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PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

TACKLING WICKED
PROBLEMS TAKES

Resident Engagement

Managers need to be leaders
in nurturing civic action

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

SUNDAY

Body Language Shapes Who You Are

Amy Cuddy

Social psychologist, Harvard Business School professor, and one of *Time* magazine's "Game Changers" of 2012

TUESDAY

Smart Communities and the Opportunities of "Big Data"

Beth Simone Noveck

First U.S. deputy chief technology officer, and founder and director of the White House Open Government Initiative

MONDAY

Leadership and the New Principles of Influence

Daniel Pink

Author of five provocative bestselling books about the changing world of work

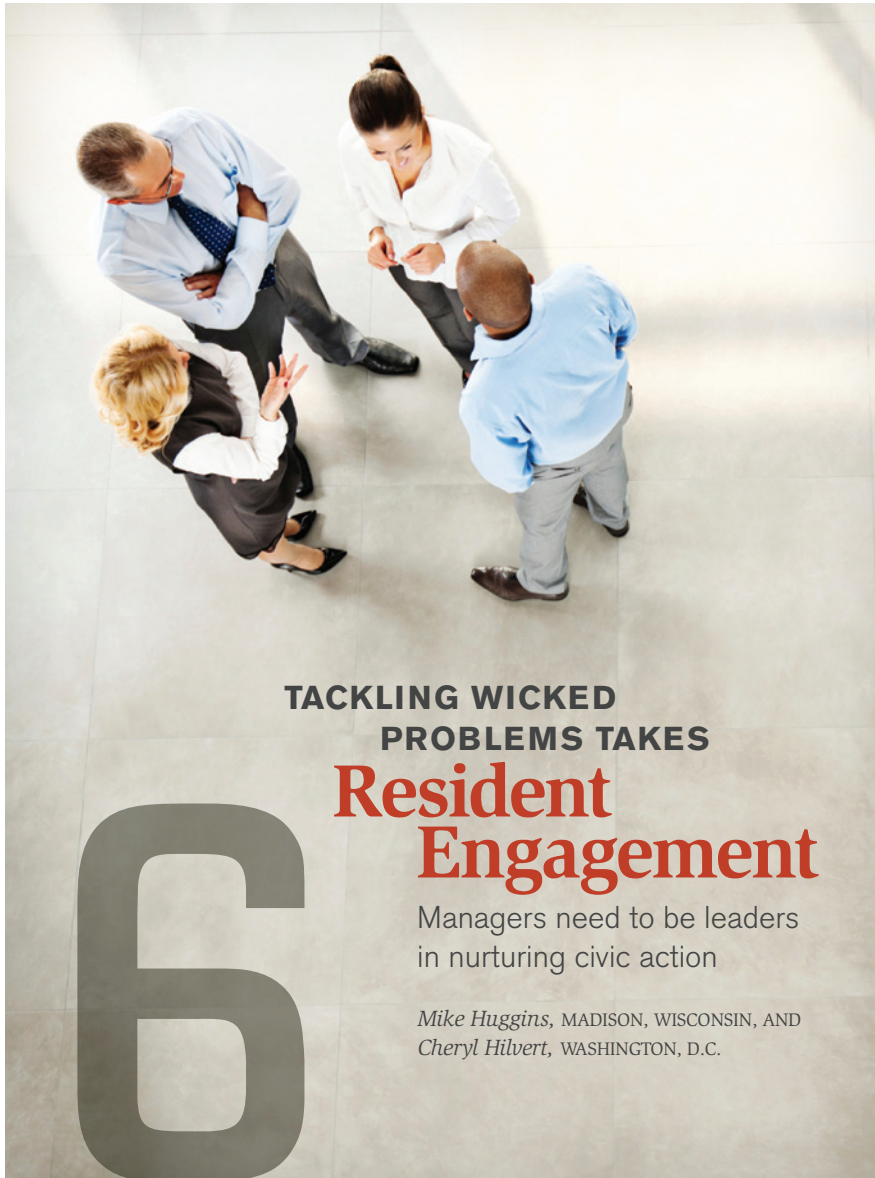**WEDNESDAY**

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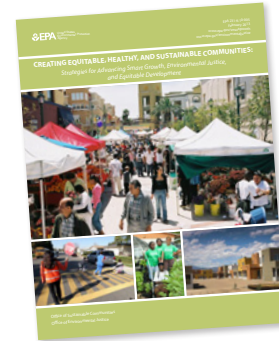
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Managers need to be leaders
in nurturing civic action

Mike Huggins, MADISON, WISCONSIN, AND
Cheryl Hilvert, WASHINGTON, D.C.

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at icma.org/pm August 1, 2013.

features

BY MARTHA PEREGO

YOU DID WHAT?

Making ethics choices

A lot can be learned from the choices that local government managers and staff make as they navigate the challenges of their work day. On the ethics front, some of those choices just make us want to ask, "You did what?"

Here are five quick scenarios based on recent headlines or cases reported to ICMA that definitely serve up some important lessons:

Facebook is not private. The now former human relations director of a county learned this lesson after posting several work-related comments on her personal Facebook page. The most notable of which were these two: "Btw, obviously, I do not want anyone to know I am able to get into the county's cell info," and "And for goodness sake, all of us have got to remember (esp. my boss!) that we cannot trust commissioners!!"

There is perhaps another lesson to be learned here. Don't trash the organization's leadership, as it is not at all constructive in the effort to build good working relationships between elected officials and staff.

E-mail isn't private either. Using his city e-mail account, a department director kept in contact with a councilmember and candidate for mayor from his former city. In addition to offering advice on how to manage the city, the department director criticized the performance of the city manager.

In one e-mail, the department director said that he hoped that after the election the new council would terminate the manager. The councilmember sent the department director one of the city manager's e-mail exchanges with council.

The department director forwarded the e-mail to the mayoral candidate with the note that the city manager's response was "insubordination and should be added to the list of actions to justify termination for just cause." The e-mails were disclosed as part of a public records request and submitted to ICMA as documentation of an alleged ethics violation. This department director was publicly censured by ICMA and barred from rejoining the association.

Secrecy is a long-odds strategy without a safety net. While serving as the lead negotiator for a local government during contract discussions, a staff member engaged in an undisclosed romantic relationship with the lead negotiator for the union. When the relationship was finally disclosed, the fallout—including termination of the staff member—was harmful to all involved.

Sitting on the sidelines, this ending was easy to call. After all, there are no secrets in city hall.

If the deal sounds too good to be true, it's probably fraud. A county manager paid $900 in a cash transaction with the county IT director to obtain four iPhones and one iPad for personal use and as gifts for family members. The manager thought all was fine because the county had a past practice of allowing employees to piggyback on county contracts.

And how was this different from the other discounts offered to public employees by various service providers? Plus, the opportunity to purchase equipment for personal use through the county's contracts was not limited to just the manager. The IT director would announce the opportunity at staff meetings.

It turned out, however, that the IT director charged the equipment purchases designated for personal use back to the county and kept the employee payments. The manager's $900 "deal" cost the county $2,400.

AFTER ALL, THERE ARE NO SECRETS IN CITY HALL.

According to media reports, a prior audit had recommended that the organization segregate the equipment ordering and receiving functions, a checks-and-balance approach that, if heeded, might have prevented the fraud.

A ship with no captain will run aground. Google the words "Dixon Illinois embezzlement." It may be the single largest episode of municipal fraud in the most unlikely of places.

Dixon is a community of 16,000 residents with an annual general operating budget in the range of $10 million. The former comptroller was sentenced this year to serve 20 years in prison for embezzling $53 million from the town over the course of 20 years.

