell the council why continuing the display will put the public in harm's way and the city in financial jeopardy.

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**If you never serve a city as city manager,  
you'll miss out on so much!**

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You'll miss the chance to advocate for an enhanced shopping center badly in need of revitalization, when adjacent neighbors don't want any added traffic.

And, most important, you'll miss out on using your talents in ways you never knew you could.

I've talked to dozens of assistants over the years about their career goals. I think that one of the unspoken reasons why many assistants do not aspire to be city managers is that

they're not sure they can do it. They see the legendary city managers, they hear the war stories about great victories and defeats, and they think: "Can I really do that?"

So, to encourage assistants to see whether they really do have the right stuff for the job, I've compiled a list of the top 10 qualifications for the job of city manager.

### **You're nosy and love gossip**

When you're the city manager, people tell you the damndest things. You'll find out who just got stopped for DUI. You'll hear who is hanging out with whom. You'll be told how much money a department really could save if something were changed.

If you are naturally inquisitive, if people like telling you about what's going on, if you're typically the one to ask embarrassing questions, if you like getting to the bottom of things, you'll make a great city manager. A city manager can't be satisfied with superficial answers. A city manager checks things out.

### **You're a control freak**

I was at a Chinese restaurant the other day with our city attorney. My fortune cookie said, "You are the master of every situation." I loved that. If you're willing to delude yourself that you're in control, city manager is the job for you. If you like to make sure things get done, plan ahead, not leave things to chance, then you'll be a good city manager.

Naturally, control is illusory. But as city manager, you sure have a lot more than an assistant does. You can influence the future. You can put your imprint on how the organization and city council achieve success. And council members will also like you for your control-freak qualities because you'll be making sure their goals are met.

### **You like doing good deeds**

When you are city manager, the list of possible good deeds is endless: fixing broken sidewalks, getting someone's tree trimmed, replacing the computer at the senior center,

finding money to solve a long-standing neighborhood flooding problem, getting a new police facility built, and many more. Employees, residents, merchants, and nearly everyone with whom you come into contact will want you to do something for them. When you can, you will be a hero. (We won't talk about the times you can't.)

### **Red pencils were always your favorite**

Do you find that editing other people's work is more fun than writing your own? As city manager, you can get others to write the staff reports, newsletter articles, and budget presentations; and then you can sit with your latte and mark them up.

### **You love thinking up things for other people to do**

Every time you go to a conference and come back with a great idea, you can get others to work on it. Remember reinventing government? Zero-based budgeting? Continuous quality improvement? Balanced scorecard?

Because you're never quite satisfied with how things are and you are always looking for improvements, you can bring a concept to your staff and have them flesh out the details for you. As city manager, you can provide leadership to help create a vision for the organization and community and move people in that direction. Your assistant can worry about how it will get implemented.

### **You've always dreamed of seeing your name in lights**

Newspapers will love printing your name and your picture when you're appointed. And whenever you do something newsworthy, that same tired photo will show up time and time again. If you're really lucky, you'll get your picture on the cover of a public works magazine. When you're city manager, you can give the newspaper article to your parents, who will proudly show their friends and hope they don't ask, "What is a city manager?" When you're named city manager, the fire and police departments will

compete for who can give you a badge first. Whenever your city builds a new facility, you'll get your name on a bronze plaque. And, of course, being city manager comes with a lifetime supply of city T-shirts for every occasion.

### **Yosemite is too tame for you**

You like adventure, the thrill of the unknown, excitement! Why would you choose to go to Yosemite when the Amazon rainforest is out there? Earthquakes, major fires, labor disputes, and tax elections all are fodder for that adventurous spirit, as are budget deficits, feuding neighborhoods, and downtown redevelopment. The list is endless.

### **You're good at herding cats**

Helping council members move in the same direction and keeping them on a path can be thrilling. Finding out just what motivates each of them, seeking that common thread that will connect them, and knowing full well that any of them can run away at a moment's notice keeps your blood moving. If you are good at building consensus, creating a vision in concert with others, and getting the organization in sync with the direction, you have important city manager attributes.

### **You like jazz**

Leaders of jazz bands have great jobs. Sometimes they lead, sometimes they follow, and sometimes they improvise with the rest of the band. Some days are smooth (no new problems), some days a bit bluesy (you just found out about a budget shortfall), and some days demand a bit of rock 'n' roll (labor dispute). If you learned to share as a kid, play well on a team, clean up your

room, settle fights at school, and roll with things as they come, you'll love being a city manager.

### **You enjoy working on your résumé**

Knowing you have options keeps you nimble and able to make the right decisions. Flexibility in life and work is one of the keys to success. Life is too short to feel stuck, so keep your résumé current.

### **After You're a Manager...**

Once you do become a city manager, remember two things:

- Take your job seriously... but not yourself. Remember you started at the bottom, and remember how employees feel from where they sit. And remember that you can always be replaced... and someday you will be. Keep a sense of humor.
- Get away to keep perspective. Travel, exercise, hang out with friends and family. Work hard, but don't let the job be your entire life or future.

What if you saw this job description? Would you go for it?

WANTED: City manager for California city. If you like challenge, interesting work, a chance to use your mind (if you don't lose it), want to be the boss, enjoy people, and like to have fun, this job is for you. If you can provide bold, compassionate leadership and you care about what the community will be like 20 years from now, you are the one we want. Pay: Negotiate your best deal.

# 6

## **Getting Past the Paper Cut: What Executive Recruiters Say about Landing That First City Manager (or Assistant City Manager) Job**

*Catherine Standiford*

City Manager, La Palma, California\*

Sometimes the opportunity to become a city manager is the result of being in the right place at the right time—when city councils search within the organization for a department head or assistant city manager who has a track record of solid performance, high credibility, and trust with both council members and the community. If such a person exists, the city's next manager could be homegrown.

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**The road to the top job is often paved with  
résumés and application screenings,  
interviews, background checks, and an  
executive recruitment firm.**

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For most aspiring city managers, however, the road to the top job is paved with résumés and application screenings, multiple interviews, background checks, and the involvement of an executive recruitment firm. Just as certain recruiters specialize in placing CEOs in corporate positions, other recruitment firms specialize in helping city councils identify the right city manager for their community. What do these executive recruiters look for in a candidate? What do city councils really look for? Which critical skills or experiences tend to distinguish one candidate from another? What should you do to prepare for the time and the scrutiny usually necessary for appointment as a city manager or assistant city manager?

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\*Special thanks to Bud Ovrum, former city manager of the city of Burbank, for his assistance with the survey; and to the executive recruiters who shared their time and responded candidly.

## **Realities of the Recruitment Process**

To answer these questions, prominent executive recruiters in California were surveyed in January and February 2003 to determine the strategies, skill competencies, and other elements that increase a candidate's likelihood of getting past the "paper cut," and into that first city manager or assistant city manager position. Here's what they said...

**Having a college degree is a must, and graduate-level degrees are becoming more and more important.** Executive recruiters report that having a bachelor's degree is absolutely essential for consideration for a city manager position. A master's degree can often distinguish one candidate from another, particularly when the pool of candidates is highly competitive. One recruiter estimates that in recent years seven out of ten candidates for city manager and assistant city manager positions have an advanced degree when they apply. Another recruiter says that competition for assistant city manager positions is so intense that having a master's degree can be even more important for an aspiring assistant than for a city manager.

No consensus has formed on the preferred advanced degree for city managers or assistant city managers. Master's degrees in public administration, public policy, and economics are well regarded, but several recruiters report that city councils also favorably consider master of business administration degrees. "The new philosophy of government-as-business gives the MBA more cachet," according to one. Another recruiter admits to being impressed by degrees in English or speech communications; still a third says that "the quality and vigor of the graduate program is more important than the specific topic or degree" a candidate has earned.

**City councils look for generalists who have specialist skills relevant to current local government issues.** Executive recruiters report that the desired experience for city managers changes as the circumstances of local governments change. Today,

in built-out cities that are experiencing dwindling resources and budgetary constraints, city councils will look for generalist candidates having strong finance, economic development, and/or budgeting experience. But city councils from cities that are still growing and have land available for development may look for someone with urban planning or public works experience.

The city's size, financial situation, development or redevelopment opportunities, internal organizational issues, and other factors will influence the kind of special experience city councils look for. Recruiters recommend that city manager candidates conduct enough research on the community to assess current and future issues and identify whether the match with their own skills is a good one. Simply relying on a job announcement for this information may not be enough.

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**City manager candidates should conduct enough research on the community to assess current and future issues.**

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In addition to being generalists with special skills that fit the community, strong city manager candidates are those who can demonstrate excellent leadership abilities and good communication and facilitation skills, and who have direct experience running something, including line budget and personnel supervision. But there is no preferred career path, according to recruiters. Instead, it depends on the short- and long-term issues facing the community, and the extent to which the city council views a candidate's background and experience as directly relevant to those issues.

The more a candidate can demonstrate an awareness of current and future community needs along with an understanding of the city council's goals, the better. Essentially, "city councils tend to hire those who they think best understand the city

council's role and those who have a reputation for helping city councils get their job done," says one recruiter.

**Which matters more—skills or good chemistry—depends on where you are in the recruitment process.** In assessing candidates, executive recruiters strongly emphasize skills over chemistry, although they admit both are important. Recruiters tend to rely on the city manager or city council to figure out the chemistry part but will try to determine a candidate's style in relation to what the council is looking for. For example, if the city council is looking for a results-oriented manager, candidates who are more process oriented may not be a good fit. The bottom line, however, is that recruiters are looking for skilled candidates who are presentable.

Recruiters report that oral board panels also tend to emphasize skills over chemistry. However, the importance of chemistry at this stage is much more pronounced if the panel has members from inside the organization. One recruiter notes that the skill level that oral board raters use for comparison tends to be their own and that "many can act as if no one is quite as good as they were at that time in their career." Another says that panels are generally better at detecting when there is no chemistry match than they are at recognizing when the fit is good.

For city managers, skills are still very important, but most recruiters feel that chemistry plays an increasingly important role in selection, perhaps as much as 50 percent. "More often than not, managers will have a choice among several strong candidates when they are hiring an assistant city manager or assistant to the city manager," one recruiter reports. "Consequently, they can afford to give strong weight to chemistry and fit, in addition to a wide range of skills."

City councils, on the other hand, are "all about chemistry and political skills," according to recruiters. They rely on the executive recruiter, city manager, and/or oral board panel to bring forward excellent candidates with the required skills. "If there are two candidates with the same skill set, chemistry will always prevail."

**Recruiters have tremendous influence over the process but not over the final selection.** Recruiters acknowledge that they wield tremendous influence over the recruitment process—particularly by ensuring that it is effective and has integrity. Recruiters say they do this by ensuring confidentiality, by showing equal respect for candidates and their time, and by clearly understanding what city councils are looking for and then evaluating candidates accordingly.

Recruiters see their chief responsibility as bringing forward only those candidates who—without question—possess the full range of skills needed for the position. Consequently, recruiters can probably get an interview for someone who might otherwise not have gotten one, and they can probably keep someone from being interviewed if they know something about the candidate that the recruiting city does not.

Recruiters acknowledge that they are gatekeepers, but they adamantly insist that they do not influence the actual selection of candidate A over candidate B. They say that they cannot influence the chemistry between a city council and a candidate, and that good recruiters will stay away from influencing the decision once finalists are presented. It's simply not in their best interests to do so.

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**Demographics and growing community diversity indicate that at some point most candidates for city manager positions will be women and/or people of color.**

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**Job prospects are bright for minorities and women—if they want to pursue them.** Executive recruiters report that shifts in the city manager profession are creating opportunities across the board, regardless of gender or ethnicity, and greater awareness and sensitivity have significantly increased the presence of women and minorities in

upper management positions. As more minorities and women are promoted to the department head level, recruiters anticipate an increase in the number of candidates applying for city manager and assistant city manager jobs. In fact, the demographics of society in general and the growing diversity in many communities indicate that, at some point, the majority of candidates for city manager positions will be women and/or people of color.

Recruiters report that city councils routinely inquire about the degree of diversity of the candidate pool for city managers and that councils are eager for job-ready women and minorities to apply. Recruiters are seeing growth in the number of quality Latino candidates, but they are not seeing growth in the numbers of African Americans applying. To increase diversity in the profession, recruiters suggest that city managers take an active role in identifying and encouraging women and minorities.

