

CHECKLIST FOR BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

Here is a checklist from the *PM* magazine article: “Local Government’s Success in Maintaining Public Trust.”

- Be responsive.** In the spirit of providing good customer service, it is important to create an atmosphere of caring. From elected members of the governing body to the entry-level operator, an attitude of caring should be the norm. This does not mean always saying yes or making promises that are impossible to keep.
- Set priorities.** Some public organizations have a tendency to conduct strategic planning exercises that allow an unrealistic number of goals to become part of the plan. These well-intentioned efforts to embrace an overly ambitious set of resident-driven initiatives often restrict the ability of staff to implement goals with existing resources.
 - If the governing body and senior staff perform the challenging work of prioritizing goals and translating them to action plans, residents will come to recognize that government can produce results, and this will instill confidence. Priority setting may require some political will in as much as a various segments of the population will not agree on the relative importance of each separate goal.
- Effectively communicate.** Clear messages that are delivered at the appropriate time are critical to building confidence. It is often tempting to avoid delivering bad news, but avoidance usually prolongs and worsens the inevitable. There are legitimate reasons for withholding or delaying the release of information at times. (However,) promoting transparency and openness is critical to building trust in government institutions, especially in this era of heightened scrutiny.
 - Government officials sometimes need to be willing to sacrifice short-term approval for long-term credibility gains. Good communication strategies help to engage people and increase the likelihood that they will be supportive of things with which they are familiar. People are uncomfortable with the unknown but are able to adjust to difficult circumstances if given the opportunity. Public leaders must refrain from sacrificing the truth for political gain.
- Lead from the middle.** Although contentious debate does occur at the local government level, such debate is usually acrimonious than at other levels of government, and consensus-based decision making, which includes high levels of resident participation, has become the norm for progressive cities and counties. This model requires public sector leaders to develop compromise solutions that produce results.
 - Although no single group obtains everything it wants, the public develops trust in the process and in the leaders who can find the middle ground and get things done. The ability to compromise solutions and build consensus should be valued at all levels of government.
- Create value.** There is almost universal recognition that decisive action is needed to address problems and build for the future. Although most local governments have been compelled to apply austerity measures of varying levels of severity in recent years, confidence in city and county government has remained relatively constant. This suggests that there may be general awareness of local government’s commitment to doing more with less and acceptance of this “new normal.”