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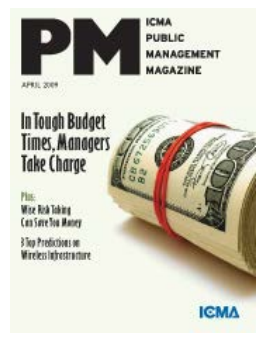


Managing Your Budget: Making Tough Decisions in Tough Times

For managers, the challenge is to estimate accurately the relationship between two independent resource streams—revenues and expenditures—for their local governments. Understanding the revenue-expenditure interplay and having tools available for mitigating the gap are keys to effectively managing budgets in tough economic times.

Robert Bland, Denton, Texas.

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Features

Wise Risk Taking, Converting Risks into Successes*

Not having a risk program can be a risk in and of itself. Samuel Oppelaar, Jr., Minneola, Florida.

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Three predictions on wireless infrastructure siting and deployment and information on the Broadband Stimulus Bill. Robert E. Smith, Wilmington, North Carolina.

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Ocean City Reduces Its Carbon Footprint*

The green effort hasn't been simple for Ocean City but it is working. Jim Rutala, Ocean City, New Jersey.

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Just Cause?*

Commentary on why managers should consider employment agreements. Rod Proffitt, Pagosa Springs, Colorado.

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The Role of Ethics in the 21st Century: A Call for Values-Based Leadership

What is your local government doing to bolster ethical behavior? Do employees, especially supervisors and managers, understand ethics and the critical role they play in maintaining an ethical workplace? Merlin Switzer, Sacramento, California.

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Departments

Ethics

Politics, Issues, and Lame Ducks

Letters*

On Retirement

Saving for Tomorrow Lowers Stress Today

Profile

Robert Gray, Winchester, New Hampshire

Healthy Communities

A Vision of Connectivity

ICMA Fund for Professional Management

2008 Annual Fund Contributions

Special Section

2008 ICMA Awards

This year's recipients of ICMA's awards are presented in this section.

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[Partners](#)
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[News](#)
[Events](#)

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Managing Your Budget: Making Tough Decisions in Tough Times

by Robert Bland

Local governments around the world find their budgets in the throes of a major recession, one that began as a crisis in the subprime mortgage market but has now morphed into a full-blown economic crisis of frightening proportions. Tough economic times require making tough decisions in order to preserve a balanced budget. What can local managers do to minimize the spreading impact of this crisis on their operating and capital budgets?

Leaders in local government know that a balanced budget is a moving target. Sometimes budget plans go awry, even when a local government has vigilantly pursued all the right financial management practices. Economies go through cycles brought on by recessions, inflation, or in recent years by overexpansion in a sector of the economy.

They also go through sectoral shifts brought on by changes in technology, economic development, and competition from domestic and international sources. Then there are the imponderables: natural disasters, epidemics, weather events, and terrorism. The current recession has pressed managers to the limit in mustering the skills needed to navigate the hardest-hit communities through these turbulent economic waters.

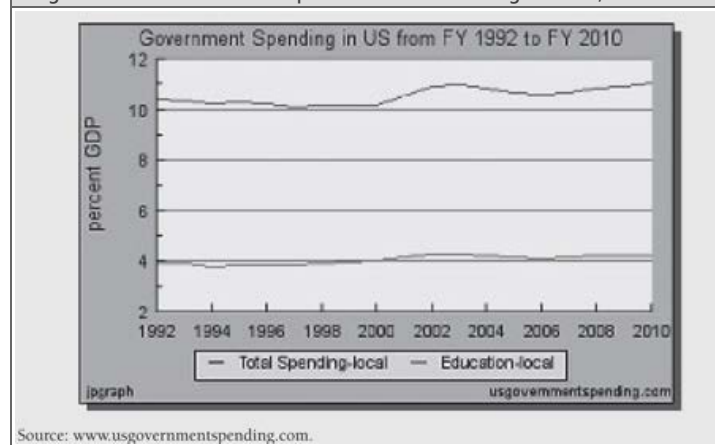
In 2008, the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) was approximately \$14.8 trillion, of which 10.9 percent was produced by local governments.¹ In other words, one in 10 dollars produced by the U.S. economy last year was generated by the nation's local governments.

When locally generated spending for education is netted out, local expenditures represent 6.7 percent of GDP (see Figure 1). Local government outputs have continued their gradual upward trend, paralleling the relative growth in combined government activity in the U.S. economy, which has grown to 36.6 percent of GDP.

Unlike spending by the federal and even state governments, local budgets are driven by personnel costs—salaries, wages, and benefits. And unlike the federal budget, managers in local governments must balance their budgets, meaning current expenditures for operations must not exceed current revenues, including draws from reserves. As a result, budget contractions inevitably impact the salaries and wages of local government employees.

