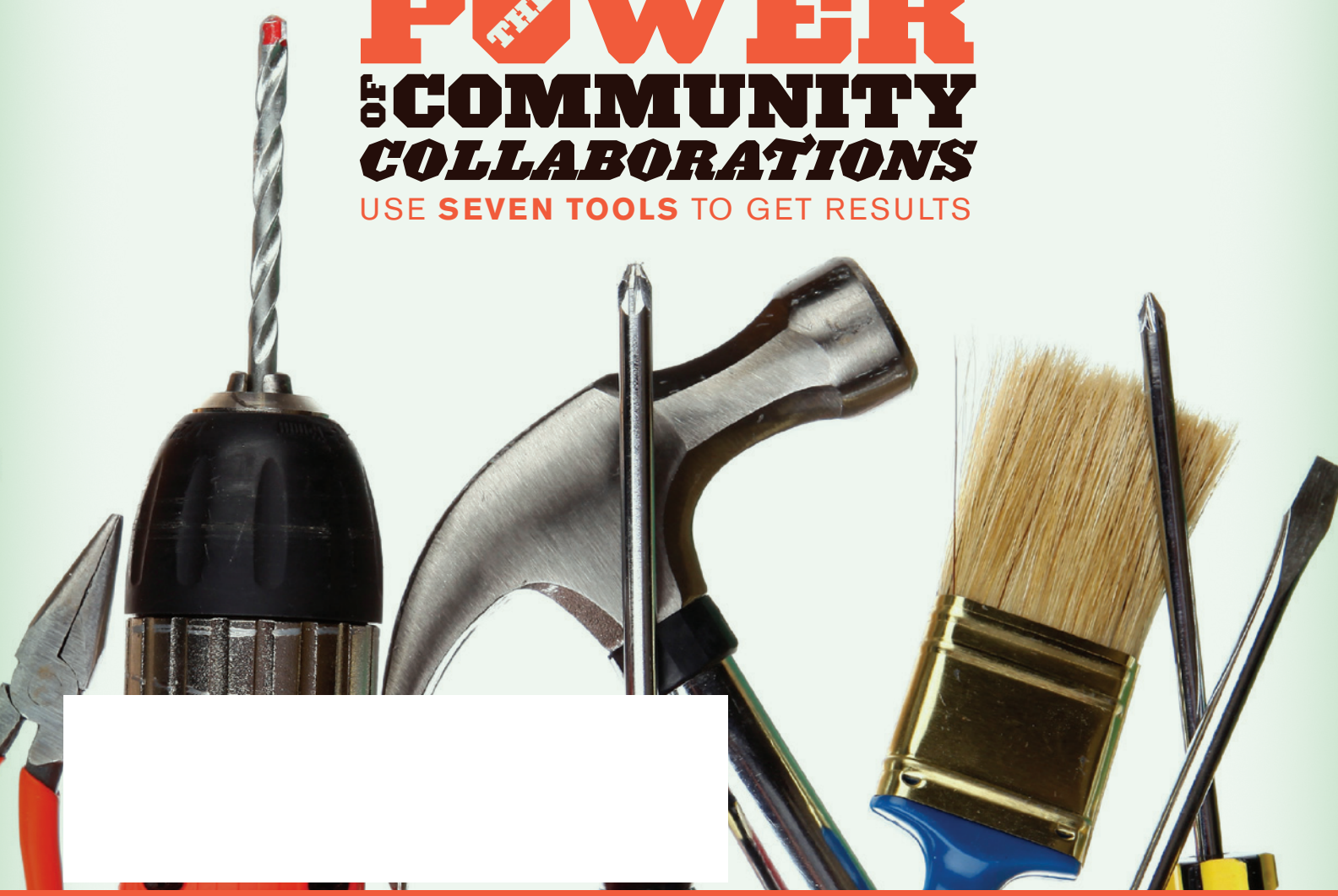
MARCH 2012 | icma.org/pm

PM
PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

INSIDE

HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

USE **SEVEN TOOLS** TO GET RESULTS



ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT WORLDWIDE

ICMA

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

ICMA'S 2012 ANNUAL AWARDS PROGRAM

CELEBRATING THE DIFFERENCE PROFESSIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT MAKES

Have you or a colleague made a significant difference in your community or to the profession? Have you implemented an innovative program that addressed a critical community need, improved quality of life for residents, or saved your local government valuable resources?

If so, plan to nominate a colleague or program to ICMA's 2012 Annual Awards Program! U.S. & International nominations accepted.

DEADLINE FOR NOMINATIONS: **MARCH 16, 2012**

Visit icma.org/awards or check the January 2nd edition of the *ICMA Newsletter* for more information.

12-114

ICMA *Leaders at the Core of Better Communities*

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

contents

March 2012 | Vol. 94 No.2

cover story

HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Community results compacts are what can help achieve goals for a community or metropolitan area.

Lyle Wray, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, AND
Paul Epstein, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

6

5 Wellness Program

departments

features

MANAGEMENT

icma.org/pm

This issue of *PM* is available online at icma.org/pm March 1, 2012.

BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

GOOD CONDUCT: IS THERE AN APP FOR THAT?

E-tools to make us more ethical

We look to technology to fix complex issues all the time. The results are often workable solutions for even the extremely challenging issues. And simple solutions that we never even desired but now couldn't do without because they make life easier. So why not a technology solution for critical needs facing all organizations: getting individuals to make good ethical choices?

Downloaded to the smartphones of staff members and local government officials, an ethics app could offer caution on today's misstep to avoid, as well as advice on common everyday issues. Customized for the user, it would have both the organization's code of conduct and their profession's standards. Perhaps even the relevant laws. It is the technology solution for the knowledge gap.

It could also work as a personal assistant, helping a person to track progress toward the goal of being a more ethical person. It's a place where you could record on a daily basis—with lots of security of course—your good and not so good deeds. Like that popular dieter's site, you would earn or lose "points" based on your behavior.

The points concept needs work because unlike dieting, a good deed doesn't always erase a bad one. But still writing down what you are actually eating, doing, and so forth is an effective behavior modification strategy.

And at the heart of it all, it is behavior that needs to change. And it is ours. In some cases, it's true that unethical conduct is more of a knowledge gap than a behavioral lapse. Unfortunately, there are people working in organizations or elected to public office who don't know right from wrong, ethical from unethical. They didn't understand that you can't do *that* in public service. They didn't understand what they committed to when they joined their professional association.

Often, the issue really comes down to our behavior. We know intellectually what the right thing to do is, but we just don't do it. Why? In the context of the Penn State scandal last fall, columnist

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Public Management (PM) aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments worldwide in the pursuit of excellence in local governance.

ICMA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Robert O'Neill, Jr.

DIRECTOR OF PUBLISHING
Ann Mahoney

EDITOR
Beth Payne

DESIGN
Rock Creek Strategic Marketing

Public Management (PM) (USPS: 449-300) is published monthly except February by ICMA (the International City/County Management Association) at 777 North Capitol Street. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-4201. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. The opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ICMA.

REPRINTS: Apply to the editor for permission to reprint any part of the magazine.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: U.S. subscription rate, $46 per year; other countries subscription rate, $155 per year: single copies, $10. Printed in the United States.
Contact: 202/289-4262; subscriptions@icma.org.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Public Management*, ICMA, 777 N. Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20002-4201.

ARTICLE PROPOSALS: Visit icma.org/pm to see "Editorial Guidelines" for contributors.

EDITORIAL INFORMATION
202/962-3619
bpayne@icma.org

ADVERTISING SALES
Fox Associates
800/440-0232
adinfo.icma@foxrep.com
CHICAGO: 312/644-3888
NEW YORK: 212/725-2106
LOS ANGELES: 805/522-0501
DETROIT: 248/626-0511
ATLANTA: 770/977-3225

PRINTING
Westland Printers
Laurel, Maryland

ICMA
icma.org | icma.org/pm

David Brooks wrote, "People are really good at self-deception. We attend to the facts we like and suppress the ones we don't. We inflate our own virtues and predict we will behave more nobly than we actually do."

For support of his position, he looked to the authors of the *Blind Spot*, Max H. Bazerman and Ann E. Tenbrunsel, who noted "When it comes time to make a decision, our thoughts are dominated by thoughts of how we *want* to behave; thoughts of how we *should* behave disappear."

How do we change behavior? We need to create organizational cultures that encourage individuals to make ethical choices and then support them when they do. There are a number of tactics that can be used, but they need to be part of an overall strategy and not used as one offs. Here they are:

- Set clear professional and organizational standards.
- Hold individuals accountable for their conduct with an objective review process. Talk about ethical issues to raise awareness.
- Engage in creative, fun, and formal training that not only builds awareness but gives individuals practical guidance about what to do when faced with an ethical problem.
- Give sound advice to those who need it.
- Make asking for help acceptable in the culture.
- Provide a safe place for anyone to report wrongdoing.

The ethics app has some promise but just as one tool in the box. As we recognize March as National Ethics Awareness Month, what is your plan to create and support an ethical workplace? PM

MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM
Ethics Director, ICMA
Washington, D.C.
mperego@icma.org

WHERE DO YOU TURN FOR HELP WITH MANAGEMENT ISSUES WHEN YOU NEED IT?

CHARLENE STEVENS, ICMA-CM
City Administrator
Willmar, Minnesota
cstevens@ci.willmar.mn.us

For advice I call on friends or colleagues who have mentored me in the profession. Whom I call might depend on the scenario, but I have always been fortunate that they take my calls!

I recently reached out to a retired city administrator to get a sense of whether my thoughts on handling labor negotiations with department heads made sense and, frankly, also for a few comforting words. He gave me the benefit of his experiences in a similar situation. I've taken his advice and, although I don't have contract settlements, I have maintained good working relationships with the department heads.

I also have to acknowledge my partner, a former administrator, who on more than one occasion steered me to a more thoughtful approach or encouraged me to reach out for advice.

JOSHUA RAY, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Aztec, New Mexico
jray@aztecnm.gov

After seven years in municipal management, I have learned that the best resource for me is fellow managers. Although I appreciate the articles and publications that ICMA produces, my colleagues typically provide me with the best real advice.

Often a situation arises that a simple article or a book cannot answer completely. Whenever I take the time to speak to my colleagues, including my mentor Lee Galloway (town manager, Waynesville, North Carolina), they can respond to the situation and can then provide more feedback for the next seven questions that pop into my head.

In our business, there is hardly ever one simple answer. Just like in most zoning questions, the answer is hardly black and white; it's mostly a lot of gray.

WADE MCKINNEY, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Atascadero, California
wmckinney@atascadero.org

As a city manager, a person learns to develop and use many resources. When struggling with management issues, I may turn to colleagues from other cities, my assistant city manager, department heads, community leaders, and even my dad, a retired manager who worked at Southern California Edison.

I am amazed at the diversity and intensity of the challenges we face, especially in these troubling economic times. On the day I wrote this I dealt with everything from the holiday lighting ceremony to the police department dealing with a barricaded subject. Clearly no one size fits all.

I'm extremely glad that I have the support of a talented assistant, great department heads, helpful colleagues, and a wonderful dad!

