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The Ultimate Community Service

Managers take time to show young people that a local government management career is worthwhile.

Elizabeth Kellar, Washington, D.C. Read article

Changing Organization Culture, One Face at a Time A story on the development and growth of one Canadian local government's culture. **Darcey-Lynn Marc, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and Simon Farbrother, Spruce Grove, Alberta, Canada. Read article**

A Manager's Turn on Reality TV Participating in a reality television show isn't easy, but it's a whole lot of fun.

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distinguishes local government managers who stay in a single community for most of their careers, and what's different about their communities? **Douglas J. Watson and Wendy L. Hassett, Auburn, Alabama** **Read article**

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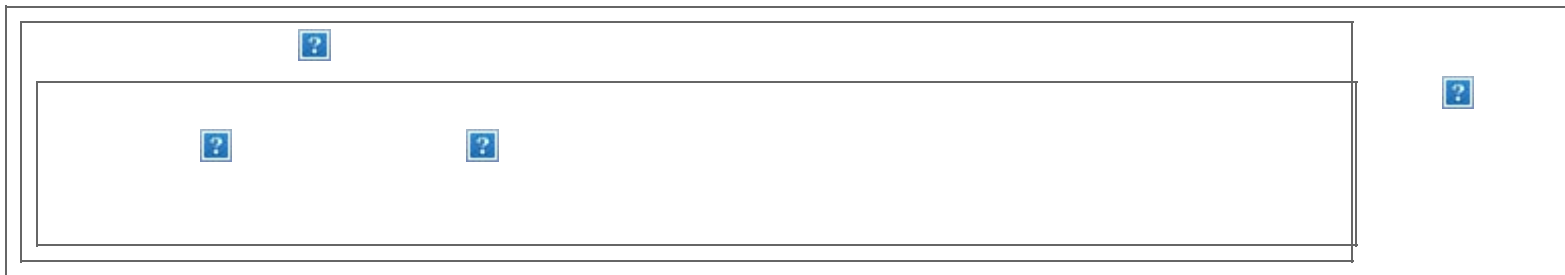## Profile

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The Ultimate Community Service

Elizabeth Kellar

"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, The Brookings Institution, in 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," compared with 58 percent who saw nonprofit organizations in that light.[1]

City and county managers have awakened to this societal challenge and are beginning to reach out to young people in order to tell of their work experiences, so that young people can learn about opportunities in "the ultimate community service." Whether they 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, these managers have made a difference to the localities they have served.

Pushing for an Investment in Youth

After seeing a rash of 13-year-old children murdered in separate incidents, George Caravalho took up the challenge to bring his community together to do something about the problem. Then city manager of Santa Clarita, California, Caravalho knew that this was not a problem that could be solved either by the schools or by 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. Caravalho speaks with pride about the substantial budget the 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. While the motivation for the complex was to provide a safe and healthy environment for young people, residents of all ages enjoy

the amenities.

Caravalho'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. He is challenged by the sheer number of internal differences within our populations: young and old, gender, rich and poor, longtime residents and new immigrants. It is not easy to tackle issues like youth violence in our diverse communities, but Caravalho likes the can-do world of local government management, where he has sometimes found "tail winds" that support the positive changes he advocates.

Making a difference, one person at a time, is something that Caravalho likes about his career choice of city manager. He repeats the story of the child who walks along the beach, periodically picking up a starfish and throwing 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 Succeed

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

Cameron reflects on another intangible benefit of being a county administrator: "You never wonder, what did you do with your life?"

Taxes have never been popular, yet there are times when elected officials conclude that taxes must be raised to provide a needed service. 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, sometimes citizens would 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 takes 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 director of finance for a city. The intern thanked Mauk for sending him to a city management seminar at which 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 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.

George Caravalho talks to members of
the Boy Scouts about his job as city
manager of Riverside, California.

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 meets and often exceeds what you see in the private sector." Mauk thinks the difference is that people who work in local government management have more passion for their work. When they picture a neighborhood full of frustration, they feel a sense of urgency about solving the problem before it becomes a crisis.

Serving the Underserved

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

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

His approach to 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."

The gray hair in the crowd reflects the reality that the profession has aged and that its

members soon will be approaching retirement in record numbers. Who will replace them?

