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ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT WORLDWIDE

ICMA

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This issue of *PM* is available online at icma.org/pm October 1, 2013.

BY MARTHA PEREGO

ICMA ETHICS ENFORCEMENT

How the process works

Standards of conduct that lack any meaningful enforcement are practically useless. Rather than setting a concrete definition of what is appropriate behavior, they get reduced to just mere "suggestions." They are about as effective as voluntary speed limits are in regulating speeding: In other words, they aren't.

ICMA members long ago recognized the importance of establishing and then enforcing the standards. The ICMA Code of Ethics was first drafted in 1924. A rigorous peer review process for adjudicating ethics complaints has been in place for decades. In 2005, a guideline was added to encourage members to report possible violations of the code.

Given the profession's commitment to add teeth to the standards, making sure that the process for enforcing the code is clear and understood is important.

What constitutes a valid complaint? Filing a complaint with ICMA is a simple, straightforward process: Put it in writing, clearly outline the alleged misconduct, and support the allegation with documentation. If that threshold is met, the next test is whether the complaint alleges conduct that, if true, would actually violate the Code of Ethics. If the answer is yes, ICMA will proceed with an ethics inquiry.

Unsure if something is really worthy of review? You can discuss the matter with ICMA staff on a confidential basis. No action is taken until a formal complaint is filed.

Who complains? The good news is that ICMA members are the most common source of ethics complaints. That shows a level of commitment by the profession to pay attention and police its own. Complaints also come from elected officials and residents who know about ICMA's standards.

Anonymous complaints get processed as well but only if supported by the requisite documentation. ICMA has a long-standing practice of taking complaints from individuals

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PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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who do not wish to go on record as the complainant. They are not anonymous, just confidential.

Is it really confidential? The entire review process is confidential unless and until it results in a finding by the ICMA Executive Board that a member has violated the code and the appropriate sanction is a public one. Absent that, every ICMA member must maintain confidentiality about the review.

What about the member's point of view? The process begins with the assumption of innocence. After all, the information presented may not be accurate. And the member's perspective on what transpired hasn't been heard.

Starting from that position, the member is given the opportunity to review the entire complaint and all documents. The member then has the chance to provide a detailed written response to the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct. The opportunity to explain what transpired and provide supporting documentation as well as statements from others is key to getting at the facts.

The committee reviews the member's response to the allegation and if the facts are clear, it can draw a conclusion as to whether or not the member's conduct violated the code. If the committee decides that it lacks the necessary information to proceed, the next step is to ask the state association to appoint a fact-finding committee.

What role does fact finding play? Members assigned to the fact-finding committee gather the missing information and report back to ICMA in 60 days. They do not determine guilt or innocence. Their efforts may involve interviewing the member at the center of the ethics review; interviewing others; collecting public records; or in the case of legal matters, obtaining court records.

Once all the available facts are collected, the fact-finding committee submits its findings to the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct for review. This is the final step in the data-gathering process.

Who decides? Based on the information made available, it's the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct that is solely responsible for determining whether the member violated the code or not. If the committee concludes that the member didn't violate it, the case will be closed.

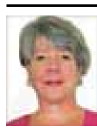
If the committee concludes that the member did violate the code, it can select from an array of censures, including private censure, public censure, suspension from membership for up to five years, permanent membership expulsion or restriction, and credential revocation. All of the options beyond a private censure require approval by the ICMA Executive Board.

Is there an appeal process? Any sanction can be appealed to the executive board, where the member has the opportunity to address the board in a hearing.

At the conclusion of every review process, ICMA notifies the complainant and the state association president that the matter has been resolved. When a public censure is issued, notice of that action is shared with the news media as well as the appropriate governing body.

Allegations of unethical conduct by public officials can harm the reputation of individuals, organizations, and the profession. For that reason, ICMA members must be willing to report matters of concern to ICMA in good faith.

You might not have all the facts. Allow an objective peer review process to sort out the facts and reach an independent judgment. PM



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WHAT DO YOU THINK LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CAN DO TO BECOME TRULY INNOVATIVE?

JILLIAN BARRICK
City Administrator
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Smart use of technology is one of the key paths to innovation. Government, however, is often accused of being antiquated because it takes so long to change, and the adoption of technology is perfect evidence. Local governments are overwhelmingly below the learning curve and missing out on opportunities to reduce costs and improve service delivery.

Having grown up in a technological world, younger professionals offer an evolved perspective about how government should and could work and are more likely to identify technological solutions to everyday problems and push the envelope when others say it can't be done.

Deliberate cultivation and incorporation of the younger generation into the public sector workforce will inevitably result in innovation in government.

AMY HAMILTON, ICMA-CM
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Many local governments already are innovative. When elected officials support collaboration and finding new ways to meet residents' needs, local governments become truly innovative. Local professionals are not afraid to innovate when we know that elected officials encourage and champion innovative service delivery.

Also, getting out in my community and talking with residents and business and property owners face-to-face, I have gotten some great ideas from these informal talks with stakeholders. The ideas lead to bigger and better ideas when you take them back to staff and encourage creativity in your organization.

JACOB SNOW
City Manager
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Over the past five years Henderson's revenues have dropped precipitously while its population has continued to grow.

The staff has made $127 million in budget cuts and trimmed the non-public safety workforce by 16 percent. With an increasing demand on resources, however, those cuts have created a strain on staff's ability to serve the community.

In order to continue providing the services, staff members must be more innovative than ever. One way we've done that is through the Henderson Quality Initiative, which is a cross section of employees empowered to help the city find better ways to do business.

By focusing on synergies between departments, leadership, process improvements, and other key areas, we've already seen great savings. We've also seen increased customer service and engagement from employees, and the effort continues to be a great success.

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Local governments can truly be innovative by seeking insight and information from a variety of sources. Local governments can sometimes get complacent with regard to doing business as usual and need to seek out new ways of doing things and asking their customers, residents, visitors, and other local governments, "How can we improve or make things better for the people we serve each day?"

This question should be at the forefront of our minds as we engage to provide services to our communities. Our most productive source of new ideas comes from our employees. They, however, need to be given the freedom and trust to think big and to be able to bring forth their ideas for consideration. PM

1 SUSTAINABLE CITIES, SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP

An international partnership formed during an ICMA sustainable communities exchange resulted in an ongoing relationship between Dubuque, Iowa, and Townsville, Queensland, Australia--and an award-winning water conservation program in the Australian city.

icma.org/townsville

2 PENSION FUNDING

Perplexed about the new pension calculations established this year by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board? Information is available that can help managers with their questions.

icma.org/pension_funding

3 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS RESOURCES

Preparation can save lives, as shown by communities nationwide.

icma.org/emergency_resources

4 ICMA CREDENTIALED MANAGERS AND CANDIDATES

More than 1,300 ICMA members have earned the ICMA-CM (ICMA Credentialed Manager) or the ICMA Credentialed Manager Candidate designation as part of the ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program. Look here for specific details about the program.

icma.org/credentialedmgr

EMBRACING THE "DECADE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT"

HOW TO FACE CHALLENGES AND SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES

By Jon Johnson, Chris Fabian,
and Cheryl Hilvert

The next 10 years will most likely be a defining period for local governments, including your own. In a June 27, 2012, *Governing* magazine article, ICMA Executive Director Bob O'Neill declared this time as "the next decade [for local government] will be a time in which the fiscal woes of federal and state governments will leave local and regional governments on their own, struggling to balance the need for innovation against the necessity of making tough choices." >>

TAKEAWAYS

› Recognize the "Decade of Local Government" requires organizational change as managers take on the inherent challenges and embrace the opportunities that are ahead.

› Identify fiscal realities facing local governments and realize that life will not simply return to the status quo that existed before the Great Recession.

"IT WILL ALSO BE A DECADE in which local government will lead the way in developing creative solutions to extraordinary problems. There are a number of reasons to be optimistic about this coming decade of local government."[1]

Even op-ed columnist David Brooks published an editorial in the June 6 *New York Times* entitled "The Power Inversion," in which he echoes O'Neill's observations. Brooks writes, "Washington paralysis is already leading to a power inversion. As the federal government becomes less energetic, city governments become more so."

Notwithstanding all the extraordinary opportunities ahead, there are also extraordinary challenges that will need to be confronted by all who serve as local government leaders. In a substantial number of communities, the scarcity of available resources is painfully apparent and has visibly impacted managers' ability not only to preserve and maintain the status quo but also to tackle emerging issues and address the day-to-day needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.

This scarcity can only be made worse by the problems plaguing federal and state agencies that now might be landing at local government's doorstep.

A New Environment

The recession may officially be over according to economists, but unlike the normal ebb and flow of the past, the picture is dramatically different than anything managers have experienced during other economic cycles. Local governments are realizing that they will not simply return to the status quo that existed before the recession.

Managers are coming to grips with an environment in which:

- Revenues will at best remain flat or continue to decline.
- Costs associated with energy, fuel, health care, and basic supplies will continue to grow.
- Taxpayers can't afford to pay more because of the recession's impact on their own personal finances.

Taxpayers are perhaps expecting local government to provide even more support in meeting their social, physical, environmental, and economic needs, especially with the declining assistance in these same areas from federal and/or state sources.

How does local government seize this incredible opportunity, embracing O'Neill's decade of local government, but still continue to offer the important, even vital, services required by communities in a responsive and timely fashion?

What can managers do to successfully navigate these challenging waters so that their communities become better, stronger, and more relevant than ever before?