NORTON BONAPARTE, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Sanford, Florida
nbonaparte@sanfordfl.gov

I turn to fellow managers, and I'll explain why with an example.

Shortly after starting as a manager in Kansas. I met with officials of each of the employee unions. At the end of a pleasant meeting with the fire union's executive board, board members indicated there was one thing they would like me to do: fire the fire chief.

I was told that he was not a good fit for the culture of the fire department and was instituting policies that the union did not like.

I posted on ICMA's electronic discussion group asking managers to share their experience. On the basis of the responses, I developed a plan where I attended multiple union meetings to hear directly from union members on issues they had with the chief.

While acknowledging relations with the chief were not what they hoped they would be, there was no justification for me to fire him.

I really appreciated being able to use the experience of my peers in crafting how I would deal with this situation. PM

1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL CITY-TO-CITY PARTNERSHIPS

New funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) gives a boost to ICMA's popular CityLinks program, which provides opportunities for U.S. local government professionals to partner with their counterparts in developing and transitioning countries to help meet the challenges of climate change, water and sanitation services, and food security.

▸ icma.org/c2c

2 BANNING FIREARMS

Sample ordinances banning firearms in city buildings as well as communities reported to have passed such ordinances can be found at this site.

▸ icma.org/firearmsban

3 WELLNESS PROGRAM

A public-private partnership in Ankeny, Iowa, helped enhance the city's existing employee wellness program.

▸ icma.org/Ankeny_wellness

4 PERFORMANCE DATA FOR THE PUBLIC

Residents in Williamsburg, Virginia, can use a web-based system of public dashboards to find out more about how their local government is performing.

▸ icma.org/Williamsburg_performance

TAKEAWAYS

› Community results compacts are powerful tools that can achieve broad goals for a community or metropolitan area.
› Compacts are distinct from other strategic planning and community visioning efforts in that they engage residents, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses in assessing a community's long-term needs.
› It is important that compacts identify specific actions to be taken by individuals, nonprofits, and local businesses to assist in achieving the community goals.
› Compacts focus on measurable results—discrete performance metrics that document progress made through the collaborative efforts of local governments, nonprofits, businesses, and individuals.

By Lyle Wray and Paul Epstein

HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

USE **SEVEN TOOLS** TO GET RESULTS

A MIDWESTERN COUNTY with approximately 400,000 residents was concerned about a high number of high school students dropping out. Members of the county board and staff joined local mayors and school superintendents over several working sessions with teachers, parents, and students to review the facts about who dropped out, explore likely strategies that would be successful in reducing dropout rates, and develop an action plan. Later, in regular meetings, the working group looked at data on dropouts and developed ways to further reduce dropouts, including reaching out to new partners in various communities to help with the task.

This real-life example won't seem unusual to local government managers. It is hardly new for a manager to lead or be part of a process of partnering with residents and other stakeholders to respond to an important community challenge or aspiration—from reducing high school student dropouts, to increasing community safety, to reducing childhood obesity—and spearhead action toward results. >>

HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Many challenges faced by communities are complex and resist easy solutions. Across the nation, communities of all sizes are grappling with challenges that fit neither a single solution nor a single organization. Too often, we try to assign to a single organization the burden of developing and implementing solutions that are beyond its grasp alone. Making a single agency solely responsible for a complex, hot issue is often a sure-fire way to dissipate community energy or to unite community energy against that organization.

Local governments, of course, have been coming together for a long time to address important issues and get results. What is different today is that the traditional impulses to work together as a community can be strengthened by complementary tools that should make these efforts more successful.

Most of the tools themselves are not new, but they emerged from different disciplines and thus are rarely used together. In this article, they are arranged into a community results toolkit, which is intended to help managers pull together community collaborations and solve complex problems. The toolkit can also help assure that action plans become reality and produce measurable community improvements.

In a 2006 book, *Results That Matter: Improving Communities by Engaging Citizens, Measuring Performance, and Getting Things Done*, the authors of this article along with Paul Coates and David Swain identified ways to improve community governance through collaboration between residents and organizations. Collaborations bring more assets to address community issues than organizations working in isolation, with some of the most effective collaborations involving measurable results that the collaborators want to achieve.

In a 2011 article for the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, authors John Kania and Mark Kramer used the term "collective impact" to refer to the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Successful collective action involves a common agenda, a common [performance] measurement, a continuous communication, and a mutually reinforcing action among the parties.

The bottom line in the authors' experience is that successful change often comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from isolated interventions of individual organizations.

The community results toolkit brings together these seven tools to help make community collaborations more manageable, more responsive to community needs, and more accountable to the community for results:

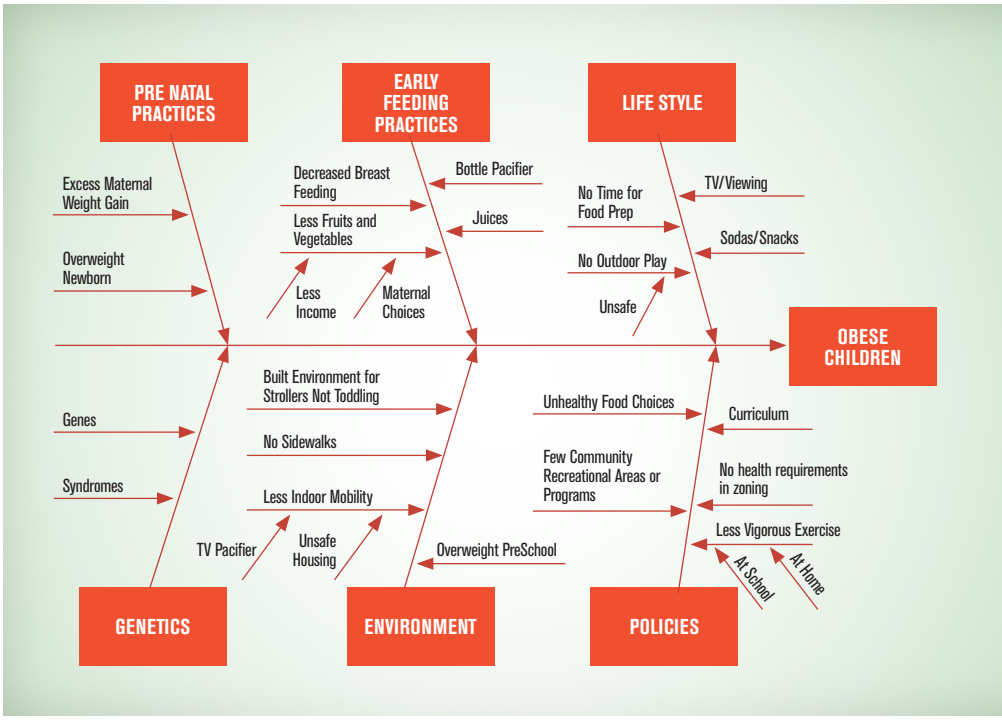
TABLE 1: Quick Guide to Supporting Residents in Multiple Roles of Resident Engagement.

MAJOR ROLES	HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT OR STRENGTHEN THE ROLE
Residents as Stakeholders • Customers • Owners • Interested parties	Help residents organize and associate with each other close to home.
	Ensure residents have an opportunity to influence things they care about as stakeholders.
Residents as Advocates	Help residents get technical and political help and find the "leverage" they need.
	Help residents "learn the way things work" in the community, and help them learn from each other to be effective advocates.
Residents as Issue Framers • Foundation builders (e.g., vision, strategic goals) • Agenda setters (issues, budgets) • Problem definers • Solution identifiers	Foster deliberative processes in which people listen to each other and make hard choices.
	Ensure residents are engaged early to set agendas, define problems, and identify solutions.
	Encourage community-centered, boundary-crossing problem solving.
Residents as Evaluators	Provide support to make residents' assessments rigorous, credible, and useful.
	Provide residents with periodic reports of performance data on issues and services of concern to them.
Residents as Collaborators • Compromisers • Co-producers • Asset leveragers	Help residents voice their opposition to get attention needed for compromise that respects their interest.
	Help residents recognize different stakeholder interests and to think beyond opposition to forge effective compromises needed to solve problems.
	Organize opportunities for residents to contribute to their community as co-producers.
	Help residents identify and leverage community assets (including themselves) to make limited investments go further and get big things done.
	Identify "sparkplugs" to energize community co-production projects, and support them in organizing the community.

Source: Epstein et. al (2006). *Results That Matter.* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), p. 21. Used with permission.

- Robust engagement of residents as partners in multiple roles.
- Causal diagrams to diagnose the problem.
- Evidence-based practices.
- Strategy maps.
- Performance measurement of drivers and outcomes.
- Detailed action plans keyed to strategy, performance, and partners.
- Community results compacts.

FIGURE 1: Childhold Obesity: Fishbone Diagram "Casual Map."



Source: Public Health Foundation

1. Engaging Residents in Multiple Roles

Too often we think of residents only as stakeholders in an issue or customers of a service, and we forget that they can play other powerful roles as partners in community problem solving. You can channel their energy constructively by supporting their efforts in multiple roles. This idea has been explored in previous *PM* articles[1] and in *Results That Matter,* which includes a quick guide to supporting citizens in multiple roles (Table 1).

Resident engagement should not stop with building consensus to address a problem; instead, it should be used throughout the problem-solving process, as Table 1 suggests. Potentially, residents can be involved in using any of the tools outlined in this article.

2. Causal Diagrams to Diagnose the Problem

Stakeholders often come to the problem-solving table with different definitions of an issue and with different solutions in mind. To become productive partners, it is important that they reach a common understanding of the problem.

They need to define the problem in a way that sorts the complexities into root causes of the problem and other causal drivers of desirable or undesirable results so they can find where they can best leverage improvement efforts. Fishbone diagramming from the field of quality improvement is a reliable causal diagramming tool, as in the child obesity example shown in Figure 1.

An effective fishbone diagram can be created in a group exercise that will strengthen collaboration by generating a common definition of the problem. Once a causal diagram is developed, partners then can identify which root causes and causal drivers are most actionable, to help them find practical solutions.

3. Evidenced-Based Practices to Get Results

Using evidence-based practices for problem solving increases the chance of success. Solutions offered from a variety of viewpoints can be put to the test of whether there has been research or practice-based evidence to show that they in fact do work. That can help a community partnership avoid wasting resources on fashionable but ineffective solutions.

For some issues, there are evidenced-based guides available. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for example, has developed "The Community Guide," an online resource (www.thecommunityguide.org/index.html) used across the country by local public health departments and their community partners that describes practices that have been subject to research and have been found to be effective in addressing a wide range of community health issues.

There is also research to be tapped for evidence-based practices on youth and education issues among many other fields; see "Developmental Asset Tools," on the website of the Search Institute at www.search-institute.org/assets. Searches of research in appropriate fields—perhaps guided by academic partners—can help identify potential tested solutions for the problem at hand.

Also, city and county managers can draw on such benchmarking with other jurisdictions as that promoted by ICMA's Center for Performance Measurement to identify communities with better results on issues or services of concern and find out which practices they are using.

4. Strategy Maps to Structure the Community Response and Improve Communication among Partners

Complex community problems rarely lend themselves to a one-dimensional solution. After identifying evidenced-

HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

based practices, a community partnership has to view those practices through the lens of its own community to determine a combination of solutions that will be effective.

