

Manager's Role in Community Leadership

State Discussion Notes – As of September 15, 2024

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Maine Town and City Management Association Summer Institute

August 14, 2024

Session on The Manager's Role in Community Leadership (notes from each table that participated in the session)

Nathan Poore, Falmouth Maine Town Manager, introduced the topic and facilitated the discussion after each table had 45 minutes to discuss the questions raised in the PowerPoint presentation. The following are notes taken at each table.

General findings/summary from notes below and facilitated large group/session discussion. The overall consensus is that the manager's role has not and should not radically change. Among many other tasks outside their duties of overseeing all service delivery and operations, managers are coaches to elected officials, evaluators, convenors, analysts, and must adapt to the elected officials and community needs. In most cases, managers are not at the front of policy development, and they strive to be neutral.

What is community leadership?

Table 1

- Building policies and culture internally and then taking it the larger community level
- Paying attention and shifting as your council priorities evolve
- Cheerleader to the team
- Meeting your community where they are at but also initiate some jumpstarts on where the community should go
- Also knowing when to slow the pace to make sure the overall community is ready
- Being engaged getting the message out

Table 2

- Listening to the needs of the community
- Delegate to be trusted
- Anticipating the future needs – long term goals. Mission of community, facilitate bring in development needs with community balance.

Table 3

- Topical, depends on situation
- Forecasting and planning
- Behind the scenes support

Table 4

- Evolution of neutrality given need for research and inform decision makers
- Divisive political environment makes presentation of facts challenging
- Is community leadership a facilitator or mediator
- Perception/challenge when presenting facts is that you are on one side of the issue
- Find common threads and use that to guide policy decisions, using trust building
- Talk about issue in pros and cons and present staff recommendations
- Consider personal values in evaluating manager positions as conflicts in community values can create hardships
- Role requires extensive work communicating behind the scenes, to prepare.
- Manager is a coach and provides historical context and forward-looking predictions

Table 5

- Communicating/connecting
- Family public events – ice cream social
- Senior lunches monthly
- Conversations with older generation
- Coffee with a cop

Table 6

- Recommend policy
- Follow Council and Community direction
- Represent as many people as possible

Table 7

- Elected officials/staff/community organizations take many forms
- Form of government and organizational structure impact who is expected to step up
- Identifying legislative process will define or outline the path you take
- Will always facilitate and build consensus

Table 8

- Caries depending on community
- Council bears a lot of responsibility in providing leadership within the community

What role does data serve?

Table 2

- Voice of the community
- Awareness of unmet vision/needs
- Changes in population and needs way of looking at community outside of tradition.

Table 3

- Increasing use and role
- Essential to have reliable good data
- Conversion from paper to digital
- Only as value if used and applied

- Examples – code, construction, budget, solid waste, GIS,
- Survey data and feedback

Table 4

- Utilize data to support work to educate constituents

Table 7

- Stakeholder engagement session to build data points
- Com plan and permit data are helpful

Table 8

- Critically important in evaluating pros and cons of actions
- Take out the emotion and provides real information
- Reveals trends
- Removes some level of arguments

What is neutrality in the actions of managers?

Table 1

- Bringing it back to the council goals and just lay out pros and cons and relation to the goal
- Goal setting presents the biggest challenge to neutrality. Keep things community wide rather than niche changes
- Balancing staff expertise and council just doing what they want
- Getting diverse councilors to work together and come to some common ground. If you do not get harmony the optics to the public are poor and people don't feel confident in decisions being made
- Managers used to be engineers and now we are social workers
- Just be helpful
- Shared leadership model

Table 2

- Bipartisan - not taking sides.
- Carrying out, facilitating the vision
- Collective input
- Let go of making all people happy, struggle with change

Table 3

- Want to do the work and not be out front
- Depends on the board/council (do they lead or do they have the manager lead)
- Can't be neutral on every issue and are expected to make recommendations
- Being a convener is important
- Education of the community is an important role and element of neutrality (just the facts)
- Sometimes we need to push back on bad or illegal ideas
- Public appearance of neutrality is important

Table 4

- Listen more and talk less
- Use active listening techniques to bring people together
- Trust the process and allow it to play out

Table 5

- Non bias
- No IRD mindset, neutral treatment/thinking
- Provide both side of a topic, what it means, provide information for decision making

Table 6

- You have to present both sides
- Be unbiased
- Be neutral

Table 8

- Managers must advocate for non-partisanship
- There are some areas with no position is necessary
- Opportunities to be as neutral as possible
- This has changed in today's society – a lot of pressure to paint people a certain way
- Being neutral is a balance of being responsive and avoiding certain impressions to ensure confidence and support of elected officials and ourselves as managers.