Even more agonizing, the close connection between a local government's budget and its economic base means that prescriptions for dealing with budget imbalances must be tailored to each city or county. No two local revenue and expenditure streams have the same economic and political characteristics. Ultimately, the task of navigating through turbulent economic times falls squarely on the manager's shoulders. Success in maintaining a balanced budget depends on a manager's savvy at understanding the times and their effect on the community's revenues and expenditures, and then taking measured steps to mitigate the short- and long-term effects on the budget.

Figure 1. Local Government Expenditures as a Percentage of GDP, 1992–2010.



Top Priority: Base Decisions on Timely and Credible Information

In this age where information is the coin of the realm, good budget information—credible historical data, reliable budget forecasts, and informed interpretation of the findings—becomes the anchor for all other budget-related actions taken by the manager. Timely and credible budget forecasts can happen only in a budget office staffed by knowledgeable analysts with proven experience in forecasting and who understand the interplay between the economy and the local government's operating and capital budgets.

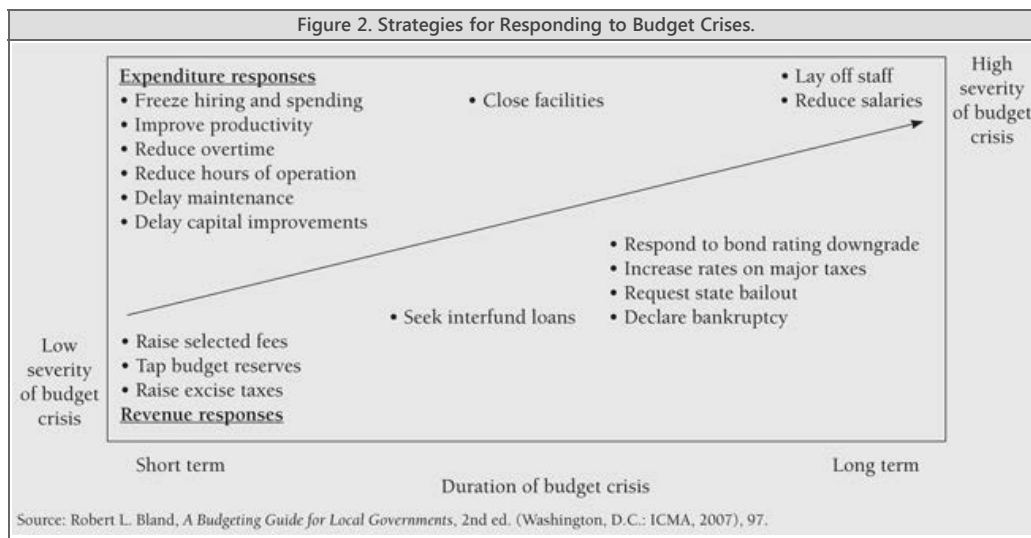
Good decision making requires credible and timely information. A commanding officer depends on credible intelligence about enemy strength, positions, and movements to formulate a successful defense. A manager must have reliable budget forecasts to navigate a local government through turbulent economic times. Cutting corners by not recruiting qualified analysts or acquiring the databases and technology to provide good budget numbers dooms the management team to relying on speculative forecasts to guide their actions.

All governments eventually encounter difficult budget conditions brought on by economic instability. Having timely and credible information on the budgetary impact of these developments gives the manager the leverage needed to take preemptive action to mitigate the adverse effects from economic turbulence. Good budget information involves:

- Year-end projections of actual revenues and expenditures, updated monthly, with an explanation of items that deviate from budget projections.
- At least monthly updates of projections for the subsequent fiscal year's budgeted revenues and expenditures.
- At least quarterly reports and analyses of the local economy, including economic trends of major indicators (unemployment, inflation, GDP, and interest rates) for the region, state, and nation that may affect the local economy, and projections for the next quarter of those major indicators for the state and region, if available.
- At least quarterly reports on performance indicators for key departments or activities that have an impact on the budget.
- Annually preparing a long-term forecast for up to five years of revenues and expenditures for all governmental and enterprise funds, with an analysis of how the local government should address any imbalance. This rolling forecast, updated annually, provides an early warning of impending gaps and gives managers an opportunity to take corrective action to mitigate adverse trends.

In the fall of 2008, the Dallas Independent School District discovered an operating budget shortfall of \$85 million caused by poor budget controls and the lack of timely and credible budget information. For the two previous years, the district's leadership had worked successfully to move the academic performance of its students steadily upward.

But the basics of good management were ignored. During the spring and summer of 2008, the district hired 500 more teachers than its fiscal year 2009 budget was capable of supporting. The fall was spent reducing the workforce in a desperate measure to restore budget balance. The best management team cannot perform above the quality of data that it uses in decision making.