The partners need to consider driver relationships among the different community actions they are considering, so they will implement them in a way that some actions will drive the success of others, ultimately driving achievement of desired community outcomes. A strategy map is an excellent tool for mapping out these driver relationships. For an example of a strategy map, visit icma.org/osceolacounty.

Strategy maps don't have to use balanced-scorecard perspectives. They do need to show driver relationships in the community's improvement plans. A strategy map not only structures the community's approach to a complex issue; it also is a powerful communication tool to help partners find their roles in the strategy, and it shows how their efforts relate to efforts of others. A map can be used to break down silos between existing partners and to help recruit more partners to the cause.

TO ENSURE CHANGES THAT WORK ON THE GROUND, HEAC PURSUES THESE GOALS THROUGH FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THROUGH LINKING THE LOCAL WORK TO STATEWIDE AND NATIONAL EFFORTS.

5. Performance Measurement of Drivers and Outcomes to Sharpen the Strategy

Once drivers and outcomes are identified, they can be used to develop performance measures that reflect those driver relationships and become an integral part of managing the strategy to improve outcomes. If you are looking to reduce childhood obesity, for example, you might track after-school recreational programs and improved school nutrition programs.

6. Detailed Action Plans to Add Discipline to the Strategy and Partnership

The use of detailed action plans is certainly not new to managers. Most probably have their own favorite formats for detailing tasks, timelines, and responsibilities. Action plans will be stronger, however, and more likely to lead to desired community outcomes if they are linked to a well-focused strategy, targeted performance measures, and community partners.

A key issue for developing plans for collaborative action is deciding who should be on the action planning team. Teams working on developing and implementing action plans ideally should be composed of contributors who can provide content expertise, community connection, and general support for the overall process. Composing teams is an art and one that will vary depending upon the issue addressed and the community involved.

In theory, performance measures and targets should be developed first, and then action plans developed for specific initiatives to hit the targets. In reality, performance measures and targets that are developed before action plans are often best guesses. You need some idea of *how* you will improve performance before targeting improvement. So, although it helps to have some critical performance measures and baseline data identified first, most measures and targets are set while action plans are developed.

7. Community Results Compacts for Partner Accountability for Results

Community compacts were used in the early days of the United States to pull together local governments, community members, and civic groups around common principles and efforts. In the past 10 to 15 years, several organizations around the country have revived the idea of compacts, involving organizations from any sector that commit to achieving a desired community outcome.

They are community *results* compacts if they are tied to improvement in performance measures that are drivers of desired community outcomes. A pioneer in results-oriented compacts is the nonprofit Truckee Meadows Tomorrow (TMT), whose Quality of Life Compacts have involved organizations from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in addressing a wide range of community challenges in the region of Washoe County and Reno, Nevada. These include increasing voter turnout, improving the natural environment, protecting open space, increasing

parental involvement in K–12 education, and increasing affordable housing (www.truckeemeadowstomorrow.org/community-collaborations).

The Healthy Eating, Active Communities (HEAC) program offers a comprehensive approach to obesity prevention that is place based. HEAC works to prevent childhood obesity by changing the environments children inhabit so these environments encourage healthy choices.

To achieve lasting change, HEAC focuses on improving policies and institutional practices. To ensure changes that work on the ground, HEAC pursues these goals through fostering partnerships within local communities and through linking the local work to statewide and national efforts.

Six California communities have implemented the HEAC model—each community in its own way—with place-based change and multisector collaborative partnerships, including neighbors, schools, public health departments, and the medical community.

Community results compacts can be even more powerful if used in combination with several of the other tools in the community results toolkit. There will be, for example, more community legitimacy to compacts, more organizations likely to join compacts, and compacts better-focused on achieving important community results if:

- Residents and stakeholders are involved in identifying the issue to be addressed and outcomes to be achieved.
- Multiple organizations and community members participate in causal diagramming, evidence gathering, strategy mapping, or action planning that lead to the compact.
- Performance measures in the compact relate to performance measures of drivers and outcomes in a structured collaborative strategy to get results.

Connecting community results compacts with a collaborative strategy involving performance drivers and outcomes can be particularly powerful. If two desired community outcomes, for example, are to reduce the number of days per year of unhealthy air quality and to reduce the carbon footprint of the region, then:

- Government and private organizations with large fleets could sign a compact to increase the percentage of clean-burning alternative-fuel vehicles in their fleets, which Washoe County did in an early TMT compact.
- Gas stations in the region could sign on to make cleaner-burning blends available to all customers.
- Private developers could sign on to produce a percentage of housing and commercial space that meets LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards for sustainable buildings.

Each partner is individually accountable for improving results for the performance drivers it can most influence, and, collectively, all partners are mutually accountable for achieving the desired community outcomes.

Use the Seven Tools

In a time of fiscally constrained resources, it is critical to leverage community members as partners, to offer the best available knowledge on what works, and to develop and carry out action plans in communities to address a range of significant challenges. Putting together the seven tools described here offers the prospects of effective collaborations to achieve results around important common goals. PM

ENDOTES

1 Public *Management* (*PM*) magazine articles include L. D. Wray and J. Hauer, "Performance Measurement to Achieve Quality of Life: Adding Value Through Citizens," August 1997; and P. Epstein, L. Wray, and C. Harding, "Citizens as Partners in Performance Management," November 2006.

LYLE WRAY, Ph.D., is executive director, Capitol Region Council of Governments, Hartford, Connecticut (lyle.wray@gmail.com). **PAUL EPSTEIN** leads the Results That Matter Team (www.RTMteam.net), Epstein & Fass Associates, New York, New York (paul@RTMteam.net).

RESOURCES

Epstein, P., P. Coates, and L. Wray, with D. Swain. *Results that Matter: Improving Communities by Engaging Citizens, Measuring Performance, and Getting Things Done.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Epstein, P., L. Wray, and C. Harding. "Citizens as Partners in Performance Management." *Public Management*, November 2006.

Kania, J., and M. Kramer. "Collective Impact." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011.

Search Institute. "Developmental Asset Tools." No date. www.search-institute.org/assets.

Sirgy, M. Joseph, Don Rahtz, and Dong-jin Lee, eds. *Community Quality-of-Life Indicators: Best Cases.* Social Indicators Research Series 22. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004.

Truckee Meadows Tomorrow. "Community collaborations." No date. www.truckeemeadowstomorrow.org/community-collaborations.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "The Community Guide: The Guide to Community Preventive Services: What Works to Promote Health." No date. www.thecommunityguide.org/index.html.

Wray, L. D., and J. A. Hauer. "Best Practices Reviews for Local Government." *Public Management*, January 1996.

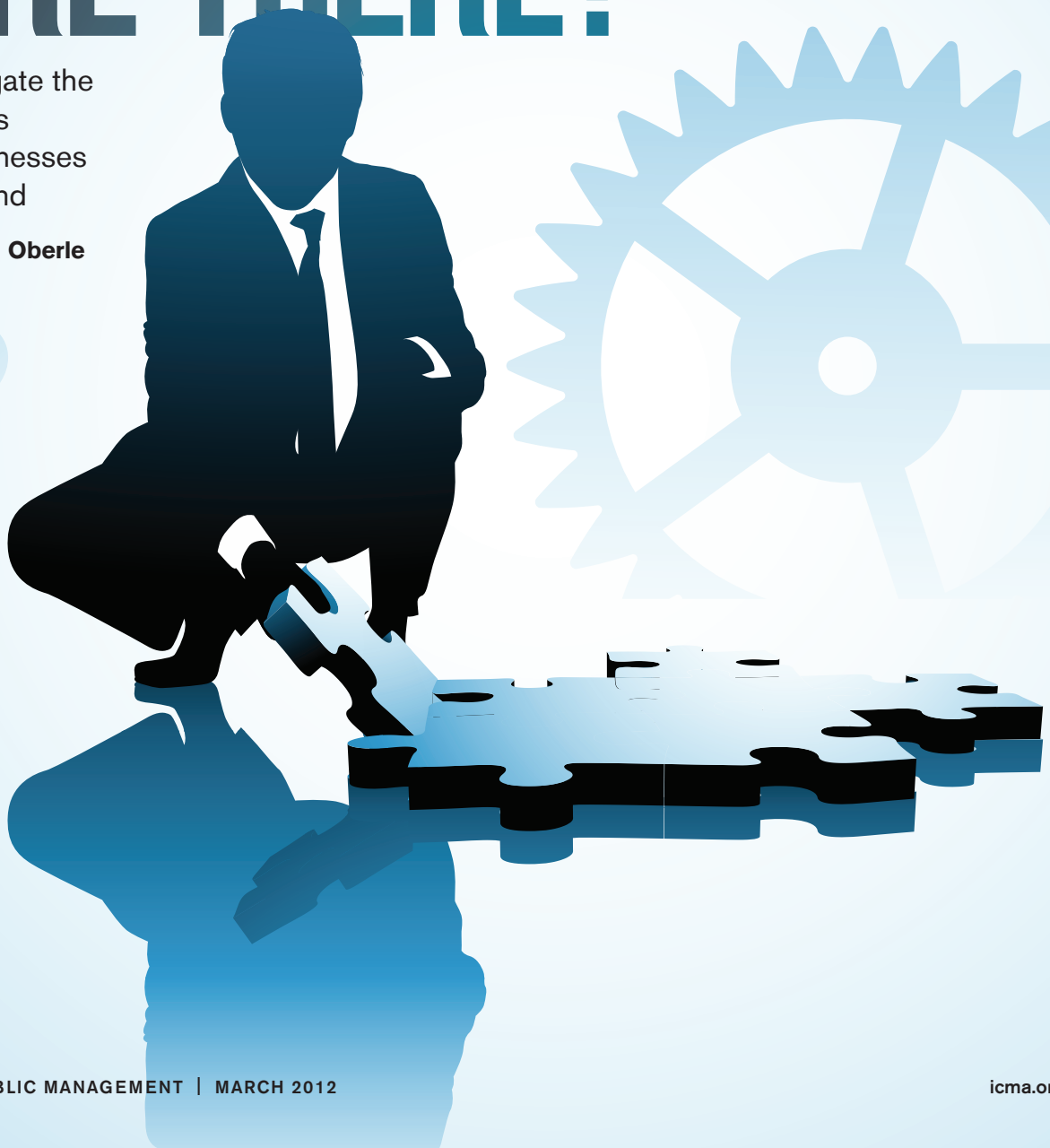
Wray, L. D., and J. Hauer. "Performance Measurement to Achieve Quality of Life: Adding Value Through Citizens." *Public Management*, August 1997.

MANAGERS AND INTERNAL CONTROLS:

WHAT ASSURANCES ARE THERE?

Investigate the systems if weaknesses are found

By Jason Oberle



What can local governments learn from abuses at Enron, Tyco, WorldCom, and other companies caused by sloppy or nonexistent internal control, an absence of ethical behavior, and improper oversight? Subsequently, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 was enacted to prevent further gross abuses in the private sectors.

The enactment of Sarbanes-Oxley led to debate about internal controls and the ability of local and state governments to provide reasonable assurances that public assets, public funds, and public transactions are not likely to undergo significant abuses. The specific connection between this article and Sarbanes-Oaxley is the mandate of having internal controls that ensure prudent and proper financial reporting.