Let's consider a completely different perspective. In order to achieve success and accept the challenges that are ahead, we must see more clearly how to manage, use, and optimize resources in a much different way than has been done in the past. This new environment demands a new vision of the future.

For managers, resources can appear to be scarce because of our tightly clenched grasp on some commonly held assumptions from which they need to break free. Perhaps there is a different way to see things.

Fiscal Transparency

First and foremost, local governments must be clear and transparent about what truly is their picture of fiscal health. Communicating that picture simply, clearly, and understandably without volumes of numbers, spreadsheets, tables, and an endless series of

WITH A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS "DO" AND WHAT THEY ARE IN BUSINESS "TO DO," **IT IS EASIER TO PRIORITIZE SERVICES AND DETERMINE THOSE THAT ARE HIGHLY IMPORTANT TO THE COMMUNITY AND WHAT ARE OF LESSER IMPORTANCE.**

charts is frankly a challenge that has plagued managers for years. If managers are going to be able to demonstrate financial reality internally to elected officials and staff, and externally to residents, they have to find better ways to make fiscal situations understandable and transparent to everyone.

Finding creative, clear, and nontechnical ways to demonstrate what the next five to 10 years might look like is a must if people are going to address fiscal concerns. All too often, local governments are unable to make sound, timely decisions regarding investing in new resources, starting new programs, or initiating major capital projects because elected officials, local government managers, and staff members are paralyzed by the uncertainty of whether they actually have enough money to appropriate for these purposes. Developing a long-term financial forecast is key to gaining a better understanding of what the future might hold.

Differentiating between *one-time* and *ongoing* revenues and expenditures to clearly understand how finances are aligned and where they might be out of alignment is a critical element in eliminating this uncertainty. Managers understand this principle but rarely make a concerted effort to be deliberate about depicting this separation in financial forecasts or budget documents. The need for this separation is understood but without actually "seeing it," managers may not be aware of its impact on the ability to manage and maximize resources. Not clearly separating the picture into these two revenue categories may obscure some serious looming fiscal problems.

How many officials, for example, have approved a capital project without considering the implications of the associated ongoing costs? Newly constructed public facilities have sat vacant because of a failure to separately identify and depict the impact of ongoing operational costs.

Adhering to this philosophy of differentiating between one-time and ongoing revenues and expenditures also helps ensure that an organization "*spends within its means*." This concept is not just about balancing the budget but allows managers to be clear that ongoing operational expenses are funded through ongoing revenue streams. Using such one-time monies as fund balance or grants to support ongoing operations is an unsustainable practice. "How much do you need?" Isn't this the question that leads off most local government budget discussions? It's certainly a far easier question to answer, but shouldn't the conversation begin with the more difficult and oftentimes nebulous question of "How much do we have?"

Devoting more time to revenue analysis is a critical element in gaining a clearer understanding of 1) what factors truly drive our individual revenue streams; 2) how to develop more meaningful and accurate multiyear forecasts, and, most important; 3) how much is actually available to spend. If managers have more clarity about what factors might impact revenue sources, they can improve their ability to foresee those changes before they happen and react to them before they arrive on the doorstep. By taking a more diagnostic approach, it isn't terribly difficult to determine where revenues specifically come from and

PREPARE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

This list can help managers outline what local governments are able to do to fiscally survive and also take advantage of future opportunities.

- Provide a clear, transparent, and easily understood single picture of your community's financial position.
- Develop a multi-year financial forecast that demonstrates clearly a projected financial position for the next five to 10 years.
- Be intentional about differentiating between one-time and ongoing revenues and expenditures.
- Ensure spending is within your community's means by first asking the question "How much do we have?" rather than "How much do we need?"
- Devote more time to revenue analysis and understanding what factors truly drive individual revenue streams.
- Ensure projected budget amounts are more aligned with actual anticipated revenues and expenditures.
- Analyze and explain all budget-to-actual variances, eliminating those variances that continue to reoccur year after year.
- Prepare and maintain a comprehensive program inventory that lists everything the organization provides and indicates the estimated cost associated with those programs or services.
- Maintain fund balance reserves even when times are tight.
- Prioritize programs and services to identify which ones offer the highest relevance to the results the community expects to achieve and which are of lesser importance to the community.

assess what internal or external forces might cause them to grow and shrink.

Precise Projections

Exercising care in ensuring that budgets are more closely aligned to actual spending plans is another essential element in optimizing our resources. In the "d*ecade of local government*," can managers afford to appropriate resources in the budget when they really never intend to spend those dollars?

Inflated budgets in a time of flat or declining revenues could lead to making decisions about staff reductions, program eliminations, and reductions in levels of service to residents that would not be required if budget dollars were more closely aligned with actual, anticipated expenditures. Budget to actual variances—the difference between what was anticipated in the budget plan and what actually occurred—must be analyzed and understood if managers are to truly manage resources in a responsible manner and dispel the perception that our budgets are riddled with fluff and fat.

It's imperative that there is more precision in expenditure projections—especially related to salary and benefit costs—as contrasted to budgeting for contingencies that have a slim chance of occurring or to provide a massive safety cushion.

In addition, just as important as having a revenue manual is the development of a program inventory. While managers do a great job of establishing an organizational structure that identifies departments responsible for delivering services, they don't always articulate well what services departments actually provide. Do most residents really know what the public works department does? By taking the time to clearly list everything that is done at a program and service level, local governments can achieve true transparency and residents can gain a better understanding of exactly what a local government does for them.

Determining the estimated costs and required number of full-time employees necessary to provide these programs just adds to the transparency. Imagine providing a list of all the programs that are offered along with their costs as part of a budget book. Cincinnati, Ohio, included in its budget document a complete listing of all of its programs and their associated costs to offer residents a clearer understanding of exactly how tax dollars were used.

For the first time, residents (and elected officials) had a more transparent understanding of everything the city provided. According to the budget director, the city received accolades for this level of transparency.

It's also important to avoid focusing on the financial picture one year at a time. This approach creates tunnel vision and prevents people from seeing how the choices made today can compromise long-range plans or worse yet, endanger long-term financial sustainability. Keeping a focus on the future and seeing what lies ahead might cause us to pause and actually make a different choice.

Finally, even when times are tight, a local government needs to maintain reserve funds to ensure it can maintain services during emergency situations, whether of an economic, a natural, or a man-made origin. Too often, the temptation is to spend down these important reserves to avoid making spending reductions. It is critical to an organization's fiscal health that reserves are established through a written policy and then monitored to ensure those reserve balances are maintained.

Pinpointing Priorities

With a clearer, more transparent picture of an organization's fiscal health, a manager is better equipped to address fiscal realities and seize opportunities to better serve a community's needs. But what do you do when those ongoing revenues are not sufficient to support the ongoing costs of the programs needed and desired by residents, businesses, and visitors?

It becomes imperative that there is a way to establish priorities and be able to divest an organization of programs and services that are of a lower priority. In order to do this, you first have to answer the question, "What are we in business to do?" "What are the results or outcomes expected by community members?"

When evaluating priorities, it is critical that an internal examination is conducted at a program or service level rather than try to identify which department is more of a priority than another department. Most governments offer hundreds of services.

Prioritizing services will help focus decisions on eliminating those services that are not as important in terms of achieving results as are other programs. This will help avoid across-the-board cuts that can make managers mediocre at delivery rather than excelling at delivering programs that are clearly of a higher priority.

In your personal finances, for example, would you cut all of your household expenses by 10 percent across the board or would you eliminate things like movie rentals and dining out in favor of paying your full mortgage and entire array of utility bills? With a clear understanding of what local governments "do" (the programs they offer) and what they are in business "to do" (the results a community wants a manager to achieve), it becomes easier to prioritize services and

FIRST AND FOREMOST, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS MUST BE CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT ABOUT WHAT TRULY IS THEIR PICTURE OF FISCAL HEALTH. COMMUNICATING THAT PICTURE SIMPLY, CLEARLY, AND UNDERSTANDABLY WITHOUT VOLUMES OF NUMBERS, SPREADSHEETS, TABLES, AND AN ENDLESS SERIES OF CHARTS IS FRANKLY A CHALLENGE THAT HAS PLAGUED MANAGERS FOR YEARS.

determine those that are highly important to the community and what are of lesser importance.

With this information, it becomes even clearer where lower levels of services can be explored, when to develop partnerships with the public or private sector, and even eliminate less relevant programs.

A Better Future

The opportunity is at hand for local governments to truly be the leaders on which people depend. In Peter Diamandis' book *Abundance: The Future Is Better than You Think*, the author promotes an idea that is imperative for our time—the idea that scarcity can be contextual. It may be true that certain resources are scarce, or it may be that they're simply inaccessible.

Writes Diamandis: "Imagine a giant orange tree packed with fruit. If I pluck all the oranges from the lower branches, I am effectively out of accessible fruit. From my limited perspective, oranges are now scarce. But once someone invents a piece of technology called a ladder, I've suddenly got new reach. Problem solved. Technology is a resource-liberating mechanism. It can make the once scarce the now abundant."

People and money are among the resources that appear to be scarce for local governments these days. There isn't enough money to maintain services, and there aren't enough people to do the work. Tax increases are floated because inherently managers feel that more is needed to do the job.

But what if they actually had all the resources really needed? What if scarcity issues were merely contextual? What if managers discovered there were sufficient resources available to build successful communities?