Dixon operated under a commission form of government with part-time elected officials overseeing local government operations. There was no fulltime manager on site.

Over time, the comptroller was given or allowed to assume the function of treasurer as well. The basic managerial oversight and segregation of duties that would serve to reduce the risk of fraud was simply not in place.

Real world examples described here can serve to remind us all to give serious consideration to our conduct. Would our conduct elicit this "They did what?" response from our peers? **PM**

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

WHAT HAS BEEN A DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING MOMENT IN YOUR CAREER, AND HOW DID THAT EXPERIENCE TRANSFORM YOU AS A LEADER?

SUSAN STEELE
Township Manager
Half Moon Township,
Pennsylvania
manager@halfmoontwp.us

The most challenging moment of my career is when the wishes of elected officials are not necessarily the same as those of the majority of residents.

I have seen this happen various times throughout my management career. The challenge is that I must implement what elected officials request, but once this is done and residents feel it is inconsistent with their desires, they blame the manager. The result is that, in turn, elected officials blame the manager and the staff when opposition occurs.

I learned to do the research, make the recommendation in writing to the elected officials, and then if controversy arises, there is written documentation on the recommendation.

This approach seems to work well with officials and agrees with the system of checks and balances.

CHRIS KUKULSKI, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Bozeman, Montana
ckukulski@bozeman.net

This past year I had half of my director team in transition. Having the good fortune of managing a growing city, I never thought to slow down. We continued moving full speed ahead on accomplishing the city commission's many priorities.

I knew my leadership resources had diminished but failed to step back, reassess, and establish a clear new direction until late in the year.

As the organization's leader, I gained new appreciation for matching expectations and resources and the need to clearly communicate when the reevaluation of priorities and resources is necessary for the overall health of the organization.

BARBARA MATTHEWS, ICMA-CM
City Manager
Rockville, Maryland
bmatthews@rockvillemd.gov

Approximately two months into my first assistant manager's job, the city manager was terminated for refusing to fire a high-level management staff member. I was asked by the city council to be the acting city manager and was faced with the same decision that had resulted in my former boss's termination.

As I was only 25 years old at the time, the possibility of being fired so early in my career was a bit daunting. I was fortunate to have had the ethical example of the former manager to follow and the sound advice of my father who told me: "There are worse things in life than losing your job."

I kept my job after also refusing to fire the staff member. This experience brought home the tough decisions that local government managers have to make. And I've always remembered my former boss's sage advice to keep two words in mind as I went forward in my career— severance agreement.

PAUL AREVALO
City Manager
West Hollywood, California
parevalo@weho.org

I began working for the city of West Hollywood, a progressive city with a significant number of gay and lesbian employees, in the early 1990s. This was at the height of the AIDS/HIV pandemic, and I was quickly immersed in dealing with the devastating effects of the disease. It was with tragic regularity that we would lose employees and city residents to the illness.

City hall staff supported each other as a family, both in living with the illness and in creating a support network as we lost our friends.

Initially, I was not prepared to deal with the crisis, but I was fortunate to learn from a caring community, which over the years witnessed both tragedy and heroic efforts to support one and another.

This early experience shaped me to be a compassionate leader. **PM**

1

WOULD YOU RATHER TELECOMMUTE?

Is telecommuting right for your local government? Here are resources that can help managers evaluate the benefits and the pitfalls.

▶ icma.org/telecommute_benefits

2

PROVIDING A ROAD MAP FOR DECENTRALIZATION

Recommendations for strengthening the municipal finance system in Lebanon, developed in part by members participating in a World Bank-funded ICMA project, were incorporated into a draft decentralization law at the national level.

▶ icma.org/lebanon
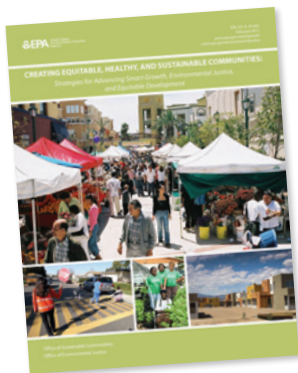
3

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE DECISIONS

Strategies outlined in a document at this site can help communities shape development and make land use decisions that are equitable, healthy, and sustainable for all residents.

▶ icma.org/equitable_development

4

STRATEGIC PLANNING LESSONS

Need help developing a strategic plan? Examine what Albany, Oregon, has planned for its future, including goals and measurable objectives.

▶ icma.org/strategic_albany

TACKLING WICKED PROBLEMS TAKES

Resident Engagement

Managers need to be leaders
in nurturing civic action

By Mike Huggins and Cheryl Hilvert

TAKEAWAYS

This article will:

› Challenge managers to think differently and expand efforts to truly engage with community members.

› Identify resources and strategies to strengthen public problem solving and navigate the challenges of local government management.

Local governments throughout the United States and many of the world's democracies are struggling to adapt to a paradigm shift—one that is resetting the roles and responsibilities of local governments, residents, and the private sector in how communities govern themselves. In the United States, disruptions to public services reached crisis proportions following the 2008 collapse in the housing market and global financial meltdown. Fiscal instability continues to plague many U.S. local and state governments.

The impact of these changing conditions is compounded by a half-century trend of local government, education, and community civic institutions becoming more task- and service-oriented, as well as organizational cultures becoming increasingly hierarchical, narrow in scope, and expert defined.

As a result, local community governance and public problem solving have become more detached from the ordinary citizen. This has led to more limited and fragmented public roles for residents, while at the same time, greatly diminishing the capacities of communities to collectively take action on the issues that confront them.

In dealing with the local impacts of national and global issues and the myriad other problems confronting local governments, managers must do so in a public policy context more frequently characterized by widely dispersed expertise in the community, rapidly expanding social media platforms and venues for sharing information and opinions, more organized and active

advocacy groups, more incivility in public discourse, and a declining public trust in government.

"Wicked" Problems

The difficult issues and challenging environments confronting local governments result in managers operating more and more in the realm of what may be called wicked problems: complex, interdependent issues that lack a clear problem definition and involve the conflicting perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

Solutions to these problems are not right or wrong, only better or worse. Wicked problems rarely yield to a linear approach in which problems are defined, analyzed, and addressed in a sequential and orderly fashion.

Rather, the most effective strategies appear to be more open-ended and focused on producing ongoing collaboration and engagement with all stakeholders, including community residents and nongovernmental organizations, to find the most acceptable solution.

While collaboration and engagement are suggested as an appropriate approach to wicked problems, to many this represents a challenge that is wicked in and of itself. Many managers simply don't know where to begin, how to plan effective programs for engagement, how to measure their efforts, or where to turn for resources and assistance.

Emerging Engagement Strategies

Ray Kingsbury, cofounder of the Montgomery, Ohio, Citizens' Leadership Academy, believes it is essential for local government to take a more robust approach to engagement—one that empowers residents to take action, rebuilds trust with local government, and "harvests the experience dividend" that residents bring to public problem solving.

Billed as the "Coolest Civics Class You'll Ever Take," the Montgomery Leadership Academy takes a different twist on the traditional local government citizens' academy by minimizing the use of organizational charts and PowerPoint presentations to describe what city and county departments do. Instead, Montgomery's 10-session academy engages participants in conversations about aspirations for their communities and creating opportunities for participants, officials, and staff to work together on community issues and projects.

Kingsbury issues a challenge to managers saying, "Local government leaders need to understand that government is not the epicenter, but rather a *subset* of the community," adding that successful and positive community engagement requires local governments to move from:

- Directive to facilitative leadership.
- Monologue to dialogue.
- Customer service to collaboration and co-creation.
- Distrust to trust.
- Entitlement to ownership.