This article shares techniques and insight about what local government managers—myself included—can learn from the private sector.

Focusing on the use of internal controls, this article aims to increase a manager's understanding of these controls. It will report on what managers should know about control systems, and it outlines the process for recognizing potential weaknesses in the control systems and evaluating those weaknesses; it also addresses the manager's responsibility. It concludes by outlining the biggest fallacy associated with implementation of these management controls in local government.

TAKEAWAYS

› Internal controls often need to extend beyond basic legal requirements.
› Internal controls require ethical, political, and professional leadership.
› Internal control systems are organic and not static, meaning they require regular and timely review.
› Prudent and proper financial reporting requires internal control systems.

What Managers Ought to Know

Internal controls, also referred to here as management controls, are the systems and techniques that managers use to ensure an organization or department is accomplishing what is intended. Simply stated, the systems and techniques described here provide reasonable assurances that government departments and the organization as a whole are meeting intended objectives and goals in an ethical, legal, and efficient manner.

Government controls are frequently established in order to comply with legal or regulatory requirements. The control systems are designed and intended to prevent or detect problems as well as keep assets secure. They also assist in preventing problems because individuals are deterred from violating rules or laws for fear of being caught by the system.

To understand how control systems assist managers, it is essential to understand the broad definition of the concept. Internal controls are the processes put in place by management and other personnel. They are designed to provide reasonable assurances that an organization will achieve its objectives in an efficient manner, produce reliable reports, comply with rules and regulations, and safeguard assets. To this end, the control structure can assist managers in achieving program objectives by producing reliable performance and financial reports, complying with laws and regulations, and safeguarding assets.

Internal control systems are intended to provide reasonable assurances, not guarantees. Also, the cost of implementing the control and the control system should never exceed the value of the benefit. The system should always incorporate five basic components: (1) the control environment, (2) risk assessment, (3) control activities, (4) information and communication, and (5) monitoring.

Recognizing Potential Weaknesses

When a review of internal control systems occurs, a manager may notice problematic descriptions of a department or organization. If so, the manager should initiate an investigation of the systems.

During any investigation, two of the most easily identifiable weakness indicators are 1) significant problems in the information resource management system and 2) vulnerabilities in the accounting system. Both of these are fairly easy to address. Other indicators are the lack of political or senior manager commitment to a sound internal control environment; this is recognizable, in part, by high turnover rates in key management positions and an inability to recruit and retain competent professional staff.

Literature on internal control systems also suggests another indicator of problems is a changing control environment, including adding new programs or major

changes in existing programs. In today's economic environment, however, significant fiscal constraints rather than internal control deficiencies may be the reason for such change.

Finally, significant material weaknesses are often cited in the findings of an audit report. If weaknesses are cited in an audit and the corrective action process is slow, this could indicate weakness in the internal control process.

TODAY'S ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT AND SIGNIFICANT FISCAL CONSTRAINTS, RATHER THAN INTERNAL CONTROL DEFICIENCIES, MAY BE THE REASON FOR PROGRAM CHANGES, WHICH IN TURN CAN BE INDICATORS OF PROBLEMS.

Evaluating the Control System

When evaluating the internal (management) control system, the evaluation must incorporate four activities: (1) organizing the evaluation process, (2) segmenting the organization into manageable and similar categories of activity, (3) conducting a risk assessment of objectives, and (4) determining the location of available internal control information.

Organize the process. Before any work can be successfully accomplished in the evaluation process, these preconditions must be met: (1) a culture of organizational integrity and ethical values, (2) an organizational commitment to competency, (3) clear and concise objectives in each area of evaluation, and (4) a supportive attitude from senior managers and elected officials.

The process of the evaluation requires clear and definitive assignment of responsibilities, establishment of internal reporting requirements, establishment of procedures to document the process in a way that can be readily understood, and organization of staff involved.

The most critical of these requirements is assigning to individuals or teams responsibility for preparing internal control plans, conducting risk assessments and reviews, taking corrective actions on identified deficiencies, and providing reports and reasonable assurances that objectives are being met.

To accomplish these tasks effectively, a manager must select an appropriate team that considers the evaluation to be of value and applies the appropriate level of seriousness. The team must be capable and must possess sufficient knowledge, skills, and experience to complete the task or be appropriately trained in the area of internal controls.

Segment the organization. The segmentation step requires significant organizational knowledge. The purpose of this step is to ensure that the size of the department, agency, or unit being evaluated is not too large to be effectively evaluated or not so dissimilar that it cannot be evaluated in conjunction with other parts of the organization. This step in the process is different in nearly every organization.

Conduct risk assessment. The risk assessment step varies by organization insofar as it is not the organizational risk as a whole that is being assessed; instead, the assessment applies to the systemic and inherent risk of the organization as it relates to the organization's objectives. This may differ significantly from one organization to the next.

These are the eight basic tenets of the risk assessment step:

- Identify the functions to be assessed.
- Obtain information of prior risk assessments.
- Define each function's control objectives.
- Identify inherent risks.
- Identify other risks.
- Identify each function's control technique.
- Identify existing knowledge of the general control environment, inherent organizational risks, existing controls.
- Form conclusions as to risk; then make recommendations.

Gather available information. In this information-gathering step, particular sources may provide good information to consider before, during, and after the evaluation of the control system. Before the evaluation, the information may help determine areas for examination. During and after the evaluation, the information may help in comparative analysis of activities and in making recommendations.

These sources are people with experience and knowledge of daily operations, management reviews, audit reports, program evaluations, annual performance reports, supplemental reports, regular activity reports, and individual experience and knowledge. Valuable sources include elected officials, city or county managers and administrators, chief executive officers, and chief administrative officers. Throughout the process, leadership is important.

Leadership's Responsibility

Leadership styles vary. The important thing to remember is that leadership is responsible for deciding where control is needed, designing and documenting control components, placing controls into operation, monitoring and improving the effectiveness of controls, testing controls periodically, reporting on the status and effectiveness of controls, taking timely and effective actions to correct deficiencies, and tracking progress on corrective actions.

Managers and others in leadership are also responsible for creating an atmosphere of ethical behavior and leading an ethical organization. I believe

that a lack of ethical behavior was the major component in the demise of Enron and Tyco and that the recognition of that fact provided the impetus for the passage of Sarbanes-Oxley. Establishing and maintaining an ethical culture throughout the organization is every bit as important as establishing and maintaining financial controls.

The Big Trap

My experience in professional management has led me to recognize shortfalls in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of internal control systems. A local government can be diligent in compliance with state laws, municipal code development, and regulatory compliance and still miss the mark on implementing good internal controls. To understand how this can occur, consider the reasons why legal and regulatory structures are set up and the reasons why internal controls are implemented in an organization.

Legal and regulatory structures are established in organizations under the mandate of law by the state or federal government. If an organization fails to carry out the mandates, it often has some detrimental consequences for the organization. These consequences may be criminal penalty, civil penalty, or ineligibility for specific types of financial transfers or payments.

Internal or management control structures are implemented in an organization under the leadership of elected officials or appointed staff members in an effort to monitor activities aimed to provide reasonable assurances that the organization will meet its objectives efficiently and effectively as well as provide reliable performance and financial reports.

The biggest fallacy is that no distinction exists between internal controls and management controls, and the reason for implementation of internal controls is strictly to adhere to legal mandates. The trap for any organization is the belief that implementing legal or regulatory requirements alone will provide management with the necessary control structure to meet organizational objectives. Therefore, it is critical that an organization establishes controls that align with management goals and not merely with legal or regulatory requirements.

Managers seeking additional information on internal controls have a number of resources. These resources are available in-house in the local government's finance or accounting department, through consultants (for example, a third-party auditing firm), and at such professional organizations as ICMA. I am also willing to discuss this subject with anyone interested in the topic, so don't hesitate to send me a message. PM

JASON OBERLE is a consultant, Sovereignty Group, Laingsburg, Michigan (jasonoberle2010@gmail.com), and former county administrator, Monroe County, Indiana.

BELL, CALIFORNIA

Where Our Profession Is Making a Difference

HOW MANAGERS STEPPED UP TO HELP THE COMMUNITY RECOVER

By Kevin Duggan, ICMA-CM

On Friday, July 15, 2011, the recruitment deadline closed for an interim city manager in Bell, California (35,500 population). Applications were counted up. They totaled zero. The Bell brand was definitely in trouble.

A little more than 18 months ago the local government management profession was rocked by the compensation scandal in Bell. Although there will always be isolated examples of members of the profession not meeting the demands of the ICMA Code of Ethics and the expectations of their communities, the extreme conduct in Bell, along with the intense media attention it generated, created challenges for the profession both in California and across the country.

While ICMA was already focused on efforts to better explain the role and value of professional management through its upcoming "Life, Well Run" campaign, one of the worst possible examples of our profession became the best-known city manager in the nation. The greatest impact of this scandal, however, was on the residents of Bell. It became their challenge to reclaim their local government.

TAKEAWAYS

› Bell, California, has been a difficult experience for the local government management community, but one day it might serve as a positive example for the profession.

› The response to the call for assistance is a clear demonstration of what the management profession and the individuals who compose it represent.

Painful Impacts

Among the impacts of the Bell scandal was an intense interest in public sector compensation in both national and local media. The response of the profession, including ICMA, was to focus on communicating the reality of compensation in the public sector and to

identify best practices. Increased efforts were undertaken in California and other parts of the nation to develop compensation guidelines.

While these efforts were under way, Bell's citizens began the hard work of reclaiming their community. The city manager and other high-level staff members were removed from their positions, and some had criminal charges filed against them. By early 2011, the previous council had been recalled and a new council was in place. The new councilmembers faced daunting challenges.

The scandal revealed not only outrageous issues regarding compensation but also significant management and leadership deficiencies and major financial problems. Compounding the problems was that the new council found itself with a much-depleted leadership team and one not of its choosing.

Councilmembers were also continuing to deal with significant community distrust and an overwhelming number of serious and challenging issues. There also was a lack of experienced leadership on both elected and appointed levels. An additional challenge was that all this was played out in the glare of intense media scrutiny.

As the new councilmembers struggled to try to move the community forward, their aspirations were further impacted by the impression that government professionals were unwilling to become involved in such a negative, difficult, and demanding circumstance. By the summer of 2011, the news media were beginning to conclude that no one was willing to help the city.

Although there were a number of reasons for the challenges faced in obtaining professional assistance, clearly one was the stigma associated with the previous city leadership and its impacts. When it came to ICMA's attention that Bell was having difficulty obtaining the professional assistance needed to reestablish effective governance and services, it was clear that action was necessary.

As painful an experience as Bell continued to be, it was time for our profession to offer help. The mayor and council immediately responded with enthusiasm to ICMA's offer to assist them in finding professional interim leadership. Also responding quickly and positively to partner with ICMA and its California affiliate, Cal-ICMA, were the League of California Cities (LCC) and its City Manager's Department and California City Management Foundation (CCMF).

The initial assistance consisted of contacting the membership of these organizations to request help. The challenge quickly became urgent when members of the new council determined they did not wish to extend the contract of the temporary chief administrative officer they had inherited from the previous governing body.