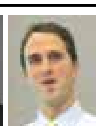
Is it possible that human and financial resources (people and money) are literally tied up in providing services that may be of lesser priority to communities or in offering services that other service providers—both public and private—are willing and able to provide?

Through the lens of fiscal health and wellness, managers are finding ways to challenge assumptions on the approaches to resource allocation and budgeting. They are seeing more clearly the picture of fiscal health and recognizing the difference between the ongoing and one-time sides of the world.

They are truly addressing variances between budgets and actual spending patterns. They are clear about the programs they offer and how much those programs cost. And finally, they are prioritizing their resources and reallocating them to new and extremely important programs and initiatives. The "decade of local government" requires it. PM

ENDNOTE

1 O'Neill, Robert J. Jr., "The Coming Decade of Local Government"; *Governing*, June 27, 2012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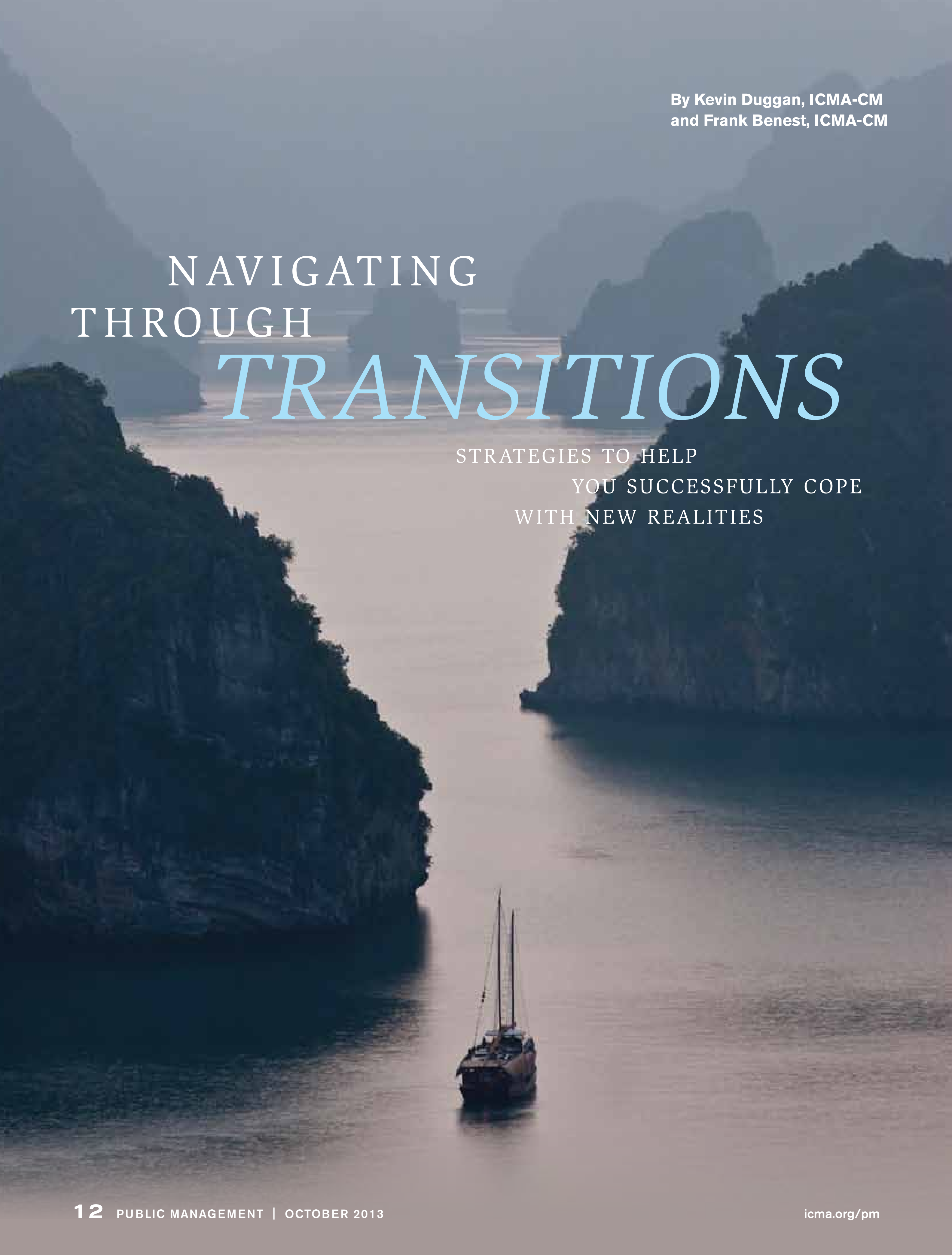

By Kevin Duggan, ICMA-CM
and Frank Benest, ICMA-CM

NAVIGATING THROUGH *TRANSITIONS*

STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU SUCCESSFULLY COPE WITH NEW REALITIES

When managers think of transitions, they might recall their first manager job, when they moved to a new organization, or perhaps even an involuntary departure from a position.

In the first two cases, managers are generally excited about the opportunity even though they recognize that there will be challenges in establishing themselves. In these situations, managers are open to new challenges, experiences, relationships, learning, and growth.

In the case of an involuntary transition, while not usually feeling positive about the circumstances, managers clearly face a challenge in both adjusting to changed circumstances and developing a new direction.

TAKEAWAYS

› Understand how the range of transitions can impact a manager's professional success.

› Recognize when a transition is taking place in order to adapt.

› Learn to develop strategies to navigate the neutral zone between old and new realities.

Many Types of Transitions

Local government managers may not recognize that they also periodically experience other kinds of transitions in addition to job changes. These transitions can significantly affect them, both personally and professionally. Recognizing when these transitions occur and then developing and implementing effective strategies to navigate through them can be critical. Such transitions might occur when managers are experiencing some of these changes:

- A new governing body member (or members) whose election may have changed the dynamics of the board.
- A new department head.
- New political demands by a vocal neighborhood, business, or ethnic group.
- A natural or human disaster or a significant incident that totally disrupts the organization or the community.
- Increased media scrutiny and criticism.
- Changing financial condition for the organization.

All of these disruptive situations require a mindset that allows managers to recognize that they are in the midst of a transition and must find ways to adapt to the new political or organizational circumstances. Not fully appreciating the impact of a transition can undercut a person's ability to lead or at worst, places a person at odds with new realities, thus putting the manager at risk—personally and professionally. The risk derives from being in a circumstance where you need to respond effectively to changing conditions, but a failure to fully appreciate and understand that a change has occurred results in an ineffective or delayed response.

While it is fundamental to our professional responsibilities that we adapt to changing circumstances, including a new policy direction, there can be a natural tendency to rationalize that continuing along the same path is the reasonable path to take.

Change vs. Transition

William Bridges, in the book *Transitions: Making Sense of Life Changes*, differentiates between change and transition. Change is situational—a new job, role, team, or community demand. Transition is the psychological process we go through in order to come to terms with the new situation. Change is *external*; transition is *internal*.

Change happens; so do transitions—with or without our consent. To effectively deal with transitions and adapt, we must first recognize the nature of the transition process.

One of the greatest potential barriers in effectively dealing with change is failing to fully appreciate when change is indeed occurring and its true impacts. In terms of processing change, denial can be the most challenging impediment to effectively dealing with change and the necessary transition that must follow.

Transitions often include a sense of loss. In fact, Bridges notes that transitions start with an ending.[1] When we leave an organization for a new one, we have lost our team.

When a new governing board majority identifies a different policy agenda, there is a sense of loss when we are required to adapt to a new direction. New political demands require an ending to an old way of doing business.

Simply put, the first step in managing transition is letting go.

The second step, according to Bridges, is navigating the "neutral zone": the limbo between the old reality and the new. It is the feeling that the old way of doing things or relating is gone and the new way is uncomfortable. It is an emotionally difficult place to be.

In response to finding ourselves in this psychological neutral zone, we can try to ignore it, rush through it, or escape from it. These reactions will mean that we will have difficulty making the change work for us and our team. If we recognize that we are struggling with a transition, we can use the neutral zone to find creative solutions to new demands and learn and grow.

Strategies to Manage Transitions

Once cognizant that there are many kinds of transitions (some of our own choosing and some forced on us), managers can more consciously use a set of strategies to successfully navigate them. These approaches include the following:

1. Vent a little. If we are feeling put upon and forced to change, it is acceptable to blow off some steam *as long as it is with a trusted family member, friend, or colleague in a safe environment*.

2. Reflect. Local government managers tend to be an action-oriented lot. Typically, we do not spend much time reflecting. To sense that we are experiencing a transition, we need to reflect and ask:

- What is changing and what is the impact?
- If I am feeling negative and put upon, why is that so?
- What is causing me to be reactive and defensive?
- How am I behaving with others?
- Am I effectively responding to this change, or simply denying or resisting?

Some colleagues have used various methods to promote self-reflection. One wrote in a journal when he was recovering from cancer treatment. Others have turned to spouses or counselors to reflect as they experience the neutral zone.

Many of us simply schedule quiet time to reflect about feeling unsettled. Simply getting away from the work environment—to walk, jog, ride your bike, take a vacation, or attend a retreat or other professional development opportunity can get a person away from the immediate environment and provide time for reflection on what is happening.

