BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES DURING DISRUPTIVE CHANGE

ICMA

PART 3: Community Engagement and Building Public Trust

Introduction

One of the best ways to build public trust and confidence from your residents is through community engagement. This holds especially true when communities are impacted by some form of disruption.

Man-made or natural, any form of disruption calls for community building and participation. Doing so creates better decisions and policies, improves civility and trust in your local government, and fosters an educated and engaged citizenry.

This e-book brings together articles from ICMA's *Public Management (PM)* magazine and ICMA's blog, Leadership {RE}Imagined, written by thought leaders in local government. It includes case examples from cities and counties that have met the challenges of change, along with advice and lessons learned from experts in the field.

Whether you're a local government manager or hold a community engagement position, you'll find best practices and tips to help you meet and overcome disruptive challenges and achieve leadership excellence in your organization.

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Tackling Wicked Problems Takes Resident Engagement

By Mike Huggins and Cheryl Hilvert

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

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

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

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

"WICKED" PROBLEMS

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

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

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

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

Many managers simply don't know where to begin, how to plan effective programs for engagement, how to measure their efforts, or where to turn for resources and assistance.

EMERGING ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The IAP2 spectrum advocates for local governments to identify the objective of the engagement activity and the promise it intends to make to its citizens. It further concludes that not all resident engagement is the same, and the design and format of the engagement needs to be matched to purpose and intended outcomes of the engagement activity.

BRIDGING THE "ENGAGEMENT GAPS"

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

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

FIGURE 1: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MOVING FORWARD WITH ENGAGEMENT

The *Connected Communities* report concludes that engagement is both the right and smart thing for local governments to do, and in the current environment of reduced resources and wicked problems, should be

looked at as a mandatory skill for managers—and something they must learn to do well.

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

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

1. Take stock of what you are already doing, distinguishing between exchange and engagement efforts.

2. Assess how receptive your organization is to initiatives from community groups and to what extent your organizational culture supports civic engagement.

3. Work with your elected officials to convene a community conversation on engagement to hear from residents how they wish to be involved in shaping community life and how local government could contribute to meeting their aspirations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A CALL TO ACTION

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

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

Key findings of this research,[7] suggest:

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

2. There is a need for a more comprehensive, intentional, and holistic approach to citizen engagement that brings together actors and agencies throughout a municipality, instead of one-shot activities that occur in isolation. One way to begin is by conducting a comprehensive assessment of existing capacities and past strategies and experiences. It may be necessary to examine and possibly revise current legal mandates and existing policies and procedures related to engaging with the public.

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

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

At the end of the day, effective civic action and problem solving depends on ordinary individuals thinking of themselves as productive people who hold

themselves accountable—people who can build things, do things, come up with ideas and resources, and be bold in their approach. Communities need places and spaces where people can develop their civic capacities and their public lives.

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

Key Resources

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

Matt Leighninger, "Vitalizing Democracy through Participation: A Vital Moment," 2010 monograph for Bertelsmann Foundation.

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) "Engagement Streams Framework."

Matt Leighninger and Bonnie Mann, "Planning for Stronger Local Democracy: A Field Guide for Local Officials," National League of Cities, 2011.

John Bryson et al. "Designing Public Participation Processes," *Public Administration Review*, January/February 2013. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02678.x/pdf

ENDNOTES

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

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

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

4   Leighninger, Matt (2012), "Identifying the Engagement Gaps." In Kelly Campbell Rawlings (Ed.), *Civic Engagement* (pp. 75–81). Phoenix, Arizona: Arizona Town Hall.

5   *Connected Communities: Local Government as a Partner in Citizen Engagement and Community Building*, James Svara and Janet Denhardt, eds. Alliance for Innovation, 2010; Matt Leighninger, "Vitalizing Democracy through Participation: A Vital Moment," 2010 monograph for Bertelsmann Foundation; National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) "Engagement Streams Framework," Matt Leighninger and Bonnie Mann, "Planning for Stronger Local Democracy: A Field Guide for Local Officials," National League of Cities, 2011; John Bryson et al. "Designing Public Participation Processes," *Public Administration Review*, January/February 2013.

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

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

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Gaining Public Trust

Why the Local Government Workforce Needs to Be Diverse and Inclusive

By Barry Quirk

A s a manager in a meeting with local government staff, you might say, "We are a select group of similar people, who are working for the wider benefit of all the people who live in this community." This statement doesn't sound right though, does it?

How can a small group of people genuinely serve the wider public? And if its members are all alike, how can they secure the trust and confidence of everyone?

Imagine this thought experiment: What if staff members for cities and counties were selected at random—as in a jury? What basis would we choose for selecting them? Why not their dates of birth?

If we wanted to select 3 percent of the population, we could just choose a day—say the 20th of each month. In this make-believe world, only those born on the 20th of each month could be eligible to work for a city or county.

Ironically, this random approach to selecting staff could produce a more diverse and inclusive workforce than is currently the case in many local government organizations anywhere in the world; however, it would be completely absurd.

It may be okay to use random selection for juries, for these make temporary demands upon residents, but we cannot use this random selection process to struc-ture lifelong careers in public service. So what should we do, and how should we do it?

DIVERSITY IS KEY

First, we must recognize that diversity in a workforce is good, in and of itself. But it's also a good that generates even greater benefits. A talented bunch of similar types can produce considerable public benefits. The world is full of inventions, projects, and services that were designed by like-minded people who all shared some key characteristics.