How does the manager build credibility?

Table 8 (This table made up a new topic/question)

- Code of Ethics – adhering to this is vitally important for neutrality.
- Providing services is not partisan
- The relationship between manager and elected officials – manager is still responsible for carrying out policy.
- Important to evaluate pros and cons
- Spin the positive side or intent to maintain neutrality on a topic or action by Council.
Rarely simple matters

Balance of tension of political neutral and reformer – guide board/council

Table 2

- Remind the community of the ability to carry out vision
- Trust of board/council/residents and town manager
- Education, transparency and communication
- Identify the change makers, vocal residents and get their input, educate

Table 3

- Sustained focus
- Transparency
- Discussed climate change as a good case study / example

Table 4

- In context of organizational improvements, use position to reform as opportunists that push and provide
- Facilitation or puppet masters
- Time and experience as manager can impact their ability to lead

Table 5

- Public workshops
- Community involvement
- Use the feedback
- Push political parties
- Neutral presentations of facts to the Council

Table 6

- The direction of the policy makers
- Making sure we are pointing policy makers in the right direction but providing information from both sides.
- Taking the lead of Community or board members
- Reforming more for process

Table 8

- Get ahead so people don't create other issues or misconceptions.
- Manager supports the Council
- Communicate and clean up misconceptions
- Input is important
- Meaningful engagement – varied and creative approaches. Must be regular and consistent
- Social media can create many issues but cant be ignored.
- Thoughtful engagement – see what comments on particular theme

Who are the partners?

Table 3

- Depends on the topic
- Stakeholder groups
- Professional services and expert opinions
- Public
- Reinforce our roles as managers not politicians

Table 8

- Elected officials, staff, community members budget is hot topic that drives participation.

How do we define the role of manager?

Table 5

- Promote positive atmosphere
- Show care
- Truly listen
- Transparency
- Flexible open and adapt
- Employee retention
- Creative and innovative

Table 6

- To provide all the information possible as unbiased as possible

Table 7

- Statutes and charters direct us
- Incorporate statutes into process
- More manager involvement in DEI work. Facilitate community conversations.
- When to direct constituency to policy makers – when does it cross that threshold

Northwest Regional City Managers Conference

March 27, 2024

Seaside, Oregon

“The Manager’s Role in Community Leadership”

Community Issues

Unhoused

Library Materials

Public Safety

Housing Needs

Infrastructure

Tourism

Mental Health

Marijuana Sales

Artificial Intelligence

Growth

Fiscal Responsibility

Recruitment/Retention of Staff

Political Divide

Mix of Services

Social Media

Community Leadership/Role of the Manager

Pursue “What’s Right”

Convene and Engage All Voices

Serving as a Broker to Community Issues

Bringing Together Voices

Qualities/Tactics for Manager’s to Be Better Community Leaders

Better able to address with tenure in position

Work hard to develop good relationships with individual Council Members

Better training for elected officials

City Managers being courageous

Support elected officials in being courageous

Discuss with City Council specifically how we lead communities

Community Academies – share how government works

Share models for successful difficult community conversations

City Managers share local thought leadership / blogs, OpEd posts

Issues – ICMA Declaration of Ideals

Address building community trust in addition to “maintain and enhance”

Expand “develop a responsive, dynamic local government organization” to better reflect current challenges on workforce recruitment and retention.

Manager's Role in Community Leadership

Kentucky City/County Manager's Association (KC/CMA)

February 2024 in Louisville, Kentucky.

Brian Dehner, City Administrator of Edgewood, Kentucky participated in the Manager's Role in Community Leadership session at ICMA in Austin in 2023 and asked that KC/CMA engage in a similar conversation.

Raftelis was asked to share the ICMA presentation with the group and engage KC/CMA in some reflection on key questions.

During the 1-hour session, participants discussed a series of questions in small groups, including:

- What is community leadership?
- How do you define the role of the manager in contemporary community leadership?
- How to managers remain politically neutral in polarized conversations?
- Is there a professional obligation to speak to unspoken values?

As the groups reported on their conversations, there was a much discussion around the manager's responsibility to uphold the policies and administrative orders of their jurisdiction. These were viewed as the guiding principles that help managers navigate any polarized conversations. There was also some conversation around a manager's choice to exit an organization when experiencing significant values misalignment.

