AUGUST 2010 · VOLUME 92 · NUMBER 7

A Customer Service Intervention in Local Government

The customer service intervention used by Salisbury, North Carolina, to begin the process of changing organizational culture, includes how customer service became the city's hedgehog principle—a concept described by author Jim Collins—to unify the organization and its most valued asset: employees.
William Rivenbark, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and Evans Ballard, Salisbury, North Carolina.
READ ARTICLE

FEATURES

211/311: Is There a Case for Consolidation or Collaboration?

Why do 311 systems remain the exception rather than the rule?
David Eichenthal, Chattanooga, Tennessee.
READ ARTICLE

The Long Reach of Military Experience*

Veterans understand the practical ways to manage.
Steve Vinezeano, Niles, Illinois.
READ ARTICLE

Perspectives on Urban Sustainability*

Focus on efficiency, diversity, connectivity, and restoration.
Craig Malin, Davenport, Iowa.
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COVER STORY

A Customer Service Intervention in Local Government

by William Rivenbark and Evans Ballard

The city of Salisbury, North Carolina, conducted a citizen survey in July 2004 to enrich its performance measurement system with customer satisfaction outcome measures across 13 service delivery areas. One question included on the survey addressing customer service caught our attention. Resident feedback regarding whether "city employees are courteous" acted as a red flag for a city with a vision of promoting a positive business climate for economic opportunities as well as being a place where individuals want to live.

Respondents were not overly critical, but it was apparent that the majority of residents were ambivalent about how they were treated by city employees. City Manager David Treme's response was that the city could move forward in one of two ways. The first was to address this issue as simply one of the several areas that needed attention based on the survey results. The second was to address it from the perspective of fundamentally transforming the organizational culture.

This article describes the customer service intervention used by the city to begin the process of changing the organizational culture, including how customer service became the city's hedgehog principle—a concept described in the book, ***Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap—and Others Don't***, by Jim Collins—to unify the organization and its most valued asset: employees.[1] We begin this article with background information on Salisbury before we describe the customer service intervention used to initiate the culture change.

We then present the results, including a citizen survey conducted in March 2009 to demonstrate the quantitative outcome. We conclude with a discussion of the adage, "It's a journey, not a destination." In other words, an intervention is only the first step toward a never-ending commitment to change.

Building on the Past

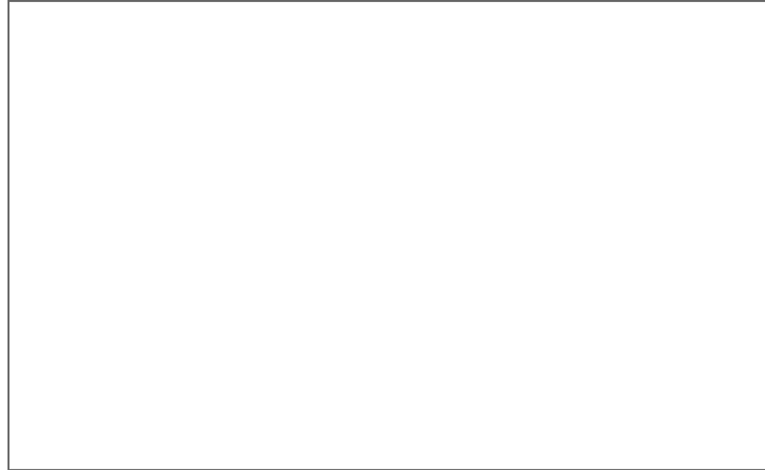
The city's commitment to change is well documented. After relying primarily on workload measures to populate its performance measurement system, the city joined the North Carolina Benchmarking Project in 1999 as a means of embracing the higher-order measures of efficiency and effectiveness and for comparing its service performance against other municipalities in North Carolina.[2] A further commitment to change was made in 2002 with the hiring of a budget and benchmarking analyst to help departments use the comparative data for reengineering their processes and procedures for service improvement.

The city had experienced a reduction in force the year before in response to the governor withholding intergovernmental revenue in order to balance the state's budget. The city manager felt that department heads needed internal technical assistance with using performance and cost data to implement change, even during a time of budget stress.

The city realized, however, that a missing component of its performance measurement system was qualitative feedback from citizens on service delivery. The city applied for and received a two-year grant from the National Center for Civic Innovation, a nonprofit organization created to facilitate the ability of local governments to adapt approaches for improving performance and communicating more effectively with constituents.[3] A major part of this initiative is the Government Trailblazer Program, supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, to encourage citizen involvement in the priorities and actions of local governments. The first year of the grant funded a citizen mail survey in 2004. The second year of the grant funded three distinct focus groups over a two-week period in 2005; the focus groups targeted business leaders, neighborhood and nonprofit leaders, and citizens.

The survey results showed that the city was doing an exceptional job in the areas of solid waste, police, and fire. Feedback on city streets, however, was negative, a rating that was used to justify funding increases in asphalt maintenance and repair. The survey results that were particularly alarming were that 43 percent of the respondents felt that city employees were courteous, while the remaining 57 percent of respondents were either indifferent or disagreed. The objectives of the three focus groups were to identify what good customer service looks like and to obtain feedback on how the city should document, report, and communicate performance to its citizens.

Customer Service Intervention



The city manager, as part of his ongoing commitment to professional development through the ICMA credentialing program, was exposed to the hedgehog principle as described in the book, ***Good to Great***, when he attended the Senior Executive Institute at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. The book describes how some organizations are able to simplify a complex environment into a single idea, which then becomes the linchpin for holding various parts of the organization together, transforming the organizational culture, and becoming a high-performance organization.

The manager had the city leadership team read ***Good to Great*** to begin the educational process of transitioning the organizational culture. Employees began training based on the concepts contained in the book, and the resulting discussions began to focus on customer service as Salisbury's linchpin, or hedgehog principle. Building on feedback from these employee meetings and the focus group findings of 2005, the city manager and the leadership team adopted customer service as the one unifying concept across all departments.

Over several months, they also began to feel strongly that customer service was indeed Salisbury's hedgehog principle for three important reasons. First, customer service transcends all departments regardless of their differing goals and objectives. Second, customer service is an integral part of successful service delivery. And third, employees recognized customer service as the defining measure of success for the city.

The next step was to embark on real change. The city hired a facilitator to collaborate with human resources staff to guide the organization through a customer service intervention. The purpose of this type of intervention was to foster among all city employees an attitude of providing excellent customer service—the core competency that would set Salisbury apart from other local governments. The customer service intervention became something much more than simply required training for all city employees.

The first step in the intervention was to secure employee involvement and ownership of the process. This began with the selection of a dedicated group of frontline employees from across the organization to serve as the customer service design team. The group's mission was to develop and coordinate the improvement process. They adopted a motto—"Salisbury is driven to serve"—and identified and defined 10 keys to excellent customer service. After the customer service intervention was framed, all levels of management and employees attended training. Strategies were then implemented to build on the positive momentum; for example, the creation of a public communication campaign, the establishment of customer feedback processes, and the communication of success stories.

As the intervention phase of the culture change continued, other strategies were identified and implemented. Each department integrated the customer service model into its service delivery areas. Another critical step was to develop an internal communication plan to share and model employee success stories. The concept of customer service is now part of the hiring and evaluation processes. A customer service perspective also is required for all key organizational decisions.

