



Lessons for the Future

General Government

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Executive Summary

General administration—the city/county/regional/tribal managers, assistant or deputy city/county/regional/tribal managers, city/county attorneys, city/county clerks, and chiefs of staff—are the great translators of the organizations they serve. General administrators take inputs from the public and the city councils, commissions, and boards they serve while remaining nonpartisan and politically neutral and translating these visions into actionable work for the organization’s employees. Conversely, general administrators also take highly technical facts from their subject-matter experts and give them meaning. That is to say, general administrators are pulled vertically into the complexity of issues and solutions as well as horizontally at the wide and growing array of issues they are asked to confront. They are the great storytellers of their organizations, sifting through information from a variety of contributors to meet the diverse needs of their communities and various constituents.

The nature of these roles puts the general administrators at a unique vantage point within the organization. Not only must they deal with project-specific information, but they also must navigate complex political waters and make sure there is consistency and continuity between all levels of the governments they lead. As the general administration group for the Local Government 2030 convening, we submit that we maintain our unique vantage point to the National Academy of Public Administration’s 12 Grand Challenges. Of note, the general administration team has identified the following issues as important:

- 1) We are attempting to solve increasingly complex and wide-spread governance issues using an archaic, post-World War II model of work that is insufficient to meet the needs of modern public servants. The current model of work was constructed under a dying premise of work-life balance that leads to fatigue, burnout, silos, and banality. We must work to modernize and reinvigorate the public service profession to ensure that there are talented individuals who wish to continue doing the important work of governing at the local level.
- 2) Social inequities permeate all aspects of our society. Homelessness, social injustice, affordable housing, and other wicked problems have become partisan or politically fraught issues rather than governance issues. It is critically important that we continue to advance solutions that foster social equity in our communities.
- 3) An inconsistent focus on the resiliency of many cities, counties, tribes, and regional governments poses a significant risk. Whether it be a natural disaster, a pandemic, civil unrest, or wide-spread infrastructure failure, it is imperative that there be dedicated efforts at the local, regional and state level towards building the resilient of all communities.

This white paper submits an analysis of these issues from the lens of general administrators, through an exploration of case studies, and a discussion about the role that offers several potential responses for consideration.

Modernize and Reinvigorate the Public Service

With its origins in the Greek city-state model, the democratic system in the United States is an experiment in governance that has evolved and transformed over time. The Greek model was extrapolated and applied in a much larger context when it was brought to the United States. There are pivotal moments in this country's history including wars, civil unrest, and political shifts that have punctuated and stretched the democratic system, forcing it to change its shape and adapt. The iterations of the Minnowbrook Conferences, first in 1968, in 1988, and in 2008, are a testament to the need for the public administration profession to stop, assess, and reflect on its relevance to the democratic system it serves. Local governments including towns, cities, counties, tribal groups, and regional governments (herein referred to as "local governments"), have not consistently adopted the strategy of reflection that academia has embraced with the Minnowbrook convenings. The profession has remained largely unchanged over time and still adheres to an antiquated model of work and an approach that is inconsistent and often fails to meet the demands of modern life. As a result, local governments are facing immense challenges and are struggling to find ways to navigate the complexity, wicked problems such as climate change, poverty, sustainability, and instabilities within the labor force.

Local governments were not always this way. Alexis De Tocqueville was famously fascinated with the construct of the American town and studied them as he wrote *Democracy in America*. He wrote:

The strength of free peoples resides in the town, however. Town institutions are to liberty what primary schools are to knowledge; they put it within the grasp of the people; they give them a taste of its peaceful practice and accustom them to its use. Without town institutions, a nation can pretend to have a free government, but it does not possess the spirit of liberty (Tocqueville, 1994, p. 102).

These are powerful and important notions. To De Tocqueville, the very embodiment of liberty, the "spirit of liberty" is housed within local governments. These are the places where democracy is transacted each day and where residents of a community have arguably the most direct access to the democratic system through their ability to attend public meetings of their councils, boards, and commissions. This makes sense when we consider the type of work that is conducted in our local governments: public safety, roadway infrastructure, water supplies, and other quality of life amenities like parks, libraries, and recreation programs. These services have the most direct and immediate impact on residents' lives.

How did we get here? How did we lose our luster and our ability to be the source of the democratic experience for our residents that De Tocqueville observed in the New England towns? The ideals of civic duty and public service remain paramount to public administration. The principles of the Athenian Oath and the commitment to leaving a community better than how it was found remain cornerstone to the field, so it is unlikely that the fundamentals of the profession have changed. What is more likely is that the role of the administrator and local government public servants need to evolve to meet the needs of modern times.