The group briefly discussed the Declaration of Ideals, with many participants indicating that they were not aware of the Ideals previously.

As the session came to a close, Brian encouraged the participants to continue conversations around the topic of the manager's role both throughout the conference and also back in their organizations.

Massachusetts Discussion

Conversation

- Many people had never seen the Declaration of Ideals before. This was even very seasoned managers and people involved in ICMA.
- Unspoken values and how they shape the behavior of the legislature (in our instance for most communities Town Meeting)
- maintain "character of community"
- Reform vs neutrality
- housing, turf, DEI work, mandates from state
- Even items in the declaration of ideals as a pillar of our behavior can be seen as hot topics in our communities
- Interesting conversation about Select Board goal setting. Do these become the Manager's goals? Should we be influencing what those goals are? Administrative goals vs policy goals

Looking forward to seeing you in Pittsburgh.

Best,

Melissa

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Melissa Murphy-Rodrigues, Esq.

Town Manager of North Andover

Nebraska City/County Management Association Annual Conference

June 20, 2024

York, NE

“A Conversation: The Manager/Administrator’s Role in Community Leadership”

Definition of Leadership (in “one” word)

Integrity, positivity, willingness, communications, adaptability, respect, motivate, understanding, sincere servanthood, selfless service, collaboration, relationships

Community Issues

Housing (multiple responses), business transition, changes, inflation, declining number of volunteers, negativity, growth (multiple responses), infrastructure needs, disinformation (via social media), downtown decay, water issues

What is community leadership, and how do we define the role of the administrator/manager in contemporary community leadership?

Making things happen, ensure all voices are heard, ethical, guiding elected officials to new opportunities and ideas, alternative options for city planning and affordability, collaboration and positive environment for productivity

What role does data serve in identifying issues that should be advanced in the community?

Reliable sources of data, data-informed decision making, avoid/alleviate “pet projects with data to support or not to support, needs of the community and not necessarily the wants, data supports being proactive vs reactive

Who are the partners that should be engaged in these discussions?

Economic development, business and industry, service providers, awareness of those against projects

What is the definition of “neutrality in the actions of local government managers, and what can we do individually and collectively to balance the tension of being both politically neutral and a reformer?

Offer options, present factual data, educational materials, avoid perception of taking a position by presenting 360 degree view, fair fiscal notes on repercussions of project investments

*The “level” of neutrality acceptable dependent of the certain topic

**When might a manager “test/push limits of” neutrality? – dispute of “facts” and legal aspects, defending employees, ethics are tested, personal attacks

ICMA Declaration of Ideals

*Manager/Administrators were not aware ICMA had a “Declaration of Ideals”

In DOI #11 the wording of “take action” is too directive of a term to a manager to also remain neutral and implement the decisions of the elected officials.

In DOI #3 – do some terms portray a political stance as term definitions can change over time and interpretations vary among different managers/administrators and their said communities.

Does the Declaration of Ideas blend and display consistency between other ICMA statements/policies? Since NCMA members didn’t know this statement existed, is it necessary? Or can it be consolidated into another statement or at least shortened?

Post conversation comment/question from a member: When we discuss neutrality it tends to be in relation to political issues. Are we to be neutral in regards to staff or advocate for staff? Or does this question not really relate to the neutrality debate?