As the city manager says, "The number one priority of the city is to provide excellent customer service to all citizens. It is our goal to build a high-performing municipal organization that accomplishes the goals and outcomes set out by our citizens and city council."[4]

Intervention Success

> **A critical part of any type of intervention is to articulate clearly that continuous improvement of customer service never ends and requires an ongoing or lifetime commitment to change.**

After two years of hard work toward building a culture of excellent customer service, the city manager authorized funding of a follow-up survey for gathering hard evidence on whether progress had been made. The survey was conducted in March 2009, using the same survey techniques and vendor as the 2004 survey.

Survey results showed that the city was continuing its exceptional job in the areas of solid waste, police, and fire. While the feedback on the quality of streets continued to be low compared with other service areas, the increase of annual funding for asphalt maintenance and repair did pay dividends. Approximately 39 percent of respondents were satisfied with the quality of streets in 2009, compared with approximately 25 percent in 2004.

The survey instrument also contained a question on whether city employees were courteous, which represents a major dimension of customer service and allowed for a direct comparison with the previous survey. The survey results showed that 68 percent of respondents felt that city employees were courteous, while the remaining respondents were either indifferent or disagreed. The 25 percent increase provided the city manager with positive feedback in two different ways.

First, the increase supported the decision that a customer service intervention was needed and that change had been made. Second, it reinforced what was advocated in *Good to Great*: commitment to a hedgehog principle—customer service in the case of the city of Salisbury—that is never ending and that always requires additional progress.

The broader story in Salisbury is one of meaningful employee involvement and customer service being an integral part of service delivery. Citizen satisfaction improved in 12 out of the 13 service areas contained in the 2009 survey.

Another way to measure success with management philosophies and techniques is whether a local government's methods are adopted by others. Now more cities in North Carolina, including Concord and Lenoir, are implementing within their own organizations a customer service model based on the success of Salisbury.

These cities, however, are implementing ***a*** customer service model rather than ***the*** customer service model. Returning to the first step of the customer service intervention, employees across each separate organization must come together and design the process together for ownership and empowerment to occur. A canned approach simply does not work when a true commitment is made to change organizational culture.

Conclusion

A critical part of any type of intervention is to articulate clearly that continuous improvement of customer service never ends and requires an ongoing or lifetime commitment to change. It's a journey, not a destination. This ongoing commitment was one of the main reasons why the city manager initiated the process described in *Good to Great*. The customer service intervention has resulted in Salisbury becoming one team operating under a single unifying principle. Providing excellent customer service embodies the city's vision and mission.

To further the city's commitment, customer service was adopted as one of the city's six core values. It is a culture of excellent customer service, quality services for all citizens, honesty and integrity, inclusion and diversity, fairness and equality, and commitment to a team of creative problem solvers. Because of this holistic approach to change, the manager regularly shares with staff the fact that he has received more customer service compliments in the past year than in the previous 10 years combined.

ENDNOTES

[1] Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap—and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001).

[2] A. John Vogt and Paula Few, *Performance and Cost Data: Phase III City Services, Medium and Smaller Cities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, School of Government, 1999).

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FEATURE

211/311: Is There a Case for Consolidation or Collaboration?

by David Eichenthal

Local governments across North America are moving forward with the implementation of 311 systems that allow residents to access information and nonemergency services with one call. Still, 311 systems remain the exception, not the rule, in all but the largest communities in the United States. Since there is no central governing authority that monitors the establishment of 311 systems, the exact number of 311 systems that exist in the U.S. (and North America) is uncertain.

A 2007 ICMA survey, however, found that only 15 percent (or 104) of responding local governments reported having any form of centralized customer service system.[1] Communities with a 311 system then comprise a subset (less than 104) of that total number.

By comparison, 211 systems—which provide access to information and referrals (I&R) in response to social service needs—are common. As of April 2009, there are more than 240 active 211 systems in 46 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Many of these systems offer statewide or regional coverage whereas 311 systems tend to cover a single jurisdiction.

Given the growth of 311 and the prevalence of 211 systems, could there be opportunities for consolidation or coordination between these types of one-call systems? In view of the lack of available research, the Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies and ICMA explored the issue and released a white paper that takes a preliminary look at this question.

Background of 211 and 311

211 is a partnership between the United Way of America (United Way) and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS). The concept of information and referral (I&R) phone lines dates back to the 1950s, but the modern history of 211 in the United States began in 1974, with the development of a seven-digit I&R number for social services by the United Way for Metropolitan Atlanta.

In Canada, Toronto launched the first 211 system in 2002.[2] 211 systems provide callers with information about human services and community information. These systems provide six different types of referral services: (1) human needs; (2) physical and mental health; (3) employment support; (4) support for older citizens and persons with disabilities; (5) support for children, youth, and families; and (6) volunteer opportunities and donations.

In the United States, 211 became a national initiative under the leadership of United Way of America and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems, with individual call centers developed at the local, state, and regional levels. In Canada, 211 initiatives are supported by a similar national steering committee and organized by province.[3] In the United States 211 centers are often operated by nonprofit organizations, and approximately 40 percent are operated by affiliates of United Way.

Calls to 211 are frequently treated as cases in the social services system. The I&R specialists who handle 211 calls are

trained to explore the underlying problems and service needs of callers who might only be seeking information about a shelter or a food pantry. Because calls frequently result in referrals to third-party agencies, it is often difficult to track the outcomes of calls, that is, whether callers received the services for which they were seeking information.

The development of 311 systems in the United States and Canada coincided with the development of 211 systems. For years, local governments throughout the United States had maintained seven-digit numbers that frequently functioned as citywide call or contact centers or switchboards. In 1997, the Federal Communications Commission approved the use of the 311 number. Baltimore became the first city to implement the system. In 2004, Canada also approved the 311 designation, and Calgary became the first Canadian city to implement a 311 system in 2005.[4]

311 systems are designed to provide a single point of entry to local government for individuals seeking nonemergency information or services from their local governments. With 311, residents and businesses no longer have to play "blue-pages roulette," where they are forced to guess the correct phone number to address their question or problem.

Instead, 311 allows businesses and residents to call one telephone number, which takes them to a centralized staff of call-center employees who can either provide the information requested or take the information necessary to request a city service. Centralized call-center staff can directly provide that information to the responsible department or departments of city government.

Although 311 can function as the front door to local government, it does not actually fill potholes, inspect housing, or collect garbage. In contrast with 211 systems, however, software supporting most 311 systems allows local governments to measure the timeliness of responses to citizen-based 311 calls. 311 calls requesting services are treated as individual requests for service.

In other words, one call about an abandoned vehicle, a pothole, and graffiti is treated as three individual requests for service, not as an overall complaint about conditions in a specific neighborhood or community. Calls to 311 can be used to document and diagnose problems at the community or city level.

311 systems are usually run by the local government and are specific to a single city or single county. Each locality determines which services will be covered by 311. Although 311 was initially designed for nonemergency police calls, not all localities direct nonemergency police calls to their 311 systems; some localities maintain a separate seven-digit nonemergency police telephone number.