In her book *Bringing Citizen Voices to the Table: A Guide for Public Managers*,[1] Carolyn Lukensmeyer explores the concept of shared responsibility for civic engagement and identifies three essential roles to ensure that engagement becomes the mechanism through which local government business is accomplished:

- *Residents* need to have to embrace an active role in their communities and demand that they be given authentic opportunities to participate on a regular basis.
- *Elected officials* need to ensure opportunities for civic participation.
- *Public managers* need to embed citizen engagement in the work of the local government.

The Alliance for Innovation white paper *Connected Communities: Local Government as a Partner in Citizen Engagement and Community Building* (see Endnotes for website link) discusses how local governments can be active contributors and facilitators for meaningful resident engagement.

The report draws a distinction between *exchange* activities that provide information, build transparency, invite input and survey opinion, and *engagement* activities that move involvement to a higher level of interaction and provide opportunities for residents and officials "to listen to and learn from each other and to work together over time to address issues or problems they feel are important."[2]

The report concludes that "citizen engagement focuses on revitalizing democracy, building citizenship, and reinforcing a sense of community, and it cannot be equated with one-way exchanges between government and citizens."[3]

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) offers the Public Participation Spectrum that further elaborates on the distinction between exchanges with citizens and citizen engagement, identifying five levels of interactions ranging from simply *informing* citizens to fully *empowering* them to make decisions. With each increasing type of interaction, the potential impact of the public participation on the actual decision increases.

The IAP2 spectrum advocates for local governments to identify the objec-

> # While collaboration and engagement are suggested as an appropriate approach to problems, to many it represents a challenge that is wicked in and of itself.

tive of the engagement activity and the promise it intends to make to its citizens. It further concludes that not all resident engagement is the same, and the design and format of the engagement needs to be matched to purpose and intended outcomes of the engagement activity.

Bridging the "Engagement Gaps"

For most local governments, an effective civic engagement strategy will likely incorporate multiple levels of interaction described in the IAP2 Spectrum (see Figure 1). Not all participants will choose to engage at the highest level chosen; some will engage at lower levels based on their interest and available time.

In a collaborative approach, for example, some citizens will participate directly as members of a working group, still more will attend workshops or meetings (likely the "Involve" level, Figure 1), others will share input online ("Consult"), and even more stay connected through media and websites but not provide input ("Inform").

Thus, local governments are required to use a variety of approaches that will effectively engage a wide range of stakeholders where they wish to participate, while at the same time encouraging the interactions to shift from simple "exchanges with citizens" to more robust "citizen engagement."

Regardless of the approaches taken, author Matt Leighninger of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium[4] warns of typical gaps that can lessen the effectiveness or even derail engagement strategies. These gaps include:

- The lack of cross-sector plans or structures that embed and sustain engagement.
- The need for tracking, measuring, and assessing participation.
- The use of online engagement that supports and complements face-to-face opportunities.
- The need to bring a diversity of viewpoints and backgrounds to the table.

A local government manager should be aware of the potential presence of the gaps in their community's civic engagement strategy. Addressing the potential for them begins with a commitment to planning and measuring various meaningful engagement opportunities (both online and face-to-face) for people across all sectors of their community.

Opportunities need to be created where community members can expect the chance to listen to one another, to compare values and experiences, and to make the decision to become engaged, ultimately feeling that their opinions and actions make a difference.

Moving Forward With Engagement

The *Connected Communities* report concludes that engagement is both the right and smart thing for local governments to do, and in the current environment of reduced resources and wicked problems, should be looked at as a mandatory skill for managers—and something they must learn to do well.

There is no single best way to achieve engagement or one technique or format that serves all engagement purposes. Recent public engagement research from a variety of sources,[5] however, consistently suggests similar types of strategies for any engagement effort.

Building upon these research findings, here are 10 suggestions that managers should consider in building an effective engagement strategy for their communities:

1. Take stock of what you are already doing, distinguishing between exchange and engagement efforts.
2. Assess how receptive your organization is to initiatives from community groups and to what extent your organizational culture supports civic engagement.
3. Work with your elected officials to convene a community conversation on engagement to hear from residents how they wish to be involved in shaping community life and how local government could contribute to meeting their aspirations.

FIGURE 1. IAP2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM.

LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION	EXCHANGES WITH CITIZENS		CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT		
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
OBJECTIVE	Provide the public with balanced and objective information and assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendation into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	Fact sheets; Websites; Open houses.	Public comment; Focus groups; Surveys; Public meetings.	Workshops Deliberative polling.	Citizen Advisory Committees; Consensus building; Participatory decision making.	Citizen juries; Ballots; Delegated decisions.

Source: International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), www.iap2.org. Used with permission.

JOIN THE CMS DISCUSSION

Be part of ICMA's conversation on civic engagement by visiting these websites:

▸ **Center for Management Strategies (CMS):** icma.org/managementstrategies.

▸ **CMS Knowledge Network Group featuring posted reports and documents:** icma.org/cmsgroup.

▸ **CMS blog, featuring commentary by technical assistance providers and specialists:** icma.org/cmsblog.

▸ **Civic engagement Knowledge Network group:** icma.org/kn/citizenengagement.

4. Identify potential issues that need resident engagement and involvement, including new ways staff could interact with residents in the day-to-day delivery of services.

5. Plan an engagement event by matching the purpose and intended outcomes with the appropriate technique and activity.

6. Actively recruit diverse stakeholder groups beyond the "usual suspects" who always participate.

7. Provide participants multiple opportunities to compare values and interests and articulate self-interests, and include opportunities in both large forums and small-group discussions.

8. Seek to combine both online and face-to-face engagement opportunities and venues.

9. Design engagement initiatives to move from talk to action by identifying tangible goals and desired outcomes; then, measure your success.

10. Develop an ongoing program in partnership with residents and community organizations to build meaningful engagement and facilitate resident problem solving in the work of local government.

A Call to Action

While there are a variety of resources available that can assist managers in developing an engagement strategy for their communities, getting started can be difficult. In fact, when local elected officials were asked in a 2006 National League of Cities survey[6] about the main obstacles to pursuing engagement activities, the most common response was the "lack of training." Many felt that both they and staff needed more background in how to recruit participants, facilitate meetings, frame issues, and move from talk to action in engagement settings.

Toward this end, ICMA's Center for Management Strategies (CMS) and its partners, the Alliance for Innovation and Arizona State University, have completed research into the field of civic engagement, identifying both best and leading practices as well as key experts and practitioners to assist managers in implementing effective strategies for engagement in their communities.

Key findings of this research,[7] suggest:

1. When done well, citizen engagement has been shown to be both the *right* thing to do in terms of promoting democracy and community building, but also to be the *smart* thing to do in terms of creating better decisions and policies, improving civility and trust in government, and fostering an educated and engaged citizenry.

2. There is a need for a more comprehensive, intentional, and holistic approach to citizen engagement that brings together actors and agencies throughout a municipality, instead of one-shot activities that occur in isolation.

   One way to begin is by conducting a comprehensive assessment of existing capacities and past strategies and experiences. It may be necessary to examine and possibly revise current legal mandates and existing policies and procedures related to engaging with the public.

3. Beyond integrated plans within the formal governmental body, it is also important to develop cross-sector plans that embed and sustain engagement throughout communities.

4. There is a wide range of activities and techniques that can be used to engage with citizens. Before focusing on a particular tool or technique, it is important to first establish the purpose of the particular initiative (why engage?) and be clear upfront about the "promise to the public" in regard to ways that residents can engage and what they can reasonably expect in terms of how their participation will be used (to what end?).

