BRIDGING DIVIDES

Tackling Polarization in Your Cities & Communities

Thursday, September 23, 2021
About this Session
After a polarizing 2020, how can city leaders help bridge divides in their communities and begin to advance policies and programs that heal and unify their residents?

In this panel, you’ll hear from a nationally recognized expert in civil discourse and bi-partisanship, and two local government leaders about how to approach complex topics, find common ground and rebuild trust.
PANELISTS

Lucas Frerichs
Vice Mayor
City of Davis

Quirina Orozco
City Councilmember
City of West Sacramento

John Wood Jr.
National Leader
Braver Angels
NON-PROFIT, NON-PARTISAN & COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

• The Institute for Local Government is the non-profit training and education affiliate of three statewide local government associations

• Together with our affiliates, we serve over 2,500 local agencies – cities, counties and special districts

• We provide practical and easy-to-use resources so local agencies can effectively implement policies on the ground
Our mission is to help local government leaders *navigate complexity, increase capacity & build trust* in their communities.
A WIDESPREAD NETWORK OF LOCAL GOV’T LEADERS

- 58 Counties
- 482 Cities
- 2,500+ Special Districts
- 20,000+ Local Agency Leaders
WHY LOCAL LEADERSHIP MATTERS

California’s local government leaders face a myriad of complex and evolving leadership challenges.

• Elected leaders and staff cannot effectively address these challenges without a strong foundation of good government - trust, accountability, responsiveness, equity and transparency.

• ILG’s Leadership and Governance pillar helps local government leaders build that foundation, develop leadership skills and increase public trust.

https://www.ca-ilg.org
## WHAT WE’RE HEARING IN THE FIELD

- Increased partisanship and polarization – at all levels of government
- Single issue/advocate candidates
- COVID makes it difficult to build trust & relationships with newly-elected Councilmembers
- Increase in negative public comments at Council meetings
- Perpetual crisis management
- Intergovernmental relations can be a challenge
- Instability of funding/financial conditions
- Difficulty communicating effectively with constituents/customer base
- Staff retention and recruitment is harder than ever
- Social media complicates communication
NATIONAL ISSUES AFFECT LOCAL COMMUNITIES
INTERNAL DYNAMICS CAN IMPACT EXTERNAL RESULTS

Internal Agency Alignment

External Community Engagement
TACKLING POLARIZATION IN THE CITY OF DAVIS
CRISIS CAN BRING US TOGETHER
ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE COUNCILS

- Develop a sense of team
- Have clear roles and responsibilities
- Honor the relationship with staff and each other
- Conduct effective meetings
- Hold themselves and the city accountable
- Practice continuous learning and development
GOVERNANCE TOOLS CAN HELP

- Team Building
- Priority & Goal Setting
- Governance Handbook
- Self-Evaluations
- Study Sessions
- Continuing Education & Professional Development
USING THE RIGHT APPROACH

Focus on Good Governance

Acknowledge and Honor Humanity & Lived Experiences

Model Civility

Prioritize Equity

Lead by Example

Seek Impartial Leadership & Governance Support
CELEBRATING SHARED VALUES
FINDING COMMON GROUND IN THE CITY OF WEST SACRAMENTO
SCHOOL SUPPLY DRIVE
COMMUNITY EVENTS BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER
CONNECTING WITH KIDS & FAMILIES
CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS STILL NEED TO HAPPEN
3 DIMENSIONS OF ARGUING BETTER

- Historical Context
- Emotional Intelligence
- Recognizing Power

Source: Better Arguments
5 PRINCIPLES OF ARGUING BETTER

1. Take Winning off the Table
2. Prioritize Relationships and Listen Passionately
3. Pay Attention to Context
4. Embrace Vulnerability
5. Make Room to Transform

Source: Better Arguments
WORDS TO REMEMBER

It's you and me vs. the problem

Not you vs. me
TOOLKITS, WEBSITES & WRITTEN RESOURCES

From ILG

• Ethics resources: www.ca-ilg.org/ethics
• Leadership resources: www.ca-ilg.org/leadership
• Western City article: Establishing a Code of Conduct for your Council