Reasons for Consolidating 211 and 311

The development of both 211 and 311 was based on the notion that individuals in need of assistance should not bear the burden of determining which department of government or nonprofit service provider is best positioned to meet their needs or answer their questions. Members of the public do not care who provides the service or answers their questions; they just want their needs met or a service delivered.

As a result, there is a strong argument for consolidation or collaboration of the now separate 311 and 211 systems. Differences between nonprofit and government service providers are no more relevant to members of the public than whether a service is provided by public works or code enforcement. Consolidation or collaboration could lead to greater efficiencies in staffing, technology, and training.

Collaborations that allow 311 and 211 data to be shared could lead to a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of a locality's needs. A neighborhood-specific analysis of 311 data on housing complaints and 211 data on requests for shelter would surely be more complete than an analysis that relied on only one source of information.

Case Studies of the Relationship

Officials with three communities where 311 and

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

The ICMA/Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies white paper on 311 and 211 (on which this article is based) represents early research and thinking on this topic. Relatively few combined 311-211 systems exist in North America and that dearth of examples itself begs the question "Why aren't there more?"

Part of the answer may stem from the fact that the focus and orientation of 311 and 211 systems are really quite different—customer service versus social service—though there certainly is overlap. Among the questions that arise when considering this issue are:

Are the training needs for 311 agents different than those for 211 agents? The customer service skills needed by a 311 call agent are not necessarily the same skills needed by a 211 call agent who often deals with individuals in the midst of a personal crisis.

How should staffing for the two systems be handled? 311 systems most often have paid staff who handle phone calls, whereas a number of 211 systems (New Mexico, Vermont, and Missouri to name a few states) use volunteers from the community.

How should performance metrics be structured for the two systems? While most 311 calls can be answered in a relatively short time period—talk times generally range from two to five minutes—whereas the length of a call to 211 can take much longer–up to 20 minutes—because agents often need to question and explore with the caller what his or her needs truly are.

How should the funding streams for the two systems be structured? Local governments often fund 311 systems from their general funds. The local United Way frequently funds 211 systems. Can these funds be blended or must they be

211 have come together—in New York City; the region of Halton in Ontario, Canada; and Bridgeport, Connecticut—were interviewed for the ICMA/Ochs Center white paper. Case studies of the ongoing efforts in New York and Halton and the Bridgeport experiment are important to understanding the challenges and opportunities of consolidation.

accounted for separately?

The experiences of the three jurisdictions—New York, New York; Halton, Ontario, Canada; and Bridgeport, Connecticut—profiled in this article don't begin to answer all the questions that arise, but they provide a much needed starting point for determining the right questions to ask.

New York City[5]

New York City is the most populous city in the United States, with an estimated 2008 population of 8.36 million residents.[6] New York provides a wide variety of municipal services, including many traditionally associated with county and state governments.

In March 2003, New York City launched the nation's largest 311 system. NYC 311 has a full-time staff of 400 call takers and receives an average of 45,000 calls per day. NYC 311 is operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As New York was launching its 311, United Way and local nonprofit agencies were already engaged in ongoing discussions about creating a 211 system for the city.

In November 2006, Mayor Michael Bloomberg publicly proposed a consolidated 311 and 211 system. In 2007, the blended 311–211 model went into effect. Under New York City's model, individuals can call either 311 or 211 to access I&R services. Calls to 211 or 311 for I&R services are treated in one of three ways:

1. In the case of many calls, 311 call takers are able to simply provide basic information to the caller.
2. In some cases, 311 call takers refer calls to nonprofit or government entities either through "hot" transfers (where the call taker remains on the line and switches the call) or by providing a telephone number.
3. For callers with more complex social service needs, calls are referred to I&R specialists in the 311 center.

Local government officials believe consolidation led to increased efficiency—streamlining access to social services and creating economies of scale related to software and personnel costs. Nearly 2,300 social services provided by a multitude of nonprofits were added to the city's 311 knowledge base as part of this effort.

Due to the nature of social service calls, which focus on determining the exact needs of the individual calling and require time for the call agent to question the individual in order to assist, the city opted not to establish service-level agreements (SLAs) for 211 calls. (SLAs establish targeted timelines for the completion of service.) In 2007 and 2008, the city received more than 2.7 million calls for health and human services, making it the highest volume 211 system in the nation.

Halton, Ontario[7]

The regional municipality of Halton has a population of 467,200 and provides such local government services as public works, along with those that had previously been provided by the province, including health, social, and community services. In June 2007, Halton launched a 211 service. Less than one year later, Halton added a 311 system to provide access to local government services.

Both systems built upon a preexistent government call center, Access Halton, which had infrastructure and staff in place. Prior to 211, approximately two-thirds of its calls were inquiries about Halton region human and social services.

The consolidation of Access Halton, 211, and 311 has produced a series of benefits. Nearly three dozen government phone numbers, for example, were eliminated and no longer required staff to answer those lines. Residents also have greater access to government services as the call center operates beyond normal business hours, taking calls from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. during the work week and 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on the weekends.

Additional training and the rigor of going through the 211 accreditation process has provided call takers with greater skill sets and knowledge of resources for residents.

Bridgeport, Connecticut[8]

United Way of Connecticut has the oldest statewide 211 system in the nation. It has a long history of working with state government to provide information related to state health insurance programs and other state-provided child services. Connecticut also is unique because of its lack of a county level of government.

In 2007, United Way and the city of Bridgeport entered into a formal agreement whereby 211 would take calls for municipal services from Bridgeport residents.

Despite apparent efficiencies, there were obstacles to success:

- Some of the existing 211 staff resisted the idea of taking municipal service calls as well as social service calls. Municipal service requests were considered a distraction. Bridgeport was a small part of the total statewide 211 calling area. Approximately 350,000 calls to 211 were made statewide annually, and Bridgeport was expected to generate only 10,000 to 15,000 municipal calls per year.

- Before implementing the 211 system, Bridgeport did not analyze workflow or departmental outcomes. None of the city departments had a well-established work-order system. Calls to 211 for municipal services generated e-mails to the appropriate departments, but there was no way to track resolution. Department employees frequently closed out requests without acting on them.
- 211 service was provided 24 hours per day, seven days a week, but it was unclear that a similar level of service was needed for 311 calls.
- Minimal effort was made to link 211 service to performance management or measurement.

With a change in administration, the contract between United Way and Bridgeport ended on December 31, 2008.

Conclusions

By providing greater public access to essential services delivered by local government and nonprofit organizations, both 311 and 211 systems increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of these services. Residents no longer are forced to spend time searching through the phonebook hoping to find the correct number when they have an issue—whether it's where to find affordable housing (211) or reporting a code violation (311). And the potential for new synergies exist, such as providing a parent with information on children's programming at public libraries (311) and after-school care programs (211). Despite obstacles, the opportunity for consolidation and the need for collaboration are clear.

Local governments and area nonprofit organizations benefit from having closer working relationships and easy access to information needed by area residents. New York City's operation of 311 and 211 may be a model for localities that currently lack either service. There are, however, relatively few locations in which a 311 system preceded 211 as it did in New York.

The greater potential may lie in the ability to have 211 systems provide the platform for the development of 311 systems. With the majority of the nation covered by 211, efficiency would suggest that 211 should assume the role of providing for municipal as well as social services. The lessons of the Bridgeport experiment, however, suggest the need for caution.