At the end of the day, effective civic action and problem solving depends on ordinary individuals thinking of themselves as productive people who hold themselves accountable—people who can build things, do things, come up with ideas and resources, and be bold in their approach. Communities need places and spaces where people can develop their civic capacities and their public lives.

Local governments need to recognize the importance of engagement work as well as the need for effective plans for engagement and ways to measure the results of their efforts. The local government manager will play a key leadership role in achieving these goals. **PM**

MIKE HUGGINS, ICMA-CM, a former city manager, is principal, Public Collaboration Strategies, Madison, Wisconsin (hugginsmw@gmail.com). **CHERYL HILVERT**, ICMA-CM, a former city manager, is director, ICMA Center for Management Strategies (CMS), Washington, D.C. (chilvert@icma.org). CMS delivers educational programming, as well as technical assistance and information sharing, and can be a resource for a local government pursuing civic engagement.

ENDNOTES

1 "Bringing Citizen Voices to the Table: A Guide for Public Managers," Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer, Jossey Bass Books, 2012.

2 "Connected Communities: Local Government as a Partner in Citizen Engagement and Community Building," James Svara and Janet Denhardt, eds. Alliance for Innovation, 2010.

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6 William Barnes and Bonnie Mann, "Making Local Democracy Work: Municipal Officials Views about Public Engagement," National League of Cities, 2010 Research Report, pg. 21.

7 Summary of key findings of AFI/ASU/ICMA research courtesy of Kelly Campbell Rawlings, Ph.D; Assistant Research Professor; School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University.

KEY RESOURCES

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Is your community's voice being heard?

CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS:
10 STEPS TO IMPROVING YOUR ODDS

By Robert Belleman, ICMA-CM

Strong labor relations and communications can offer considerable benefits, especially when it comes to contract negotiations. Labor negotiations are essential to local government management and can create a forum to share the community's vision and goals.

During the past 16 years, I have had the opportunity to directly and indirectly negotiate collective bargaining agreements in two Michigan communities influenced by the auto industry, the economic decline, and the state's legislative directives. During this time, I have gained great insight on what contributes to successful contract negotiations and builds better labor relations.

Here are 10 recommended practices for achieving success. »

1 Do your homework and know the law.

Have a solid understanding of state and federal labor law. Know what topics are considered mandatory or permissive subjects of bargaining, how to retain flexibility on agreed-upon proposals (tentative agreements), what to do when you reach an impasse, and how to implement your "last best offer."

To obtain a better understanding of labor law, you could attend seminars and workshops, read arbitration awards, and converse with your community's legal counsel. Significant knowledge can be gained through experience and learning from your mistakes.

2 Develop a strategy and understand the financial implications.

When preparing for labor negotiations, it is important to develop a strategy on what economic and non-economic issues are most important to your organization. It is also imperative that the community's negotiating team fully analyze its position on issues prior to and throughout negotiations.

Communities often overlook the full impact that proposals and tentative agreements have on their finances. Longevity payments, for example, were common in collective bargaining agreements and typically represented a small annual payment. These payments, however, have grown as an overall share of labor costs.

When considering cost-containment options, the payments are possible topics for negotiations. Communities typically freeze longevity pay for existing recipients and eliminate eligibility for new employees.

One way of identifying the elements of the contract that need to be modified is to review grievances or problems that have developed during the past several years. Common issues are promotions, holiday pay—especially for employees required to work or on call for an emergency—and more recently, layoff procedures.

A manager's strategy offers a basic plan for negotiations but it should not be set in stone. Be willing to modify your strategy based on counter proposals received or how the negotiation process is proceeding.

3 Be prepared to give on something.

The art of negotiating is the ability to compromise, which requires both parties to modify initial offers and demands. You and your team must understand the bottom line and be

early on whether you plan to play a direct or indirect role in negotiations. If you elect to play an indirect role, you should be prepared to offer opening comments and to set the stage, including communicating that the community's chief negotiator is empowered to make decisions.

Then empower that person to make the necessary decisions regarding modifications to proposals and live with the changes. You may find value in scheduling periodic meetings with your chief negotiator to act as a sounding board.

> One of the most overlooked causes of failed negotiations is a lack of understanding of the issues. It is imperative that the community's negotiating team fully explain its proposals and why it is necessary to seek the change in contract terms.

prepared to withdraw other issues. It is typical for negotiating teams to submit a laundry list of non-economic and economic issues for negotiations.

Non-economic issues generally require an open discussion on operational needs and the reasons behind the proposal. These discussions can lead to improved procedures and enhanced communication. Economic issues are typically the heart of negotiations.

Employers attempt to maintain consistent benefits, while unions attempt to address their unit's individual needs. The ability to compromise is the key to successful negotiations.

4 Keep the players the same.

It is important that the negotiating team members remain the same. You, as the manager, will need to decide

Likewise, it is important for the union to have its negotiating team remain unchanged. Negotiations are slowed when players change.

5 Make it a priority.

Labor negotiations occur every two to four years. At least six months prior to contract expiration, you should commence negotiations for a successor agreement.

Once contract negotiations begin, it is vital for you or your negotiation team to dedicate the necessary time and energy to reach agreement. You should be prepared to meet regularly—multiple times a week, if necessary—to remain on schedule.

During negotiations on economic matters, meetings may need to be farther apart to ensure you allow enough time for financial analysis as it may be required in making sound proposals and

counter proposals. Making yourself available will ensure negotiations progress.

6 Be professional and respectful.

Labor negotiations have the potential to become personal, especially with heightened frustrations and in light of difficult economic times. You will need to ensure the parties remain professional and respectful.

Setting ground rules at the beginning of negotiations is helpful. You should request a break or caucus when it appears tempers are flaring or reschedule the negotiations when progress appears unlikely. Keep in mind the importance of maintaining long-term positive labor relations. Allowing negotiations to get personal will only delay achieving your goal.

7 Hold your ground.

There will be certain topics (e.g., organizational restructuring) that you will propose to ensure the long-term financial health of your community. You should share those issues with your union(s) and clearly explain why you believe the matter is difficult to modify.

The community is not required to move from every position it takes; however, it is required to listen to the union on concerns it may have with regard to the implementation of the matter and address any valid concerns, especially ones that could affect working conditions. Employers should be prepared to "hold their ground" on proposed policy changes.

8 Lead by example.

When pursuing reduction in labor costs, you should lead by example. You must firmly believe in the change you are attempting to implement (e.g., a new health plan, a modified retirement program) because it is vital to the long-term financial health of the community.

As such, you should demonstrate your commitment by reflecting those changes in an employment contract or benefit schedule. When you lead by example,

you remove the long-standing claim that management is unwilling to live by the same terms as front-line employees.

9 Build relationships.

The most important element to labor negotiations is a strong relationship with the unions. Open and honest communication is instrumental in building trust and the foundation for these relationships.

The trust and communication must extend beyond contact negotiations. It is okay to "agree to disagree" with the union and still maintain the strong relationship.

10 Explain your proposals to educate and engage.

One of the most overlooked causes of failed negotiations is a lack of understanding of the issues. It is imperative that the community's negotiating team fully explain its proposals and why it is necessary to seek the change in contract terms. You should invite the primary

stakeholders into negotiations to be a part of the discussions on a particular proposal that may impact operations.

Likewise, it is just as important for the union to explain its position and for you and your team to fully understand what would be accomplished if the proposed language is accepted. Failure to fully understand the issues could cause frustrations; result in grievances; and, ultimately, damage relationships.

As I advanced to larger organizations during my career, I learned to rely heavily on the human resource director to negotiate contracts but also to remain supportive of the process and committed to these practices. I hope these 10 practices assist you and your negotiating team in achieving increased success and improved labor relations. **PM**

ROBERT BELLEMAN, ICMA-CM, is controller/chief administrative officer, Saginaw County, Michigan (rbelleman@saginawcounty.com).