3. Use a new manager mindset. The reason most managers succeed in a new job is because they are more or less prepared and approach it with a new manager mindset. As new managers, we typically:

- Are open to the new experience.
- Are curious.
- Collect data.
- Consider different perspectives and do not rush to judgment.
- Want to learn.
- Build relationships and rapport.
- Engage people at all levels, internally and externally.
- Develop a plan/strategy.
- Implement our plan/strategy with energy and enthusiasm.
- Assess, after a period of time, how the plan implementation is proceeding.

This kind of mindset will help managers deal with other transitions as well.

4. Approach transitions as opportunities for a fresh start. As an established executive, managers may bemoan a possibly disruptive new councilmember or a new advocacy group demanding political change. We may hope that the established political agenda or ways of doing business will not undergo a dramatic shift, making it difficult for us or our team.

If the transition is approached as an opportunity for a fresh start, however, managers can focus on building positive relationships and rapport. While a transition may be difficult and may not always be positive, it can be a reinvigorating challenge that can become a source of professional and personal growth.

5. Engage in conversation. As the poet David Whyte suggested at a presentation to the 2000 annual conference of the City Managers Department, League of California Cities, leadership is the art of conversation. In the midst of

A NEW MANAGER MINDSET WILL HELP US DEAL WITH *OTHER KINDS OF TRANSITIONS.*

THE LIMBO ZONE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW REALITY IS *AN EMOTIONAL AND DIFFICULT PLACE TO BE.*

transitions, managers need to engage people internally and externally in open-ended conversations, welcome different perspectives and interests, and question long-held assumptions as they adapt to change.

You might, for instance, be a police chief in a community that has quickly undergone demographic change. With the arrival of a number of Spanish-speaking immigrants, the community is experiencing a day-worker challenge in the downtown area. Established residents and merchants are demanding action to rid the downtown of the day workers.

Some councilmembers are beginning to consider a new ordinance to ban the solicitation of work from street corners. As police chief, the manager turns the problem over to you.

While your first reaction is to target special enforcement, you wonder if that is the right approach. After some soul-searching, you engage merchants, neighborhood and church leaders, and new immigrant group members in a series of conversations to explore possible responses. These efforts eventually lead to a pilot day-worker center operated by a local church.

6. Avoid isolation. During uncomfortable transitions, we may isolate ourselves. Social support is one of the keys to dealing with the emotions of transition.

We need to find the opportunity to share with trusted colleagues, informal coaches, friends, and family members the challenges of our situation, concerns and doubts, some possible solutions, and then get feedback.

7. Focus on learning. If we reconceptualize the challenge as an opportunity for learning, the transition can be a time of creativity and growth. Learning activities might include:

- Conducting a review of the literature.
- Talking to colleagues.
- Interviewing experts.
- Engaging non-subject matter experts from different disciplines in brainstorming different approaches.
- Trying out a pilot response, which we fine-tune based on initial experiences.

Given your busy life, you may not have the time to do all of the above; however, one or more of these learning strategies may help you gain perspective and insight.

As we go through the transition, we must continually debrief: What is going well? What is not going well? How do we feel? What are we learning?

8. Share the burden. Even if we understand that we are going through a transition, we do not have to do all the relationship building, creative problem solving, and learning ourselves. As we engage internal staff and outside stakeholders, we can share the learning and leadership work.

Helping Others Cope

As managers experience transition and try to personally cope with it, they as leaders need to help others cope with transition, too. Since colleagues may be struggling with the new realities of layoffs, organizational restructuring, different reporting relationships, or outside political demands, they will certainly need emotional and other kinds of support.

As leaders, managers can help colleagues by encouraging conversations that over time:

- Provide a safe environment to vent.
- Acknowledge feelings of loss and any sense of unfairness or resentment.
- Encourage, ultimately, a search for opportunity, experimentation, and learning in response to change.

Shaping the Change

If we recognize transitions in their many forms, acknowledge the loss involved, and work through the emotional neutral zone between the old and new reality, then we have the chance to help shape the change.

We will likely be able to effectively cope with the transitions that inevitably occur in our professional lives if we:

- Understand the various types of transitions that can impact us professionally and personally.
- Are alert to when they occur.
- Learn to accept the new reality.
- Develop and implement strategies with energy and enthusiasm.
- Periodically review and adjust strategies based on the results we are experiencing.

Properly handled, transitions give managers the opportunity to confront challenges and adversity, re-engage, learn, and renew themselves and their team. PM

ENDNOTES

1 *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, William Bridges, Corporate & Professional Publishing Group, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Reading, MA (p. 4, 1993).

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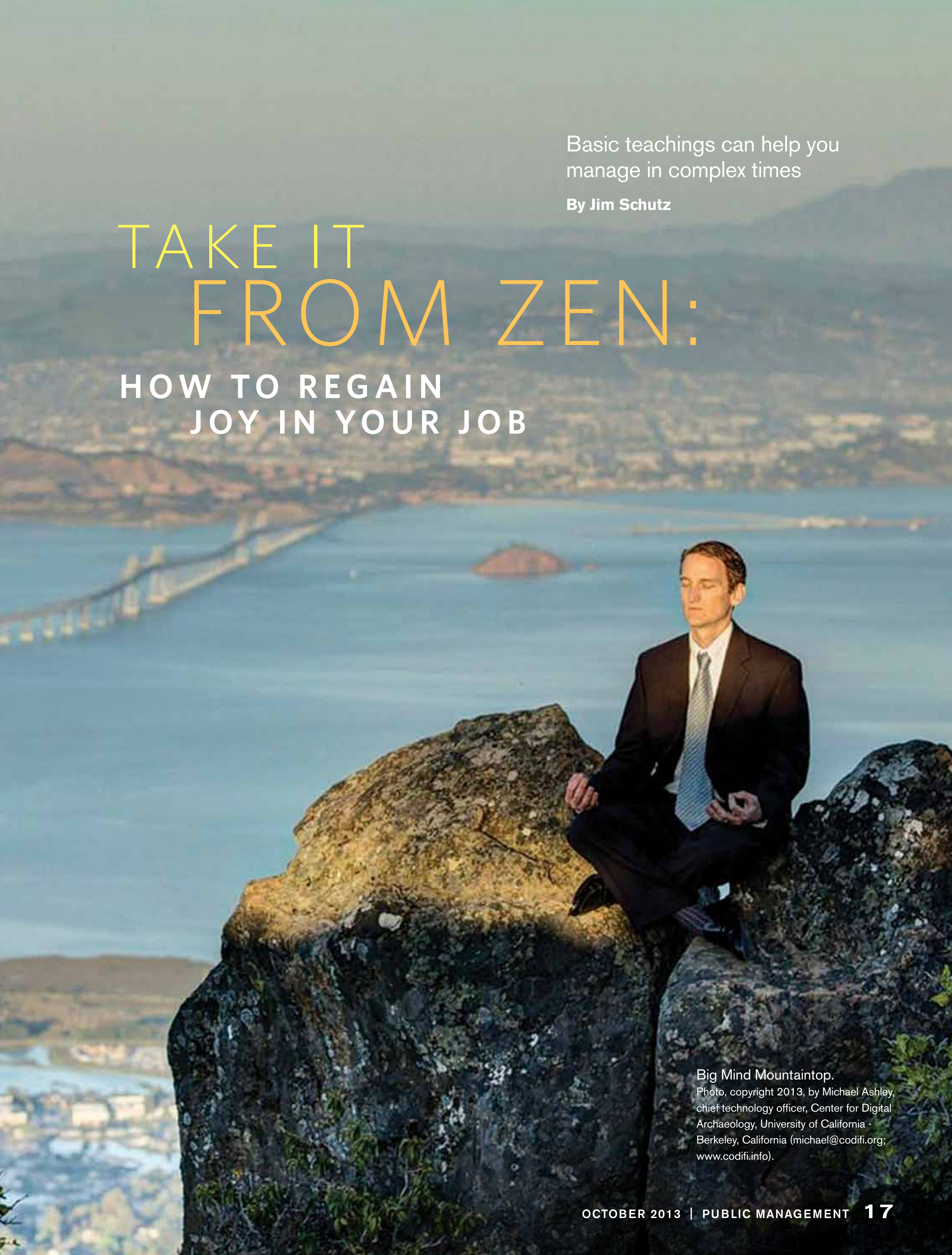

Basic teachings can help you manage in complex times

By Jim Schutz

TAKE IT FROM ZEN:

HOW TO REGAIN JOY IN YOUR JOB

Big Mind Mountaintop.
Photo, copyright 2013, by Michael Ashley, chief technology officer, Center for Digital Archaeology, University of California - Berkeley, California (michael@codifi.org; www.codifi.info).

TAKEAWAYS

› Zen teachings can help managers rediscover the joy in the post-Great Recession world.

› Zen has more in common with local government management than you may think.

› Learn about big mind, monkey mind, and mindfulness.

NOT LONG AGO THERE WAS JOY.

Then came a long set of rogue waves called the Great Recession. The first wave was named "hiring freeze," but it was quickly followed by its close relatives, each bent on destruction. They arrived with names like "furloughs," "early retirements," "layoffs," "pay cuts," "new benefit tiers," and the tallest wave of them all, "unfunded liabilities." They shattered services that had taken decades to develop and left bewilderment and anger in their place.

Public confidence was also left wet and cold. At the federal level, public trust in government is at or near an all-time low. Though state and local governments fare better in opinion surveys, a cursory read of any local newspaper may suggest otherwise, especially if one dares to read the letters to the editor or, for the boldest among us, the online comments.