Cameron adds that it is important to break down barriers between government and the faith community. Washington County has an Interfaith Action Committee. The county staff works with the faith community, distributing information about community services at local churches and other places of worship, as one way to reach people. "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 might 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.

"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 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 of 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 manager of a community with train tracks that run through the middle of it, 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 headfirst into the challenge and look for ways to persuade everyone, from the railroad interests to the downtown merchants and the state and federal agencies, to find a 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 the environmental impacts generated by the number of trains traveling through Reno, Nevada Senator Harry Reid 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 trainbed inside the city. Reno also 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 most benefited by the project agreed to a special assessment based on the value of their properties.

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. "[The agreement] 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.

Charles McNeely, city manager, Reno, Nevada, and Reno's elected officials worked together to keep citizens informed about the complex negotiations involved in lowering a trainbed located inside the city.

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

It's All About the People

When Peggy Merriss, city manager of 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 just mean diversity 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 died, and annual turnover was extremely high. "[The new director] told the staff that he would stay for six months and that, at that 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 managers 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 it was a challenging year for the Decatur management team while Merriss served as ICMA's president (2002–2003), Merriss had confidence that the city was in good hands when she was away. One reason why the timing was good for Merriss to take on the leadership post at ICMA was that Decatur had just adopted a 10-year strategic plan in July 2000. "The city council questioned the initial investment of $300,000" in the strategic planning process, recalls Merriss. "I went to lunch with each member of the 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.

"The Decatur City Council Commission is totally behind this effort, and it now reviews the action steps to implement the strategic plan twice a year."

Golden Opportunities for the "Service Generation"

Anyone attending a meeting of local government managers can see the opportunities that lie ahead for young people seeking a way to make a difference in people's lives.

A 2002 report published by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press paints an encouraging picture of the values that young people bring into the workplace. In looking at generational differences in the civic and political health of American citizens, the research center surveyed 3,246 residents, including 1,001 from the "Tech" Generation (ages 15 to 25) and 1,000 from the Gen X age group (born between 1964 and 1976). The Tech Generation (called "DotNets" in the Pew study) includes almost 40 million young adults who grew up with technology as a central part of their lives.[2]

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). [3] Many of them began volunteer work because their high schools encouraged or required them to do community service work.[4] 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.[5]

With its focus on college seniors (the class of 2003), the Brookings Institution's June 2003 report provides greater insights into how the Tech Generation may apply this 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 in the nonprofit sector, or for a contractor. Those seniors who were serious about public service had considered opportunities in the federal government (18 percent) and in state or local government (19 percent).[6]

What was disturbing about the survey results was that government was ranked below the nonprofit sector on a wide variety of questions (see Figure 2): less fair in its decisions (48 percent), compared with the nonprofit sector (74 percent) or a contractor (63 percent). In addition, government got the lowest ratings as a place where you could help people (66 percent), as opposed to NGOs (85 percent) and contractors (77 percent).[7]

Government was rated highest in just two areas: serving the 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 for a chance to make a difference.[8]

These results may not be surprising when one considers the constant messages that young people have heard throughout their lives. Since the late 1970s, most successful presidential campaigns have been run on an "anti-Washington" platform that suggested that there was substantial waste, fraud, and abuse 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 spawned imitations spread across the country, often passed with a fanfare of negative rhetoric about government. These negative messages were sometimes offset after a major disaster, most 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, or 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 are in the early stages of their careers. As shown in Figure 3, the college seniors who participated in the Brookings Institution survey listed their top five most desirable job attributes.[9]

We also know that members of this Tech Generation have responded to the call to community service when they were asked to do so by their high schools. This is a generation that likes to be asked. Reaching out to young people, offering meaningful

internships and entry-level jobs in which they can learn new skills and help people, is far more important than stressing high salaries. Only 30 percent of survey respondents said salary was an important consideration.

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Scott Lazenby, city manager of Sandy, Oregon, is a good model for the importance of reaching out to young people. The city of Sandy runs a "shadow program" for high school students in which they are given the opportunity to shadow the manager, mayor, or a councilmember for a semester. Because this program goes on for a full semester and is truly a hands-on learning experience, students gain significant insights into 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 his 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 Lazenby hired him. (He has since moved on to another community.)

