



Des Moines City Council Governance Workshop

Agenda

May 23, 2023

8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Facilitators: Jacquelyn McCray and Scott Meyer

Objective: Review current policies and procedures for governance, identify areas for improvement and develop consensus priorities for enhanced effectiveness.

Outcomes

1. Review interview themes, current Council priorities
 2. Discuss governance best practices
 3. Identify options for enhanced operational effectiveness
 4. Develop consensus priorities for improvement
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8:00 a.m. **Call Meeting to Order, Welcome and Opening Remarks**

- Mayor T.M. Franklin Cownie and Scott Sanders, City Manager

Ice Breaker Exercise

Review and Discuss Interview Themes

- Strengths, Opportunities, and Current Issues

Review and Discuss Good Governance Best Practices

9:50 *Morning Break*

Review City Council Procedures for Operation

- Process
- Civility
- Teamwork

Identify opportunities for increased effectiveness and develop consensus

11:45 **Wrap up and Next Steps**

12:00 p.m. **Closing comments and adjourn meeting**

Attachments:

- a. *Des Moines City Council Procedural Rules*
- b. *Attributes of Exceptional Councils, ND, Institute for Local Government*
- c. *Tips for Promoting Civility in Public Meetings, 2011, Institute for Local Government*

1. Review the summary of interview themes, *Des Moines Council Procedural Rules* and two attached articles on the following pages and return to this page to record your thoughts and ideas to share with your City Council colleagues.
2. Think about and answer the following questions based on your review of the materials.
 - a. What struck you about what you read? Why?
 - b. What ideas from the materials can help Des Moines City Council members improve their effectiveness as a governing body?

[illegible]

Des Moines City Council - Summary of Interview Themes

Greatest Strengths of the City

- Small town feel; big city amenities
- Safety (Community Policing)
- Affordable housing
- Respect for all people
- Good, professional city staff
- Lots of people in the City with good ideas
- The City is a show place and a destination
- Amenities such as: parks, green space, trails, arena and regional attractions
- We listen and interact with residents and businesses
- Sustained financial management

Greatest Opportunities

- Availability of office space in downtown and other parts of the City
- Financially stable city; depending on state legislature not reducing
- An urban city with established neighborhoods
- How we define ourselves NOW, and going forward
- Determining the best ways to use reduced funding from the State to benefit residents
- Greater emphasis on service delivery
- Improve neighborhoods
- Continued partnerships with the County

Greatest Challenges

- Attracting development
- Getting young people engaged
- Attracting retail throughout city
- Addressing budget challenges caused by revenue reductions
- Addressing mental health issues
- Addressing homeless and housing
- Change in perception and marketing the City
- Increasing office vacancies in the downtown

Top Priorities

- Addressing/improving infrastructure (street, storm and sanitary sewer conditions)
- Aligning economic development with city values
- Housing
- Enhancing safety (violence and speed reduction mentioned most)
- Promoting a culture of innovation
- Taking a regional approach to problem-solving (i.e., airport improvements)
- Reinvesting in neighborhoods; address housing rehabilitation
- Growing tax revenue
- Adding affordable housing without concentrating it

Council Norms, Practices and Procedures

- Use of work sessions and workshops to deliberate issues prior to budget and policy development
- Council members are working and thinking together as a group to guide decision-making

- Neighborhood workshops are used to gather resident and stakeholder input

Good Governance and Decision Making

- a. What Council Needs from Staff:
 - Information
 - Clear recommendations and opinions
- b. What Council Should Give to City Staff:
 - Respectful treatment and communication
 - Engage during the meetings
 - Prepare and get questions answered prior to public hearings
 - Relay information and opinions from the public
 - Refrain from taking “pet projects” to staff
- c. In General:
 - No surprises
 - Do not take disagreements personally
 - No personal attacks
 - Practice transparency with each other and with staff


Elements of Civility

- Meetings that operate in accordance with the Procedural Rules of Council
- Adhering to civil behaviors with other Council members and with the City Manager and staff
- Honoring the Golden Rule; Treating everyone as you wish to be treated
- Refraining from making disparaging remarks about staff members to other Council members
- Determining the proper time and place to disagree
- Encouraging deliberation on issues even when majority agreement exists (at least four “in favor”)
- Respecting differing opinions and dissent through vetting, rather than shutting down different voices
- Willingness to modify position

CITY COUNCIL PROCEDURAL RULES

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The following procedural rules govern the conduct of the Council and shall be interpreted to ensure fair and open deliberations and decision making at Des Moines City Council business meetings.

 [DOWNLOAD PDF](#)

Part I. General Provision

Rule 1. Scope of Rules.

These rules shall govern the conduct of the Council and shall be interpreted to ensure fair and open deliberations and decision making.

Rule 2. Technical Parliamentary Forms Abolished.

Except as specifically required by these rules the Council shall not use any formal points of parliamentary order, personal privilege, parliamentary inquiry or other technical forms.

Rule 3. Matters Not Covered.

Any matter or order or procedure not covered by these rules shall be referred to the presiding officer, who shall decide the matter with the assistance and advice of Corporation Counsel or his or her representative in conformity with the purpose of these rules in a fair and expeditious manner. The decision of the presiding officer may be reversed by a majority vote of the Council.