The Shift of the Politics-Administration Dichotomy

The politics-administration dichotomy is deeply rooted in the educational development of public administrators. Woodrow Wilson first coined the term in his 1887 essay *The Study of Administration* where he wrote "The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics" (Wilson, 1887). One can

imagine that this notion would be practical to implement at the time it was written, in a world devoid of social media, constant communication, and the abundance of wicked problems that plague local governments today. Public administrators today take on a much more complicated and nuanced role of running communities than ever before with the introduction of social media. Previously, administrators could oversee day-to-day operations for their organizations without much interruption. Their decisions were generally made in relatively quiet council chambers and board rooms, notwithstanding the occasional contested zoning conversation or incident. Local governments could operate under a strict hierarchical system because efficiency and clarity of responsibilities were important values of that time. Elected officials set the vision and deferred implementation to the technical expertise of their staff. Elected officials could bear the brunt of political activity and buffer their staff. Staff, in turn, could remain the neutral, removed, technical experts. The role of local government employees has changed dramatically in recent years. Elected officials now want to be involved in the implementation—they want to see an issue through from start to finish instead of turning it over. Residents can (and do) openly discuss local issues on social media platforms and can do so with relative ease without ever having to attend an in-person public meeting. They can contact the city administrator, county administrator, or tribal leader, record their conversation, and share it on social media—without any context—and generate a debate that may lack pertinent details. While this type of exchange and access is great for democracy because barriers to participation have been virtually eliminated, it requires a shift in the approach for the public administration field.

The problem with local governments continuing to operate under this model of administration is that it is incongruent with modern times. Residents in many communities expect to be able to contact their local government administrators and have a greater amount of input on its operations while also calling for higher degrees of accountability and timely results. In a society that is seeing the “death of expertise”, local government administrators can no longer consistently respond to these issues as the neutral technocrats. Attempts to do this often ends poorly, with the administrator characterized as distant toward and uncaring about the communities they serve.

While times have changed, what remains the same is the need for good government. A complete abandonment of the politics-administration dichotomy is not prudent; but perhaps, we can change our expectations of administrators to be better aligned and more congruent with the communities they serve. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) recently completed its first iteration of the “Athenian Project”, a space in which public administrators are called to deliberate the Athenian Oath and have critical conversations about major philosophical issues facing the profession. That group recently presented at the 2022 ICMA Annual Conference in a session entitled “Athenian Dialogue: Partisan Divide, Why ICMA Members Must be Political”. The definitions of “partisan” and “political” were defined in the session, queuing up an important distinction: one can be political, meaning “of government” and remain politically astute without becoming partisan and maintaining a strict adherence to a particular platform.

This distinction is extremely nuanced, but nevertheless remains important for local governments and their administrators. Addressing this distinction and teaching administrators that they can be politically astute without being partisan is central to overcoming the grand challenge of modernizing and reinvigorating public service because the game has changed. In many cases, local government administrators must now be the best politicians in the room, working to develop professional relationships with their councils, boards, and elected bodies to understand their perspectives and derive strategy using emotional intelligence. As we depart from a strict separation between politics and administration, we must lean even more heavily on our ethics and standards to bridge the gap between the two. This is something the profession has done an outstanding job of articulating, training, and responding to.

What does this look like in a practical application? Re-orienting our perspectives on what is appropriate political behavior from administrators is a start, and work done with ICMA’s Athenian Project is a step in the right direction. It is critical that we share our experiences navigating politically turbulent issues with each other so we can learn from the process.

Humanizing Public Servants

A critical component in modernizing the profession is humanizing our public servants. In the midst of growing distrust and, at times, vitriol against government employees, it is important that we help the public understand that

we are not nameless, faceless bureaucrats. While we are public servants who are dedicated to public service, we are also residents with a vested interest in the overall well-being of our communities. This commitment to service and good government should provide a level of trust between administrators and the public, but somehow that does not always get translated. If we are to restore trust by humanizing public servants it is important that we harness the power of storytelling, engage in authentic community engagement, and height our accountability and transparency.

Storytelling

Part of the challenge associated with the more traditional model of the politics-administration dichotomy, is that local governments have not told their stories. We have relied too heavily on the provision of services speaking for themselves. We are not accustomed to explaining our actions to the public, and therefore are less accustomed to telling the story about what is happening with a particular project, event, or zoning case. ICMA recently published research entitled *Storytellers in Chief: How Top Local Government Managers Use Storytelling to Lead*. The research compiles empirical data collected over a decade with actual stories of how administrators use storytelling to convey what is occurring in their communities. The story has been used throughout history to relay important information about cultures, history, and special traditions. It is a powerful tool that helps connect people with critical information—even in the most contentious of situations. This is how storytelling can be used to convey what is happening with a project, why a zoning case occurred the way it did, even though they (the residents) didn't want that particular use in their community, or why a road project is taking so long. When people understand the narrative, they can piece together complex and even foreign concepts to obtain an understanding of what is happening. In this increasingly divisive world, public administrators must master the ability to explain without offending and unite people to understanding the common good for their communities.

Storytelling is also a uniquely powerful tool to motivate and inspire people. Tales of great leaders and triumphs of good over evil have always inspired. While fiction does not seem to have a place in government administration, the non-fiction narrative of public service certainly does. Telling our *why*—why we chose public service over private work, why we are committed to resolving an issue for a neighborhood, or why we fought the good fight against a developer—these are the draws to the profession. This is how public administration can capture the attention of younger generations who have demonstrated great concerns for social issues and social equity.

Council Relations

To say today's political environment is vastly different than the decade that preceded it, could be considered a gross understatement. The heightened degree of political polarization, the decrease of civility and the growing debate surrounding "fact(s)" have produced an increasingly difficult environment for general administrators to navigate both in counsel chambers and in the community. Today's technology has exacerbated the silo-ing of different groups leading to increasing monolithic "communities". Unlike previous decades, today we can easily choose to read and view only information that supports our own opinion which contributes the rise in distrust and gridlock.

