Effective City Council/City Manager Communications: Key to Good Governance and City Success
League of California Cities
Mayors and Council Members Executive Forum
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Session Overview

- How roles, purpose, communication and mutual respect create the foundation for effective governance
- Why developing successful City Council/City Manager relationships are important
- Why it can be challenging to establish effective communication and grow relationships among diverse Council members and the City Manager
- Strategies and best practices to build communication, relationships and a cohesive City Council/City Manager team
- Questions you’re so anxious to ask

Good Governance Is About...

Building relationships through:

Effective Leadership by the Mayor and City Council
- Responsive management and leadership by the City Manager
- Meaningful communication: honest, direct, respectful, proactive
- Understanding roles and fulfilling expectations
- Fostering mutual respect and building trust
- Ethics
Attributes of High Performing Councils

- True partnerships with Members, City Manager and Staff
- Clarity on and Respect for Roles and Responsibilities
- Civility and Respect for All
- Conduct Effective Meetings
- Hold Themselves and CM Accountable
- Practice Continuous Learning

Noble Purposes

- Make Local Representative Democracy Work
- Build Community
- Enhance and Sustain your City
You can be a standout Councilmember and a solid team player too!

City Government is a team sport

It’s all about collaboration, persuasion and relationships

**TWO BASIC RULES**

1. Count to “4” to get anything done.*

2. If I slam my colleagues or they slam me, refer to Rule #1.

*Note: 3 on a 5 member Council.
LEAD TOWARD SUCCESS

- Don’t have to prove anything
- Pressure from constituency to produce results...but begin slowly
- Get the lay of the land
- Listen, listen, listen...then listen some more to your colleagues

- People vote for people and do business with people that they like and trust
- Have to now build relationships with your colleagues to achieve success...
- Civility is key!!
Look for connections and intersections
• With your priorities
• With Councilmembers and City Manager

Relationships matter
• Work together to develop a support system (Brown Act caution)

Discuss your interests with the City Manager and the Mayor

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**HOW MUCH SHOULD I TALK AS A COUNCILMEMBER?**

• Be focused, direct, clear, and brief
• Questions and comments can lead to an action/motion
• Democracy simply moves slowly
FOCUS ON OUTCOMES

- Be attentive
- Ask clarifying questions
- Let people know you are listening

• Separate People from the Problem
• Focus on Interests, not Positions
• Invent Options for Mutual Gain
• Insist on Using Objective Criteria
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Seek effective means to involve the community in big picture decisions

- Public hearings don’t cut it
- The civic engagement builds trust and confidence in local government

TEAMWORK

- Getting things done for the community as a team makes us all look good
- Accomplishments build relationships... which lead to other successes
Can’t I disagree with a colleague on an issue?

It depends on how you do it...

- The terms that come to mind when dealing with your colleagues are dignity, civility, kindness, patience, support and inclusiveness.

- Never underestimate the power of a little civility and kindness.

Suggestions and Some Basic Rules for Successful City Council, City Manager and City Attorney Relationships.
The Importance of Developing Successful City Council and City Manager Relations

- Organizational Effectiveness
- Mutual Success and Fulfillment
- Positive Staff Morale
- Heightened accountability
- Enhanced Community Confidence
- Community Success and Outcomes

What Makes for a Successful City Council and City Manager Relationship?

- Mayor, councilmembers and city manager develop a sense of team, working together in furtherance of their common purpose.
- Build understanding of what councilmembers bring to the table when they get elected – understand their backgrounds.
- Individual team members work collaboratively with a high degree of respect, trust and openness.
- The team values diversity in style and perspective.
- Clear understanding of each other’s roles, responsibilities, and stated expectations.
- Developing and maintaining effective communication between the chief executive and the governing board.
- Trust is the most critical characteristic in a successful relationship, and effective communication is essential for building trust.
CITY MANAGER - COUNCIL RELATIONSHIPS