Recruiters also see a huge talent pool of competent women at the assistant city manager and the assistant to the city manager levels. Unfortunately, recruiters more often than not hear that women, particularly if they are married or attached, don't want to become city managers. One reason appears to be an unwillingness to relocate. "To get that city manager position," one recruiter says, "you will probably have to move. I find that many women are not willing to move if the spouse or significant other is not willing to." Women are also sometimes concerned about the impact the high-stress city manager job will have on their quality of life, such as their ability to be involved in their children's activities. Although opportunities abound for women, "it's a self-imposed glass ceiling," recruiters report.

The other impediment to the hiring of women and minorities, according to recruiters, is that some are not as job ready as other candidates. "Ultimately what gets you the job is distinguishing yourself as being talented," they say. "Unfortunately, there are more good jobs than good candidates."

## Advice especially for department heads

Recruiters report that, unless department heads are promoted from within their own organization, it is often easier for them to be appointed as assistant city managers than as city managers. They have the following suggestions for aspiring department heads:

- **Make sure you are good at your current job** You should have a reputation for:
  - Managing your department effectively
  - Appointing and developing strong people
  - Making sound decisions
  - Having superior listening skills
  - Collaborating with and supporting others
  - Caring for the entire organization and community, not just your department turf.
- **Understand the city budget as well as the different types of financing available to cities** Budget and financial management is a core function of a city manager.
- **Look for assistant city manager opportunities within your own organization** The title of assistant city manager or deputy city manager may seem superficial, "but it's a major plus," say recruiters, and it adds "credibility when applying for city manager positions." To get the title, approach the city manager, express your interest in becoming an assistant city manager, and ask for their advice. Doing this makes the city manager aware of your interest, and it may cause them to consider you for future opportunities. In addition, the city manager may be willing to mentor you toward your career goals. "Most city managers want their staff to succeed and are more than willing to help," reports one recruiter.
- **Seek out and volunteer for significant special assignments that involve working directly for the city manager and city council** Projects that provide a high degree of community exposure, are highly controversial or complex, or have regional



significance can provide department heads with great opportunities to distinguish themselves as talented up-and-comers.

- **Explore what it means to be a city manager or assistant city manager; talk with quality people who already hold those positions** “Being a good city manager or assistant involves environments of conflict and ambiguity,” reports one recruiter. “It’s not a matter of being willing to deal with it—effective city managers and assistants thrive on it.” There’s much more to the city manager job than the title, salary, and benefits. As with any career opportunity, it’s important to know thyself and whether you have the skills and interests the job requires.

### Advice especially for assistant city managers and assistants to the city manager

Suggestions for assistants and assistants to the city manager are similar to those for department heads, including “be highly competent in your current job.” Recruiters say that assistant city managers often have an advantage in applying for city manager positions by virtue of their close working relationships with the city manager and city council. However, they do need to demonstrate both potential and relevant experience. Recruiters suggest:

- **Get your experience in an organization of the highest quality** Try to work for a quality management team, and be cautious of learning bad habits from a bad organization. Cities do develop reputations, which can positively—or negatively—affect your own credibility as a candidate. Work for organizations whose reputations will enhance, not detract from, your career.
- **Use your time as an assistant to learn as much as you can** Develop the basic skills—leadership, communication, and budget and finance expertise—associated with the core requirements for being a city manager. Many assistants have good technical skills but get pigeonholed in administrative roles without much line supervision or responsibility. Assistants need to expand their experience to include working directly with the community and developing policy recommendations. Another suggestion is to look at the types of items that routinely appear on city council agendas and try to get experience with those things. Taking the initiative to express your interest to the city manager is a good first step.
- **Seek out opportunities to manage or oversee one or more politically sensitive projects** This provides good exposure to community issues and how decision making works in the political arena. “City council members like problem solvers who can work with both homeowners and the business community,” one recruiter says. Learn how to get people working together and how to advance the city council’s agenda as articulated by the city manager.
- **Demonstrate job stability in your career** City councils are apprehensive of candidates who have not remained in one place for very long. “You can’t be hopping around from job to job every two years” and remain a credible candidate, advises one recruiter. The bottom line is that you should carefully manage your career, wherever you are.
- **Be willing to look at comparable or smaller jurisdictions to get experience** “You are better off being a city manager in a small city than an assistant city manager in a large one,” states one recruiter. “The jump from assistant to city manager is a quantum leap. If you’ve been a city manager—even if you have been fired—you’ve earned your wings.”
- **Apply to cities where your own education and experience match the city’s needs and where the city council is interested in potential** Councils in smaller cities tend to look for more hands-on managers, while councils in larger cities want proven city management experience. Don’t be a square peg trying to fit into a round hole.

## Remember...

- **Do your homework** During the application process, research the city council and its goals and objectives. Get information about the city's priorities. "Find newspaper articles, campaign literature; find out who endorsed each council member," so that you understand the political environment at play in the city, suggests one recruiter. Review city Web sites, drive around town, speak with members of the chamber of commerce and other key community stakeholders. This will help you assess whether your strengths and interests match what the city council is looking for and better prepare you for the recruitment process itself. "You would be surprised," one recruiter says. "I see it all the time—people who are not prepared at all for an interview." Another laments, "Then candidates wonder why they don't get farther in the process."
- **Do some internal homework on the kind of organization you want to work in** Do you see yourself leading a big city or a smaller one? Seek employment opportunities that match your career objectives and keep quality in mind. If your career objective is to be in an urban, full-service organization, then try to work in one.

Working in a small, rural, contract city won't be as helpful in achieving your dream.

- **Determine whether the city manager job is right for you** Recruiters believe that successful city managers possess a certain psychological resilience. Effective city managers don't just deal with the political, ambiguous, conflict-ridden world of local government; they get up in the morning looking forward to it. They get excited by the daily demands of problem solving, consensus building, and managing the sometimes diverse needs of individual city council members. Determine whether you can be an active and visible member of a community and whether you are willing to invest the personal time that requires. "Know what makes you happy, and be very clear about what you want to do, before you throw your hat into the ring," recruiters advise.

Most city managers will tell you that, while the hours can be long, the challenges steep, and the demands high, being a city manager is a highly rewarding career. To those willing to attempt achievement in this noble profession, executive recruiters sincerely wish "Good luck!"

# 7

## **We're in This Together: Managers and Assistants in Powerful Partnerships**

*Audrey Seymour*

Assistant City Manager, Menlo Park, California

Particularly tricky times face the local government manager. Demands for service seem to be ever expanding, while revenues are flat or declining. Changing workforce demographics and economic uncertainty have made it even more critical to retain employee talent and enhance organizational performance. Increasingly complex regional issues require creative, collaborative, and time-consuming solutions. And the need to build constructive relationships with governing officials is a constant priority.

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expanding, while revenues are flat or  
declining.**

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How can local government managers juggle these many demands when their primary currency—their time and energy—is in finite supply? Feelings of stress and isolation are not uncommon as managers must make tough choices about where to direct their attention and how to use most productively the resources at their disposal.

In this context, the assistant manager is an important and often underused resource. Powerful partnerships between the chief executive and the second-in-command provide real benefits to the executive, improving the manager's effectiveness and helping preserve the manager's sanity. What's more, such partnerships help prepare and even encourage those assistants who aspire to become chief executives.

To gain a better understanding of the current status of the manager-assistant partnership, the author interviewed 30 city managers and assistant city managers in California, not necessarily matched by city. These local government officials shared examples of partnerships that had provided a meaningful level of support to chief executives by offering a trusted sounding board, distributing the workload, and enabling guilt-free (or, at least, reduced-guilt) time off.

Yet, while almost all of the managers interviewed reported that they valued their assistants and were delegating the appropriate quantity and level of work to them, 40 percent of the assistants surveyed said they did not feel that their positions were fully made use of. This did not mean that they were sitting around with nothing to do, but rather that they believed

their skills and talents were not being put to the best use. Simply stated, assistants want more opportunities to contribute at a higher level.

In particular, assistants seek a seat at the table in policy meetings with elected officials; line supervision so their organizational authority matches their de facto roles; leadership in key initiatives, deals, and projects; the freedom to do things their own way; and the manager's support for their decisions.

All of this raises an interesting question: If the local government chief executive's time and energy are limited, and if assistants are eager to take on additional responsibilities, why do some managers seem reluctant to delegate more and to develop stronger partnerships with their assistants? While many factors come into play, the heart of the answer lies in the manager's philosophy about the chief executive role and the quality of the manager-assistant relationship.

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### **The assistant manager is an important and often underused resource.**

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In other words, what a manager gives to and gets out of an assistant position depends on how the manager sees his or her role and on how the two individuals get along as people. And because the manager and assistant are in fact human beings working in a complex organizational setting, some other issues will likely affect the strength of the partnership.

Based on analysis of the interview data, the sections below outline (1) diverse chief executive personas and their implications for assistants; (2) the characteristics of effective manager-assistant relationships; (3) the tensions that managers and assistants face when working together; and (4) eight strategies that managers and assistants can use to build more powerful and effective partnerships.

## **Local Government Manager Types**

As the interviewed managers talked about what they would and wouldn't delegate to their assistants and why, it became clear that they were driven by the roles they chose for themselves. Sometimes these choices were implicit rather than clearly articulated. To help explain the different roles that managers expressed in the interviews, these roles have been labeled with the names of four well-known celebrities. These roles are not necessarily mutually exclusive; managers could certainly exhibit traits from more than one of the models below.

### **The Vidal Sassoon model**

The motto of the manager in this model could be a takeoff on the tagline used by hair-care empire founder Vidal Sassoon: "If you don't look good, I don't look good." These managers feel it is their job to make the organization run seamlessly so that it provides superior service to the community and the governing body. It doesn't really matter whether the manager, the assistant, or a department head takes the lead, just as long as that person delivers.

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### **Managers are driven by the roles they choose for themselves.**

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The manager involves the assistant in substantive ways in everything, including policy discussions with the governing body, development negotiations, department supervision, and key organizational initiatives, so that the assistant knows the context well enough to step up and make good decisions. In the Vidal Sassoon model, the manager and assistant are virtually interchangeable, with the assistant considered the co-manager.

### **The Dave Thomas model**

As with the founder of the Wendy's restaurant chain, the manager in this model is

easily recognizable as the organization's spokesperson. Such managers place a high value on, and are personally involved in, public outreach and marketing. They believe it is their role to take the visible lead on matters of critical importance to the community and the organization. This sends the reassuring message that the manager is on top of things and that high-priority issues are getting the attention they deserve.

According to managers in this model, the chief executive's involvement in internal communications is particularly important, as they believe that a core function of the chief executive is to demonstrate caring for employees and to set the tone for the organization. Consequently, internal and external projects that are highly visible are not delegated to the assistant. This is not to say that the assistant doesn't lead on other issues—just not on those in the areas the chief executive has claimed. The role of the assistant under the Dave Thomas model could be described as that of the “traditional assistant.”

### **The Bill Walsh model**

Like the successful former coach and general manager of the San Francisco 49ers, the chief executive in this model assumes the role of lead strategist. This kind of manager is intent not just on winning this game or this season but also on building the team for the future. The manager in this model works hard to develop good relationships with the governing body (the team owners), so that the organization has what one interviewed local government manager referred to as the “calm and resources so that people can do their jobs.”

The role of the assistant in the Bill Walsh model is to take care of the day-to-day operations of the organization, freeing up the chief executive to focus on broader community issues and governing-body relations. Thus, the assistant could be referred to as the “chief operating officer” or the “internal manager,” in contrast to the chief executive's role as the “external manager.”

### **The Martha Stewart model**

In accordance at least with the public perception of this maven of domestic affairs, the chief executive in the Martha Stewart model is involved in all aspects of the organization: internal and external, strategic and tactical. This manager is hands-on and feels that it is the role of the chief executive to set priorities and to chart the sometimes detailed paths toward accomplishing these priorities.

The assistant is called upon to play a key support role and will take on projects as assigned but won't likely be self-directed or have a significant level of involvement with the governing body or with high-profile projects. The role of the assistant in the Martha Stewart model is sometimes referred to as that of a “glorified analyst.”