In such times, it is easy for local government managers to become dispirited or overlook the laudable reasons we got into this profession. How do we rediscover the joy? Is it possible to find the Zen of work during these complex and trying times?

What might we learn from an ancient tradition that is still useful and relevant today? I have assembled several lessons of basic Zen teachings that will come in handy whether you find yourself in a 13th century *zendo* in Japan or a 21st century town hall meeting.

Find your inner monk. Zen offers practical techniques to cultivate calmness in the face of adversity, let go of anxiety and stress, pay attention to the moment, and find peace and contentment. Such characteristics are amazingly relevant in today's local government environment of depleted budgets, regional consolidations, contracting out, and partnerships with an increasingly skeptical public.

The "being-in-the-world qualities" emphasized in Zen are no different from the character traits encouraged in management, says Zen teacher and former IBM executive Les Kaye in *Zen at Work*. A great Zen master might look for the same traits in a student as you might find today in a job announcement for a local government executive: integrity, strong morals and ethics, personal conviction, calm and even-temperament, adaptability, and perseverance. We are all capable of such traits; it is just a matter of living them in a focused and intentional way. How can that be done?

The path to your inner monk is through the universal human qualities of attention and awareness that are the key ingredients of mindfulness. The problem is, according to mindfulness teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn, "in our society, we tend to take these capacities for granted and don't think to develop them systematically in the service of self-understanding and wisdom." That needs to change to be successful in this post-Great Recession world.

Discover the present moment. Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, uses some simple words about cooking to illustrate the concepts of mindfulness and staying in the moment. He says, "To cook is not just to prepare food for someone or for yourself; it is to express your sincerity. So when you cook you should express yourself in your activity in the kitchen. You should allow yourself plenty of time; you should work on it with nothing in your mind, and without expecting anything. You should just cook!" This is equally true for managing a local government.

With a task list longer than your arm, e-mails multiplying in your in-box, and beeps and chimes from our mobile devices reminding us how late we are, it is natural to feel scattered. Local government executives, however, should strive to keep the mind on one task at a time. Kaye says, "When we choose to perform an activity, we make it a gift by dedicating our entire body and minds to it . . . this is how we express complete understanding in our work."

Between past, present, and future, there is really only one (the present) in which we physically spend any time. Most of our mental and emotional time, however, stays clamped in the past or future. We dwell on some disappointment of the past or get anxious about anticipated future problems.

We ask ourselves questions like these: Will my performance evaluation go well? Will there be public opposition to staff recommendations? How will the local newspaper

As managers in these uncertain and stressful times, finding the Zen of work may be a clear path to rediscovering the joy. After all, like Zen, working to build strong communities is inherently meaningful, powerful, and rewarding.

characterize a recent issue? The worry is often far worse than the actual outcomes. Just cook.

Quiet your monkey mind. Post-Great Recession life is a stressful place given unemployment rates, fiscal instability, underwater mortgages, rising costs, and other pressures. With public trust in government low, community meetings can sometimes take on the feeling of a "no holds barred" wrestling match on pay-per-view. When criticism is being hurled like a metal folding chair, it is hard not to take it personally. While the folding chair is metaphorical, the suffering caused may be real and long lasting.

Arthur Jeon, author of *City Dharma,* writes, "Negative things happen [but] there is very little that happens to us on a daily basis that is really 'bad,' and when it does occur, it passes quickly. But we then create endless suffering through our interpretation, our conditioning, and our identification with the thoughts around the event." In short, our monkey mind, an ancient term for restless thoughts, chatters away.

The Zen approach is to notice any negativity, but pass through it without dwelling on it. Humorist Michael Pritchard says, "Anger held longer than 30 seconds is just ego." This mindful concept is similar to a common trait of successful local government managers: "having a thick skin."

Managers should filter the noise to take in what can be useful in strategic decision making, without getting bogged down by it. The goal is to be patient, not take things personally, attempt to understand the reasons behind any negativity, and keep a supple mind to find the creative solution.

Just sit. When asked the path to enlightenment, Zen masters are fond of saying, "Just sit." But meditation isn't just for those seeking nirvana anymore. It is increasingly mainstream.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services suggests meditation for a number of ailments. One of Google's most popular employee training courses, "Search Inside Yourself," teaches meditation, mindfulness, awareness, and compassion.

Zen meditation involves sitting with a straight back—typically with some sort of cushion, stool, or chair—with a focus on the breath, stillness, and a restful mind. When the monkey mind inevitably asserts itself with daydreaming or random thoughts, it is important to notice the thoughts, acknowledge them, release them without attachment or judgment, and return to the breath.

Kabat-Zinn suggests looking at meditation by viewing the process of thinking itself as a waterfall, a continual cascading of thought. He says, "In cultivating mindfulness, we are going *beyond* or *behind* our thinking, much the way you might find a vantage point in a cave or depression in the rock behind a waterfall. We still see and hear the water, but we are out of the torrent."

Managers should make time for regular meditation. Kaye explains it as a stress *prevention* activity that allows us to go home from work feeling buoyant instead of wiped out. He says, "Instead of worrying about the stressful situations waiting for us tomorrow, we have the confidence that we will be able to respond to them in a positive way."

Open your "big mind." In Zen there is the "small mind," akin to ego, that is the product of our life's conditioning and our attachment to people, experiences, and material possessions. Zen also uses the term "big mind," which emerges when our concerns turn from ourselves to others.

While a local government manager's small mind may be concerned with authority, reputation, or the aggravation of some conflict, the big mind is clear, peaceful, and focused on helping the community achieve its goals.

While big mind is not typically in the manager's lingo, seeing the "big picture" is, and there are many similarities. The big mind recognizes the interconnectedness of all things.

Kaye points out that seeing the big picture requires acknowledging the web of relationships and connections in an organization and throughout a community. Managers should pause on key decisions and consider whether their big mind or small mind is making the call—and adjust accordingly.

Tend your garden. The problems that barge into the office of local government executives tend to be the ones that are the most difficult, thorny, conflict-ridden, and emotion-laden. It makes sense, because any problems that could be dealt with at another level probably already have been. This can lead to the feeling of managing in wait of the next sucker punch.

But we create the imagery framework for ourselves. Kaye acknowledges that a stressful workplace can take on a hard, rocky feeling as if in "an endless desert of problems to overcome and goals to attain, always in danger of stubbing [your] toe." By changing our perspective to be mindful, we change the work landscape.

By doing so, Kaye says that "Work [becomes] like a garden, with new and interesting shapes, textures, and fragrances at each turn." At the local government executive level, we are good at solving problems. Let them just become shapes and textures that we tend to for the health and vigor of the overall garden.

> Between past, present, and future, there is really only one (the present) in which we physically spend any time. Most of our mental and emotional time, however, stays clamped in the past or future.

Focus on "how" not "what." Local government management should come with a warning label stating "actual results may vary." While managers do not often control a particular result, we do control our effort.

Author Suzuki says, "The most important point in our practice is to have right or perfect effort," rather than the perfect outcome. Right effort includes a mindful awareness and carrying out responsibilities in a Zen-like manner—with sincerity, deep listening and understanding, and compassion whether we are meeting with staff, elected officials, or the community.

Jeon writes, "It is not what you *do* but rather how you *are* while you do it that creates happiness and meaning." This may seem to run counter to government's data-driven focus on results. However, with a focus on "the how," the results take care of themselves.

Show yourself compassion. Compassion is a key part of Zen as it is based in an understanding of the true nature of our lives. But we can't build compassion for others until we have it for ourselves.

Kaye writes this is different from self-pity. Instead, it means we have an internal awareness and a desire to take care of ourselves by doing such things as taking vacations, enjoying our families, and making time for meditation and exercise.

Compassion for ourselves, says Jeon, softens our stance on others. We can recognize our judgments and shortcomings and be more forgiving when we see them appear in others. He writes, "We do not take it personally, because we understand. We've been there."

The above strategies may be useful for those in local government who are still trying to dry off from the rogue waves of the Great Recession. As managers in these uncertain and stressful times, finding the Zen of work may be a clear path to rediscovering the joy.

After all, like Zen, working to build strong communities is inherently meaningful, powerful, and rewarding. PM

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BY HILLEL PRESSER

PLAN AHEAD FOR YOUR ONLINE HEREAFTER

Three Steps to Take Now

Digitally, you really can live forever, but that's not necessarily a good thing. Many of your online accounts—from automatic bill payments to eBay—may remain active after you die, unless you take steps to ensure they don't.

Automatic bill pay, for example, can theoretically keep tapping your bank account long after you're gone or, at least, until your money is. It's important to make sure your online bank and shopping accounts, even your social media, can be closed out, or that your loved ones are authorized to access them.

You may ask, 'Why would I care if I'm gone?" I can tell you from experience that not taking care of such digital details can create real headaches and heartache for your family.

Preventing Problems

Bank and shopping accounts will be vulnerable to identity theft, which would affect your estate if someone opens credit cards in your name. You might have valuable intellectual property, like domain names. Family members may need access to your health records, particularly if you died under questionable circumstances.

There's the sentimental things—photos and e-mails—that your family may want as a remembrance of you, and the libraries of music and e-books, which may represent a considerable investment on your part.

The problem is, even if you provide a family member with all of your accounts, log-ins, and passwords, they may not be legally allowed to access them. In many cases, they may be violating the accounts' terms of service or violating federal privacy and computer fraud laws. Some states have laws governing online materials, but they're different and which of your accounts are covered depends on where the provider is located.

