BUILDING CIVIC LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY – free webinar

10:00 - 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time, Wednesday, April 13, 2016

*** Advance registration required for this no-charge webinar ***
https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7654394604042805249

Webinar topics:
1. Why is it important for local government agencies to help build civic leadership and community?
2. What are effective strategies to encourage civic leadership and community building?
3. What are examples of best practices that agencies can use?
4. What resources are available to support you?

Presenters:
* Ed Everett, Next Door, retired City Manager, Redwood City, CA
* Mike Goodrum, Assistant City Manager, Sugar Land, TX
* Roy Otto, City Manager, Greeley, CO

Audience: All local government professionals and up and comers

1. Register for the Webinar:
   There is no charge for participating in the webinars, but each requires advance registration.

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GoToWebinar for sound quality. Depending upon your internet connection, VOIP option for audio (computer speakers) can have delays or sound quality issues.

3. Ask questions:

You may submit questions anonymously via email to ICMACoaching@donmaruska.com in advance or via the webinar during the panel discussion. As moderator for the session, Don Maruska will pose the questions.

4. Presenters’ presentation materials: We post these with the Agenda at “Agendas & Archives” tab of http://icma.org/coachingwebinars. The PPT will be available 24 hours before the webinar.

After a webinar occurs, a digital recording along with a PDF of the presentation materials and results of the polling questions will be available after 24 hours at the "Agendas & Archives" tab of http://icma.org/coachingwebinars.

Post-Webinar Group Discussions:

Many agencies are organizing groups to participate in the webinars (live or recorded) and discuss the topics among themselves after the webinars. Some are summarizing their discussions and distributing them to managers throughout their organizations. Use the Coaching Program as an effective way to enhance professional development in your agency. Here are some discussion starters for this session.

a. How would we like to help boost civic leadership and community in our area?
b. What strategies and tools sound useful for our agency?
c. What resources would we like to explore to support our efforts?

MORE RESOURCES--See http://icma.org/coaching for valuable resources to boost your career. Sign up for the complimentary email list at http://icma.org/coachinglist to keep informed of the details for future ICMA Coaching Program sessions and other resources.

Enjoy the resources and support to thrive in local government.

Don Maruska, MBA, JD, Master Certified Coach
Director, ICMA Coaching Program – thrive in local government
Author of “Take Charge of Your Talent” www.TakeChargeofYourTalent.com
**Ed Everett**, City Strategist, Nextdoor.com, retired City Manager

Ed is a nationally known expert in the areas of Community Building and Civic Engagement. He has spoken to numerous state and national conferences on these topics, has led successful training programs in these areas and written articles on these topics. His passion is to help cities and communities understand and implement successful community building and civic engagement strategies. Ed uses his 37 successful years in local government, including 24 years as a city manager, to share his research and practice in these fields.

Ed, who retired as the city manager of Redwood City, California after sixteen years, was awarded the ICMA’s highest award: “Award for Career Excellence” in 2007. He understands the power and impact of community building and civic engagement and led Redwood City in establishing and implementing it core purpose: “Build a Great Community Together”.

He has a degree in Economics from U.C. Davis and a Masters Degree in Urban Affairs from Princeton University.

Ed is a City Strategist for Nextdoor.com a start up company. He is also a Senior Fellow with the Davenport Institute of Public Engagement and Civic Leadership at Pepperdine University.

**Mike Goodrum**, Assistant City Manager, Sugar Land, TX

Mike Goodrum has been with the City of Sugar Land for over 13 years and is currently serving as the Assistant City Manager. Goodrum oversees Finance, Public Works & Utilities, Human Resources, Information Technology, Parks & Recreation, & Office of Strategic Initiatives.

He began his career as an intern with the City of Sugar Land in 1999 and progressed to several leadership positions with the City, including Community and Environmental Services Director and Director of Public Works. He earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Texas A&M University.

Goodrum is member of the International City/County Management Association, the Texas City Management Association and the American Public Works Association. Mike currently sits on the board for Texas Coalition of Affordable Power.
He and his wife, Jessica, have two daughters and a son. All were born in Sugar Land and are active with their school and sports leagues.

Roy Otto, City Manager, Greeley, CO

Roy Otto is a native Coloradoan who graduated from Greeley West High School and earned a Bachelor’s degree from Colorado State University in Political Science. Following graduation, he moved to St. Petersburg, Florida where he served in various management positions in Public Works, Neighborhood Services and Economic Development. He also served as General Services Director in Seminole, Florida. While working in Florida, he received a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of South Florida. In 1999, he returned to his hometown of Greeley, Colorado to serve as Assistant City Manager. He was promoted to City Manager in 2005.
Building Civic Leadership and Community

Webinar, April 13, 2016
Thank you, ICMA-RC!

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Overview of Session

1. Why is it important for local government agencies to help build civic leadership and community?
2. What are effective strategies to encourage civic leadership and community building?
3. What are examples of best practices that agencies can use?
4. What resources are available to support you?

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- **Don Maruska**, Director, ICMA Coaching Program

…and polls and questions along the way.
Polling Question #1

How many people are participating at your location?
Building Civic Leadership
AND
Building Community

Ed Everett
Retired City Manager
City Strategist at Nextdoor.com
Senior Fellow Davenport Institute
My Hypothesis

We Have:
• Lost the Sense of Community
• Lost Civility in Our Discussions

We Are:
• Using the wrong model of government to build civic leadership and community

Hence:
• We do poorly in building civic leadership and community
Lost the Sense of Community
Why Is This Important?

• Without the sense of Community, we don’t have civil and engaged citizens.

• Community is our most important infrastructure.

• Building Community starts at the block and neighborhood level, not from the top down.

Please read:
• “Bowling Alone” by Robert Putman
• “Community” by Peter Block
The neighborhood was the original social network.
Fact

Majority of our residents don’t know 50% of their neighbors by name.

– Pew Research Center, June 2010
Nextdoor helps bring back a sense of community to the neighborhood.
Loss of Civility

Why?

• Loss of Community
• Customers v Citizens
• Ability to be Anonymous
• Role modeling the negative behaviors of our Civic and National leaders
How Do We Turn This Around?

1. Emphasize/Focus on true Civic Engagement

2. Emphasize/Focus on Building Community

3. We need a Different Model of Local Government to make significant changes
Our Local Government Model

It Is Broken. Let’s Fix It!
Existing Model

BITCH

and

FIX
Old Model (Assumptions)

• **Local Government**
  - Is responsible for the quality of life in a city or county
  - Must solve people’s problems
  - Requires little of residents

• **Elected Officials**
  - Are elected to fix all problems

• **Residents**
  - Act and feel like they should be treated as customers

• **Professional Managers**
  - Make all the above happen
Old Model (Decision Making Process)

• **Staff:**
  - Has expertise/data to solve all problems

• **Elected Officials:**
  - Should always be the “Deciders”

• **Residents:**
  - Don’t have expertise, time or persistence to solve problems
Old Model (Attitudes)

We have a 80% negative opinion of the public!

The Public is

- Uninformed
- Arrogant and entitled
- NIMBY driven
- Self-interested not community-oriented
- Shouts and fights at meetings
- Finds fault and blames others
"Old" Stakeholder Model: Gov't at Center

From: Ray Patchett, Retired CM, Carlsbad
The Old Model Doesn’t Work Well!

• Problems are more complex and wicked.
• With less resources and the same high expectations, old model is not helpful.
• We faked it when we had money.
• Our environment has changed but not our model.
New Model

Partnership
Partnership Model

• Difficult challenges are only solved by partnering with residents.

• Crime, drugs, gangs, failing schools, homelessness, affordable housing can never be solved solely by local government.

• We are not asking residents to pave street, trim trees or hire our employees.
New Model (Different Assumptions)

• Local Government:
  - Can’t solve all problems and never could
  - Only partially responsible for Quality of Life

• Elected Officials
  - Set Priorities and allocate Resources

• Residents
  - Must act more like citizens less like customers
  - Take responsibility for their Quality of Life

• Professional Managers
  - Facilitate problem solving vs. solving problems
New Model  
(Different Decision Making Process)

- **Staff**
  - Staff doesn’t have all the expertise
  - Combine staff expertise with citizen expertise

- **Elected Officials**
  - Partner with citizens to solve problems within their legitimate policies, limits boundaries

- **Residents**
  - Take responsibility to help solve problems

- **City/County Managers**
  - Facilitate problem solving vs. solve all problems
New Model (Different Attitude)

We need to have a positive attitude of the public.

The Public:
- Is much smarter than we think
- Will become involved and develop creative solutions
- Has skills and expertise
- Will be civil and responsible if good civic engagement practices are used
- Can become a valuable partner, not your enemy
Partnership Wheel – Issue at Center

LOCAL GOVERNMENT  CITIZENS  PROPERTY OWNERS  BUSINESS

STAKEHOLDERS  VOLUNTEERS  GRANT ASSOCIATIONS  EDUCATION  NON PROFITS  FAITH COMMUNITY

From: Ray Patchett, Retired CM, Carlsbad
Old and New Models

Old

Bitch and Fix Model
Resident as Customer
City is the “Decider”
Service Focused
Public a necessary evil

New

Partnership Model
Resident as Citizen
Civic Engagement
Building Community and service focused
Public as partner
How Will We Change To the New Model?
Our Residents: Customers or Citizens???

• They mostly act like Customers.
• Why Customers?
• Customers are your worst enemy.
• Citizens are your partners and friends.
Citizens are Good Partners, Customers are Not

**Customers**
- Name, Blame, Complain, find fault
- Think in terms of “I” or “me”
- Demand vs. solve

**Citizens**
- Help solve problems
- Accountable for quality and safety of their neighborhood
Redwood City Examples

RWC’s Core Purpose:

*Build a Great Community Together*

- Used to decide how to provide services and solve problems
- Turned Citizen’s Academy upside down
- Razor focused on importance of Building Community and used *Nextdoor* to help do just that
- Turned a dividing issue into unifying one
Punch List for Next Steps

1. Start with 1 small step
2. Start the Journey don’t worry about path
3. Be flexible to discard or add “Tries”
4. OK not to know final Journey
5. It doesn’t take lots of $$$ or Staff
6. Have courage
7. Leave a Legacy
Thanks for allowing me to challenge you with some different ideas.

Contact info:
Ed Everett
ed@nextdoor.com
650-868-0854
Polling Question #2

Which of these elements make sense for your agency to strengthen community?
Building Civic Leadership & Community

Sugar Land’s Approach

Mike Goodrum
Assistant City Manager
City of Sugar Land
Sugar Land at a Glance

- Company Town (Imperial Sugar)
- Incorporated 1959
- 87,504 Population
- Very Diverse
Sugar Land at a Glance

- White: 44%
- Asian: 35%
- Hispanic/Latino: 11%
- Black/African American: 7%
- Other: 3%
Sugar Land at a Glance

- 34% Foreign Born
- 12% Not US Citizens
- 44% Speak a Language other than English
  - 19.7% Asian and Pacific Island
  - 13.8% Indo-European
  - 7.9% Spanish
  - 2.8% Other
The Racial Dot Map

Image Copyright, 2013, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (Dustin A. Cable, creator)
Sugar Land at a Glance

- 99% rate Sugar Land excellent or good place to raise children
- 97% rated Sugar Land excellent or good place to live
- 95% Sugar Land as a place they are proud to call home
Sugar Land’s Strategy

- Civic Leader Talent Pool Building
- Challenge our Community
- Celebrate Community
Civic Leader Talent Pool Building

- Programs that develop & educate residents
- Prepare residents for public service
- Recruit residents that represent your community
- Listen & Engage
Civic Leader Talent Pool Building

- Sugar Land 101 Series
- Citizen’s Police Academy
- Citizen’s Fire Academy
- Community Assistance Support Team
- Community Emergency Response Team
- Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council
- Volunteer Program
Civic Leader Talent Pool Building

Sugar Land 101 Series

q Annual Program
q Education on form of government & functions
q Equips & encourages leadership role in community
q Connects residents to:
  q Civic leadership opportunities
  q Volunteer opportunities
q Builds talent & expertise database
Civic Leader Talent Pool Building

Volunteer Program

- Connects residents to their government and each other
- Residents apply for positions
- Enhances services and community pride
- 800+ volunteers annually
- 28,000+ hours volunteered
- $500,000+ annual value
Civic Leader Talent Pool Building

Identify talent and expertise

- Task Forces
- Boards and Commissions
- Neighbor Issues
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Emergency Response
Polling Question #3

Which of these actions is your agency taking to build civic leadership?
Challenge your Community

- Challenge community with “real” issues
- Do not try and “control” the outcome
- Get out of the way
- Facilitate and be a resource
- Act on outcomes!!!
Successful Sugar Land Examples

Community Non-Profit Seed Program

q Sugar Land Heritage Foundation
q Keep Sugar Land Beautiful
q Sugar Land Legacy Foundation

Citizen Task Forces

q Rental Registration Program
q Red Light Camera Task Force
q Visioning Task Force
Successful Sugar Land Examples

Community Non-Profit Seed Program

q Identify community need
q Identify community leaders with relevant talent, skills and passion
q City assists with creation of non-profit organization
q Non-Profit works to meet community need
q Non-Profit recruits residents to serve
Successful Sugar Land Examples
Successful Sugar Land Examples

Citizen Task Forces

- Rental Registration Program
  - Modified program
- Red Light Camera Task Force
  - Recommended expansion
- Visioning Task Force
  - Recommended destination centers
  - Community gathering places
  - Community events
Successful Sugar Land Examples
Successful Sugar Land Examples
Successful Sugar Land Examples
Celebrate Community!!!