## **Characteristics of Powerful Partnerships**

As suggested, the approach to partnering depends in part on the chief executive's philosophy about the chief's role. It also depends on the personal and professional relationship between the manager and assistant. Stronger partnerships that entail higher levels of delegation to the assistant are more likely if the following characteristics are present in the relationship:

- **Trust and loyalty** The chief executive needs to trust in the assistant's discretion, support, and ability to deliver. It also helps if the manager can feel secure in the belief that the assistant is not after the manager's job.
- **Shared values** The relationship will be strongest if both parties are passionate about public service and have similar basic policy perspectives.
- **Complementary skills** The partnership will benefit if the assistant brings a different set of strengths, interests, and approaches to balance out the manager's weaknesses and minimize the conflict that might result if both parties wanted to do the same things.

- **Open communication** Managers and assistants must be able to communicate openly and honestly, even when this means delivering hard messages to one another.
- **General comfort level** It makes a big difference if the manager and assistant understand and genuinely like each other.

## Tensions Inherent in the Partnership

The above characteristics of effective relationships might seem basic, but this does not mean that they are easy to develop and sustain. Managers face tensions in building powerful partnerships with their assistants:

- This effort takes self-knowledge, time, energy, and a willingness to see things from the other person's perspective—as in any relationship between two people.
- Even with hard work, an administrator can't necessarily generate rapport if the chemistry just isn't right. However, managers should be careful not to take age, gender, race, sexual identity, or other personal characteristics as key determinants of compatibility.
- Successful efforts to build trust and rapport can result in friendships that extend beyond the workplace. While this is comfortable for some managers, others fear the possibility or perception of favoritism when tough decisions must be made. In addition, the manager may worry that a strong manager-assistant partnership will lessen the perceived status and therefore the commitment of department heads.
- There may be reluctance to let the assistant shine if the manager feels the assistant's success is job threatening.
- Some administrators find it hard to stay out of the details and don't know how to let go of their favorite tasks, thus limiting their assistants' opportunities to contribute and build credibility.
- Pressures placed on local government managers are unique and very real. In an effort to protect organizational morale and

project a professional image, some managers may buy too heavily into the lonely-at-the-top mentality and, in the process, close themselves off from the kind of support that a competent assistant could offer.

In addition to the barriers faced by managers, assistants must walk some fine lines and cope with certain contradictions because of the inherent tensions in the manager-assistant relationship. Assistants may feel that their managers are telling them:

- Be loyal and supportive but brutally honest, even if this means telling me I'm being a jerk or making a big mistake.
- Be different from me to balance my skills, but not so different that our styles and values are incompatible.
- Handle it, and keep me out of the details. But never let me be surprised or embarrassed.
- Make the decision, but if you mess up, I'm accountable and I'm not going to be happy.
- Have the skills and credibility to handle big assignments, even though you can't develop skills and credibility until I give you some big assignments.

## Eight Strategies

Given these real tensions faced by both managers and assistants, is it even possible to build a strong and effective partnership? The answer is yes. Here are eight strategies that managers and assistants can use to increase the odds of forging a partnership that works for both parties:

1. As manager, pick the right person for the job. In fact, managers and assistants should really interview each other and check each other's references to make sure that there are similar values, complementary skills, and compatible personalities.
2. Hold explicit conversations. Talk about your roles and interests at the outset and throughout your working relationship. Make sure you are both clear

- about who is doing what. If something is not working, fix it.
3. As manager, clearly communicate the role of the assistant to the governing body and the organization. Managers can send this message through both words and actions. For some administrators, this means letting everyone know that the assistant is the number-two person in the organization and setting his or her salary accordingly.
  4. Articulate, as the manager, your underlying goals, perspectives, and "givens." Make sure it's clear what really matters to you, what you are hoping to accomplish, and what your absolute dos and don'ts are.
  5. Demonstrate, as the assistant, that you understand and support the manager's goals. To build loyalty, show that you have the manager's best interests at heart. Help the manager delegate without concern by illustrating that you know what the manager would do or say in given situations.
  6. Give frequent, honest feedback. Make an explicit agreement that you will seek and accept total honesty from each other, without consequence.
  7. Support each other publicly and one-on-one. In public, praise each other's accomplishments, and promote each other's agendas. In private, give as much emotional support as is appropriate to the relationship. Listen and commiserate, as everyone in the field needs this from time to time.
  8. Get to know each other as people. Building a relationship takes a commitment not just to reach out but also to let yourself be known. Share your fears and mistakes as well as your successes. Spend unstructured, informal time together: go for a walk, have no-agenda meetings, talk about life outside of work, and don't forget to have fun.

### **Valuable Support**

Local government is a challenging and rewarding field. If the manager and assistant succeed in forging a powerful partnership, then both the burdens and the benefits can be shared. While such partnerships take work, they are worth it in the long term because they can provide a valuable support system to the executive, build the organization's capacity, and lay the groundwork for the next generation of managers.



## Help Wanted: What Can Elected Officials Do to Attract Young People to Public Service?

*Frank Benest*

City Manager, Palo Alto, California

Stop and listen. Do you hear the silence? That's what you hear when nobody is following.

The baby boomers who are dedicated to public service are quickly approaching retirement, and far fewer young people are following in their footsteps. This creates a large replacement gap in the public sector. This is particularly a problem in local government, which employs five out of every eight government employees.<sup>1</sup>

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Elected officials can play a critical role in  
drawing young people into the public sector.

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We in public leadership roles are beginning to address this disheartening trend and are designing ways to draw younger people—those born since 1965—into the public sector. Elected officials can play a critical role in this effort.

### What Is the Problem?

Demographic, political, and value issues are converging to create this quiet crisis in the public sector. What are these large forces at work?

- **Fewer midcareer professionals** As baby-boomer managers retire from government, fewer young professionals are waiting in the wings. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in one example of this demographic replacement gap, predicts that by 2006 there will be 151 million jobs in the U.S. economy, but only 141 million people in the workforce to fill them.<sup>2</sup> Across all sectors, but especially in the public sector, the greatest turnover in workers will be

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel M. Ehrenhalt, *Government Employment Report 6* (June 1999): 19–22, quoted in Marnie E. Green, “Beware and Prepare: The Government Workforce of the Future,” [www.managementeducationgroup.com/frames/articles/beware.html](http://www.managementeducationgroup.com/frames/articles/beware.html).

<sup>2</sup> Roger Selbert, “The New Workforce,” *Growth Strategies* No. 954 (June 2003): 4.



among occupants of executive, administrative, and managerial positions. A case in point: 53 percent of the federal workforce will qualify for retirement by 2004.<sup>3</sup>

- **An antigovernment bias** In the 1960s and early 1970s, many baby boomers learned that public service was an honorable, even noble, calling. For example, my mother was a public school teacher and a VISTA volunteer. It never occurred to me to select any career other than government service. For the past two decades, however, our national leaders have denigrated public service and exhibited an antigovernment bias. Government work is now seen as bureaucratic, mind numbing, and generally second rate. Our best and brightest have not been encouraged to choose public service. According to a recent study by the *Wall Street Journal*, in the 1963 class of the Harvard Law School, 30 percent of the graduates selected government service. In the class of 2000, only 2 percent did so!
- **Different values** Members of Generation X and Generation Y exhibit values different from their older baby-boomer manager colleagues. They place more emphasis on having a balanced life, and they are less open to sacrificing family and personal interests to their careers. Younger professionals in local government perceive that senior managers are often singularly focused on work, overwhelmed, abused, and attacked.

## What Can Elected Officials Do?

A working group of the City Managers Department of the League of California Cities has been addressing the issue of preparing the next generation of public managers. The group recognizes that in addition to better preparing and grooming younger employees

who already serve in government agencies, increasing the numbers of young people entering the local government field is an absolute necessity. What can elected officials do to help?

The working group identified five strategies for local elected officials:

- **Stop bashing government** Political incumbents as well as first-time candidates for local office have long taken their cues from national leaders who have run against government in general and disparaged bureaucrats—public employees—in particular. Elected officials need to demand excellence, but demanding exemplary performance is a far cry from running against city hall, which has become the norm in campaigns, and bashing staff, which is common in many council chambers. If our elected leaders tear down government, what young person today will choose to work for the public?
- **Insist on civility** Elected leaders are role models. Mayors and their council colleagues must act in public with civility and decorum even when there are policy disagreements. Democracy demands public discussion and debate about policies. And, yes, democracy can be messy. But the rough and tumble of a public debate in the council chambers should not be an excuse for council members or citizens to personally attack each other. Elected officials need to model appropriate policy debate and insist on civility by the public. Why would young people aspire to public service careers if they perceive that the public's work is often hurtful and even ugly?
- **Promote the rewards of service** Elected as well as appointed officials do not do a good job of promoting the rewards and joys of public life. Deep in public officials' hearts, they understand that they choose to do the public's work because they want to build community, improve everyone's quality of life, and simply make a difference. This is especially true at the local government level, where citizens can more readily see the positive impact of the efforts of public servants.

<sup>3</sup> *Federal Employee Retirements: Expected Increase over the Next 5 Years Illustrates Need for Workforce Planning*, report no. GAO-01-509 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, April 2001), 17–18.

**What can you do to attract teens to public service careers:**

- Work with your counterparts on the school board to offer credit for students who volunteer in local government or other community service; develop a community service requirement for graduation; provide a mayor's certificate and an additional graduating tassel of a different color for those who volunteer for public service.
- Involve young people as volunteers in political campaigns. Orient them to the issues, assign them to develop issue papers of interest to young people, make it fun—but also promote it as a résumé builder for college.
- Recruit one or several young people to intern for you over the summer. If possible, use leftover campaign funds to pay a stipend. Even if funds are unavailable, some students will recognize the experience as a plus for their university applications and their personal growth.
- Ask the personnel department to list and describe typical local government careers offered by your city. Hand out the list during your next talk to students. Pair up for the presentation with a young professional on staff who can describe the rewards of working for the public and the path to achieving that status.
- Organize with city staff a Student Day in Government. Challenge the students to develop proposals to address a real-life problem troubling the community.
- Ask your city manager if you can talk with the summer recreation leaders and lifeguards during employee orientation. Promote the joys of service and careers in local government.
- Involve scout groups in local government projects. Encourage scout groups to offer a badge in government service.

The problem is that young people do not perceive these rewards. While a number of recent surveys indicate strongly that the younger generation wants to contribute to the community, most young people consider only the nonprofit sector—not the public sector—as the place to make a difference. Elected officials need to articulate the benefits of serving if government is to attract a new generation of employees.

- **Reach out to students** Surveys suggest that young people do not consider public sector careers because “no one asks.” Officials, therefore, need to reach out to students in both high schools and universities to discuss:

- The nature of local government
- Careers in local government
- Rewards and benefits of public service.

In California, for example, before young people graduate from high school, they receive only a minimal amount of formal instruction in local (as opposed to federal and state) government. In most states, curriculum standards do not require formal instruction, and state tests do not assess any knowledge of local government. We must change that. Moreover, most students do not realize that local governments employ large numbers of clerks, accountants, engineers, human resources professionals, and general administrators as well as the police officers, firefighters, librarians, and other professionals normally associated with local government.

Elected officials need to visit classrooms, discuss local government careers, and present the possibilities of public life.

- **Introduce teens to public affairs and service** Many public sector professionals were originally introduced to local government through youth involvement and youth service programs operated by city governments. Tried-and-true programs include:

- Volunteer service programs for which students receive high school credit and/or recognition
- Student day in government

- Youth representatives serving on city commissions and boards
- Youth commissions
- Paid and unpaid internship programs of all kinds
- Explorer programs tied to police, fire, or other departments
- “Volunteer” programs in which teens receive a stipend for volunteering during the summer months in city programs.

The League of California Cities and the National League of Cities maintain an inventory of successful youth involvement and service programs. Elected officials can ask city management to contact the California League or National League to do a search of exemplary efforts.

Recently, the California League working group, “Preparing the Next Generation,” conducted focus groups of young local government professionals. Often these young professionals recounted how they were hooked into their public sector careers through an internship or a summer job in recreation. (In fact, I got my start in public service at age 14 as a junior rec leader.) The working group is in the process of developing and promoting a statewide network of local government internships that will offer

interested students a taste of local government work.

## **A Legacy Issue**

Involving young people in local government used to be just a nice thing to do. With dramatic declines in the total numbers of young people available for or interested in working in local government, attracting young people to public service is a critical business issue for government. Council members—the elected leadership of local government—need to reflect on their role in promoting public service, especially among young people. In addition, elected officials need to challenge city management on how it is responding to this quiet crisis.

