How To Avoid Being Fired By Your Department Heads……

Panelists:

• Dan Rich, City Manager, Mountain View

• Lorie Tinfow, City Manager, Benicia

• Kevin Duggan, West Coast Regional Director, ICMA
### Why This Topic:

- Cal-ICMA Survival Skills Project—Goal to Increase the Odds of City Manager Success
- Department Heads are a Key “Audience” for the CM
- Nature of the CM/DH Relationship Impacts the CM/Council Relationship
- Recent Examples of Significant Challenges

### Types of Issues:

- Council Interference in Hiring/Termination of DH’s
- Good (or bad) Relationships Between DH’s and Councilmember(s)
- CM Viewed as Not Holding the DH’s to a High Enough Standard
- CM Viewed as Not Able to Develop and Maintain and/or Maintain an Effective Relationship with DH’s
Questions:

- What Was the Most Challenging Issue You Have Had with a DH and How Did You Handle It?

- As a New CM Coming Into an Organization, What Do You Do to Establish and Maintain an Effective Working Relationship With Department Heads?

- What Challenges Have You Experienced With City Councilmembers Relating to Department Heads?

- What Can You Do to Establish and Maintain the Credibility of Your DH’s With the City Council?

- How Do You Deal With One or More Councilmembers Wanting to Get Involved in DH Appointment or Termination Decisions?

- How Do You Strike a Balance Between Being Supportive of Your Department Heads While Being Responsive to Council/Community Concerns?
Strategies

• Recognize the Department Heads as a “Key Audience”—Commit the Time Necessary to Establish and Maintain an Effective Relationship

• Fully Appreciate the Connection Between Your Relationship With the DH Team and Your Relationship with the City Council

• Determine How the Council Can Provide Input on Service Quality Without Overstepping Into Managerial Responsibility

Strategies

• If You Are Having Challenges With Multiple Department Heads, Carefully Consider the Cause and What to Do About It

• Balance the Desire to Provide Support to DH's With the Need to Require Adequate Performance

• Have a Plan, Including Specific Techniques, on How to Establish and Maintain an Effective Relationship With the DH Team—"Invest the Time!"
Strategies

• Help Establish the Credibility of DH's With the Council—Both as People and Professionals

• When You Need to Improve Performance/Replace DH's, Do So Thoughtfully and Skillfully

• Avoid Overreacting or Underreacting to DH Performance Issues

• Clearly Communicate Expectations; Be Consistent, But Adjust Style and Technique Based on Circumstances

• Create Techniques to Allow City Council Input on Organizational/Departmental Performance—Without Direction on How to Resolve Concerns

• Protect Your Authority to Appoint/Remove DH's While Keeping the Council Informed of Significant Issues Involving Department Heads/Departments
QUESTIONS

Resources:

- ICMA (International City/County Management Association): [icma.org](http://icma.org)

- ILG (Institute for Local Government): [ca-ilg.org](http://ca-ilg.org)