- Know your neighbor program
- Give credit to civic leaders
- Celebrate Successes
- Special Events
Know Your Neighbor

Know Your Neighbor: Navroz

Navroz is a Persian word that translates to "New Day." It marks the first day of spring and the beginning of the New Year in a number of cultures and communities around the world, several of which make their home in Sugar Land. Navroz is a time of renewal and rejuvenation in both a physical and spiritual sense. It is a time when the dead of winter gives way to the spring of life.

Navroz coincides with the vernal equinox (the first day of spring) and takes place on or around March 21 each year. The day is observed in the Bahai and Parsi communities, as well as amongst Shia Muslim communities in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Afghanistan. It is celebrated in wider circles in parts of the Middle East, Central and South Asia, Northwest China and the Balkans as well as by the Shia Ismaili community around the world.

Many Iranians and those with Persian roots have a table in their home and place upon it symbolic objects. This can include silver coins to represent wealth, sprouted wheat or beans for prosperity and painted eggshells for productivity. Amongst Ismaili Muslim communities, special prayers are recited in places of worship known as jamatkhana. There are two jamatkhana in Sugar Land: one on Corporate Drive and the other on First Colony Boulevard.

Know Your Neighbor: Holi Festival of Colors

Holi, the Festival of Colors, is one of the major and vibrant festivals celebrated across India and Nepal. The local Indo-American community celebrates Holi every year. In 2011, more than ten thousand celebrated at Oyster Creek Park with the same spirit and significance as in India.

Per the Hindu calendar, it is observed on the full moon in March or sometimes in February, at the arrival of spring—a season of joy and hope. Holika Dahan, the lighting of bonfires on the eve of Holi, is the religious tradition that symbolizes the victory of good over evil. The Festival of Colors occurs the next day. People chase each other and throw dry colored powder and water at each other as an expression of love. They also share special foods, sweets and drinks.

The traditions of the festival of colors are believed to have health benefits. The change from winter to spring induces the growth of bacteria, and the heat from the bonfires kills it. Likewise, biologists believe that when colorful powders from plants such as henna, turmeric, marigold and calendula flowers are sprayed on the body, they have medicinal benefits in addition to being beautiful.

Know Your Neighbor: Kwanzaa

by Karolina Serratos, Multicultural Advisory Committee member

Kwanzaa is a celebration of African heritage that originated in the United States in 1966. Dr. Maulana Karenga founded the tradition, which is now celebrated by approximately two million people nationwide. The name Kwanzaa comes from a Swahili word meaning “first fruits.” The holiday begins on Dec. 26 and ends on New Year’s Day.

The Kwanzaa tradition revolves around seven principles and seven primary symbols. The seven principles include unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. Seven candles are one of the symbols, known as “mishuuna saba.” Collectively, they represent these seven principles. Individually, the single black candle represents the people, the three red candles signify their struggles and the remaining green candles symbolize the future and hope that comes from their struggles.

The seven primary symbols used in the celebration of Kwanzaa are a place mat, a candle holder, the seven candles, a unity cup, crops (fruits, nuts, and vegetables), an ear of corn and gifts. The symbols are assembled on the place mat, which is made of straw or African cloth to illustrate the foundation of communities.

A special candle holder called a kinara holds the seven candles—the black one in the center, three red on the left and three green on the right. On the first night of Kwanzaa, the black candle is lit. One additional candle is lit each night, using the black candle to light the others from left to right.

It is important to note that Kwanzaa is not a religious holiday, but rather a cultural one. All are welcome to come together and celebrate.
Celebrate Community!!!

- Give credit to civic leaders
- Press Releases
- Publications
- Groundbreakings
- Ribbon Cuttings
- Celebrate Successes
- Special Events
Take Aways

- Study the makeup of your community
- Recruit residents that represent your community
- Educate and cultivate civic leaders
- Challenge your residents
- Involve early in process
- Facilitate vs advocate
- Relinquish need to control outcome
- Celebrate community and successes
Polling Question #4

Which of these actions would be useful to productively challenge your community?
Achieving Community Excellence

Presented by
Roy Otto, Greeley City Manager
Greeley City Council Priorities

**Image**
- Community promotion & marketing, Healthy neighborhoods
- Appealing community entryways & corridors, Youth success
- Quality of life

**Safety**
- Crime prevention & suppression, Emergency readiness & response
- Traffic safety

**Economic Health & Development**
- Engaged business and industry relationships,
  Active support of business development,
  Economic initiatives

**Infrastructure & Growth**
- Public facilities & equipment,
  Environmental infrastructure, Human infrastructure
  Civic infrastructure
Our ACE Story......

It’s about Relationships

Each step of Excellence is taken by the power of Aligned Principled Relationships
IMAGES THAT FORM LEADERSHIP HABITS & ATTITUDES
Achieving Community Excellence

Tree of Life & Tree of Knowledge

Tim Elmore
TREE OF KNOWLEDGE (good & evil)
LIFE GRABBING

1. Fear, anger, blame
2. Thrives on rules and outlines
3. Imposes control
4. Built on competence, self serving
5. Acts out of duty and obligation
6. Fear of loss of control
7. Repulsive
8. Results in tired performance

TREE OF LIFE
LIFE GIVING

1. Secure, free, transparent
2. Thrives on relationships
3. Expresses confidence
4. Built on connection and relationships
5. Acts out of devotion and gratitude
6. Faith in people
7. Magnetic
8. Results in empowered service
Increase in middle school youth sports participation in 3 years
D6 Stadium
- New football field (turf)
- New game board
- New soccer field (turf)
SPORTS + INTENTIONAL DEVELOPMENT = HUMAN GROWTH
2015 GREAT Greeley Chalk-a-Lot!

One of 12 in the State

Greeley Creative District

District 6

Arts Picnic
Art on Loan
1% for Art

Greeley Creative District

Colorado Creative Industries
District 6

Greeley Creative District

DISTRICT 6 ART WALK
FRIDAY MARCH 5-8pm
‘Zoo Crew’

22 Potential Next Steps of Excellence

Expand College Promise / Expand Career Pathways / STEM Grant / Crown Jewels Busing Program / Fun in the Sun Educational Partnership / New Downtown Hotel and Conference Center / Enhanced Community Athletic Fields / Young Leadership Summit / Greeley Unexpected / NOCO Economic Development / Chamber Leadership Multiplier Program / Community Education Metrics of Success / Jobs of Hope Mentoring Program / ACE Fund / Student Recovery Program Community Health Initiative / Strive Together / Homeless Coalition / Aven’s Village Universal Playground
400% increase in GET Ridership
250 attendees at free ACE Young Leadership Summit thanks to State Farm/District 6 partnership
6-fold increase in internships for Career Explore
$137k in Grant Funding Received

Educational Excellence
G.Town Promise

Leadership
Crown Jewels Busing Program
ACE Young Leadership Summit
Career Explore
College Promise
Bright Futures Weld County

Community Leadership

Master Multipliers
Barn Building

A farmer builds the barn on his property first. Why?

Because the barn will pay for all of the other structures.

Leaders start by mobilizing the critical people that enable everything else to happen.

If you want to lead well, you must make Relational Excellence your “barn.”
Punch List - Points to Remember

• Civic Infrastructure is as or more important than the traditional bricks and mortar we manage.

• Be intentional about mapping out how you are going to develop and engage your civic infrastructure.

• When it is all said and done it is about relationships. Do you have any relationship pot holes you need to fill?

• We created a non-profit advisory board to lead ACE.

• It’s one relationship at a time. Manage expectations.
Thank You

GreeleyGov.com/ace
GreeleyUnexpected.com
Polling Question #5

Which of these make sense for building community through your agency?
Post-Webinar Discussion Questions

a. How would we like to help boost civic leadership and community in our area?
b. What strategies and tools sound useful for our agency?
c. What resources would we like to explore to support our efforts?
More Resources and Feedback

• Go to “Agenda & Archives” tab under “Webinars” at web site for a recording of this webinar (available in 24 hours) and other professional development resources.

http://icma.org/coaching

• Subscribe to “ICMA Coaching” at http://icma.org/coachinglist to receive latest updates about the ICMA Coaching Program.

• Please complete the follow up survey and offer your ideas for future topics and services.
Find helpful resources online
http://icma.org/coaching

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The ICMA Coaching Program launched in January 2016 with our new National Platinum Sponsor ICMA-RC. Expanding upon the success of the Cal-ICMA Coaching Program and 15 ICMA State Association Coaching Partners in 2015, we are bringing coaching programs and resources to all members and non-members of ICMA nationwide and even internationally.

Key Services to Thrive in Local Government

The ICMA Coaching Program delivers a suite of services to help you grow and enjoy your career.

- **6 live webinars per year** spotting best practices on key topics from local government professionals throughout the U.S. -- invite your whole team to participate.
- **Digital agendas and archives** with video recordings and extensive presentation materials and examples from dozens of sessions available in a convenient online library--delivering you "professional development in a box"--when you want it and where you want it.
- **1-1 Coaching resources** to provide personalized support.
- **Speed Coaching session at the ICMA Annual Conference** and templates for use at local level -- expand your networks.
- **Career stories of ICMA leaders** and rising stars offering career insights and tips.
- **Career Compass newsletters** that address critical career issues.

*All available without charge to promote professional development at all levels in local government.*
presentation materials are in Agenda packet—note: you can use your browser to save and/or print items from the Agenda packet

### Upcoming Events

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Building Civic Leadership and Community [free, advance registration req’d -- see Agenda]</td>
<td>April 13, 2016 - 10:00 AM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics in Action [free, advance registration req’d -- see Agenda]</td>
<td>May 19, 2016 - 01:00 PM</td>
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### Archived Videos

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<td>Thriving as a High Performance Organization [see Agenda for presentation materials and polling results]</td>
<td>Mar 10, 2016</td>
<td>01h 29m</td>
<td>Agenda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best Practices for Managing Social Media &amp; Gossip [see Agenda for presentation materials, polling results, and sample policy]</td>
<td>Nov 5, 2015</td>
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<td>Serving Diverse Populations Successfully [see Agenda for presentation materials and polling results]</td>
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<td>Engaging Employees Effectively -- webinar [presentation, resource materials and polling results appear in Agenda]</td>
<td>Sep 16, 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moving from Conflict to Civility and Problem Solving -- webinar [presentation, resource materials and polling results appear in Agenda]</td>
<td>May 14, 2015</td>
<td>01h 34m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best Practices in Strategic Planning and Action [see Agenda for presentation materials and polling results]</td>
<td>Apr 1, 2015</td>
<td>01h 31m</td>
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<td>Developing Effective Relationships with Elected Officials [see Agenda for presentation materials and polling results]</td>
<td>Mar 5, 2015</td>
<td>01h 31m</td>
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video recordings
Polling Question #6

How was the webinar of value for you and your agency? [click all that apply]
Contacts for Today’s Session

- **Ed Everett**, Next Door, retired City Manager, Redwood City, CA  everetted@comcast.net
- **Mike Goodrum**, Assistant City Manager, Sugar Land, TX mwg@sugarlandtx.gov
- **Roy Otto**, City Manager, Greeley, CO Roy.Otto@greeleygov.com

- **Don Maruska**, Director, ICMA Coaching Program ICMACoaching@donmaruska.com

A PDF of the PPT, results from polling questions, and a video recording will be available in 24 hours. Go to http://icma.org/coachingwebinars and click on “Agenda & Archives” tab.
Upcoming webinars

• **ETHICS IN ACTION** – free webinar
  1:00 - 2:30 p.m. Pacific Time, Thursday, May 19
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• **SUCCESSFUL SUPERVISION AND LEADERSHIP** – free webinar
  10:00 - 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time, Thursday, September 8
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The attached files are complimentary benefits of this ICMA Coaching webinar, *Building Civic Leadership and Community*; normally one would purchase these at ICMA’s online bookstore (icma.org/press). These represent a value of $25.90 (ICMA member price) or $39.90 (non-member price).