- Council sets policy and overall direction
- City Manager implements council policy and day-to-day operations and offers policy advice
- In discussions with Manager and Council, find that line and both stay within your area of responsibility

CITY MANAGER - COUNCIL RELATIONSHIPS

- Yes it is often more complicated
- But it is best if
  - The Council is not seen as involved in staff and administrative matters
  - The City Manager is not seen as dominating public discussions
MANAGER GOALS

- Make the Council as a whole productive and successful
- Help each Councilmember to succeed
- Meet the Council’s goals and the City looks good
- Help to keep the Council together and making progress
- Guide and develop staff and organizational culture

COUNCILMEMBER ROLE

- Encourage a close relationship and meet with your Manager periodically
- Your Manager can be your greatest asset in reaching your goals
- Want to get things done? Ask the Manager, not the staff
COUNCILMEMBER ROLE

- You cross the line of responsibilities when you start to direct staff to work on your projects
- Unless your City Charter is different, the City Manager, City Attorney, and perhaps the City Clerk, are your only employees
- The Council directs the City Manager and he/she directs staff - simple chain of command

COUNCILMEMBER ROLE

- Hold the City Manager accountable for Council goals
- If there is conflict around an individual Councilmember’s request, then the Manager needs to work on resolving the conflict
- Do not publicly criticize the City Manager or staff - take up your disappointments privately
**MAYOR’S ROLE**

- Don’t forget about the Mayor
- Meet with the Mayor frequently to discuss your ideas or concerns
- Mayor works closely with the City Manager to move the City Council goals forward, anticipate upcoming issues, and manage the action of the council meetings
- All of this can happen more smoothly if the Mayor understands your concerns
- Remember the Brown Act applies to the Mayor as well!

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**CITY ATTORNEY’S ROLE**

- Represent the organization itself, not individual Councilmembers or members of the public
- Provide clear and accurate legal advice on myriad of complex laws
- Be fair and impartial
- Provide full disclosure
- Use candor and diplomacy
Challenges to Effective Communication and Building Positive Working Relationships

- Can’t control who gets elected or who may have been appointed City Manager prior to your election
- Don’t fully appreciate what is expected of each other’s respective roles
- Underdeveloped interpersonal skills…or someone else’s
- Not putting in the time to work on the relationships
- Not fully understanding the perspectives of City Council, City Manager and the staff
- “Outlier” members of the governing body
- Lack of trust

Strategies and Best Practices to Foster Communication and Build Relationships

- League Trainings for new Councilmembers
- Council Goal Setting
- Council Appointed Officer evaluation processes
- Create processes/protocols before things become an issue
Council Goal Setting

- Critical to provide direction to the organization on priorities and to keep projects on track
- Encourage Council to work with City Manager to establish goals for the year - both for the organization and for the City Manager personally (through evaluation process)
- Staff to provide regular updates to Council on goals
- Budget priorities should follow goals
- Hayward Strategic Roadmap:  [https://www.hayward-ca.gov/content/hayward-strategic-roadmap](https://www.hayward-ca.gov/content/hayward-strategic-roadmap)

Council Appointed Officer Evaluation Processes

- Important to establish annual evaluation process for City Manager, City Attorney, and City Clerk (and other appointed officers)
- Facilitates goal setting process and establishes officer’s role in accomplishing goals
- Allows Council to share feedback and direction as a whole on the officer’s performance
- Allows City Manager to share feedback with Council regarding items of concern and also confidential issues within the organization
Create processes/protocols before things become an issue

- Council handbook a key*
- Council Referral Memos/Colleagues Memos
- Council inquiry response protocol
- Develop robust Council candidate and new Councilmember orientation programs
- City Manager should meet regularly with all Councilmembers (at least monthly) and with Mayor (at least weekly) - special briefings with staff on specific topics as warranted
- Make sure all Councilmembers receive the same information as quickly as possible and at the same time
- Work/Study Sessions before action item agendized for controversial items


Questions You’re So Ready to Ask???
Thank You!