Many of today's public officials have chosen to adopt these ideologies in efforts to satisfy their constituents or deliver on campaign promises. Fortunately, general administrators are sworn to uphold a code of ethics and remain unpartisan as they work with their governing bodies to present recommendations to address local issues. This is not an easy line for general administrators to walk. Part of this challenge comes in the need for administrators to be politically astute without becoming partisan because government employees are still people and people have thoughts, beliefs and opinions.

Public Engagement

Local governments are all too familiar with traditional forms of public engagement. While well intentioned (and sometimes mandated), these one-dimensional approaches do not yield the results needed to build capacity and partnerships, sustain progress, and create change. Too often, typical forms of engagement—public hearings, for example—bring out the "usual suspects," who generally appear to angrily express frustrations with the inefficiencies of their local governments. These traditional approaches often exclude marginalized communities, whose issues and barriers are then not considered during the policymaking process.

Public engagement is critical in efficient service delivery. Taking time and investing resources to improve engagement methods is often seen as a risk by local governments, but, if done correctly, residents get “the services they need, the city can better solve important problems, and trust in government improves” (Lee, 2019).

Modernized Approach

Effective public engagement should aim to be informed, authentic, inclusive, accessible, and sustainable. When local governments engage with the public effectively, they are able to better identify the public’s values and ideas, foster more civil discussions and community buy-in, improve decisions that yield stronger outcomes in a shorter timeframe, and educate the public on how local government works.

One approach that should be further reviewed is The Institute of Local Government’s (ILG) *Principles of Local Government Public Engagement* to aid in effective, ethical public engagement practices, which include:

- 1) Inclusive planning;
- 2) Transparency;
- 3) Authentic intent;
- 4) Breadth of participation;
- 5) Informed participation;
- 6) Accessible participation;
- 7) Appropriate process;
- 8) Authentic use of information received;
- 9) Feedback to participants; and
- 10) Evaluation (Institute for Local Government, 2016, pp. 2-4).

In shaping new approaches to engage with the public, local governments must also consider the role of data. Communities who use Bloomberg Philanthropies’ *What Works Cities* initiative have reported that the percentage of communities engaging with residents on the progress of their goals has increased from 19% to 70% (Bloomberg Philanthropies, 2021). Public officials must consider “the role data and evidence can play in improving transparency and advancing residents’ trust in municipal governance” (Evans, Zapata Encias, Siefeld, & Starshinina, 2021).

Building Relationships and Trust with Out-of-Reach Communities

As previously noted, building trust between local government practitioners and the residents they serve has been a continuous challenge, complicated by a changing political climate and a global pandemic. Policymakers must strive to reach a broader audience by first understanding the barriers to public engagement and being intentional with their efforts to mitigate this challenge.

ILG’s profile on Community Leadership Programs highlights the importance of these efforts. Community leadership programs “build skills and support the development of emerging leaders through a series of seminars, workshops and other local projects. The programs seek individuals who want to improve their community and give voice to traditionally under-represented community members” (Institute for Local Government, p. 2). Key components of these programs include:

- 1) Identifying issues of community interest;
- 2) Building skills to support engagement; and
- 3) Fostering new and inspired leaders.

Local governments must also foster relationships with trusted leaders of the community groups, organizations, and agencies that spearhead these initiatives. These community figures often act as a link between policymakers and members of traditionally underrepresented communities. Leaders of these organizations “can be vital in identifying and engaging underrepresented populations that might not otherwise participate in public discussions and the local decision-making process” (p. 6).

Further, community leadership programs are pipelines for emerging leaders. Investing in these relationships early on can help to fill appointments, cultivate volunteers, and mold future public officials, which is vital in ensuring that the policymaking process is equitable and reflective of the community it represents (p. 6).

Improving Processes and Building Capacity

Committing to improving the processes in which local governments deliver services is integral in creating position interactions with the public. Creating user-centered tools will lead to more efficient service delivery and more faith in local government.

One example of this is the city of Orlando, Florida. After receiving feedback that residents found their website difficult to navigate, Orlando created a plan to train their employees with efficient service delivery at the forefront of their goals. Their three-day Digital Services Academy, run by a new Digital Services team, was created to train staff in evaluating the effectiveness of their current digital interactions on their city website. Through this academy, employees nominated by their managers evaluated other departments' digital forms and created new forms based on feedback from their colleagues. Employees then tested their prototypes with the public at city parks and made changes based on this input before going live on their website. As a result, satisfaction of service delivery has increased by over 60%, 170 user-centered services are available on Orlando's city website, and over 100 city employees are educated in the importance of user-friendly design (Lee, 2019).

By directly involving the public in their mission to create user-friendly digital tools, Orlando began the process of building capacity for long-term public engagement. Residents can take a short survey to submit their feedback about their experience using their city website with the option to volunteer to provide feedback in the future. As a result of this feature, more than 700 residents have volunteered to serve on a panel that provides additional feedback to the city via surveys and tests services as needed (Engaged Cities Award, n.d.). It is important that we continue to look for ways that we can continue to improve process and build capacity within our community.