Kansas Discussion

- What types of events or social disruptions force local government managers to engage in challenging community discussions?
 - What is the duty of a manager to shed light on issues or (failing) solutions? DEI is the hot button issue but there are other issues that managers get tripped up on (climate change and the impact on responding to severe weather events).
 - Some of our latitude depends on the community we serve and how far the Governing Body is willing to go on some of those hot button topics
 - It helps to have an elected leader or several with you
 - There is something to be said for working in a community that more closely aligns with your personal views so that you are able to work on some of those challenging hot button issues and move the conversation forward
 - Used mask mandate examples for how challenging those issues can be and how quickly they can become challenging community discussions
 - Talked about how there are instances where managers need to lead from behind the let either elected officials or another organization take the lead, there are instances where our direct engagement can be more of a deterrent than a positive influence
 - Affordable Housing
 - Elections
 - Economic Incentives
- Do we accept (or reject) the premise that “neutrality” is defined by alignment?
 - What is definition of “neutrality” in the actions of local government managers?
 - We have an obligation to present issues holistically, however, we are still humans and with that comes bias
 - We do need to make sure that our Governing Bodies know the process we went through to come to a recommendation, what the best practices are and what the pros and cons of moving forward will entail—that is as close to neutrality as we can get
 - Sometimes we are not neutral and when that is the case, we need to be upfront about it and help articulate the “why”
 - Used mask mandates as an example for both this and the first question
 - Managers are "selling out" because of this and because there is pressure to keep the job.
- What does the ICMA Declaration of Ideals mean to today’s local government managers? Should Declaration be amended to reflect current challenges facing ICMA members today?
 - What are the ICMA Declaration of Ideals? They should be highlighted more then they currently are so people are more familiar with what they are.
 - There may be an opportunity to update them but overall they still feel relevant
 - These should be included in Board Orientations to help align roles and responsibilities of staff vs. Governing Bodies
 - Important that managers still "ring the bell."
 - The old prototype of a city manager is no longer relevant. Big change in the career and life of a city manager versus what it was even a few decades ago. Dual career households, unwillingness to move family frequently, healthier balance, resistance to toxic work environments, mental health, etc. all are being negotiated and a heroic city manager putting job on the line and leading change

is not as easy, or common for those now in our considering this profession. This should probably be reconciled with ICMA documents.

- What role does data about programs and services serve in identifying issues that should be advanced in the community?
 - Get approval from the Governing Body on the methodology on the front end (Is it statistically valid? Is there a target number of participants? Is it checking a box?)
 - Use data as a starting point but it isn't the end all be all
 - Need to be clear about the interpretation and who is doing that (and what qualifies them do to it or are we asking the public to come to their own conclusions and just providing raw data?)
 - Need to have benchmarks for success
 - Data helps us to "ring the bell" on important or emerging issues.
 - We need more community education about local government.
 - Differentiate between local government and national politics. Differentiate between professional and political roles.
- Who are the partners that should be engaged in these discussions? Elected officials (and their state and national associations), Councils of Governments, academia, philanthropic organizations?
 - All of the above in some capacity, it is important to have a variety of perspectives involved in the discussions
- What tools and resources do local government managers need to successfully navigate these issues?
 - More help and easier access to monitor and participate at the State and Federal level during the legislative session, it can be hard (or expensive) to engage in these topics
 - More civic education
 - Better define things like DEI - don't get stuck on inaccurate definitions or triggering terminology - reframe in accurate, but non-threatening ways. Connect concepts to local community culture and vocabulary.

Virginia Discussion

DECLARATION OF IDEAS

- Declaration of ideas should be part of our work processes
- Need to be conveners

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

- Setting a vision
- Identify issues/recommendations to solve
- Dollar and cents (budgets)
- Accountability
- Representation
- Listening to community
- Being involved/set standards
- Being available
- Promoting good professional
- Building a team
- Being voice for the unheard
- Deal with tough questions
- Plan for emergencies and respond
- Assume risk/personal professional action
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Getting to know community
- Educate community

DATA

- Extremely important to decision making
- Help identify blind spots
- Ensure trusted processes in data collection
- Need for quality performance measurement
- Be involved/engaged in data collection
- Partnering with academic institutions
- Be deliberate about collecting and sharing data and information (identify bad information)

PARTNERS

- Key staff members-Dept. Heads
- Business leaders
- Faith based
- Non-profits
- Civic associations
- Elected officials
- School leaderships
- Military/Federal
- Academic Institutions
- Health Care
- Youth community

NEUTRALITY

- Hard to stay neutral
- Neutrality means trust
- Question if neutrality is still possible
- Lead with strategic planning to support neutrality
- Be careful with labels and words
- Leave politics to politicians
- Important for local managers to remain neutral
- Need to have emotional intelligence to promote neutrality

The Manager's Role in Community Leadership

Washington State feedback (notes from a session held at the Washington City/County Management Association summer conference in Wenatchee, WA, August 2024)

To Start: A Visual

- Our role is like the Civil War battle scene in the movie “Glory” where the flag bearer goes down and the next one picks up the flag and continues to run with it. We have to be champions for democracy even when things are hard.



What is our Role? Are we Reformers?

