

ADDRESSING THE RISE OF INCIVILITY: A TOWN HALL EVENT | APRIL 2025

Checklist for Fostering Good Governance

Serving the public requires trust and confidence in local government. Governing bodies and executive staffs all play critical roles in building and sustaining that trust. With incivility on the rise in some places, it is even more important that good governance practices be recognized and supported.

The fundamentals of good governance can help a governing body and its executive team keep focused on delivering public services during these times of increasing polarization and incivility.

There is “no one right answer.” It takes a multitude of different steps to create the type of governance system and culture that can withstand pressures of incivility and distractions.

This checklist of governance tools and techniques has been prepared by Raftelis in support of the “Addressing the Rise of Incivility” Town Hall event, sponsored by the International City/County Management Association, the National League of Cities, the American Public Health Association, and the American Psychological Association.



Tools and Techniques for the Governing Body

- ☐ Adopt a code of ethics and conduct for the elected body, staff, and meeting participants, including enforcement mechanisms.
- ☐ Participate in training pertaining to governance, ethics, fiduciary roles, and other relevant topics.
- ☐ Create and nurture a culture of civility, respect for roles, partnership, and teamwork.
- ☐ Respect the professional manager’s role in managing the organization.
- ☐ Collaborate with colleagues and staff to support shared goals and address community needs.
- ☐ Use the manager/executive as the primary resource for problem-solving and accomplishing the governing body’s goals.
- ☐ Establish strategic priorities aligned with the budget and staff work plans to meet key community needs.
- ☐ Hold annual goal-setting workshops, including discussions of how the elected body and chief executive (and senior staff) are governing as a team.
- ☐ Participate in one-on-one meetings with the chief executive for information sharing and strengthening relationships.
- ☐ Evaluate the manager/executive’s performance regularly using a neutral facilitator, with a focus on building trust and mutual confidence.
- ☐ Offer training to residents across the community who are interested in elected office, preparing them for the full scope of governing responsibilities.

Tools and Techniques for the Chief Executive

- ☐ Orient newly elected officials on their roles and what governance involves.
- ☐ Provide protocols to elected officials regarding communicating with department heads and staff.
- ☐ Provide ongoing training and development to ensure local government staff serve effectively.
- ☐ Monitor performance and make course corrections for better results.
- ☐ Conduct regular independent audits to monitor and report on the use of public funds.
- ☐ Document business practices and continually improve them for efficiency and effectiveness.
- ☐ Maintain easily accessible records online, including budgets, meeting minutes, and policy documents.
- ☐ Implement whistleblower protections for reporting corruption, fraud, and abuse without fear of retaliation.
- ☐ Build public confidence through competent and fair provision of services and projects.
- ☐ Use civic engagement tools to gather public input before formal hearings.
- ☐ Run proactive public information campaigns via social media and other channels to share accurate, timely updates on policies, services, and key issues.
- ☐ Promote civic education through schools, community groups, and media to highlight government functions and encourage participation.
- ☐ Use online platforms to provide services, information, and opportunities for public interaction with local government.
- ☐ Acknowledge failures and challenges transparently, and take meaningful action to address them.
- ☐ Take responsibility for the safety and well-being of elected leaders and senior staff.
- ☐ Establish procedures to protect officials and their families, including threat reporting, cybersecurity, and emergency plans.
- ☐ Provide mental health services, de-escalation training, and peer support to assist elected officials and key staff.
- ☐ Foster strong relationships between law enforcement and the community to enhance trust, including regular public forums on safety and policing.

Tools and Techniques for the Governing Body and Chief Executive

- ☐ Collaborate on setting vision, long-term goals, and achievable priorities in a way that respects professionalism and capacity.
- ☐ Conduct annual check-ins to assess the working relationship and its support for good governance.
- ☐ Regularly reflect on the purpose of public service and reinforce ethical boundaries.
- ☐ Enforce stringent anti-corruption laws and regulations to promote integrity.
- ☐ Govern transparently and fully comply with sunshine laws.
- ☐ Anticipate potential disruptions and develop plans to manage them effectively.
- ☐ Build positive relationships with key individuals and groups to foster goodwill and resilience against anti-democratic efforts.
- ☐ Identify ways to engage the public in the budget process to foster greater understanding and transparency.

Sample Statements of Civility and Council Governance Norms

City of Seal Beach Civility Policy

The City's [Council Policy 100-14](#) incorporates civility principles, encouraging positive (or at least respectful) communication and discouraging volatile, hostile, or aggressive actions. Further, it affirms the City Council's intent to safeguard participatory democracy in Seal Beach, California. Under the proposed policy, all persons (public officials, staff, members of the public, etc.) attending public meetings or engaging in business in a City facility in Seal Beach should strive to:

- 1 Treat everyone courteously
- 2 Listen to others respectfully
- 3 Exercise self-control
- 4 Give open-minded consideration to all viewpoints
- 5 Focus on the issues and avoid personalizing debate
- 6 Embrace respectful disagreement and dissent as democratic rights, inherent components of an inclusive public process, and tools for forging sound decisions

City of Laguna Niguel Civility Statement

The City of Laguna Niguel, California, puts this sign in the lobby of City Hall when they are expecting a large crowd.



For the respect and courtesy of all people in attendance, we ask that you please refrain from engaging in the following:

- Disruptive Behavior
- Displaying Large Signs
- Profanity, Insults, Vulgar Language, or Gestures
- Making Loud Noises or Outbursts
- Speaking out of turn
- Noisemakers
- Debate between Audience and Speaker

City of Grover Beach Governance Norms

The City of Grover Beach, California, [2025 Strategic Plan](#) outlines the City's multi-year goals and the City Council's governance norms, affirming the governing body's commitment to effective governance and accountability. The Council's norms include:

1. Maintain a Citywide perspective while being mindful of our districts and communicate with our community
2. Work together as a body, modeling teamwork and civility for our community
3. Disagree agreeably and professionally
4. Listen to one another. Communicate with each other. Seek to understand
5. Assume good intent
6. Demonstrate respect, consideration, and courtesy to others
7. Share information and avoid surprises
8. Keep confidential things confidential
9. Respect the Council/Manager form of government and the roles of each party
10. Communicate concerns about staff to the City Manager; do not criticize staff in public