Utilizing Digital Tools and Technology

Local governments are constantly trying to adapt to rapidly evolving technology and the role it plays in our everyday lives. Over the last decade, the civic tech industry has become more prevalent in engaging with the public. When local governments choose to leverage various technologies to engage with their residents, "cities empower their citizens, improve satisfaction levels, and enable proactive communication and interaction with city departments" (Governing Institute, 2015). However, these tools – and the way local governments use them – must be evaluated for their effectiveness in different populations and sub-communities. Local governments who are not diligent in understanding the makeup of their communities and their specific barriers to public engagement may end up only magnifying the voices that are already involved in the public engagement processes (Labosier, 2020, p. 2). Local governments must recognize that like traditional forms of public engagement, digital engagement is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Knowing and understanding the demographic makeup of your community is critical in using digital tools to inform the policymaking process.

The use of mobile technology in general is most effective with "younger, lower-income, or more ethnically diverse residents... WhatsApp and WeChat tend to have higher percentages of minority users" (Labosier, 2020). Additionally, engagement via social media platforms varies with age groups. Almost 70% of adults ages 50-64 and almost 50% of adults 65+ use Facebook, while Instagram and SnapChat are more popular with adults in their 20s through 40s. These demographics are useful in crossing platforms in order to yield results most reflective of the community.

San Jose, California is a strong example of this. The city conducted targeted public outreach to historically disenfranchised neighborhoods to collect data on households without access to broadband. San Jose then applied this data and created digital desert heatmaps, using it to develop comprehensive plans to close the digital divide. The city negotiated outcome-based contracts with providers, resulting in almost 3,000 small cell sites in these areas. This information was critical in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. San Jose engaged with schools, community organizations, and families to indicate how many WiFi-hotspots were needed, and then acted quickly to ensure over 13,000 hotspots were ordered and distributed to those most in need (Evans, Zapata Encias, Siefeld, & Starshinina, 2021, pp. 5-6).

Like San Jose, local governments quickly turned to creative, innovative methods to engage with residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, with most relying heavily on technology. These solutions brought the issue of equity access to public engagement to light; barriers such as childcare or lack of transportation no longer hindered residents who could speak from their home at a public meeting on Zoom (Labosier, 2020, p. 2). Moving forward, local governments should not revert back to their “old” ways, but note that these digital tools should supplement, not replace, in-person engagement (Labosier, 2020, p. 4).

Changing the Culture Among Employees

At its core, public engagement is “about changing the culture of local government: recognizing that the goal is not getting the public on board with what the experts have decided it needs, but rather shaping government policies to meet the needs and priorities of the public that they serve” (Labosier, 2020, p. 4). The role that public employees play in changing this culture is critical, yet often overlooked. Ensuring that authentic, effective public engagement is a value throughout city halls takes a commitment of time, intention, and resources; however, these commitments will result in innovative and satisfactory service delivery, more efficient spending of tax dollars, and employees who feel productive, fulfilled, and valued.

The city of Fort Collins, Colorado has created a workplace culture that values public engagement. In its 34-page *Public Engagement Guide*, the city highlights the importance of public engagement, stating that “local government has the advantage of being closest to the people it serves,” and that residents “are an extension of our efforts and should take part as collaborative problem solvers... by exercising effective public engagement practices, city government becomes a vehicle for participatory democracy creating citizens who act instead of watch” (City of Fort Collins, p. 3). Fort Collins points out that public engagement goes beyond “checking a box,” and that it should help deliver the best services possible for their community.

More than a guide offering tips, resources, and guiding principles, Fort Collins created a public engagement support network, which includes a public engagement team. The team hosts roundtables to enable public employees to problem solve and collaborate on public engagement efforts. In addition, the city circulates *Project Buzz*, a newsletter employees can subscribe to help foster productive public engagement. Equity and barriers in the engagement process are also highlighted in the plan, as the city offers a Civic Engagement Liaison to assist in building relationships with traditionally marginalized communities.

Public Safety

A critical role of a local government is delivering public safety services to its community. In recent years, public safety officers have responded to an increasing number of calls from people experiencing mental health crisis (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019, p. 1). “As such, there is increasing urgency to ensure that officers and 911 dispatchers have the training, tools, and support to safely connect people to needed mental health services” (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019, p. 1).

Local government efforts to respond to calls for people who need social services instead of a punitive response have been hampered by a lack of extra-agency partnerships (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019, p. 1). “Understanding a need for greater collaboration, many [. . .] agencies have begun taking important steps to improve responses to people who have mental health needs” (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019, p. 1). These steps have included “improvements in practices, such as providing mental health training to law enforcement workforces and including mental health, [and] crisis intervention, [. . .] as part of some states’ law enforcement training standards” and designating officers for specialized mental health response teams (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019, p. 1). This has resulted in an emerging cooperative policing trend which attempts to divert community members dealing with homelessness and mental illness away from punitive action and towards supportive resources.

This cross-system approach, known as police-mental health collaborations (“PMHCs”), requires local governments to build community partnerships with other public entities, non-profits and healthcare organizations (Dupont, Cochran, & Pillsbury, 2007, pp. 5-8). PMHCs require commitment from law enforcement and political leaders; formal partnerships with community-based mental health providers and organizations representing people living

with mental illnesses; quality training on mental health and techniques that is provided to all officers; and written procedures that are clear and adhered to by staff. (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019, p. 2)

An example of this being successful can be found in St. Petersburg, Florida when they created the Community Assistance and Life Liaison (“CALL”) program wherein emergency dispatchers will send social workers to certain calls for service “including mental health crisis, suicide intervention, truancy, homeless complaints, and neighborhood disputes” (City of Petersburg, 2022). South Lake Tahoe, California created a similar program—“South Tahoe Area Collaborative Services”—intended to “to improve [its police] response to persons experiencing mental health crises, substance use issues and homelessness” (Tahoe Daily Tribune, 2021). Through this program, officers review calls for service regarding mental health, substance use and homelessness, and related homeless issues such as illegal camps, and trash on private property. Rather than issue citations, the City’s police department works to provide individuals with access to services and support (Tahoe Daily Tribune, 2021). This necessitates partnering with area stakeholders, such as EMS entities, hospitals, homelessness non-profits, behavioral health agencies, school districts, family services organizations, and transportation providers (Tahoe Daily Tribune, 2021). Programs such as these should be further researched to understand the outcomes and provide local governments with more resources to address these complicated issues.