Although integration of 311 into an existing 211 system may spare some local governments the expense of recreating a call-center infrastructure, cities must prepare to invest in the workflow systems that are critical to the effectiveness of 311. Whether a local government is preparing to develop its own 311 system or partner with 211, leadership commitment to the effort—accompanied by adequate resources—is essential.

Use of 211 for local government systems may also lead to the development of more regional 311 systems. Numerous 211 systems already operate at a regional level. The example of Bridgeport suggests that a regional 311 system being operated by a regional 211 system may result in a better fit for consolidation.

Consolidation of existing 311 and 211 initiatives may be harder to achieve. Many 211 initiatives are regional or statewide, but few 311 systems are. If a 311 system were to take over 211 calls for a specific city or county, 211 would still need to exist for those parts of a region or state not currently served by 311.

With fewer obstacles to success, there is a clearer opportunity for 311 and 211 systems to collaborate closely even where they remain separate:

- Both 211 and 311 systems play critical roles in a local area response to a disaster, natural or otherwise. Close collaboration should be commemorated through formal disaster response agreements.
- 211 and 311 organizations can learn from each other with regard to best practices in the operation of public-interest call centers. Common best practices in telephony and training are feasible first steps for collaboration.
- Both 311 and 211 systems are important sources of data for comprehensive community indicators. By studying data from both systems, local governments can achieve a much clearer picture of community needs.
- Joint marketing efforts would help clarify the respective roles of the two systems.

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[6] U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2008, www.census.gov/popest/cities/SUB-EST2008.html.
[7] Unless otherwise indicated, this case study is based on an interview with Katie Johnston of the regional municipality of Halton (June 9, 2009).
[8]

Unless otherwise indicated, this case study is based on interviews with Michael Meotti (May 19, 2009) and Sean Ghio of United Way of Connecticut (May 29, 2009).

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- United Way of Connecticut: Sean Ghio, Michael Meotti
- United Way of New York: Gordon Campbell, Hayyim Obadyah

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PM*PLUS*

Wendell Berry, Michael Pollan, and the Leadership of Local Communities: Lessons in Sustainability and Health

by Neal Beets

> *I begin with the proposition that eating is an agricultural act.*
>
> —Wendell Berry
>
> *Many of the problems of health and nutrition we face today trace back to things that happen on the farm, and behind those things stand specific government policies few of us know anything about.*
>
> —Michael Pollan

Wendell Berry is a novelist, poet, essayist, and farmer. Michael Pollan is a journalist and journalism professor. Together, they are leaders of a land, food, and economic ethic that provides important lessons for local government administrators. This article explores some of the conclusions reached by Berry and Pollan about our food system and our quality of life that are germane to local government managers. It presents local practices for improving the health of our communities consistent with the themes developed in the work of Berry and Pollan.

Background

In both his fiction and nonfiction work, Wendell Berry writes about stewardship of communities and land.[1] Especially in his essays, Berry decries the waste in our modern economy and the pollution of our land, water, and air. He attributes much of the responsibility for waste and pollution to intensive, large-scale industrial farming. Typical traditional farming involves rotating crops so as not to wear out the soil, using compost and manure to replenish the soil, tilling for weeds, and managing pests through use of competing insects or other organic methods. These traditional farming practices have largely been replaced in the United States by chemical fertilizers, chemical herbicides, and chemical pesticides—all of which are manufactured with the assistance of large quantities of fossil fuel and then applied by mega-machinery built and operated with fossil fuels.

The result is large, cheap yields of crops but negative impacts on the soil, our streams, and smaller-scale farmers who can't afford to compete against industrial-scale farmers selling to multinational corporations. Rural communities suffer, too. Rural communities used to depend on the diversity of local occupations that supported diverse farms and numerous farm families.

Now, the industrialization of farming has reduced the number of farmers in this country from approximately 5 million in 1950 to just a little more than 2 million today, and the number of persons living on farms has decreased from approximately 15 million in 1950 to fewer than 6 million today.[2] Large-scale monocultures of a handful of commodity crops such as corn and soybeans and the concentration of farm animals in large-scale confinement operations—CAFOs or concentrated animal feeding operations—have created a landscape that is not hospitable to small-scale farming and small communities.

As Wendell Berry compares traditional family farming to industrial farming, Michael Pollan tracks food from farm field to dinner table.[3] Pollan describes an amazingly productive food

It's a Fact

The industrialization of farming has reduced the number of farmers in this country from approximately 5 million in 1950 to

system. For less than the minimum wage for one hour of work, an American can purchase a fast-food meal almost anywhere in this country at almost any time of day that will contain more than enough calories to sustain a person for the entire day.[4] On average, one American farmer produces enough food to feed 129 people.[5] By any standard, these are prodigious achievements.

just a little more than 2 million today, and the number of persons living on farms has decreased from approximately 15 million in 1950 to fewer than 6 million today.

But these impressive achievements have come with costly consequences. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) characterizes obesity as an epidemic in this country, assigns much of the responsibility to a high-calorie, low-quality diet of mainly mass-processed food products, and prescribes locally grown food and meat as one part of a comprehensive response to this epidemic.[6]

CDC estimates the price tag for treating obesity and its related diseases at $147 billion each year, or 9.1 percent of all medical spending.[7] After the CDC issued its report, it created an implementation guide with specific recommendations for local government to reverse the obesity epidemic.[8] Finally, CDC has created a program called Lean Works! with an obesity cost calculator and specific recommendations to get employees more active and lean.[9]

In addition to the obesity epidemic, CDC associates our processed-food culture with alarmingly high levels of type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and some forms of cancer.[10] Thus, diets high in calories from processed foods but lacking in real food value are contributing to our ever-increasing health care costs.

Plainly, many factors are at work, but it is no coincidence that as the percentage of our household income used to purchase food has come down from 20 percent to 10 percent since the 1950s,[11] our collective spending on health care as a percentage of gross domestic product over that same period has risen from 5 percent to 17 percent.[12]

What follows in this article are some examples of local practices by city, town, and county government that address some of Berry's and Pollan's concerns about our food system and modern economy. Following the description of each local practice are representative examples of that practice in actual use and a list of resources for learning more.

Practical Applications

A. Culture and Agriculture. Berry highlights the linkages between culture and agriculture. Eating is obviously central to our lives. Yet, we have removed agriculture from a practice of almost everyone to a business dominated by fewer and fewer large, global corporations. Berry and Pollan advocate a more decentralized approach and a more local scale for growing and selling real food, emphasizing fresh food produced within 100 miles or so of every city and town—or, best of all, in your own community or yard.

1. Community-Supported Agriculture. Community-supported agriculture (CSA) consists of residents buying shares of produce or meat from local farmers. The CSA program began in 1986 with two farms, and, as of 2007, 12,549 farms in the United States reported to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that they marketed products through a CSA.[13]

Being local, CSAs avoid high transportation costs and delays between harvesting and eating that reduce the nutritional value and taste of food. In addition, local farmers can sell food directly to consumers without expensive packaging, processing, or intermediaries.

