

# From Red Tape to Green Tape: Improving Grievance Procedures in Local Government Organizations

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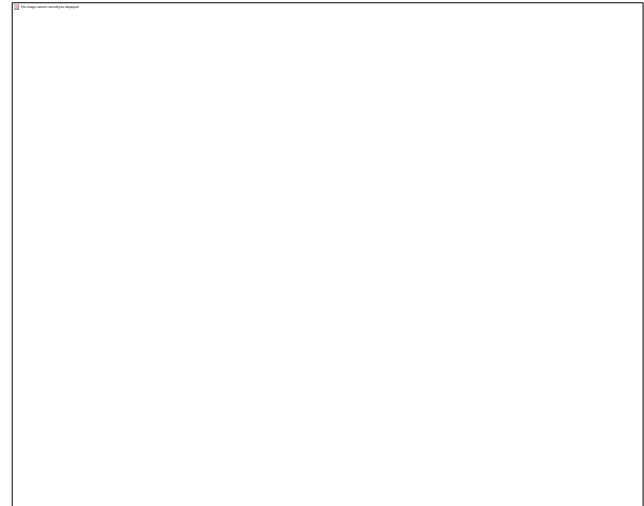
**Reina Schwartz, Director of General Services, Sacramento, CA**

**Karen Thoreson, Alliance for Innovation**



# Agenda for Today

- Introduction to the LGRC
- First Research Project
- Panel Discussion
- Audience Q & A



# Local Government Research Collaborative

- Two Year Pilot – managed by the Alliance for Innovation, Arizona State University and ICMA
- Comprised of 20 Local Governments and Three Universities
- Collaborating to identify and fund research on emerging practices in local government
- Providing a critical link between academic researchers and local governments
- Convert research to education/technical assistance for local government managers across the globe

# Local Government Research Collaborative

## Mission

- Proactively pursue research on issues that matter;
- Focus on new concepts and ideas or on items that have been researched, but where implementation by local governments has not occurred, or occurred well;
- Produce research that is actionable, influential and, ultimately, results in positive change in our communities; and,
- Actively disseminate research through outlets provided through AFI, ASU, ICMA and other partners.



# Local Government Research Collaborative

- Arvada, Colorado
- Auburn, Alabama
- Austin, Texas
- Catawba County, North Carolina
- Clearwater, Florida
- Decatur, Georgia
- Dubuque, Iowa
- Edmonton, Alberta
- Evanston, Illinois
- Flagstaff, Arizona
- Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- Grande Prairie, Alberta
- Kansas University
- Milton, Georgia
- Navajo County, Arizona
- Oak Ridge, Tennessee
- Olathe, Kansas
- Phoenix, Arizona
- Sacramento, California
- Sarasota County, Florida
- Stafford County, Virginia
- UNC-Chapel Hill
- UC - Denver



Leisha DeHart-Davis  
Associate Professor  
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## Preliminary Findings



# Why Study Grievance Procedures?

- Litigation alternative
- Conflict resolution
- Employee voice
- Managerial quality
- Diversity
- Red tape

# Research Objectives

- Identify and evaluate promising practices in due process rules that can be considered by other local government organizations across the nation
- Identify non due-process program elements (training, juries, mediation) that reduce workplace conflict\*
- Assess the influence of due process on organizational performance



# Today

- Status Update
- **Extremely** Preliminary Data Analyses
- Next Steps

# Research Design

- Survey 100 counties in North Carolina
- Conduct 20 interviews
- Synthesize relevant scholarly and professional literature

# Due Process and Grievance in NC Counties

- NC counties can have employees with and without property rights in job
- Property right granted when employees can only be fired for cause

# Status

- Conducted Qualtrics survey in June/July 2014
- 63% response rate
- Representativeness
  - Slightly over-represents larger organizations
  - Represents three tiers

# Preliminary Results

- **WARNING:** Premature interpretation is hazardous to your intellectual health
- Correlation  $\neq$  Causation
- Results are suggestive and subject to change