In lieu of the contract being extended, the mayor became the interim CAO, a circumstance that neither he nor his council colleagues wanted to continue any longer than absolutely necessary. ICMA, LCC, and CCMF needed to move quickly to identify professional interim leadership.

Ken Hampian's Story

After some direct outreach by professional colleagues, Ken Hampian, ICMA member and the retired city manager of San Luis Obispo, California, offered his services for a 30-day period. This provided time for the recruitment of a longer-term interim manager.

Not only was Ken willing to change a number of personal plans for those first 30 days, but he also insisted that he serve without compensation. He did not want any questions raised regarding his motivation to assist.

Since retiring from city management in January 2010, Ken had not been interested in pursuing interim manager positions. He was enjoying other kinds of work and service and believed the city hall portion of his life was over. But, as Ken describes it, to his surprise he had a great urge to "answer the Bell."

He viewed the opportunity as a mission and not a job and an opportunity for our profession to demonstrate what professional service and management are really about. He was also motivated by a strong desire to change the impression created by those who preceded him and claimed to be public servants.

Within five days of the vacancy occurring, Ken interviewed with the Bell council. Within 30 minutes of meeting Ken, councilmembers appointed him interim CAO, and he immediately found himself sitting in the CAO's chair for a jam-packed council meeting. He provided advice and suggestions at the meeting that lasted until 2 a.m.

As Ken quickly found out, the challenge was much greater than helping the organization and community recover from the compensation scandal. He found an organization in shambles. Policies, processes, hierarchy, equipment, training—the normal accoutrements of organizational life—were nonexistent or severely withered.

There were no department heads or citizen advisory bodies. Ken found the remaining staff dedicated but skeletal and shouldering an overwhelming workload. He also found Bell entangled in a net of bad debts, bond levies, lawsuits, and grant violations.

Ken was immediately immersed in an almost overwhelming number of issues ranging from those having great significance to the mundane. Compounding the challenge was the absence of staff support in key areas and the complete lack of organizational infrastructure to address even the most routine of inquiries.

He also quickly discovered that, although this working-class community had accomplished through the recall process the initial recapture of their community, they were severely handicapped by a lack of governing experience and civic involvement. The community's dignity and self-respect had also taken a serious hit, and trust was greatly lacking.

Although a dedicated, committed, and intelligent mayor and council had been elected, they were not experienced in local government and its services. It became apparent immediately that the challenges were so great that Ken needed some direct assistance. Within

days, additional local government professionals offered their help.

Of particular note was the assistance of the city of Santa Monica (City Manager Rod Gould), which immediately freed up Deputy Police Chief Al Venegas to serve as a chief of staff to Ken and assist with addressing the overwhelming number of pending issues. Deputy Chief Venegas used two weeks of his personal vacation time to help out during this critical initial period.

While immediately prioritizing a wide array of serious issues and problems and providing stability to the provision of essential daily services, the management professionals realized that a major challenge was to find a highly qualified professional to replace Ken after his 30-day emergency assignment. Again, ICMA, CCMF, and the LCC joined together to advertise and review applicants for recommendation to the council.

A committee, under the leadership of retired city manager and Cal-ICMA member Kevin O'Rourke, ICMA-CM, sprang into action. The response to an extended deadline and additional professional outreach was gratifying. A strong group of candidates was identified, with three ultimately recommended to the council for interview.

Ken and other dedicated volunteers made great strides toward stabilizing the Bell organization and to help the council move the community forward during this initial period. Trust and confidence in professional management was already significantly restored after Ken's time in Bell.

His service was greatly appreciated, and when he completed his 30 days of service the community graciously expressed its gratitude, not only to Ken but also to ICMA/Cal-ICMA, LCC, and CCMF.

Arne Croce's Story

Arne Croce, ICMA-CM, ICMA Life Member, and the retired city manager of San Mateo, California, has had a number of professional adventures since leaving full-time city management in 2008. In addition to providing consultant assistance to several California public agencies, he also promoted professional local governance through service in Iraq and Kosovo.

Shortly after returning from Kosovo, he was encouraged by fellow local government professionals to consider the challenge of the long-term interim CAO assignment in Bell. He was one of the several highly qualified applicants solicited to apply and was one of three final candidates recommended to the council. He was subsequently interviewed and selected to replace Ken. The joint recruitment and selection process by ICMA, CCMF, and LCC was, amazingly, completed in less than three weeks.

Arne knew that this task would require him to be away from his home in northern California for at least nine months while working for less than would normally be expected for this type

BELL HONOR ROLL

The number and diversity of professionals and professional organizations that came together to assist in restoring Bell and to demonstrate the difference that professional management can make in a community is impressive. These groups and individuals deserve our thanks and appreciation for their efforts.

INDIVIDUALS

Ken Hampian, Retired City Manager, San Luis Obispo

Pam Easter, ICMA Senior Adviser, Rancho Cucamonga

Arne Croce (ICMA-CM), ICMA Life Member, San Mateo

Al Venegas, Deputy Police Chief, Santa Monica

Kevin O'Rourke, ICMA-CM, Cal-ICMA Committee on the Profession. Fairfield

Dave Mora (ICMA-CM), ICMA Senior Adviser/Range Rider, Salinas

Linda Barton, ICMA-CM, Past President, City Manager's Department, League of California Cities, Sacremento

Chris McKenzie, Executive Director, League of California Cities, Sacremento

Wade McKinney, ICMA-CM, President, California City Management Foundation, San Diego

Bill Garrett, Executive Director, California City Management Foundation, San Diego

Bill Statler, Retired Finance Director, San Luis Obispo

Mike Multari, Retired Community Development Director, San Luis Obispo

Bill Smith, Retired City Manager, Westminster

Susan Loftus, City Manager, San Mateo

Norma Gauge, City Clerk, San Mateo

Wandzia Rose, City of San Mateo

Marvin Rose, Retired Public Works Director, Sunnyvale

Dave Hill, Retired HR Director, Anaheim

Linda Spady, HR Director, San Mateo

Sheila Canzian, Parks and Recreation Director, San Mateo

Dave Bass, Retired Finance Director, Bell Gardens

Vern Ficklin, Retired Manager, Public Works Department, San Mateo

David Schirmer, IT Director, Beverly Hills

Melissa Lindley, Housing Department, Santa Monica

Rod Gould, City Manager, Santa Monica

Jeff Kolin, City Manager, Beverly HIlls

Steve Belcher, Interim Police Chief, Bell

Debra Kurita, Interim Community Services Director, Bell

Kristine Guerrero, League of California Cities, Sacremento

Julie Hernandez, International Hispanic Network, San Jose

Nancy Fong, Interim Community Development Director, Bell

JoAnne Speers, Institute for Local Government, Sacremento

ORGANIZATIONS

International Personnel Management Association

Alliance for Innovation

Because you can't always predict where an accident will end up. Or where it'll begin.

From road construction to parks and recreation, we understand that you're responsible for a wide range of public projects. And for those days when one of them unexpectedly veers off course, you can count on Travelers. Trust us to be your partner in protecting the public: pairing our specialized risk control and claim resources with local knowledge of your community's unique needs. Because when so much depends on you, you should be able to depend on customized protection that's anything but middle of the road. Wherever that may be.

TRAVELERS

travelers.com

of interim assignment. He was drawn to this challenge by his desire to assist the community after it had been ravaged by an individual who claimed to be a member of the management profession. He also was drawn to the opportunity to work with elected officials who were committed to making things right again.

Although a great number of problems had been initially addressed by Ken and his team of volunteer professionals, the vast majority of problems still faced Arne. Among these were helping to establish effective community dialogues, including at council meetings, addressing the daunting financial and budget challenges, and hiring a team of department heads.

At the same time, Arne felt warmly welcomed to the Bell organization and community. He found the community positive and supportive. There was obvious appreciation for his willingness to join them in their efforts to restore the community. He also sensed their relief in having professional management that they could trust and that would provide good advice and day-to-day management to their organization. He found the employees receptive to new ideas and open to change.

Among Arne's immediate priorities was to further expand the cadre of professional volunteers to help on a wide variety of projects and assignments. These included the development of an RFP process for a refuse collection contract, the need to create basic HR policies and procedures, and the necessity to address poorly maintained mobile home parks that he had discovered were owned by the city.

A major step forward was Arne's ability to assemble a small but highly skilled and professional group of full-time interim department heads. Although they are compensated, they have been willing to serve for payment that's below what they could otherwise earn; they have accepted their temporary jobs because of their belief in the important work being done. He has seen tremendous progress through the efforts of these dedicated professionals.

Arne has also greatly expanded the number of volunteer part-time professionals who provide valuable help on a wide variety of topics. Also, a number of professional associations including ICMA, the Alliance for Innovation, the Institute for Local Government, and the International Personnel Management Association have offered assistance in a variety of ways. Other cities, including San Mateo, California (City Manager Susan Loftus) and Beverly Hills, California (City Manager Jeff Kolin, ICMA-CM), have provided specific assistance in such areas as upgrading the technology infrastructure in city facilities.

Arne sees the organization moving in a positive direction, with the greatest achievements so far being the establishment of professional interim leadership in departments, triage of critical problems and issues, initiation of an effective budget process, and creation of an expectation for openness and transparency relating to all municipal business.

His overarching goals for his time in Bell include stabilizing the organization, establishing permanent professional staff, creating needed internal organizational infrastructure, and stabilizing the city's financial condition. The bottom line for Arne is to have his time and the time of his fellow professionals demonstrate what can be expected from honest, open, and professional local government management.

Pam Easter's Story

Pam Easter, a retired city manager, assistant city manager, and ICMA Senior Adviser, is one person in an extraordinary group of dedicated volunteer professionals who stepped in to support Ken and subsequently Arne and who is continuing to provide assistance to the Bell community. As she watched the compensation scandal unfold, she fully appreciated the negative impact it had on the Bell community and on our profession.

Immediately upon hearing of the challenges encountered by Ken Hampian, Pam volunteered to serve and subsequently undertook a long daily commute in order to help stabilize the organization. Like Ken and Arne, she wanted to be part of the effort to help

EIGHT LESSONS OF BELL

Bell, California, represents both the worst and the best of our management profession. In reflecting on the story of Bell up to this point, these lessons are suggested:

- Significant authority is part of being a local government manager. Managers can make a great impact on a community by the way in which they undertake their professional responsibilities. This authority must be exercised in a professional and ethical manner.
- Successful communities need to have effective professional management, effective and public-spirited elected officials, an interested and involved community, and a vigilant media.
- Personal interests can never impact professional decision making.
- Openness and transparency are essential ingredients for effective local governance.
- Professional management can have a significant positive impact on local communities.
- Our profession is often more valued and appreciated by residents and elected officials than we fully realize.
- Members of our profession believe in good government and the value of professional management and are willing to sacrifice to demonstrate their belief.
- Without adequate checks and balances and the willingness to confront inappropriate conduct, all organizations are at risk.

Bell recover as well as demonstrate the positive impact that professional and ethical local government management can have on a community.