How to Manage Your Digital Afterlife

Here is what you can do to ensure your family isn't left with a virtual nightmare after your passing:

- Create a list of all of your accounts, including login names, passwords, and answers to any security questions. Obviously, your list will need to be securely stored. Since you'll need to update it regularly as you add accounts or change passwords, it will be easiest if you keep the list on your computer in a password-protected folder.

  Some versions of Windows allow you to create protected folders, but you may need to get third-party software to do this, such as no-cost AxCrypt. Remember to create a backup of your list, whether it's on a jump drive or printed out on paper. Store the backup in such a secure place as a safe deposit box. Do not put password information in your will, which is a public document.

- If you have a Google account, set up the new inactive account manager. In May 2013, Google became the first site to give users an option for choosing what becomes of their content if they should become debilitated or die.

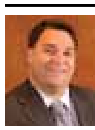
  Under the profile button, click "Account," scroll down to "Account Management," and you'll find instructions for "Control what happens to your account when you stop using Google." You can select how long the account should be inactive before your plans are set into motion; choose to whom you want to offer the content, including YouTube videos, g-mail, Google+ posts, blogger, and Picasa web albums; or also if it should simply be deleted.

- Appoint a digital executor. Perhaps the simplest way to ensure your online life is taken care of is to appoint a digital executor—a tech-savvy person who will be willing and able to carry out your wishes. Authorize the person who can access your inventory of log-in information; then spell out what you want done with each account and specify whether that's providing access to loved ones or business partners or deleting the information.

The digital world has grown and transformed so rapidly, the law hasn't kept up, which makes managing your digital afterlife challenging. Until there are more consistent laws and procedures governing this area, it's best to plan ahead, leave clear instructions, and compile a list of accounts where your estate lawyer or a loved one can find it and access it. It can make a world of difference to your survivors. PM

3 STEPS TO PLAN AHEAD

1. CREATE A LIST OF ACCOUNTS.
2. SET UP AN INACTIVE ACCOUNT MANAGER
3. APPOINT A DIGITAL EXECUTOR



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BY SHARON HAWA

HELPING CHILDREN SEPARATED BY DISASTERS

NCMEC provides free online registry

The figure is staggering: 5,192 children were separated from their parents during hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. It took eight months after those storms made landfall to reunite the last child with family members.

A significant number of children made disaster shelters their homes until their legal guardians were identified and located. Some of these children were either too young or too traumatized to speak for themselves, making their identification more challenging.

Keeping tabs on the unaccompanied minors proved difficult as some were passed from agency to agency or across state lines with little or no paper trail. Families traveled from state to state to flee the disaster-affected area, which also added to the reunification challenges with their children.

Local law enforcement, social services, and emergency management agencies also were inundated with other competing priorities and human services-related needs. All of these factors added to reunification challenges and delays.

TOP: Signs in a Texas disaster shelter helped manage the unaccompanied minors separated and displaced as a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
BOTTOM: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's child locator center in Lake Park, Florida, is a call center that manages child reunification-related phone calls following a large-scale disaster.

National Registry to the Rescue

Following Hurricane Katrina, Congress authorized the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to establish the National Emergency Child Locator Center, a call center designated to support an influx of child reunification-related calls, as stated in the 2006 Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act.

Working in collaboration with the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA), NCMEC has developed the Unaccompanied Minors Registry (UMR), which is a free, online data collection tool that makes the swift reunification of children a top priority. UMR creates a central location to share, store, and retrieve information on children separated as a result of a disaster. UMR's national portal is continuously available to reunification experts as well as the general public.

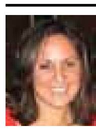
Keeping Minors from Harm

Children who become separated from those who best understand their individual needs makes coping with their reality that much more difficult and adds to their anxiety and stress levels. And if not planned for or protected properly, these minors may be susceptible to maltreatment, abuse, kidnapping, and in the most extreme cases, exploitation.

NCMEC offers technical assistance to emergency management and law enforcement agencies, disaster relief organizations, social services agencies, and faith-based communities to manage the task of reunifying children with their parents or legal guardians. With resources and a network of partnerships, NCMEC helps to alleviate the burden on these agencies to field, assess, and investigate phone calls and inquiries that could take large amounts of time, energy, and resources that a local government or state may not have to reunify families in the midst of a disaster.

NCMEC, which was established in 1984 as a nonprofit organization, has created a public and private partnership to build a coordinated, national response to the problem of missing and sexually exploited children. It also has established a missing children hotline and serves as the national clearinghouse for information related to these issues.

Using NCMEC's UMR tool is essential to a leading-practice approach to reunification that is outlined and endorsed by reunification leaders in the forthcoming FEMA publication, *2013 Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach*. When this article was written, the release date or access information for this publication had not been determined. PM



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BY PHIL SCHAENMAN

$AVING MONEY WITHOUT SACRIFICING SERVICE QUALITY

Complimentary Urban Institute reports detail proven strategies

The Urban Institute (UI) began a project in 2012 to identify approaches used by local governments to save costs with minimum adverse impacts on quality of services, if not improving them. Local governments are under significant budget pressures likely to continue for at least several years.

While much networking occurs to find good ideas, governments might not have the time and resources to record their best ideas or adequately research and evaluate cost-saving approaches of others.

Three reports have been released by UI examining how local governments can cuts costs without sacrificing service quality.

Opportunities for Police Cost Savings Without Sacrificing Service Quality: Reducing False Alarms (available at www.urban.org/publications/412729.html) examines ways to reduce the false alarms from security systems that waste many officer-years to respond and investigate. Seattle, Washington; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Montgomery County, Maryland, increased vetting of alarms by alarm companies before they call police. The communities also use graduated fines for properties that are the worst offenders and instigated various measures to improve reliability of security systems. The three communities reduced police false alarms by a dramatic 65 to 95 percent, at no net cost to the taxpayers, and without adding delays to responses or affecting clearance rates.

Opportunities for Police Cost Savings Without Sacrificing Service Quality: Reducing Fuel Consumption (www.urban.org/publications/412803.html) summarizes approaches to reduce fuel consumption of police patrol vehicles, notably New York City's use of more than 1,000 hybrid vehicles for patrol. A net savings of some $20,000 per vehicle can be achieved over a five-year period, with no observable impact on crime control, anecdotal evidence of improved officer comfort, and positive resident reactions to a greener police department.

Opportunities for Cost Savings in Corrections Without Sacrificing Service Quality: Inmate Health Care (www.urban.org/publications/412754.html) discusses ways that state and local corrections departments have reduced costs of inmate health care. These costs make up as much as one-third of corrections budgets. Cost-saving procedures that allow significant dollar savings with little impact on inmate health include telemedicine, insurance-like screening of medical requests, joining consortiums for buying pharmaceuticals, and greater use of generic drugs. These approaches were culled from corrections departments in Washington, D.C., the states of Florida and California, and others.

Looking to the future, ICMA and the Urban Institute recently approved an agreement to jointly undertake further research on cost-saving approaches. PM

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BY MARSHA FRIEDMAN

SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN TIMES OF TRAGEDY

Contemplating the proper response

If you're using social media as an information source for your community, what should you say following a tragedy like the deadly blasts at the Boston Marathon on April 15? The elementary school shootings in Newtown, Connecticut? Or weather-related natural disasters that people experienced this year?

Sometimes, nothing at all.

A Relatively New Phenomenon

The age of social media brings with it new challenges, including how to respond during a national tragedy. Remember, as recently as September 11, 2001, we had no MySpace, much less Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. Except for e-mail, no vehicle for delivering instantaneous messages existed.

After 9/11, one of the most painful days in American memory, most of us had time to pause, reflect, and put on hold information for print, radio, and television that might be considered inappropriate or offensive.

In recent months, there has been lively debate on this topic in my world—the marketing community—including how and when to tie—or not to tie—a marketing-type message into the news of the day, a widely used strategy.

IF YOU WANT TO POST SOMETHING AND YOU'RE UNSURE ABOUT WHAT TO SAY, TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT OTHER COMMUNITIES, BUSINESSES, AND OTHER BRANDS ARE SHARING, AND HOW ONLINE USERS ARE REACTING.

Gaffes can occur with the most innocent of intentions in any media content, marketing or not. Earlier in April, a new episode of the musical comedy "Glee" upset and angered parents in Newtown, Connecticut, because the plot featured a student bringing a gun to school, where it accidentally discharges. Even though the show's programming is supposed to be topical and current, one of the actors reported that it was not the show's intent to upset people.

Avoiding a Blunder

Usually, however, simply applying your own sense of decency and good taste can help you avoid a blunder. Here are suggestions for do's and don'ts:

- If you use automated posts scheduled through a site such as HootSuite, turn them off immediately. If people don't find them insensitive and uncaring or silly, they'll likely conclude your messages come from a robot—not a real person—which is just as bad.
- Can you be helpful? Hours after the blasts in Boston, with cellphone service out in the city and family and friends desperately trying to connect with loved ones, Google.org launched "Person Finder: Boston Marathon Explosions." There, individuals and organizations could share information about the status of marathon participants and spectators for those trying to find them.

  If your community has suffered a tragic event, perhaps you have helpful information to share. Here in Florida, which is affected by hurricanes, people use social media to help evacuees and their pets find shelter, and to alert others to such danger as downed power lines.