Second Priority: Make Difficult Decisions Without Delay

Budget crises seldom materialize suddenly and without advance warning. Failure on the part of the leadership team to take corrective action, regardless of the pain, only delays the inevitable and narrows the range of actions available in the future. Sometimes political stalemate precludes the manager from taking corrective action.

Other times, a strained relationship with the council may have chilled a manager's ability to communicate difficult information to the council. And at other times, the manager may become the sacrificial lamb and persuade the council to take preemptive action only to then bear the blame for the controversial decision.

When commenting to the media on his city's growing budget woes in 2004, Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy acknowledged that he had erred in not initiating a discussion sooner on modernizing the city's antiquated revenue

policies. Although a top-notch budget team might not be able to anticipate all crises, it will have the expertise to propose a range of responses that fit with the community's economic and political characteristics.

When the budget office identifies a cloud on the financial horizon, transparency from the management team is advisable:

- Notify the council or other legislative body of the nature of the problem and its gravity in terms that they can understand.
- Explain the source of the problem to the best of your knowledge, if those sources can be identified without pointing fingers or implicating past leaders (if the problem is due to past negligence that will become apparent to all without having to drag their reputations into the dirt).
- Recommend a progressive series of steps to correct the problem, with a benchmark at each step to indicate progress and when additional corrective measures may be delayed or avoided.

The more quickly a local government responds to the crisis, the more likely that a serious budget gap can be averted, at least in the short term.

Third Priority: Determine the Type of Fiscal Crisis Your Government Faces

The late Charles Levine, a noted public administration scholar, developed one of the more useful typologies for how local governments deal with fiscal crises.² He segmented budget crises by their duration (short-term versus long-term) and intensity (low versus high) to formulate four types of budget crises in which local governments can find themselves: a fiscal crunch (short-term but low intensity), a fiscal crisis (short-term but highly intense), a fiscal squeeze (long-term but low intensity), and the worst scenario—a fiscal crush (a combined long-term and highly intense crisis).

Building on Levine's typology, Figure 2 displays the progression of actions a local government can take as it rides out the crisis. This figure provides a dynamic profile of the strategies—reducing expenditures and increasing revenues—that local governments use to deal with budget crises. Initially, managers look to expenditure reductions to realign revenues with expenditures. Here are actions that reduce spending:

- Reducing or eliminating overtime; the crisis may provide an opportunity to offer incentives for cross-training of personnel, then shifting those personnel to meet peak periods of demand.
- Making productivity improvements.
- Imposing a hiring or spending freeze.
- Delaying maintenance or capital expenditures.
- Seeking a voluntary reduction in salaries in order to avoid layoffs.

Revenue initiatives may include raising fees, particularly for activities in the general fund, such as recreation, that receive a tax subsidy; tapping budget reserves; or, more proactively, increasing selected excise taxes. Other measures include:

- Aggressively pursuing delinquent taxes, fines, and fees (one frequently used strategy is to introduce an amnesty program for delinquent parking fines, followed by aggressive enforcement of warrants for scofflaws).
- Review of partial and full tax exemptions granted under local law to determine whether any should be modified or eliminated.
- Adjusting fees for enterprise activities to ensure they recover both direct and indirect costs.
- Increasing broad-based taxes, such as property or sales taxes (this is usually a last resort).

If the crisis continues or worsens, the options for closing the budget gap become fewer and more painful:

- Increasing taxes.
- Reducing salaries.
- Reducing the workforce.
- Closing facilities.
- Selling fixed assets.

Inevitably, during periods of economic decline, calls will be made to sell selected fixed assets of the local government, such as vacant land or parking garages it owns. The best time to sell such assets is during expansionary periods when market values have peaked.

The current housing market collapse has left local governments in some areas of the country holding foreclosed homes. Sale of these sorts of fixed assets, especially those that return property to the tax rolls, should proceed quickly. The sale of other assets, particularly property that may be part of a longer-term economic development plan, should proceed only after careful consideration and clear support from the leadership team. Consideration should be given to placing part of the proceeds from such sales in a rainy-day fund.

The ultimate recourse for a local government is to file for bankruptcy. Although rarely used, Chapter 9 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code provides the statutory basis for local governments to petition the federal bankruptcy court to



reschedule payment of their debts, including municipal bonds, accounts payable, and even salaries payable. Chapter 9 does not allow liquidation of a local government's assets or the dissolution of the local government although these options might be possible under state law.

Begin Now to Build a Foundation for a More Robust Economic Future

During periods of budgetary stress, the manager's attention is understandably riveted on getting through the crisis with as little damage to the organization or community as possible. But attention should also be given to laying a foundation for implementing financial and tax policies that can lead to a more robust economic future.