Pam found that the councilmembers and staff were dedicated to the difficult work of reforming and rebuilding the organization. Although greatly impacted by the actions of a few Bell leaders, the staff was committed to creating an organization and community of which they could be proud. Pam was encouraged to find that the new council understood the importance of professional and ethical management.

What had initially been an offer to assist Ken for the first few challenging days of his service turned into a much longer commitment. Pam provided critical support during Ken's month as interim city administrator and then continued her service after Arne arrived. Pam has served in a variety of capacities ranging from interviewing employees to helping assess the organization, undertaking administrative analysis, and serving as acting interim city administrator and interim finance director.

She found a group of employees who were still committed to providing public services but who had suffered from the absence of professional and ethical leadership. Employees had also been severely impacted by the barrage of negative publicity and the constant negativity regarding all things related to Bell.

They also were operating in an atmosphere of great uncertainty on almost all levels, ranging from finances to organizational leadership. Pam was impressed to find that, after looking deeper than the now stereotypical view of what to expect in a "Bell employee," she found a committed and concerned group of staff members doing their best to provide services under difficult circumstances.

Pam was able to help employees stay focused on their obligation to provide important and often vital public services. She also got great satisfaction from being able to serve as an example to the staff of how professional managers conducted themselves.

Working with Ken and Arne, she was able to demonstrate that organizational leaders can serve as role models and can work positively and constructively in a team environment with their fellow employees while providing support and encouragement.

Pam's commitment and the commitment of many other volunteers to the management profession and all that it stands for is being demonstrated every day in Bell.

Conclusion to Date Is Positive

Ultimately, as is the case in all of the communities in which managers serve, the success of Bell and the Bell community is in the hands of its residents and council. Even with the great progress that has already been made, it could take years for the community to recover from the poor leadership and governance of the past.

Though the challenge is long term, the current budget development process is a clear example of progress. A community-involved budget process (totally lacking previously) is underway and will lead to clear city goals and priorities. The budget format is being revamped to include basic workload and performance measures. Progress against goals, priorities, and performance will be regularly monitored and reported. While these steps may appear basic for most communities, these are major steps forward for Bell.

With the help of professionals dedicated to the public interest, the elected officials in Bell and the community as a whole are working to reform and restore their community. Although the experience of Bell has been difficult for the local government management community, the story is changing and it is hoped that Bell can one day serve as a positive example for the profession.

The response to the call to assist by so many organizations and individual professionals has been a clear demonstration of what our profession and the individuals who compose it represent. Only a small fraction of the many offers of help could actually be accepted. All of us who are committed to good governance and effective and honest local government management owe all of these organizations and individuals our gratitude and appreciation.

While the negative example of the previous Bell leadership will be difficult to overcome, we can be grateful to the new community leaders and dedicated professionals who are striving every day to create a positive example of how effective local governments can function.

Professional local government management makes a significant difference in our communities. This is now being proven every day in the city of Bell. PM

REBIRTH OF BELL:
ONLINE ARTICLE AVAILABLE

An important commitment for professional local government managers is to advocate professionalism in communities outside their own. As you will read in the article "Rebirth of Bell," ICMA, Cal-ICMA, and the California City Management Foundation worked together to help Bell, California, overcome a year of intense public scrutiny to make significant strides toward restoring the public trust.

Bell came so far that it celebrated its "rebirth" at a special press conference on August 24, 2011, during which ICMA, the League of California Cities, and the California City Management Foundation (CCMF) were praised for their contributions to the city's success.

To learn more about this fascinating story, visit the CCMF website at http://www.cacitymanagers.org/rebirth-of-bell and the article "Rebirth of Bell."

KEVIN DUGGAN, ICMA-CM, is ICMA West Coast regional director, Mountain View, California, and is former city manager of Mountain View (kduggan@icma.org).

By Larry Houstoun

Secondhand Parks: NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR URBAN PUBLIC SPACES

TAKEAWAYS

- Public spaces can be investments in economic development and antidotes to sprawl.
- Urban populations are changing rapidly and so are their tastes in leisure spaces.
- Walking has replaced driving among the baby-boomer and millennial generations in selecting residential locations.

Opportunities that residents need and like

Urban public spaces are parks and plazas within walking distance of major concentrations of people, leisure places that can be reached on foot or by bike or public transit. They can be destinations where people go to have fun or they can be urban linear parks that take people somewhere else. Urban public spaces in America are as old as Savannah's colonial public squares. In the 21st century, the unprecedented expansion of populations in and near downtowns has triggered the generation of new and more popular urban spaces in communities large and small.

Within the past 50 years, the composition and number of urban open space users have changed greatly. As demand and preferences change, so have park design and responsibilities for care and financing, along with expectations about users. This article is about changes in urban open spaces and leading ideas for expanding and adapting this essential amenity.

Today, more are being created, they are closer to their beneficiaries, they offer greater benefits to nearby properties, and they reflect greater concern about the quality of urban life. Importantly, they display civic imagination at its best.

Once upon a time, the U.S. government published decennial list of national parks and recreation plans along with surveys asking Americans, "What do you most enjoy doing in your leisure time?" In the 1930s, the highest-ranked activity was driving for pleasure. Curiously, that was number one when cars were much less numerous than today, were less comfortable, and took a greater share of family budgets.

By the 1970s, the plan and its survey were terminated. In the traffic-plagued, postwar world, fewer people thought of driving as recreation. Before the national plan concept was dropped, it became apparent that the plan's context was essentially suburban. The Department of the Interior refused to include urban recreation in the national plan. Why bother with cities?

They were losing population by the millions, especially among those most likely to use the state and federal parks. Of the dozen or so such facilities in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, for example, only one large park had direct access by public transportation from Pittsburgh, the region's urban center. Attention was focused on the big and remote parks, not the ones closest to people.

Since the U.S. government effectively denied that local governments needed or deserved parks and recreation, both supply and demand for urban open spaces have changed markedly. Here are nine of the changes that are shaping urban open spaces today:

New Residents

First has been the change in local government populations. Locality centers are drawing residents in unprecedented numbers, households that can afford to live almost anywhere. They include all ages. As a generalization, people aren't moving to communities for employment opportunities; many of them have had a net job loss. The new migration is largely amenity driven. There are more amenities per square mile in metropolitan centers than elsewhere in their regions.

New Places

Urban public spaces are cropping up in new places as civic leaders see the opportunities for leisure where manufacturing, commerce, and transportation had long dominated. Reusing municipal streets has been successful in Manchester, England, where a new street was created in order make it into a pedestrian way. Another such street was created on one of New York City's busiest streets. So crowded by cars was Broadway at Times Square that the intersection was considered obsolete.

CONVERSION OF SECONDHAND LAND TO URBAN PUBLIC

Boston built a linear pedestrian way over a subway tunnel and a destination park over a reconstructed parking garage. Hartford has created an elevated park over a rail line and a highway, one that that connects the commercial center with the Connecticut River. Earlier, San Francisco created pocket parks by replacing one or two parking spaces in some blocks with small leisure places.

In Arlington County, Virginia, athletic fields have been created out of a former PCB-filled brownfield. Inserted between a major highway and active CSX tracks and beneath the flight path of planes leaving Reagan National Airport, in an all but forgotten dump, the county park has already seen soccer competitions. Nearby Marymount University has shared some of the acquisition and development costs and will use the park as its home field for lacrosse and soccer games. The area of the worst lead contamination is beneath the small, paved parking lot.

New Sponsors

Entities other than general governments have become the creators, designers, and maintainers of urban public spaces. At one time people looked exclusively to governments to fulfill these responsibilities, but today the largest and best-financed of the business improvement districts (BIDs) are seeing the creation or re-creation of parks as important elements of their overall economic missions. Real estate interests have paid to restore such parks as New York's Bryant Park, capturing the value added to nearby buildings as bait for higher office rentals.

New Tests for Success

In decades past, success was measured by such tests as "Are they cheap to maintain?" Today, public spaces are being examined in terms of their benefits to residents, to visitors, and to real estate values. Are they well used?

Success is measured by numbers of users. If urban public spaces are crowded, they are successful. People are not satisfied with mere space fillers, those vacuous, tax-exempt places where the public cost of security and maintenance far exceeds their civic benefits. In pursuit of low-cost maintenance, many localities simply poured concrete and installed inhospitable benches that seemed to attract only panhandlers.

Urban public spaces enrich host communities, serving as rarely acknowledged economic assets. *City Beautiful,* a 2008 report published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, described a study of 250 metropolitan areas that found that the extent of amenities present, including parks, produced the third-highest rates of growth. Convenience of parks and golf courses were among the 15 factors studied. The report urged officials to invest more in recreational capital as the digital age has produced new priorities for selecting residence and work locations.

New Reuse Opportunities

Just as new concentrations of amenities attract newcomers to downtown, changing economic purposes have made redundant and reusable land and structures available to accommodate increased population and expanded leisure facilities. The decaying waterfront in Wilmington, Delaware, has been transformed into a mixed-use complex with an active theater company, farmers market, restaurants, minor league baseball stadium, and a river-edge walkway. Washington D.C.'s Anacostia River sports a handsome new water-edge park in a segment of the river earlier considered useless and virtually poisonous.

New Opportunities

Two major forces contributed to the urban real estate revolution benefiting urban centers. First, the commercial centers of U.S. cities were grossly overbuilt a century ago for today's retail markets and are obsolete for today's office requirements. Retail stores were replaced by vacant lots. With dwindling demand for small-office space and much shopping moved to out-of-town locations, land prices crashed in downtowns. Yet arts and cultural institutions kept alive by public and private subsidies continued to draw culture patrons to eating and drinking establishments.

Second, tastes change. Old is in. Suburban life palled. Downtown property had become inexpensive, and New York's success with converting attractive older office towers into popular residential units stimulated conversions elsewhere. About the only asset missing was readily accessible leisure space, and urban centers began to overcome that deficiency.

New Values

Decades of fear of crime had dampened enthusiasm for living and visiting downtowns. This concern has since passed in all but a few commercial centers. Five years ago, a survey of those who newly moved into central Philadelphia listed the neighborhood's absence of crime, second only to walking to work, as the two principal appeals of inner-city living.

Newcomers found that handsome town houses and apartment towers were appealing and affordable. Suddenly central cities bloomed with strollers and pets and new restaurants and swanky town houses. Demand has spread to additional blocks and long-dormant neighborhoods. Once marked by widespread blight, downtowns have become the metropolitan centers of places to have fun. The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway in downtown Boston is an economic generator, attracting hordes of tourists and residents to its varied attractions, even in winter.

New Appreciation for Communities

In the scramble for park financing, more costs are being shared with nonprofit corporations, developers, and other businesses. Owners of substantial structures are paying for air rights to build along side of or above New York's High Line,

SPACES IS A WISE COURSE FOR THIS CENTURY.

and BIDs are recreating, maintaining, and programming long-neglected parks in Philadelphia and elsewhere. The increasingly shared financing with nongovernmental entities may also produce more shared responsibility for open space governance.

A mixed board of directors—local officials and assessed property owners—illustrates a decision-making structure that is a promising improvement over one composed of only government or only residents. Although BIDs are not entirely composed of leisure facilities, the public-private successes of more than 1,000 BIDs are impressive. Most BIDs are authorized to finance urban open spaces.