Rule 4. Interpretation.

These rules are intended to supplement and shall be interpreted to conform with the statutes of the State of Iowa and the ordinances of the City of Des Moines.

Part II. Time and Place of Meeting

Rule 5. Regular Meetings.

The City Clerk shall prepare an annual schedule of Council meetings and forward it to the City Council, to adopt by resolution, at least 60 days prior to January 1 of each year. Regular meetings will begin at 5:00 P.M. in City Council Chambers. The Council may, by resolution or motion, continue or postpone any regular meeting to another day and time, or may cancel a meeting. All regular meetings shall end by 9:00 P.M. unless the Council by a 2/3 vote agrees that the meeting may continue. All hearings shall be scheduled for 5:00 P.M. the day of a regular meeting and shall commence promptly at the conclusion of the Consent Agenda and prior to consideration of any item removed from the Consent Agenda or any other Agenda item unless the presiding officer or the Council otherwise directs.

Rule 6. Special Meetings.

Special meetings may be called by the Mayor or by any four Council Members. A call for special meeting shall be filed with the City Clerk in written form unless the announcement of the special meeting is made at a regular meeting at which all Council members are present. The call for the special meeting shall specify the day, hour and subject of the meeting and shall be posted at the door of the City Council Chambers.

Rule 7. Quorum.

A majority of all members elected to the City Council shall constitute a quorum for transaction of business.

Part III. Agenda

Rule 8. Preparation of Agenda.

Prior to each regular Council meeting the City Clerk shall publish an Agenda which contains all items the Council anticipates acting upon at the meeting. The Council may adopt the agenda as presented or may amend the agenda as provided by these rules and may adopt the agenda as amended.

Rule 9. Consent Agenda.

In preparing an Agenda the City Clerk shall separately designate items as "Consent Agenda" which may be acted upon by the Council under Rule 37. The "Consent Agenda" shall consist of routine non-controversial items which in the City Clerk's determination can be appropriately considered in bulk at the Council meeting.

Rule 10. Hearings, Permits and License Agenda.

The Clerk shall prepare as separate portions of the Agenda a schedule of hearings and separate listing of requests for Permits and Licenses.

Rule 11. Agenda Deadline.

Any member of the Council, the City Manager, Corporation Counsel and City Clerk may have an item included upon the Agenda by requesting the City Clerk to include the item by 5:00 P.M. on the Tuesday preceding the Council meeting. If the item is requested by a Council Member, it shall first be recommended for inclusion to the City Manager by a majority of the Council prior to inclusion on the Agenda, otherwise it shall not be

included. If the Mayor is the requesting Council Member, the item shall be included on the Agenda without needing other Council Member recommendation. If a majority of the Council decline to recommend including the requested item at the meeting at which it is first requested, then after that meeting occurs, the requesting Council Member may make a second request for inclusion on the Agenda for the next regular meeting. If the item is again not recommended for inclusion on the Agenda by a majority of the Council, the item shall not be placed on the Agenda to be considered by the full council until at least four council members have indicated a desire to the City Manager for it to be placed on the Agenda for Council review or inclusion of the proposed item at a future Council Workshop.

Rule 12. Extra Items.

Items requested or filed after 5:00 P.M. on the Wednesday preceding a Council meeting shall not be included upon the Agenda unless a Council Member shall deem the item of sufficient urgency to warrant immediate Council action. These items shall be designated as "Extra" items and will be considered at the appropriate place on the regular Agenda (prior to or after a related item) or at the end of the regular Agenda. The requirements of Rule 11 shall also apply to Extra Items requests. The City Clerk shall record on the item the name of the sponsoring Council member.

Rule 13. Sponsor Required.

The City Clerk shall not place upon the Agenda any matter for reconsideration unless sponsored by a Council member who voted on the originally prevailing side or who was absent at the time of the original action.

Rule 14. Staff Withdrawal of Items.

Only the City officer requesting the placement of an item on the Agenda may withdraw the item prior to the Council meeting, but in withdrawing the item shall state the reason therefore which reason shall be transmitted to the Council. An item withdrawn by the City Manager, City Clerk or Corporation Counsel may nonetheless, in the discretion of the Council, be acted upon in its regular order.

Rule 15. Council Action to Defer, Continue or Not Act.

A member of the City Council shall not withdraw any item prior to the start of Council meetings, provided however, a Council member wishing Council to defer action or continue an item has a right to have a motion to continue, defer or not act on any item considered before any other action which Council may consider.

Rule 16. Des Moines Residents, Property Owners and City Taxpayers Requests to Speak.