- Our job is to lead staff and give the mayor and council the best information possible
- Our job is to bring the community voice to council members who may not truly understand the experiences of their constituents
- My job is to help the Council give me good direction and to bring the issues to them
- I am not comfortable leaning in on social issues – I don't see this as our job at all
- The electorate is not truly represented when only 20% of people vote – it is our job to help bring the voices of everyone, not just the loudest people or not just the people who vote
- If we agree that our job is to serve everyone – what does that mean?
- We need to push our electeds to find the courage to do the things they need to do – I see that as part of our job
- Taking on challenging issues leads to strain in relationship and I just simply don't want to go there
- Our ability to influence community conversations depends on our form of government and whether we are a city manager or a city administrator

Thoughts on Building Trust

- It is key to establish trust when things are good so people trust you when things go bad
- Build on trust and look for the art of compromise
- It all comes back to trust
- You build trust by telling the truth and giving people a common playing field
- Importance of meeting regularly with your council members cannot be understated (or your mayor, depending on form of govt)
- When things go sideways, meet individually with council members and community members to hear them out; this will build trust for the long term

Thoughts on Neutrality

- You need to be in either drive or reverse – neutral won't take you anywhere
- A good facilitator, a neutral third party, can be key to making progress in difficult conversations.
- There is no such thing as neutrality when there are people involved – rather think of it as nonpartisan. It is all a balance.
- Nowadays, there is a higher percentage of electeds who identify as partisan even though their positions are supposed to be nonpartisan. This is very different than it was 20 years ago.

When is it Time to Speak Up?

- When your electeds start pointing to conspiracy theories you need to step out there and speak up and not worry about the consequences
- Ask yourself: Am I a paycheck player or am I going to lean in and engage in leadership to help make my community the best that it can be?
- It is our job to bring facts, even when doing so it tough, and especially when disinformation is running rampant
- At some point, though, you do have to push back against misinformation – that is our duty
- It is not always political, but you always need to lean in
- Where do you want to go? What does that mean for you? These are good questions to ask council members when things get rough.
- Recommend you get into the conversation. If you're not part of the conversation, you'll be excluded and may not have any say in how things go or turn out.

Make it Personal

- How do you nibble at the edges on issues like housing? Can you make it personal: "Where will your kids be able to afford to live when they grow up?" That may help them see the issue differently.

Thoughts on Finding Middle Ground

- One technique is to bring the conversation back to things that are important to everyone
- "Elevate and out" – elevate the conversation to shared values/to a broader perspective and then you can move forward.
- Baby steps. Sometimes that is all you can manage, but at least it's progress.
- Can we agree on something larger like "we all want to create a safe community" and start from there? Can we then work to define safe together?
- At times in these conversations, value systems are at odds, and that makes things really hard, but it is important to persist.
- Finding wins means setting your ego aside and accepting some losses for the overall good of the community
- Timing is everything. Sometimes you have to pause and come back.
- Try reframing the issue in terms your electeds can relate to
- Can all agree we need to be good stewards of public resources and start from there?
- Sometimes we need to take a breath and focus on community and not ideology
- Appeal to the group – we can't get there without you

- We should push – but only to a point
- Leadership is facilitation
- It's important to take time to recalibrate when necessary

On the Declaration of Ideals

- How does the declaration tie back to the Code of Ethics?
- The Association of Washington Cities and the National League of Cities need to put a lot more focus on the importance of city management as a profession

Closing Thoughts

- We are stronger together. Can we come together as regions or states rather than individual cities or counties and to help ensure this work is successful? There is power in the group that individual jurisdictions may not be able to hold alone.
- How can we cover and protect each other through this challenging but important work?
- We are in the business of democracy and that should center us when things get tough

Alaska

It is true that managers play an evolving role- from encouraging policy change to implementing policy change we may not agree with- and how we lead that change varies depending upon the topic or issue. Some of the themes from our discussion on the National Conversation included:

- Managers should prepare and lead their communities to develop and adopt strategic plans at least every five years that are community-driven and adhered to. emphasized that the development of strategic plans can help their communities stay on track, prioritize goals, and avoid 'shiny new objects' that some elected officials and community members may want but are not a priority to the community.
- It is beneficial, but not easy, for managers to encourage their communities to adhere to strategic plans by adopting the "remove one effort if we add one effort" philosophy.
- A tactful approach can be seeking support on initiatives from key influencers (such as the mayor) and allowing elected officials to lead reform while providing support and leading implementation as the administrator. This may involve allowing elected officials to support the manager's idea and allowing them to take credit (and also the risk) for major policy actions.
- One major challenge for some administrators/managers is adherence to the Council-Manager form of government, where some elected officials interfere with personnel decisions when they should not.
- In today's environment, data and analytics can support good management, efficiency, and positive policy change.
- ICMA's Declaration of Ideals and the ICMA Code of Ethics support the role of managers in community leadership, and we should continue to refer to these important resources.