In the world of the early 21st century, it is more common for innovative breakthroughs to occur when combining ideas from people who have differences. In the world of public service, the diversity of people's personal and social characteristics is as vital as the diversity of their ideas.

This is a key feature for us in London. In a dynamic and growing city of some 9 million, what is evident is the "hyper diversity" and incredibly varied heritage of Londoners. Throughout the world, only New York City has a comparable level of population diversity to London.

In my borough of Lewisham, its population of 300,000 is a complex weave of people from London and from across the United Kingdom, as well as people who have come to London from around the globe—people with differences in their heritage, faith, ethnicity, culture, and economic circumstances.

All councils need to make decisions locally to invest in public infrastructure, to design public services, and to decide between competing claims for public benefits. In so doing, they need to have the trust and confidence of the public they serve.
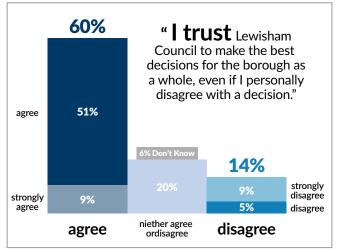
Is the investment going into places where it is most needed? Are services designed for the best impact locally? And when there are competing claims locally, how are decisions made fairly?

In all of these respects, council officials need to act in trustworthy ways. It's simply not an option to command the public to have trust and confidence in us as managers and leaders—we need to act in ways that generate that trust.

The one chart (see Figure 1) that gives me the most pride in the 20 years I have been employed at my authority is the one about public trust in the council's actions. Customer satisfaction charts, educational attainment charts, business improvement charts, and crime reduction charts each tell a positive story.

Charting the trustworthiness of your organization, however, is perhaps the most important metric for the 21st century. Basically, in a 2015 randomized survey, 60 percent of Lewisham's residents responded that they trust the council "to make the best decisions for

the borough as a whole, even if I personally disagree with a decision."

THE ISSUE OF TRUST

For residents to posit trust in a public professional or in a council, they must believe in the competence and reliability of the person or council concerned. This belief usually stems from direct experience of the quality and reliability of the person or council. It can also arise from indirect reports from friends, family, and neighbors or from publicly available media coverage.

The degree of trust that residents place in public action by councils will also rely upon the degree of personal contact they have with those people who make the decisions—whether elected or appointed—and who are involved in delivering public services. Trust in councils can corrode through the small but repeated failures of external contract staff, as much as through big policy failures of elected decision makers.

Critically, it is difficult to trust others if you know nothing about them as individuals. Hence a degree of intimacy and personal connection is essential for generating trust. It is not enough to be competent and reliable. That is why the sources of trust are found not just in how you perform your role, but they are also embodied in who you are.

"How you work" is tied up with the council's capabilities: professional credibility of staff, organizational reliability, and consistency of project and service delivery. "Who you are" is a question that is tied to your values. It is about character, integrity, and personality.

The crucial point is that organizations composed of socially diverse people are more likely to be creatively innovative and offer points of personal connection to a wider public. They are more likely to deliver valued public services.

In Lewisham, most residents work in the private sector elsewhere in London. In the main part of the city, they work in financial services, the scientific and knowledge economy, the service sector, and creative industries. Some 16,000 people work for public sector employers based in Lewisham. Of these, only one in eight works for the council. The remainder work in schools, health care services, the police force, and the local university.

If we were to consider disparities between the public served and those serving the public, it is notable that whereas 45 percent of all local residents are of black and minority ethnic heritage, the comparable rate

FIGURE 1: Does the Public Trust Us to Make Decisions?

" **I trust** Lewisham Council to make the best decisions for the borough as a whole, even if I personally disagree with a decision."

60%
agree 51%
strongly agree 9%
agree

6% Don't Know
20%
niether agree ordisagree

14%
strongly disagree 9%
disagree 5%
disagree

Source: London Borough of Lewisham, Residents Survey 2015

among the Lewisham Council staff group is 39 percent. The rate in school systems, however, is lower at 32 percent, and the rates among university and police force are below 20 percent.

These reflect broad labor market and narrower professional biases as much as they reflect institutional practices. The barriers and obstacles to achieving workforce diversity and inclusion will, of course, vary from organization to organization and from place to place.

Thus, while the councils need to ensure that the pattern and profile of the local government workforce is broadly reflective of the community, they also need to act with other partners to ensure that public services generally are held in trust and confidence by members of the public.

Failure in any one public agency can serve to undermine trust and confidence more widely across the community. And there is little point in promoting workforce diversity and inclusion in one local organization—the council, for example—if it is not attended to with the same rigor in the local police force or school system.

A SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP APPROACH

There was a time at the end of the last century when local government in the United Kingdom retreated into an elaborate form of reputation management and stakeholder analysis. These approaches had their merits and forced local governments to move away from an internalized focus on resource management, service strategy, and performance measures.

Instead, they made us think about what other people think about us. At one level, this created a new form of institutional egoism. We become fixated on what people thought about us as an organization. We should have been focused outside of ourselves on whether our local economies were thriving and whether our local communities were becoming healthier. This could happen with diversity.

We should not narrow our focus on just our own diversity. The non-hiring of ethnic community members by a large private company locally, for example, is as injurious to racial justice as is the relative disparity in hiring (and promotion) rates within a council's own staff.