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### **Attracting young people to public service is a critical business issue.**

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In addition to developing new service programs, improving municipal facilities, and repairing the city’s infrastructure, would it not be a wonderful legacy for elected officials to engage a whole new generation of young people in public service?



## Self-Development Strategies for Aspiring Managers

*Audrey Seymour*

Assistant City Manager, Menlo Park, California

As a large proportion of the current generation of city managers nears retirement, a recurring question is whether the next generation is ready and willing to step up. Preparing to become a city manager is a serious undertaking; it requires both ability and ambition.

Being a city manager is one of the most noble and fulfilling of professional callings. What could be more worthwhile than building a strong, responsive organization that succeeds in helping a community clarify and accomplish its values and goals? Such is the reward of the great city manager.

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Preparing to become a city manager is a serious undertaking; it requires both ability and ambition.

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Great city managers practice both technical craft and art, bringing the sum of their knowledge, talents, values, and personal attributes into play. The question is not just how the aspiring leader can prepare to become a city manager, but how that aspiring leader can build the foundation to become a great city manager. Summarized below are barriers that promising candidates often face and nine strategies for self-development.

### Barriers Experienced by Aspiring Managers

The “Preparing the Next Generation” working group, sponsored by the City Managers Department of the League of California Cities, conducted focus groups and surveys with California city managers and assistants to learn how current managers prepared themselves and what assistance aspiring managers feel they need most (see Chapter 3 for a description). Through this outreach, managers and assistants identified several barriers that aspiring managers should understand as they embark on their paths of self-development.

- **Narrowly defined roles** Managers and assistants alike acknowledged that the typical assistant role doesn’t always provide first-hand exposure in critical areas. In particular, many cited a lack of cross-department experience; limited visibility both inside and outside the organization; insufficient understanding of the big picture; and scarce opportunities to lead, take risks, and make mistakes.

- **Lack of time with senior managers**  
Aspiring managers need to be exposed to different leadership philosophies, styles, and problem-solving approaches. They need to have mentors who will talk with them about their career goals and provide guidance about how to develop themselves and their careers. Access to such mentors was not universal among the assistants surveyed.
- **No line supervisory responsibility**  
Assistants who aspire to be city managers must have experience directing, supporting, and motivating the work of others. Typical assistant roles as project managers or the keepers of administrative processes may not provide this opportunity.
- **Limited comfort with council relations and politics**  
The successful city manager must be able to see, but stay out of, different political agendas; support all council members equally; set boundaries; and react well to curve balls. Hands-on experience is the best way to develop confidence and skill in the nuances of working with elected officials. Because relations with the council are often the province of the city manager, assistants tend to lack practice in this arena.
- **Weak spots in key technical and/or soft skills**  
Aspiring managers need to have a solid base of technical knowledge and proficiency in such areas as budgeting, labor relations, and service delivery. They also need to possess the less tangible skills of analyzing complex situations, team building, and conflict resolution. Such soft skills can be the most critical for city managers and are best learned through the type of trial and error that may not be afforded in typical assistant duties.

## Self-Development Strategies

The nine suggestions that follow are called self-development strategies for two reasons. First, and perhaps most obviously, the aspiring manager—not the organization that person works for—must take responsibility for them. Second, these strategies are intended

to recognize and develop the whole self that comes to the job of city management. They address the need to understand and build the personal philosophy and attributes—as well as the skills and experiences—necessary to succeed as a city manager. The strategies below suggest things to do as well as things to think about.

- **Get in touch with what in local government motivates you, and make a commitment to keep this motivation alive**  
Take the time to put it into words. Carry it in your wallet or schedule it as a recurring reminder on your personal digital assistant (PDA) so that you can easily revisit it. Remembering what attracts you to public service will not only increase your job satisfaction and effectiveness; it will also make people eager to work with you and for you. People will find your passion compelling.
- **Take time to think about and articulate your leadership philosophy**  
What kind of city manager do you want to be? What do you want to accomplish? What values do you want to embody? Which city managers or senior managers would you like to emulate? Figuring out the answers to these questions will help you focus your acquisition of skills and experiences. It will also help others see your leadership potential when you are interviewing for a promotion or being considered by your boss for a special assignment.
- **Understand your emotional and personal attributes and how they equip you for the reality of heading up a city administration**  
John Nalbandian of the University of Kansas Department of Public Administration, in “Educating the City Manager of the Future,” summarized the research of Edgar Schein and Donald Wolfe and identified several emotional and personal attributes necessary to be an effective local government professional. He included the capacity to be stimulated by crises rather than to be exhausted by them; the “capacity to bear high levels of responsibility without becoming paralyzed”; the “ability to exercise power and

make difficult decisions without guilt or shame”; and a “spirit of inquiry about how things really work, including a commitment to one’s own learning and growth.”<sup>1</sup>

- **Assess your skills and weaknesses and develop strategies to capitalize on the former and remedy the latter**

Develop a learning plan with specific goals, actions, and timelines. Ask your boss, your peers, and your direct reports for constructive feedback to assist your self-assessment. Ask for their active participation in your learning plan. Understand and play to your talents. Don’t assume that every weakness has to be overcome. No one can be good at everything. In fact, good leaders don’t try to do it all because they know this will result in their own burnout and will weaken organizational morale and capacity. Be strategic and focus on those weaknesses that present the biggest barriers to becoming the kind of city manager you want to be.

- **Give yourself a solid grounding in the basics** Try to balance both the breadth and depth of your knowledge and experience. Seek positions or assignments that build your understanding of line department operations as well as citywide administration. Key areas of expertise include financial management, land use, labor relations and personnel management, business/economic development, and project management.
- **Acknowledge the soft, intangible leadership skills** like decision making, risk assessment, council relations, interest-based negotiation, problem solving, facilitation, and organizational development and motivation. Attributes like self-confidence are important, too. Hard technical skills are necessary, but these soft skills are often more critical for aspiring managers because others in the organization will always have more technical expertise than you do. Or at

least they should have. Successful city managers aren’t technicians. They are leaders who use their judgment, vision, and people skills to set the organization’s direction and help it stay on track.

- **Seek knowledge from a wide variety of sources** Diverse sources include business management periodicals such as *Fast Company*. Also, take advantage of training opportunities provided by city or professional associations. Sign up for a leadership or management academy offered at work or through the chamber of commerce or a local university or community college. Consider getting an MPA or an MBA.
- **Join professional associations** such as groups for municipal assistants, statewide associations for city managers, the Innovation Groups, and ICMA. But don’t stop there. Take on a leadership role by helping to plan a conference, serving as an officer, developing the expertise to deliver training seminars, or volunteering to research and write an article such as this one.
- **Seek out special assignments that round out your portfolio of experiences** For example, if you don’t have experience in budgeting, negotiate a position as acting analyst in the finance division. If a department head position opens up, volunteer to step in and serve as the acting director during the search process. If you see a need in the organization, propose a plan or a project to address it and volunteer to take the lead.
- **Attend city council meetings regularly** to get exposure to the issues facing the city as well as to gain a better understanding of council, staff, public, and special-interest dynamics.
- **Seek real-time learning opportunities** If you are heading into a negotiation or about to take on another new or high-visibility role, ask your boss or another senior manager to help you prepare. This could be through role playing. Outline what

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<sup>1</sup> John Nalbandian, “Educating the City Manager of the Future,” in *The Future of Local Government Administration: The Hansell Symposium*, ed. H. George Frederickson and John Nalbandian (Washington, D.C.: ICMA, 2002), p. 254, table 1.

you are trying to accomplish and how you plan to approach the task. Ask your boss to propose hypothetical situations and give you feedback on your responses. After a presentation to the council or another public “performance,” ask your peers to critique you. Hold regular debriefing sessions and ask what you did well and what you could have done better. When you see your boss or someone else handle a tough situation well, ask that person to describe the strategy and preparation.

- **Get supervisory experience** If you don’t currently have others reporting to you, lobby for an organizational change or seek project leadership responsibility for which team members will have a reporting relationship with you. It is important to build your experience in directing and supporting the work of others because this is key for a successful city manager.
- **Build relationships and “collect” people wherever you go** First and foremost, cultivate your boss. Don’t assume that this relationship will just happen or is the sole responsibility of your boss to develop. Actively seek to understand your boss’s goals and values and be a resource to your boss. Strive to forge a partnership based on trust and communication so that your boss will find it easier to delegate more to you and give you opportunities for growth and advancement. Negotiate with your boss and be explicit about expectations and opportunities to gain diverse experiences.  
Find mentors inside or outside your organization. Identify senior managers known for developing aspiring managers and interview them to get suggestions for your self-development plan. Attend city manager area group meetings. Start an area group meeting for assistants. Reach out to your network and ask for advice when you are working through a tough challenge. Enlist your colleagues’ help in assessing and building your readiness.
- **Find the solution to the work–life balance dilemma that makes the most sense for you** Outreach by the “Preparing the Next Generation” working

group showed that concern about work–life balance prevents some potential city managers from pursuing the position. Many talented assistants admitted they weren’t sure they wanted to work even longer hours, be in the public spotlight, and serve at the whim of a fickle council. These are important issues that you should explore to help you make the decision to advance and to be successful once you do. The right approach for you might be to commit to develop a partnership with a strong assistant who can help shoulder the burden. You might actively work on developing a thicker skin so that you will be less likely to take the inevitable public scrutiny personally. You might seek advice on how to negotiate a fair employment agreement that will give you some protection and security if and when the time comes to separate from the city.

- **Market yourself so that others are aware of your desire to learn and have confidence in your potential** This doesn’t mean engaging in shameless self-promotion. It means taking active responsibility for building your credibility and people’s confidence in your abilities. You can’t assume that others, including your boss, know what your interests and strengths are or that they remember your noteworthy accomplishments. The goal is to encourage people to think of you when there are opportunities in the organization or in a professional association and to respond favorably when you pitch a project or request a special assignment.

## Conclusion

Becoming a great city manager is a long process of learning and growth. It requires a wide range of knowledge, experiences, talents, and personal attributes. Those who aspire to be great city managers must take proactive responsibility for their own development and must work to create their own opportunities. Self-development strategies can help aspiring managers be ready to take the next step and in so doing set the stage for the next generation.

# 10

## 39 Best Practices for Preparing the Next Generation

*Frank Benest*

City Manager, Palo Alto, California

Preparing for a senior management position is of course the responsibility of the aspiring manager. However, top executives in the local government organization can provide specific support and a structure for developing talent. This chapter describes the best practices of city and county managers who have focused on their developmental role in preparing the next generation. Although each senior manager is unique and organizations are of different sizes and have different capacities, traditions, and cultures, the following menu offers choices for every senior manager.

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Top executives in local government can provide support and a structure for developing talent.

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### Personal Outlook

Specific practices, programs, and other efforts to groom up-and-comers flow from positive attitudes:

1. **Acknowledge that the profession as a whole and your own organization in particular need to secure replacement talent for top positions** City and county managers and other senior managers need to educate themselves on this quiet crisis.
2. **Recognize talent development as a primary role, of equal importance to other executive management tasks** If the longer-term developmental role is not a primary responsibility, it will get shoved aside by urgent, shorter-term challenges. But if something is believed important, it will occupy time and attention—an executive's most significant resource.
3. **Understand that the chief executive is foremost a role model** The most powerful way that adults (as well as children) learn is through the modeling of behavior. City and county managers must therefore recognize that their every action will be observed by subordinates and will serve—for better or worse—to shape their successors' attitudes and behaviors.



4. **Develop a more risk-taking attitude**  
Many senior managers are risk averse, but managers who consciously develop talent must be open to mistakes. Managers should encourage up-and-comers to stretch, take on new roles, and make mistakes—even visible ones. Learning and growth occur after missteps, even failure.
5. **Adopt a broader notion of professional legacy** A legacy includes not only specific community improvements but also talent development.
7. **Identify up-and-comers from throughout the organization** (not just the city or county manager's office) who have the talent and the potential to lead. Because senior managers have limited time and attention to invest in developing talent, top management must focus time and resources on those most likely to develop as potential successors.
8. **Devote sufficient time to up-and-comers** Time and attention are an executive's primary resources to invest. Spending time with aspiring managers will signal the executive's interest in them and will act as a significant motivator.