Alabama City/County Management Association Survey and Small Group Follow-up

June – August 2024

Gretchen DiFante, City Manager in Pelham, sent out a survey to association members and followed up with small group discussions. A bulleted summary is provided below:

Key Responses to Questions

1. How do we define the role of the city and county manager in contemporary leadership?
 - We serve more like a CEO of an organization equipping other leaders within the organization with autonomy to make decisions within their departments.
 - We provide resources, communications, and lead by example
 - We engage the community, our governing bodies, and the staff
 - City and county managers must be collaborative with community partners
 - We are called to be transformational leaders who leave the community in a better position than we found it.
 - We need to be charismatic, authentic, and flexible
 - Sometimes a manager's hands can be tied to define their role, depending on the elected body, but when the manager has flexibility and the support of their governing body to lead with a certain degree of autonomy, the manager should be seen as the person who has their finger on the pulse of the community.
 - The manager should know what the issues are, what issues are coming, and how to creatively and efficiently deploy the resources of their community to solve problems and create scenarios where the community can thrive.
 - A good manager needs to be action and strategy-focused, just like a good CEO planning for the future, setting expectations and standards for the organization.
 - City managers need to be excellent facilitators.
 - City managers need to be brave and willing and able to get the community members together to solve problems together. Someone has to lead change, why not city/county managers? If not us, then who?

2. What role does data serve in identifying issues that should be advanced by the community?
 - Data should be used to provide empirical evidence/justification when determining the needs of our cities and counties
 - Without data, we can't know if the issue we are tackling is truly an issue or simply a small group's attempt to get the government's attention and waste time and resources.
 - Relevant data should always be used to make decisions.
 - Quality real data is not hard to come by, and those who don't use technology to access data will be playing catch up.
 - Leveraging data helps us deploy the right number of resources to take on an issue.
3. What is the definition of "neutrality" in the actions of local government managers?
 - Focused on the big picture -not getting into the weeds with political ideologies.
 - There is often a fine line between political and social issues – and while politics is always going to be a no-fly zone, social issues are where it's hard to define where a manager can tread and where they can't. I would define the line as taking an affirmative position that negatively impacts the confidence of the community in the manager as an impartial leader.
 - Local government managers do not need to get involved with their own political opinion but stay neutral in accomplishing goals.
 - "Neutrality" would be asking if (whatever the topic is) the decision/outcome is in the best interest of the residents (not council, commissions, etc.)
 - As local government managers are often in a political climate it is important not to "pick sides" or become overly passionate about an issue. Our task is to execute the wishes of the elected officials tasked to determine policy.
 - As city managers, we have to be courageous when we see change that needs to take place where we believe the good of our community is at risk (now or in the future). Professional managers are not hired or trained to be order takers from the elected body. We were hired to know the community, understand trends in the country and in our states, know what lag and lead indicators are, and be brave by asking questions that may make others (even our elected officials) uncomfortable. It is also not our role to push an agenda simply based on how we feel. Understanding

history, and data that show the likelihood something will happen when certain indicators are in place is imperative to being a good and effective manager.

4. What can we do individually and collectively to balance the tension of being politically neutral and a reformer?
 - Keep a clear vision of what is important to the community which is making responsible decisions to enhance the quality of life for our residents.
 - I think this comes down to using your head. Before taking a stance, think about what the ramifications might be. When in doubt, kindness and compassion always win.
 - As an individual tasked with executing elected official policy, there exists a theory of constraints. These constraints can take many forms. Often there may not be enough resources to execute a particular policy. Once the policy is determined by the governing body, the manager is tasked with executing or guiding the body within the limits of constraints.
 - Continue to seek resident input through comprehensive plans and citizen surveys and continue to use the resources from the residents.
 - The focus should always be on remembering the customer and how the decisions positively affect them.
 - We have to ask the question, "Do our residents know what is going on today that will impact this community tomorrow?" The answer is that most do not, and it is our job to determine what the red flags are for our community that will cause issues in the future and provide education backed up by facts. We also need to solicit help from fellow local governments that are likely dealing with the same challenges. There is power in numbers.