DAYTON ★

● MIDDLETOWN

★ CINCINNATI

MEET ME IN THE
MIDDLE

How one city partnered for a brighter future

By Judith Gilleland and Noah Powers

TAKEAWAYS

› Innovative methods can allow local governments to leverage public-private partnerships to foster new outlets for local economic development opportunities.

› Public-private partnerships are allowing local governments new ways to target their revitalization efforts.

› Localities can aide job growth in their region by using public-private partnerships to prime their area workforce for business investment.

MIDDLETOWN, OHIO, is located midway between Cincinnati and Dayton. It has faced systemic problems generated from the loss of manufacturing jobs and a mismatch between area workforce skills and local employer demands. In 2008, the city was infamously declared by *Forbes* magazine to be among the fastest-dying cities in the nation. Since that time it has witnessed a remarkable change in course.

Middletown has made this exciting turnaround possible by developing substantial public-private partnerships throughout the community. The past five years have seen a flurry of activity on the part of local officials, residents, businesses, business groups, and educational institutions. These new partnerships have given local officials new latitude to attack problems that have been systemic in Middletown for years.

Minding Medical Needs

The first of these significant partnerships began with selecting and developing the location for what would become the Atrium Medical Center. This medical center alone represented a $195 million investment, and the surrounding medical campus represented a total investment of $300 million.

After completion of the medical center it became necessary to ensure the stability of staffing it. This prompted Middletown, the Warren County Port Authority, Miami University, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, Warren County Career Center, and Atrium Medical Center to all partner together to create the $7.6 million Greentree Health Science Academy, which first opened its doors in August 2011.

This academy allows nearly 700 high school to undergraduate students at different academic institutions to receive training for a career in health care while gaining real world experience. At the same time, Greentree reduces the costs of operations by sharing a single facility among several institutions.

Greentree has been a success, and Middletown was recently recognized for its involvement in the project by being awarded the 2013 Ohio City/County Management Association's Community Partnership Award. More than 150 Greentree students have completed their clinicals at Atrium Medical Center. Today, Greentree ensures that Atrium Medical Center is well staffed and that Middletown-area residents have a new avenue in the pursuit of social mobility.

Cultivating the Arts

The city continued to pursue new partnerships with the creation of the Pendleton Art Center (PAC) in downtown Middletown, helping to fund and renovate the building site that would eventually become the center. The building where PAC is located sat vacant for nearly 20 years.

Recognizing that this building could be an asset rather than a liability, the city, supported by community members and arts activists, partnered in 2010 with The Verdin Company, a 170-year-old maker of bronze clocks and bells, to bring PAC to Middletown. This art center features studio space for nearly 80 local artists and galleries.

With its grand opening in April 2011, PAC is open to the public the first Friday and Saturday of each month. These public events allow residents and visitors to view and purchase high-quality and locally produced works of art.

In fact, the entire downtown area comes alive for First Fridays and Second Look Saturdays, which feature special monthly events that average nearly 2,000 visitors. Middletown's already strong arts community, along with PAC, now serve as economic drivers for the downtown area.
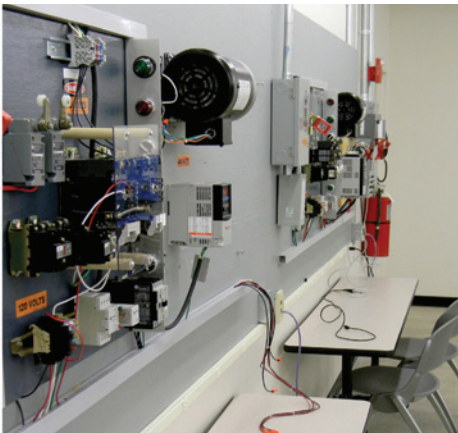
In August 2012, a new branch campus of Cincinnati State Technical and Community College opened in downtown Middletown, Ohio, making it the first and only community college in Butler County, Ohio.

Photos courtesy of Mark Reedy, Middletown, Ohio.

Opening a New Branch Campus

Although Middletown has a number of public-private partnerships on which to hang its proverbial hat, the most recent may be the most impressive. On August 29, 2012, the new branch campus of Cincinnati State Technical and Community College opened its doors in downtown Middletown, making it the first and only community college in Butler County, Ohio.

Cincinnati State joins Miami University as the second provider of higher education in Middletown, assuring the availability of educational opportunities to students from a wide array of backgrounds and at different levels of education.

The opening of the college in August 2012 was the culmination of a four-year partnership between Middletown and Cincinnati State. This partnership had its inception when a local businessman approached the Cincinnati State president about conducting some of the school's operations in Middletown.

Later, the partnership began to fully develop in October 2010 when the Cincinnati State board of trustees agreed to begin negotiations with the city on locating a branch campus in downtown Middletown.

The city's elected officials were prepared to walk hand-in-hand with Cincinnati State to make certain that every step toward opening the new branch campus would be successful. In order to help accommodate the facility needs of a college campus, Middletown agreed to acquire several properties without a signed agreement with the university to ensure their availability. This was a risk worth taking, and the city believed in the vision.

In preparing the new facilities, Cincinnati State decided to work with Higher Education Partners, Inc., a Massachusetts-based company that provides capital start-up costs so that community colleges can fund new infrastructure and facilities. The company agreed to acquire and manage the new branch campus facilities, and Middletown remained closely involved to make sure all the necessary properties were obtained.

The city sold one of the buildings it had acquired to the company and donated a second building. These buildings were capable of handling Cincinnati State's needs and what it was planning to accomplish.

The college was one of only two of Ohio's 61 colleges to see an increase in enrollment this past year. The Middletown campus saw more than 350 students attend classes in its inaugural semester. Of these students, 247 were completely new to the Cincinnati State community. This was a positive first step for the continued development of Cincinnati State Middletown.

Gearing Up for More Growth

The enrollment figure is expected to increase significantly over the next several years until the campus reaches an enrollment of nearly 3,000 students. This increase in downtown traffic from local students should help to drive additional growth in the area, particularly for restaurants and small shops.

Cincinnati State offers students 13 associate degrees and five certification programs, which span a wide variety of interests including accounting technology, criminal justice, social work, business management technology, public safety technology and others, along with several health care-related courses. Certificates can be earned in such areas as paralegal, medical coding, human services, and others.

Cincinnati State also offers training through its workforce development program, which currently has a training agreement with AK Steel, one of the city's largest employers. The college

plans to expand the role of its workforce development program at the Middletown campus, thereby increasing the college's exposure to the business community.

This will help the college to fulfill its goal of gearing its programs to meet the needs of local businesses. By accomplishing this goal, the college will be able to generate highly employable graduates with skills that match the demands of local employers, priming the Middletown area workforce for future growth.

Cincinnati State's new downtown home near the Pendleton Art Center and the nationally known BeauVerre Riordan Stained Glass Studio are expected to increase the profile and

attractiveness of the city's urban core. These institutions provide a foundation to support new and developing businesses of all sorts.

In the coming months, the downtown area expects to see restaurants and other local businesses take root. With future projects already in the works, the redevelopment of downtown Middletown is off to a fast start! **PM**

JUDITH GILLELAND is city manager, Middletown, Ohio (judyg@cityofmiddletown.org), and **NOAH POWERS** is human resources manager, Middletown (noahp@cityofmiddletown.org).

The new public-private partnerships have given local officials new latitude to attack problems that have been systemic in Middletown for years.