## Specific Practices

Once the chief executive and other senior managers decide to develop talent, they can choose from the best practices that engage aspiring managers in experiences that promote learning by doing instead of learning by formal education and training only.

To identify best practices and to explore obstacles perceived to get in the way of younger people becoming the successors of top management, we first surveyed aspiring managers and conducted focus groups. Younger respondents cited the lack of time spent with senior managers; few direct supervisory responsibilities; a lack of broad experience, especially line authority over different functions; an absence of a big-picture view of the organization; minimal organization visibility; and little sense of real politics. (Chapter 3 has a fuller discussion of the survey and focus groups.) Consequently, many best practices counter these major obstacles:

6. **Articulate to the whole organization, and especially to the management team, the need to develop replacement talent as a key organizational challenge** Without an understanding by management of the replacement-gap problem, other staff will not comprehend and may even resent efforts of the chief executive or other senior managers. In addition, many of the best practices must be shared across top management to be effective.
9. **Engage aspiring managers in conversations of substance** Subordinates learn best through the modeling of behavior, and behavior can be more clearly understood if the leader converses with subordinates about specific situations. Such conversations can focus on the context and demands of a problematic situation, the approach of the leader in addressing the problem, and what was learned. Through such informal conversations, aspiring managers can learn about the big picture and the politics of the organization, the complexities and subtleties of relating to councils and other governing boards or external entities, and, more generally, how senior managers think and strategize. During these conversations, the senior manager can also provide informal and ongoing performance feedback.
10. **Share your personal experiences and professional journeys with aspiring managers** A great way to engage a talented employee in one of these conversations is to share one's personal journey, including one's first interest in public service, transforming experiences, stops along one's career adventure, missteps and other challenges, significant mentors, and achievement of career goals. Such personal stories are powerful, and they encourage up-and-comers to create their own career journeys. During these

informal development conversations, the executive—to assess how assistance might be offered—also can ask the younger person about dreams, goals, and career plans.

11. **Provide aspiring managers with a broad range of technical assignments** Potential successors must acquire experience in budget, personnel, labor relations, contract management, legislative analysis and advocacy, and intergovernmental or external relations. In e-mail surveys and focus groups conducted as part of this research, management assistants clearly felt they lacked opportunities to develop a broad range of these hard skills and technical responsibilities.
12. **Place aspiring managers in a variety of departments, especially line departments** They need to get a good, basic education in public works, public safety, recreation and community services, and utilities as well as in administrative support areas such as finance and human resources. Upward-looking young people will become familiar with the differing styles of senior managers: their philosophies, organizational perspectives, and problem-solving approaches. They will have an opportunity to identify people they wish to emulate—or not—as they progress in their careers.
13. **Assign lead authority in managing special projects** Often talented support staff are assigned to only support roles in multidepartment, special project teams focused on downtown development, infrastructure, neighborhood service, affordable housing, citizen participation, or other cross-functional needs. As a stretch assignment, the executive can ask them to lead the special project team (this includes the authority to direct team members) and then, of course, announce the assignment and publicly articulate that leadership role. Involvement with multidepartment teams also provides the aspiring leader with a bigger-picture view and various organizational perspectives. As part of the learning process, the team leader could debrief with the executive who convened or sponsored the team and receive any feedback and advice. (It is interesting to note that, in e-mail surveys, city managers often cited inadequate soft skills as key impediments to the advancement of assistants; in surveys of assistants, however, the assistants often emphasized the need to build hard skills in order to move up in management.)
14. **Provide direct supervisory authority, especially through the positions of acting manager or interim manager** One critical gap in the skills portfolios of management assistants, analysts, and other administrative staff is the lack of direct supervision of employees. In our surveys, both managers and assistants strongly suggested that local government managers fill vacant supervisor and manager positions at the unit, division, and department levels with interim or acting managers from the up-and-comer group. To increase the support structure for interim managers, senior managers could match them with other senior managers who could assist them. In addition to the experience of direct line authority over employees and service programs, acting supervisors—with the active support of higher-ups—can gain a wealth of organizational knowledge, self-confidence, and new contacts.
15. **Structure the assignment to include council, board, and/or commission interaction** Aspiring managers often do not have much contact with members of governing boards, official advisory commissions, or citizen committees. Consequently, they do not develop the necessary political acumen for more responsible management positions, or they often fear the sometimes messy, rough-and-tumble interaction with boards and advisory groups. Stretch assignments should include taking a project from idea conception to

council or board approval; this includes writing the staff report and making any public presentations.

16. **Assign liaison responsibilities** Up-and-comers, with adequate support, can serve as liaisons to council and board standing or ad hoc committees, advisory commissions, citizen committees appointed by the council or chief executive, and/or external groups such as the chamber of commerce or neighborhood associations.
17. **Put an assistant in charge of agenda planning or budget** If the assistant city manager, assistant to the city manager, or principal analyst coordinates council agenda planning, budget development, or a capital improvement project, that person will learn to deal with complexity; receive a lot of visibility; and have to interact with department directors, the mayor, and council members on a regular basis.
18. **Articulate the rewards of local government management** City and county managers complain too much about unreasonable or meddlesome elected officials, less-than-competent employees, and hypercritical citizens. Although it is sometimes healthy to share the challenges of our positions, it is also important to promote the benefits, rewards, and joys of our jobs throughout our organizations as well as in professional settings. Many assistants do not perceive sufficient rewards to offset the problems, stresses, and even the occasional abuse involved in the top job. In our e-mail survey, assistants cited (in addition to good pay and good benefits) several rewards of local government management:
  - Making a difference in the community
  - Improving the organization
  - Addressing diverse and stimulating challenges
  - Serving as linchpin among council, staff, and community
  - Engaging citizens, other government agencies, and community organizations in solving problems.

These are the rewards of city and county management that resonate with our successors. Therefore, we need to articulate the joys of leading. Otherwise, why would bright and talented local government staff aspire to the position of chief executive?

19. **Urge aspiring managers to involve themselves in the profession** Many chief executives cited as critical their involvement in their state associations, area manager groups, ICMA, associations of assistants, and the like. Managers can support aspiring managers by budgeting funds for their professional development activities, encouraging their involvement (including committee work), and even inviting them to accompany the chief executive to a luncheon of area city managers or to a state conference of city managers.
20. **Encourage aspiring managers to complete an MPA or an MBA degree** An MPA or MBA not only provides a solid education for local government management; it also screens in those eligible for advancement. Senior managers can help aspiring managers secure graduate degrees by providing tuition reimbursement, flexible schedules that permit class attendance, and work projects that can double as class projects.
21. **Authorize an up-and-comer to troubleshoot and fix an organizational problem** Such an assignment provides high visibility for the troubleshooter as well as practical experience in problem solving, dealing with sensitive or controversial situations, and resolving conflict.
22. **Include the assistant to the city manager on the executive team**, rotate management assistants through the executive team, and/or encourage department heads to periodically bring a division chief or a management assistant to executive team meetings. Participating in executive team discussions or just listening to team dialogues provides a big-picture view of the organization, educates aspiring managers about the politics of the

community and the organization, widens contacts, sends a positive message about developing talent, and serves as a reward in itself.

23. **Ask the assistant to provide input into the annual performance evaluation of department directors** (and let this input be known!). Because management assistants in the manager's office as well as assistant managers often have significant interaction with department heads, chief executives can request their input during performance evaluations. Acknowledging this practice will certainly make it easier for assistants to secure cooperation from department heads. In addition, it will train aspiring managers to evaluate performance and understand the criteria by which the chief executive evaluates.

24. **Teach how the manager deals with demanding, bullying, or otherwise troublesome elected officials**  
Because assistants may feel intimidated by overly demanding elected officials, the manager can use a conflict situation with a council member or a board member as an object lesson for aspiring managers. Remembering that the best way to teach is through modeling, the manager in a conflict with a council member could reflect with an assistant about possible respectful yet assertive responses. The assistant will get some ideas about how to interact appropriately with council members even in difficult situations.

### **Structured Programs**

In the face of the growing replacement gap in senior management, some local governments have developed formal programs or other structured mechanisms to develop talent and potential successors:

25. **Create a pool of management assistants who rotate among various departments** Departments should be required to provide a structured orientation for the management assistant with respect to the department as well as

new duties. Some programs also set criteria to ensure that the department provides substantial work assignments for management assistants.

26. **Involve management assistants from various departments in quarterly seminars led by the chief executive or senior managers** The senior manager might share a personal journey and discuss a key organizational challenge in an interactive fashion. Participants are asked to share and reflect upon their work and project experiences in the departments. One or two participants may also be assigned to discuss an article or training experience or asked to share a learning report. The seminar format provides an opportunity to network, connect with senior managers, and share information.

27. **Assign a team of management assistants from various departments to conduct an ongoing or special project of organizational significance** After collecting data and analyzing the problem, the team can present its recommendations to the department heads and the chief executive for consideration. In addition to team building and problem solving, the experience provides visibility and leadership development as well as project management opportunities.

28. **Create a leadership academy or a management certificate program for aspiring managers** Some local governments are large enough to establish their own academy or certificate program or jointly develop and fund the program with other local governments or through a community college, local university, or even the chamber of commerce. The curriculum often includes leadership philosophy, development of hard and soft skills, a class project, and networking opportunities. Department directors and other managers often nominate the participants.

29. **Create career ladders or intermediate positions** (for example, principal analyst or assistant to the city man-

ager) so management assistants can move up in the organization and gain additional responsibility, authority, and management experience. A ladder of move-up positions and a tradition of upward mobility also help the organization better retain its talent.

30. **Establish a formal succession plan for the organization** This is the most structured mechanism for ensuring that ready and able successors are available when senior managers leave or retire. Succession planning is common in the private sector and can be adapted to the public sector, including local government. Although the plan may reside organizationally in the human resources department and be managed by the human resources director, it is the responsibility of the executive team to develop, implement, and revise the succession plan as circumstances change. A typical succession plan identifies:
- Key management positions for which internal successors must be groomed
  - Knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences required of successors if they are to move up
  - A ladder of succession, including rungs of increasing responsibility and authority
  - The specific group of employees to be developed over time
  - Mentors who will informally or formally coach the potential successors
  - Internal and/or external training, opportunities, and special assignments that will assist in the professional development of each designated employee.

In addition to providing ready and able successors, a formal succession-planning process better retains staff. Succession planning also minimizes the concern raised by aspiring managers in our e-mail survey that “moving one’s family around the state or country” was a key obstacle to eventually becoming a city or county manager.

31. **Develop a certain number of special assignments in various departments for potential successors** Usually, these assignments are time limited for six to eight months and include a specific project with certain tangible outcomes or results desired by the end of the project period. Departments may bid on the limited number of special-assignment slots, and employees from other departments can formally apply. Special-assignment opportunities can be advertised over the organization’s intranet. Although special assignments must produce tangible results, it is equally important that they provide new learning experiences, perspectives, and contacts. Funding is often provided to the donor department to fill behind the employee lost because of the special assignment.
32. **Trade a management assistant or other aspiring manager to a neighboring local government** This is a good option for smaller organizations that cannot provide much mobility and development opportunities for aspiring managers. Trading talent for a time-limited period provides up-and-coming managers with experience in different organizations as well as new skills and learning opportunities they can bring back home.

## Other Ideas

Here are some other ideas to develop and prepare aspiring managers:

33. **Offer a short career development course** within the organization (or through adult education or a community college). The course would focus on how to develop one’s portfolio of skills and experiences, write a winning résumé, interview for promotions, and attract the attention of executive recruiters.
34. **Ensure there is no gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, or harassment in the organization** The majority of employees entering the

American workforce in the coming years will be made up of women and people of color. One focus group concerned with women in management identified harassment, especially sexual harassment, as a specific barrier to women's advancement. One participant recounted the instance of a male manager who harassed his female subordinate and was subsequently promoted (which sent a clear message to the organization); the female subordinate was devalued and shamed and eventually left the organization. Harassment of any kind is morally, ethically, and legally wrong. During a talent shortage, it is also stupid.