That's why we need to have a systems leadership approach to diversity and inclusion. Our workforce, of course, needs to be diverse. That way, the possibilities for internal organizational creativity is enhanced, and also the pluralism in our community meets itself in our staff. This leads the way to greater trust in council decisions and actions.

Diversity and inclusion are not simply agenda items for organizational leaders. They are social goals for communities and for all of the public agencies and private companies woven into the fabric of our communities.

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There's More to Engagement Than Transparency

Use a full cadre of tactics to engage residents

By Matt Leighninger

Public managers at all levels of government are working hard to provide more information to citizens. To some critics, the pace of this transparency movement seems too slow, but it does have momentum. Transparency advocates inside and outside government claim that making more information publicly available is an empowering act that will help rebuild trust between citizens and government.

When I began the research for *Using Online Tools to Engage – and Be Engaged by the Public,* I found that when some people talk about public engagement and citizen involvement, what they really mean is transparency.

The problem is that although transparency is one element of engagement, it is not the whole enchilada. And if it is not conducted as part of a more comprehensive set of engagement initiatives or reforms, transparency promises to create new tensions and controversies, further erode citizen trust in government, and destroy the careers of many managers.

MAIN CHALLENGE

The central problem in most democracies is not a lack of information. The main challenge is that citizen expectations and capacities have undergone a sea change in the past 20 years, and our public institutions have not yet adjusted to the shift.

Because of rising levels of education, increased access to the Internet, and different attitudes toward authority, 21st-century citizens are better able to disrupt policymaking processes and better able to find the information, allies, and resources they need to make an impact on issues they care about.

Managers at the local government level, and increasingly now the state and federal levels, have experienced the most immediate result of these changes: a small cadre of people—sometimes referred to as "expert citizens" or more derisively as "the usual suspects"—who regularly make themselves heard at public meetings and in the blogosphere.

In case after case, on issues ranging from land use decisions to school closings to the use of vaccines, these active citizens are able to wield an outsized influence on public decisions. Managers are constantly being surprised by the timing and ferocity of the challenges they receive and are constantly wondering whether the views of these active citizens are truly representative of the broader electorate.

For some time, smart and experienced managers have been dealing with these challenges and trying to tap the new capacities of ordinary people by organizing large-scale public engagement efforts. These projects are successful when they involve large, diverse numbers of people ("going beyond the usual suspects" is a common phrase), and when they create environments where citizens compare notes on their experiences, learn more about the issues, and talk through what they think government should do. Some of these initiatives also build in opportunities for action planning so that citizens can decide how they want to contribute to solving public problems (in addition to making recommendations for government).

MORE PEOPLE INVOLVED

Transparency can enrich these kinds of engagement efforts, but it doesn't replace them. We need larger numbers of people to be involved in public discussions, and we need those people talking with each other, not just to government.

Without initiatives and structures that will produce that sort of engagement, transparency will simply give more information to journalists and active citizens who are trying to expose government misconduct and misjudgment, champion tax revolts and other antigovernment measures, and oppose decisions and policies they don't like.

"Transparency is a necessary but insufficient condition for democratic control," says Archon Fung, a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government who is one of the authors of Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency.

It is of course beneficial to expose the errors and transgressions of public managers. There is truth to the favorite quote of transparency advocates, Louis Brandeis's 1914 pronouncement that "Sunshine is the best disinfectant." But while transparency makes government cleaner, it won't necessarily make it better. By itself, transparency doesn't change the arms-length relationship between citizens and government. It just gives more ammunition to those who are inclined to throw stones.

In addition to providing more information to citizens, managers should focus on the enormous potential of the Internet to overcome the distance between people and their governments. Face-to-face and online interactions are different—both kinds of communication have unique strengths and weaknesses, and they complement each other well—and so the most forward-thinking managers are finding ways to integrate the two in their public engagement initiatives.

Still other pioneers are considering ways to sustain public engagement, in part by using social media, so that the democratic principles of proactive recruitment, small-group deliberation, and joint action planning become more embedded in the ways that public business is conducted.

Exploring and implementing these other aspects of engagement will be critical for bringing out the productive side of transparency and dealing with the conflicts and scandals that will inevitably emerge. For local government managers, transparency is already the right thing to do; if it is part of a broader engagement strategy, it can also be the smart thing to do.

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The Seven Leadership Qualities for Times of Civic Disruption

By Randall Reid

I n local government leadership circles we often discuss "disruptive technology" when dramatic changes in technology innovation turns established industries upside down. In politics, campaigns such as those mounted by billionaire Donald Trump and socialist Bernie Sanders, and the subsequent criminal investigation of Hillary Clinton appear to be similarly "disruptive" civic events, attracting many new participants into the political processes while exposing currents of mistrust, inequity and doubt in the integrity of our public institutions. This political environment further aggravates underlying racial unrest and fears of terrorism resulting in an epidemic of civic tension and instability in many communities. As we await the final Presidential election results let's focus on the seven qualities of public sector leadership appropriate in times of fear, distrust, and political disruption.

1. LEADERS GENERATE TRUST IN OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM

Leaders at all levels can instill trust in our democratic systems. A recent book, *America, The Owner's Manual,* by former Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham models this instructive and reassuring style of leadership. The author is the founder of the Bob Graham

Center for Public Service at the University of Florida which instructs college students, adults and educators on effective citizenship. Written as an owner's manual, it focuses on how citizens can organize civic campaigns, impact policy agendas, communicate with government officials, make effective public presentations in meetings and use social media for advocacy. Each chapter highlights successful citizen initiated activities to improve their communities and build coalitions with other citizens. The book serves as a "hands on" guide for any citizen seeking effective participation through practical "tips from the pros" from government officials, civic activists and social media experts.