New Places for Urban Spaces

Probably the most remarkable new urban space in America is Manhattan's High Line, an abandoned, elevated freight line that served the Meatpacking District for a half century. Traveling at approximately the third-story level, the High Line made it possible to make pickups and deliveries by rail at the sides of warehouse-style structures.

In one instance, the tracks passed entirely through a building, adding interest to what has become a national attraction, an elevated and landscaped linear park. Confirming what scores of real estate studies have shown, the elevated park has stimulated billions in private investment in a district previously known as a neighborhood eyesore. On a sunny Saturday in late November, the place is mobbed.

Central Philadelphia sits between two rivers. At the westerly one, the Schuylkill, a linear park shares space with an active freight line. Along the Schuylkill, the first of several planned segments of an urban linear park has been cleaned, landscaped, and expanded, linking residential centers to 25 miles of trails to Norristown and Valley Forge.

The trail follows CSX on the city side and overlooks the new 25-acre recreation space between the river and the University of Pennsylvania, a reuse of land long occupied by rail yards serving U.S. mail trains. Plans call for pedestrian bridges linking the east and west sides of the Schuylkill and at least one segment to be cantilevered over the river to permit people to pass uninterrupted around a still-active factory. The responsible nonprofit corporation, Schuylkill Banks, encourages fishing and conducts boat tours among various historic points of interest along the shore.

On the east side, a former shipping pier has been converted to a half-acre park complete with grassy slopes, trees, and seating for public presentations and river watching. The Race Street Pier Park is an early phase of a seven-mile linear park.

Can We Capture More of This Resource?

The supply of abandoned or undesirable urban land seems inexhaustible at the metropolitan centers. When rail transportation was an essential resource, for example, rail lines converged at the centers. Much of that redundancy remains unused.

Similarly, there is little evidence that the residential appeal of these centers will diminish as it is principally appealing to the three-quarters of American households who are without children and even some who have them. The National Association of Realtors released a study of householders suggesting a rosy future for inner-city living. Its 2011 survey reported, for example, that people want a park within a three-minute walk. That's not a prescription for a low-density, suburban lifestyle.

Mixed uses are especially important for successful parks. The late urbanist Jane Jacobs, upon studying a park that was particularly popular, observed that users were continually coming and going—early morning dog walkers, then businesspeople walking to work, then mothers tending children, then sunbathers, and so on.

She noted that mixed uses produced a constant flow of users, the ultimate test and unlikely where a park attracts only baby tenders or office workers. Jacobs wrote that the greatest influence on park use is the number and variety of potential users in the surrounding blocks, much more so than what is in the park.

Philadelphia has begun a process that other towns and cities would do well to watch. A complete inventory of land potentially converted to urban open space (from concrete playgrounds) has been completed for the entire community, and the city has set bold, yet attainable goals that all residents should have a park within a half-mile walk of their homes.

Maps in Philadelphia's 2010 report show where this standard is met and where it is not. Although much work has been accomplished in center city, some large opportunities exist despite the existing density. An elevated, abandoned rail line, for example, remains unused and is highly suitable for conversion to open space.

Urban public spaces attract and retain populations. They help support local growth, and living is healthful and stimulating. Parks make better neighbors than all that wasted land we've inherited. This may be a golden age in terms of the accessibility, utility, and popularity of urban public spaces. Business and governments should treat these amenities as investments in economic development and antidotes to sprawl.

Walkable has replaced driveable among the baby-boomer and millennial generations in selecting residential locations, wrote Charles B. Leinberger in the November 25, 2011, *New York Times* opinion piece, "The Death of the Fringe Suburb." Conversion of secondhand land to urban public spaces is a wise course for this century. PM

LAWRENCE HOUSTOUN
is partner, The BID Experts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (lhoustounjr@verizon.net).

BoardDocs Introduces FREE Video Service!

How much should video for your paperless agenda service cost? We think it shouldn't cost anything. So, starting now, all BoardDocs subscribers can access our unique and innovative video solution at no charge. No charge, as in absolutely free.

BoardDocs free video simplifies the task of managing and associating videos for private or public meeting agendas. It's easy, fully searchable and best of all, it's from the same company that includes no-charge, on-site training and US-based, 7 x 24 technical support with every subscription.

Free video from BoardDocs. No Strings. No Fine Print. Just FREE.

For more information or to arrange a demonstration, call 800-407-0141 or visit www.boarddocs.com.

BoardDocs®
Your Paperless Governance Solution

BY JOAN MCCALLEN

INVESTING SMART

Tips when planning

Thinking about and evaluating your retirement investments can help you work toward achieving a comfortable retirement later in life. Now may be a good time to review your investment goals and your strategies for achieving those goals. You can also update your investment portfolio, if needed.

No matter where you are in your retirement investing—just starting to invest, looking to diversify, or nearing retirement—there are various strategies you can use to help keep your investments on track:

1. Determining your risk tolerance. You can start by identifying your goals, determining your personal tolerance for risk, and setting a timeline. It's also important to remember that risk may be a necessary part of investing and that over an extended period of time, risk may pay off.

2. Choosing your asset allocation. Asset allocation is an important factor in managing investment risk. Deciding how to diversify your overall portfolio between different types of stocks and fixed-income securities is one of your most important investment decisions. Your decision may be based on such factors as your age, income, and desired risk level.

3. Selecting your funds. Selecting the appropriate funds to invest in on your own requires work. There are resources to help you with your decision. First, research the type of fund—equity or fixed income—that you wish to invest in. Then look at the funds that are available to you through your retirement plan. Be sure to consider the costs associated with investing in each fund.

Whatever investment strategy you use, remember that your personal objectives may change, making it important to reevaluate your goals annually. It is also a good idea to keep a long-term perspective when investing. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when planning your investment future:

- Make decisions based on a personalized plan, not emotions or rules of thumb.
- Not taking risk can be a risk, causing you to lose to inflation.
- But don't take excess risk to catch up or take on more risk than you can tolerate.
- Protect your family, assets, and health—be adequately insured.
- Have a contingency plan—wills and financial and medical powers of attorney. PM

For more information on investment strategies, visit the InvestSMART section of ICMA-RC's website, www.icmarc.org/investsmart.

This article is intended for educational purposes only and is not to be construed or relied upon as investment advice. ICMA-RC does not offer specific tax or legal advice and shall not have any liability for any consequences that arise from reliance on this material. It is recommended that you consult with your personal financial adviser prior to implementing any new tax or retirement strategy. ICMA Retirement Corporation, 777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-4240; 1-800-669-7400; www.icmarc.org. AC1211-5302.

JOAN MCCALLEN
President and Chief Executive Officer
ICMA-RC
Washington, D.C.
www.icmarc.org

BY JONATHAN ANDERSON

FLASH MOBS REVISITED: PUBLIC THREAT OR DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM

PM magazine's December cover article, "Flash Mobs: The Newest Threat to Local Governments," introduced a recent phenomenon. Flash mobs are "groups of people who congregate in public spaces to carry out incongruous acts and leave after a brief period of time."

Although the author noted that "most flash mobs are harmless" and that 81 percent of law enforcement agencies reported "flash mobs were not a problem in their communities," the thrust of the article, coupled with the ominous title, "Threat to Local Governments," created a sense that flash mobs are bad and implied a need for local governments to take action to monitor, control, or prevent such gatherings.

The highlighted "Takeaways" are that flash mobs are either criminal activities or "gatherings of complete strangers . . . who perform a pointless act." The reader is left with a sense that flash mobs are a potentially criminal activity.

Not the Real Story

In reality, flashmobs are a method of gathering people. Another reality is that some criminals have used social media for communications. These two realities are not the same.

In fact, flash mobs are assemblies of people protected by the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. People gather for political protest, campaigning, music, or social activities, and sometimes they gather to commit criminal activities. This is nothing new.

The real takeaway is that local governments' response to public gatherings of any kind is a serious issue. Citizens gather for many reasons, and government responses to public activities must be nuanced and selective. Recent activities of the so-called Occupy movements are only the latest incarnation of political demonstrations that are a mainstay of American culture and part of our democratic system.

Citizens demand both order and freedom, and democratic governments have always walked a tightrope of delivering the former without repressing the latter. Public assemblies of any kind confront local governments with manifestations of a vigorous democracy. A focus on order and efficiency alone negates the principles of freedom upon which this country was founded.

The First Amendment to our Constitution protects individual rights of speech, press, and assembly, as long as citizens are not engaged in breaking the law. Countless court cases have defined boundaries of acceptable law enforcement actions in traffic stops and house searches, essentially requiring a reasonable suspicion of criminal activities, not just a gathering of residents.

As local governments seek to walk the tightrope of order versus freedom, they must consider: Has a crime been committed? Is public safety so explicitly threatened that individual freedom must be controlled?

A study of police management of demonstrations by the Police Executive Research Forum begins with a comment that "Perhaps there is no greater challenge for police officers in a democracy than that of managing mass demonstrations. It is here, after all, where the competing goals of maintaining order and protecting the freedoms of speech and assembly meet."[1]

Weigh the Options

Government responses to resident assemblies generally fall into two categories; monitoring and interacting with planners of such assemblies, and managing such assemblies once they happen. Most local governments have policies surrounding the management of assemblies, demonstrations, parades, picketing, and so forth.

Where governments begin to tread on dangerous ground is when their policies or practices involve surveillance, covert activities, infiltration, or even disruption of assemblies. Freedom

and democracy were not founded on the principles of government efficiency. Making sure the trains run on time is a laudable managerial goal, but it must be informed by where those trains are going and why they are traveling there.

Surveillance and disruption of assemblies, even when legal, may lead to public suspicion of police and negate community policing goals. In August 2011, the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District disrupted cellphone reception on its trains in anticipation of a political protest. The resultant uproar was extreme, and the Federal Communications Commission opened an investigation of the action.[2] Recent use of pepper spray by campus police on nonviolent, unresisting protesters at the University of California–Davis campus was national news and cost the police chief his job.[3]

Such actions quickly break down painstakingly built bonds that authorities seek to build with their communities. Quick, short-term results may be achieved at the cost of long-term erosion of public trust and confidence. Extreme actions may be called for when there is an extreme threat to public safety, but local governments should carefully weigh the pragmatic costs and the benefits as well as the ethical impact of aggressive approaches.

There is a need for clear policies outlining operational boundaries to intelligence collection, training officers adequately, and providing an oversight mechanism for reviewing ongoing activity for continued justification. A local government manager should make sure to consult with an attorney before embarking on measures to inhibit resident gatherings that may threaten civil liberties and cause serious public relations problems.

The real takeaway is that the job of a public manager is not just to deliver goods and services but also to manage a democracy. When governments forget their larger role, the consequences for the city, state, or nation can threaten the legal, moral, and ethical foundation of our society and undermine government legitimacy. PM

WHERE GOVERNMENTS BEGIN TO TREAD ON DANGEROUS GROUND IS WHEN THEIR POLICIES OR PRACTICES INVOLVE SURVEILLANCE, COVERT ACTIVITIES, INFILTRATION, OR EVEN DISRUPTION OF ASSEMBLIES.