The food can be more flavorful as well, inasmuch as it does not need to be bred and grown to withstand mass processing, packing, lengthy transportation, or an extended shelf life. Some local governments provide links on their websites to local CSAs and promote them through the bulletin board on their government access cable channels. Most land-grant universities and county agricultural extension services have paper and electronic material about CSAs operating in their states.[14]

Important for our local economies, the share concept used in CSAs is also being used in community-supported enterprises (CSEs). CSEs use the concept of shares or subscriptions to support small, often rural businesses that the local community deems essential.[15]

2. Farmers Markets. The number of farmers markets has almost tripled since 1994, when the USDA first began collecting data about them.[16] Today, according to the USDA's official directory, there are an estimated 5,000 farmers markets in the United States.[17] Farmers markets are an excellent way to connect farmers with consumers and often become important community gathering places. Some localities support farmers markets by providing space for the market as well as start-up financing, ongoing funding, or both. Most of these markets are summer operations. With even limited shelter, they could operate nearly year-round. For details about operating a year-round market in an unfavorable climate, explore the Purcellville, Virginia, farmers market website at smartmarkets.org.

3. Community Gardens and Farms. Community gardens, too, have grown rapidly in number in the last decade. Community gardens usually consist of city- or county-owned land that the local jurisdiction initially tills and then rents in small-plot sizes to residents for a growing season. The local government assists by providing the land, initial compost and tilling, and water; it also processes applications from residents for garden plots, usually for a small fee.

Weston, Massachusetts, also has a community farm called Land's Sake that is owned and operated by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. This historic 40-acre farm was acquired with assistance from the Weston town government.

Land's Sake introduces children to gardening and other domestic arts. It also provides plenty of opportunities for community volunteering.

In addition to all their other virtues, both community gardens and community farms can be an important source of fresh food for the needy. Other sites for community gardens or farm plots are apartment grounds, K–12 schools, colleges, universities, and even jails and prisons.[18]

4. Domestic Arts of Home Gardening and Cooking. The counterpart to more local gardens and farms is learning to grow and cook real food, as contrasted with purchasing processed food products and microwaving them. Some communities support the domestic arts in agricultural and culinary schools.

Seattle, Oregon, for example, has assisted FareStart, a nonprofit culinary training and placement program for homeless and disadvantaged individuals.[19] Some schools, from K–12 to community colleges to four-year colleges and universities, have agriculture and culinary arts programs that teach children and adults about growing and cooking local food.[20]

B. Environment. In Berry's view, there is no sensible distinction between people and the environment. The environment is not an article of clothing we wear. Our environment is a part of us, and we are part of it. We are one, not two. There are many important practices that local governments are undertaking to protect the health of our environment, our communities, and ourselves.

1. Greening Our Buildings. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the generation of the energy used to operate the lighting, heating, cooling, and other systems in our buildings produces almost 40 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, thus contributing mightily to the problem of global warming.[21]

Accordingly, some communities have committed to meeting Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards in their own public construction projects. LEED is a creation of the U.S. Green Building Council (see www.usgbc.org).

And some public entities have taken the next step to incorporate LEED standards into building codes applicable to all construction, private as well as public. A life-cycle costing model will show the payback period for investments in green buildings.[22]

2. Greening Our Fleets. Given the success of LEED in building construction, the concept of establishing green standards and levels of green achievement is spreading to local fleets. In the Puget Sound region of Washington State, for example, cities are collaborating with nonprofit groups and the county to create green fleet standards similar to LEED standards for buildings.[23]

3. Low-Impact Building and Development Codes. As LEED is to buildings, LID—low-impact development—is to building sites. Both programs aim to minimize the negative environmental effects of development. LID standards are also pivotal in meeting the requirements of state and federal environmental agencies regulating stormwater pollution. Permits issued under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) often rely upon LID techniques to meet environmental standards and permit requirements.[24]

It's a Fact

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4. Aggressive Recycling and Composting. Local recycling of paper, aluminum, and glass is well established now. Some cities and counties are expanding their recycling programs to include yard waste, food scraps, and other nonhazardous, organic materials. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that yard and food waste make up 25 percent of the local waste stream.[25] [author: what about the news coverage that national recycling experts are calling for restraint in trash recycling, which can be more costly and environmentally damaging than dumping?]

Getting these materials out of the waste stream lengthens the useful life of expensive landfills, reduces transportation costs, and saves these materials for reuse as compost. Compost restores nutrition, tilth, and water-holding capacity in soil, boosting the capacity of soil both to grow plants and to hold water. Some communities make backyard composters available for sale at discounted prices and offer tips to minimize composting odors.[26]

5. Smart Growth Policies. Overarching the preceding list of particular environmental practices is the ongoing conversation in our profession about smart growth.[27] Local government smart growth policies run the gamut from simple efforts to cluster housing and minimize sprawl to complex and comprehensive efforts that include some of these components:

- Create mix of land uses and enhance connectivity to encourage walking, biking, and public transit.
- Enact energy codes requiring energy-saving appliances and minimal amounts of insulation.
- Put in place codes regulating the amount of land grading, tree retention, and new landscaping that accompanies new development.
- Specify open space or recreational space that new development must provide or fund.
- Require compact building design.

Require site design sensitive to existing landforms.

ICMA supports the Smart Growth Network, which has numerous publications and recommendations for sensible smart growth policies and practices.[28]

C. Local Economy. Local communities can struggle in an increasingly global economy. Local businesses have a hard time competing with the economies of scale and lower wages that global businesses exploit. To mitigate the negative effects of the global economy on local economies, Berry urges us to do what we can to support and to build a strong local economy. This can take many forms.

1. Locally Owned and Operated Businesses. A growing number of local business associations advocate for and promote independent, locally owned businesses.[29] The concept here is to keep money circulating inside the community as long as possible rather than move it out of the local economy and export it to the regional, national, or international headquarters of absentee corporations.

Furthermore, independent local businesses are more likely to use other independent local businesses for their supplies, bookkeeping, banking, information technology, skilled trade, and other service needs than a national franchise that is committed to national suppliers of goods and services. Independent, locally owned businesses also create the kind of local distinctiveness and character that contributes to community interest and vibrancy.

2. "Buy Local" Initiatives. Similar in purpose to locally owned businesses are campaigns to buy local, which have become especially popular in the current economic recession. As consumers reduce their expenditures in response to recession, local businesses suffer from loss of trade. That negative effect is compounded when residents shop outside their community.

3. Local Currency. Use of a local currency is consistent with the concept of circulating money inside a community as long as possible. BerkShares are one of the first and most successful examples of local currency.[30] The nonprofit E. F. Schumacher Society also compiles articles and essays about local currencies.[31]

D. Community Membership and Culture. The pressure in our economy for low costs and high volume produces efficiency, productivity, and financial profitability. It can also encourage the externalizing of costs so certain costs don't count in the formulation of product price. Pollution and exploitation of natural resources are two examples of externalized costs. To protect against externalized costs and abuse of resources, Berry urges a strong local culture.