35. **Encourage talented midcareer managers to enroll in workshops for future city managers** In California, the California City Management Foundation funds and organizes an annual "Future City Manager" workshop. Space is limited, so participants must apply and be recommended by their city managers. The format includes small groups and individual sessions. The instructors are a team comprising both well-established and first-time managers. Everyone shares personal journeys and discusses in an interactive setting the rewards, challenges, and skills of local government management.
36. **Include talent development as part of ICMA's code of ethics or knowledge assessment** If ICMA were to incorporate talent development in the code of ethics or in its knowledge assessment, it would certainly highlight this important role for managers and elevate its importance in the field of local government management.
37. **Attend workshops, query colleagues, read the literature, and learn from the private sector** To the extent that developing talent or suc-

cessors is a professional crisis that must be addressed, local government managers need to "go to school" on the issue. Educational resources could include ICMA University classes, workshops at state association conferences, learning from colleagues who have begun to address the challenge, and reading the literature on succession planning and related topics (see Appendix B for resources).

38. **Encourage your state association or group of area managers to host networking and/or educational events for up-and-comers** Such events provide important information, widen networks, and motivate aspiring managers. Or, better yet, a group of area managers can identify regional issues—urban runoff, affordable housing, transportation challenges, for example—for assistants to analyze and recommend solutions to the managers as a group. Of course, assistants can also be included as full members of area managers groups.
39. **Participate in the annual conference of assistants** By attending a conference of assistants, senior managers demonstrate that they care; and they provide attendees with an opportunity to grow their network. Local government managers can also serve on session panels, critique résumés, participate in mock interviews, and meet assistants informally at the social events.

## A Legacy

Not every best practice is suitable for a particular chief executive or organization. However, by adopting a mix of these practices, all city and county managers can effectively develop successes and leave long-term legacies for their communities and for the profession.

# Appendix



## Case Studies of Local Government Programs

### MEMORANDUM

**SUBJECT:** “Preparing the Next Generation of Managers”—A Call for Case Studies

A large number of baby-boomer city managers will be retiring in the next five years. Yet there are fewer Generation X managers who are willing and ready to take their place. Consequently, the working group on “Preparing the Next Generation of Managers,” sponsored by the League of California Cities City Managers Department, is developing a resources guidebook to assist city and county executives in better developing their successors and other aspiring managers.

The resource book on “Preparing the Next Generation of Managers” will include a number of case studies from local governments that have consciously developed or prepared “replacement talent.” We would like your organization to submit a case study on your organization’s formal or conscious effort to develop and promote aspiring managers. These case studies will then be published as part of the resource book.

Examples of formal programs or other structured efforts include:

- Establishing an internal supervisory or management academy
- Offering an internal “management certificate” program
- Rotating management assistants through departments
- Developing time-limited special assignments in different departments and filling those assignments with designated up-and-comers
- Bringing management assistants together from the various departments and providing a quarterly seminar
- Developing a standard practice of assigning up-and-comers to interim- or acting-manager positions in departments
- Rotating management assistants from the departments into the assistant to the city manager position
- Implementing a formal succession plan
- Periodically trading management assistants with a neighboring local government

The deadline for returning the completed form is January 30, 2003.

Thank you,

Frank Benest, City Manager  
City of Palo Alto, California

## Anaheim, California

1. *What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

We have three leadership development programs:

- Leadership Scholarship Program
- Degree programs on-site
- Anaheim LEADS.

2. *Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

Of Anaheim's top managers, 93 percent are retiring or will be eligible to retire in the next 10 years.

3. *Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

The city provides scholarships for high-potential managers to attend one-week executive leadership programs at such places as Harvard University, Center for Creative Leadership, and Columbia University. Scholarships are typically in the range of \$4,000–\$8,000, including tuition, transportation, and room and board. The city awards two or three scholarships per year.

Anaheim offers on-site degree programs, including a bachelor's degree program in organizational management and a master's degree program in organizational leadership. The city does have a tuition reimbursement program.

The city offers a 43-hour leadership academy called Anaheim LEADS. The curriculum covers such leadership practices as systems thinking, change management, and servant leadership. Approximately 140 people have graduated from the program in two years.

The target audience for these programs is high-potential managers. The intent is to prepare internal staff to be ready to move into department and division manager positions as they become available.

4. *What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

We used Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes and Posner) for pre- and post-assessment on Anaheim LEADS, and we saw significant increases in scores in both self ratings and ratings by observers. There has been extremely positive feedback (qualitative data), especially about the city as an "employer of choice," because of its investment in leadership development.

5. *Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

The important lessons learned were to offer more than one type of program for leadership development depending on schedules, personality, and previous training/education of the individual. Also, putting many people through the program in a short period of time has huge payoffs for the organization in terms of creating synergy around key leadership concepts and moving toward a learning organization.

6. *Who is the contact person for more information:*

Connie Phillips, Senior HR Development Specialist; phone, 714/765-5256; e-mail, cphillips1@anaheim.net

### Jurisdiction information

Population: 328,000

Number of employees: 2,000 (full-time)

Operating budget: \$980 million

## CCMF, MMASC, and MMANC

1. *What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

New & Future City Managers' Workshop

2. *Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

To provide individuals interested in becoming city managers with an opportunity to discuss issues with city managers; issues include obtaining a city manager position, council/manager relations, negotiating a



city manager contract, and the effect the city manager position has on one's personal life.

3. *Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

The New & Future City Managers' Workshop is an intensive weekend workshop led by five city managers. The workshop is structured to encourage in-depth discussions on several specific topics as outlined in the syllabus but also enables the participants to add topics of interest for discussion. In addition, meals are structured to ensure each city manager has an opportunity to join a different group of participants. The target group for this workshop is limited to assistant city managers, assistants to city managers, and department heads who are within two years of applying for a city manager position.

The key elements of this program center on the candid, open discussions that occur throughout the workshop and the fact that the participants are all facing similar issues as they contemplate the next step to city manager. As a result, the discussions are very pointed, applicable, and honest.

4. *What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

"Whenever I have the chance to encourage a new city manager to attend, I always tell them—it is the best thing you can do to start your career on the right foot."

—Carol Jacobs,

*2010 New & Future City Manager Seminar alumnae, and City Manager of Eastvale, California*

The follow-up surveys indicated the participants found the workshops extremely beneficial for answering numerous questions on becoming a city manager as well as discovering that their colleagues were grappling with many of the same issues regarding their career decisions.

5. *Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

The workshops have been very successful. Minor adjustments have been made after

each workshop, but overall the program format has been effective, and we plan to continue with the program as is.

6. *Who is the contact person for more information?*

For more information on the program, including videos and photos from past events, interested parties are encouraged to visit [www.cacitymanagers.org/nfcm](http://www.cacitymanagers.org/nfcm).

## **Elk Grove, California**

1. *What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

We use a program called the Executive Development Review (EDR).

2. *Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

The program was created as a development tool to enhance the skills of employees to prepare them for internal promotion.

3. *Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

Basically, the city leadership team meets once a year to evaluate the strengths and developmental needs of all of its management employees or up-and-comers in any position. We then rate promotability and color code each person reviewed. A green dot is RN (ready now); a blue dot is P1, P2, or P3 (promotable in 1, 2, or 3 years); a yellow dot means well-placed; and a red dot is AR (action required). The results are viewed by employees' departments to ensure the right people get the appropriate training to enhance their future worth.

4. *What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

Based on last year's evaluations and training efforts, four employees were promoted.

5. *Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

No, staff are very pleased with the current program.

6. *Who is the contact person for more information?*

Terry Fitzwater, Assistant City Manager;  
phone, 916/478-2280

### **Jurisdiction information**

Population: 90,000

Number of employees: full time, 27; additional contract employees

Operating budget: \$25 million

### **Fremont, California**

1. *What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

City of Fremont Leadership Academy

2. *Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

As is the case with many other organizations, several of the city's executive managers will be retiring in the coming two to five years. In an effort to be proactive rather than reactive, the city created its own leadership academy in anticipation of these upcoming organizational changes.

3. *Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

The City of Fremont Leadership Academy is a multifaceted program designed to make leaders out of strong managers, a critical step in ensuring the long-term vibrancy of an organization.

Preference in the academy is given to those managers who possess relatively strong management skills, demonstrate leadership ability, and have the potential to move into upper level/executive management positions in this organization.

The leadership academy has several key elements:

- **Assessment**—To give participants a better understanding of their areas of strength and areas of opportunity, we offer an assessment that includes management-style profiles, in-basket exercises, group activities, and one-on-one interviews.
- **Core curriculum**—After consulting with a number of cities, universities, and Fortune 100 companies to find out what they consider essential for leadership development, with assistance from outside consultants we designed the courses on the following topics: exploring the role of a leader, creating a shared vision, ethics/values, systems thinking and strategic planning, building a winning team and developing inclusive partnerships, futures forecasting and analysis, and what drives political and administrative decision making.
- **Mentoring**—To provide support and assistance to participants as they progress through the academy, we pair them with mentors from our executive management team.
- **Practical application/activity days**—To ensure that the academy meets the needs of those enrolled, participants are given an opportunity to identify the key challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. Workshops are then developed to address those challenges (e.g., solving performance problems, coaching, taking action as a leader, managing up and outwards, leading people through change). Panels of our own executive managers, other city managers, and private industry executives are also set up to broaden the perspective of the participants.
- **Problem-solving projects**—To augment the experiential activities, participants form teams to work on projects of significant importance to our organization, develop recommendations, and present action plans.
- **Presentation skills**—So that participants can better represent their departments and the city, they attend the Dale Carnegie high impact presentation course.
- **Reinforcement**—To assist participants with applying what they learn in the acad-

emy, one-on-one meetings are held with participants after the academy ends to review progress made on their professional development plans.

*4. What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

Evaluations of speakers and course content are done after every session so that modifications can be made, as needed. Midsession evaluations are completed by participants to assist with the design of future training. Final evaluations are completed by participants and our executive management team to determine the overall value of the academy.

Our first academy began in January 2002, with graduation in October 2002. From the executive management team's perspective, those who went through the academy:

- Demonstrate a greater citywide perspective, not just a departmental perspective
- Take more ownership in the issues on which they are working
- Act like partners with the executive management team rather than subordinates
- Focus more on coaching and mentoring those they supervise rather than being hands-on managers
- Have a better understanding of and play an active role in spreading Fremont's unique organizational culture.

From the participants' perspectives, the academy helped them:

- Gain a bigger-picture perspective of the organization, its values, and what is expected of leaders
- Manage for results by developing individual work plans with their employees
- Maximize the potential of their employees through coaching and mentoring
- Be more action oriented, balancing the need for solid research with consolidated time frames.

Of the 15 managers enrolled in the first academy, three have been promoted internally: one to police captain, one to senior

manager, and one to a deputy director. Three accepted promotional opportunities elsewhere: one as a police chief, another as a public works director, and another as a deputy director of recreation and administrative services.

*5. Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

We learned a number of lessons from our 2002 academy, many of which have been factored into the design of our second academy:

- There was a wider-than-expected variation in the skill levels of the participants. For that reason, the focus of our next academy will be to provide a broad, results-oriented knowledge base first. After that base is established, participants can move on to leadership principles and practices.
- Given existing workloads, the time commitment of two days per month of classroom involvement plus outside work on the special projects was too burdensome. Although the projects have significant value, they are not part of the second academy and instead may be incorporated into follow-up training.
- Given the characteristics of the next target audience, the assessment component has been modified to better meet those needs. Rather than an assessment center, there will be more use of individual written instruments and a debriefing workshop with the group as a whole.
- There was an expressed need for individual coaching; therefore that is included in our next academy.

*6. Who is the contact person for more information?*

Cynthia King, Project Manager; phone, 510/284-4013; e-mail, cking@ci.fremont.ca.us

**Jurisdiction information**

Population: 203,500  
Number of employees: 888  
Operating budget: \$107 million

## Long Beach, California

1. *What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

Management Assistant Program

2. *Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

The program was initiated in 1980 to attract the best and brightest individuals to the organization. The program serves as a recruiting source for future career professionals and managers.

3. *Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

Management assistants—two or three are selected each year from a pool of approximately 50 applicants—receive one-year appointments; during this time they gain experience through four department rotations of three months each. Candidates are drawn from graduate schools, local agencies, and professional organizations. Applicants must possess at least a master's degree, and they often have had some professional experience or an earlier internship.

The program is budgeted and coordinated in the office of the city manager. The assistant city manager is the program executive, and day-to-day coordination is managed by the human resources department.

Proposals to host a management assistant are requested from all city-manager departments, and other departments are encouraged to submit proposals as well. Rotation assignments are designed to develop assistants' writing, research, and analytical skills as well as their skills in areas such as special projects. Day-to-day assignments provide exposure to a wide array of municipal services.