  Depending on your area of expertise, you may be able to provide more general information or commentary. An educator, for instance, can share tips for answering children's questions about the event. Philanthropists might comment on those people who selflessly step up to help.
- Of course, social media is also about reactions and, for many, that's a sincere expression of sympathy for—and unity with—those affected.

If you want to post something and you're unsure about what to say, take a look at what other communities, businesses, and other brands are sharing, and how online users are reacting. You may decide to just say nothing for a day or two, or whatever time seems reasonable given the nature of the event.

Sometimes, saying nothing at all speaks volumes. PM

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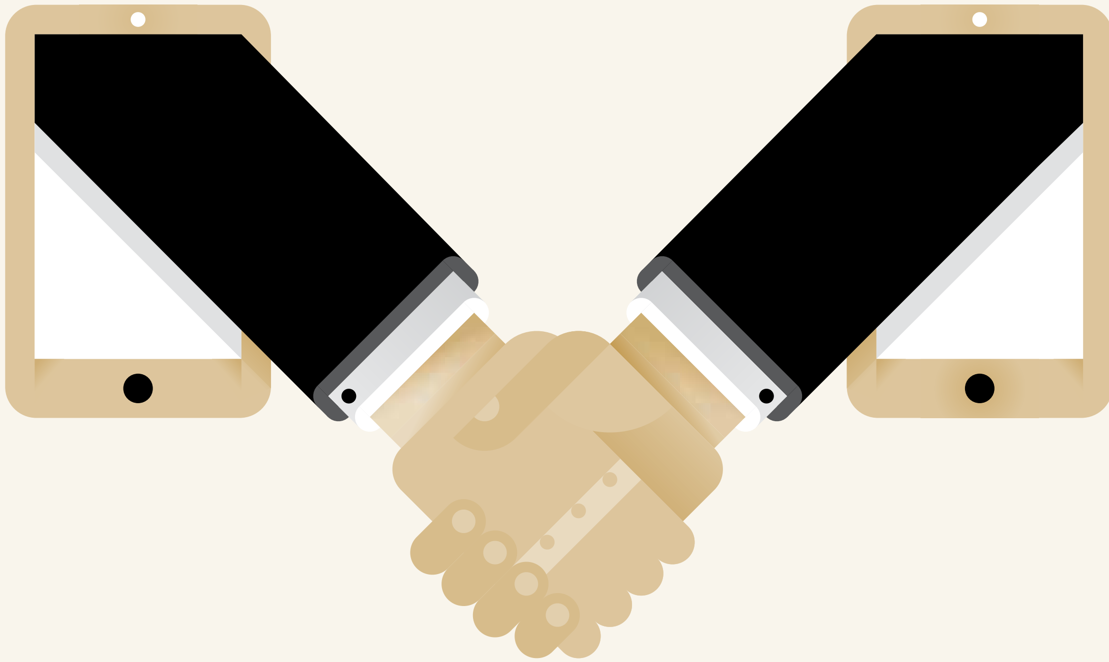

BY BRENTON CLARK

LEARNING ABOUT LOCAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A lesson in building community trust

Sheer serendipity led me from working temporary positions in Seattle to interning for San Juan County, Washington. In an affirmation that who you know is as important as what you know, a chance contact with ICMA Range Rider Bob Jean achieved what a year of job hunting since earning my master's in public administration had not—an appropriate job opportunity.

While I had been focused on environmental policy, I was suddenly thrust into the world of local governance, where I received a crash course in budgeting, land use, intergovernmental agreements, and personal communication issues to which my graduate classes had paid only scant attention.

My MPA courses left me enchanted by the glitzy idea of shaping public policy. While the policy-setting debates in state capitols or Washington, D.C., capture the most attention, local government has the greatest potential to make a positive impact on everyday life.

From health and human services counseling, to the passion-raising issue of personal land use and environmental regulations overseen by community planning officials, residents interact most frequently with local government. In early 2013, I heard firsthand about the myriad positive and negative impacts residents experience from county government.

Building Community Trust

San Juan County spent the first quarter of 2013 conducting a series of community meetings on all three of its major islands. Hosted by the county council, these "Community Conversations" asked the local community to help identify shared goals and values, and explore how to better align public services and priorities with residents' needs.

I worked closely with both administrative leaders and councilmembers in planning and conducting these meetings. Our planning was adaptive and spontaneous, setting out an overarching theme for four separate meeting topics but allowing each meeting to set the direction of the next.

It was an organic, occasionally frustrating process that, in the end, evolved from our initial plans. Yet, somehow, it worked.

Coming on the heels of a contentious local election and an update to the Critical Areas Ordinance, as well as during an election for a restructured council (from six members to three), I was worried that these conversations would devolve into yelling and rancor. We certainly saw passion, and maybe a little posturing, but the meetings proved cordial.

I credit both the positive tone set by our topics—asking people to identify values and programs that build up the community—and the "roundtable" format with moderating the extreme voices and giving the local community a chance to converse rather than pontificate.

Some of what we heard was not surprising. People live in the San Juan Islands because they love nature, have an independent spirit, and value strong community ties. We also heard new things, including innovative ideas put forward to address county issues: cluster housing opportunities on agricultural land; attracting or creating a local credit union; accepting Canadian currency; and forming a local business incubator, among many others.

Also important was the opportunity for residents to realize their neighbors might hold different views than they had assumed. One particular exchange started with a "nobody wants…" statement, followed quickly by "actually, I do!" from someone else.

As I received thanks from attendees while hurriedly packing our equipment to catch the ferry, I realized that people had been itching for an opportunity like this. There is no shortage of space for residents to speak their minds, but the intimate and respectful nature of these discussions actually allowed two-way education and communication to occur.

What this venue provided that other public discussions did not was the chance to build trust—trust that the government would listen to its residents, trust between residents that they could bridge differences of opinion, and trust that residents could appreciate the effort put forth by government employees. This is what effective civic engagement is about: having the format and facilitation necessary to ease tensions and build trust in government.

Moving Forward With Technology

The San Juan County community conversations wrapped up in mid-April and at this writing, a report of findings and recommendations will go to the new three-member council in June 2013. These conversations should not stop here, nor does the county's responsibility to show action on public input.

Further efforts to gather resident input will likely include such less intensive formats as social media or other online technology. We have discussed using online surveys to follow-up on priority-ranking exercises, as well as investigating the internal policies necessary to host Facebook or Twitter accounts that meet public records requirements.

The value of structured, respectful civic engagement as a way to build trust in local government will remain a pivotal learning moment in my career. PM

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BY KAREN THORESON

OPEN DATA OPENS NEW DOORS

Hackathons generate new community service apps

The first time I heard the word "hackathon" it about gave me a heart attack. I got a vision of really smart, scary folks sitting in dark rooms breaking into critical computer systems to steal personal information and use that data for malicious purposes, ruining lives and businesses in the process.

But attending Code for America's 2012 Summit in San Francisco changed all of that. There I learned how open data (and hackathons) can change a community's perception of local government and how introducing the tech community to government can build an appreciation and admiration for public service.

Finding New Uses for Data

A number of forward-looking communities today are opening up their computers to local "geeks" and allowing them to get a 360-degree-view of the enormous data storage that a local government maintains. Those folks, in turn, rethink the use and purpose of the data and build applications that improve services for residents. Here are some examples:

The federal government led the way with the release of the website data.gov. Since its inception in 2009, the site has grown to host 373,029 raw and geospatial datasets from 177 agencies as of March 2013. This has led to the creation of 308 apps, 137 which are mobile enabled, developed by residents.

This paved the way for large cities like San Francisco to introduce data. So far, the city has posted 249 datasets from 31 departments leading to the creation of 53 resident-developed apps addressing a variety of such issues as crime, politics, the environment, and transportation. Routsey, for instance, uses data from San Francisco's Muni, BART, Caltrain, and AC Transit to help people get where they want to go using public transportation. [1]

In Honolulu in 2011, the city and county launched CityCamp. Some 140 people discussed how to bring the tech community, residents, and government together. A civic hackathon followed with coders, developers, and designers creating prototypes of new applications.

This event created a new approach to open data through the development of the Hon*Celerator, whereby teams competed for prizes over the course of two months. Hon*Celerator was the result of work with the city and county of Honolulu and Code for America and brought together Hawaii's best coders, designers, app developers, and entrepreneurs to create more ways to engage with government.

Winning projects included a visualization of the city's budget, a sliding time scale for real-time crime, and a mapping tool to show electric car charging locations.[2]

Palo Alto, California, decided that being a digital city means hosting and supporting events that create an intersection of community and technology where ideas can flourish and connections can be made. In 2012, the city participated in its first-ever outdoor hackathon called Super Happy Block party.

Palo Alto shut down a block in the downtown core where hackers, artists, and entrepreneurs came together for 12 hours of networking. Hundreds of visitors set up laptops to code and to network. The event also featured technology demonstrations, opportunities for kids to learn code, and a venture capital corner to pitch inventions to venture capitalists.[3]

The city of Austin, Texas, opened its Open Data Portal in 2011 and quickly followed up with its first hackathon in 2012. That event spawned many great community applications—all fueled by local government data.

Among them was the development of Prepared.ly, an application that provides wildfire prevention tools and tips using weather and environmental data from the Austin fire department and other state of Texas agencies.

StrayMapper.com mines data from the Austin Animal Services Department to help reunite lost pets with their owners. StrayMapper not only helps owners

THIS IS WHAT EFFECTIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS ABOUT: HAVING THE FORMAT AND FACILITATION NECESSARY TO EASE TENSIONS AND BUILD TRUST IN GOVERNMENT.