Any City resident, property owner or taxpayer may request to speak on a regular Agenda by filing such request in writing with the City Clerk on or after the date ten days preceding a regular Council meeting but prior to 5:00 P.M. on the Tuesday preceding a regular Council meeting. Speakers may provide written materials to Council for review at the Council meeting, subject to Council's acceptance. Video and audio materials may not be played or otherwise utilized at or during the Council meeting. Such materials shall be provided to the City Clerk upon submitting the request required under this Rule 16 so that the Clerk may arrange for the City's Information Technology staff to scan any such materials for viruses or other issues. Once such materials are scanned and determined safe, Information Technology will then notify Council that the item(s) are available for Council to review at Council's convenience. All such speaker requests, up to a maximum of thirty items, shall be placed under a single item number, but last on the agenda, by lettered paragraph and limited collectively to no more than sixty minutes in duration. Each item shall receive up to two minutes time and shall not be recalculated or additional speakers recognized if the time used by any speaker is less than two minutes or the collective time for all speakers is less than sixty minutes. No other person may speak on any such item. Any requested item not included on the agenda due to the collective time limit and maximum number of items specified herein being exceeded, shall, subject to such time limit and maximum number of items applied to each Agenda for a subsequent regular meeting, move in the same order received by the City Clerk to the Agenda for the next regular meeting or, as necessary, the Agenda for the next subsequent meeting(s), with any new timely requests added to the end of the list of pending speaker items in the order

received. Any person may have no more than one speaker item request pending at a time and the City Clerk shall not accept a new request from a person that has a request pending.

Part IV. Conduct of Meetings

Rule 17. Roll Call.

Before proceeding with the business of the Council, the City Clerk shall call the roll call of members present and enter those named in the minutes. The Clerk shall determine the presence of a quorum as required by law and these rules.

Rule 18. Call to Order.

The Mayor or Mayor Pro Tem shall call the meeting to order at the appointed hour. In the absence of the Mayor or Mayor Pro Tem the City Clerk shall call the meeting to order and a temporary presiding officer shall then be selected under Rule 19. The selected temporary presiding officer shall serve as successor Mayor Pro Tem for the meeting for purposes of Des Moines City Code Section 2-26 authorized to sign all measures passed and contracts approved at the meeting.

Rule 19. Presiding Officer.

The Mayor, or in the Mayor's absence or incapacity, the Mayor Pro Tem, shall be the presiding officer at all Council meetings. If both the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem are absent the most senior Council member present shall preside. In the event two or more members equally possess the greatest seniority then the eldest person among them shall preside.

Rule 20. Control of Discussion.

The presiding officer shall control discussion of the Council on each Agenda item to assure full participation by the Council in accordance with these rules.

Rule 21. Order of Consideration of Agenda.

Except as otherwise provided in these rules, each Agenda item shall be considered in the numerical order assigned by the City Clerk. Each Agenda item shall be separately announced by the presiding officer, or City Clerk, for purposes of discussion and consideration. To announce an item, it shall be sufficient to identify the item by the number assigned by the City Clerk, unless greater specificity is requested by some person in attendance. This rule shall not apply to consideration of items under Rule 37 or Rule 38.

Rule 22. Discussion.

A Council member shall speak only after being recognized by the presiding officer. A Council member recognized for a specific purpose shall limit remarks to that purpose. A Council member, after being recognized shall not be interrupted except by the presiding officer to enforce these rules.

Rule 23. Presiding Officer's Right to Enter into Discussion.

The Mayor (or other presiding officer) as a member of the Council may enter into any discussion.

Rule 24. Limit on Remarks.

Each Council member shall limit his or her remarks to a reasonable length.

Rule 25. Presiding Officer's Right to Speak Last.

The presiding officer has the right to close debate and speak last on any item.

Rule 26. Closing Debate.

Discussion shall be closed on any item by the presiding officer with the concurrence of a majority of the Council. Except as provided by Rule 35, a call for the vote shall not close discussion if any member of the Council still wishes to be heard or the presiding officer determines the continued participation of citizens will be helpful to the Council.

Part V. Citizen Participation

Rule 27. Citizen's Right to Address Council.

Persons other than Council Members shall be permitted to address the Council only upon specific Agenda items.

Rule 28. Manner of Addressing Council.

At each regular Council meeting, if any requests to speak have been received, a person desiring to address the Council shall step to the podium, state one's address, and group affiliation (if any) and speak clearly into the microphone. In lieu of providing a current residential address at the time of speaking during any non-public hearing item at the meeting, a person may provide one's address via email, written mail, or other writing to the City Clerk on or after the date ten days preceding the meeting but prior to 3:00 P.M. on the day of the meeting at which the requester desires to speak. If the person has provided a current address to the City Clerk as required herein and the City Clerk has verified this address, then the person desiring to speak shall only be required to provide one's name, zip code and ward residency at the time of speaking. If an address is not verified by the City Clerk, then the person submitting the request shall not be recognized to speak. At all public hearings, however, each speaker at each hearing that is a party in interest shall be required to provide one's name, address, and group affiliation (if any). All other speakers may, if an address previously was provided to the City Clerk, only be required to provide one's name, zip code and ward residency at the time of speaking. If the meeting is entirely electronic, the person shall use the prescribed method for comments, but shall not speak

on the same item more than once. If the meeting is not entirely electronic, then only those persons in attendance at the physical location of the meeting will be permitted to speak and only in accordance with these rules and the City Code. The person shall follow these rules and the direction of the presiding officer at all times.

Rule 29. Time Limit on Citizen's Remarks.