1. Build Social Capital. Robert D. Putnam popularized the phrase "social capital" in his book, *Bowling Alone*. Berry and others have been writing for decades about the value of community morale and membership. Local governments often provide financial support to these organizations, events, and places to help create social capital in their communities:

- Parades and festivals.
- Community centers, plazas, and other public gathering places.
- Historical societies and local history books.
- Civic organizations, such as the League of Women Voters.
- Social organizations, such as Kiwanians, Rotarians, and Lions.
- Time banking, where residents exchange their time and labor helping one another.[32]

2. Community Engagement. In an era when residents often seem alienated from or apathetic about government, including their local government, it is imperative for a local government to reach residents where they live. In that spirit, communities often support these forms of community engagement:

- Neighborhood associations.
- Citizen surveys and focus groups.
- Community visioning processes.
- Community roundtables organized around a particular issue or topic.
- Police and citizen academies to introduce citizens into the inner workings of key departments.
- Beautification campaigns, including but not limited to anti-litter and anti-graffiti campaigns.

ICMA has published some excellent articles about community engagement, written by fine managers. Two that are particularly good are "Five Ways to Keep Citizens Engaged—Especially In Tough Financial Times"[33] and "Community Building—Ten Lessons Learned."[34]

3. Emphasis on Place, Not Mobility. One of the larger ironies of our profession is that we work and work to build a high quality of life in our local communities, only to see many of the children raised in that community move away to other places, perhaps for a job or more education, rarely to return to the location where they were raised. Such mobility makes it difficult to sustain the familiar and the familial ties that bind together a community and help create culture across generations.

Accordingly, we must make our communities as comprehensive of community needs as possible. Local opportunities for education, shopping, manufacturing, health care, and agriculture are key, as is our attitude toward mobility.

E. Accountability and Comprehensiveness. Berry and Pollan remark on our tendency toward reductionism—finding

the easy or plausible solution that oversimplifies issues and is dangerously incomplete. For the local manager, here are the prophylactics against this tendency toward reductionism:

1. Evidence-Based Leadership and Policies. The ICMA Code of Ethics urges us to base our decisions and recommendations on the facts and merits of the issue.[35] Consistent with this approach is the emphasis on evidence-based leadership. ICMA Executive Director Bob O'Neill expands on the important concept of evidence-based leadership and its relevance to local managers in his article in Governing magazine, "Baseball and the Limits of Conventional Wisdom."[36] Finding the story within the data is a core competence for the good local manager.

2. Full-Cost Accounting. In an era of economic contraction and fiscal austerity, it is more important than ever to understand and practice good financial accounting. Essential to good financial accounting is to capture all the costs of your actions. The triple bottom line is one way to do this. In addition to conventional concern with the financial bottom line, there are also the environmental and social bottom lines. Every development decision, every procurement decision, every building permit issued by local government has an environmental impact and consequence.

To be good stewards of our communities, we need to understand and account for those impacts. Similarly, every local government decision can have a positive or negative social impact on or within our community, perhaps creating a disproportionate impact on one geographic area or a disproportionate impact on one group of residents. Stewardship requires us to understand these impacts and to practice fairness in the sharing of benefits and burdens.

It's a Fact

For less than the minimum wage for one hour of work, an American can purchase a fast-food meal almost anywhere in this country at almost any time of day that will contain more than enough calories to sustain a person for the entire day.

3. Performance Measurement. Perhaps nothing we can do to create public trust is more important than transparency and accountability. Being above board in all our transactions reflects our fiduciary duty and our ethical responsibility to our residents. Transparency is advanced by understanding and publicizing how our communities stack up to similar communities. To advance that sort of understanding and publicity, ICMA maintains a Center for Performance Measurement that provides managers the data to compare service levels and results across jurisdictions.

Managers can spot trends, build on strengths, address weaknesses, and better respond to citizens and elected officials who understandably want to know how we are doing as a community compared with peer communities. Local government is largely a monopoly style of operation; we have few competitors for the services we provide. That lack of marketplace competition coupled with the attachment Americans have with competition makes it doubly important that we track and publicize how we are doing compared with other places.

4. Public Input and Decision Making. The credibility and vitality of our democratic institutions depend on robust public input and support. As Abraham Lincoln said, "Our government rests in public opinion. Whoever can change public opinion, can change the government. . . ." Hence, as local government managers, we have a duty to avoid secrecy and to provide numerous opportunities for public input. Seeking public input can be both a high-tech and a high-touch endeavor.

Technology makes available such social media as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Many communities are establishing accounts with these forms of social media. Comprehensive government websites with online permitting, service request forms, document archiving and retrieval, streaming video, interactive surveys, and budget questionnaires reduce barriers to citizen input. In addition to high-tech approaches, there is no substitute for high-touch involvement with residents at civic club meetings, citizen roundtables, community visioning exercises, or other face-to-face meetings.

Conclusion

Wendell Berry and Michael Pollan speak eloquently for the health of the communities we lead as local government managers. In an era when we seem overmanaged and underled, their vision of responsible membership in local communities can inspire us as leaders. The practices outlined in this article, as well as many others, can put us on a better path toward being healthy citizens in healthy communities.

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1 The most complete and up-to-date list of Wendell Berry's essays, novels, and poetry is found at website http://brtom.typepad.com/wberry/.
2 Compare USDA, 1950 Agricultural Census, "Farm People," page 12, with USDA, 2007 Agricultural Census, Table 49.
3 Michael Pollan's bibliography is compiled at www.michaelpollan.com. This article draws mostly from Pollan's ***The Omnivore's Dilemma***, 2006.
4 Michael Pollan, The Omnivore's Dilemma, p. 115.
5 Pollan, ***The Omnivore's Dilemma***, pp. 32–34.
6 D. Keener et al., "Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 23, 2009, www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5807a1.htm.
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9 "Lean Works!" Centers for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov/LEANWorks/.
10 Keener et al., "Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States," p. 1.
11 Pollan, ***The Omnivore's Dilemma***, p. 243.
12 "Health Care Spending," U.S. Government Accountability Office, February 15, 2007, www.gao.gov/new.items/d07497t.pdf.
13 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, Table 44.

[14] See, for example, Washington State University, Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources, http://csanr.wsu.edu/publications/SPNW/spnwarchive.html; see also a list of CSAs by interactive zip code at www.localharvest.org/csa.
[15] Helen Labun Jordan, "Community Supported Enterprises," Preservation Trust of Vermont, www.ptvermont.org/CommunitySupportedEnterprises/csejordan.htm.
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[17] Ibid. For a list of farmers markets by interactive zip code, see www.localharvest.org.
[18] See, for example, "From Neglected Parcels to Community Gardens: A Handbook," Wasatch, Utah, Community Gardens, http://wasatchgardens.org/files/images/FromNeglectedParcelsToCommunityGardens.PDF.
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[20] See, for example, culinary arts programs at Seattle Central Community College, http://seattlecentral.edu/programs/culinary.php, and Walla Walla Community College, www.wallawalla.cc/CMSX/main.php?module=department&collegecode=200&deptcode=CUL.
[21] "Emissions of Greenhouse Gases Report," Report no. DOE/EIA-0573(2008), Energy Information Administration, December 3, 2009, www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/1605/ggrpt/index.html.
[22] See "Code Green," ***Governing***, February 2009, pp. 38–39.
[23] "Clean Vehicles Now!" King County, Washington, http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/cleanvehiclesnow.aspx.
[24] "Low Impact Development Strategies and Tools for NPDES Phase II Communities," Low Impact Development Center, www.lowimpactdevelopment.org/lidphase2.
[25] "Food Scraps and Yard Waste Summary," U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, October 20, 2006, www.epa.gov/osw/partnerships/wastewise/events/summaries/organics.htm.
[26] See, for example, "City Extending Compost Bin and Rain Barrel Sale," ChrisD.ca, July 18, 2009, www.chrisd.ca/blog/10779/city-extending-compost-bin-and-rain-barrel-sale.
[27] See Smart Growth Online, www.smartgrowth.org.
[28] For example, "Smart Growth Resource Library," Smart Growth Network, www.smartgrowth.org/library.
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[30] "BerkShares, Inc.," www.berkshares.org.
[31] "Local Currencies," E. F. Schumacher Society, www.smallisbeautiful.org/local_currencies/articles.html.
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[33] "Five Ways to Keep Citizens Engaged–Especially In Tough Financial Times," ICMA, www.icma.org/main/ns.asp?nsid=4583.
[34] "Community Building—Ten Lessons Learned," ICMA, www.icma.org/main/ns.asp?nsid=4195.
[35] "ICMA Code of Ethics with Guidelines," http://icma.org/en/icma/ethics/code_of_ethics.
[36] Robert J. O'Neill Jr., "Baseball and the Limits of Conventional Wisdom," ***Governing***, July 4, 2007, www.governing.com/column/baseball-and-limits-conventional-wisdom.