MY REFLECTIONS

- A management internship in local government provided a good dose of reality to temper the theory taught by an MPA program.
- Good civic engagement uses formats that promote moderating of extreme positions and build trust within communities, between residents and their government.
- Ongoing, low-level engagement may take advantage of social media and other new technologies, anticipating and staying ahead of rumors and disinformation.

to quickly find their beloved pets, but also reduces the resource strain on the shelter which houses lost animals.[4]

For the Public Good

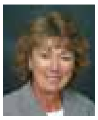
The buzzword today in management circles is "big data" and for good reason. Advancement in information technology and the rise of social media have data being generated at an unprecedented speed--doubling every two years.[5,6] At this rate, we can anticipate that in the next two years the amount of data generated will be more than the amount of data developed in the entire history of the planet.[7]

Designing spaces for do-it-yourself open governance data has done more than grant the public access to government information: It has also created opportunities for the public to proactively represent ideas and interact with government.

With the advancement in information and computational technologies, public agencies and the processes of governance are undergoing fundamental changes. Public agencies at all levels are opening up their data reservoirs to the general public for improving transparency and accountability.

With this openness, there is the possibility of creating value by analyzing, exploring, and finding novel uses for this data for the public good.[8]

It also allows residents the opportunity to interact with their government in new ways that emphasize a new community connectivity, which embraces how residents can combine individual interests for the public good. Rethinking the old mode of protecting government data to giving the public "their" data will be the way of the future. PM



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ENDNOTES

Citations 1–4 and 8 below are taken from "The Digital Future: Open Data to Open Doors," *The IDEAS Quarterly Report*, Spring 2013, Volume 14, Alliance for Innovation.

1 "Keep Reinventing" by Greg Hermann, assistant to the city manager, City of Carlsbad, California, pg. 7–8.

2 "Hon*Celerator" by Burt Lum, executive director, Hawaii Open Data, pg. 9–10.

3 "Lessons Learning in Using Technology to Deepen Community Engagement" by Dr. Jonathan Reichental and Sheila Tucker, City of Palo Alto, California, pg. 14–15.

4 "The Austin, TX Open Data Movement" by Matthew (Mateo) Esquibel, Internet services and IT applications manager, City of Austin, Texas, pg. 13.

5 Heywood, J. (2009). The big idea my brother inspired. Presented at the Technology, Entertainment, Design. Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/jamie_heywood_the_big_idea_my_brother_inspired.html.

6 McGaughey, K. (2011). World Data More Than Doubling Every Two Years–Driving Big Data Opportunity, New IT Roles. Retrieved from http://www.emc.com/about/news/press/2011/20110628-01.htm.

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8 "How Open Data Moves Us Closer to Precision Governance" by Erik Johnston, Rashmi Krishnamurthy, Tanya Kelley, Ajay Vinze, Arizona State University, pg.

BY KATY SIMON, ICMA-CM

TAKE THE WORK SERIOUSLY

But not yourself

As managers, we are often in the limelight in our communities for better or worse. Most of us would probably agree that transparency in government—warts and all—is a good thing and helps us to make better decisions. When practiced consistently, it also keeps appointed and elected officials humbled in the face of the daunting challenges we face.

And as it turns out, humility can be one of the most important things we have in our toolkit when it comes to being someone whom the public, employees, and elected officials feel they can trust as a human being.

I've had perhaps more opportunities to be utterly humbled by my own imperfections than many managers, because I also perform as a singer at community events and venues. One such event was particularly memorable.

A Special Performance

I was asked to sing the national anthem for Washoe County, Nevada's highly popular new Triple-A baseball team, the Reno Aces (who went on to win the national championship in 2012). As we've all come to appreciate, the national anthem is a moving and personal song. It's also intimidating to sing under the best of circumstances because not only is the song's range extensive and difficult, but listeners also have specific expectations about how the anthem should be performed.

For this occasion, I invited my long-time singing partner, an attorney who is a gifted singer, to join me in performing the national anthem as a tasteful, respectful *a capella* duet.

The day for the performance came, and members of our staff, county commissioners, and the mayors of the county's local cities had all bought tickets to the game and were there, at least in part, to hear me sing.

It was time for us to walk out on the field and begin. The stadium was packed. It was a beautiful summer night early in the season, and families were spread out all over the stands.

A Disastrous Glitch

We stepped up to take the handheld microphones and the earphone monitors designed to lessen the distraction of the two-second delay between the notes sung and notes heard over the giant stadium sound system. Our faces were splashed 10-feet-tall on the stadium jumbotron as we opened our mouths and began our performance.

As I started to sing, my gaze circled the 9,000 pairs of eyes watching us in the stadium. Suddenly, I realized something was terribly wrong. No one was hearing my voice! My microphone had been shut off.

We struggled mightily, expecting the sound engineer to discover the error and turn me up, while my partner continued singing his harmony part to the duet, which was utterly unrecognizable as the national anthem. Disgusted murmurs and loud laughter from the crowd were palpable.

It was embarrassing, humiliating, mortifying, disappointing, and absolutely humbling—the proverbial emperor with no clothes, and with staff and commissioners and mayors all watching it in horror on the jumbotron!

A Perfect Do-Over

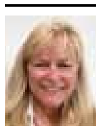
I handled lots of good-natured ribbing and abuse from my colleagues with aplomb. The Reno Aces representatives appeared in my office the next day with flowers and an apology from the team, delivered by the team mascot, with an invitation for a do-over, which my singing partner and I accepted and performed flawlessly.

We had lost the tune, but I gained many friends who appreciated that I wasn't above taking the risk to make myself look like a complete fool.

The moral of the story is: Take the work seriously, but never take yourself too seriously. And never lose the ability to laugh at yourself.

The ability to graciously endure and laugh at our own public gaffes makes us more human and more accessible. It will help residents and public officials see us as someone likable, someone whom they trust isn't above taking a good-natured stumble. And, most importantly, as someone whom they can be themselves with to get things done. PM

HUMILITY CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS WE HAVE IN OUR TOOLKIT WHEN IT COMES TO BEING SOMEONE WHOM THE PUBLIC, EMPLOYEES, AND ELECTED OFFICIALS FEEL THEY CAN TRUST AS A HUMAN BEING.



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ICMA UNIVERSITY

Regional Summits 2014

ICMA members and state officers are invited to attend the Regional Summit in their region to network with colleagues, participate in a professional development opportunity in the form of an ICMA University workshop, discuss ICMA issues and programs, and provide feedback to the ICMA Executive Board and staff. ICMA Executive Director Bob O'Neill with Felicia Logan, director of Leadership Development, will lead an ICMA University workshop on a topic of importance to local government management.

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Southeast Regional Summit
March 6–7 | Williamsburg, Virginia

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April 3–4 | Princeton, New Jersey

Mountain Plains Regional Summit
May 1–2 | Dallas Metro Area, Texas

West Coast Regional Summit
May 8–9 | San Jose, California

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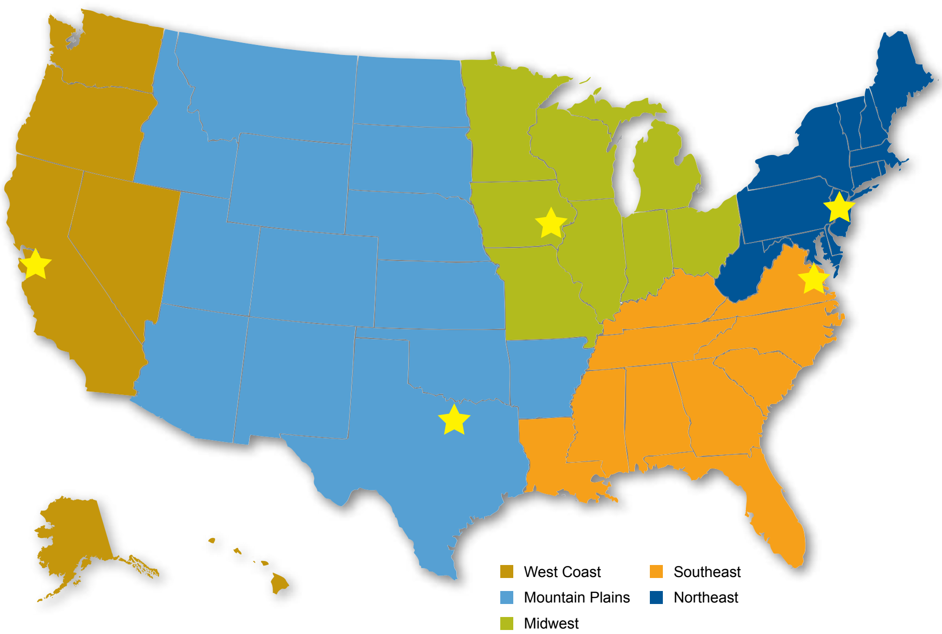

The **Young Professionals Leadership Institute (YPLI)** precedes each Regional Summit on Tuesday and Wednesday (Southeast Regional YPLI: March 5–6; Midwest Regional YPLI: March 19–20; Northeast Regional YPLI: April 2–3; Mountain Plains YPLI: Apr 30–May 1; West Coast YPLI: May 7–8). ***Managers are encouraged to invite assistants, assistant managers, and those who are beginning their career path in local government to attend this special leadership skill building institute.*** The cost is $99. For more information, visit **icma.org/YPLI**.

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