Citizens shall be limited to no more than five minutes speaking time per Agenda item on which the public is allowed to speak, unless additional or less time is determined by the presiding officer. Total citizen in-put on any subject under Council consideration can be further limited to a fixed period by the presiding officer. A majority vote of the Council may alter the time limitations of this rule.

Rule 30. Remarks of Citizens to be Germane.

Citizen comments must be directed to the subject under consideration. The presiding officer shall rule on the germaneness of citizen comments. Citizens making personal, repetitive, slanderous, or disruptive remarks or engaging in any action that otherwise impedes the orderly conduct of a council meeting shall not be recognized by the presiding officer during the remainder of the meeting. To ensure the meeting is conducted orderly and free from interference or interruption, the presiding officer is vested with exclusive discretion to review and determine whether remarks or actions meet any prohibited terms of this rule. Without limitation, arguing with the presiding officer about any determination will be considered per se disruptive. Persons who make or attempt to make non-germane remarks during any portion of the meeting shall not be recognized by the presiding officer during the remainder of the meeting.

Rule 31. Matters Not on the Agenda.

The Council may in its discretion and only upon an affirmative vote of a majority of Council allow citizens who wish to raise a matter not on the Agenda and who have not filed a request under Rule 16 to address the Council at the end of the regular Agenda.

Rule 31A. Failure to Follow Council Rules.

To enable the Council to transact the business of the City and conduct efficient meetings, persons other than Council members who fail to follow the direction of the presiding officer on more than one occasion during a Council meeting shall not be recognized by the presiding officer during the remainder of the meeting.

Part VI. Council Action

Rule 32. Motion Required.

All action requiring a vote shall be moved by a member of the Council and seconded by a different Council Member. Any motion not seconded by a different Council Member shall be deemed failed by the presiding officer.

Rule 33. Motion to Reconsider.

A motion to reconsider must be made by a Council Member and seconded by a different Council Member, both or either of whom were either on the prevailing side in the original action or were absent at the time of the original action. The sponsorship of the reconsideration of a matter by the Mayor, or other presiding officer, has the effect of a motion to reconsider.

Rule 33A.

Rule 33 of these Rules notwithstanding, when less than seven members of the Council are in attendance at a meeting and an Agenda Item fails to receive four affirmative or negative votes then the Agenda Item shall, upon the request of any Council member in attendance at the meeting, be placed by the Clerk on the Agenda for the next Council meeting, and continued thereafter upon the Agenda for subsequent meetings until it shall receive four affirmative or negative votes. In the event an Item continued under this rule is consideration of an ordinance, the ordinance shall not be considered to have been read or

considered for its first or any subsequent passage unless it shall receive four affirmative votes.

Rule 34. No Motions by Presiding Officer.

DELETED by City Council Roll Call 99-525 of February 22, 1999.

Rule 35. Call for Vote.

At the conclusion of debate the presiding officer shall call for a vote, provided however, a majority of the Council may require a vote at any time.

Rule 36. Separate Consideration.

Except as otherwise required by these rules each Agenda item shall be voted upon separately by electronic means and each separate vote shall be recorded by the City Clerk.

Rule 37. Action on Consent Agenda.

Except as herein provided the "Consent Agenda" shall be considered in bulk and voted upon in a single motion. Each Council Member shall separately note upon a form provided by the City Clerk any matter on the "Consent Agenda" upon which he or she wishes to speak or to vote no. No Council Member may speak on more than four items without the approval of a majority of the council. At the time of consideration of the "Consent Agenda" the presiding officer shall announce the items upon which Council Members have indicated they wish to speak or vote no. Members of the public may not request to remove any consent item. Any four or fewer items upon which any one Council Member wishes to speak, or items exceeding four upon which any one Council Member has requested to speak and which have been approved by majority vote, shall be removed from the "Consent Agenda" and be considered separately and not as a portion of any motion calling for action upon the remainder of the "Consent Agenda". The City Clerk, on all matters contained in the "Consent Agenda" shall record the yes and no votes on each item separately as if each item had been moved, seconded and voted upon separately. Rule 21

shall not apply. Nothing in this rule shall be construed to prohibit a City resident, taxpayer, or property owner from contacting a Council Member prior to the meeting to request that the Member speak and remove an item from the "Consent Agenda".

Rule 38. Action to Multiple Items.

With the consent of a majority of the Council, Rule 36 hereof notwithstanding, the Council may consider for voting purposes more than one item, but in such event the vote upon each item will be separately recorded by the City Clerk noting specific yes or no votes of each Council member on each item.

Rule 39. Consideration Out of Order.

With the consent of the Council any Agenda item may be considered out of order at the request of a Council member.

Rule 40. Recording Names of Moving Members.

The City Clerk shall record the name of the Council Member making each motion and the name of each Council Member who provides the second to the motion. If there is no second, the motion fails.

Rule 41. Consideration of Matters Not on Agenda.

Except as to matters which by law require the publication of notice before consideration by the Council any member of the Council may, at the close of the regular Agenda, bring a matter not on the Agenda to the Council's attention by making a motion to discuss the matter. If the motion is not seconded, or if seconded but not approved by a majority of the Council for discussion, the motion shall be considered failed, and the matter shall not be discussed further. Council may act upon such matters as permitted by law or direct such matter be included upon a later Agenda.

