City Manager & City Council Relations: Working With an “Outlier” Council Member

Panelists:

- Gustav Larsson, Vice Mayor, Sunnyvale
- Dana Reed, Council Member, Indian Wells
- Deanna Santana, City Manager, Sunnyvale
- Kurt Wilson, City Manager, Stockton
- Moderator: Kevin Duggan, ICMA West Coast Regional Director, ICMA
Why This Topic?

- Cal-ICMA “Survival Skills Project”/Challenges and Opportunities Report
- “Outlier” Council Members Was a Significant Concern
- A Need to Define the Issue and Suggest Strategies

Goals for Session

- Define the Types of “Outlier” Council Members
- Review the Impacts They Can Have
- The Council’s Role vs. the City Manager’s Role
- Provide Strategies to Deal With These Situations:
  - What The Council Can/Should You Do
  - How You Can Help Support the City Manager and Staff in These Situations
Outline For The Session

- Creating Context
- Questions for the Panel/Discussion
- Some Suggested Strategies
- Questions/Discussion With the Audience

What is An Outlier?

- Different Types/Different Impacts
- Simply a New Member?
- A Council Member Who Represents Different Policy Positions/A Different Perspective?
- A Council Member With a Different Personality/Work Style?
- A Council Member With a Negative and Confrontational Approach?
The Most Challenging “Outliers”:

- Every Staff Presentation is an Inquisition
- Questions Motives/Integrity of Fellow Council Members
- Routinely Discloses Confidential Information
- Spends All Their Time on Minutia/Miss Big Picture
- Never Prepared for Meetings/Ask for Information Already Provided
- Never Willing to Bring Closure to An Issue
- Refuses to Abide by Meeting Rules of Order
- Goes Around Manager to Staff
- Always Trying to Make the Fellow Council Members/Manager/Staff Look Bad

Impacts on the Organization

- How the “Outlier” Can Impact the Council
- How the “Outlier” Can Impact the Manager/Staff
- The Significance of the Council’s Reaction:
  - If You Do Nothing
  - If You Overreact
  - The Attitude the Council Demonstrates
Question #1:

• What Type of “Outlier” Have You Experienced?

• What Did You Think Your Role as a Fellow Council Member or Manager Was in Regard to Getting Involved?

• What Did You Think Your Manager’s or Council’s Role Was?

Question #2:

• What Strategies Did You Enlist?

• How Effective Were They?

• Did You Consider “Enlisting Allies”?

• How Did it Work Out?

• What Would You Do Differently the “Next Time”?
Question #3:

- What Do You Do if There is No Hope of Change?
- Any Suggested “Coping” Mechanisms?
- Can Anything Positive Come From Having to Work With an Outlier Council Member?

When Is Intervention Appropriate?

- When the Work of the Council is Being Disrupted/Negative Interpersonal Relations
- When the Manager/Staff are Being Negatively Impacted
- When Public Confidence is Suffering
Steps in the Process

• Diagnose the Type of “Outlier”
• Carefully Discern Your Role
• Thoughtfully Consider Strategy
• Implement Strategy (if action is appropriate)

3 Levels of Strategy

• Personal Intervention
• Soliciting Help From Others/Facilitation
• Formal/Outside Intervention:
  • Censure
  • Investigation
  • Formal Complaint
What Allies Can You Enlist?

• Mayor?
• Other Councilmembers?
• Manager?
• Community Leaders?
• Supporters?

What If Nothing Changes?

• Exercise Emotional Maturity/Intelligence
• Keep Communication Open/Don’t “Shut Down”
• Keep It in Perspective
• Do Your Best to Insulate Manager/Staff
• Help the Council/Staff Stay Focused
• Recognize That the Best You May be Able to Do is Minimize the Damage
Cal-ICMA Survival Skills Project:

Challenges and Strategies: Maximizing Success for City and County Managers in California

icma.org/challenges+strategies

The Institute for Local Government (ILG):

Leadership and Governance Resources:

www.ca-ilg.org