

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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City/County/Village Managers are judged most by what they get done. In all communities, we need other people (outside our jurisdictions) and external organizations to get things done; which is why solid community relations strategies and principles are necessary.

But if we do not manage our community relations effectively, our community profiles, and are self-aware about how we influence people, we risk alienating and getting ahead of our governing bodies.



WHAT SHOULD BE THE CITY MANAGER'S OR ADMINISTRATOR'S EXTENT &/OR LEVEL OF VISIBILITY IN TOWN?

[SKILLS, ROLES & EXPECTATIONS FOR MEDIA, ELECTED OFFICIALS & CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS]

- What should be the manager's overall "profile"? [roles]
- How should "relations" with other community leaders and influencers (external to the city/county organization) be used and managed by the city manager/administrator to best advance the interests of the city/county/village? [roles & expectations]
- How do you want to influence staff, your elected officials & external partners? [skills]



COMMUNITY RELATIONS GROUND RULES FOR MANAGERS

- Don't get ahead of your Mayor & City Council
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- Discuss with council members, in advance, what they want and are looking for when it comes to external relations
 - So long as they are willing, let the Mayor/Village President be the city's media spokesperson, the one with the shovel at the ground breakings, and the one who does radio and podcast interviews. The manager should always be second string/back-up.
 - Within the parameters above, I speak and meet with community groups as often as possible to build relationships and avenues of communication (because I do not always know when I will need to go down one of these avenues for help and partnerships).
 - My preferred pronouns are “we” and “they”; never “I”; and almost every speech or casual conversation includes a reference to the “Mayor & Council’s” policies and goals.

USE OF POWER & INFLUENCE

- How do YOU want to be influenced by others; OR, stated differently, in what ways are you comfortable, receptive and respectful when power is influenced over you?
 1. Information
 2. Ability to dole out rewards and punishments (and other threats)
 3. Subject matter expertise
 4. Control over critical resources
 5. Referential influence, charisma, and conviction to a principle or vision
 6. Connection to powerful and/or influential persons
 7. Level of personal dedication to tasks/objectives (e.g., works long hours)

WHO DO YOU CALL & REACH OUT TO?

WHAT DO YOU TELL THEM WHEN YOU REACH THEM?

- The agreement you carefully negotiated with 7 commercial property owners for sharing costs on a public-private improvement on the city's south side is falling apart because 2 of the parties aren't certain they can afford it (having earlier said they could); 2 others are supportive, but want to wait until next year; the other 3 are anxious to proceed now.
- A mental health clinic wants to take-over and remodel an old strip mall that has been vacant for years, offer services not generally available in town, and employ 90 people. Two adjoining landowners are having NIMBY reactions and want it moved somewhere else. The developer will take the project to Kentucky if this preferred site is rejected.

SURVEY SAYS

- To develop positive community interactions, I am comfortable stepping up and acting as a leader whenever there is an absence of competent leadership

OR

- To develop positive community interactions, I seek to be perceived primarily as an advocate for “Good Governance” principles, and an expert on government process

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- To develop positive community interactions, I keep careful track of which groups will advance different political agendas, so I know who to call on when each is needed



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GOOD LOCAL GOVERNANCE

- The driving principles for good local governance as articulated by the International City/County Management Association (International Committee):
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1. **Legitimacy of Voice:** Regardless of governance structure, meaningful citizen participation is assured, including the freedom to comment and interact in the process of governance.
2. **Vision:** There is thoughtful direction reflecting a public service ethic, including the ability to plan strategically and effectively realize measureable outcomes.
3. **Accountability and Transparency of Services:** Equitable, sustainable, efficient, reliable and responsive delivery of services is provided to all citizens.
4. **Accountability and Transparency in Processes:** Service delivery is based on sound financial practices, merit-based selection, conformance to the Rule-of-Law, equal access to due process and ongoing public review of policy decisions.
5. **Continuity of Local Government:** Actions are taken to strengthen local organizational and decision-making structures so normal and periodic replacements of policy-making officials and leaders does not disrupt service delivery.

THE MANAGER'S ROLE DEFINES EXTERNAL COMMUNITY RELATIONS

- As managers, our political and policy objectives should always be: “GOOD GOVERNANCE” (usually nothing else)
- Policy objectives and political issues that fall outside the broad category of “good governance” are for someone else to advance
- Be the “go-to-person” for process, and what to do next. But resist the temptation to be partisan, to take a side, and weigh-in on what the outcome should be UNLESS the desired policy outcome(s) has/have been clearly articulated by the governing body.
- You build tremendous leadership capital with ALL community groups by being the person who (regardless of political persuasion) can be discerning about “the way forward.”
- Build social relationships with external community groups before you need them

YOUR STORIES

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