BY GARIN GIACOMARRO

GETTING TO KNOW GENERATION Y

Instead of clashing head-on, learn the language of this new wave of workers

I'm slouching down in my chair, eyes intent on the floor, as I try to shrink away from my current situation. On the projector screen in front of me and 40 of my newly met colleagues is a popular online video that is primarily made up of questions posed by an off screen individual and the answers of current college students.

The room is howling in laughter. These wide-eyed 18- and 19-year-olds are expecting to make how much in their first job? They expect to be promoted when? They got *that* degree and expect to find an actual job? I weep for future generations.

These interviews are slowly phased out by the more reasonable, middle-aged managers who are stating plainly what they expect. "If your job starts at 9 a.m. and that's when you arrive, you're late." The whole room nods in agreement. "It's not about doing what you want or what interests you. It's about being productive." Universal agreement rings out.

Understanding the Disconnect

The video ends and the room as a whole moves on in conversation. I, on the other hand, can't shake the experience. Are people my age really that bad? Is there something inherently wrong with those

who have never known a Reagan presidency or why Michael Jackson was such a big deal? I first feel embarrassed, then defensive, and finally contemplative. Where is this disconnect coming from?

I have so often heard the near-universal assessment that people entering the workforce these days are both lazy and entitled. Once they get to a point in their career, they expect to be handed the reward for it and for their subsequent work to be directed at their next advancement. Where did we learn such ungrateful behavior?

I've grown up in a generation that was told day in and day out, "Work hard, do good in school, go to college, get a good job, and have a fruitful life." Millions of children were sold on the idea that, if you do A, B and C, you get what you want. We were raised on this philosophy and continue to rely on it.

What does it take to get into a credible four-year university? Primarily,

it relies on your standardized score. If a university's average SAT score is 1950, getting above that means you're in. It's a plateau mentality that says: If you just accomplish this goal, you get to reap all of the reward after it. It's still hard work; it's just of a different variety.

The first instinct of Generation Y isn't to plan out how to save up money every month; it's to figure out a way to get more money with one plateau-forming act. It's a change in budget or a new job. Our hard work is discovering that solution and making it happen. We accomplish goals to obtain things.

We've been told all of our lives to love what you do. Movies, parents, society, media—you name it—all of them paint a picture of having a job that is fulfilling and that still allows us to live the way we're used to. Is it really so mysterious why a college student who has lived comfortably his or her entire life graduates with an art or philosophy degree?

"Go to college, get a good job, live a fruitful life." We've done Step 1 in our plan of accomplishment. It's Step 2 that eludes us, and we don't have the skills necessary to adapt easily to it. We've been taught checklists, not strategies.

Time management is another issue that generates criticism for my generation. Often times, working from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. doesn't seem as critical to us as it does to others. Older generations' instinct is to call this laziness, and for many, you'd be right. However, I'd ask managers to look at the whole context.

We've been raised with heroes like Gates, Jobs, and Zuckerberg. These are business leaders with incomplete educations who didn't become rich and famous by always working exactly eight hours a day with a 60-minute lunch and not one minute over. They did it by loving their job, being entrepreneurial, working without a clock, and accomplishing things at a meteoric rate.

We've been raised to question the traditional model, even be wary of it. Why make a person work for eight hours

when he or she can accomplish everything that needs to be completed in six? It seems so obvious to us, but it comes across as lethargy to those who measure their work ethic by the number of hours worked in a week.

Tips on Working Together

My generation has entered into a workplace that is foreign to everything on which we've been raised. I believe that, in time, the workplace will transition to more closely align with what comes natural to us. After all, in 30 years, we'll be the ones deciding how the workplace works. During that transition, though, we are undoubtedly going to clash with managers who subscribe to a different philosophy.

we need a standard to refer back to for subsequent projects.

3. We are a generation of students. The truly meaningful things we learned in college, we learned from a professor whom we loved. Provide us a teacher. Mentor programs, or at least a mentoring presence, will do wonders for both accountability and performance. If we have someone we can impress, we will naturally strive to keep them happy, the same way we did for our parents and then our teachers.

4. We thrive on productive multitasking. It's when we run out of things to do that trouble starts. Keep us working or show us how to find more work. Most of

THE FIRST INSTINCT OF GENERATION Y ISN'T TO PLAN OUT HOW TO SAVE UP MONEY EVERY MONTH; IT'S TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO GET MORE MONEY WITH ONE PLATEAU-FORMING ACT.

Here are four important things to remember when working with a hired Generation Y individual that will help you both get the most out of your working relationship:

1. We thrive on accomplishments. Working endlessly with no goal in sight demoralizes us more severely than you might expect. Accomplishments are how we got to this job; it's how we expect to better ourselves after it.

2. Feeling like we've been left to fend for ourselves is counterproductive. We will remain engaged, regardless of whether it's for the good of the organization or not. Provide us direction and keep working us toward it. Don't throw us "at" things. Tell us what you want accomplished and we'll do it. In time, we'll learn to do it on our own, but

us want to do right by our company and will want to know what else to work on, but if there's a void there, it will be filled by something that does keep us engaged.

My generation has its flaws. Like every workforce before us, we have lazy, immoral, dishonorable, and downright bad workers. But don't take a clash in cultures as a sign of incompetence. We're the new wave of workers, and we're bringing with us a new way to work. Help us to do it the best way we can. In the end, that's what we want, just as much as you. We just need it told to us in the language we grew up learning. **PM**

GARIN GIACOMARRO
Economic Development Coordinator
Murphy, Texas
ggiacomarro@gmail.com

BY MICHAEL HOULIHAN AND BONNIE HARVEY

OOPS, MY BAD!

Five ways your organization can improve by admitting to mistakes

I t seems our society has turned dodging responsibility into an art form. From celebrities who insist that a brush with the law was all a big misunderstanding to national political figures who use spin and doublespeak to blame everything on the other side, no one wants to admit it when they mess up.

If you're a leader, the temptation to use this strategy can be huge. After all, you are paid to get it right, so the last thing you want is for people to know that a mistake has been made, right?

Maybe not. When your local government organization admits to mistakes in a constructive way, you won't damage its brand in the way you feared. In fact,

you have a valuable opportunity to gain respect and loyalty.

You and your organization are not judged by how well you do when you're good but by how well you do when you're bad. The fact is, everyone—and every organization—makes mistakes. Denying that they have happened usually exacerbates and magnifies an already awkward situation because chances are, you aren't fooling anyone and you appear insincere.

In fact, in a very real way, trying to dodge responsibility can hurt you and the organization's reputation more than simply owning up to the mistake in the first place. Honestly and humbly

admitting to missteps often diffuses a tense situation instead of exacerbating it. And as time passes, people tend to remember more clearly how the mistake was handled as opposed to what it was.

Here are five suggestions on how to handle a "my bad:"

Cop to it. Yes, it's uncomfortable to admit that your organization did something wrong. Uttering that mea culpa involves swallowing your pride and acknowledging that you are not, in fact, perfect, which is an illusion that our culture encourages us to zealously cultivate.

But the sooner you admit to the error, the more you reduce the drama, and the faster you can move on to the next, more important stage: what you are going to do about the situation.

People actually like a little imperfection now and then. It demonstrates a level of authenticity, vulnerability, and humanity with which we all can identify. Plus, it's harder to be angry with someone who says, "You're right—I messed up," than with someone who insists the fault doesn't lie with him, even though you know it does.

And it's difficult—if not impossible—to make any constructive progress if the responsible party refuses to admit there's a problem.

Recognize how it happened. If you admit fault but then put the incident behind you, guess what? You've just increased the chances that it will happen again. It's important to investigate how and why an error occurred, so that you can fix the faulty procedure or process.