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DEPARTMENTS

Ethics Matter!

Take the Ethics Challenge

Test your knowledge of all things ethics with this quiz

QUESTIONS

1. In the past 10 years, what was the most common ethical violation committed by an ICMA member?

A. Conflict of interest.
B. Taking improper gifts.
C. Engaging in political activity.
D. Embezzlement.

2. As a manager works with elected officials and residents in shaping the future of her community, her personal convictions are driving her to actively engage in debates about climate change, off-shore drilling, mountaintop mining, and energy efficiency. The manager thinks the future looks bleak without radical change and feels that sitting on the sidelines is unethical. That said, she believes this is such a polarizing topic that getting involved will certainly get her slapped with a party label. The most ethical thing to do is:

A. Stay silent and don't advocate for a position because this is a political issue.
B. Advocate for the policy only if your elected officials agree with your position.
C. Advocate for the policies that you regard as right whether your elected officials agree or not.
D. Stay silent, but get your staff members who don't belong to ICMA to advocate for your position.

3. As a result of the economic downturn, the prices of some really attractive properties in your community have decreased considerably. The new prices coupled with cheap mortgage rates make these attractive investment opportunities. Since none of your other investments are doing well, you and your spouse are kicking around the idea of buying a few of these properties. You can rent them, sell when the market starts to rebound, or even hold onto one of the beachfront condos for your retirement. This manager should:

A. Reject this idea because the ICMA Code of Ethics prohibits owning any property within the community that you manage other than your home.
B. Go ahead and buy the properties. Since they are already developed, there is no conflict of interest for the manager.
C. Go find attractive investment opportunities in another local government.
D. None of the above.

4. Under the rules used by ICMA to enforce the Code of Ethics, complaints will only be considered for review if:

A. The matter has been investigated first by the state association.
B. The complainant is willing to go on record and be identified.
C. The member consents to the review.
D. None of the above.

ANSWERS

1. C. Running for elected office while working for a local government; signing petitions; making campaign contributions at the local, state, or national level; and endorsing candidates were all violations of Tenet 7 committed by members. About a quarter of all violations involve political activity. Members working in local government should limit their activity on behalf of candidates to voting for the candidate of their choice.

2. C. The ICMA Code of Ethics defines "prohibited political activity" as providing any support for a candidate for any elected public office. The code does not prevent or prohibit members from taking a position on an issue or from actively advocating on behalf of an issue. It is a distinction that is frequently misunderstood.

ICMA members may make a financial contribution to an issues-oriented organization, serve on the board or as a member of such, and publicly state their opinions on issues via the range of communication options available. It's not engaging in "political activity" to advocate for an issue even if the issue is hotly debated at the state and national levels.

Your personal advocacy efforts should be on your own time and without leveraging your title or position with the city. Stay clear of any activities sponsored by a candidate for elected office even if that candidate shares your perspective on the issue. These events tend to be candidate rallies in disguise, and attending could create the appearance of an endorsement.

Consider how your advocacy role may relate to your job. Does the governing body share your point of view? Would being known as an ardent supporter of an issue make it difficult for you to do your job? It is not a reason to cease your advocacy, but it is something to contemplate.

3. C. The code does not specifically state that it's a violation to own any property within your community other than your home. The guideline on investments advises that members should not invest or hold any investment, directly or indirectly, in any financial business, commercial, or other private transaction that creates a conflict with their official duties.

For managers who have oversight of all local government functions and the opportunity to influence decisions, owning rental properties or other real estate within the community they manage creates a host of serious potential conflicts. While it might appear to be a public good to invest in your own community, purchases and sales that might be interpreted as speculation for a nice profit can create the opposite impression.

To merit the trust of those we serve, it is recommended that members refrain from business investments in real estate within their communities.

4. D. The review process will be initiated when a complaint is filed in writing with ICMA and contains sufficient documentation to support the allegation. The first step in the process is to answer this simple question: If all of the allegations made were proven to be true, is the conduct described a violation of the code?

If the answer is yes, the case is opened and the member is contacted to provide a personal perspective on the matter. If a member declines to participate in the review process, the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct will convene a fact-finding committee at the state level to obtain any available information on the case.

Fact-finding committees are also used when the member's response does not provide all the necessary information. ICMA retains jurisdiction over any case filed against a member, so resigning from the association will not end the review process.

Finally, the process does not require that a complainant go on record. While this may be distressing to a member whose conduct is under review, the issue is not the source of the complaint but whether the member's conduct met the high standards of the profession.

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Ethics advice is a popular service provided to ICMA members. The ICMA Executive Board members who serve on the Committee on Professional Conduct review the inquiries and advice published in PM magazine. ICMA members who have questions about their obligations under the ICMA Code of Ethics are encouraged to call Martha Perego at 202/962-3668 or Elizabeth Kellar at 202/962-3611.

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DEPARTMENTS

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Make the Most of Grants

Your jurisdiction won a federal grant. How will you manage it? The U.S. Department of Energy has released two documents to guide recipients of its Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block grants.

icma.org/energygrants

Vocabulary You Can Use

If "complete streets" and brownfields" aren't familiar terms in your jurisdiction, check out Smart Growth Network's latest report, which outlines nine strategies for combating climate change.

- icma.org/climatechange

The Student Factor

Neighborhoods located near university campuses can be overwhelmed by "studentification." The Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs presents several models for keeping these communities vibrant and decreasing tension between students and long-term residents.

- icma.org/studentfactor

Enduring International Partnerships

For many years, ICMA's USAID-funded CityLinks projects have matched local government professionals in developing and transitioning countries with their counterparts in the United States. A number of these partnerships have lasted far beyond the official end of the funding.

- icma.org/partnerships

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DEPARTMENTS

Healthy Communities

Fit in Las Cruces

Leaders don't play games with children's health

Las Cruces, New Mexico, named a 2009 Playful City by the children's advocacy group, KaBOOM!, aims to have a play space located within one-half mile of every residence. And, despite recent annexations, Las Cruces is close to meeting that goal. Combine this accomplishment with its public street fairs that celebrate walking, cycling, and dancing to live music, and you have a community that works hard to promote healthy fun.