Recent experiences of local governments in the United States suggest that those with weakened economic bases experience progressively greater budgetary stress with each successive wave of economic contraction. The budget contractions have left these local governments fiscally emaciated with few options to reverse their economic fate.

One of the more common measures managers take to mitigate unforeseen events is the creation of rainy-day (or contingency) funds. Every local government should have at least one rainy-day fund. The more unstable the local or regional economy, the larger that fund should be.

The more stability a local government can bring to its annual operating budget, the more control it can exert over its economic future and indirectly over the community. A stable budget conveys to business leaders a favorable investment environment. Unstable budgets bring the greater potential for less predictable tax and fee rates and thus a less predictable environment in which to conduct business.

Another element of long-term financial viability is the development of a strategic plan to guide economic development initiatives. What are the local or regional economy's strengths and weaknesses? Are there clusters of related businesses or is there the potential to build clusters of related businesses (agglomeration economies)?

What threats exist to undermine the local economy? How do current tax and fee policies affect the economy? On the basis of this analysis, local leaders can develop a multiphase plan for building on the community's economic strengths and ameliorating its weaknesses, and for capitalizing on opportunities while mitigating the threats.

Interplay Is Key

The local budget represents the confluence of two independent resource streams—revenues and expenditures. Managing the local budget boils down to managing the interplay between these two streams. The rate at which budget problems develop depends on the differences in the sensitivity of these two streams to changes in the economy.

For managers, the challenge is to estimate accurately the relationship between these two streams for their city, town, or county. Understanding the revenue-expenditure interplay and having tools available for mitigating the gap are keys to effectively managing budgets in tough economic times.

¹Christopher Chantrell, compiler, "United States Federal, State, and Local Spending, Fiscal Year 2008," www.usgovernmentspending.com.

²Charles H. Levine, "Police Management in the 1980s: From Incrementalism to Strategic Thinking," *Public Administration Review* 45 (November 1985): 691–699.

Robert Bland, Ph.D., is professor and chair, University of North Texas, Department of Public Administration, Denton, Texas (rbland@unt.edu). Bland is author of two ICMA finance books: *A Budgeting Guide for Local Government*, 2nd edition, and *A Revenue Guide for Local Government*, 2nd edition.

Portions of this article have been adapted from *A Budgeting Guide for Local Government*, 2nd edition, and *A Revenue Guide for Local Government*, 2nd edition, both published by ICMA. The author gratefully acknowledges the comments of former manager Mike Conduff, The Elim Group; and Jon Fortune, assistant city manager, Denton, Texas.

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The Role of Ethics in the 21st Century: A Call for Values-Based Leadership

by **Merlin Switzer**

The headline in the July 26, 2008, *Sacramento Bee* proclaimed: "City's salvage scandal spreads." This was one in a series of articles about a scrap-metal dealer who had admitted to bribing employees in three northern California cities. "Whew!" you say, "That's too bad . . . at least it wasn't here."

But it could happen in your city. What is your city doing to bolster ethical behavior? Do employees, especially supervisors and managers, understand ethics and the critical role they play in maintaining an ethical workplace? This article is a call for values-based leadership at all levels. Leaders who understand values-based leadership and follow the practical steps listed below will take progressive steps toward developing and sustaining an ethical work environment.

What Are Ethics?

Webster's New World College Dictionary defines ethics as "a system of moral standards or values; a particular moral standard or value." The Josephson Institute defines ethics as the "standards governing the conduct of a person or members of a profession." There are three aspects to ethics:

- Discerning right from wrong.
- Committing to do what is right.
- Doing what is right.

The ICMA publication, *The Ethics Edge*, says ethics is about "good and bad . . . virtue and vice . . . benefit and harm . . . and propriety and impropriety." But, ethics is about values too. Values are defined as "traits, behaviors or qualities to which we ascribe some worth or importance."

Joanne Ciulla, in *Ethics, the Heart of Leadership*, contends that "Ethics is about the assessment and evaluation of values." She defines values as "the ideas and beliefs that influence and direct our choices and actions."

In short, ethics is about behaving—making choices and taking actions—according to one's values that reflect beliefs about how things should be done. The question logically follows, "Whose values are we talking about?" People come into the workplace with their own values, which may or may not be similar to those of the person next to them or yours, for that matter.

All organizations develop a culture. Culture is simply the "prevailing ideology (beliefs/values) that people carry around in their heads," according *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture*. Still, what are the values that drive culture? It depends!

What Are Your Values?

As a leader, you have values, too; just as do other leaders in your city. Whose values do you follow? If you are the city manager, does that mean others will buy into yours? Wishful thinking!

On the wall, on its Web site, in its strategic plan, or in other locations your city likely has its values posted, too. Are they the same as yours? How do you get others to buy into the city's values?