Make sure employees aren't afraid to make or report mistakes, but bad behavior or an inability to perform also should not be overlooked. You want to keep the same mistake from happening again. Real progress in progressive organizations is often built on the backs of mistakes and the improvements they spark.

Aim, don't blame. What happens when a mistake involving your organization

MISTAKES ARE A FACT OF LIFE. NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU TRY, YOU CAN'T COMPLETELY AVOID MAKING THEM, AND THEY CAN ACTUALLY HELP TO IMPROVE YOUR COMPANY'S EFFECTIVENESS AND REPUTATION IF YOU HANDLE THEM WELL.

really can be traced to someone else? While it's easy and temporarily satisfying to point your finger and say "Not my fault!" the truth is, if it happened on your watch and you are accountable for the finished product, you ultimately share the blame in the customer's eyes.

In this situation, get to the bottom of what happened and aim your focus on what you and your organization can do on your end to prevent the situation from happening again.

Write it down. If you successfully resolve a negative situation that was sparked by an error, then rub your hands together and continue with business as usual as if to say, "Yes, it happened, but it's all cleaned up now," then you're making a second misstep. If you don't write down what happened and how to avoid it, even you are in danger of making the same mistake again, and the same is doubly true of others.

When you are still smarting in the immediate aftermath of a fiasco, it's easy to assume that you will always remember what you did wrong and that it will never, ever happen a second time. But often, as life goes on and your focus inevitably shifts to other things, your memory can get fuzzy. And you certainly can't pass your own experiences to everyone else in your company through osmosis.

That's why it's crucial to take the lessons you learn and physically make them part of your organization's policies. This might mean writing a new

procedure, checklist, or sign-off sheet, or drafting a new clause in a contract. But whatever you do, write it down.

Resolve that it won't reoccur.
Along with your apology, assure the injured parties that it—whatever "it" was—won't happen again. Voluntarily describe how the mistake happened and what changes you are implementing to prevent its reoccurrence. And most importantly, tell the other person or group how you and your organization are going to make things right.

Most people will appreciate your thoughtfulness, resolve, and the action you are taking. And often, handling an error in this way will reinforce the fact that you are, ultimately, a trustworthy organization that can be relied upon.

Once again, mistakes are bound to happen so don't waste time and energy beating yourself up, and especially don't try to create the illusion that you or your organization are perfect. Remember, what people recall most of all is how you handle missteps and errors, not what they were.

Don't miss out on the golden opportunities to show integrity, reduce the drama, and improve the way your organization operates. That is how you can make mistakes right. **PM**

MICHAEL HOULIHAN and **BONNIE HARVEY** are authors of *The Barefoot Spirit: How Hardship, Hustle, and Heart Built America's #1 Wine Brand*, Forestville, California (info@thebarefootspirit.com; www.thebarefootspirit.com).

BY KATHY VACCARO

MANAGING THE MANDATES

Gearing up for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

Countless employers across the country are wondering how the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA)—the health care law—will affect their organizations. Whether we're ready or not, the marketplace changes are coming. In many respects, they've already arrived.

The Employer Mandate

The PPACA has significant implications for virtually every American. Take, for instance, PPACA's individual mandate. A flashpoint in the legal debate over the law,

subsidy. The penalty is $2,000 per year for each full-time employee, minus the first 30.

But even if coverage is offered, an organization can still be subject to a penalty if the coverage is either not affordable or does not provide minimum value. In either of these instances, the penalty is the lesser of $2,000 per full-time employee (minus the first 30) if a single employee receives federal premium assistance for exchange coverage, or $3,000 for each employee who receives the federal premium tax credit.

So, if you're an employer, act now to determine the number of employees on staff who have full-time status under the law, to be clear about whether you're subject to the employer mandate. You can't just count heads; you need to follow the PPACA formula, and you might want to ask your legal counsel to weigh in.

If the mandate applies, examine the benefit plan to make sure the coverages you offer are affordable and provide the appropriate level of value, as defined by the law.

Fees and Taxes

Insurers and self-insured plans are already subject to a comparative effectiveness research fee, the first payment of which is due July 31, 2013. This fee is levied on insurers and on employers who fund their own health plans to pay for research, essentially to determine which treatments work best in real-world scenarios.

Starting in 2014, health plans and self-insured employer-sponsored plans will also be required to pay two new fees to help fund PPACA's coverage mandates:

> BUT EVEN IF COVERAGE IS OFFERED, AN ORGANIZATION CAN STILL BE SUBJECT TO A PENALTY IF THE COVERAGE IS EITHER NOT AFFORDABLE OR DOES NOT PROVIDE MINIMUM VALUE.

the individual mandate will require most Americans to maintain minimum essential health coverage, starting next year.

Then there's the employer mandate. Though not as volatile an issue as the individual mandate, it is no less critical in terms of impact. If you have 50 or more full-time employees—employees who work an average of at least 30 hours per week or part-time equivalents—the employer mandate applies to your organization. And you have two choices.

A large employer can elect to not offer coverage to its full-time employees and their dependents up to age 26. In that case, a penalty applies if one full-time employee purchases coverage through one of the law's new exchanges and qualifies for a federal premium

"Affordable" in the PPACA lexicon means the cost of coverage for the employee-only option for the lowest-cost plan offered; it must be less than 9.5 percent of the employee's W-2 wages. "Minimum value" means that the plan pays at least 60 percent of allowed charges for covered services.

The penalty amounts are calculated on a full-year basis, levied in 12 monthly installments. It's worth noting that there is transitional relief for employer-sponsored plans that are effective on a date other than January 1. Those plans won't be subject to penalties if they're in compliance by the first day of their 2014 plan year. Employers aren't permitted to change their plan year now to qualify for transitional relief.

- The reinsurance assessment paid annually by insurers and self-funded employers to help insurers defray the cost of covering high-risk individuals insured under policies purchased on the exchanges.
- The health insurance industry fee paid by insurers to fund the considerable cost of implementing PPACA coverage and access requirements.

The Exchanges

The biggest change to come involves PPACA's new health insurance exchanges—online "marketplaces" through which individuals and

employers with 50 or fewer full-time employees can purchase health plans. These exchanges are scheduled to go live on October 1, 2014. At that point, prospective buyers will have a chance to compare and enroll in plans offered by participating insurers and best suited to their circumstances.

In some cases, individuals will be eligible for federal subsidies to help them pay for insurance purchased on an exchange. If individuals are employed and they use those subsidies, their employers might have to pay penalties, as we've noted. Later this summer or early fall, the government will offer guidance to employers about how to provide employees with information about the exchanges and the availability of subsidies.

There is a tremendous amount of information to digest about PPACA,

but you can ease your way through the maze by:

- Understanding your responsibilities.
- Staying alert for new regulations and updates.
- Communicating frequently with your HR specialists and all your employees.

And please remember: You're not alone. Cigna has resources to help you stay ahead of the curve. Go to InformedOnReform.com for news, facts, and webinars on evolving issues. Check out our "Health Care Reform for You" tool for employees.

Learn more from me at the ICMA Annual Conference in Boston/New England, where I will lead the session The Edge of Change in Benefits: What the Patient Protection and Affordability Care Act Means to Me and My Community on Tuesday, September 24, 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

So take a deep breath and move ahead with confidence. **PM**

KATHY VACCARO
Vice President
Cigna Health Care Reform
Hartford, Connecticut
Kathleen.Vaccaro@cigna.com

EACH PERSON IN PUBLIC SERVICE IS UNIQUE.

UNDERSTANDING THAT IS HOW TO KEEP THEM HEALTHY.