The Council of State Government Justice Center outlines the following approach for local administrators to follow to implement this approach.

- 1) Develop relationships with executives in the behavioral health system to get buy-in for the collaboration, promote the initiatives to the public and internally, and coordinate efforts with advocacy organizations.
- 2) Engage local community organizations and advocacy groups that represent consumers of mental health services and people with lived experience and their families. This engenders support and buy-in from local agencies, bringing partners together that might not otherwise have a strong record of collaboration.
- 3) Establish an interagency workgroup including law enforcement, behavioral health, and government and community-based organizations. Workgroups bring the partner agencies together to regularly plan, implement, and assess the success of the PMHC. An effective workgroup should reflect “the community’s demographic composition (e.g., racially and economically) and includes members from not just law enforcement and behavioral health, but also local advisory groups, criminal justice coordinating councils, public safety answering points (e.g., 911 dispatchers), hospitals, courts, and corrections, as well as people who have mental illnesses, family members, and other advocates who have a stake in the success of the collaboration.
- 4) Advocate for PMHC funds including for training, overtime, vehicles, and office space.
- 5) Affect a cultural shift by modifying officers’ performance evaluations to include PMHC goals and recognizing officers who employ skills to further the program (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019).

Foster Social Equity

In the last ten years, local government has made a concerted effort to apply equity in the advancement of public policy, program implementation, and service delivery. From equitable budgeting principles to equity performance measures, local governments are embedding the term equity in the way they do business. However, the concept of equity in government is not new, as evidenced by the discussion and call for confronting social inequities at the Minnowbrook I in 1968 and continued to be a theme in Minnowbrook II and III (Gooden & Protillo, 2011). But between then and now, equity was often interchanged with equality. So, what exactly is equity?

In 2000, the National Academy of Public Administration defined equity as “the fair, just, and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract, and the fair and equitable distribution of public services, and implementation of public policy, and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy” (Gooden & Protillo, 2011). The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) defines equity as “one interpretation of fairness or justice...people are treated uniquely by public policy to compensate for different circumstances and consequent need for help from government” (Government Finance Officers Association, n.d.). And finally, the International City and County Management Association (ICMA) defines equity as “the guarantee of fair treatment, advancement, opportunity and access for all individuals while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups and ensuring that all community members have access to community conditions and opportunities to reach their full potential and to experience optimal well-being and quality of life” (International City/County Management Association, 2022).

Equity in Government

The meaning of equity differs from organization to organization, but at its core remains a focus on fairness and justness. The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) has been the leading organization to support all levels of government to normalize, organize, and operationalize equity not just in programs but in policy by building a national network of local government organizations committed to the equity work (GARE, 2015). As a result of GARE’s work, hundreds of jurisdictions across the country are embedding equity into their decision-making processes using their resources such as technical assistance, toolkits, webinars, and trainings. Following in GARE’s footsteps, professional organizations such as ICMA and GFOA have developed their own curricula and resources to support their member organizations with the implementation of equity.

The trend has now shifted from ‘normalizing’ equity which is the creation and agreement of a shared definition of equity within the organization and across its communities to ‘operationalizing’ equity and embedding it in service delivery and public policy. The persistent inequalities and disinvestment, especially in communities of color, across the country have led to a call from the community to reimagine public service. Local governments are past the point of understanding what exactly equity is and are now looking for actionable strategies to address inequities in their jurisdictions that produce impactful outcomes for all communities.

Gender Disparities in Local Government Executive Leadership

As equity is operationalized by local governments, consideration needs to be given to both the external delivery of services and internally to the organization. This is yet another example of the 12 Grand Challenges intersecting with one another. As we look at the people that hold key leadership positions within our communities, we should reflect on how that aligns (or doesn’t align) with the make-up of our specific community.

One area that we can see this play out and have good data to demonstrate the need for further discussion is the gender disparities in the executive leadership of local governments. Beyond pay disparities, women also face significant discrimination in the workplace; they are regularly overlooked for promotions and in some instances, struggle to be afforded the same level of respect as their male colleagues. Over the past decade, city and county manager

associations at the state, regional and national level have sought to increase the number of women in leadership roles. A 2018 membership diversity study conducted by the Florida City and County Management Association found that only 25% of their female members were in leadership roles (Hannah-Spurlock & Silverboard, 2021). These results are similar to those found by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) in their 2021 membership survey, which found that only 19% of COA's nationally were women and 40% of ACAO nationally were women (International City/County Management Association, n.d.). This data highlights the severity of the issue and the need for intentional action. Although there have been improvements over the past few years, progress on this issue will require continued support from elective bodies, diverse candidate recruitment strategies, and a comprehensive network of executive women mentors.