Part VII. Miscellaneous

Rule 42. Motions.

At any appropriate place on the Agenda, any member of the Council may make a motion followed by a second by a different Council Member for the Council to act upon any matter if the motion is germane to the matter under consideration. Any member of the Council may make a motion to recess or adjourn the meeting followed by a second by a different Council Member at any time during the meeting for any reason.

Rule 42A. Waiver of Ordinance Readings.

A Council member may move the final passage of an ordinance, with waiver and suspension of the requirement that an ordinance must be considered and voted on for passage at two Council meetings prior to the meeting at which it is to be finally passed, by reciting or paraphrasing the following motion:

"Moved by (insert the moving Council member's name) that the rule requiring that an ordinance must be considered and voted on for passage at two Council meetings prior to the meeting at which it is to be finally passed be suspended, that the ordinance be placed upon its final passage and that the ordinance do now pass."

or may move waiver and suspension by reference to the language of this section to be known as "the waiver rule". Either motion shall require a second by a different Council Member or shall be considered to have failed.

Rule 43. Applicability of Rules.

These rules shall apply to the Council when meeting in any form including such times as it acts as the Municipal Housing Agency Governing Board.

Rule 44. Name of Sponsor on Roll Call.

Any time these rules require an action to be sponsored by a Council member the City Clerk shall note the name of the sponsoring Council member on the face of the roll call for said item.

Rule 45. Suspension of Rules.

These rules or any part hereof, may be suspended for a specific purpose by a two-thirds majority of the Council.

Rule 46. Hearings.

Any other rule to the contrary notwithstanding, unless required by statute or necessary to conform to proceedings required for a special purpose, a hearing shall commence when declared open by the presiding officer and shall close when closed by the presiding officer or by other formal action of the Council. Any member of the public who fails to follow these rules during any hearing process shall not be recognized by the presiding officer during the remainder of the meeting.

Rule 47. Informal Requests.

A member of the Council, before or during the consideration of any matter, or in the course of a hearing, may request and receive information, explanations or the opinions of the City Manager, Corporation Counsel, City Clerk or any City employee.

Attributes of Exceptional Councils

Leading public organizations and governing with colleagues on a council is a challenging art of community service. The Institute recognizes that many aspects of leadership and governance are not intuitive. This piece is intended to provide councilmembers and city managers insight into the attributes of exceptional councils as well as provide practical tips to help them become exceptional.

1. Exceptional councils develop a sense of team – a partnership with the city manager to govern and manage the city

The mayor, councilmembers and city manager see themselves and work as a team as they undertake a series of tasks to further their common purpose. The individual team members work in a coordinated and collaborative manner with a high degree of respect, trust and openness. The team values diversity in style and perspective. The team thinks and acts strategically as it examines issues/situations and decides on a course of action serving their city's mission and goals.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Successfully transition from candidate to a member of the council.
- Become a champion of 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 citywide perspective.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Build capacity to create a more effective team. The governance team (mayor, councilmembers and city manager) should get to know each other; how each person approaches issues, decision making style and so on. This can be accomplished at annual meetings or workshops through-out the year. In the event that councilmembers disagree, clear ground rules (norms of behavior and practice) can help quell acrimony before it becomes a problem. It's important to remember that trust is built around understanding and respect, not necessarily agreement.

2. Exceptional councils have clear roles and responsibilities that are understood and adhered.

Exceptional councils understand their role is to serve as policy maker - to represent the values, beliefs and priorities of their community while serving in the community's best interest. They carry out a variety of responsibilities including: developing and adopting a vision for the city; focusing and aligning plans, policies, agreements and budgets in furtherance of this vision; and holding themselves and the city manager accountable for results.

Exceptional councils understand that the city manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. The city manager is responsible for undertaking and accomplishing the policy objectives of the council. Exceptional councils recognize the subject matter expertise of staff and utilize their knowledge and experience to guide and inform decision making.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Understand the role of local government and their responsibilities.
- Know their role- to set vision and policy, avoid micromanagement.
- Councilmembers should strive to be informed about the issues facing the city and be prepared to ask questions of staff and each other.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Create a shared understanding of the city manager's role and the council's expectations to optimize the working relationships. This shared understanding is informed by local charter and ordinance provisions that provide the overall framework for the relationship. The council should make time to have conversations during retreats and or study sessions to define and/or reveal and refine their role and responsibilities. Since role clarity between the city council and city management is critical to mutual success, having clear protocols helps avoid misunderstandings.

3. Exceptional councils honor the relationship with staff and each other

Exceptional councils understand that a good working relationship with staff is vital for the city to be run successfully. Exceptional councils treat each other and staff with dignity and respect. They act with civility and a high level of professional decorum. Councilmembers build trust by not playing the "gotcha game" and strive to have a no secrets, no surprises approach as an operating norm. Finally, they respect the diversity of styles and perspectives among their colleagues and staff and are open to new ideas.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Councilmembers 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 councilmembers reflect positive decorum/model of leadership by providing respectful tone with colleagues.
- Establish a set of behaviors ahead of time, potentially documented in a code of conduct, to help promote civility and respect.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Set council priorities and strategic goals at an annual meeting; these goals and priorities are a tool to guide the city manager and staff on where to focus their efforts. This annual meeting provides time for the council to reflect on community priorities as well as offer an opportunity to discuss their decorum and their relationship among each other and the relationship between the city manager/staff and the council.