There was an unexpected spin-off benefit from the high school student's experience. His mother, previously uninvolved in the community, decided to run for the Sandy city council—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 or internships. In the Brookings survey, more than half of the college seniors had had such experience, compared with just 11 percent who had had experience with either state or local government and 8 percent who had had experience with the federal government.[10]

We can take some of the mystery out of local government by affording some good opportunities for young people to gain experience in our communities. 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 also has supplied teaching modules to teachers, including some GIS teaching tools for geography instruction.

Debbie Anderson, Vancouver's social planner for children and youth, notes that

"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 what the issues and needs are 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 youth were trained in community asset mapping and 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 has to overcome a great deal of cynicism. The national conversations about government (often negative) tend to spill over to local government. The city has had success by going to the places where the young people are, including youth groups. Vancouver's Civic Youth Strategy (CYS) was connected to the city's successful bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics, involving youth and adults in a day-long workshop to explore ways to engage youth in a meaningful way. For more information about CYS, go to http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/cty clerk/cclerk/20030626/csb2.htm.

The academic community notes that few 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. Managers and assistants are welcome at college campuses, especially with career counselors and professors who like to offer real-world perspectives in their classrooms.

Yet another asset that 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, but also they can speak with pride about the principles that guide public service.

Parting Thoughts

My daughter graduated from college in 2003 with a major in sociology and holds views much like those reflected in the Brookings Institution study. She wants to make a difference, help people, and 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 local 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 writes, "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 members of 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 (his mother) and public administrators (relative to the private sector) are grossly underpaid and questioned why I didn't make a transition to the private sector. My response was:

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

From the College Student's Viewpoint

Nicole Kopf doesn't know what a city manager does. The fourth-year college business student never knew her skills could be used just as easily in the public sector as in the private sector because no one ever told her. "I never thought of government as a job possibility," Kopf says. "I've always been told that, if I liked managing people and getting things done, I should get a business degree and work for a company." Kopf says she sees government as "a big game that hardly accomplishes anything."

Perceptions like this one concern Mary Hamilton, executive director for the American Society for Public Administration in Washington, D.C. "Unless young people have firsthand information about the positive aspects of public service," Hamilton says, "all they have is the unbalanced media portrayal of public employees as inferior people who are stuffy and bureaucratic at best, incompetent and uncaring at worst."

A surge of studies indicates that Kopf is only one of many young Americans focused on the private sector. A 2002 Hart-Teeter study found that only 27 percent of young Americans preferred working in the public sector, and a 2002 ICMA survey discovered that, of 65 college students in two introductory urban affairs classes at Cleveland State University, only 6 percent planned to pursue an advanced degree in political science or public administration. Between 1934 and 2002, the percentage of city managers aged 40 or younger dropped from 41 percent to 15 percent. The reports indicate that baby-boomer executives are approaching retirement with few young administrators ready to fill their public shoes.

Another study recently conducted by ICMA revealed that while roughly 75 percent of responding undergrad and graduate students viewed a career in local government as somewhat-to-very appealing, nearly 54 percent had never considered a career as a city, town, or county manager, largely because they simply hadn't considered the possibility.

Aware of this impending scenario, some managers worry that in the nation's current state of affairs, public servants will only be leftovers from private employment. "I'm really concerned that people are looking to the public sector [for careers] out of restricted options rather than drive," says Jim Keene, manager of Tucson, Arizona.

Keene worries that the priorities and perspectives of America's college students may have further adverse effects on integrity in the public management field. "Many students really have what I think is an immature and simplistic image of how society works, which is unfortunate for the community and nation as a whole," Keene says. "There is increased value placed on financial return and a generally material focus in life. This job requires passion and the ability to see a larger purpose that is bigger than oneself. I rarely see that passion."

Promoting the Profession

In an effort to counteract these trends, several organizations have developed nationwide campaigns to educate the public about the service sector and to recruit college students. This year, the International City/County Management Association launched a national campaign to assist local governments in promoting internships in the public sector.

The City Managers' Department of the League of California Cities is in the process of implementing a Next Generation Working Group to groom potential public servants. The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, which represents more than 240 college and universities, has started the Public Service Careers Initiative to raise student awareness about government careers.