Equity in the Community

Communities thrive when all people regardless of gender, race, disability, or geographic location has equal access to opportunity. Unfortunately, for far too long, local government systems and policies have disproportionately effected minorities and marginalized communities. Recognize the potential of public services to be a source for good, local government leaders across the country are taking steps to make their communities a more just and equitable place to live.

Criminal Justice

Acknowledging that crime and incarceration erode a community's vitality, focusing on the improvement of community-police relations is of immense importance if our profession hopes to truly address the distrust of law enforcement among racial and ethnic minorities. While any intervention should be tailored to meet local needs, research has shown that strategies that incorporate open and ongoing dialogue on issues of race and community relations with the police department, recruiting diverse personnel, transparent reporting, and regularly scheduled community town halls to be most effective.

Building on this growing field of research the City of Danville, VA, has overhauled its approach to gang prevention and community policing through their Police Engage in Active Community Engagement (P.E.A.C.E.) initiative. Over the course of the past three years this stratified approach to policing has helped build community trust, prevent and reduce crime, and reduce juvenile recidivism. The program has achieved this by partnering with local organizations to provide crime prevention services through employment and training programs and collaborating with residents to improve crime reporting and police response times. Together they were able to reduce reported motor vehicle thefts by 67%, reduce violent crime by 51%, and reduce property crime by 23% (Booth, 2022).

Community Health & Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of our respective communities is of the utmost importance. Among the many things unearthed by the COVID-19 pandemic has been the persistent disparities in access to health and wellness services. However, health and health care disparities are not new. They have been documented for decades and reflect longstanding structural and systemic inequities. Today, city and county managers are applying new and innovative approaches to this longstanding issue. For example, Corpus Christi, TX, created a wellness and health initiative "Safe-Fun- Fit at the Bayfront" to help increase the number of residents participating in physical activities. The program designated a 1.25-mile fitness lane that reduces crowding on sidewalks and allows residents to bike, run, jog, or walk. Another example of invitation is the City of Phoenix, AZ "Fit PHX Initiative" which allows residents to sign up for free group workout and healthy cooking classes". These are just a few examples that illustrate the transformative power of innovation in the areas of access, affordability, and opportunity that change lives on the opposite side of convention. This is an area that needs to be further researched and explored to give communities more tools to implement innovative solutions that work for them.

Rural & Urban Divide

As we reflect on social equity, one crucial area to address, in addition to the components already highlighted, is the current rhetoric about the 'urban-rural divide.' As outlined in, *The 'Rural-Urban Divide' Further Myths About Race and Poverty—Concealing Effective Policy Solutions*, there are several myths that have been perpetuated about the characteristics that comprise urban and rural areas that don't address the nuances of specific areas and can negatively

impact how we address policy and how people are represented at every level of government (Love & Hadden Loh, 2020).

Census Count Impacts

In March of 2022, the U.S. Census Bureau issued a press release that quoted Director Robert L. Santos saying, “Today’s results show statistical evidence that the quality of the 2020 Census total population count is consistent with that of recent censuses” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). While on the surface that could be considered a positive outcome given the additional complexities of the collection efforts that occurred in 2020, there are still some groups that are either under- or over-counted.

The same release noted “the 2020 Census undercounted the Black or African American population, the American Indian or Alaska Native population living on a reservation, the Hispanic or Latino population, and other people who reported being of Some Other Race.” The 2020 Census statistically significantly undercounted the Black or African American population by 3.30%, the Hispanic or Latino population by 4.99%, and American Indian or Alaska Native population living on a reservation by 5.64% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

The census is a critical tool used by the Federal Government to distribute federal funding. With undercounts happening in historically vulnerable populations, it further exacerbates a systemic issue of getting resources to populations that would most benefit from the funding.

Not only does the Census help identify funding, but it is also a tool used to help inform re-districting efforts. When vulnerable populations are undercounted, it not only limits access to federal funding for the next ten years, but it also impacts these communities' ability to elect representatives proportionally to other appropriately counted groups. This only further perpetuates systemic injustices, and impacted communities have little recourse until the next census is completed.

There is little that local governments can do to address the under- and over-counts for the 2020 Census; however, communities that are impacted should be aware of the issue and take steps to ensure that there is an understanding of how the entire community is being served and to understand where there are gaps in representation at the local level as it relates to the workforce, governing body, advisory boards, and other community groups.

Building Resilient Communities

In the wake of a global pandemic, communities have used the word resilient to describe their return to normalcy, which is fitting since the common definitions of resilient are the ability to bounce back or recover quickly in the event of a disruption or disturbance. A quick search of the literature on resilience will return articles focused on climate change or hazard mitigation, but resilience and its principles have been applied to various fields and disciplines such as social work, urban planning, and transportation. Local governments recognize that their challenges are diverse, ranging from natural disasters, economic fluctuations, to a global pandemic; and their response to these challenges must be strategic and adaptable.

