



2022  
ICMA

108<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE

SEPTEMBER 17-21, 2022

COLUMBUS/FRANKLIN COUNTY, OH

# 2022 STUDENT CASE SIMULATION COMPETITION

Monday, September 19  
1:00pm-3:00pm EDT

ICMA

# CONTENTS

---

Instructions	1
Case Brief	2
The Players	4
The Problem	8
The Deliverables	11
Judging Criteria	12

# Welcome to the ICMA Student Case Simulation Competition!

The goals of the competition are to encourage national connections among future professionals in city and county management, and to provide a platform for honing your skills in solving problems creatively, collaboratively, innovatively, and pragmatically. We also hope that you have some fun along the way!

Each team will include 6 to 7 members, and we will be randomly forming in-person teams during the event in Columbus. Part of the challenge is seeing how well you quickly adapt to working with new people, a challenge that confronts the effective city or county manager regularly.

You have been given background materials already, and we hope you have reviewed these. The timing of this competition is quick and will proceed as follows:

<b>Introductions and Welcome</b>	10 minutes
<b>Team Assembly</b>	10 minutes
<b>Group Work &amp; Case Response</b>	90 minutes
<b>Wrap-up</b>	10 minutes

Your slide deck and half-page memo is due promptly at 11:50pm central time via submission to [rcarty@icma.org](mailto:rcarty@icma.org). Late submissions will not be eligible for consideration. You are limited to 5 slides total and a 250-word memo, and more details on their content and judging criteria are in your Case Brief. Assistance will be available throughout the competition from volunteers, though they are on hand only to help with clarification and are not allowed to provide substantive advice on how you respond to the case brief.

# CASE BRIEF

---

## Background: Rustville in decline

Assume your case takes place in 2022.

After more than 75 years of reliance on heavy industry to sustain its population, the city of Rustville is facing the challenge of declining population, diminishing tax base, and deteriorating infrastructure, and all the associated problems that come along with that. The city needs to move in a new direction.

Rustville is the second-largest city in the state, with a population of just under 150,000 people. Located on a major waterway, from the 1940s through the 1980s it was the hub of economic and social activity for Southside County and the surrounding four-county region. Along with its decline, the city suffers from **old-style politics and the social consequences of a long history of isolation from the region.**

During the years of its prosperity, Rustville attracted a large number eastern and southern European immigrants. Employment opportunities also brought immigrants from Mexico and African Americans from the southern reaches of the United States. The diverse character of the population created both opportunities and challenges. Assimilation of European immigrants was pursued aggressively in Rustville as it was in other Rust Belt localities, but it was associated with **problems including discrimination, segregation, and the concentration of political power.** Initially, political power resided in the hands of a few white males who led the charge for economic growth. Over time, the political machine was built on the votes of the immigrant population. Jobs and benefits went to those who supported the ruling politicians and fueled the political machine. Political corruption was expected, largely tolerated, and thriving because loyalty brought economic benefits. However, the divisions along ethnic and racial lines provided little room for African Americans and Mexicans to participate and, as a result, they were largely isolated and marginalized.

***Please note:** your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.*

# CASE BRIEF

---

The **social transformations occurring nationwide in the 1960s and the large-scale automation of industrial processes eliminated 80 percent of the city's manufacturing jobs.** Once a city supported by industry and able to support its residents, Rustville began to suffer from industrial closures, increasing unemployment, and rising ethnic tensions. Economic devastation was accompanied by a growing political vacuum.

Today, **the city sustains a couple of large-scale manufacturing plants and is using its remaining environmental assets to promote tourism.** For example, the lakes that long served industry also gained recognition as recreational outlets, even though that was not anticipated in the original design of the city. Now efforts are underway to revitalize the few existing parks and recreation areas, and a vision has been formulated for expanding the lakefront as a tourist destination. Surrounding communities offer a host of options ranging from nature hikes to shopping, and visitors see the assets of nearby communities as an important attraction.

However, Rustville **has made little effort to work collaboratively with its neighbors.** Economic initiatives over the past twenty years have been piecemeal. Without a long-term plan, the direction of the city's efforts has changed with each mayor. Each new mayor spotlighted a "showcase" for his term, and these projects were undertaken and completed with limited support from the city council. **Citizens at large were not invited to participate in defining the new Rustville.**

Meanwhile, other communities in the region have been moving forward with coordinated plans to revitalize economically, socially, and environmentally. So while newer communities engage in visioning programs, Rustville is being left behind. Recognizing the city's current status is not the problem: whether talking to residents on the streets or representatives of the city, one hears the same litany. **The larger problem is deciding on the city's future direction, and then implementing policies that support the vision.**

*Please note: your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.*

# The Players

---

This problem now belongs to **Barbara Baxter, the new city manager**, along with the **city council** and **Mayor Tracy DiAngelo**. The city also has several departments, such as Environmental Affairs (headed by Gilbert Greenleaf) and Economic Development, whose interdepartmental relationships matter to the progress of Rustville.