Ideas for Next Steps

- *ICMA can highlight stories of city managers who have shown great courage to help place their communities in a better place. It would be encouraging to hear from managers who stayed the course despite great obstacles with a positive result for their communities.*

- *We need to know how and where to get data to audit our communities to see where our particular community is most vulnerable. Teach us how to be auditors of our future.*
- *Facilitative skills are imperative to promote healthy discussion. Can ICMA provide facilitator training and even train the trainer? What about mediation skills?*
- *As many of our co-workers and elected officials question the value of ICMA, how can we bring quality, reasonably priced training to our workplaces without traveling? If facilitator training (for example) were available and four communities wanted to take advantage of it and share the cost, is there a way to do this?*

Illinois City/County Management Association (ILCMA) Idea Exchange June 17, 2024

Contemporary Community Leadership Grounded in Ethics and Ideals

A summary of conversations in breakouts from the ILCMA Idea Exchange session from June 17, 2024 follows.

1. What is community leadership?

- Role of leadership is to support residents and make sure to use tools so that people feel supported and safe within own communities; provide factual information; and, put plans and processes together.
- Community members seem to expect local leadership to take a stance on issues of state, national, or international significance, over which local government has little, if any, influence.
- Using migrant crisis as an example, try to keep operations as non-political as possible. Treat people safely and humanely as you would anyone else in the community – matter of public safety; our role is to keep the temperature down.
- Collaborate collectively instead of working in a silo can take longer but can have longer lasting relationships and improved outcomes.
- The most important role is to support and provide a welcoming community to all – including residents, businesses, employees and visitors.
- An example given was addressing/combating rumors related to an affordable housing development. Be factual and transparent without becoming political. It can be a fine line.

2. How do we define the role of the manager in contemporary community leadership?

- Role of manager is to make sure you have policies and programs in place (and their associated action plans) to support efforts.
- To identify problems and to bring them to attention of policy makers or the community in a manner that will be received as well as possible. How the problem is presented is as important as the timing. Managers try to bring about solutions to problems; but there is also a place to step back and bring together community leaders and assets and resources to find solutions together.
- There is a need to remember what we as managers are responsible for and that our internal organization is looking to us for leadership.
- The manager finds him/herself having to help elected officials manage expectations when they are caught in the line of fire.

3. **What role does data serve in identifying issues that should be advanced in the community?**
 - Data supports policies and procedures that are in place.
 - Use data to provide information to support decisions in an unbiased/non-partisan way.
4. Data provides reports and educates. Can set the agenda. **Who are the partners that should be engaged in these discussions?**
 - When leadership/managers work on problems collaboratively, this naturally brings in community partners (other units of government, not-for-profit/religious leaders, community supporters and stakeholders, etc.)
4. **What is the definition of neutrality in the actions of local government managers?**
 - Nonpartisan – provide recommendations and reports in a nonpartisan way that seeks to provide arguments and counterarguments so that elected leaders understand the discussion.
 - Flexibility, information, be a “cheerleader” to support/encourage the work, and the opportunity to lay the groundwork.
 - Provide factual information.
 - Neutrality in both practice and appearance. Hold the middle.
 - Provide options with stated impacts of each option.
 - Assist in the facilitation of consensus around facts, not feelings.
 - Providing pros and cons of a decision to be made.
 - Neutrality requires careful communication outside of meetings.
5. **What can we do individually and collectively to balance the tension of being both politically neutral and a reformer?**
 - Stay away from social reform.
 - Should city manager/administrator facilitate reform discussions? Perhaps rely on consultants to drive operational or economic reform
 - If an issue/reform is mentioned that isn’t within the city manager’s role, advise an elected official to bring it forward.
 - Rely on established documents like a comprehensive plan and/or strategic plan to articulate why something is being reviewed or discussed.

The Declaration of Ideals (11 Tenets)

1. **Should the Declaration of Ideals be amended to reflect current challenges**
 - Tenet #6 - Advocate equitable regulations and service delivery – even more important today.
 - An example was given where a new mandate on “Lead Service Line Replacement Act”, the cost may not be affordable to some

communities. That this needs to be treated equitably and fairly – equitable regulation and service delivery. Data collection to help with making decisions.

CALIFORNIA

Manager's Role in Community Leadership

Video Recording: <https://vimeo.com/1008449778/7dd67bbbee>

What does the ICMA Declaration of Ideals mean to Local Managers

- Many people didn't know that they exist
- Is it time to update these? it was adopted in the 80s
- Ideals vs. ethics – (constitution vs. the declaration of independence example)
- Ideals establish a sense of fairness and equality
- Everyone wishes that the ideals were more widely distributed by ICMA
- Leadership is telling the Council that they need to make a decision on a hard topic, but the things that City Councils have to discuss have gotten more complex and decisions are harder to make in today's time.