The challenges of running local governments are unique, to say the least. That's why you need a different kind of health insurance company – Cigna. First, we don't see your employees as numbers on a piece of paper. We see each and every one as the unique people they are. We get to know what makes each one of them tick, and that helps keep them healthier. Because when your workforce is healthy, productivity increases and benefit costs decrease. And that's one thing everyone can agree on.

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EMPLOYEE BENEFITS FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR
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BY CHRIS LINDSEY AND JOSH RAUCH

OVERLOOKING YOUR WEBSITE?

If so, residents and businesses may be overlooking you

Managers: We have a problem on our hands. It's a different kind of problem, but one that directly affects our ability to interact with people we serve. It's a problem that will perhaps take time, dedication, and even some funding to solve. Plus, it's a problem that promises to get bigger.

The problem is our local government websites. Now, before you roll your eyes and turn the page, allow us at least a few words to explain.

Web technologies that didn't exist a few years ago are now mainstream. As the Internet changes, our websites need to grow and change with it to stay relevant. We have to provide information in places where people already consume it—smartphones, social media accounts, apps, and so on.

Staying Relevant

It's important to remember that your organization's web presence isn't just about your organization. A website is about people, and it's increasingly the primary way people learn more about your community.

These are people who want to live, work, and play in your community; they want to start businesses and find jobs in your community. The website may be the first and the only part of your community they see, so show them something beautiful and up-to-date!

If your website is pleasing to the eye, people will be less inclined to click away from it. And a website that showcases the beauty of your community communicates a great message.

At the same time, that beauty must be accompanied by an intuitive interface. How many of us have spent too much time on a website looking for the right buttons to click, or searching—

vainly—for the link that will take us to the information we need?

A streamlined, unified, and clear interface will ensure that the pleasing facade of your website is put to good use. That interface should put the end-users first and cater to their needs; modeling a website after the employee organization chart isn't necessarily a good idea. Instead, your design should facilitate a user's capacity to find information and perform common tasks with minimal effort or knowledge of government.

Finally, we need to make sure that the information behind the facade is worthwhile, important, and useful to the people visiting our websites. Remember: People go to government websites to find information and use services. This means the users shouldn't have to look too hard to find what they need, and once they find the information they want, it shouldn't be difficult for them to share, download, or otherwise use that data.

To that end, post data that's easily accessible regardless of the platform your visitors are using (PDF files, for example, can be easily opened by those who can't afford Microsoft Word).

Form and Function

The final challenge is to provide all this to any user, at any time, on any device, and still retain the attractiveness, intuitiveness, and utility of your community's website. Have you ever tried visiting your community's website using a smartphone or a tablet? Imagine yourself behind a visitor's screen: Can you quickly find the address to city hall or to the county courthouse? Access park hours and information? Learn that you are business-friendly?

New web standards, like HTML5 and CSS3, are designed to make it easier for web administrators to accommodate a variety of devices and streamline designs. Such content management systems as WordPress and Drupal use these standards to ensure that websites built with them are flexible and viewable on any device.

Other key design considerations include:

- A prominent and effective search box.
- Data that is cross-platform, portable, and open (e.g., RTF, CSV, or PDF).
- Functional integration with social media that should support and promote a website.
- Interactive calendars and news feeds.

To sum up, websites should be used to reach people. This technology is powerful because of its portability, accessibility, and potential to leverage marketing, news, and services. Ask yourself: Is your community's website just a line-item expense? Or is it something your organization is using to give back to and engage with your community?

Does your current design support users who visit your site? Does it look good? Can visitors read it? Can they use it easily? Are they getting the messages about your community that you want to deliver?

We believe government websites don't have to be ugly. For more information and examples on web design for local governments, visit http://govdesign.wordpress.com. It may not seem like a pressing issue in the whirlwind of other responsibilities and challenges, but a well-designed website can be a tremendous help to staff, community residents, and visitors. Be sure to pay attention to it! **PM**

CHRIS LINDSEY is budget analyst, Jefferson County, Colorado (clindsey@jeffco.us), and **JOSH RAUCH** is deputy economic development administrator, Springfield, Ohio (jrauch@ci.springfield.oh.us).

BY MARK ROHLOFF

FINDING THE GOOD IN THE GADFLY

Why we must stay responsive to all residents

Early in my management career, a city manager had me follow up on issues raised during the "citizens' statements" portion of our local government's council meetings. Most items were fix-it items that were resolved with a quick call to a fellow staff member. Occasionally I was asked to review comments made by an individual who addressed the council on a more frequent basis.

We all know the type. Even today, I still have one person's name and address vividly committed to memory. These individuals go by many terms but for the sake of discussion, let's just call them by a more common name, the gadfly.

After the manager asked me to follow up on something raised by our resident gadfly during her semimonthly address to council, I was lamenting with fellow staff members about my menial assignment. When I questioned why my talents were being wasted on this task, a long-tenured engineer explained my assignment with a saying that has stuck with me ever since: "Even a broken clock is right twice a day."

Carrying on the Old Adage

Throughout my career, I continue to follow that adage in advising staff members who work with me and have come to appreciate the wisdom behind the "broken clock" theory. By discussing these sometimes outrageous claims with staff members, we recognize the common experience we share with one another through our gadfly.

This is not to suggest that I believe the community's garbage collectors are deliberately throwing trash cans into the street, particularly when wind gusts were 50 miles per hour that day, or that a car parked on a street for 48 hours is the sure sign of illicit criminal activity, when a minivan with a luggage rack suggests out-of-town relatives.

Amidst the more extreme claims and comments, there may be something that warrants a response. My challenge to staff is to avoid overlooking the proverbial needle that may exist in the haystack of the gadfly's claims.

Is this pursuit of ridiculous claims a waste of the public's resources, as I observed years ago? I have come to recognize that we do not necessarily respond for the benefit of the gadfly. Rather, we respond for the benefit of those who may be observing us respond to this resident, perhaps for the first time. When our more reasonable residents summon up the courage to address our public bodies on issues of concern to them, we want to assure them that their comments will receive the appropriate consideration.

Following the Right Path

Recently, the Oshkosh Common Council and department heads revised the Oshkosh strategic plan. Through that process, we agreed on some "guiding principles," among them a commitment to be "engaging, responsive, equitable, and transparent."

When a resident addresses the council, we need to demonstrate that we are practicing these principles, including when we respond to gadflies. The ICMA Code of Ethics states in part, "…encourage communication between the citizens and all local government officers; emphasize friendly and courteous service to the public; and seek to improve the quality and image of public service." We need to demonstrate our belief in these principles, even when the member of the public happens to be our very own gadfly.

Local governments are more visible than ever. Meetings are cablecast, video streamed, and available on YouTube at the click of a mouse, sometimes before the meeting's conclusion. While some people may see us justified in dismissing our gadflies, we do so at our own peril.

WE HAVE TO REINFORCE THE REASONS WHY MAINTAINING THE PUBLIC'S TRUST IS SO VITAL TO OUR MISSION, AND HOW RESPONSIVENESS IS PART OF THAT SUCCESS.

We need to demonstrate that we will treat all residents with an appropriate amount of respect, even if they may be like the broken clock, only correct in a rare moment. Without that respect, we risk sending a message to others that we do not value public input.

I know that my staff is fully capable of sorting out our gadfly's claims. We have to reinforce the reasons why maintaining the public's trust is so vital to our mission, and how responsiveness is part of that success. If I can effectively share this vision with my staff, perhaps someday, one veteran staff member will pass along that "broken clock" wisdom to another generation of public servants. **PM**

MARK ROHLOFF
City Manager
Oshkosh, Wisconsin
mrohloff@ci.oshkosh.wi.us