Management assistants attend key staff meetings and are mentored by the director of their department, alumni of the Management Assistant Program, and the program coordinator.

4. *What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

The city has benefited from fresh perspectives and new ideas generated by management assistants; and a number of former assistants now hold analytical and management positions throughout the city, including acting deputy city manager. In addition, former management assistants around the country remain dependable professional resources.

5. *Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

The city has learned that for the program to work there must be:

- Executive management support and buy-in—executive management and supervisors must be included in all facets of the program
- A formal support structure—a top-level executive program manager, a day-to-day coordinator, a mentoring program, and an alumni advisory committee are necessary
- Meaningful work assignments—review of proposals, feedback from management assistants, and flexibility within rotations based on interest and department needs
- Meaningful professional exposure—attendance at executive management meetings, training and professional development opportunities, hands-on experiences with department practitioners, membership in professional organizations
- Continuous improvement and evaluation—ongoing updates of recruitment contacts and resources, orientation and rotation evaluation, regular substantive meetings with assistant city manager and program coordinator, and alumni advisory committee assessments and recommendations
- Mentoring—department director provides an organizational perspective, alumni advisers advise on program implementation and city operational issues, and the program coordinator serves as an informal mentor.

6. *Who is the contact person for more information?*

Kevin Boylan, Human Resources Director;  
phone, 562/570-6475

### Jurisdiction information

Population: 461,500

Number of employees: 6,000

Operating budget: \$368 million (general fund)

## Naperville, Illinois

1. *What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

Naperville Employee University (NEU) opened its doors in January 2002 to offer a wider variety of learning events, including skill enhancement for supervisors, managers, and directors.

2. *Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

A learning track for our leaders was developed within NEU because:

- We believe that in most organizations, including ours, employees are promoted to supervisory positions on the basis of their technical skills. Although technical skills are important, the new supervisor now has a very different responsibility and needs to be trained in the appropriate skills for this new leadership role
- To fill the gaps created when current leaders leave, this organization must aid in succession planning efforts by offering both skill-building events and leadership events such as rotating supervisory opportunities.

3. *Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

Within NEU we have several concurrent programs:

- **Leadership Certificate Program**—In the fall of 2002, one manager or supervisor from each department was enrolled in this

program. To acquire the certificate, each participant must attend and successfully complete three graduate-level courses taught on campus by North Central College staff. This cohort group of ten moves through each class together. In teams, they also must complete a year-long research project that leads to information or conclusions that benefit our city. The final piece of the certificate is to attend six city council meetings and the learning sessions that follow.

- **IG School for Leadership and Change**—We currently have two project teams enrolled in the Illinois school run by the Innovation Groups (IG). We believe this effort will allow for teams to explore the scope of an identified initiative within the city, will allow participants to learn facilitation skills they can use back on the job, and, finally, allows participants to network with other organizations and receive feedback on their projects.
- **Leadership Learning Labs**—In the spring of 2003 we will offer special Leadership Learning Labs for our managers and supervisors. Each department will identify one person who could benefit from the experience. The three labs are day-long events and cover three areas of leadership development. Before the lab, each participant receives preparatory work as well as the goals of the workshop and then brings a concern or project to work on during the session.
- **NEU courses**—Twice a year, NEU distributes a curriculum brochure offering a variety of learning experiences for leadership development. Offerings this term include “Situational Leadership,” “Emotional Intelligence at Work,” “Performance Management,” “Talent Selection” (interview training), and a course we call “What Every Leader Needs to Know”—this topic changes annually to address and inform leaders about city policies and procedures.
- **Rotating supervisory positions**—Several departments offer rotating supervisory positions, which permit a number of employees the opportunity to lead and to learn from that experience.

4. *What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

The first three items mentioned are very new learning initiatives. We have set goals and expectations for each, and these will need to be met in order for the programs to continue.

Item four—NEU courses—has been in place for several years. Through needs-based assessment activities, the classes vary each term, with some classes continuing as requested.

Rotating supervisory positions has also been in place for several years and has proved so successful that other departments have replicated the experience. A rotating format allows the employee to not only gain leadership experience but also receive feedback on developmental needs. An experienced, well-rounded future leader can emerge from this practice.

5. *Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

So far, two lessons are worth noting:

- With the rotating format, the employee must receive feedback on performance; otherwise it was just an experience—not necessarily a learning and growth experience.
- Employees who participate in programs such as the Leadership Certificate Program or the IG School for Leadership and Change must have opportunities to use these new skills. Those opportunities need the support of city leaders and should, to some extent, be put into place before the program starts and be included in the annual performance goals.

6. *Who is the contact person for more information?*

Sharon Adams, Learning and Performance Supervisor; phone, 630/548-1114; e-mail, adamss@naperville.il.us

**Jurisdiction information**

Population: 128,000

Number of employees: 1,000

General fund-operations, FY03: \$85 million

**Palo Alto, California**

1. *What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

Palo Alto Police Department Succession Plan

2. *Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

We recognized the need to ensure leadership continuity through a structured program of employee development.

3. *Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

The plan is an aggressive program consisting of:

- A review of minimum entry requirements for each sworn rank
- Identifying the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for promotion to each rank
- Identifying all eligible candidates for promotion to each rank
- Identifying specific developmental actions to prepare every eligible candidate for promotion to the next rank
- Annual career planning meeting
- Biannual promotional coaching classes, open to all personnel and presented by top command staff; the current program targets sworn personnel although we have recently embarked on a similar program for civilian personnel.

4. *What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

The program has been in place for less than a year, so it's too soon to tell how successful it will be in the long term. It was well received and conveyed the department's concern for each employee's personal development in a very positive way.

5. *Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

Creation of a working group composed of representatives from throughout the department helped generate enthusiasm and credibility. Wide distribution of the plan, which names every sworn employee, was also very effective.

*6. Who is the contact person for more information?*

Pat Dwyer, Police Chief; phone, 650/329-2555; e-mail, pat\_dwyer@city.palo-alto.ca.us

### **Jurisdiction information**

Population: 58,500

Number of employees: 1,200

Operating budget: \$320 million (general fund and all utilities)

## **Plano, Texas**

*1. What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

Management Preparation Program of Plano

*2. Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

The city of Plano developed its Management Preparation Program of Plano (MP3) in response to a need to address the upcoming attrition of a large percentage of its management staff within a five-year period. A valued component of the program is its dual capacity to enhance the managerial skill sets of participants within their current positions and to prepare them to compete successfully for future promotional opportunities.

*3. Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

The MP3 provides an experiential learning opportunity for members of the city's management staff who meet established educational and tenure guidelines. The participants are matched with selected development

coaches (at the executive level) who work with them in an academic and experiential setting for one year. Some key elements of the program are that specific courses are designed for participants, and participants must compete to be involved. However, all participants understand this to be a preparatory program and not a guarantee of promotion. The goal of the program is to provide participants with the tools to compete successfully and improve their current managerial skills.

*4. What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

The first MP3 class commenced in January 2003. Thus far, the reception and participation are good, and excellent programs and interactive learning experiences are in place. The results of the selection process were good, and we believe that good results will follow as the program is completed in December 2003.

*5. Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

At this point, we know we will need to expand the manner in which we advertised the program to ensure all potentially eligible participants know of application deadlines. We will also expand our preparation training for coaches; they need to understand the full scope of what they are being asked to do. As we proceed, we are open to suggestions and will use the quarterly evaluations from development coaches and participants to make modifications to enhance the results of the program.

*6. Who is the contact person for more information?*

LaShon Ross, Director of Human Resources; phone, 972/941-7422; e-mail, lashonr@plano.gov

### **Jurisdiction information**

Population: 222,000

Number of employees: 1,931 (full-time)

Operating budget: \$300 million

## San José, California

1. *What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

Building the Bench is the name of the overall effort, and the Leadership and Supervision Academy is the major element now under way.

2. *Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

For two principal reasons:

- To improve middle managers' and supervisory employees' leadership and management skills and knowledge in their current positions
- To prepare them to be successful in obtaining and performing in senior management positions.

San José's initial citywide employee survey (conducted in 2001) showed that 22 percent of respondents felt that management skills could be improved and 17 percent asked for better communication between managers and employees. While San José has provided leadership training in various forms since the mid-1980s, the survey results indicated a need for a more comprehensive approach, enabling us to reach a larger percentage of supervisors and managers to enhance their skills and improve practices in these areas.

In addition, it was seen as critical to more proactively develop leadership, management, and promotional opportunities to help achieve one of San José's corporate priorities: to be the "best public employer." Finally, we were seeking additional opportunities to promote staff's awareness and application of San José's five other corporate priorities: performance-driven government, customer service, neighborhood-focused service delivery, support for effective council policymaking, and effective use of technology.

3. *Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of partici-*

*pants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

The goal of the Leadership and Supervision Academy (LaSA) is to ensure that new supervisors are well equipped to handle the added responsibilities that come with a move to management. Initially, attendance will be mandatory for all new supervisors and those existing supervisors who have never attended any city supervision training. After this group completes the program, it will be opened to nonsupervising "lead workers" as a further opportunity to "build the bench" and develop these skills throughout the organization.

Begun in April 2002, the new academy was developed in-house by a team of employees from the employee services department and the city manager's office. The 10-week (40 hours total) training academy is delivered entirely by city staff.

Major subject elements are:

- **Leadership and management training**—leadership theories and application to the San José environment; introduction to San José's corporate priorities and its customer-focused, results-based service delivery framework; and managing for results—how to use data to improve services and allocate resources
- **Interpersonal effectiveness**—communication skills, including proactive listening and timely feedback, and conflict resolution
- **City policies and procedures**—how to handle harassment, discrimination, and performance problems; also information on resources available to assist supervisors in a number of procedural areas when needed.

4. *What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

To date, the LaSA has graduated approximately 190 supervisors and midlevel managers in three academies. Feedback from both participants and their supervisors has been positive—the overall rating by participants is 4.2 on a 5-point scale—with constructive suggestions that are assisting us in improving the experience as we plan subsequent



sessions. Within the next two years, the goal is to have all current supervisors graduate from the academy, which will enable us to open the program to other employees as a building-the-bench opportunity.

We also now track the ratio of internal to external appointments to senior and executive staff position vacancies. Since January 2001, 26 of 42 appointments (or 62 percent) went to internal candidates. We will continue to track these numbers as part of the evaluation of our overall building-the-bench efforts.

*5. Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

Overall, the model is working well, but, because the academy trainers are all in-house employees, the commitment to training must be balanced against performing other job duties and functions. However, we believe that there is a significant long-term benefit to using in-house trainers instead of using the services of outside consultant trainers for this particular program. As the academy progresses, we will have the opportunity to expand our pool of trainers by engaging former graduates to deliver portions of the training. In making such a commitment to a large number of employees, it is important to create and maintain a strategy to deliver training over the long term.

For the future, it will be important to keep the academy subjects relevant and responsive to the needs of both students and their managers. Data from the employee survey and focus groups will be important to maintain and sustain the value of this training, making changes to the curriculum as necessary.

*6. Who is the contact person for more information?*

Brooke Myhre, QUEST Program Manager;  
phone, 408/277-5861; e-mail,  
brooke.myhre@ci.sj.ca.us

**Jurisdiction information**

Population: 895,000  
Number of employees: 7,187  
Operating budget: \$733 million

**Santa Ana, California**

*1. What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

The Public Business Academy has three programs:

- Public Business Concepts, Theories, and Practices (PBC)
- Public Business Management (PBM)
- Advanced Leadership Development (ALD)

In addition, the city also sponsors an internship program for high school, college, and graduate school students.

*2. Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

The Public Business Academy was developed in 1993 as the next step in the city's plan to become a learning organization with a total quality service (TQS) philosophy. In response to a continuously changing environment, the city invested in the academy program to enhance employees' ability to make significant contributions within the city or other public entities. The program is intended for our leaders of today and potential leaders of tomorrow. It is a visionary program with the intention of teaching employees how to conduct business in an entrepreneurial manner, how to plan strategically, and how and when to take risks. The program focuses on employee empowerment, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation. Throughout, the program aids in creating a quality-focused organization that is responsive to change and helps build commitment and a common language and culture among city employees.