4. Exceptional councils routinely conduct effective meetings

Open and public meetings are central to democratic decision-making. Exceptional councils master the art of effective meetings. They develop and adhere to meeting protocols and processes. They spend time planning and organizing the agenda with the aim of having a more focused meeting. They allocate the council's time and energy appropriately (focused on the council's role and responsibilities) and meeting short- and long-term priorities. They honor the public's participation and engagement and they generally start on time and are held during reasonable hours.

Exceptional councils use public meetings not only for their intended purpose, information sharing and decision-making,

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

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

but they also use the meeting to demonstrate respect and civility for each other, staff and the public. Exceptional councilmembers prepare in advance of the meeting, remain focused on the city goals and objectives and mindful of their role and responsibilities.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Develop and adopt (with regular reviews and updates), guidelines for conducting meetings and making decisions. These governance protocols typically address meeting procedures (agenda preparation, how to put issues on the agenda, debate and voting procedures (parliamentary rules) and standards of decorum (civility)). As part of a regular self-assessment, councils should evaluate their meetings and their effectiveness and adjust behavior and practices for better results.

5. Exceptional councils hold themselves and the city accountable

Exceptional councils operate openly, ethically and work to engage the community in a myriad of decisions impacting the prosperity and well-being of their community. Toward that end, exceptional councils consistently provide short- and long-term strategic direction and goals, as well as provide budget, program and policy oversight.

Exceptional councils hold themselves accountable for the conduct, behavior and effectiveness of the council. They establish clear priorities and goals and hold the city manager accountable for results. And finally, they embrace accountability as a process and tool to calibrate ongoing efforts to address and meet policy and program objectives.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Councilmembers 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.
- Councilmembers hold themselves responsible for adhering to operating protocols and codes of conduct.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Annually evaluate council and city manager performance toward achieving the city's priorities and goals (consider having this be part of an annual goal setting meeting). Council should consider assessing its own behavior and effectiveness as part of its annual self-assessment.

6. Exceptional councils have members who practice continuous personal learning and development

Governance is not intuitive. In addition, the policy and economic environment impacting cities are ever changing. Exceptional councils continually provide the opportunity to build their knowledge and skills, to enhance their understanding of key issues, increase their awareness of best practices and sharpen their leadership and governance skills.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Stay informed on key issues
- Gain key insights and knowledge on all aspects of governing, from budgets to plans and everything in between.
- Learning to listen is sometimes more important than learning to give a speech.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Seek out national, state and local professional growth and educational opportunities. These opportunities can focus on the nuts and bolts of governing to helping you gain valuable information and/or insights on key policy issues facing your city. In addition, city run orientations for newly elected officials provide a good way to acclimate new members to the council's norms and protocols as well as the budget and key policy issues.

Tips for Promoting Civility in Public Meetings

www.ca-ilg.org/OrientationMaterials

December 2011

What is Civility?

In the context of democratic debate, civility is about how people treat each other. Civility involves the display of respect for those who have positions with which one disagrees.

Even though disagreement plays a necessary role in governance and politics, the issue is *how* one expresses that disagreement. The key is to focus on the strengths and weakness of proposed solutions to community problems—not to engage in personal attacks against those who favor different solutions.¹ An even more powerful leadership strategy is to listen for the concerns and values that underlie people's diverse perspectives to try to identify points of agreement and common ground.

Specific Strategies

- **Embrace Diverse Points of View.** Local officials are grappling with difficult policy challenges. Bringing as many perspectives on what might be the best solution to a given problem increases the likelihood that the solution will indeed be successful and enduring. A goal is to create a culture of tolerance for differing points of view that credits everyone with having the best interests of the community in mind.
- **Everyone Gets a Chance to Share Their Views.** Voltaire said "I may not agree with what you say, but I will fight to the death for your right to say it." Everyone's right to have their view heard is a central democratic value. Conversely, a strategy that relies on drowning other perspectives out usually results in a turning up of the volume and corresponding decreases in civility in discussions.

Related Resources

This tip sheet is a distillation and update of the Institute for Local Government's 2003 whitepaper called *Promoting Civility at Public Meetings: Concepts and Practice*, available at www.ca-ilg.org/civility.