A jurisdiction's resilience is the function of its many parts such as its infrastructure, economy, people, environment, and government. The more complex these subsystems are, the more complex the approach and strategy to building resilience becomes for a community. In 2014, Arup and the Rockefeller Foundation launched a comprehensive Cities Resilience Framework (Framework) to support cities seeking to understand their opportunities for growth and areas of strength. The Framework used a systems approach for local governments to articulate their capacities to respond to chronic stresses or sudden shocks under four categories:

- 1) Health and well-being (people)
- 2) Urban system and services (place)
- 3) Economy and society (organization)
- 4) Leadership and strategy (knowledge)

Within the four categories are indicators that provide a holistic overview of the subsystems within a community that articulates the capacity for resilience by identifying the outcome of actions to build resilience and not specifically the actions itself. For example, under the 'Health and Well-Being' category one of the indicators is 'minimal human vulnerability' which can encompass a whole host of actions to accomplish that outcome. Having developed and tested the Framework in collaboration with 10 cities across the globe, the Framework was then utilized by the 100 Resilient Cities Program, also funded by the Rockefeller Foundation (Foundation).

Starting in 2013, the 100 Resilient Cities Program (Program) provided funding to 100 cities across the globe over the course of six years to develop resilience strategies and create a network of practitioners who can learn from and help each other. The Program is now called the Resilient Cities Network (network), a city-led non-profit that works to expand resilience practices to other communities by sharing best practices and peer-to-peer learning to develop their own resilient strategies. The United States currently has the most member-cities at 21 of any region as of 2022 and the list is expected to grow as local governments engage the Network and develop their own resilience strategies and dedicate personnel and funding to the implementation. Separate from the Network, local governments have created 'Chief Resilience Officer' positions to lead the development and implementation of resilience plans or strategies, recognizing their importance to the longevity and sustainability of their communities.

The success of the Network, the Framework, and the proliferation of 'Chief Resilience Officers' would not have been possible without partnerships from the public and private sector. A review of the various strategies currently in place by any local government within the Network will show that partnerships with private sector are critical to reaching goals. Take for example Houston, the 101st Resilient City. Houston was a unique city in the sense that their entry into the network was funded by a private company, as opposed to Foundation funding. In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, their funder recognized the pressing need for a strategy to not only respond to natural disasters but also support the community by addressing long standing disinvestment in communities of color.

Houston’s plan also serves as a best practice of combining hazard mitigation, emergency preparedness, and social justice in one plan. Earlier plans and strategies by cities selected in the first wave of the Network focused predominantly on climate change, but as cities identified different vulnerabilities, a shift occurred in the subsequent plans to focus on addressing social inequity as the key strategy to ensuring a community has the ability to bounce back.

The future challenges of resilience in the profession are the ever-evolving definitions of resilience, the role of a Chief Resilience Officer, and the need to center social equity in the planning, implementation, and development of a strategy. As previously mentioned, the term resilience is commonly associated with climate change or hazard mitigation, but in the wake of a global pandemic and civil unrest, the planning and implementation of resilience plans must be broad but also applicable to various shocks and stressors. Chief Resilience Officers, or any equivalent role, have the unique opportunity to work across internal and external silos, integrate resilience theory of change frameworks, align plans and strategies, and foster social equity. Resilience-building activities requires the intentional inclusion of social equity principles to ensure that the most vulnerable populations not only participate in the planning process but also benefit from the various recommendations within the plan. The following case studies demonstrate the ways in which resilience planning has been undertaken.

Extreme Weather Conditions and Natural Disasters

Natural disasters such as fire, flooding, and drought, pose a major threat to communities across the United States (Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 2021) “Natural disasters are becoming more frequent and more costly as a result of climate change. Reducing the threats these disasters pose to lives, properties, and the economy is a top priority for many communities” (Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 2021). “[E]mergency response begins at the local [. . .] level [which] is closest to the [. . .] communities most impacted by an emergency, can plan in advance with local resources and respond more quickly than higher government levels” (Wolf-Fordham, 2020, p. 560). Therefore, local public agencies have an important role to play in building resilient communities (National Academy of Public Administration, n.d.).

Local administrators play a role in each stage of emergency planning and must consider preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery (Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), 2021).

A key precept of resilient communities as applied to the natural disaster planning is partnerships (Waugh Jr. & Streib, 2006, p. 131). In recent decades, emergency planning and response has been hampered by a failure to leverage partnerships (Wolf-Fordham, 2020, p. 562); (Waugh Jr. & Streib, 2006, p. 136). Recalibrating government approaches to partnering and integrating new communications platforms to engage all community stakeholders is critical to protecting life and property within a community. Coordinating resources and increasing agencies’ disaster preparedness, and response requires a greater focus on (1) developing effective multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plans, and (2) engaging the public and business community.

Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan

One core consideration for local governments in building resiliency is developing a successful multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan. “Mitigation is most effective when it is based on a comprehensive, long-term plan that is developed before a disaster occurs. The purpose of mitigation planning is to identify local policies and actions that can be implemented over the long term to reduce risk and future losses from hazards. These mitigation policies and actions are identified based on an assessment of hazards, vulnerabilities, and risks and the participation of a wide range of stakeholders and the public in the planning process” (Federal Emergency Management Administration, 2013). When local governments create a FEMA-approved mitigation plan, they will become eligible for certain federal emergency funding pursuant to the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 and its implementing regulations. *See* Public Law 106-390, Sec. 322; 44 CFR § 201.6.