Health also has a serious side in Las Cruces, county seat of Doña Ana County, where one in every four high school students struggles with obesity. The county is not unusual in this respect. Mexican Americans who live in the U.S.-Mexico border region are five to 10 times more likely than other Americans to experience overweight or obesity and a sedentary lifestyle. Besides physical inactivity, poverty and poor nutrition contribute to the problem.

During the past few years, stakeholders have joined forces to improve the health of the region's young people. They have tried a range of approaches and learned some valuable lessons in the process. In 2008, ICMA cosponsored a day-long regional dialogue to identify strategies for addressing the problem of young people who are at risk for obesity. Many who participated were also members of the parks and recreation advisory board's Playful City committee and the state's Healthy Kids–Las Cruces, a community-wide obesity prevention project. Not surprisingly, participants sometimes had difficulty keeping events and opportunities separate.

A follow-up plate-waste study found that children ate 23% more of their meals than they had before.

It soon became clear that they could get more bang for the buck by strategically combining events and by collaborating more. "We've learned that people can't guard their territory if they want to be successful," said Lori Grumet, the city's public services director. "Everybody wants a healthy community."

As the various committees evolved into a single Healthy Communities–Playful Cities team, the group recognized a need for marketing expertise. As Grumet observed, even the best events are lost opportunities when the right people don't know about them. That became clear with the 2008 Passport to Health program, designed to encourage children to be physically active during the summer.

The city distributed official-looking "passports to health" and designed a special stamp to identify completed activities. Children who earned 24 stamps could compete in a drawing to win one of more than 35 donated prizes, including bikes, basketballs signed by the New Mexico State University basketball team, karate lessons, and a birthday party at a gymnastic studio.

Despite distributing 11,000 flyers to promote Passport to Health, the city received only about 350 completed passports. The city hopes that the program will grow naturally next year, but it will also engage the schools more and promote the program through personal contact with kids. A marketing specialist from a local radio station has now joined the team and will provide live remotes, announcements, and expertise for this and other future events.

Another lesson learned early was that an idea doesn't have to be expensive to make an impact. In 2002, recognizing that students weren't eating their lunches, Las Cruces Public Schools changed the schedule at its elementary schools to hold recess before lunch instead of afterward.

A follow-up plate-waste study found that children ate 23 percent more of their meals than they had before. This recess-before-lunch initiative, which was totally free, not only reduced waste but also helped children focus better in the classroom after lunch through improved nutritional intake.

Another low-cost idea is Las Cruces Mayor Ken Miyagishima's "5-2-1-0 Fitness and Nutrition Challenge" for local third

graders, which was part of the city's Healthy Las Cruces, Healthy Kids initiative started in 2007. The challenge requires five servings of fruits or vegetables per day, no more than two hours of screen time, one hour of physical activity, and zero sodas per day.

Children must get their parents to sign a daily support form in order to participate. If they stick with it for 21 days, they receive a special coin and a recognition letter from the mayor.

The city is also working with a neighborhood association in one of the city's poorest and most historic neighborhoods to support the first community garden in Las Cruces. When the community group in this traditional Hispanic community received grant money to build an enclosure, pergola, and small storage shed, the city contributed an attractive parcel of land along the main street as well as the water supply.

Residents were asked to contribute $15 per year for a plot. It was reported that all plots were reserved before the opening in early 2009, and residents continue to request more gardens.

As Las Cruces and Doña Ana County continue with these and other creative initiatives, local children will be having more fun, learning to make better choices, and going strong.

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DEPARTMENTS

Balancing Act

Self: Taking Charge in Balance (Part 3 of 3)

> *We need great leaders in the future. It is your responsibility as officers and directors to show this job can be done and the needs of work and the needs of family and the needs of self can be in balance.... When does the leader get involved? My response is "when wouldn't you?"*
>
> —Cathy Green, president of Food Lion, with 1,300 retail stores and more than 70,000 employees

Welcome to August. Labor Day is around the corner, and your schools and other aspects of your community will be coming back to life soon, shaking off the lazy days of summer. Are you ready? Do you feel in charge and ready for your role as a public manager as well as for what your life outside of work will bring?

How would you like to get closer to feeling at ease and confident? One idea worth considering is coming to work knowing your workplace appreciates work and family balance. In this column, we will explore how you as the Public Manager can create a work environment that values balance.

When thinking about a workplace that values balance, your first thought might have been: "This is impossible, no workplace will ever support balance!" It is understandable if you did. Many workplaces believe hard work means extra effort, long days, and sacrifice of balance. In that environment, supporting a sense of balance is difficult, but it is not impossible. Creating balance does require effort, commitment, and self-awareness on the part of the leader. If you are building from scratch, it will also require you to be the center of initiative.

> *. . . people think, "Well, if I work more I'll deliver more." That has not been my experience. These jobs are not rocket science. They are not. Not that I expect you to make it look effortless but at some point . . . after you have been in a job (awhile), if you are still struggling with work, family, self balance, something is wrong.*
>
> —Cathy Green

As my team has pursued the application and reality of work and family balance with private industry and Public Managers, certain individuals have stood out as centers of initiative and made balance part of work. They are leaders who have applied the lessons explored in this column over the past year and have been able to support factors that lead to the long-term maintenance of balance in their organizations. The benefits have been significant: balance for their teams, increased productivity, and greater work satisfaction for their staffs.

> *Daven, I believe this work will help them as leaders, but I also want them to take what they've learned and be able to use it outside of work. I want them to be happy and better people at home as well as the office.*
>
> —Robert Kiely, city manager, Lake Forest, Illinois

Bob Kiely asked for a leadership development program for his senior staff that would help them work better as a team. As a member of an ongoing group of leaders, he knew that my organization also had expertise in family balance. He asked me to listen to his team members as they came through and, while maintaining their privacy, allow them to share their pressures and think through what was possible in terms of decreasing stress in their lives outside of work.

Bob is a compassionate leader who takes an active interest in his team. All of his staff participated in a day-long program to understand themselves as leaders and, as he noted, "as people." When they followed up in a conversation with us, Bob encouraged reflection and application of the leadership ideas in life outside of work.

He encouraged individuals to consider their balance and their overall stress. He noted that he was concerned about stress and asked how he, as a supervisor, could help with pressures they might be feeling. By taking these actions, Bob did several things:

- He demonstrated balance was important.
- He was a center of initiative for balance in the entire organization.
- He modeled compassion for employees for his executive staff.
- He demonstrated how to see employees as whole people.

Many of the most meaningful conversations were not about deadlines, budgets, reports to the council, or problem employees; instead, they were about dreams, worries, or other personal thoughts that don't fit neatly into categories.

Bob Kiely's tactics are excellent for modeling behaviors. He is setting a tone from the highest point of local government management leadership, and it directly impacts what the organization values.

> *Who wouldn't buy into creating a better balance between work, self, and family! People get it conceptually. They get the theory behind it. Where the real tension comes in, is who is and is not holding the organization accountable?*
>
> —Cathy Green

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