2. ETHICAL LEADERSHIP MATTERS.

In 2015, a Pew Charitable Trusts survey found that 74 percent of Americans believed that most elected officials didn't care what people thought. Regardless of the outcome of the upcoming November election, what is certain is local government leaders will be faced with the challenge to incorporate an increasingly polarized citizenry into the democratic processes of our local governments. The healing balm of civic hope that can bring people together best resides in local government officials that are known to have integrity, are accessible,

and who will listen to their concerns about their family's future wellbeing. Our profession's reform movement roots, professional integrity, and promotion of ethical leadership has never been more essential or needed in our communities.

3. LEADERS TODAY MUST BE CIVIC HEALERS.

An escalation of violence against citizens and police officers vividly demonstrates that successful public leaders must practice the new leadership skill of "civic healing" to assure resilient communities. Civic healing after such traumatic events demands rapid apology for failure and supportive empathy from public administrators as well as transparency and justice in operational reviews and investigations of wrong doing. However, civic healing will not be achieved without an ongoing and higher level of meaningful civic engagement by our citizens. A democratic government cannot long be estranged from its citizenry nor abandon our public servants employed in dangerous law enforcement activities. Civic healing brings a community resolve to recognize our common aspirations.

4. LEADERS FACILITATE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION.

The respect for our democratic ideals should allow public managers to come along side citizens and mentor them to assist them to accomplish their desired goals, understand processes and sponsor civic education opportunities. Local officials need to recognize that citizens voting in their first elections, attending their first public meetings, organizing groups to practice legal civil disobedience and those drawn into illegal civic disturbances in city streets are all practicing forms of civic engagement, often outside our control as public leaders. Another civic engagement "program" is not the ultimate outcome; truly committed citizens confidently involved in local governance and co-producing civic health should be our goal. Inclusive engagement of citizens will provide a welcomed accessibility and voice for the new participants, the disenfranchised or those alienated from their community or government.

5. LEADERS PROMOTE COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING.

Whether due to divisive violence or acrimonious rhetoric, leaders should be dedicated to equipping citizens and assisting community participants channel energy into effective and positive civic responses. These channels may be through more convenient voter registra-

tion, civic oriented social media platforms, intentional community conversations or facilitating peaceful civil demonstrations. The level of connectedness within a community is perhaps the best assurance of resiliency. This community capacity building through civic education and empowerment can reestablish trust, reconcile community participants and broaden the number of citizens participating effectively to impact local government policies and programs.

6. TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS EMPOWER CITIZENS.

Any owner's manual is written to assist people to enjoy and protect their cherished possessions. What more important possession do we share than our local communities and our representative democracy? Local government public administrators would do well to reflect frequently upon our core professional and democratic values. In light of changing technology, policies and practices regarding citizen access, transparency and engagement must also be updated. Public employees must not be the source of frustration in a democratic process but rather be the stewards of the democratic ideals our profession was founded. Our expertise when shared as a citizen with other citizens enhances democracy.

7. LEADERS RECOGNIZE CIVIC RENEWAL CAN ARISE FROM COMMUNITY DISRUPTION.

Periods of disruptive politics occur in democracies. The civic empowerment and hope highlighted in Graham and Hand's *America, The Owner's Manual* may be just the prescription our ailing civic health diagnosis demands. Just as the case of technology, there are opportunities for positive change in our institutions and our performance in times of disruption and civil unrest. Leaders can reaffirm community and democratic values. Hopefully this current period of civic disruption can produce a period of civic renewal and a more meaningful participation for citizens in the civic community institutions we cherish.

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Plan for the Bumps

Put Public Participation Protocols in Place Now

By Mike Conduff, ICMA-CM

The mayor and councilmembers were clearly frustrated. After years of working hard for the community; sacrificing time, energy, and personal resources in their volunteer positions; effecting widely appreciated improvements in the community; and even after being acknowledged as City Council of the Year by the state's professional managers, their meetings had turned ugly.

"We had more people show up at one meeting than we had all of last year," is how the mayor put it to me during a council retreat. "And they were all angry, and they all wanted to speak—if yelling and screaming constitutes speaking. They were mean, vicious, and nasty, and those were the nice ones."

This annual planning retreat that was scheduled a year in advance, just happened to come on the heels of a significant water rate increase and its associated public outcry.

PROBLEMS GALORE

Weather-event-related catastrophic line failures and significant capital maintenance expenditures, which had to be accelerated as the result of annual inspections, had also left this diligent body no alternative other than to invest the money necessary to keep the water utility strong and functioning.

The public, however, was fuming and chose to use the public-comment section of a council meeting agenda as one means to express their outrage. Charges ranging from "being inept" to "being corrupt" were being leveled, and trying to maintain civility at the meeting in the face of the mob mentality was nearly impossible.

"Our informal rules of procedure, which we hadn't really even been following because there was no need for them until now, simply did not work. Since we had not been using time limits or even needed to think about decorum, trying to do so in this instance just left us open to charges of trying to stifle the residents and added fuel to a fire that definitely didn't need any," another councilmember added.