While a “community can develop its own single jurisdiction plan”, it can also “work with neighboring jurisdictions on a multijurisdictional plan” (Federal Emergency Management Administration, 2013). Multi-jurisdictional plans

can offer advantages such as: (1) improved communication and coordination; (2) mitigation of shared risks; (3) leveraged individual capabilities and sharing costs and resources; and (4) avoiding duplication of efforts (Federal Emergency Management Administration, 2013). Thus, partnering allows coordination and assignment of emergency responsibilities and allows participating jurisdictions to receive federal funds to support their efforts. Public administrators can assist this process by organizing departmental stakeholders, communicating with participating jurisdictions and third-party emergency management consultants, and assessing legal requirements, to navigate the FEMA approval process.

Engaging the Public and Local Business Community

A second core consideration for local governments in building resiliency is improving engagement with the public and local business community. As discussed above, it is important to create a Hazard Mitigation Plan before an emergency occurs. One important stakeholder in plan development is the public. FEMA requires that the public be involved in the planning process (Federal Emergency Management Administration, 2013, pp. I-3). “[T]he public should be engaged early to understand community priorities. In addition, although members of the public may not be technical experts, they can help identify community assets and problem areas, describe issues of concern, narrate threat and hazard history, prioritize proposed mitigation alternatives, and provide ideas for continuing public involvement after plan adoption.” FEMA. (2013), p. 3-3; 44 CFR § 201.6(b)(1). During public outreach, agencies should “ensure equal access and meaningful participation of all individuals with access and functional needs, including individuals from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, with and without limited English proficiency, seniors, children, and members of underserved populations” (Federal Emergency Management Administration, 2013, pp. I-3). Contacting grassroots community leaders and NGOs are one viable approach to engaging traditionally underrepresented groups (Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), 2021, p. 8).

Community engagement during an emergency is also critical. Public administrators, in performing public information duties, should “alert and communicate with their communities in various ways, such as using electronic [. . .] alert systems, outdoor sirens, the media, and social media (Mitcham, Taylor, & Harris, 2021, pp. 3-5). The “widespread usage of social media” has given rise to the trend of using “social media in a disaster both as an [immediate] information source and a channel for crisis communications” Mitcham, et al. (2021), p. 3.

Public agencies using emerging communication platforms such as social media for emergencies should be mindful of conflicting disaster-related messaging with other stakeholders which can create confusion. To avoid this problem, stakeholders “must establish communication frameworks prior to a disaster.” Mitcham, et al. (2021), p. 3-5. Multi-jurisdictional mitigation plans provide an opportunity to develop such a framework. Also, “[v]ulnerable populations in affected communities, such as older adults and individuals with low socioeconomic status, might lack access to smartphones, [. . .] or internet connection needed to receive disaster related social media messaging.” Therefore, primary communication methods such as radios and emergency alert systems should be used concurrently. Mitcham, et al. (2021), p. 5.

The local business community should also be engaged for disaster planning and response. Natural disasters disrupt transportation and availability of essential goods such as food and water (Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), 2021, p. 7). It is recommended that public administrators engage with the business community to plan for disruptions to essential goods and services and communicate with the public when disruptions occur.

Housing Affordability

Access to safe and affordable housing is paramount to building resilient communities that serve all residents. The housing market is impacted by several variables that are not inherently under the direct control of local governments, such as interest rates, supply and demand curves, cost of labor and materials, land limitations, among others. However, despite that, local governments have a role to play in finding a path forward to ensure that all community members have a safe and affordable place to live.

There are a number of emerging trends that can be found across the country of local governments being an active partner to find solutions to affordable housing challenges. Some of these include, but are not limited to, housing

market analysis, housing tool kits, public-private partnerships and so forth. These trends should continue to be reviewed and implemented as the needs of the community are understood.

As general administrators, it is critical that we look at this issue holistically and recognize the importance of finding long-term solutions that understand the tangential impacts of adding housing or the consequences of not meeting those demands within our communities. There is an impact to the services that we provide when the supply and demand curve for housing is out of alignment. Not only does affordable housing impact the resiliency of our communities but it also impacts social equity.

This challenge, like many others, is not one that can be addressed solely at the local level by a singular governmental agency. Instead, it is an issue that needs the support of all levels of government, private development, and non-profits, all working together to accomplish a common goal. This is a multi-faceted challenge, and several tools will have to be used. There is no one-size fits all approach to addressing housing affordability.

Conclusion

The general administration group has identified modernizing and reinvigorating public service, fostering social equity and building resilient communities as the most pertinent challenges to the work it does. There is also an understanding the NAPA Grand Challenges are intertwined and do not exist exclusive of one another. General administrators cannot address modernizing and reinvigorating public service without discussing the importance of developing new approaches to public engagement and connecting individuals to meaningful work. Understanding how being a steward of natural resources and addressing climate change along with fostering social equity is key to building resilient communities.

As the great translators of the communities they serve, general administration must work harder than ever to manage the narrowing gap between the day-to-day administration and politics of local government. The unsatisfactory action on wicked issues at other levels of government has placed the expectation to work towards resolution on these challenges at the local government level. General administration finds itself exercising political astuteness while maintaining its apolitical status. General administration is uniquely situated to tell the stories of their communities, build relationships with disenfranchised populations, and value the input gathered through public engagement. Furthermore, as the great translators, general administration must strategize to build communities capable of bouncing back after a natural disasters and economic fluctuations. While emergency preparedness and hazard mitigation plans are important to responding to a natural disaster and extreme weather conditions, addressing social inequity and focusing on different vulnerabilities such as housing affordability is key to the development of these preparedness plans and ensuring resiliency.

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