Included Files:

- ICMA IQ Report, November 4, 2009: *Community Building: How to Do It, Why It Matters*
- ICMA InFocus Report, November 4, 2011: *How Civic Engagement Transforms Community Relationships*

Given the financial benefit, please do not share these files with others. Attendees cannot pass along the electronic versions, but may print a copy for personal use. If you know colleagues who would enjoy these materials, please direct them to the webinar archives to access a copy.

**Public Management (PM) Magazine**

*Public Management (PM)* is ICMA’s flagship member magazine. Published 11 times a year, it is available in print and online versions. From strategy to operations, with articles, case studies, leading practices, and data and trends, *PM* aims to inspire innovation and inform decision making for ICMA members and local governments worldwide in the pursuit of excellence in local governance. Subscriptions are available.

**Additional resources** from ICMA on this topic can be found:

- In ICMA’s Knowledge Network: [icma.org/citizenengagement](http://icma.org/citizenengagement)
- Online Learning Store: [bit.ly/1YfP8Kl](https://bit.ly/1YfP8Kl) and select “Community Building and Citizen Engagement (15 Sessions)”
- Leading Ideas interview with Peter Block at [icma.org/leadingideas](http://icma.org/leadingideas) (ICMA member resource)
Today’s complex and difficult problems cannot be solved by government alone. To have a higher quality of life—higher educational performance, lower crime, and better physical and mental health—a city or county needs to focus on building a stronger community. Building community develops trust between residents and government and generates a partnership between them. It creates an environment in which there is almost no issue that cannot be resolved, leads to better ideas and solutions, encourages people to be responsible for and committed to improving the quality of life in their communities, and makes the job of the local government manager easier.

This report describes what community building is, why it is important, and how to achieve it. In so doing, it defines the various roles of local government in building community and presents concrete examples of those roles as well as listing some of the lessons that have been learned along the way. Through this report, you will come to understand not only the power of community building but also the way that community building relates to the reasons why many of us were drawn to the profession of local government management in the first place.

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ICMA IQ Report
VOLUME 41/NUMBER 4
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Community Building: How to Do It, Why It Matters

Ed Everett recently retired as city manager of Redwood City, California, a position he had held since 1992. He has a passion for helping cities understand and implement “community building/civic engagement” and for sharing his research and practice in this field. In 2007, Ed was awarded ICMA’s “Award for Career Excellence.” He would like to credit Peter Block, Meg Wheatley, John McKnight, Robert Putman, and Angeles Arrien for providing ideas and inspiration to build community in Redwood City.

Many cities are well run, efficient, and effective; they use performance measures, benchmarking, innovation, and technology. All these tools are important and necessary, but they are not sufficient. Successful cities, towns, villages, and counties must have a goal, a vision, or a core purpose, as well as a passion, to build communities. Redwood City, California, developed a core purpose—“To Build a Great Community Together”—which provided a sharp focus for how we deal with our community.

If cities are not working to build community and are worrying only about their physical city, they are failing their residents and falling short of their potential.

A Definition and Assessment of Community Today

After a lot of reading, thinking, and experimenting, I have come to believe that community is best defined by four feelings:

1. A feeling of belonging to something or some group
2. A feeling of pride in our group, be that a neighborhood, service club, sports team, hobby club, or whatever
3. A feeling of being part of something important, of being included
4. A feeling of not being alone, of knowing that others in our community will help us even if they don’t know us.

In his book Bowling Alone, Robert Putman studied the rise and fall of community, or what he calls “social capital.” The data show that from 1960 to the present, there has been a continual decrease in

- Membership in service clubs, PTAs, unions, and national organizations
- Volunteer hours (although recent data suggest that we may have bottomed out and may now be increasing in this category)
- Attending public meetings, church, and school affairs
- Having friends over to the house for dinner or going to friends’ homes for dinner
- Belief that we can trust other people.

Putnam also cites national surveys that tell us that

- A majority of the public don’t know 50 percent of their neighbors
- Seventy-five percent of the public thinks “breakdown in community” and “selfishness” are “serious” or “extremely serious” problems
- Eighty percent of the public believes that there should be more emphasis on community even if that puts more demands on them.

“Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world: indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

When was the last time that 75–80 percent of society agreed on anything, especially if it “puts more demands” on us?

Psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists tell us that

- We all need to be part of a community, such as a family, service group, hobby group, business organization, or sports team.
• Some of us acknowledge and understand this need while others aren’t conscious of it; however, we are all relational animals and need relationships.
• Regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion, all of our ancestors from at least four generations ago came from strong communities and knew the importance and skills needed to build and maintain them.
• As mankind was evolving, we needed community just to survive.
• Remember the “use it or lose it” rule? We have been on a continual decline since the 1960s in using our community-building skills, and we have lost them slowly, as we would a muscle that atrophies in a cast.
• The need and skills to be in a community are lodged in the “reptilian” part of our brain and are accessible to us all.

It is our job as local government managers to resurrect that knowledge and skill base in our residents. We need to slowly retrain our public to use those lost skills rather than continually
• Calling the city about a barking dog or a loud neighbor
• Calling the city to remove leaves clogging a storm drain during a storm
• Demanding that the local government make them feel safer
• Demanding that the local government fix all their problems
• Blaming the city or county or school board for almost everything that “isn’t right.”

Often when I talk of community building, some of my colleagues say, “Ed, so what. . . . Get over it. . . . Times are changing. . . . Don’t live in the past. . . . Move on. . . . It is all about being plugged in and technologically savvy. Forget what used to be. . . .” Well, for all of you who are willing to get over it, forget about it, and move on, you should know the hard facts of such a policy decision.

The Importance of Community Building

Putman ranked all fifty states by their level of social capital/community and then compared them in four important policy areas: education performance, crime, physical health, and social health. He found that as social capital/community increases,
• Educational performance increases
• Crime (measured per 100,000 population) decreases
• Physical health increases
• Mental health increases.

Today’s complex and difficult problems cannot be solved by government alone. So if you want your city or county to have a higher quality of life as measured by higher educational performance, lower crime, and better physical and mental health, it is essential to focus not just on building your physical city but also on building a stronger community.

Community building does much more than improve education, crime, and health. Getting the community involved and committed has other far-reaching effects as well:
• It develops trust between residents and government and generates a partnership without alienating the public from government.
• It creates an environment in which there is almost no issue that cannot be resolved.
• It leads to better ideas and solutions as well as to faster implementation of those ideas and solutions.
• It encourages people to be responsible for and committed to improving the quality of life in their communities.
• It makes your job easier, and it is why most of you got into this profession.

Community building and civic engagement are terms that are often used interchangeably, but there are some differences. As I see it, community building is like building a foundation upon which you construct events or processes that call for civic engagement. Once a civic engagement around a particular issue is over, community building is the social capital, or glue, that holds the community together until the next reason for civic engagement occurs.

Coming Together as a Community

It is unfortunate, but studies show that we most often come together as a community after a crisis or natural disaster. After September 11, for example, we behaved differently from how we behave during “normal times.” For one thing, the National Football League canceled all its football games the first weekend after 9/11. When the games resumed a week later, we acted differently, starting with the singing of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” We quit talking, and even the drunks shut up. When asked, people said they felt connected to others and part of something bigger. Some described it as feeling “patriotic” for the first time.
What else did we do that was different? We talked to strangers in the grocery line instead of reading the weird headlines in the tabloids. We spoke with neighbors whom we didn’t know very well. We immediately connected with our family members even though we knew they were not in danger. We became more civil while waiting in line. We reached out to each other.

We did something else that was huge. We gave billions of dollars. Not millions or hundreds of millions but billions! We gave our blood—many of us for the first time—and overwhelmed the blood banks. We gave our dollars and our blood, such precious commodities to us, and we gave them to people we didn’t know.

“Hands that give also receive.”
—Ecuadorian Proverb

Remember the fourth feeling of a community: “a feeling of not being alone, of knowing that others in our community will help us even if they don’t know us.” Most of us did just that around September 11 and enjoyed the good feelings of being in a community. We loved how we felt. We experienced

- Being connected in an invisible way to others
- Helping others
- Being part of something bigger than ourselves.

We were feeling the power of being in a community. And then we lost it. Some lost the feeling in a few weeks or months, and soon almost all of us went back to “normal,” which I believe is “abnormal,” or a lack of community.

I hope that this part of my report has given you a sense of what community is and why building community is important. Now let’s turn our attention to the issue of how to build community.

Getting to Community Building

To understand where we are, we need to look at where we have been and where we are going. In Table 1 below, I summarize the evolution of local government and public involvement. We are currently stuck in the “vending machine” form of government, with the public viewing themselves as customers. Vending machine government depicts the local government as a machine in which citizens put in their tax dollars and pull a lever to get the exact service they want. If they don’t get exactly what they want, they do what we do with vending machines: they give it a hit. They pull the lever again to get their service, and if they don’t get what they want, they kick the machine. After the third time, they hit the machine, swear at it, and kick it. We have all experienced the equivalent of hitting, swearing, and kicking from our “customers.” The hope is that we are headed into a future where government’s orientation is “community as partner,” and the public actually see themselves as “citizens” rather than “customers.”

When I use the word citizen, I mean anyone who works and lives in our community—corporate/businesspeople as well as residents. I am not referring to any legal status, as all people who live within our communities are citizens of our communities. Immigration is a separate issue. Peter Block’s new book, Community: The Structure of Belonging, does a marvelous job of describing the difference between citizens and customers.²

How did our public come to see themselves as customers? The private sector was the first to realize that providing high-quality customer service and saying that the customer is “always right” is very good for business. Nordstrom perfected this approach and thrived. Many of us in the public sector believed this orientation toward our residents made sense, and we emulated the private sector. We then trained our staff to treat our residents like customers.

When people are treated like customers, whether by business or by local government, they become customers. When they are told that they are always right, they come to expect to be served exactly the way they want to be served. This mindset has caused

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them to lose their sense of being responsible citizens and accountable for their community.

How might we characterize “customers”? Customers are people who

- Give away their power to others
- Allow others to define their needs through marketing and believe that their needs can best be satisfied by the action of others (e.g., Wal-Mart, Costco, and Nordstrom) or, in the case of government, by council, staff, teachers, cops, etc.
- Consume but do not create, and so are always complaining about something not working in their city or county
- Think in terms of “I and me,” not in terms of the welfare of the whole community
- Feel “entitled,” which allows them to escape their accountability, responsibility, and commitment to their communities.

Citizens are much different from customers and hence act differently. Citizens can best be characterized as people who

- Are willing to be accountable for and committed to the well-being of the whole community
- Determine the future rather than waiting or begging for it, demanding it, or just dreaming about it
- Choose to own and exercise their power rather than delegating it or deferring to others
- Understand that sustainable change in a community can happen only when citizens are involved, committed, and accountable for that change.