DISCIPLINE BEHAVIOR

While enacting appropriate public participation procedures during a chaotic time is certainly problematic, elected and appointed officials can all relearn the lesson they mostly already know.

The time to plan for the bumps is before we encounter them. We call this the discipline behavior. It is not hard

to do, but takes consistent commitment to do it.

From a governance perspective, acting on behalf of and connecting with the "owners"—think residents—is a top priority. While it is challenging to get meaningful engagement when things are going well, great councils work hard at finding and, if necessary, manufacturing ways to solicit public participation in decision making at any time. Part of that is being thoughtful about the rules of engagement.

While each state is certainly different in terms of open meetings procedures, and elected officials and managers simply must work with their community's attorney to avoid First Amendment issues, most high-performing officials have the key components of time, place, and manner restrictions in common for the public comment section of a meeting's agenda.

These restrictions:

Require signing a "request to speak" card that simply asks the requestor's name, address, and subject. This is often done in advance, certainly before approaching the podium at the beginning of a meeting.

Mandate a time limit that is generally between three and five minutes per speaker, although some councils set aside a specific amount of total time (say, 30 minutes) and divide that among the number of folks who signed up to speak.

Provide guidelines for appropriate decorum; for example, speakers "may not employ tactics of defamation, intimidation, personal affronts, profanity, or threats of violence."

Prohibit engagement by the elected members so that there is no violation of open meetings laws.
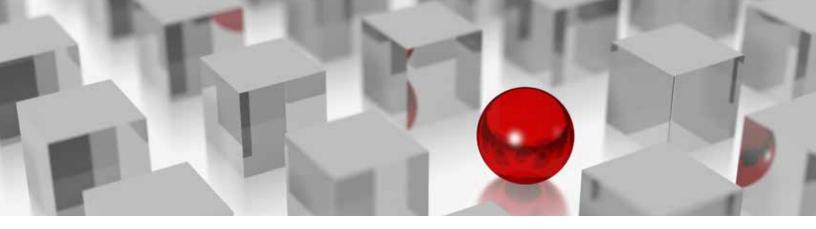
WILL IT WORK?

The key, of course, is to apply these mechanisms fairly, evenly, and consistently in good times and bad. Seek the reputation of encouraging meaningful input and appreciate it, even when it is uncomfortable or contrary to the current direction.

Then when bad stuff happens, and it will, you will have earned at least the benefit of the doubt.

In the case of the community example here, because of the elected officials' good governance background and their employment of the "one voice" principal (even the member that voted against the rate increase defended his colleagues), this council was able to weather the storm.

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Leadership Skills for Managing Wicked Problems in Local Government

By Michael Huggins, ICMA-CM

In the early 21st century, a persistent challenge facing many local government managers is how they can lead their organizations and communities to address their most pressing social, economic, and public service issues. Both governing institutions and those they govern are too frequently unable to come together in effective public deliberation and problem-solving.

I believe this is so for three reasons. First, during the 20th century, traditional political, education, and community institutions became heavily service-oriented, with organizational cultures and work approaches increasingly hierarchical, narrow in scope, and expert-defined. Local governance and public problem-solving became disconnected from local sources of connecting community knowledge and the work experiences of everyday people. This in turn limited and fragmented the public problem-solving roles for professional managers, elected officials, and citizens, and diminished the capacities of local governance institutions to create the political will needed for sustained public action.

Second, for many local leaders, effective public problem-solving became even more elusive as disruptions to public services reached crisis proportions

following the 2008 housing bubble collapse and global financial market meltdown. In the U.S. the 2008 market collapse came on the heels of over a decade of growing fiscal revenue shortages and fiscal instability for local and state governments. Writing in the August 2012 issue of **State and Local Government Review,** researchers Lawrence Martin, Richard Levey, and Jenna Cawley concluded in "The 'New Normal' for Local Government" that the bursting of the housing bubble, the banking and financial market crisis, and resulting 2008 recession permanently altered the local government landscape, resulting in a "new normal" for local government finances, employment, and services. They argued that the foreseeable future for local government will consist of significantly fewer resources, smaller workforces, and an emphasis on new ways of delivering services. Local government leaders will face hard decisions about sorting the values and priorities on which services to keep, how to pay for them, and how they should be delivered.

Finally, in working to rebuild a sustainable balance of public services, citizen expectations, and fiscal resources, local leaders find themselves operating more and more in the realm of **wicked problems.** In 1973

Horst Rittel and Mel Webber, professors of design and urban planning respectively at UCLA, wrote an article on "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning" in which they observed that many real-life, messy situations are complex social and organizational problems interwoven with interdependent sub-issues, and are highly resistant to successful resolution through traditional linear and orderly problem solving approaches. Labeling such challenges as *"wicked problems"*, Rittel and Webber compiled a list of ten identifying characteristics still referenced today.

I often use a briefer working definition: **Wicked problems** are complex and interdependent issues, with no clear and agreed upon problem definition, no single criteria for right or wrong; and which involve the conflicting perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Wicked problems are not 'solved,' only made better or worse. Wicked problems can be contrasted with **tame problems**, which have clarity on goals and problem definition, sufficient and adequate data, a clear solution and ending point, and for which one correct solution can be derived. How to fix a broken water line is a tame problem requiring only the application of the appropriate expertise to resolve. How to define the problem of poverty, much less 'fix' it in our local communities is something else again.