From Other Sources

• Better Arguments
• Ohio State University: Divided Community Project
• Living Room Conversations
• USA Today: “Hidden Common Ground” Series
• Arizona Public Media (National Institute for Civil Discourse): The Role of Civility in Bridging Racial Divides
DISCUSSION AND Q&A
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Twitter
Follow us on Twitter
@instlocgov

LinkedIn
Connect with us on LinkedIn
Institute for Local Government

Newsletter
Sign up for our e-newsletter
www.ca-ilg.org/stayinformed
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John Wood Jr.  
National Leader  
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THANK YOU FOR JOINING US!
ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE COUNCILS
DEVELOP A SENSE OF TEAM

Key Characteristics

• Successfully transition from candidate to a member of the council.
• Become a champion for the city. Make decisions based on the needs and interests of the community at-large / the greater good.
• Develop, communicate and support policy goals and council decisions.
• Demonstrate a willingness to work collaboratively (as a team) and have a city-wide perspective.
HAVE CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Key Characteristics

• Understand the role of local government and their responsibilities.
• Know their role: to set vision and policy, avoid micromanagement.
• Council members should strive to be informed about the issues facing the city and be prepared to ask questions of staff and each other.
HONOR THE RELATIONSHIP WITH STAFF AND EACH OTHER

Key Characteristics

• Council members have the ability to respectfully disagree (to disagree without being disagreeable).
• They are able to leave it at the dais; debates are about policy, not personality.
• Exceptional board members reflect positive decorum/model leadership by providing respectful tone with colleagues.
• Effective boards establish a set of behaviors ahead of time, potentially documented in a code of conduct, to help promote civility and respect.
CONDUCT EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Key Characteristics

- Council members are respectful of each other, the public and everyone’s time.
- Council members use engaging body language as a way to demonstrate respect.
- Issues are not personalized and thoughtful dialogue is the objective.
- Agenda packets are read, Council members come prepared and have an open mind.
- Respect is demonstrated for varied opinions.
- Everyone strives to be civil and act with decorum.
Key Characteristics

• Council members operate ethically and with integrity.
• Councils conduct team building / goal setting exercise to track progress towards mutually agreed upon goals.
• Councils taking responsibility for the results (good and bad).
• Councils celebrate success.
• Council members hold themselves responsible for adhering to operating protocols and codes of conduct.
• Everyone strives to be civil and act with decorum.
PRACTICE CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Key Characteristics

• Stay informed on key issues, even those that are uncomfortable to discuss, like race, equity and engagement.
• Gain key insights and knowledge on all aspects of governing, from budgets to plans and everything in between.
• Learn to listen. Listening is sometimes more important than learning to give a speech.
• Gather insights from people with lived experience, as well as other subject matter experts.
GOVERNANCE TOOLS
GOAL SETTING & STRATEGIC PLANNING

Encourage Council to work with the City Manager to establish goals for the year

- City staff should support them
- Quarterly updates
- Budget priorities follow goals
- Link between CM performance goals and strategic planning goals
- Use a third party for goal setting and performance evaluation
ESTABLISH CLEAR MEASURES FOR SUCCESS

- **Specific**
- **Measureable**
- **Achievable**
- **Realistic**
- **Timely**

Encourage regular review of policy effectiveness and implementation practices.
PERIODIC REVIEWS OF NORMS

Confirm or modify Board norms

• Review the agreements made previously and check in on how they are working

• Determine tune-ups needed

• Consensus on agreements

Consider:

• What norms are important for the Board-to-Board working relationship to be most effective?

• What will make the Board - Manager relationship most effective?
SAMPLE NORMS

- Work together, modeling teamwork and civility for our community
- Demonstrate honesty & integrity in every action
- Share information & avoid surprises
- Disagree agreeably & professionally
- Work for the common good, not personal interest
- Strive for win-win – work toward for consensus and seek common ground
- Honor “discussion” before “decisions” – reserve formal motions until initial discussions have taken place
# SAMPLE GOVERNANCE HANDBOOKS & CODES OF CONDUCT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form of Government</td>
<td>Board Powers and Responsibilities</td>
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<td>Board Norms &amp; Ground Rules</td>
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<td>Communications Media &amp; Community Engagement</td>
<td>Legal Standards &amp; Conflicts of Interest</td>
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<td>Meeting Protocols</td>
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<td>Financial Matters</td>
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<td>Advisory Bodies</td>
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SELF-EVALUATIONS → CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Section I: The Board