The art is in knowing when your residents are customers and when they are citizens. When residents sign up for a recreation class, they are customers who are buying a product. The process should be efficient and the class of high quality. When residents turn on their water, they are customers and should expect clean, uninterrupted water at a fair price. However, residents are not customers when it comes to our educational system, crime, homelessness, youth violence, sustainability, affordable housing, and many other important issues facing cities and counties. Managers need to start talking to their staff, councils, and residents about the differences between customers and citizens. There will need to be some consciousness raising around this issue.

A major inhibitor to building community is that our residents act like customers, and we treat them as if they are. However, there are other inhibitors to community building that need to be understood in order to move forward:

**Engaged, but Not Involved**

I am told that to be reelected mayor of Denver, one must have the most efficient, effective, and responsive snow removal program possible. So one mayor set up a very elaborate phone bank operation that city employees staffed during blizzards. In the middle of one blizzard, a nineteen-year-old man called and somehow got put on hold. After ten minutes, someone realized that this person had gotten lost in the system, picked up his line, and apologized profusely. The young man was irate and yelled at the employee, who continued to say how sorry she was that he had been put on hold. After the young man calmed down, the employee asked what the problem was. He responded that the city had plowed his street. The employee said, “Good, so what is the problem?” The young man said that the city left a large snow berm in front of the old lady’s house across the street and that she was unable to get out to her doctor’s appointment.

Now at first blush, one might say that—contrary to how some people perceive today’s youth—this young man was fulfilling his duty as a concerned and caring neighbor and an active citizen: he took the time to call, and he stayed on the line for over ten minutes. He was engaged.

However, in the time that he took to call and complain, he could have gone across the street and shoveled the snow berm himself. Certainly our fathers or grandfathers would have taken the responsibility upon themselves to go out and shovel the snow so that their neighbor could make her appointment. But instead, he did what he had learned to do: call, complain, and demand action of the city. In other words, he was a concerned resident, but he hadn’t learned how to be an involved citizen. We need to help remind our residents what being an involved citizen really means.

- **We are fear driven:** The media is quick to play upon fear in its marketing strategies. We are quick to label people. We talk about “those kids” instead of “our youth.” We talk about “welfare mothers” instead of “mothers.” We define people as “gang bangers,” dropouts, immigrants, the poor, and the uneducated; we refer to the “ghetto” or the “barrio.” We label people and neighborhoods and allow our fears to divide us. We cannot achieve community if we are driven by fear.
- **We assign fault:** We blame someone for everything that is wrong. We blame Congress, Republicans and Democrats, unions and businesses, school districts, city councils, city managers, and school
superintendents. We are always blaming the anonymous “those people” who are never in the room.

- We worship self-interest: We are always hearing directly or indirectly: “me, my neighborhood, my idea/belief, what’s in it for me, what do I get out of it.”

### Breaking Free

We have to change the way we view ourselves and our community, which in turn will change our relationship with our community. Specifically, we have to move from customers to citizens in the way that we treat our residents and that they see themselves. We need to encourage people to let go of fear and labeling in order to be open to the ideas and perspectives of others, to move from fault finding to accepting responsibility and accountability for their community. We need to move from self-interest and silos to connectedness and caring for the whole community.

To achieve these changes, we have to change the way we interact with our residents and how they interact with each other. We have to learn better ways to come together. We have to change the discussions that we currently have with our citizens and, most importantly, the discussions that citizens have with each other. We cannot build community if we stay stuck in the same old ways. We cannot continue an approach that doesn’t work for the local government or our citizens.

The traditional meeting with the community looks something like this:

- The problem gets defined prematurely: people are brought together without having built any relationships or having attempted to find common ground.
- People begin to blame someone or some group for the problem.
- People put forth their ideas, or the government puts forth its idea.
- We all advocate for, debate, and defend our ideas endlessly without listening to or learning from others.
- The meeting usually ends up with people shouting at each other; positions harden with no resolution.

When we bring people together, we have to begin by building relationships instead of leaping into problem solving. We first must encourage people to discuss their hopes and dreams so they can begin to find common ground. Then we have to get them to start talking about the “possibilities” instead of solutions. If, for example, we want to talk with the community about gangs, it might be best to set a broader context, such as youth violence, and then ask our citizens—always in small groups of no more than eight—to share their hopes and dreams for our youth. This is a much different discussion than talking about “those kids” or “gang bangers.”

Do we want our citizens to look backwards and define the gang problem, thus limiting the discussion? Or do we want them to look forward and develop a plan for new possibilities regarding our youth? Most importantly, are our youth highly represented in this discussion? Framing the issue and the language used is very important if the community is to become engaged in a positive way. We must be willing to trade our problems for our community’s possibilities.

> "You must be the change you want to see in the world.”
> —Mahatma Gandhi

It is also important to make sure we understand the difference between a problem and a symptom. Too often we try to solve symptoms and never get at the underlying problem. We usually talk about the problem being crime, drugs, teenage pregnancies, or low-performing schools. Not that these aren’t problems, but the most important underlying problem is a breakdown in community. As noted above, the data show that the higher the social capital/community, the lower the crime rate, the higher the physical and mental health, and the higher the educational performance in the community. Honestly talking about the breakdown in community and working on building a stronger community will have a greater long-term impact on these problems than developing specific programs, which usually don’t last.

The reason to frame the discussion in these terms is that your citizens are more likely see the role they play in the breakdown of the community than to see the role they play in the rising crime rate. Correctly naming the issue as a “breakdown in community” allows citizens to focus on restoring their community.

A very interesting question to ask people in small groups is, How have you contributed to the issue you are complaining about? At first you will probably get blank stares or resistance, but with some gentle nudging people will begin to realize that their contribution to an issue is most likely that they have done nothing about it.
The most important question we must ask small groups of citizens is, What are we going to create together with regard to this issue? This frames the issue by acknowledging that only citizen involvement will allow the community to reach its vision.

Another way to make our citizens come together differently is to have them start having conversations with each other. Encouraging a good conversation is more important than pushing for a quick fix. A conversation is different from a debate, a problem-solving session, or the typical meeting that is only about sharing information or trying to sell a program. Real conversations are a bit messy at the beginning, and we have to suppress our need for control over them. If we try to rush past the uncomfortable and messy part, we most likely will have to deal with disruption later on in the group. Meg Wheatley’s book Turning to One Another provides a wonderful discussion about the power of conversations. We need to remember that any important change always starts with a few people having conversations about an issue they really care about.

A major part of having a conversation is listening. Most of us, including our citizens, have forgotten how to listen. Listening is actually a very healing act, and it has nothing to do with advising, coaching, critiquing, or persuading. We all have our own stories that we want to tell, but only to people who are willing to listen without judgment.

Community comes about because of relationships. Relationships develop by listening to each others’ stories. Community building, conversations, and listening are all tied together and take time to develop. Our fast-paced society is not conducive to thinking, reflecting, and understanding. So it is important to get your citizens together differently, help them build relationships, share stories, and have conversations about issues that matter to them.

### Three Important Truths about Community Building, and a Conceptual Model

John McKnight of Northwestern University has been studying community building across the United States and has discovered three crucial factors that must be present in order to truly build community.

1. **Focus on the Gifts:** Unfortunately, we focus on groups in terms of their deficiencies—for example, “special education kids” instead of students, or “welfare mothers” instead of mothers, or “chronically unemployed” instead of unemployed. It would be similar to having a meeting with a group of friends to plan an event and saying, “Bill, what skills don’t you have that can’t help us?” or “Sally, what aren’t you able to do to contribute to this event?” Citizens in true communities want to know what you can do, not what you can’t do. We must focus on the gifts that all people in our community have. Look for people’s gifts, not their deficiencies.

2. **Associational Life:** Systems and organizations—for example, cities, counties, or welfare agencies—can provide quality services but not care. Associations are groups of people who come together voluntarily to do something good—to help people they care about because those people are part of the whole community and not because they are deficient or needy. McKnight describes a community as “an association of associations.”

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3. Power in Citizen Hands: Citizens have the ability to identify and solve issues themselves or in partnership with their local government. In fact, sustainable improvement in a community occurs only when citizens discover their own power to act. Citizens must choose to be accountable for what their community will become. Citizens will be accountable for and committed to what they help create. They will not be committed to a plan that they were not a part of creating, even if they think it is worthwhile.

Ray Patchett, a good friend and retired city manager of Carlsbad, California, has developed interesting models that visualize the role of the local government in building a community. The first model (Figure 1) shows the city or county recognizing that there are a lot of other stakeholders; however, the local government is at the hub. By implication, local government is responsible for solving all the community’s problems. Unfortunately, this model is outdated.

In a newer iteration of this model (Figure 2), the city or county is just one of many stakeholders, and the topic or issue is at the center or hub. This clearly means that the local government is a partner with others in addressing an issue and that any combination of stakeholders can get together and deal with an issue without involving the government. This model removes the city or county as the sole responsible party to resolve all thorny issues.

**Leadership and the Roles of the Local Government in Community Building**

Community building means leadership! This is not something that has been written about in ICMA’s Green Books, taught in MPA programs, endorsed by your city council, understood by your staff, or demanded by your citizens. Community building requires initiative, risk taking, creativity, and strong leadership. As the local government manager, it will be up to you to provide the leadership to start building community in your city or county. It is the most lasting legacy you can leave your community.

The roles that a local government can play in community building fall into four categories.

**Consciousness Raiser**

Being a product of the 1960s, I learned that if you want to move people in a certain direction, you have to spend time raising their consciousness about an issue before they are ready to take a journey with you.

**Example: Community Building Speaker Series**

Redwood City citizens, like most citizens, were not thinking about community building, nor was it a priority for them. It was not on anyone’s radar screen. I put together a speaker series in which I cajoled some of the top writers, speakers, and thinkers on community building to help my citizens think about and understand the importance of building community. One hundred citizens signed up for a series of five presentations. We met from 6 to 9 on a weekday evening, and as you must always do, we served dinner so that everyone got to know their tablemates. The feedback was “over the top” positive. We repeated this speaker series on three separate occasions, all to rave reviews, and the attendance never dropped off. People were delighted and profoundly moved that the city would put on such a series.

**Convener**

A powerful role for the city is to convene meetings of citizens so that they can talk to each other and discuss
issues of interest to them. Sometimes you may just convene events for people to get to know each other and have fun. Ultimately, citizens will begin to convene themselves, but the city will play a part in this important development.

**Example: Redwood City Plaza** Redwood City built a plaza where there was none, and we began to aggressively manage the plaza to get citizens to begin to use it as their gathering place. Every Wednesday we have free outdoors movies, every Thursday free dance lessons, and every Friday a free concert. The downtown plaza developed a buzz as the place to go and meet your friends.

**Example: Citizens Academy** Redwood City is in its tenth year of running a citizens academy, but it is not like most citizens academies. Our purpose was for citizens to meet other citizens and for our employees and citizens to get to know each other. City council members, the city manager, and department heads were restricted to a three-minute welcome. For nine weeks the citizens met on weekend evenings from 6 to 9 and were served a nice dinner at round tables holding about eight people. Each table was given a topic—for example, tell us something about your name or family history that is interesting to you—as a way for attendees to get to know each other better.

City employees had to show citizens what to do without lecturing them. It had to be hands-on, interactive, and fun, with no talking heads or PowerPoints allowed. We have continued to get rave reviews, and the attendance has stayed steady. Citizens get to know each other personally and they get to know their city employees. Both sides drop the negative labels they have for each other. The citizens feel pride in their city and their employees. (Remember feeling #2, “the feeling of pride in something.”)

**Catalyst**

Sometimes it is important for the city to make something happen in order to kick-start other actions. The city can become the catalyst that prompts people to get together and do something for themselves.

**Example: Redwood City Plaza** Redwood City, like many cities, was trying to revitalize its downtown. And for that we decided that we needed a center to galvanize the citizens. We decided to build a plaza, which would serve both as the community’s “living room” and as a catalyst for further economic development. The synergism of the plaza, with its entertainment, restaurants, and retail outlets, has created a focal point for the community. The citizens are using their living room, and there is a sense of excitement downtown.