Martín Carcasson, founder and director of the Center for Public Deliberation at Colorado State University has observed that the dominant public solving approaches we use in local government rely on either *professional and technical expertise* or *advocacy/interest group politics.* Both approaches are ineffective at best in addressing wicked problems, and often make the situation worse. Managers are more likely to be successful with strategies founded on public participation, collaboration, and deliberative engagement. Aligning purpose with process, bridging local engagement gaps, and diligent pre-planning are keys to implementing broad community participation and engagement. Completing the Civic Engagement Organizational Self-Assessment, available for free download from ICMA is a good way to begin a local public engagement planning process.

To these macro community strategies, I would add a micro strategy of **relational problem-solving**, which emphasizes reflective and pragmatic language about doing public work and uses core reframing concepts and core skills to help leaders and work groups move from talk to action. I became more deeply involved in relational problem solving as part of the Clear Vision

Eau Claire civic engagement initiative that I and then County Administrator Tom McCarty convened in 2007 to address serious community infrastructure needs, as well as a growing trend of fragmented and divisive public participation. Working with the National Civic League, and later with the Center for Democracy and Citizenship (CDC) at Augsburg College, Clear Vision developed a train-the-trainer public engagement process centered on convening and training community members in relational public problem solving. Drawing from on the Public Achievement model developed by the CDC in the 1990's, Clear Vision has trained over 300 Eau Claire residents in engagement and problem solving. These residents have in turn led multiple community initiatives to take action on performing arts facilities, community gardens, jobs for the underemployed, community parks, homeless shelters, bicycle routes, environmental education, and elementary school partnerships.

Relational public problem-solving draws on reframing conceptual language to empower participants to envision roles as important co-creators of public work and decision making. Key concepts include:

- **Public life:** The roles that people take at work, at schools, and in the community (apart from private and family relationships) where they act on diverse self-interests to solve common problems. The success of public problem solving, and local democracy, depends on how everyday people live their public lives.

- **Politics:** From the Greek *politikos*, meaning "the work of citizens." This includes the customs, habits, power structures, and the formal and informal rules we use to make decisions where we live and work.

- **Power:** From the Latin *potêre* meaning "to be able" is the capacity to act in and influence our world. Power exists in a give-and-take, multi-dimensional relationship. Power is derived from many sources: relationships, knowledge, experience, organization, perseverance, moral persuasion, and resources.

- **Self-interest:** From the Latin *inter* and esse "self among others." The product of our personal history, motivation, experience, understanding, and reflection about who we are and what we care about most in the context of our relationships with others. Self interests are why people take action and stay engaged in public life.

Relational problem-solving also relies on a short of list of core of individual and group skills to help participants build the relational trust and community

connections essential for any sustained public action. These core skills include:

- **Values house meeting:** A 1 ½-2 hour structured small group discussion through which diverse stakeholders identify deeply held values, concerns, and strategies for public action through round robin responses to three questions:

  1. What values and traditions are important to you?
  2. What forces threaten these values?
  3. What can we do in our community to address these threats and strengthen our civic life?

- **Power Mapping:** A simple graphic technique for work groups to organize knowledge and power relationships about potential stakeholders and to illustrate the political and cultural resources that affect and are affected by an issue. Maps are also used to create one to one meeting assignments.

- **One-to-One relational meeting:** A 30-minute face-to-face meeting scheduled for the purpose of discovering another person's self-interest and potential for building a public relationship around shared interests in a problem or issue. One-to-ones focus on open-ended "why" and "what" questions to explore another person's interests, passions, stories, and public issues that energize the interviewee. Archimedes is quoted as saying "Give me a place to stand and with a lever, I will move the whole world." I can't speak to the whole world, but the one-to-one is the lever with which you can move your community.

- **Public evaluation:** A 5-10 minute debrief at the end of work group meetings to allow participants to evaluate their collective work, assess progress, clarify misunderstandings, and reflect on the impact of their work on the broader community. Possible questions might include: "What worked well?" or "What could we do better next time?" or "What one word describes how you feel about our work today?"

Learning and applying these concepts and skills requires minimal time and resources and can be accomplished in as little as 4-6 hours in a workshop training format. Alternatively, I have found that a very effective learning approach is to incorporate relational problem solving training and practice into the meetings of individual work groups as they come together to address specific community problems. A more detailed discussion of these and other core problem solving skills can be found in Harry Boyte's **The Citizen Solution**.

We live in a VUCA world-volatile, uncertain, complex, and *ambiguous*-where government is neither the epicenter of the community nor the locus for all public problem solving. And as managers, we work in an environment marked by anti-government rhetoric, widely dispersed community expertise, highly organized advocacy groups, widespread incivility, declining social cohesion, and shrinking public trust. Increasingly, our community leadership challenge is to close the widening gap between what the community can do, and what the community has the political will to do. This gap is where we most often encounter the wicked problems that plague our communities and keep us awake at night. Learning and using relational problem solving skills is one way we can tackle these problems more successfully and close the gap.

Mike Huggins, ICMA-CM is a former Eau Claire WI city manager with more than 30 years of leadership experience in city management and urban planning. As a Civic Engagement Service Provider for the ICMA Center for Management Strategies, he works with local governments and communities to build the civic problem solving skills of everyday people to collaborate and do extraordinary and meaningful public work. He is a Senior Lecturer on community leadership and public engagement in the Honors Program at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and holds MA degrees in public administration and urban planning from the University of Kansas. He is a board member of Clear Vision Eau Claire, a 2015 Finalist for the Harvard University Ash Center Innovations in Public Engagement in Government Award. He also serves on the board of the Chippewa Valley Post, Inc., a hyperlocal news initiative, and is vice-chair of the E-Democracy.org Board of Directors. (hugginsmw@gmail.com)

Managing Local Government Is Tougher than Usual

What is a Manager to Do?