Clarity about values is important. Ansel Adams, the famous photographer of Yosemite, once said, "There is nothing worse than a sharp picture of a fuzzy concept." A clear understanding about values and what they mean is important

for everyone in the workplace, but especially for those in leadership positions. Without clarity, values and ethics remain shadowy. Leaders are responsible for providing clarity.

Why Are Ethics Relevant for the 21st Century?

What are the challenges cities will face in the 21st century? According to the National League of Cities, the following are high-impact issues facing cities:

- The shift from goods and services to a knowledge-based economy while the revenue system remains the same.
- The interaction and flow of revenue between federal, state, and local governments.
- The significant shift in demographics that changes the services needed by residents.
- A rise in antigovernment sentiment coupled with declining civic engagement.
- The safety of communities.

Related to these are a variety of such sub-issues as maintaining constituent trust, public oversight, recruitment and retention of qualified staff, contracting out services, and maintaining employee benefits in the face of rising health care costs.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to demonstrate that there are a plethora of issues facing communities in the future. Values-based leadership will be needed to bring clarity to what is most important and how the actions of all employees are needed to strengthen trust and commitment toward a commonly understood mission.

What Is Values-Based Leadership?

James O'Toole in *Leading Change—The Argument for Values-Based Leadership* says "At its core . . . values-based leadership is the creation of moral symmetry among those with competing values . . . [it] brings order to the whole by creating transcendent values that provide a tent large enough to hold all the different aspirations, and in which all can find satisfaction." These tips can be gleaned from O'Toole's book:

- Demonstrate respect by being willing to listen to people's needs and wants, which leads to a trust relationship between leaders and followers.
- Identify the good in followers to create a higher-order view of the common good to create a transcendent vision.
- Demonstrate authenticity and integrity throughout the process.
- Avoid the natural tendency to lead by pushing; instead, pull by inspiring values.
- Make sure the organization acts in consistent ways to build a strong culture.
- Expect spirited debate when people have competing values.

In another expression of values, Darin Brumby, chief information officer of First Group, a U.K.-based company, defined value-based leadership as "choosing to lead your life based on the core values you hold dear . . . an overarching way of looking at the world and choosing a principled way of behaving"¹ and suggested:

- Involve everyone and communicate expectations clearly and often.
- Select the values that are core to your beliefs and attitudes about life.
- Positively discriminate and reward behaviors that reflect core values.

In essence, public sector values-based leadership is providing leadership based on values that reflect the output of a collaborative process involving employees and stakeholders. Many localities have developed values in this manner but may have stopped short of tapping into the full potential of the values they created by not ensuring leaders lead in ways that reflect those values. The next section offers some practical steps for bringing values-based leadership to life.

Practical Steps to Values-Based Leadership

As you reflect on the following list of practical steps, check each box that applies to you. Also, consider what steps you need to take to strengthen ethics in the workplace.

- Know your city's values well enough to talk about them comfortably.
- Explain or discuss the relevance of the values and ethics with employees.
- Describe behaviors consistent with those values.
- Engage employees in dialogue concerning values and ethics.
- Circulate values and ethics literature to raise employee awareness.
- Watch for and recognize employee behavior that is consistent with the city's values.
- Live the values.
- Coach others toward higher value acceptance.
- Debrief values and ethics failures to identify measures to prevent future issues.
- Create an ethics committee or similar body that has specific, though not exclusive, responsibility to promote values-based and ethical behavior.
- Include a values and ethics section in employees' evaluation and promotional processes.
- Develop metrics to track values and ethics efforts.

- Reference values and values-based leadership in recruitment literature.
- Explain how vision and values are linked.
- Use a values-based decision-making model to enhance ethical decisions.
- Admit mistakes and right wrongs to restore trust.

Conclusion

Ethics will play an important role in this century if public sector leaders are to find solutions for the challenges that lie ahead. Values-based leadership is a framework to provide an environment that will raise the ethical bar by bringing clarity to what is important and creating a stronger, more ethical culture.

¹Darin Brumby, "Values-Based Leadership" (presentation at National Computing Centre annual conference, October 17–18, 2006, Croyden, Surrey, UK), www.ncc-conference.co.uk/presentations/18th%20October/Darin_Brumby.pdf.

Merlin Switzer, a student at Regent University, School of Global Leadership and Entrepreneurship, Doctor of Strategic Leadership Program (change@surewest.net), is a retired Sacramento, California, sheriff's department captain and has served in leadership positions in the community.

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DEPARTMENTS

Ethics

Politics, Issues, and Lame Ducks

SCENARIO: BALLOT MEASURES

By a 4–1 margin, the city council placed a measure on the spring ballot to increase the local sales tax. The dissenter was the mayor. Generating new revenues to support service levels and capital investment had been an issue for debate even before the current economic tsunami hit. Because the vote to place the measure on the ballot was not unanimous, the city council decided that no members of the council should use their official titles to advocate either for or against the measure. The city manager sought advice on an appropriate role for both him and the senior staff.

ADVICE:

The ICMA Code of Ethics draws a distinction between activities on behalf of a candidate for elected office (such activities are not permitted) and advocacy for issues (these are permitted). The code recognizes that there is a legitimate role members can play in providing crucial information to governing bodies and the voters on the impact of ballot measures.

The guideline states that members may assist the governing body in presenting issues involved in such referenda as bond issues, annexations, and similar matters. This makes sense given the professional expertise local government managers and staff contribute to the policy dialogue.

Members may also make financial contributions to issue-oriented political action committees (PACs), publicly express their views, and actively engage in the debate and dialogue. As members consider their involvement, they should keep in mind four caveats:

1. Know and comply with the law regarding use of public resources for ballot measures.
2. Consider where the governing body stands on the issue. If members are opposed, divided, or have taken the position described above, a low-profile strategy limited to providing background information on the measure may be wise.
3. Caution is necessary even if you decide to actively join the debate. Think carefully about the most effective role you can play and what impact your involvement may have on your ability to serve the local government.
4. If you feel compelled to raise funds for the measure, do not ask your staff to contribute, as they may not feel free to say no.

This advice works for senior staff as well as the manager. A strong argument can be made that the proper role for all staff is to provide the information and then let the voters decide. There is an equally compelling argument that, as professionals who have expertise in local government operations and a vested interest in the future of the community, it's an act of integrity on the part of managers to make their voices heard.

SCENARIO: LAME DUCKS

Mix in a few retirements with some defeats and the county will soon be governed by a commission with one incumbent and four new members. Rather than retreating, the lame-duck commission is aggressively moving to leave its imprint. The outgoing chair has directed the county manager to place several items on the agenda for a vote during the remaining 60-day term.

Among the measures is a final vote on an update to the region's comprehensive plan. The sole incumbent and the incoming commission members are opposed to the measure. A vote by the county commission will cement a plan already approved by the other local governments in the region.

The returning incumbent has privately approached the county manager to discuss ways to ensure defeat of this effort. After all, the election of a new commission is a signal that the public expects change!

ADVICE:

The rule of law is paramount here. While lame ducks they may be, they are legally empowered to act on behalf of the constituency until a new commission takes over. The strength of the council-manager form of government has been to represent and implement the actions of the governing body as a whole. There is no ethical role for the manager to play in anticipating the wishes of a commission yet to be sworn in and ignoring the authority of the one still in place.

—Martha Perego, ICMA-CM
ICMA Ethics Director
Washington, D.C.
mperego@icma.org

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On Retirement

Saving for Tomorrow Lowers Stress Today

If you're feeling financially stressed or know someone who is, you're not alone. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association, money is a leading source of stress for Americans. Of the 2,500 respondents to the 2008 survey, 80 percent named money as the number one factor affecting their stress level.

Because April is National Stress Awareness Month, now is a great time to focus on the causes and solutions for dealing with the stresses in our lives, including money. Developing good financial planning habits today can help you reduce your financial stress and build financial security for the future.

Even now, many Americans continue to feel financial strain from the volatility that hit financial markets last fall. For people nearing or in retirement, the economic downturn has raised grave concerns about the safety of their retirement future and has created the need for some to put off their goals and dreams for a few years more.

For others, the economic crunch meant the loss of a home, job instability, shifts in spending habits, and strict belt-tightening. Now, in the aftermath of the economic slump, most of the nation faces great lifestyle changes. Smart financial planning is one of them.

During difficult times, it's important to spend responsibly and maintain a saving discipline that can help us get through those tough times. Taking a few steps to plan today can provide us with a strong path to follow toward good financial *and* physical health. Here are some tips that can help you and your associates get started:

1. **Pay yourself first.** No matter how small the amount, always set aside some money in your employer-sponsored retirement plan. One advantage of saving through your employer-sponsored retirement plan is that the money goes toward your savings before you have a chance to spend it. The money is deducted directly from your paycheck. An added benefit is that you are saving pre-tax dollars, which means you save money and reduce your taxable income at the same time.
2. **Assess your current financial condition.** Develop a net worth statement by putting all of your assets—cash, real estate, stocks, retirement savings—on one side of a sheet of paper, and all of your debts—credit cards, mortgage, installment loans—on the other. Subtract your debts from your assets to get your net worth. Knowing this figure can help you determine your short-term and long-term needs and your savings goals.
3. **Set a monthly budget.** Keep track of what you spend in a month. Create a list of needs versus wants, and match that amount against your monthly income. If your expenses exceed your income, you may need to cut out some of the extras. Remember to live within your means. Try to limit all essential spending to about 60 percent of your income, and save the rest.
4. **Look for smart ways to save money.** Taking your lunch to work instead of eating out, car pooling or biking, renting a movie instead of going to the theater, clipping coupons, and buying generic brand items are all smart ways to save money. Tuck away those extra dollars you save into a savings account specifically for big-ticket items or use them to build an emergency fund.
5. **Avoid using credit cards.** The ability to buy now and pay later can be enticing to those who are short on cash. But it's important to remember that eventually everything purchased with credit will have to be paid back with interest, which can add up significantly over time. Especially avoid any debit cards that can be linked to your retirement accounts. Borrowing from a retirement savings account can be costly in a variety of ways, including heavy taxes, penalties, and fees.
6. **Choose an investment strategy that's right for you.** Develop a personal investment strategy that fits your goals and personal circumstance. Many factors can go into the strategy you choose, including your age, your investment time horizon, retirement income requirements, and your tolerance for risk. Select a strategy you believe will work best for you. You can learn more about how to do this by reading ICMA-RC's online guide, "Developing a Personal Retirement Investment Strategy," available at www.icmarc.org/xp/rc/planning/investsmart/developstrategy.html.

There is no easy path to financial or physical health. Minimizing the stress takes discipline, foresight, maintenance, and patience. In the end, however, it is well worth the effort. Feeling the sense of security that comes with a financial foundation strong enough to weather difficult times and having a large enough reserve for a comfortable retirement are essential to your well-being. Start by taking stock of your situation today, and plan smart for a secure future.

—Joan McCallen
President and CEO
ICMA Retirement Corporation
Washington, D.C.
www.icmarc.org

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Profile

Right-Time, Right-Fit Job for Gray



Photo: Steve Hooper/*Keene Sentinel*

Robert "Bob" Gray is town administrator of [Winchester, New Hampshire](#).

When Robert N. "Bob" Gray and his wife, Karen, moved to Troy, New Hampshire, from Rhode Island in 2003, he found a more traditional side of New England. "There's so much more open space and woods, and less congestion," he said.

But more than the look of things, Gray enjoys the fact that "the people are more friendly, and it's easier to strike up a conversation. It's more of what I like to call what New England is, up here."

And he ought to know, since Gray spends his time behind the counter at Winchester town hall—where he worked with the public for almost five years, the past two months as town administrator.

Town hall has been through some upheavals in 2008: voters abolished the town manager position in March, charging the board of selectmen to restructure the staff. Selectmen chose Amy Lewis as the first town administrator, but she left in September when her husband took a job out of the state.

Until two months ago, Gray had served as the town's property records manager for the assessing department, a position he never planned on occupying when he and his wife packed up and headed north. Now that he is the town administrator, he's continued shaking things up.

He has consolidated the records manager and town administrator positions so work that was once done by three people—the administrator, the records manager, and an administrative assistant—is now done by two.

"The selectmen thought this was a plan worth trying, so we hammered out the details to save the town some money. My goal has always been to provide the highest level of customer service for the people of Winchester, for whom I work," he said. Gray, 55, hopes to continue streamlining the office and helping the selectmen through the budget season. He has a long professional history and varied experiences that have served him well since joining town hall, he said.

For 20 years, he worked as a production supervisor for Avery Dennison, a manufacturer in Framingham, Massachusetts. When it became clear his division was going to close, the Grays moved to Troy, where one of their two daughters already lived.

"We just thought we'd like to make a change. We had always wanted to try and sell real estate," so they studied up, got their real estate licenses and gave it a shot. But the housing market made it clear "one of us needed to get a job with steady income," Gray said, laughing, and so he took his recently gained real estate knowledge and took the assessing job in Winchester.

Gray found working in town to be a great fit for many reasons. His real estate training dovetailed with his work with deeds, and his manufacturing supervision background helped him work with the rest of the staff.

And of course, there was the fact the town let him bring Cassie to work. Cassie, a nine-year-old shih tzu with curly white fur, loves company, a fact anyone who steps into Gray's office learns quickly. She greets every visitor with a friendly bark and an excited tail that wags her whole body.

Gray—and Cassie—sat in an office next to Lewis during the transition months, and shared a philosophy about the job. "One of the

things that she and I agreed on was that the town administrator would be accessible to the people," he said, so he followed her footsteps and kept his office on the first floor, front and center.

"It's a little more work—you get more interruptions from folks coming in to the window, but it's very rewarding." The selectmen are so far pleased with their choice.

"Bob has always been an ideal candidate for this," said Selectman Robert Fraser. "He's conscientious, he's a hard worker, and he's very, very smart. He's always done a good job in the assessing department, and we knew it would carry over, and so far he's done a superb job."

—Sarah Palermo
Sentinel Staff
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PM MAGAZINE

DEPARTMENTS

Healthy Communities

A Vision of Connectivity



Manager Gail Weniger has organized walking clubs and participates in wellness programs in her community.

Warwick Township, Pennsylvania, Manager Gail Weniger envisions her township as a place where residents can opt to leave their cars at home and still get to their favorite destinations—even in neighboring communities. To see this vision through, she is connecting her entire community to walking or biking trails, creating an extensive trail network that connects Warwick—a suburban community 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia—to its neighbors. This strategy aims to satisfy two practical needs: to compensate for poor access to public transportation and to take advantage of the trails' significant health benefits.

"If I made a list of things that I believe are important for the community and achieve the goals of the elected officials, the items would all be a subset of one goal—having a healthy sustainable community where the quality of life for the residents is high," Weniger said. "The promotion of active living and walkability in the community contributes to this goal, not only by increasing fitness and health but by creating a sense of community through linking people to each other and to the business community."

SETTING UP A NETWORK

To reach its healthy and sustainable objectives, the township has been protecting open space and connecting neighborhoods and parks during the past decade. In fact, one of Weniger's first projects, to achieve her board's policy of connectivity, was securing easements and linking a park's connecting sidewalks and walkways to three neighborhoods. Now, residents are safely enjoying a once dangerous pedestrian route.

Warwick recently implemented a \$7 million open space referendum that the electorate had passed overwhelmingly. To date, the township has borrowed about \$2.6 million to buy 17 acres adjacent to an existing park as well as conservation easements that protect an additional 61 acres near environmentally sensitive areas. In total, the township has spent more than \$10 million on land acquisition and easements and has protected well over 300 acres in the past 10 years. This vast open space provides residents with easily accessible places where they can be physically active.



To further help in building connections, the township updated its comprehensive plan to match the subdivision and land development ordinances so that developers are required to provide sidewalks in all new subdivisions. "The requirement of sidewalks and trails during the development process is the key to creating a walkable community," says Weniger, adding that the requirement helps create a walkable community without using tax dollars.

Importantly, in the rare event that the township waives the sidewalk requirement, developers are required to contribute a fee to a fund to build new trails or sidewalks in areas where they are needed.

Currently, Warwick is constructing a trail under a state highway to provide a pedestrian link from a historical landmark, the Moland House, to a future 50-acre park. And its approach toward sidewalks and trails also addresses specific uses, as a recent trail allowing for equestrian use demonstrates.

"The sidewalks and trails, required by ordinance, can be specifically tailored to meet the goals of each area of the community," said Weniger. In addition, in partnership with its neighbor, Buckingham Township, and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the township built a pedestrian bridge over a large creek that links the two communities.

SAFETY AND MAINTENANCE

Safety issues were also addressed in the comprehensive plan. Developers, for example, are required to install pedestrian countdown signals. The community installed its first countdown signal this year, allowing pedestrians to safely cross a five-lane state road. "It's a new application for us and one [that] we would like to continue to promote pedestrian travel, particularly in high-traffic areas," notes Weniger.

One major challenge for Warwick Township is maintaining the growing trail network. Although the parks and recreation and public works departments are responsible for maintenance, the township must subcontract some of its work, such as the removal of large trees. Fortunately, the fund created from developer fees helps cover the maintenance costs of the current trail network.



ICMA'S HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AMBASSADORS

Currently in her eighth year as manager of Warwick Township, Weniger is no stranger to the health benefits of using sidewalks and trails. Her first position with the township was parks and recreation director, and she previously spent seven years in the Department of Recreation in Philadelphia and nine years as a registered nurse.

In 2004, she joined ICMA's Healthy Communities Ambassador program. One of Weniger's first tasks as parks and recreation director was to organize a local walking club, which met for a number of years.

Weniger also leads by example, participating in wellness programs offered by the township's insurance provider and encouraging township employees to do the same. "I try to keep selling the wellness initiatives to the employees and actively promote participation the program," says Weniger.

The wellness program, run by the Delaware Valley Health Insurance Trust, offers rewards to participants who complete specific health initiatives, like quitting smoking or losing weight. Weniger herself earned a \$500 "bonus" in 2008 through the program.

"On a personal level, I welcome the incentive of going to the gym, [which provides] a \$250 reimbursement." However, she points out, "The \$100 incentive to complete a comprehensive physical is possibly the most important. The physical is the baseline tool to identify problems or address issues for which a person is at a higher risk."

Besides early disclosure of problems that can be managed, Weniger points out, "preventive care keeps health care and its costs manageable by treating problems early" or preventing them entirely.

—Melissa Friedman
Assistant Project Manager
ICMA
New York, New York
mfriedman@ICMA.org

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