Should the Ideals be amended to reflect current challenges?

- Should there be one overarching document vs one on ethics and one on ideals?
- Ideal #6 - Advocate equitable regulation and service delivery, recognizing that needs and expectations for public services may vary throughout the community.
 - o brings to light an interesting interaction between staff's responsibilities and the direction of council. There was concern about the word choice, Advocate. There was concern that this idea suggests that the CM advocate for a position?
- "The Code is a standard we're committed to and potentially sanctioned for not adhering to. Makes sense to me to have a more aspirational statement that's not a compliance standard"
- People being nasty in the public, and the things that people get nasty about is changing, so the topics the ideals cover should be updated
- The Ideals can speak more to the true role that CMs have in setting up discussions in the community – maybe through context to set the discussion in the right light
 - o Maybe this is including a recommendation on how to move forward
- Participation in government has changed over the years. the very definition of involvement may need to be redefined
- CMs must protect the mental wellbeing of staff against the residents

The role of Data In advancing the community

- 5 years ago there was no ChatGPT, sometimes a Council can do some of their own research and potentially complicate conversations ---- and those conversations have deadlines
- Data can expose issues that were not an issue before.
- More analysis has led to more eyes on everything
- Can also be used to advocate for the team

The use of Partners that are engaged in a difficult discussion

- Important to involve partners so interest groups are included
- But also being strategic in who is invited so to not sway the decision to how we would like to see the discussion go

What are some difficult conversations in the community but require neutrality?

- Climate change
- DEI
- Facts and data can also be seen by some as an opinion –and this needs to be explained with attention to detail
- CMs must always be aware that every decision will never win over everyone. There will always be upset people
- CMs will let councilmembers know ahead of time difficult questions or topics that might be brought up during meetings.

Contemporary Community Leadership Grounded in Ethics and Ideals

Professional local government management is rooted in reform, yet professionalism often calls for neutrality. We will discuss how we interpret the role of the Manager in contemporary community leadership.

- Discussion Questions:
 - What is community leadership, and how do we define the role of the manager in contemporary community leadership?
 - Before you can be a community leader, you have to be involved and know the community
 - The most successful leaders are constantly involved and able to set a good background to the issue. This can be done in several ways
 - Depending on the political landscape, CM will need to manage how Councilmembers will react to CMs stepping up and taking a leadership role
 - Councilmembers really like to be “in front” for many issues. CMs have to gauge the interest and how it will be received
 - “the behind the scenes” leadership is important with one on one’s with the Council
 - Remember that CMs are elected, and they don’t get a vote in the discussion
 - Democracy is an experiment and sometimes those experiments fail – and we learn from those failures
 - Particular care should be given to new councils when they come in trying to derail certain projects. Leaders need to also make an effort to “getting everyone to swim in the correct lane”
 - How can local government managers remain true to the DNA of reform while being seen as politically neutral in polarized conversations?
 - What types of community conversations stress the tension of political neutrality and “reformer”?
 - CMs should step back and do a community workshop before difficult conversations – doing work beforehand. This prework can involve other parties
 - Acknowledging contrary voices adds credibility and legitimacy to difficult decisions

- Is there a professional obligation to speak to unspoken values? How does this play out in our communities?
 - The topic of homelessness was discussed – this is a fuzzy, complicated conflict, that the CM sometimes will need to provide direction on
- How can professional managers successfully navigate this tension?
 - If the Council hasn't directed the discussion, the CM should be the facilitator in some of these discussions
 - Leadership is knowing “what hill to die on” on some of these issues that require great lengths of education

Agenda Item Outcome: An understanding of the difficult conversations professional local government managers are drawn in to – both from the perspective of the call for reform and the call for political neutrality – and how to balance this.

The Declaration of Ideals

- We will reexamine the Declaration of Ideals and begin developing a guide to what the ideals look like in action in today's environment.
- Discussion Questions:
 - Where are you challenged to live out the Declaration of Ideals?
 - What tools do you need to navigate the tensions that exist in your community so you can live out the Declaration of Ideals?

Agenda Item Outcome: Model questions and conversations that can be replicated by state associations to develop an understanding of how today's Managers can live out our Declaration of Ideals.