Additional resources from the Institute include

- *Dealing with Emotions at Public Hearings*, available at www.ca-ilg.org/respondingtoconflict and
- *A Leader's Role When Tragedy Strikes*, available at www.ca-ilg.org/tragedy

- **With Rights Come Responsibilities.** For there to be time for everyone to weigh in on an issue, there may need to be reasonable time limits on how long individuals speak. The goal is to create a culture in which as many people as possible (including decision-makers) are respectful of other people's time in attending and participating in the meeting.
- **Avoid Debates and Interruptions.** Interruptions should be discouraged so that individuals have the opportunity to complete their thoughts. A good practice for everyone participating in the conversation is to make a note of a question or different point of view that occurs to you when someone is speaking and then address that issue when it is one's turn to speak. This is an especially important approach for decision-makers to model.
- **Reduce Uncertainty.** Assuring people they will be allowed to share their views and how can reduce concerns that they will not be allowed to be heard. Explaining the process to be used to allow all views to be heard at the outset of a meeting or discussion item can reduce tension levels.
- **The Importance of Listening.** Listening is an important sign of respect, as is giving others the opportunity to listen. Decision-makers' active interest in what people are saying is vital. Repeating back core points that a speaker makes reassures the speaker that their message has indeed been heard—even if one does not necessarily agree with it. The mood turns ugly if the public thinks the matter has already been decided, decision-makers don't care about public input, or decision-makers are being impolite or disrespectful of the public they serve. Everyone attending a meeting should respect other attendees' right to both listen and be heard. One person should talk at a time, any private conversations should be taken outside or deferred, and smart phones should be turned off (texting and emailing should not occur during the meeting).
- **Be Compassionate About the Fear Factor/ Heckling and Applause Not Allowed.** Polls suggest many people fear public speaking.² This fear can come from concerns about

Agenda Guidance

Some local agencies include language to the following effect on their agendas:

Free expression of all points of view is an important democratic value in this community.

To allow all persons to speak who may wish to do so, each speaker is allowed a maximum of __ minutes. An effective approach is to lead with your key point or concern and then explain the reasons underlying it.

If others have already expressed your views, you may simply indicate that you agree with the previous speaker. If appropriate, a spokesperson may present the views of a group.

To encourage and respect expression of all views, meeting rules prohibit clapping, booing or shouts of approval or disagreement from the audience.

being judged negatively or having ideas that people will ridicule or reject. Allowing cheering and booing or other forms of heckling discourages people from sharing their views (even silence or no applause can be perceived as rejection). It also runs the risk that those that do speak will focus more on getting applause than moving the conversation towards addressing difficult issues. (Eye-rolling and grimacing can be non-verbal forms of heckling and also have no place in communities that value mutual respect.)

- **Separate People from The Problem.** Personal attacks or questioning people's motives or character rarely moves the conversation forward to a solution of a problem. In the book about effective negotiating called *Getting to Yes*,³ the authors encourage negotiators to attack the problem, not the people involved in the problem. Anything that approaches name-calling should be off limits.
- **Consider Using Titles.** Referring to each other by title and last name (Supervisor Hassan, Council Member Lee, Board Member Avíña) can serve as a way of showing respect that an individual has been elected and is participating in the conversation in that capacity. Using similar forms of respect for members of the public (Mr., Ms, Sir, Madam) when speaking can also reinforce the notion that everyone is engaged in a special kind of discussion. Community norms vary, however, and in some communities this may be perceived as an affectation.
- **Take a Break.** If conversations get heated, consider taking a break. As one veteran observer of public meetings noted "time can be an anti-inflammatory agent" that can give people a chance to calm down and restore order.⁴

A Note on Civility and Staff

Staff plays a critical role in providing service to the agency and the public the agency serves. An agency's ability to attract and retain capable and motivated staff is an important determinant of how satisfied the public is likely to be with the agency's performance and that of its elected officials.

An old management saw counsels those with oversight responsibilities to praise in public and criticize in private. That advice is sound for those in public service.

If an elected official has concerns about a staff member's performance or actions, a good practice is to make the top administrative official of the agency aware of those concerns.

Similarly, if a member of the public raises concerns about the performance of a public agency employee, refer it to management with a request for follow up.

If the communication is more in the nature of a personal attack, try to identify the underlying concern and respond to that. Encouraging the person to focus on the issue and avoid personal attacks. Separating people from the problem can be just as valuable a strategy when it comes to staff.

- **Ejection a Last Resort.** If a recess does not work to restore order and other techniques are not successful, calling in the sergeant of arms is a last resort. A good practice is to create a record that disruptor was given ample warnings and opportunity to leave or reform their behavior voluntarily. If selective removal of one or more disruptors does not restore order, state law does allow clearing the room with the media allowed to remain⁵ (as an even more last resort).

Parliamentary Procedure and Civility

Rules of parliamentary procedure are another tool to encourage civility and decorum at meetings. The most famous source of parliamentary procedure is Robert's Rules of Order. A good starting point is www.robertsrules.com/ (the "survival tips" page is especially helpful).

A former mayor and county supervisor (and now judge) has created a simplified version for use at the local level. Called "Rosenberg's Rules," the text and an explanatory video are accessible from the Institute's website at www.ca-ilg.org/rosenbergrules.

The following is an excerpt from Rosenberg's Rules on about courtesy and decorum:

The rules of order are meant to create an atmosphere where the members of the body and the members of the public can attend to business efficiently, fairly and with full participation. At the same time, it is up to the Chair and the members of the body to maintain common courtesy and decorum. Unless the setting is very informal, it is always best for only one person at a time to have the floor, and it is always best for every speaker to be first recognized by the Chair before proceeding to speak.