# Statistics

- Descriptives
- Bivariate
- Multivariate

# Organizational Outcomes of Interest

- Turnover (resignations, terminations, retirements)
- Grievances
  - Absolute numbers
  - Rates\*
  - Upheld
  - Resolved at department level
  - Timing

# Proportion of Counties Adopting Managerial Tools

- Probationary Employment Period (78%)
- Employee Performance Appraisal (69%)
- Employee Assistance Program (59%)
- Workforce Planning (18%)
- Succession Planning (19%)
- Mentorship (5%)



# Proportion of Counties Using Employee Involvement

- Employee Opinion Surveys (47%)
- Grievance Input into Grievance Policy Design (29%)
- Employee Advisory Committee (24%)
- Ombuds Office (2%)

# Proportion of Counties Offering Training

- Supervisory (64%)
- Policy (57%)
- Leadership (48%)
- Customer Service (41%)
- Diversity (33%)
- Conflict Management (29%)

# Grievance Policy Elements— High Adoption Rates

- Opportunity for employee to present evidence (83%)
- Grievance policy purpose (83%)
- Final decision made by the county manager (78%)
- Retaliation protection (75%)
- Maximum Timeframes (69%)
- Pre-Disciplinary Conference (64%)

# Grievance Policy Elements— Medium Adoption Rates

- Bypass Supervisor (54%)
- Different procedures for discriminatory vs. nondiscriminatory actions (48%)
- Mediation opportunity (46%)

# Grievance Policy Elements— Low Adoption Rates

- A final hearing from someone other than the county manager (33%)
- External review by personnel board or civil service commission (27%)
- Grievance committee of peers (24%)

# Descriptive Statistics

- Counties range in size from 62 to 6282 employees
- Grievance policies range from 38 years old to brand new
- 38% of counties have separate grievance policies for employees with property rights
- 63% of counties had an employee grievance filed last year

# Grievance Rate Correlates (Preliminary & Subject to Change)

- Full-Time Employees (+)
- Green tape (-)
- Retaliation Protection (-)
- Supervisory Training (-)
- Policies/Procedures Training (-)
- Design with a wider range of stakeholders (-)
- Percentage of male employees (+)

# Grievance Rate Correlates (Preliminary & Subject to Change)

- Performance appraisal (-)
- Employee assistance programs (-)
- Involvement of County Attorney in Grievance Policy Design (-)
- Involvement of HR in Grievance Policy Design (-)
- Involvement of more stakeholders (-)



# Uncorrelated With Grievance Rates (Preliminary & Subject to Change)

- Rate of employees with property rights
- Number of grievable issues
- Rate of minority employees
- Innovative practices: mediation & peer review

# Interpreting The Data: An Example

- Retaliation protection is strongly and negatively correlated with grievance rates
- Interpretation: retaliation protection builds employee trust in management, which lowers grievance rates
- Rival interpretation: local governments with high-trust cultures are more likely to protect employees from retaliation and also have lower grievance rates

# Potential Recommendations From This Snapshot of Data

- Involve stakeholders, particularly human resources and legal
- Design and implement good grievance rules that employees and managers will follow
- Making grievance easier (grievable issues, property rights, retaliation protection) appears to reduce workplace conflicts, possibly by eliciting employee trust

# Caveats

- Extremely small sample size
- Missing data to fill in
- Lots of work to do

# Next Steps

- Identify and evaluate promising practices in due process rules that can be considered by other local government organizations across the nation
  - Contemplate survey of Alliance members
  - Gather information from question posted on AFI knowledge network for innovative ideas
  - Begin lit syntheses
  - Conduct interviews post-surveys

# Next Steps

- Identify non due-process program elements (training, juries, mediation) that reduce workplace conflict\*
  - Backfill missing data in county sample
  - Simplify the survey and expand sample to NC cities
  - Continue analyzing the data
    - Multivariate modeling
    - Turnover

# Next Steps

- Assess the influence of due process on organizational performance
  - Model key organizational outcomes as a function of property interest and grievance characteristics



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# Questions / Comments?

For more information on the LGRC contact....

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ICMA  
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