**Example: Disaster Planning** The city was the catalyst for neighbors coming together to plan for the next disaster. We had two objectives in creating this initiative. First, all community building starts at the neighborhood level (again, most of our residents don’t know half of their neighbors). Although they were tasked with preparing for a disaster, neighbors were also getting to know each other and forming a community. Second, we knew that when the big earthquake hits, we won’t be able to return to our neighborhoods for at least seven days, and citizens need to know how to make it on their own for that period of time.

**Example: Fundraising** Most noteworthy was a community-building effort by our fire department. A fire crew went out on a medical call and learned that a little girl had brain cancer and needed surgery; however, her parents didn’t have insurance and couldn’t afford the surgery. Without asking permission, the crew decided to put on a small fundraiser within the department for the girl. The event grew as community members learned of these efforts and began to help the fire crew. The result was that over 500 community members attended a fundraising dinner and auction and raised around $80,000 for the girl and her parents. Over 95 percent of the citizens who attended did not know the girl or her parents. Remember feeling #4, “A feeling of not being alone, of knowing that others in our community will help us even if they don’t know us.” This is a great example of that.

**Facilitator**

The role of the city is to provide high-quality, professional facilitation so that a meeting of citizens is well run and doesn’t get into the same old unproductive behavior of debating, advocating, ignoring others, and each person pushing his or her own idea.

**Example: Recycled Water** Redwood City was using more than its allotted share of water. After much research, city staff developed a program of water conservation and recycled water for irrigation and commercial use. During the development of the program, a growing segment of our community began to worry about the health factors of putting recycled water on parks and playing fields. This issue began to divide the community. The council knew it had to cut back on potable water, but it didn’t want to divide the community.

The mayor asked me as city manager to come up with a better process. We positioned the council to
move from controlling the outcome to establishing a process with policy guidelines. We put ten citizens in favor of using recycled water and ten folks opposed to it on a task force, gave them $60,000 to hire consultants to help them, and provided a highly qualified professional facilitator. We told the task force that they had to save 2,000 acre-feet of water per year and that they could not spend over $72 million, which was the cost of the plan that a segment of the community opposed. We gave them four months and said they must reach a consensus recommendation. The last condition was that if they failed to meet the above policy guidelines, the council would move forward with Plan B, which the opponents didn’t want. This last condition prevented the opposed group from bringing the task force to a standstill. The council also stated publicly that if the task force met all the conditions, it would accept their recommendation.

In the end, the task force came back with a recommendation that was a better idea than staff or consultants had devised. The council accepted the recommendation, and Redwood City solved its water supply problem and, at the same time, built a stronger community. The task force members who used to dislike each other ended up having celebratory anniversary dinners for several years after they completed their work. People in Redwood City still refer to that task force as a model. The council learned that often there is more power in setting up a legitimate process with policy guidelines than in being the “decider.”

**Lessons Learned**

Through the experiences in Redwood City, I have learned the following lessons about community building:

- Understand that the roles of the local government are consciousness raiser, convener, catalyst, and facilitator.
- Ask the right questions: it is more important than rushing to solutions.
- Engage your public in a well-designed community-building strategy, and they will accept their responsibility and act like citizens, not customers.
- Change old assumptions, roles, and behaviors of staff, council, and citizens.
- Trust what your community is telling you. Go to great lengths to be truthful in soliciting and accepting community involvement and input, even if it is critical of your programs or actions. Provide clear and thorough information, and always maintain candor with community members to gain a high level of mutual trust.
- Believe in and embrace the concepts and the value of helping people connect with the local government and with each other. The commitment to working on community building must initially exist in the city manager’s office and eventually be endorsed and embraced throughout the organization.
- Let go! The city doesn’t always have an “end-product,” “desired outcome,” or “right answer” identified. Often, the dialogue itself is the outcome. It’s a process, not just a project, and it can be a long, slow process that doesn’t take place in the fast lane. It stops and starts and changes direction. Allow for and accept a high degree of ambiguity.
- Make community building a way of doing the city’s business. Make it an everyday part of your organizational culture and your philosophy with a need for flexibility, determination, and long-term commitment.
- Bring people together and help them make community connections. This is more important than measuring results.
- Make sure that the nuts-and-bolts logistics are handled well in order to place a high level of attention on the dialogue and substance of the community-building process.
- Follow up early on with community members who participated in a particular event, and develop a means of maintaining contact with them and renewing the community connection that you’re trying to nurture.
- Bring all points of view to the table. Don’t dismiss differing viewpoints as bad or wrong; just view them as new ideas that you haven’t yet considered. Know that the more diversity you have in the room, the more creativity you will have in community problem solving.
- Keep a sense of humor and use it to share the excitement and enthusiasm of working to build a great community together.
- Be a leader in this venture.

**Community Building: Why We Love This Profession!**

Let’s step back from the data, concepts, examples, and specifics of community building and talk about it from a very personal level. Community building
Community Building: How to Do It, Why It Matters

is all about building relationships, helping others, empowering people, connecting people, helping them to dream and believe in themselves, and helping them to not feel alone. This is why most of us got into this profession in the first place, but over time many of us seem to have lost our focus. We haven’t lost our love for the profession, but we have forgotten what it is we love about it: the community-building aspect. So as a reminder, this job is about

• Feeling good because you are helping little kids who have it really tough and seeing them laugh and have fun
• Helping a family realize their first home and watching the tears of joy as they get the keys to it
• Taking a dead downtown, turning it around, and hearing residents speak about the change with pride and ownership
• Helping citizens begin to understand and feel the power and pride in building their community
• Playing Santa Claus for the police and fire departments’ holiday toy drive, giving presents to families in need, and watching the kids’ eyes light up with joy and the tears of gratitude from their parents
• Pulling together a divided community and getting folks talking instead of arguing
• Turning people on to possibilities before them and getting them excited about achieving their vision.
• Giving senior citizens a place to meet and not be alone, and helping them to feel worthwhile and useful rather than useless
• Providing safe programs for young kids so that they don’t just hang out and get into trouble
• Watching a neighborhood come together and feel pride in planning its new park
• Making this world just a tiny, tiny bit better because of what you have done.

All the above are about community building. It simply doesn’t get any better than this. Of course, it is a job that will kick your butt at times, but it will also provide you with passion, pride, joy, happiness, excitement, and challenge.

Community building is the part of your job that fills your soul.

Community building is the part of your job that feeds your spirit.

Community building is the part of your job that makes you feel alive.

Conclusion

Let me close with a story from my experience in Redwood City:

We had just finished a program to connect people and build community, and we wanted to know if the program had any impact on the citizens who attended. We simply asked what, if anything, had changed for them. Most people spoke and were very positive of the program. The last person to speak was Maria, who had lived in Redwood City for twelve years. Each morning, she said, she woke up and drove to South San Francisco, where she worked. Each evening she got in her car and drove back to Redwood City, where she lived. She then got quiet.

I waited for a while and finally asked, “But Maria, what changed for you?” “Oh, everything has changed. I still drive to South San Francisco in the morning but after work when I get in my car, I now drive home. Driving home is very different from driving back to where I live.”

Community building is about making all our residents feel like they are driving home.

Notes

Notes
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Volume 41/Number 4 2009

Community Building: How to Do It, Why It Matters
Civic engagement means different things to different people. This article addresses civic engagement initiated by a city or county government with its residents. (Civic engagement also happens without city involvement when citizens are involved in a service club or are volunteering.) This article complements the white paper, “Connected Communities,” produced by the Alliance for Innovation, a partner organization to ICMA. The purpose of this InFocus is to give readers hands-on information on how local government staff can build upon or expand their understanding and skills of civic engagement.

This InFocus describes what civic engagement is and what it is not. The report describes the benefits to cities, the challenges, and why some people resist civic engagement. It also defines different levels of civic engagement, offers tips on how to lead a civic engagement event, and discusses new roles for staff. Also included is a discussion of the biggest barriers to civic engagement and some stories and case studies.
Civic engagement and community building: What is the relationship?

It is important to understand that when civic engagement is done well, you will also begin to build community among the participants. Civic engagement and community building are the flip sides of the same coin. Regardless of which area is emphasized first, it will lead to the other. One way to understand the subtle differences is that community building builds the foundation (i.e., social capital) necessary to have quality civic engagement. Community building holds the citizens together during the time frames between civic engagement processes. Community building is discussed at length in a 2009 InFocus report.1

Civic engagement: What it is and is not

Be open to outcome, not attached to outcome.
—Angeles Arrien2

There are two common misconceptions about civic engagement to address. One misconception is the “Institutional Control Model.” This model is best described by a quote from the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan: “Civic engagement is a device whereby public officials induce non-public officials to act in a way the public officials desire.” Unfortunately, many staff members and elected officials share this inaccurate description of civic engagement.

The second misconception is the false model, “Neighborhood Organizing Model.” This model involves lobbying or pressuring an elected body to make a decision. The father of community organizing, Saul Alinsky, once described CE with this scenario: “If you have a vast organization, parade it before the enemy and openly show your power. If your organization is small do what Gideon did: conceal the numbers in the dark but raise a clamor that will make the listener believe that your organization numbers many more than it does. If your organization is too tiny even for noise, then stink up the place.” Most public officials fear this situation will occur when trying to engage their citizens and often choose not to tread into the civic engagement waters.

The Hardwood Institute of Public Innovation has a good definition of true civic engagement: “Civic engagement is appropriate when an agency is seeking to learn from

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Recently retired as the city manager of Redwood City, California, after sixteen years, he was awarded ICMA's highest award, “Award for Career Excellence” in 2007. During his career, he has also served as city manager of Belmont, California; assistant county manager for Washoe County, Nevada; and fire chief for Palo Alto, California.
the public. But learning is more than simply soliciting input, adding up the responses, and using the data to make a decision that is allegedly supported by citizens. It is about gaining and using public knowledge."

Civic engagement is about citizens talking to citizens. The role of staff or elected officials is to pose the right questions, listen, and learn from the public. Staff and elected officials who sit at the front of a room and only answer questions while not actively soliciting input from participants are not engaging in civic engagement.

Civic engagement is not:

- Selling an idea, program, or policy to the public
- Convincing residents to vote for a bond measure or tax override measure
- Convincing people to support a plan or idea of the staff or council
- A meeting where people gather to complain, blame, or find fault
- Gathering more or different people only to have the same old discussions
- A process where the staff or council always controls the outcome
- Lobbying the elected body.

There is nothing wrong with any city or county engaging in the first three activities described above. However, they are functions appropriate to marketing and public relations and are not examples of civic engagement.

Civic engagement does not, cannot, and will not happen at a council or planning commission meeting. Instead, it needs to happen outside of these venues. Although there are laws that require public input at public meetings, it is critical not to confuse these requirements with legitimate civic engagement. Three minutes at a microphone is not civic engagement. Council meetings are the community’s business meetings. If there is good civic engagement prior to the council meeting, a city will have a better community business meeting.

Civic engagement is not a new program that gets added to your plate. It is not about doing civic engagement. Rather, it is a way of operating—a change to the process you use to get your job done.

**Benefits of civic engagement**

There has to be value added to expend the efforts to civically engage citizens. Powerful benefits to using civic engagement include:

- Achieving greater buy-in to decisions with fewer backlashes such as lawsuits, special elections, or a council recall.
- Engendering trust between citizens and government, which improves public behavior at council meetings.
- Attaining successful outcomes on toxic issues, which helps elected officials avoid choosing between equally unappealing solutions.
- Developing better and more creative ideas and solutions.
- Implementing ideas, programs, and policies faster and more easily.
- Creating involved citizens instead of demanding customers.
- Building community within a city.
- Making your job easier and more satisfying.
Why is civic engagement hard to do?

The hope is that we are headed into a future where government’s orientation is “community as partner” and the public actually see themselves as “citizens” rather than “customers.” Citizens are anyone who works and lives in our community—corporate/businesspeople as well as residents. All people who live within our communities are citizens of our communities.