ENDNOTES

1 Tony Narr, Jessica Toliver, Jerry Murphy, Malcolm McFarland, and Joshua Ederheimer, "Police Management of Mass Demonstrations: Identifying Issues and Successful Approaches," (Washington, D.C.: Police Executive Research Forum, 2006), www.policeforum.org/library/critical-issues-in-policing-series/MassDemonstrations.pdf.

2 Michael Cabanatuan, "BART Cell Phone Shutdown Rules Adopted," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 2, 2011, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/12/01/BA1C1M74UB.DTL.

3 Lisa M. Krieger and Sean Webby, "UC Davis' Pepper Spray Fuels National Debate, Growing Protests," *San Jose Mercury News*, November 23, 2011, www.mercurynews.com/health/ci_19403610?source=most_viewed.

JONATHAN ANDERSON, PH.D.
Chair, Public Administration Department
California State University
San Bernardino, California
He recently served two terms on the Juneau, Alaska, City and Borough Assembly.

STATISTICS SHOW:

EMPLOYEES DON'T APPRECIATE BEING TREATED LIKE STATISTICS.

People don't like being treated like numbers. And at Cigna*, they're not. Our philosophy is simple: we treat people like individuals — employer and employees alike. It's a custom approach designed to help keep your workforce healthy and reduce costs, delivering sustainable savings of up to 26%.** And that's statistically significant.

Health benefits designed for the public sector.
Cigna.com/healthiergov

GO YOU℠

Cigna®

*Cigna Choice Fund® Experience Study, October 2010.

BY ANNA READ

SOLAR PV ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Green and energy-efficient construction and rehabilitation are becoming increasingly common in affordable housing. Building or rehabilitating affordable housing units in a green and energy-efficient way can help make affordable housing more sustainable and healthier, and, over time, energy costs for both tenants and building owners can be reduced.

Renewable energy can be an important component of green and energy-efficient construction or of retrofits of affordable housing units. Solar photovoltaic (PV) systems, in particular, can offer clean, reliable, on-site energy generation that can power common areas and residential units. Although financing for solar PV can be a challenge, several communities have pursued partnerships and found innovative financing models for installing solar PV on affordable housing developments.

Denver Program

In Denver, Colorado, the Northeast Denver Housing Center (NDHC) partnered with Del Norte Neighborhood Development Corporation, Groundwork Denver, National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), Bella Energy, and Governor's Energy Office of Colorado to install PV systems on 12 existing buildings in the Whittier Affordable Housing Project.

These PV systems, which total more than 47 kilowatts, provide energy for 30 affordable housing units. In addition to the installations, NDHC developed a solar installer job-training program for residents and provided tenant outreach and education to increase conservation.

To make the project a reality, NDHC designed an innovative financing model that leveraged private equity funding, utility rebates, federal tax credits, and public sector funding, including a $107,500 grant from the governor's energy office. The program is set up as a power purchase agreement (PPA). Through the PPA, an investor owns the PV systems for 20 years and sells the power generated to NDHC.

NDHC will have the option of purchasing the systems at the beginning of year seven at a fair market value. By using such a third-party finance model as a PPA, NDHC is able to take advantage of federal tax credits and the modified accelerated cost recovery system (MACRS) for accelerated depreciation. NDHC also leveraged Xcel Energy's Solar Rewards rebate and production incentive programs.[1]

St. Louis Reports

In St. Louis, Missouri, the St. Louis Housing Authority (SLHA), recently partnered with McCormack Baron Salazar (a St. Louis–based builder) and Sunwheel Energy Partners (a St. Louis–based renewable energy development firm) to install 618 kilowatts of solar PV on four mixed-income housing developments and SLHA's headquarters.

The solar installations, which were completed in September 2011, are providing energy to the buildings' common areas, including hallways, management buildings, and courtyards. Because of the absence of virtual net-metering in Missouri, systems are not being used to power apartments.

The installations as well as rainwater cisterns designed to reduce water usage for grounds maintenance were financed using a combination of a $5.6 million U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Capital Fund Recovery Competitive grant and a $1.5 million Section 1603 grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). SLHA and its partners were also able to leverage $2.6 million in a new market tax credit equity investment through a $9.9 million new market tax credit allocation to the project, made by RBC Community Development, LLC.[2]

California Projects

California took state-level action, establishing the multiple-family affordable solar housing program (MASH) as part of the California Solar Initiative, a state solar-rebate program for customers of investor-owned utilities. The $108 million MASH incentive program offers rebates per watt (the amount depends on whether the energy generated powers common areas or residential units) and is coupled with energy efficiency with the goals of increasing solar energy adoption and awareness of solar energy in the affordable housing sector, reducing and offsetting energy loads, and providing economic benefits to both building owners and tenants.[3]

The Housing Authority of Santa Barbara combined ARRA funding with MASH rebates to install two megawatts of solar PV on 250 buildings, providing 100 percent of the power to 863 residential units—the largest solar installation on affordable housing in the country.[4] PM

ENDNOTES

1 "Integrating Photovoltaic Systems into Low-Income Housing Developments: A Case Study on the Creation of a New Residential Financing Model and Low-Income Resident Job Training Program," U.S. Department of Energy Solar Energy Technologies Program, September 2011, www1.eere.energy.gov/solar/pdfs/51075.pdf.

2 Jennifer Dockery, "St. Louis Housing Authority Installs More Than 2,600 Solar Panels," *Novogradac Journal of Tax Credits* 2, no. 11 (2011): 1–4.

3 California Public Utilities Commission, "Decision Establishing Multifamily Affordable Solar Housing Program Within the California Solar Initiative," Decision no. 08-10-036, October 16, 2008.

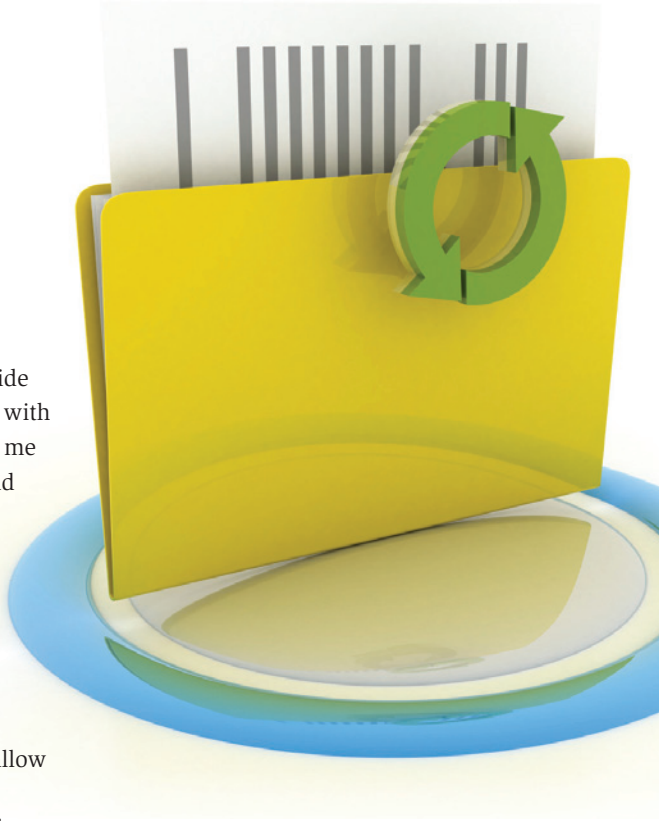
4 John Toews, "Planet Solar Completes Largest Government Solar Installation in US," *Renewable Energy World*, September 18, 2011.

ANNA READ
Project Manager
ICMA
Washington, D.C.
aread@icma.org

BY AARON CHURCH

PULSE OF BUREAUCRACY IN A REPORT

My belief in routine communication



After five years in local government management, I have concluded that the most important rule I've learned thus far is "communication." After I was the assistant to a veteran manager from 2007 to 2010, with the opportunity to learn under his leadership, I was hired by a board of commissioners in another county to assume the role of deputy county manager (as a trial of sorts) in January 2010. Then, in June 2010, I was hired as county manager. Two years later I am still in the post.

My first week on the job, I sent all the commissioners an e-mail that included the first weekly communication I prepared for them. I called it the "County Manager's Report," and I continue to send it to this day. That first issue explained that the report would provide precise information to the board on a weekly basis, and it included a disclaimer that read: "Unless otherwise directed, the county manager's office will deliver the publication by U.S. mail and by e-mail to each commissioner every Friday afternoon."

It works like this. Rain or shine, in sickness and in health, I write a report weekly and distribute it to each individual board member at the exact same time. Nothing stops me. If the board doesn't receive the report, they know that one of two things has happened—I've been kidnapped or I'm dead. If I am on vacation or attending a retreat, conference, wedding, or funeral, board members receive the report.

My weekly goal is to have the report typed no later than late Thursday evening. I begin adding information, however, as early as Monday. Aside from the needed communication with board members, the report helps me measure my own productivity and effectiveness. If Wednesday comes and there is nothing to report, I am either on vacation or not working hard enough. This self-actualization exercise motivates me to produce results that will prevent my weekly report from being shallow or laughable at best.

Does it get old? I can truthfully answer, no, it does not. It's second nature, reflective, and sometimes relaxing. It's my only constant in public service and possibly the board's, too. Sometimes it's long, sometimes it's short, but it always is there. This is likely a practice that most CEOs do in some shape or fashion and likely old news for the young and old. For me, however, it's not a task, it's a privilege.

It's not my report; it's the "County Manager's Report" that provides weekly information to the leaders who are elected by the residents they serve. It's a tool provided by a neutral, official "county manager" to the residents' representatives, and it places their fingers on the pulse of bureaucracy.

German sociologist and economist Max Weber, who asserted that bureaucracy can hinder citizens' freedom by creating an "iron cage" or a "polar night of icy darkness," would likely agree that city and county managers need elected officials to counteract their inherent bureaucratic nature, which may unintentionally isolate residents without their—and the managers'—knowledge.

Weber might also agree that weekly reports from the top of the machine can provide elected officials the knowledge to rein in irrational control and unsettling direction, while offering a more entrepreneurial spirit and fresh air to government.

Toward that end, as a younger, 33-year-old public administrator, my atypical yet fortunate situation is that I have the privilege of serving at the pleasure of five bosses who are elected from a pool of 38,000 residents every two years. And now my description of my effort to achieve constant, open, and honest communication through my weekly manager's report will be published in *PM* magazine. The commissioners were, of course, made aware of my submission to *PM* by way of the "County Manager's Report," Issue 102, December 15, 2011. PM

AARON CHURCH
County Manager
Yadkin County, North Carolina
aaronchurch@mac.com

The Center for State and Local Government Excellence

Visit slge.org to

- Download free publications on pensions, health benefits, competitive employment practices, demographic trends, and financial planning.
- Use the Public Plans Database containing comprehensive information for more than 126 state and local defined benefit plans.
- Subscribe to the Center's e-newsletter.

www.slge.org

bringing solutions into focus.

For over a decade, we've been delivering innovative thinking that strengthens organizations by bringing solutions into focus. We offer an exceptionally high level of management consulting services, combining the personal attention and flexibility of a small firm with the sophistication and senior-level expertise of a large firm.

Visit TheNovakConsultingGroup.com or call 513-221-0500 to learn how we can help you.

The Novak Consulting Group