By Ed Everett

Alienation, anger and a lack of trust in local government are making it extremely challenging to manage our cities and towns and build relationships with residents. Unfortunately, some managers feel there is nothing they can do to reduce alienation, minimize anger and build trust so they just accept the status quo. Other managers have attempted to connect with residents in a variety of ways:

- Many managers try to improve services as a way to connect with residents, which has proven to have little impact.
- Some managers think the answer lies in more rigorous management systems, such as strategic plans or performance measures, but that is not the answer.
- A few managers opt for "transparency" by showing residents all the data, but that is only a small part of the solution.

Developing relationships with our residents is the only way to mitigate alienation, anger and a lack of trust.

Local government has begun to turn to more effective citizen engagement as a way to build relationships and trust. Civic engagement will only be successful if combined with three other important and complimentary strategies: **Build Community; Enact a Partnership**

Model and Treat Residents Like Citizens. The relevance and importance of each of the three strategies are briefly described below prior to discussing engaging citizens.

BULID COMMUNITY

If you don't build community, you will **never be successful** in your efforts to reduce alienation, minimize anger and build trust.

What is community? Community is the feeling of:

- Belonging,
- Inclusiveness,
- Togetherness, and
- Pride in your neighborhood.

Community is knowing that your neighbors are there to help you and you are there to help your neighbors. It starts with people feeling connected to the place they live, to their neighbors and their neighborhood. Community is all about establishing and maintaining successful relationships.

People must know their neighbors to begin building community. Unfortunately, a Pew survey in 2010 showed that the majority of our residents don't know 50% of their neighbors by name! Unless local govern-

ment helps correct this situation, we will never overcome alienation, anger and mistrust toward local government.

Local government cannot build community alone. We must build a partnership with our residents. Community building starts at the neighborhood level and grows and expands from this grass roots effort. Government can play four distinct roles to help to build community: Consciousness Raising, Convener, Catalyst and Facilitator.

Improving trust with our residents means first helping build relationships between neighbors and second, helping build relationships between our neighbors and local government. Nextdoor.com is an easy first step for local governments to help build community with minimal staff resources. Nextdoor.com is a free, on-line application that connects neighbors to each other and allows government to connect to neighbors and neighborhoods.

To learn more about building community and the roles that local government can play, I recommend the following:

- *Community Building: How to Do It. Why It Matters*, IQ Report Vol. 41. No 2,
- *Community Building* by Peter Block, and,
- *The Abundant Community* by John McKnight and Peter Block.

FIX THE OUTDATED LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT MODEL

Local government must change our modus operandi.

Old Model: We are operating under an old model, which is doomed. Most local governments operate under a **"Bitch and Fix"** model. Our residents complain, bitch and find fault and we are expected to fix their problems. If we continue this model, we endanger the success of other efforts, such as being transparent, engaging residents, developing performance measures, etc.

The old model is based on outmoded and ineffective assumptions and beliefs, which drive our behavior and actions. Under the **"Bitch and Fix"** model, we have operated under the faulty assumptions in which local government:

- Is responsible for the quality of life in a community,
- Must solve people's problems, and,
- Requires little of residents.

New Model: The alternative is a **"Partnership"** model. We must be honest and admit to our residents and ourselves that none of the big problems we face,

including crime, drugs, affordable housing, child obesity, sustainability, failing schools, gangs and others, can be solved by local government alone. Complaining and anger are not answers to these tough problems. We must ask and expect our residents to help solve these problems.

The new model sets forth completely different assumptions to the one listed above. The **"Partnership"** model assumes local government:

- Cannot solve all problems alone and never could,
- Is partially, but not completely, responsible for the quality of life in a neighborhood or city, and,
- Needs the intelligence and ideas of committed residents to be successful.

Below is a summary of the two models:

BITCH AND FIX	PARTNERSHIP
Resident as Customer	Resident as Citizen
City as "Decider"	Citizen Engagement
Service Orientation	Service + Community Building
Public as necessary Evil	Public as Partner

To learn more about the full set of assumptions and beliefs in each model, I recommend the following article: *Today's Local Government Management Model: It Is Broken, Let's Fix It* in *PM Magazine* August 2015

TREAT RESIDENTS LIKE CITIZENS, NOT CUSTOMERS

Local government has made a big mistake by treating our residents like **customers.** Instead, we need to treat them like **citizens.**

Customers: Yes, our residents are sometimes customers; however, when solving big problems, they need to act like citizens. Customers behave in set patterns went they are not satisfied: **they name, blame, complain and find fault.** Customers think in terms of "I" and "me" and not the greater good of the community and they expect someone else to solve their problems. Bitching and complaining will never solve our big problems.

Citizens: On the other hand, citizens (anyone who works and lives in your community) feel a shared responsibility and accountability for the welfare of their community. Citizens understand they have a role to play to **improve and strengthen their neighborhood** and town. We

need the creativity and intelligence of our citizens to help solve our collective problems. If engaged correctly, citizens will become a powerful ally and partner.