How did our public come to see themselves as customers? The private sector was the first to realize that providing high-quality customer service and saying that the customer is “always right” is very good for business. Many of us in the public sector believed this orientation toward our residents made sense, and we emulated the private sector. We then trained our staff to treat our residents like customers. When people are treated like customers, whether by business or by local government, they become customers. When they are told that they are always right, they come to expect to be served exactly the way they want to be served. This mindset has caused them to lose their sense of being responsible citizens and accountable for their community. Unfortunately, this change has made civic engagement difficult due to the following factors:

1. **Distrust:** Public officials have not been straight with citizens for a long time as they have tried to sell, convince, or market their ideas, programs, and policies under the disguise of civic engagement (as Senator Moynihan observed). The public has seen through this ruse. There is also the general societal distrust of government with which public officials must contend.

2. **Role clarification:** Civic engagement is very difficult to achieve when residents are treated as customers and not citizens. In order for civic engagement to work effectively, residents need to start acting as citizens and not as customers.

3. **Attitude and behavior:** Staff and elected officials will have to change their attitudes of the “public” in order to change some of their behaviors that are not productive. Likewise, citizens will have to change some of their attitudes of government in order to change their behaviors. Without behavior changes by all parties, civic engagement will be ineffective.

4. **Perceived loss of control:** Too often staff or elected officials feel that they are giving up control when they truly engage their public.

Challenges of civic engagement

*Pay attention to what has heart and meaning.*

—Angeles Arrien

Although there are challenges to implementing a civic engagement process, it is still possible to benefit from its use. Recognizing these challenges will put you on the right path for the positive exchange of ideas.

**Time:** It may take longer to make decisions using civic engagement, but only in the short run. Staff and the elected body often move quickly in deciding an issue only to find that the public is upset and angry about the decision. Many public officials have experienced the lawsuit or ballot initiative to negate a decision, which ends up taking much longer than a well-designed civic engagement process.

Over the years, many studies have been conducted comparing U.S. and Japanese businesses. These studies have revealed that U.S. businesses spend about 20 percent of
their time on planning for a new product or policy and 80 percent on implementation. In Japan, the reverse is true: businesses spend 80 percent of their time on planning and 20 percent on implementation. It is interesting that the total Japanese business timeline was shorter than the U.S. business timeline. There is a wonderful quote from Cicel Reeves, a respected community facilitator, which holds true for this example: “Go slow to go fast.”

**Money:** It is slightly more expensive to engage the public, but again, only in the short run. Jurisdictions also have experienced the cost of a lawsuit or special election following a process that did not include civic engagement.

**Skills:** Civic engagement takes a certain skill set that many staff and elected officials haven’t yet developed. Both the skill of designing an effective civic engagement process and the skill of facilitating meetings are critical to its success.

**Support:** If the council or city/county manager does not fully support civic engagement, these efforts will not be successful.

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**The civic engagement spectrum**

*Show up or choose to be present.*  
—Angeles Arrien

Civic engagement can best be described as a spectrum and hierarchy of processes. The chart (see sidebar) gives a visual perspective of the various phases of civic engagement. When you increase the level of engagement you increase the level of the public’s influence. Each level builds off the previous level. For example, if you want to consult you must first inform (i.e., provide education about the issue).

Civic engagement can range from a simple “inform” process to a very sophisticated “empower” process. The stages are:

**Inform:** This phase provides information to the public by educating them on the subject. However, as soon as the public becomes informed, they will have expectations of providing input.

**Consult:** At this stage, ask for public input on an issue or a set of alternatives that the staff or council will take into consideration when making a recommendation or a decision.

**Incorporate/Collaborate:** The differences between these phases are not significant. Incorporating means involving the public in developing specific alternatives or

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Figure 1. Civic engagement is a spectrum and hierarchy of processes

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“forced choices” to be discussed. Collaborating requires that the city work with the public at the very beginning to frame the issue as well as the alternatives. Incorporating and collaborating mean that the public could be making specific recommendations to the staff or council.

**Empower:** Empowerment is the most sophisticated of the processes and involves asking the public to make the decision or solve the problem. With this approach, the elected body has provided some broad guidelines (e.g., budget constraints or policy guidelines) that the group must meet. This process usually requires developing a working group of fifteen to twenty citizens who will meet over several months and use a professional facilitator.

Lack of clarity about which of the above civic engagement processes is being used is the most commonly occurring mistake. Sometimes the city is trying to inform, but it isn’t specific, so residents think they are being asked for input. Other times, the city wants input, but the citizens want to help define the problem or develop the alternatives.

Be very clear and specific about what is needed from the public. In the beginning, it is OK to admit being new to this process and that if all goes well, the public will be involved at higher levels next time. Most often people will respect directness and honesty.

**Purpose determines process**

*Tell the truth without blame or judgment.*

—Angeles Arrien

Often, the first question asked is, “What process should be used?” The answer depends on the purpose and the organization’s skill level.

There are several factors that will determine what civic engagement process is most appropriate to use. Here are guidelines:

**Purpose:** Is the intent to inform or for the public to make a recommendation?

**Role of government:** Will the council be the decision maker or will the public decide?

**Timeline:** Is there limited time or a willingness to take the time that is necessary?

Discussion structure: The “inform” stage does not create real discussion. However, if using the “consult” stage or beyond, then there needs to be a structure that encourages real dialogue.

**Facilitation:** Although not needed during the “inform” stage, facilitation is helpful when used during the “consult” stage, and is essential for all stages beyond that.

Cities should start small and move to more sophisticated processes as they learn from each engagement process. The exception is if public officials have the resources to hire someone who is skilled at designing and facilitating engagement processes.

**Questions to ask before starting**

**Is the organization ready?** Is there real support from the council and/or city/county manager to use the information that is generated by civic engagement? Do people within the organization have the skill set to handle the civic engagement process under consideration?

**What is the purpose/goal of this civic engagement effort?** Never start a civic engagement process without a clear response to this question. Is the goal to educate the public or get input? Should the public rank alternatives the city has developed or develop
alternatives that will be discussed? Should the organization partner with citizens and define the issue and develop a solution together?

Is there enough time? Has the public been brought into the process early enough to include the gathered information and knowledge in the recommendation to the council? Deadlines are often set arbitrarily and can be extended to allow sufficient time for civic engagement.

Is the issue important? Due to time, effort, resources, and interest, civic engagement is not practical or appropriate for many issues. Two or three major issues a year will require a city/county to use a full civic engagement effort. Some smaller issues will require a lower level of civic engagement.

Who is in control? Can residents be approached without a solution or direction already decided? When moving from the left to the right of the civic engagement spectrum, the government’s traditional role as the “decision maker” will weaken. Control has moved from making the decision or recommendation to establishing an effective and legitimate process that allows more interesting and creative decisions or recommendations.

Putting civic engagement into action

Whoever can see through all fear will always be safe.

—Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching

Although this report cannot create skilled civic engagement practitioners, it does provide helpful ideas and a general framework for civic engagement:

1. First, civic engagement is about citizens talking to citizens with staff and elected officials listening and learning from the dialogues. Too often public officials think civic engagement involves a lot of talking when in reality it involves a lot of listening on their part. (See “Listen up” sidebar.)

2. Civic engagement is not about the city manager, elected officials, or panel of experts sitting at a head table and lecturing to residents and then answering questions.

3. Never have a room set up in auditorium style seating. All discussions should happen at round tables with six to eight individuals at a table.

Listen Up

I had worked with a neighborhood group about the issue of speeding on their streets. Tired of how the city had been handling requests for additional stop signs, I designed a three-meeting process with the neighbors. Several council members wanted to attend the second meeting since they had heard good things about the first meeting. I told them they could attend, but asked them not to speak. This request was not met with enthusiasm. I told them to trust me on this and that I would tell the neighbors that the council was there to listen and not speak. I told the neighbors not to ask them any questions, and if they did I had asked the council member not to answer. At the end of the two-hour meeting, many of the neighbors approached me and the council members to tell us they were honored that council members had spent two hours of their valuable time listening to them. It was a great lesson to the council and me about the power of listening to our residents.
4. There should never be a head table.
5. Staff or elected officials should never speak for more than fifteen to twenty minutes during a two- to three-hour civic engagement meeting.
6. The facilitator for the meeting should ensure all discussion happens in the small groups seated at the tables, with each group reporting out and sharing their findings or ideas with the other groups.
7. People should be randomly assigned to tables, which results in having diverse viewpoints at each table.
8. Food should be provided at all meetings, especially at evening meetings that last two hours or more. Providing food eliminates one barrier to coming to a meeting. It also provides a time for individuals to start to build relationships with each other before starting the conversation. Breaking bread together is an old custom and builds relationships. A well-organized buffet takes only 30 minutes for up to 100 individuals.

Avoid having the same old discussion

To succeed, civic engagement meetings need to enable citizens to break free of old discussions that always ended up with individuals finding fault and blaming someone or something. Instead, citizens should be able to interact with each other in ways that produce new ideas and better solutions.

These important components will help citizens have productive discussions:

1. **Framing the issue:** How an issue is defined or framed is critical to having an effective discussion. Frame the issue in the most neutral way possible and in a way that causes citizens to begin to own the problem. For example, instead of using the term “gangs,” use “our youth.” Instead of saying “failing schools,” say “our school system.” Frame “recycle water” as “our city’s sustainability around water.” Youth, schools, and water are community issues and as a result, they are “our” issues.

2. **Building relationships:** It is necessary to build relationships before leaping into problem solving. Citizens cannot effectively solve problems without developing a relationship with their colleagues. Plan to start relationship building at the round tables, during the meal if one is being served. Instead of the usual introductions, ask people to (1) share how they came to live in the city; (2) tell something interesting about their name or family history; and (3) describe what caused them to accept the invitation to come to this meeting.

3. **Starting the discussion:** Start the discussion by asking people to share their “hopes and dreams” around the topic or issue. Sharing hopes and dreams will help build common ground between citizens at the tables.

4. **Continuing the discussion:** Ask the small groups to discuss the “possibilities” of the issue versus “solving” the issue. In order to discuss the possibilities, the group will have to look to the future and think about what might be. In contrast, in a problem-solving mode, the group has to look backward at situations that “caused” the problem and as a result, groups become unproductive by finding fault and blaming others.

5. **Allowing time for discussion:** Allow adequate time for conversations to happen in the small groups. Do not ask people to talk about “the possibilities for our youth” and then only give them fifteen or twenty minutes to do so. Allow the messiness and complexity of real conversations to happen.
6. **Ending the meeting:** Do not always push for a solution or answer at the end of the meeting if it is premature and the participants are not ready to reach a consensus. Do not push for a consensus if it is not there.

One word of caution: it is impossible to have productive discussions when trying to control the outcome. Unfortunately, this behavior has been built on the misconception that city managers should always be in control.

**Civic engagement advisory group**

When planning a large or sensitive civic engagement process, it is helpful to have an advisory or civic engagement planning group. The purpose of this group is to partner with the city to develop a civic engagement design process. Ensure that the civic engagement advisory group understands it is not there to solve the problem. This type of planning group is also very helpful in developing the options or alternatives to be discussed.

The advisory group will give the process credibility and involve important stakeholders early on in framing the issue. This group can also be very helpful with the media and enhancing participation.

**Getting people to attend**

Usually, it takes more creativity to persuade people to attend civic engagement events than using the traditional government methods. The invitation to any civic engagement process is very important and thoroughly discussed in Peter Block’s book, *Community*. Do not underestimate the impact of a well-developed invitation. Instead of sending the usual required meeting notices, actually send out invitations. Be creative and use www.evite.com and other means to invite neighbors in lieu of announcing a meeting.

Many people tend to focus on the number of people attending a civic engagement process. Initially, the numbers may be very small, because citizens do not believe that their input will be heard or they expect a boring, uncivil meeting. Start small and grow as you learn. Word of mouth will take care of the numbers. Keep this Native American Indian proverb in mind: “Whoever comes is who is meant to be there; whatever happens is what is meant to happen, and when it is over it is over.”

**Changes staff needs to make**

*People are like tea bags. You find out how strong they are when you put them in hot water.*

—Anonymous

Psychologists believe that people cannot change their behavior until they have first changed their attitude. In order for public officials to effectively change their behavior with the public, they must change their attitudes about the public. During civic engagement training of city and county staffs, I ask participants to shout out their perceptions and beliefs of the public. The results are always the same with approximately 85 percent of the descriptions negative and 15 percent positive.