A research study headed by the George Washington University in Washington, D.C., found that, aside from job security and benefits, students perceived government positions as unattractive when compared with high-paying business positions. The greatest challenge for the national initiatives is combating an apparent predisposion to see government service as stagnant and not encouraging intellectual aggressiveness.

Ted Gaebler, a former city manager and author of the book Reinventing Government, says these notions may not be completely unfounded. He has spoken in 47 countries on this stagnation and on the negative image of government. He says government, including city management, has changed but that people in government positions aren't willing to abandon traditional concepts of their roles.

"There are a lot of people wedded to the past and afraid of their own shadow," he says. "New blood is the best thing that can happen right now. I will take brain, dedication, and focus over experience anytime." Gaebler is confident government jobs will not go unfilled and says recent trends are only cyclical. "Any idiot can manage. What we need is change."

A Greater Demand Arising

While campaigns strive to rally interest in local government management, students pursuing public administration—a field with fewer than 5 percent of managers under 30 years old—are finding a fertile job market, sometimes sooner than they expected.

University of Florida graduate Karen Kolinski works as a county management intern for Alachua County, Florida. Kolinski, who was offered a job managing a city before she'd even completed her degree, is wary of inexperienced graduates' filling open executive positions.

"I think it's important to gain experience coming up the ladder," Kolinski says. "There are great benefits from learning from someone experienced in the field." Kolinski credits her internship experience with showing her how to make a career out of helping the public.

"In the private arena, there's the money motivator, but then you also have the stress of meeting quotas, constantly making money for your company, and the energy you have to put into running the rat race," she says. "I can use that same energy to affect an outcome and see some customer receive a service and appreciate that service."

James Mercer, president of the Mercer Group, Inc., says that his management consulting firm has seen fewer and fewer young city managers but that there hasn't been a sharp decline yet. He does foresee increasing demand and says he hopes more young people will consider public management as a career choice.

"I believe there will be a larger demand for younger public officials in the future," he says, "and would encourage young people to pursue the public administration field because of the opportunities in it."

> **—Katie Reid, journalism major, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, and daughter of Randall Reid, county manager, Alachua County, Florida.**

[1] Paul C. Light, In Search of Public Service (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, Center for Public Service, June 2003), p. 3; on the Web at www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/gs/cps/search.pdf.

[2] 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); on the Web at www.puaf.umd.edu/CIRCLE/research/products/Civic_and_Political_Health.pdf.

[3] Keeter et al., p. 35.

[4] Keeter et al., p. 19.

[5] Keeter et al., p. 39.

[6] Light, p. 5.

[7] Light, p. 12.

[8] Light, p. 13.

[9] Light, p. 15.

[10] Light, p. 20.

Next Generation Resource Guide

ICMA has partnered with the City Managers' Department of the League of

California Cities and the California City Management Foundation to develop a resource guide to help senior managers reach out to the next generation of local government managers. It includes data, research, best practices, and a variety of articles about the rewards of public service. "The Ultimate Community Service" is one of the book's chapters. To view or download any part or all of *Preparing the Next Generation: A Guide for Current and Future Local Government Managers*, go to ICMA's Web site at icma.org, click on JobCenter, and look for the title under the Resources tab.

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Ethics Inquiries

Racial Profiling in Antiterrorism Strategies

Some confusion surrounds the ethical principles that govern racial profiling. To specifically target members of an ethnic group for suspicion of certain crimes is not ethically acceptable. The reason is that one individual's conduct (or a group's conduct) does not necessarily indicate the expected conduct of other members of that same group. However, while race should not be used as grounds for the prediction of a person's conduct, nor for suspicion, it may be used as a description of a specific individual or group of people sought by law enforcement for criminal activity.

Imagine standing in line at a security checkpoint at one of the United States's busiest airports. Ahead of you is a group of men who could be from the Middle East. This group reaches the security officers, who subject the men to a search far more intensive and harsh than anyone else in the line received. Do you feel sympathy, relief, or both? If you feel relief, are you supporting racial profiling?

I will argue that you are not. Even a person who strongly opposes racial profiling (correctly defined) could support certain terrorism-prevention tactics that focus on specific segments of the population.

Racial Profiling and Probable Cause

In part, the confusion lies in two different meanings given to the term "probable cause."

Technically, "probable cause" applies when officers have valid reasons to suspect that an individual has committed a crime, although they cannot yet prove this.

Colloquially, however, the term "probable cause" often is used to describe a minor violation serving as grounds to stop a person whom the officer

suspects of a more serious violation, though he or she has no grounds for that suspicion. For example, an officer uses a broken taillight violation as "probable cause" to stop an individual in order to investigate a possible DUI or narcotics violation, when nothing about that individual's conduct has given the officer reason to suspect the DUI or narcotics offense.

Let's examine three scenarios based on the second use of the term "probable cause":

1. It is clearly ethical for officers primarily concerned with narcotics or DUI to stop all drivers with broken taillights.
2. It is also ethical to randomly stop drivers with broken taillights and check the possibility of other infringements.
3. The ethical problem arises when an officer targets a specific ethnic or socioeconomic group, age, or sex for broken taillights.

On the one hand, the person violated a regulation by driving with a broken taillight. So the officer is free to stop the person and, while doing so, to make a quick search for other possible violations. On the other hand, the ethical question arises when, by stopping only those taillight violators of a specific ethnic group, the officer is assuming that a member of this specific group is more likely to break laws governing DUI and narcotics than members of other groups. This assumption could be based on personal bias, in which case it is clearly unethical.

Statistical "Facts" vs. Personal Bias

But what if the officer's assumption is based not on bias but on "statistics." Is that unethical, too? Let's assume that a credible statistic suggests that members of a particular ethnic group constituting a small percentage of the population are responsible for a dispropor- tionately large percentage of instances of a given crime. In this case, is it ethically acceptable (putting aside the law) to specifically target members of that group for minor regulatory offenses in the hope of finding allegations of the larger crime associated with members of that group?

The answer is "no," it is not ethically acceptable. Why? Because one individual's conduct (or a group's conduct) does not necessarily indicate the expected conduct of other members of that group. All individuals are free to make their own choices and so are held accountable for the choices they make. The history of an individual's conduct can only be used to predict their own future choices, not those of other members of their group.

Statistics are the accumulation of a sample of people's conduct. But this sample either excludes the individuals concerned or includes them only in an extremely diluted form. Suspicion should only result from a suspect's choices, as expressed in word, action, or attitude. Suspicion should never be based on the ethnic group to which the potential suspect belongs. Individuals can only be responsible for impressions of suspicion they create by their own choices. They are not responsible for the historic choices of the group to which they belong by reasons of birth, culture, or religion.

If statistical information is not an ethically valid basis to profile specific ethnic groups for suspicion of certain crimes, then what is the basis to target people from the Middle East for stricter security checks at airports than those given to members of other ethnic groups?

Profile: Grounds for Description, Not for Prediction or Suspicion

While race should not be used as grounds for the prediction of a person's conduct, nor for suspicion, it may be used as a description of a specific individual or group of people already being sought by law enforcement for criminal activity. Security officials at airports and other officers searching for terrorists usually do not stop people based on suspicion of them as individuals, but rather based on intelligence information that there are potential terrorists at large and that these belong to an identifiable ethnic or religious group.

This in no way implies that all members of this group are terrorists. It merely suggests that all the wanted terrorists are from this ethnic group. For this reason, it is inefficient and dangerous to dissipate limited resources on groups or individuals who do not fit the description of the wanted terrorists.

This situation does create the problem of some loyal and innocent citizens and residents being subjected to a potentially humiliating experience. It is vital that officers are well trained to reduce this effect through sensitive handling of all people with an extra dose of human dignity. The public, too, should be trained to be tolerant of the necessity of targeting people who more closely resemble the sought-after terrorists, rather than those who bear no resemblance to them at all.

In the fight against terrorism, law enforcement is seeking members of known groups with the declared intent to harm, kill, and commit crimes. Using any descriptive profile to identify possible members of these groups within the bounds of the law is ethical. Law enforcement, however, must be vigilant to prevent a spillover into legitimizing racial profiling as a tactic in conventional crime prevention.

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