The internship program is designed to attract, develop, and mentor innovative individuals interested in pursuing a career in the public sector. The program recognizes the need to provide rewarding and career-oriented work experiences for young people in the hopes of retaining participants after graduation.

*3. Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for*

*senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

### **Public Business Academy**

- PBC is designed for all city employees and requires eight weeks to complete. The intent of the program is to ensure participants gain a fundamental base of knowledge on the overall picture of the organization, important operational systems, and a better understanding of themselves and others.
- PBM is designed for supervisors and managers and takes 13 weeks to complete. PBM's intent is to provide an arena to network, to teach the nuts and bolts of running a public business, and to enhance employees' ability to accurately focus their work effort in a manner consistent with city direction. It does this by focusing on seven learning modules that, taken together, provide managers with the theory and skills needed to achieve success.
- ALD is designed for employees who are currently leaders or who are on their way to becoming leaders, and it requires 14 weeks to complete. ALD offers seven learning modules designed to provide the opportunity to explore concepts and techniques that keep the city on the cutting edge of progressive local government administration. This is accomplished through a graduate school seminar format.

### **Internships**

The city classifies interns into six categories:

- Student interns—High school juniors and seniors
- Administrative interns—College freshmen and sophomores
- Senior administrative interns—College juniors and seniors
- Management interns—Graduate school students
- Engineering interns—College juniors and seniors in engineering-related fields
- Budget interns—College juniors and seniors in finance-related fields.

Interns are recruited for and placed within divisions to best match the departments' needs and students' interests. Interns meet on a quarterly basis for training, informational seminars, and networking opportunities.

*4. What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

### **Public Business Academy**

To date, approximately 600 employees have graduated from the PBC program and 200 each have graduated from the PBM and ALD programs. In addition, the Public Business Academy has provided the following benefits:

- Enhanced leadership and management skills among managers and supervisors
- Increased capacity to identify and implement long-range goals consistent with city's social, political, legal, and practical realities
- Increased communication among departments
- Better working relationships between managers and supervisees
- Clearer understanding of the city's goals and objectives.

### **Internships**

The city consistently maintains approximately 55 interns across all departments. The internship program has helped to identify and retain highly motivated and skilled young talent. Graduates of the program have gone on to successful careers as professionals and managers in a variety of public service agencies.

*5. Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

### **Public Business Academy**

The city initially developed the PBM and ALD modules. From the outset it would have been beneficial to develop a complete program that included all employees. In addition, the city has recognized the need for ongoing training. In response to this need, the city has developed seminars for upper-level and midlevel managers to update skills, offer information on new and relevant topics, and provide

forums for continuous interaction among managers. Examples of recent seminar topics include “Managing the Generation Mix” and “Teamwork Is an Individual Skill.”

### Internships

The internship program has enjoyed much success. However, the city may wish to explore cross-departmental training, provide more group activities in addition to the quarterly meetings, and incorporate a job-shadowing component.

*6. Who is the contact person for more information?*

Alma Flores, Senior Management Assistant; phone, 714/647-6989; e-mail, aflores@ci.santa-ana.ca.us

### Jurisdiction information

Population: 338,000

Number of employees: 1,748

Operating budget: \$180 million (general fund)

## Santa Clarita, California

*1. What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

The city has two programs. The first program is referred to as the Management Analyst Team (MAT). The second program is a formal mentoring program.

*2. Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

For several reasons:

- To provide the skills and competencies of aspiring analysts who sought to be managers
- To provide opportunities to gain broad-based experience in the various areas of municipal management
- To gain insight on higher-level policy matters and decision-making processes through interaction with executive managers
- To develop a next level of managers to fill critical management positions—bench strength, in other words

- To attract and retain talent to the organization.

*3. Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

### MAT

The MAT reports to the city manager; however, on a day-to-day basis MAT members are assigned to the operating departments, and they report to the department head.

Several elements have been used:

- **Core competency training program**—On the basis of ICMA-identified core competencies, a formal training program was developed with sessions on negotiation skills and public-speaking skills.
- **MAT special projects**—The team is often called to conduct organizational analysis and/or management audits. This provides every analyst the opportunity to work on broad-based policy issues that extend beyond their own departments and expose them to assignments that require big-picture thinking.
- **Assignments to interim management positions**—On several occasions the organization has drawn from the MAT to fill critical management positions such as department heads, division heads, and assistant to the city manager.
- **Job rotations**—Management analysts are rotated among operating departments approximately every two or three years.

### Mentoring program

Formal one-year program for all employees that matches a mentor and a protégé in an effort to provide a structured learning environment. The program provides an initial training program and follow-up quarterly meetings to gauge the efforts and successes of the relationships. The program also includes applicable materials on topics such as leadership and communications. The city manager contributes support in the form of training sessions. Participants meet at least

monthly to discuss an agreed work plan. There are also opportunities for special projects outside the protégé's normal work.

*4. What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

The MAT program has produced positive results:

- Several management analysts have been promoted to management positions
- Retention of key talent in the organization
- Positive reputation of the city manager as one who develops and promotes aspiring managers
- Future attraction of talent
- Analysts with greater skill sets who can work on the multitude of issues with a big-picture perspective
- Higher-quality analysis and program development
- Greater pool of talent to work on complex analytical projects and politically sensitive projects with higher comfort level.

The mentoring program also produced positive results:

- Individual growth on the parts of both the mentor and protégé
- More engaged employees who are focused on their development
- Opportunities to find talented people who may not have been identified previously.

More in-depth analysis will be conducted at the end of the one-year program.

*5. Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

**MAT**

- Provide more consistency and structure to ensure long-term stability of program.

**Mentoring program**

- Evaluate selection process to ensure appropriate relationships
- More training so that participants have a clear idea of what mentoring means
- Provide a recommended template on how to develop a work plan and methods to stay on track.

*6. Who is the contact person for more information?*

Ken Pulskamp, City Manager; phone, 661/255-4905; e-mail, kpulskamp@santa-clarita.com

**Jurisdiction information**

Population: 151,000

Number of employees: 338

Operating budget: \$53 million (general fund)

**Sarasota County, Florida**

*1. What is the name of your program or structured effort to better develop and prepare aspiring managers?*

RoadMaps to Learning

*2. Why did your local government develop the program or structured effort?*

For three reasons:

- **Succession planning**—Sarasota County has been a longevity-based, central hierarchy for several decades. Past performance and loyalty were the key drivers used to evaluate a potential manager. It was apparent that we were always looking outside for new managers. This fact led to a degree of introspection and analysis that supported the need to define expectations for each management class and to create an environment where we could grow the managers that we needed and public service demanded.
- **Performance management**—As part of the overall assessment effort, it was also revealed that we had created nothing more than a class of “super employees” and called them managers. Responsibility and accountability had been delinked, with accountability absorbed by layers of the organization detached from where outcomes were to be achieved. All 125 management-level positions were placed in a management class and now serve at the will of the county administrator. At the same time we understood that these managers were “victims” of previous promotional decisions. Expectations for outcomes and the skills and competencies required had never been articulated for the

vast majority. Many of these people were set up to fail in an environment where the bar had been raised significantly.

RoadMaps to Learning represents a conscious decision to invest in our existing people resources, their success and their succession.

- **Change management**—To promote rapid, wide-scale change and ensure accountability at all levels of the enterprise, Sarasota County launched a focused effort to drive strategic alignment. While we have been actively engaged in a number of continual improvement activities over the past five years, we struggled to bring alignment throughout the enterprise. It became clear that we needed to establish a streamlined approach that linked all key activities to our vision, mission, values, and strategic initiatives.

*3. Please briefly describe the program or structured effort to develop aspiring managers and help prepare them for senior management positions. Who was the targeted group of participants? What are some key elements of the program or effort?*

The RoadMaps to Learning program is unique in several aspects. In July 2002, core competencies and specific performance expectations were established at the chief officer, executive director, manager, supervisor, and employee levels. While the identification and development of core competencies are already used in some organizations, we also linked the balanced scorecard principles into our competency descriptions. To that end, defined core competencies include: customer and community champion, financial manager, process improver and capacity builder, and continuous innovative learner. Because alignment was critical to our success, core competencies at all levels of the enterprise were designed in a cascading manner. Our aspiring leaders throughout the organization now have a clear path to future success. All learning and development activities have been designed to support advancing levels of competency within each of the balanced scorecard perspectives. To ensure overall success, these same competencies operate as

the foundation for all hiring and selection practices and the performance management system (a pay-for-performance model). This consistency has helped to promote alignment, create shared expectations, and launch opportunities for continued professional growth across the enterprise.

Another key feature of this program is its emphasis on freedom and choice in exchange for accountability. A concentrated effort to include blended learning options has been launched. Managers have a variety of growth options, including:

- Accelerated learning techniques within the classroom setting
- An extensive computer-based training library
- Team learning options
- Mentoring opportunities
- A repository of leadership books, videos, and audios
- Practical toolkits.

Because the performance management system and individual development plans are designed to support business plan objectives, accountability is automatically woven into the process through clear performance measures.

The target audience in the RoadMaps to Learning program includes executives, general managers, managers, supervisors, and employees. While it is critical to invest in leadership development, we also believe that the employee education is essential to the future success of the enterprise. As we help our existing leaders advance their skill sets, we also provide numerous opportunities to grow future leaders.

Additional elements have also contributed to the success of our learning and development programs. Redeploying several full-time staff into the organizational and employee development business unit has offered new opportunities to improve both leader and team effectiveness. A unique assessment process and carefully designed intervention processes have been implemented across the enterprise. This alternative form of learning has played a significant role toward improving manager and group effectiveness.

We are also very excited about our progress toward improved alignment. To date, our business plans, budget, performance management practices, and learning and growth programs work in synergy to support strategic initiatives. The learning and growth programs now serve as fuel to promote success in the other areas of the balanced scorecard. Since Sarasota County government's organizational changes have been rapid and comprehensive, special efforts to communicate the scope of our programs have been launched. To ensure clear understanding on all levels of the enterprise, a product entitled RoadMaps to Learning was also developed. This tool reflects both the big picture and detailed views of diverse learning opportunities.

*4. What were the results? To what extent was the effort successful?*

We have used both Kirkpatrick's model and the balanced scorecard to measure results. Internal customer satisfaction with the overall learning experience indicates an average rating of 4.7 on a 5.0 Likert scale. All (100 percent) of our learning activities are now aligned to identified core competencies. Participants also report a greater than 50 percent improvement toward the stated learning objectives. The team-learning format has illustrated an even higher percentage of progress toward identified objectives. More specifically, a 70 percent gain in knowledge/insight has been reflected through the group-learning environment. Baseline team assessment measures were collected last year. Follow-up studies are also under way (incoming reassessment data reflect measurable improvement). This year, we will begin linking our learning and development data to the newly developed corporate scorecard. This scorecard will enable us to create clearer linkages to improvements in customer service, financial management, and process improvement.

It is also interesting to note the financial aspects of our RoadMaps to Learning program. By increasing the ratio of internal to external trainers, engaging in facilitator

negotiations, and developing an internal organizational development specialist role, the organizational and employee development business unit has helped our internal clients avoid \$280,000 in external facilitator fees during the past fiscal year. In addition, we have been successful in significantly expanding the breadth and depth of our organizational development and education services. This has been accomplished without adding to our training expenditure line item. Costs per leader and costs per employee remain significantly below benchmarking data of the American Society for Training and Development. Participation levels in learning activities have also increased dramatically. To date, we are facing wait lists for many of our classes.

*5. Are there any lessons learned on things your organization would do differently in developing such a program or effort?*

Our program was designed to ensure a broad scope and increased opportunity at all position levels. To that end, we did not clearly label our overarching program as "Leadership Development." Because many of our existing managers have concrete, linear learning preferences, we have experienced some branding issues. Simply put, some of our managers were still looking for the traditional management development program. In the months ahead, there are plans to add quarterly leadership development seminars to supplement existing opportunities.

*6. Who is the contact person for more information?*

Sue Marcinko, General Manager,  
Organizational and Employee Development;  
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**Jurisdiction information**

Population: 326,000  
Number of employees: 3,717 (BCC plus elected officials)  
Operating budget: \$474,771,158 (general fund plus special operating funds and districts)

# Appendix

## B

### Resources

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ICMA advances professional local government worldwide. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advancing professional management of local government. ICMA, the City/County Management Association, provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 12,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect 185 million individuals living in thousands of communities, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.

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