I hear the following responses with regularity:

- The public will just screw things up!
- The public doesn’t understand complex issues.
- The public will get into shouting matches.
• The public doesn’t really care anyway.
• No one will show up or the same people will show up.
• You can’t control these meetings.

Public officials need to reframe their perception of the public. The following is a better and truer description of the public during a well-designed civic engagement process:
• The public is not the enemy but our lifeline on really tough issues.
• The public has good ideas when made aware of the issue.
• The public is smart and can learn quickly.
• The public is willing to help if approached correctly.
• When honestly engaged, the public will behave appropriately during a well-designed civic engagement process and when talking with the council, will compliment you for your efforts.

**Suggested new roles for staff**

Staff involved in civic engagement must let go of old stereotypes and incorporate some of the positive traits just described. Consider these new roles for staff:
1. Be a partner and consultant to the public instead of acting like an expert who knows the right answer.
2. Be open to interesting ideas from the citizens. Although public officials have the technical expertise, they may not always have the best or only good ideas.
3. As a consultant, mix technical expertise with the public’s values and knowledge of their city and neighborhood to achieve more creative ideas and approaches.
4. For public officials, being in control comes from anxieties and fears that residents will screw things up and then, they will be blamed. Let go of this fear.
5. Listen much more than talk.

**Suggested new roles for council members**

Council members need to begin to look “outward” (to the public) for solutions and ideas and not always look “inward” (to city staff or themselves). They must begin to understand that their role is more about “facilitating” a decision than it is about always “making” the decision. Your job is to help council members understand their new roles:
1. Since council members can’t possibly know all the answers, and they know this as well, they need to stop acting as if they do.
2. They do not need to be at the front of the room or at the head table. Sometimes, they should not even be in the room when citizens are having a dialogue with each other. If they are in the room, they should sit in the back and honor the citizens by carefully listening and not responding.
3. They should not try to always control the discussion or the outcome.
4. They need to be open to the ideas of others and understand that good leaders know when to follow.
5. Yes, the council is the “decider,” but there is more than one way to decide.
6. Sometimes council members can have more power and be more effective by setting appropriate boundaries, conditions, and broad policies; then stand back and allow the community to decide how best to solve a problem within the policy framework set by the council (see the Redwood City case study for an example of this approach).
Two barriers to civic engagement

No one is hurt by doing the right thing.
—Hawaiian Proverb

The most important civic engagement concept to understand is the difference between a customer and a citizen. The first major barrier to civic engagement is that public officials treat residents as customers, and residents act as customers and not as citizens. Public officials cannot have effective civic engagement with customers; they can only have quality civic engagement with citizens. This customer versus citizen concept is explained in-depth in the 2009 InFocus report.¹

The second major barrier to civic engagement is when local government continues to see itself as responsible to fix all problems and be all things to all people. Public officials cannot solve all problems, fix all complaints, and make life easy for all residents. Instead of behaving as if they were the hub of the wheel, public officials must understand that they are only one of the spokes. To be successful with civic engagement, public officials must move from the old stakeholder model to a new partnership model. This concept is also described in depth in the aforementioned InFocus.¹

New roles for residents

I cannot stress enough the importance of helping residents move from always being customers to understanding that they are citizens and need to take responsibility for the quality of life in their communities. The best way to accomplish this is for the city to begin playing a role in building community within cities.¹ The other way to shift residents from customers to citizens is to use well-designed civic engagement processes.

Case studies

The following case studies illustrate legitimate and sophisticated civic engagement processes that have been successful in various cities. Contact information is provided for each city for more details and additional help.

Redwood City, California – Recycled water

Redwood City (population 75,000) had used more water than allocated from a regional agency. Since neighboring cities had not used their full allocation, it was not a problem for the present. However, in the future the city would be facing a major water reduction for which it had not prepared. As the city manager, I instructed the public works director to develop a plan to fix this problem by the year 2015. He developed a good plan, which most of the community did not initially resist. Unfortunately, one person used the Internet to frighten parents by telling them that if babies played on grass watered with recycled water, they could become sick and even die. Although this was false information, 25–30 percent of the community started to oppose the original plan.

In order not to tear the community apart, I recommended that we establish a Recycled Water Task Force (usually necessary with a very technical problem) of twenty residents: ten that favored the city plan and ten that opposed it. We provided the task force with a professional facilitator and a budget of $60,000 to hire technical consultants. The city council developed criteria and policy parameters for the Task Force, which included:
Four months to develop a consensus recommendation
No minority report
Save 2,000 acre-feet of water per year by 2015
Not exceed a budget of $72 million (the cost of the original city plan)
Failure to meet the above criteria meant that the city would proceed with its original plan.

This last requirement provided an incentive to the task force members who opposed the city plan to come up with a better plan and not scuttle the task force. The council stated that if the task force met all the requirements and their plan met legal muster, then the council would approve it.

The task force agreed on a unanimous recommendation that met all the criteria. The council adopted the plan and avoided a possible lawsuit, referendum, and/or recall of the existing council members. Best of all, the council set broad policy guidelines and allowed the citizens to resolve the problem.

For more details contact: Ed Everett, retired city manager, 650-216-6595 or everetted@comcast.net.

Salt Lake City, Utah — Land use, locating a government facility, historical districts
Salt Lake City (population 186,000) has a strong mayor from a government that uses sophisticated civic engagement processes. Mayor Ralph Becker has been the champion of these efforts and understands and practices civic engagement in ways most elected officials do not. He has adopted civic engagement as the process the city uses to accomplish tough or controversial projects. The city has effectively used online tools for civic engagement, such as Peak Democracy (www.peakdemocracy.com), for resolving more than ten issues the city had faced.

Salt Lake City used the Oregon Solutions (www.orsolutions.org) civic engagement model to successfully resolve a long-term issue of a rundown park in the downtown area. The city had recently adopted UserVoice (www.uservoice.com) as part of its civic engagement lexicon. UserVoice was used as an online open house to help prioritize different issues, and Peak Democracy was used as an online public hearing to have a dialogue about those prioritized issues.

The city will use a private web company for the program, “Salt Lake City Listening.” The software will scan the Internet for any blogs, comments, discussions groups, or dialogues about Salt Lake City and summarize them into thematic categories that are provided to staff who can begin to anticipate issues or concerns of their citizens.

For more details contact: Mary DeLaMare-Schaefer, deputy director of community and economic development, at mary.ds@slcgov.com or 801-535-6180 or Nole Walkingshaw, planning program supervisor, at N.walkingshaw@slcgov.com.

Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District (HBMWD), Humboldt, California — What to do with excess water?
The HBMWD was in danger of losing some of its water rights, as it had not used all of its water allocation. The district’s initial plan was met with opposition and lead to some board members losing their next election. Several years later a new district manager worked with the board to develop a more robust civic engagement process. After working with the board on several strategic planning issues, the district manager then commenced an 18-month civic engagement process, which included a carefully chosen advisory committee. This advisory committee hosted a series of public discussions that involved more than 400 residents and stakeholders.
The advisory committee developed a three-prong solution to which the district board made minor changes and will soon adopt. The district hired a local professional facilitator to help design the civic engagement process and facilitate the advisory committee and the public meetings. There have not been any lawsuits, referendums, or recalls, and the community has stood behind the proposed plan.

For more details contact: Carole Rische, district manager, at 707-443-5018 or GM@HBMWD.com.

**Christenburg, Virginia — Budget issue**

Christenburg (population 20,000) had faced substantial budget reductions and wanted residents’ input into the budget process for the first time. The city used the Center for Priority Based Budgeting (www.pbbcenter.org) to help them with a process that significantly involved both the staff and the public. Using this process, the council moved from a line item budget review to a policy budget review. The council received very useful input to help make tough budget decisions; they also received praise from previously critical residents.

For more details contact: Becky Wilburn, public information officer, at 540-382-6128, ext. 148.

**Albuquerque, New Mexico — Planning issue**

The staff of the City of Albuquerque developed a plan to redevelop a 4-mile stretch of the 4th Street corridor. The city had hired a land use consultant to work with a 15-member advisory committee appointed by the city. The plan began a very contentious public debate that became more hostile and angry over time. (Beware of some consultants who say they understand civic engagement!) The merchants on 4th Street were so angry that they ran a candidate against the councilperson from this district. That effort failed, but the city knew it needed to adopt a different approach.

The city backed away from this original plan and brought in a consultant from the Consensus Building Institute (www.cbuilding.org). The consultant conducted a thorough analysis of the issues and developed a civic engagement process that involved multiple educational sessions and structured mediation and negotiation sessions that were open to the public. This public process took a year to reach a final consensus with the merchants, residents, and the city, and resulted in a white paper authored by the negotiation group. The staff redrafted their original plan based on the white paper, and the council approved the plan. There have not been any recalls, lawsuits, or referendums.

For more details contact: Deborah Stover, director of planning, at 505-924-3860 or Dstover@cabq.gov or Kelly Sanchez-Pare, policy aid to district councilperson, at 505-765-3159 or ksanchez-pare@cabq.gov.

**Evanston, Illinois — Budget issue**

Evanston (population of 75,000) is an upper-middle-class city that had faced a $9.5 million deficit that required a 12 percent budget reduction last year. The new city manager had the staff engage the citizens well in advance of making any recommendations or drafting a proposed budget. The city hired a professional facilitator who helped design a thoughtful five-step civic engagement process. This public process culminated in a list of the top ten recommended budget cuts. The city put the civic engagement meetings on YouTube and had more than 1,000 comments about the top ten list that the council reviewed. The city also engaged its employees to develop a list of possible cuts.
Councilmembers were delighted with the input and thought it made their final budget review more relevant and focused.

For more details contact: Martin Lyons, assistant city manager, at 847-866-2936 or mlyons@cityofevanston.org.

**Brea, California — Engagement of employees**

The city of Brea is an excellent example of a city that understood that it needed to engage its employees with as much emphasis used to engage its citizens.

They developed a very sophisticated engagement process where working groups of employees developed and presented the budget, which eliminated thirty-five positions, to the city council. This process of engagement led to successful negotiations with the unions to freeze salaries, benefits, and step increases. The city used the same employee engagement process to rework the organizational structure after cutting the budget and service levels. Working groups of employees developed and presented to the city council a new organization structure that eliminated four departments, created three new departments, eliminated assistant city manager positions, and reduced nine departments down to six departments. This reorganization was accomplished with buy-in from employees and the city council.

The city of Brea is a very engaged and collaborative organization that has also done a good job of engaging their citizens. These efforts were led, encouraged, and supported by the city manager, Tim O’Donnell.

For more details contact: Tim O’Donnell, city manager, at timo@ci.brea.ca.us or 714-990-7710.

**Conclusion**

*With a stout heart, a mouse can lift an elephant.*

—Tibetan Proverb

Civic engagement is the right thing to do and it is the smart thing to do. Given the significant budget reductions that all local governments have experienced, public officials can no longer be all things to all people, solve all problems, and satisfy all residents. This new reality frees public officials from the old paradigm that their role is to provide all services and cure all evil. We cannot afford to operate under this outmoded concept of government. The only way pressing problems will be solved is through partnerships with the public, which include business, faith-based organizations, homeowners associations, philanthropic agencies, service clubs, and the education community. They are a local government’s best allies and partners.

Local governments that do the best job of engaging their citizens also do a very good job of engaging their employees. The skills and techniques of engaging citizens are the same skills and techniques for engaging employees. Employees who are not engaged at the workplace will not be as willing to engage citizens by recognizing the inconsistency. Often, public officials may not engage their employees for the same reasons that they do not engage the public.

Lastly, civic engagement requires that some managers let go of outdated and ineffective practices. Managers cannot be effective in leading and supporting civic engagement, employee engagement, and community building if they are micromanagers, control driven, or risk adverse.
How Civic Engagement Transforms Community Relationships

Civic engagement and community building are the realistic alternatives to this outmoded paradigm. By allowing the public to participate, civic engagement appreciates and acknowledges the public’s gifts and talents to help solve community problems. It takes a community to successfully address problems. Civic engagement and community building are leadership skills that all local government managers will need to learn and embrace to be successful in the new normal of the future.