The Chair should always ensure that debate and discussion of an agenda item focuses on the item and the policy in question, not the personalities of the members of the body. Debate on policy is healthy, debate on personalities is not. The Chair has the right to cut off discussion that is too personal, is too loud, or is too crude.

Debate and discussion should be focused, but free and open. In the interest of time, the Chair may, however, limit the time allotted to speakers, including members of the body.

Can a member of the body interrupt the speaker? The general rule is "no." There are, however, exceptions. . . .

Note that the chair may have greater latitude in enforcing decorum among decision-makers than between the public and decision-makers.

- **Walk the Talk.** For civility to be a regular part of community discourse, community leaders must set the standard. Scholars are concerned—and the data seems to demonstrate—that public officials’ incivility to one another contributes to voter alienation and antipathy toward public officials and public agencies.⁶

A good approach is to treat people how you would like to be treated. This includes a) limiting one’s statements in discussions to those that move the conversation forward, b) keeping one’s remarks brief, to the point and non-repetitive of comments others have made (other than to note one’s agreement), c) avoiding personal attacks (in public and private) and d) otherwise adhering to the strategies described above.

Conclusion

How a community conducts its public meetings is a reflection of the community and its values. As Dr. Martin Luther King’s observed:

In a neighborhood dispute there may be stunts, rough words, and even hot insults; but when a whole people speaks to its government, the dialogue and the action must be on a level reflecting the worth of that people and the responsibility of that government.⁷

Dr. King’s admonition to his listeners to set their standards of discourse high--irrespective of how others behave--is consistent with the quote from Gandhi to his followers that “you must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

About This Resource

This resource is a service of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) whose mission is to promote good government at the local level with practical, impartial, and easy-to-use resources for California communities. ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties. For more information and to access the Institute’s resources on Local Government 101, go to www.ca-ilg.org/localgovt101.

*The Institute welcomes feedback and suggestions on enhancing this resource:

- *Email:* info@ca-ilg.org Subject: *Tips for Promoting Civility in Public Meetings*
- *Mail:* 1400 K Street, Suite 205 ▪ Sacramento, CA ▪ 95814

Sample Codes of Civility

Drafting Note: A threshold issue is whether an agency's code will be positive or negative. In other words, will the code describe conduct that is prohibited or describe the kind of conduct it desires to be the norm. Describing the kind of conduct that is preferred has the advantage of being more instructive in setting the goal and encouraging people to meet that goal.

Commitment to Civil Behavior

To maintain a cohesive, productive working environment, the members of the San Diego County Water Authority Board of Directors commit to:

1. Support the Authority's mission.
2. Bring Authority related concerns, issues, and conflicts to the Authority Board for discussion.
3. Offer alternative solution(s) when addressing a problem or issue.
4. Show respect to each other as appointed representatives of their member agencies.
5. Promote civility during Board meetings and tolerate nothing less.
6. Maintain the confidentiality of material discussed during closed Board meeting sessions. Similarly, not to disclose the content or substance of confidential or privileged communications relating to Authority business.
7. Limit the length of comments during Board meetings to three minutes per Director per item and not repeat points that already have been stated by other Directors.

Pledge of Civility

1. The manner in which we govern ourselves is often as important as the positions we take.
2. The organization's collective decisions will be better—and truer to our mission—when differing views have had the opportunity to be fully vetted and considered.
3. All those who appear before the organization's board and committees have the right to be treated with respect, courtesy, and openness. We value all input.

Accordingly, we commit to conduct ourselves at all times with civility and courtesy, to both those with whom the Board interacts and to each other. We also pledge to endeavor to correct ourselves, should our conduct fall below this standard.⁸

Resources and References

¹ Burgess, Guy and Heidi, *The Meaning of Civility*, Conflict Research Consortium at www.colorado.edu/conflict/civility.htm.

² <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1891/Snakes-Top-List-Americans-Fears.aspx> (fear of public speaking ranks second to fear of snakes).

³ Fisher, Roger and Ury, William L., *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (1991).

⁴ See Vermont Institute for Government, *Born to Chair: An Introduction to the Science and Art of Chairing a Board Meeting* (1998), available at <http://www.sec.state.vt.us/municipal/pubs/chair.pdf> and <http://crs.uvm.edu/citizens/chair.pdf>, page 3.

⁵ See Cal. Gov't Code § 54957.9, which provides:

In the event that any meeting is willfully interrupted by a group or groups of persons so as to render the orderly conduct of such meeting unfeasible and order cannot be restored by the removal of individuals who are willfully interrupting the meeting, the members of the legislative body conducting the meeting may order the meeting room cleared and continue in session. Only matters appearing on the agenda may be considered in such a session. Representatives of the press or other news media, except those participating in the disturbance, shall be allowed to attend any session held pursuant to this section. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the legislative body from establishing a procedure for readmitting an individual or individuals not responsible for willfully disturbing the orderly conduct of the meeting.

⁶ Carter, Stephen L., *Civility: Manners, Morals and the Etiquette of Democracy* (1998) at 9.

⁷ *From the March on Washington for Jobs, Peace and Freedom*, 1963.

⁸ Adapted from the Pledge of Civility adopted by the California Public Employee Retirement System Board.