Another new player on the scene is the **Regional Excellence Initiative (REXI) Executive Committee**, which recently released an important sustainable development proposal that will affect Rustville.

## Barbara Baxter, City Manager

Barbara Baxter came to Rustville six months ago with more than ten years of city management experience. She had been manager for two suburban communities of fewer than 3,000 residents each. Aware of the mounting challenges faced by Rustville, she nevertheless came on board with enthusiasm at the prospect of applying her training and experience in an urban setting.

When Baxter interviewed for the position, the council probed her views on the importance of developing trust in city government and fostering interdepartmental collaboration. Their concern focused on a long-standing turf war between the city's Department of Environmental Affairs and Department of Economic Development. This turf dispute was seriously impeding communication between the city staff and the council members on important growth issues. The previous city manager exerted no leadership in solving this problem.

Overall, Baxter feels she enjoys strong support from the city council as a whole, though Council President Timmers and Councilmember Roberts have been less supportive. One major change she has pushed is to have the city council work directly with her, rather than directly with department heads, in response to the turf wars mentioned above. Also, Baxter is strongly committed to pursuing economic development that is cognizant of environmental issues and is more engaged with the health of the region as a whole, as opposed to only local interests.

***Please note:** your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.*

# The Players

---

## City Council

The city council has seven members: two at-large representatives and five members representing districts. One of the council members serves as president, while the chief executive for the city is the independently elected mayor. For a long time, political insiders maintained their elected positions by relying on the political machine. Long-established loyalties cemented voter commitment to those representatives who sought to protect the city's interests—albeit at the expense of good relationships with the surrounding communities. Partisan elections and low voter turnout worked against modernizing local politics, although a recent influx of younger residents, many of them white-collar professionals, offers some hope for change. In fact, in the last twenty years, the council's composition has included more women and younger members with a broader vision of the city's interests.

The current council president is now in his fourth term as an at-large member and his third term as president. Of the remaining members of the council, four are in their third terms, and two are newly elected. The council has considered areas for economic revitalization but has not revisited the city's master plan or the zoning ordinances in over ten years. Transportation concerns have also been neglected. While the councilmembers have a long history of working directly with department heads, Baxter's approach emphasizes communication with her directly. She also has a strong commitment to pursuing economic development that is sensitive to environmental concerns and sustainable regional development.

When the council hired Baxter, it simply wanted the two problem departments—environmental affairs and economic development—to get along, both to expedite infrastructure improvements and to bring new businesses to the area. Now, council must rely more on the expertise of Baxter. Most are fine with this, but two adversaries exist who preferred the prior direct connection with department heads and who are wary of environmental and regional concerns: Tim Timmers, the Council President, and Rob Roberts, the other at-large member. Both disagree strongly with Baxter's pro-environment, pro-regional vision, and both are concerned about her alignment with Mayor DiAngelo's policy and political interests. Although they are in a minority in terms of numbers, Timmers has considerable control and influence, and Roberts is popular. Past votes have shown that other councilmembers can be persuaded to follow them.

**Please note:** your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.

# The Players

## Tracy DiAngelo, Mayor

The election of Tracy DiAngelo three years ago was a stunning upset. Her opponent, Sam Simon, is a prominent, long-standing member of the opposing party. Not only is Simon a party leader but he also is a prominent businessman serving the largest manufacturing facility in Rustville and, previously, serving the city itself. Simon, Timmers (current council president), and Roberts (current at-large councilmember) were all close friends. DiAngelo's success was attributed to her message of change. A professional manager by training, she maintains that economic development can benefit the community only if it focuses on the long-run interests of the community and region.

She wants the city to create a vision for itself that will address the issues of crime and poverty, ecological sustainability, and business growth simultaneously—a vision for sustainable regional development that is shared by City Manager Baxter.

## REXI and the Regional Planning Commission

Approximately twenty years ago, the state legislature established a **regional planning commission for a five-county area including Southside County**. The Regional Planning Commission (RPC) is responsible for transportation planning and, to a lesser extent, economic development planning in the Rustville area. RPC's mission is to improve the long-term economic, social, and environmental conditions of the region, but resources have been limited and transportation planning has taken priority.

Although it lacks binding authority on individual cities and towns, the commission has earned a reputation for providing excellent services and advice. **The Regional Excellence Initiative (REXI) is a product of the RPC and is housed in the RPC**. It was formed five years ago, when concern for a more balanced approach to development emerged in the region. An executive committee formulates resolutions to guide cities and towns in their quest for sustainable development and presents them to the full REXI board.

REXI's seven-member executive committee represents the interests of the five member counties. The mayor (or a designated appointee) of the largest city in each county is a voting member of the committee, along with four at-large representatives.

When Mayor DiAngelo took office, she appointed Gilbert Greenleaf, the head of the Rustville Department of Environmental Affairs, to be her designated appointee.

*Please note: your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.*



# The Players

---

## The Corporations

International Manufacturing Corporation and World Business Corporation are the city's two largest employers. IMC is an international manufacturing operation and employs more than 5,000 people. WBC, in the city of Rustville, employs almost 4,000 workers in tourism-related enterprises. Both companies rely on easy access to major transportation routes including ports, roads, and airways.

IMC is concerned about the impact of congestion and roadway deterioration occurring on major transportation routes as a result of suburban sprawl; accidents and road hazards have caused IMC to miss some contract deadlines. IMC realizes that truck traffic, including its own, is a frustration and burden in the eyes of some residents, but knows the city, region, and state would be significantly less prosperous without IMC's presence. In fact, **IMC plans to expand its manufacturing and is finalizing design plans for another plant in the city** that will employ an additional 400 people. The expansion is expected to increase the property tax payments made to the city by more than \$2 million.

Growth is essential to long-term profitability—although not without cost to the community. A legacy of the area's long industrial history is high levels of both air and water pollution. While in compliance with federal and state regulations, IMC knows that any proposal to increase the size of its plants will not get a favorable reception from environmentalists because of the resulting increase in emissions.

WBC is a relative newcomer to the region. It also relies on diverse transportation modes for its various enterprises. Tourists arrive by road and air, and materials and supplies are delivered via rail and truck delivery. The growth potential of the firm and the tourism industry is heavily dependent on safe, reliable, and easy access to transportation. As concerns heighten regarding gas prices and energy efficiency, WBC would like to see reasonably priced transportation alternatives in the region.

WBC also sees growth potential in the city and the region. As the region's overall population continues to grow, WBC will draw new customers to its tourism-based facilities in the restaurant and hotel sectors. The hospitality industry will require higher levels of disposable income, and it must market the city as a destination. The image that tourists want to see is one of clear blue skies, long stretches of clean lake beaches, and appealing entertainment and restaurant venues—no reminders of issues they face in their own hometowns. From WBC's perspective, for Rustville to become a true national destination, **it will have to acquire new shoreline property, construct at least one large hotel and convention center, and build more access roads.**

*Please note: your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.*

# The Problem

Recently, the REXI board unanimously endorsed Resolution 101 (see below).

Planning Commission Resolution No. 101-LRPC

WHEREAS the five-county region has been designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an air nonattainment area for more than ten years; and

WHEREAS the growth projected for the region over the next twenty years will require additional roads and more vehicle miles traveled; and

WHEREAS the focus of RPC must shift from one of developing new transportation routes to one of investing in regional transit systems; and

WHEREAS continued industrial growth will limit an improvement in human health conditions and the natural environment,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that by adoption of this resolution, The Regional Excellence Initiative endorses and supports the following:

- (1) A moratorium on facility expansion that will apply to the three largest industrial facilities in the five-county region for at least five years.
- (2) A regional transportation network consolidating all existing municipal and county systems and providing new services, with a new hub in the city of Rustville in Southside County.

## ***REXI's Impact on Rustville***

The REXI resolution will directly affect the city in two important ways, one positive and one negative.

**First, the resolution threatens to reduce the city's economic base.** Two of the three facilities targeted for the moratorium on expansion are located in Rustville. The other facility is located in Millville, the largest city in Port County. Both of the Rustville facilities recently applied for rezonings to allow for expansion of their facilities. They contend that world demand for their products is growing and the need for expansion is pressing. Together they employ just over 9,000 individuals and account for over one-half of all property taxes collected in Rustville, totaling \$17 million.

The city's economic picture looks like this. Expenditures average about \$45 million per year, and the city is running a deficit of approximately \$2 million. It collects its revenues from the following sources: \$30 million in property tax revenues, \$1 million in sales taxes revenues, \$3 million in tourism-related fees, and \$6 million in city income taxes. The city also receives intergovernmental funds in the amount of \$3 million.

***Please note: your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.***

# The Problem

---

**The second effect of the REXI resolution is likely to be positive.** A regional transportation hub in Rustville would support increased access to employment opportunities and job markets, provide jobs to transportation sector employees, and reduce vehicular air emissions. The reality is that the city's public transit service, which provides limited service, is almost bankrupt. A modest cost share is required for supporting the transportation hub in Rustville, but the regional planning commission and its members would be providing the bulk of the funding to complete the hub.

**Rustville's city council must vote to approve the REXI resolution.** The mayor, who already favors it, plans to meet with the council within the next month, to urge it to adopt the resolution and begin planning for its implementation. Baxter has talked to the mayor on many occasions regarding the resolution, and they wholeheartedly agree that it would move the city toward sustainable development and benefit the entire region.

## **Council Politics**

Beyond approval of the resolution, Baxter needs the city council's approval of a budget that will allow the initiative's programs to succeed. In the past the council, excepting Council President Timmers and Councilmember Roberts, has shown interest in attracting new business to increase revenues, but it also has shown an interest in pursuing a sustainable approach sensitive to environmental and regional interests.

After the REXI resolution made the headlines, Timmers and Roberts approached Baxter to tell her that the city council would like a report detailing the REXI initiative for its meeting in two weeks. At the meeting Baxter must present recommendations to the council on how to proceed.

In discussing the resolution with Baxter, Timmers and Roberts expressed frustration with the mayor's approach to solving Rustville's economic issues and her willingness to commit staff time to an initiative not yet reviewed by the council. More specifically, Timmers stated he would not tolerate city staff members' devoting additional time and energy to REXI activities. "The city staff should focus on local initiatives, and REXI membership strains valuable city resources," Timmers warned. "If Gilbert Greenleaf remains on the committee and you do not limit his and others' involvement, I will begin the process of terminating your employment." This was Timmers's last statement to Baxter.

**Please note:** your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.

# The Problem

---

After careful reflection, Baxter concluded that her role as a city manager was to provide leadership, develop policy, and engage the community in improving the quality of life of the city's residents. Now she would have to use her skills to convince Timmers that they share the same objective. Timmers's unwillingness to commit staff resources to the initiative was due in part to his short-term re-election focus. Baxter perceives her responsibility, by contrast, to extend not only to current but also to future residents. Baxter thinks that by joining forces with other communities, Rustville will see long-term financial, social, ecological, and administrative benefits. For now, though, she needs more resources than the city has if she is to manage effectively.

Coordination and collaboration are vital—so is reaching consensus among the parties within and outside the city. This approach could prove to be Baxter's opportunity to moving the community forward in a sustainable way. At the same time, Baxter knows that if she is not responsive to the needs and desires of the city council, it has the authority to terminate her. While she brings a wealth of training and experience to the job, she is not irreplaceable. She also has a new baby on the way.

# The Deliverables

---

## Baxter's Next Steps

**Your task as a team is to function as Baxter's Assistant Manager.** Overall, you are in lock step with Baxter and believe that all existing evidence and your own experience suggest the REXI resolution should be adopted by council. But instincts are not enough: you and Baxter will need evidence on multiple fronts. **Council is going to vote on whether to support a three-month study by Baxter, her staff, and other departments, and Baxter needs to present her strategy for gathering evidence.** The end result of that three-month study will be a report to council with a recommendation to support or oppose adoption of the REXI resolution, or conduct further study.

Your team must complete two deliverables. **First**, a set of **five slides** that reflect your recommended strategy for gathering evidence about the REXI resolution. Your target audience is both city council and members of the public. You should include the following, and **for each you should be mindful of the judging criteria and of the complete context in which you are working, detailed at length in this brief:**

- How will you estimate the potential costs and benefits of the expansion moratorium? You must be clear in articulating what the potential costs and benefits are, and in explaining your method for estimating them.
- How will you estimate the potential costs and benefits of the regional transportation hub? You must be clear in articulating what the potential costs and benefits are, and in explaining your method for estimating them.
- How will you involve existing city departments in the study?
- How will you engage the public in discerning its support and concerns about the REXI initiative? Be sure that you are attentive to the realities of the pandemic.
- **OPTIONAL:** Estimate the cost of the study you are proposing to council.

**Second**, write a half page (not to exceed 250 words) about Baxter's optimal strategy for addressing the relationship with Timmers and Roberts on the city council. This is meant as an internal communication from you as Assistant Manager to City Manager Baxter. Specifically, are there ethical concerns she should act on? How can she leverage support from existing leaders and community members?

***Please note:** your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.*

# The Judging Criteria

---

Your submission will be judged on the following criteria:

Professionalism in verbal and any graphical communication	<b>25%</b>
Innovation and creativity	<b>15%</b>
Knowledge of better practices in city / county management	<b>15%</b>
Attention to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion	<b>15%</b>
Attention to sustainability (balancing equity, environment, and economy)	<b>10%</b>
Demonstrated understanding of Rustville and the broader region	<b>10%</b>
Consideration and understanding of ICMA Code of Ethics	<b>10%</b>

*Special thanks to Dr. Thomas Skuzinski, Director of the Institute for the Study of the Environment, Sustainability, and Energy, Northern Illinois University, for adapting the case and preparing it for this competition.*

**Please note:** your participation in this event acts as consent to be included in photographs that may be part of ICMA publications.