Notes

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BY ED EVERETT, ICMA-CM

TODAY’S LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT MODEL

It’s broken, so let’s fix it

I am of the opinion that if you have tried something for one or two decades and it is not working, then you should try something else. I am not referring to the council-manager, strong mayor, or other forms of local government, but rather the way that managers do their work regardless of the form of government.

My hypothesis is that the local government model is not working, and managers need to change that model.

This hypothesis is based on my 24 years of experience as a city manager and my continuing work with local government as a trainer and consultant over the past eight years. Being removed from the day-to-day stress of managing a city provided me the time to reflect and learn from my experiences.

The objective of this article is to describe the existing model and propose a different, more effective one.

Existing Model: “Bitch and Fix”

Unfortunately, most managers operate under the “bitch and fix” model. Residents get to gripe, and the local government manager believes the issue must be fixed.

A local government and its residents become caught in this model, even though neither likes it. Although they don’t particularly like the model, each group gets enough out of it to prevent changing it.

As local government officials, managers don’t want to lose control over solving problems. They think they have the right answers and accept the belief that they must fix everything.

Residents are not willing to accept their share of the responsibility and accountability for the quality of life of their neighborhoods. As a result, their behavior is to complain about issues.

Managers and residents are in this dance together. They must change the music and the steps since they can’t change their partners. I believe it is the responsibility of local government to initiate this change.

Let’s break the existing model down into three components: assumptions, processes, and attitudes. Then, let’s compare it to the new model: partnerships.

Assumptions under the existing model: Managers tend to make these assumptions about who does what:

Local government:
• Is responsible for the quality of life in a community.
• Must solve people’s problems.
• Requires little of residents.

Elected officials:
• Are elected to fix all problems.

Residents:
• Act and feel like they should be treated as customers.

Local government managers:
• Make all the above happen.

Decision-making process under the existing model: Nearly all decisions affecting residents are made by staff and elected officials. Managers talk about engaging residents; however, residents are most often approached with the end decision in mind and the locality tries to convince them to accept it.

Local government has a defined mindset about how decisions need to be made:

• Staff: They have the expertise and data to solve all problems.
• Elected officials: They were elected to make all decisions and be the “decider.”
• Residents: They don’t have the expertise, time, or persistence to solve problems. If we involve the public, then we can’t control them. The same people attend meetings, which often turns into chaos.

Attitudes under the existing model:
I’ve found that managers have a negative view of the public. When I conduct civic engagement training for managers and elected officials, I ask participants to shout out the first adjective that pops into their head when they hear the word “public.”

Overwhelmingly, managers consistently describe the public with negative adjectives about 80 percent of the time, and elected officials describe the public with negative adjectives 70 percent of the time.

Some of the common negative adjectives I hear about the public are: uninformed, not interested, entitled, rude, NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) driven, and blames others. There are plenty of studies that show that the public also has negative images of government employees.

This deep-seated negative attitude about the public directly and adversely impacts the way managers engage the public, solve problems, and make decisions.

Conclusion: The existing model described here does not work well. Community and management problems today are more wicked and complex so managers must consider alternatives. They have less revenue and fewer
resources with the same high level of expectation from residents, but the model has not changed.

When communities were resource rich, managers could compensate for a broken model. They cannot afford to do that anymore.

**New Model: Partnership with Residents**

The difficult challenges that local governments face will only be solved in partnership with residents acting like citizens. Residents must assist government to develop solutions to such problems as crime, gangs, drugs, falling schools, and homelessness.

Managers need to partner with residents in both identifying alternatives and in implementing solutions. Without active involvement by residents, the problems will never be solved solely by government.

This model does not mean to imply that managers expect residents to help government pave streets, trim trees, or hire employees.

**Different assumptions under the new model:** Managers need to make these different assumptions:

**Local government:**
- Can’t solve all problems alone and never could.
- Are partially—but not completely—responsible for the quality of life.

**Elected officials:**
- Set priorities and allocate resources for the most pressing issues.

**Residents:**
- Need to act more as citizens and less like customers.
- Must take shared responsibility for the quality of life in their neighborhoods.

**Local government managers:**
- Facilitate cooperative problem solving rather than always solving problems themselves.

**Different decision-making process under the new model:** If managers are going to form an effective partnership with residents, they must build strong and successful relationships. Relationship building happens in two ways.

First, neighbors must build relationships with each other. Second, local government must develop strong relationships with neighborhoods.

Managers must openly and effectively engage residents. This does not and cannot happen at council or commission meetings. So what are the new roles and mindsets of the various parties in the new decision-making process?

- **Staff:** Doesn’t have all the expertise or correct answers. Combining staff’s expertise with citizen’s expertise will yield better decisions.
- **Elected officials:** For the really challenging problems, establish a collaborative problem-solving process that involves a partnership with residents, within the legislative body’s broad policies, limits, and boundaries.
- **Residents:** Take responsibility to cooperatively work with staff to solve problems.
- **Local government managers:** Facilitate problem solving. Do not always solve the problem yourself.

**Different attitudes under the new model:** Studies have proven that we can’t permanently change a long-term behavior without first changing our attitude. Quitting smoking or losing weight, for example, does not happen without first changing the attitude we have around those issues.

Managers need to develop a more positive attitude of the public. They also need to understand that our residents:
• Have skills and expertise.
• Are smarter than we give them credit for.
• Will become involved and develop creative solutions if engaged correctly.
• Can become a valuable partner, not an enemy.

How Will We Change to the New Model?
Change will not be easy. Managers need to change their attitudes, roles, and assumptions, and they must learn new leadership skills.

**Partnership model:** The partnership model has positive outcomes and benefits for residents and local government leaders alike:
• Provides a positive outlet for the energy and talents of the public to help solve problems.
• Rids local government of ways of thinking and behaving that are ineffective.
• Reduces the stress and anxiety of professional managers and elected officials by developing a cooperative problem-solving process.
• Makes residents positive stewards of their own neighborhoods.
• Unleashes enormous potential for local government.
• Builds and strengthens the community.

Local government leaders must learn the leadership skills of civic engagement and community building.

**Residents as citizens, not customers:** Customers tend to behave in similar ways. They name, blame, complain, and find fault. They also think in terms of “I” or “me,” and feel entitled and demand that someone solve their problems. Customers don’t make good partners because they don’t feel it is their responsibility to help government solve tough problems. As a result, it is difficult to engage them.

Think of yourself in a store when you have not received the help you needed. We often name, blame, complain, and find fault. We do not think about the concerns of other customers, and we demand someone solve our problem.

Citizens act quite differently. They want to solve problems. Citizens understand that they are partially responsible and accountable for the safety and quality of life of their neighborhoods. Citizens make good partners and are much easier to engage.

We must treat our residents as citizens and expect them to share responsibility for the quality of their neighborhood. Even though residents are sometimes customers, they are primarily residents with a shared responsibility to help government solve tough problems.

**Civic engagement leadership skills:** Civic engagement is the skill of designing and facilitating an effective civic engagement process. Civic engagement requires asking quality questions of citizens and engaging them in an open and productive discussion while local government listens and learns. It is another key tool in the leadership toolbox.

Civic engagement is not about having more meetings. It is not about getting more people to attend unsuccessful meetings. Civic engagement cannot and will not happen at regular council or commission meetings. It happens outside those meetings, and, if done correctly, makes those meetings more effective.

Civic engagement is not something a local government needs to do on most issues. It is most useful when applied to problems:
• Fraught with strong values or emotions.
• Needing community support.
• Having more than one right answer.

Local government cannot perform successful civic engagement if managers continue to hold that 80 percent negative image of the public. Civic engagement can take place using such various forums as traditional meetings, online discussions, a “marketplace of ideas,” and design charrettes.

There are several online applications that can be helpful, including Peak Democracy, MindMixer, and UserVoice. Personally, I have found Peak Democracy the best online platform for civil discussion.

**Community building leadership skills:** Local government’s most important infrastructure is the community. The potential that resides in our community is huge. Without a strong partnership and involvement of citizens, local government will never solve the tough problems of gangs, drugs, crime, failing schools, homelessness, lack of affordable housing, and child obesity.
We often name, blame, complain, and tough problems. As a result, it is difficult responsibility to help government solve because they don’t feel it is their that someone else solve their problems. or “me,” and feel entitled and demand Residents as citizens, not customers: and community building.

Leadership skills of civic engagement

- Makes residents positive stewards of
- Provides a positive outlet for the
- Benefits for residents and local government
- Partnership model:

Change will not be easy. Managers need to change their attitudes, roles, and stand that they are partially responsible demand someone solve our problem.

Civic engagement leadership skills:

- Can become a valuable partner, not
- Will become involved and develop
- Are smarter than we give them credit for.

How Will We Change to the

- City organization centric
- Decider
- (Public as necessary evil)

Once residents connect with their
city government. Local government can encourage building community by playing four important roles: 1) raising consciousness, 2) being a catalyst, 3) acting as a convener, and 4) becoming a facilitator. Next-door, Front Porch Forum, EveryBlock, and rblock are websites used by neighbors to stay connected.

Time for a New Journey

Managers are spending enormous time and energy on a model that does not work well. They are frustrated and tired of being yelled at, criticized, and blamed. The public is frustrated with being left out. Let’s quit beating our head against the old model and try the partnership model.

Of course, the change will be difficult. There are limited resources, and managers must learn new roles and skills. They must ask residents to spend some of their precious time helping local government.

Moving to the new model will require all of us to change: elected officials, managers, and residents. We will all be challenged. Elected officials will need to open the decision-making process to residents.

Managers will need to relax their need to be in control and rethink the way they always reach decisions. Residents will need to take some responsibility for the quality of life of their neighborhoods and their communities.

Let’s all start this journey. PM

ENDNOTES

1 “Citizen” in this context has nothing to do with legal status but means anyone who works and lives in a local government.

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RESOURCES
More information on the civic engagement process can be found in ICMA’s InFocus report: “How Civic Engagement Transforms Community Relationships” (Volume 4, No. 4, 2011). Single-copy online issues are $12.95 (ICMA members) and $19.95 (non-members) at http://icma.org/en/press/digital.)


You can also explore the topics of citizen engagement on ICMA’s Knowledge Network at icma.org/kn.
Share a photo of what inspires you to work in local government and you could win a free trip to Kansas City for ICMA’s Annual Conference in September.

Learn more: 
http://lifewellrun.org/career-resources/student-contest/
Polling Results from “Building Civic Leadership and Community” – webinar
April 13, 2016
399 locations; 861 estimated participants in live audience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many people are listening on your line?</td>
<td>80% 1 -- just myself, 14% 2-5, 4% 6-10, 2% 11-20, 1% 21 or more -- please send number using Question on webinar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which of these elements make sense for your agency to strengthen community?</td>
<td>76% focus on a partnership model rather than fix it model, 72% view residents as citizens rather than customers, 60% deeply engage residents in deciding appropriate solutions, 73% be community building and service delivery focused, 71% welcome public as a partner</td>
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<td>Which of these actions is your agency taking to build civic leadership?</td>
<td>62% programs to develop and educate residents (academies, etc.), 50% volunteer programs to prepare residents for public service, 24% steps to identify and develop talent and expertise to engage, 5% other measures (please send via “Question” function)</td>
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<td>Which of these actions would be useful to productively challenge your community?</td>
<td>74% challenge community with “real” issues, 63% do not try and “control” the outcome, 43% get out of the way, 85% facilitate and be a resource, 64% act on outcomes</td>
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<td>Which of these make sense for building community through your agency?</td>
<td>56% Civic infrastructure is as or more important than physical, 57% Be intentional about mapping out civic infrastructure, 84% It’s all about relationships and tending to them, 23% Create non-profit advisory board to lead community building, 71% It’s one relationship at a time. Manage expectations.</td>
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<td>How was this webinar of value to you and your agency? (check all that apply)</td>
<td>67% explaining why building community is critical for local govt, 84% providing models and strategies to encourage community, 79% giving examples of best practices that agencies can use, 54% offering resources to support your efforts, 3% other [send via “Question” in webinar]</td>
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