We cannot allow our residents to act solely like customers. If we want local government to be successful and reduce alienation, minimize anger and build trust, then we must change our expectations and assumptions regarding our residents.

ENGAGE CITIZENS

Civic (or Civil, Citizen, Public) Engagement is the final key to building relationships and trust to solve our tough problems.

It is critical to understand what civic engagement is and is not. **Civic Engagement is not:**

- Selling or convincing the public to accept or buy-into your ideas,
- It is not 3 minutes at the Mic or formal Public Hearings,
- The Mayor or Manager holding forth in front of a community meeting,
- Does not, cannot and will never happen in a Council, Commissioner or Board of Supervisors meeting.

Civic Engagement is:

- Staff asking the right series of questions,
- Letting citizens discuss these questions among themselves in groups of 6-8 people, and,
- Staff and elected officials listening, learning and using the public input to develop recommendations.

Residents will learn to act and think differently if they experience a well-designed and facilitated engagement process.

To learn more about civic engagement, I recommend the following two articles:

- *How Civic Engagement Transforms Community Relationships*, ICMA InFocus Vol.43 No. 4-2011
- *Connected Communities*, Alliance for Innovation's White Paper

SUMMARY

To break through the mistrust, alienation and anger in local government, it is imperative for managers to:

1. Build community within neighborhoods and throughout your community,
2. Move from a "Bitch and Fix" to a "Partnership" model,
3. Treat and expect your residents to act like citizens, not customers, and,
4. Engage the creative wisdom and intelligence of your citizens to help solve the tough problems.

We must integrate these 4 strategies into a comprehensive effort if we hope to be successful. I am not suggesting this will easy! You will make mistakes, confront challenges, have some failures and, at times, feel insecure.

It will take years to accomplish but the rewards will be substantial. You will:

- Positively change the culture in your city, town or county,
- Find that the almost impossible job you have will become easier and less stressful, and,
- Allow your staff to feel less stressed and more hopeful as they see citizens helping them solve problems.

Changing our attitudes towards our residents and partnering with our citizens makes political sense for your elected representatives.

My commitment to these important strategies is that I will provide free help to anyone willing to try. ***Go For It!***

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ABOUT ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government worldwide. The organization's mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional management to build better communities.

ICMA identifies leading practices to address the needs of local governments and professionals serving communities globally. We provide services, research, publications, data and information, peer and results-oriented assistance, and training and professional development to thousands of city, town, and county leaders and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect millions of people living in thousands of communities, ranging in size from small towns to large metropolitan areas.

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BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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

1. Identify current initiatives
Take stock of what you are already doing, distinguishing between exchange and engagement efforts.

2. Determine receptiveness
Assess how receptive your organization is to initiatives from community groups and to what extent your organizational culture supports civic engagement.

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

3. Work with your elected officials
Convene a community conversation on engagement to hear from residents how they wish to be involved in shaping community life and how local government could contribute to meeting their aspirations.

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

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

7. Provide a forum for discussions
Participants should have multiple opportunities to compare values and interests and articulate self-interests, and include opportunities in both large forums and small-group discussions.

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

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

CHECKLIST FOR BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

Here is a checklist from the *PM* magazine article: "Local Government's Success in Maintaining Public Trust."

☐ **Be responsive.** In the spirit of providing good customer service, it is important to create an atmosphere of caring. From elected members of the governing body to the entry-level operator, an attitude of caring should be the norm. This does not mean always saying yes or making promises that are impossible to keep.

☐ **Set priorities.** Some public organizations have a tendency to conduct strategic planning exercises that allow an unrealistic number of goals to become part of the plan. These well-intentioned efforts to embrace an overly ambitious set of resident-driven initiatives often restrict the ability of staff to implement goals with existing resources.

→ If the governing body and senior staff perform the challenging work of prioritizing goals and translating them to action plans, residents will come to recognize that government can produce results, and this will instill confidence. Priority setting may require some political will in as much as a various segments of the population will not agree on the relative importance of each separate goal.

☐ **Effectively communicate.** Clear messages that are delivered at the appropriate time are critical to building confidence. It is often tempting to avoid delivering bad news, but avoidance usually prolongs and worsens the inevitable. There are legitimate reasons for withholding or delaying the release of information at times. (However,) promoting transparency and openness is critical to building trust in government institutions, especially in this era of heightened scrutiny.

→ Government officials sometimes need to be willing to sacrifice short-term approval for long-term credibility gains. Good communication strategies help to engage people and increase the likelihood that they will be supportive of things with which they are familiar. People are uncomfortable with the unknown but are able to adjust to difficult circumstances if given the opportunity. Public leaders must refrain from sacrificing the truth for political gain.

☐ **Lead from the middle.** Although contentious debate does occur at the local government level, such debate is usually acrimonious than at other levels of government, and consensus-based decision making, which includes high levels of resident participation, has become the norm for progressive cities and counties. This model requires public sector leaders to develop compromise solutions that produce results.

→ Although no single group obtains everything it wants, the public develops trust in the process and in the leaders who can find the middle ground and get things done. The ability to compromise solutions and build consensus should be valued at all levels of government.

☐ **Create value.** There is almost universal recognition that decisive action is needed to address problems and build for the future. Although most local governments have been compelled to apply austerity measures of varying levels of severity in recent years, confidence in city and county government has remained relatively constant. This suggests that there may be general awareness of local government's commitment to doing more with less and acceptance of this "new normal."