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>The Board</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Board is committed to a common vision.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Governs as a team, strategically focused and mission driven.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Governs in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with</td>
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<td>civility and respect.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Governs in an accessible manner, committed to openness and transparency.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Governs within a culture of inquiry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Governs in a collaborative manner with the community, staff and within</td>
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<td>the Board.</td>
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Board Governance Survey

The Board has established 7 governance principles that guide their behavior. More information can be found on pages 9 and 10 of the Board Governance Manual. A workgroup of County employee's created a value statement that was adopted by the Board in 2012. Please provide feedback on these two items below. More information can be found on page 8 of the Board Governance Manual.

Please indicate your perception of the Board's attainment of the following principles:

- The Board governs as a team, strategically focused and mission driven.
- The Board aligns goals and resources.
- The Board establishes and governs within a culture of inquiry.
- The Board governs in an accessible manner, committed to openness and transparency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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STUDY SESSIONS ARE ONE SOLUTION TO CONSIDER

• An opportunity to bring special or difficult topics to the Council for open discussion in a public setting

• Allow policy-makers to reflect on issues and raise concerns before an item is fully developed into a policy or plan

• Are purposeful, do not require a vote, and are an opportunity to learn and share insight & perspectives on challenges or issues
CONTINUING EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

New to Public Service? Here's your road to success...

www.ca-ilg.org

www.CalCities.org
WHAT IS “AUTHENTIC” PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

With authentic engagement, leaders know where the public stands as problem solving progresses, and residents themselves can contribute to solutions through their input, ideas and actions.

- Inclusive
- Accessible
- Dialogue-Focused
- Culturally Competent
AUTHENTIC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MAY HELP BRIDGE DIVIDES

Better identification of the public’s values, ideas and recommendations

More informed residents - about issues and about local agencies

Improved local agency decision-making and actions, with better impacts and outcomes

More community buy-in and support, with less contentiousness

Faster project implementation with less need to revisit

More trust in each other and in local government
## HONE YOUR ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

**Good tips for listening to public comments when you cannot respond.**

- **Listen for** *substance* behind emotion.

- **Suspend your** *assumptions*. Be aware of personal biases and preconceived notions.

- **Practice** *curiosity*.

- **Put into** *historical perspective* of racial, economic and social injustices.

- **Pay attention to** *nonverbal* communication.

- **Reframe.** Complaints can also reveal what otherwise remain hidden.
**Dealing with Challenging Participants**

- **THINK AHEAD:** utilize a meeting design that allows for real engagement but limits “grandstanding”.
- Practice active listening, be respectful.
- Identify and respond to the substance of the question.
- Acknowledge and validate opinions and viewpoints.
- Pause the meeting/take a break and chat with the participant one-on-one.
- Acknowledge underlying history and assumptions.
- Make sure to allow time for online input.
- Use a neutral facilitator if possible.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan, Prepare and Provide Information</th>
<th>Be clear about the process, purpose and how final decisions will be made.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meet with groups/orgs that are likely to have strongly held beliefs early in the process.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide appropriate background information.</td>
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<td>Present a broad spectrum of views (presenters).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be ready for the comments and don’t take it personally.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Invite a co-host from the community to share in meeting facilitation duties.</td>
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ILG’S PE TRAINING IS NOW VIRTUAL!

NEXT TRAINING on 11/18

- Updated to include post-COVID resources
- New emphasis on virtual engagement strategies and equity considerations
- Customized for individual contributors in local government

THURS, NOVEMBER 18 & FRI, NOVEMBER 19, 2021 via ZOOM

WWW.CA-ILG.ORG
NEW LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

JOIN US on 12/6 & 12/13

• Learn strategies to promote civility and respond to diverse viewpoints

• Understand various roles and responsibilities of the governing body, your agency’s administrator and staff

• Explore community engagement strategies and collaborative decision-making processes

• Share real-world experiences with other elected officials

LEVEL UP YOUR LEADERSHIP!

Master Your Role as an Effective Elected or Appointed Official & Community Leader

MONDAY, DECEMBER 6 and MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2021
5:00 PM - 7:30 PM via Zoom

TRAINING HOSTED BY: WWW.CA-ILG.ORG

LEARN MORE & REGISTER: