

County Leadership Handbook



County Leadership *Handbook*



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Acknowledgements

The idea for this handbook originated with NACo's Programs and Services Committee, under the leadership of its Chairman, Gerry Hyland, Supervisor, Fairfax County, Virginia. The original County Leadership Handbook was published by NACo and distributed by state associations of counties in 2000.

The 2008 update of the handbook has been a NACo team effort with the support of the Programs and Services Committee, Chairman Helen Purcell of Maricopa County, AZ, and coordinated by Ruth Nybro, Director of Education and Training, County Services Department. NACo staff Lisa Cole, Tom Goodman, Bert Jarreau, Jim Phillips, Alex Welsch, Stephanie Osborn and Phyllis Pines-Garnett contributed content and editing. Bill Cramer, Jack Hernandez and Emily Pollock provided graphic design and layout. Special thanks go to Edward Ferguson, Director, NACo's County Services Department, for his support and encouragement.

The Handbook's greatest value may be found in the examples, advice and stories of veteran county officials – both elected and appointed – who added their time and insight. Evidence of their leadership can be found throughout the five sections of the Handbook. Many thanks to all of you!

About the National Association of Counties

Founded in 1935, the National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization in the country that represents county governments. With headquarters on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., NACo's primary mission is to ensure that the county government message is heard and understood in the White House and in the halls of Congress.

The NACo Vision

NACo, with the creative involvement of its membership, will develop the leadership, programs and services necessary to enable counties to meet the challenges of the 21st century, manage rapid change, and assist their citizens in achieving a better quality of life.

NACo achieves this by serving as a liaison with other levels of government, improving public understanding of counties, acting as a national advocate for counties, and helping counties find innovative methods for meeting the challenges they face.

Dear County Official:

NACo is pleased to join with our state associations of counties to bring you this County Leadership Handbook. It represents hours of research, writing, and editing to bring you hundreds of issues and an armload of practical information. We hope it will prove valuable in carrying out your important role.

NACo realizes that it can't build leaders with a single tool such as this. So we have many ways to serve you - legislative analyses and lobbying on Capitol Hill - three major conferences each year - workshops, seminars and technical assistance - timely research and information outreach - helpful publications, including *County News*, our bi-weekly newspaper - and financial services to help your county save money. We hope you will take advantage of the many resources that NACo provides with your interests in mind.

Thank you for using this Handbook. If you and your county are already NACo members, we hope you will stay with us for years to come. If your county is not a NACo member, we hope this publication, and knowledge of all that NACo offers, will convince you to join right away.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Naake".

Larry Naake
Executive Director
National Association of Counties

Dear County Official:

"My half century of public service has convinced me that leadership is not the result of genius or even natural ability, it is the result of persistence, perseverance, and hard work. To be a good leader, one must work at it." -Senator Robert C. Byrd, West Virginia

We have all heard of leading by example, and county officials are in an exceptional position to put this into practice. Your state's county association executives work to ensure that county officials are prepared and inspired to carry out their responsibilities to the best of their abilities. We present this County Leadership Handbook to serve as a guidebook for you to truly lead by example and make the most of your county government opportunities.

This handbook is a collaboration between the National Association of Counties and the National Council of County Association Executives. It is just one example of what we can all accomplish by working together. We encourage all counties to become members of their state association and of NACo so everyone will benefit from the projects and services provided at both the state and national level.

As you apply your heart and mind to the tasks ahead, I offer the reminder, "Look over your shoulder now and then to be sure someone's following you." -Henry Gilmer



With Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patti Hamilton".

Patti Hamilton
Executive Director
West Virginia Association of Counties
President
National Council of County Association Executives

Dear Fellow County Official,

As an elected county official you are already a leader in your community and your county. Significant responsibilities come with your job, including making the tough decisions. Enhancing your leadership skills can help you deal with new issues, technology advances and rapid change.

As business school professor Kathleen Reardon says:

“People who become good leaders have a greater than average willingness to make bold moves, but they strengthen their chances of success – and avoid career suicide – through careful deliberation and preparation.”

The County Leadership Handbook can help you with that preparation. Its five sections cover your various roles as a community leader, communicator, administrator, finance and budget officer and technology expert. It may not have all the answers, but it offers tips, models and advice.

The goal of the handbook, as with many of NACo’s programs and services, is to help you to become more effective as a county official and more responsive to the people you serve. I have been in office 14 years, and the handbook still helps me to focus on what is essential and how to efficiently do my job.

You’ll find the handbook to be a helpful guide for the challenges and satisfactions you’ll encounter in this essential leadership role in your county and a link to other NACo services and affiliates that are ready to offer continuing support. I congratulate you and look forward to working with you to realize the vision you intend for your community.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Don Stapley".

Don Stapley
NACo President 2008 – 2009
Supervisor, Maricopa County, Arizona

About Counties in 2008

As of this printing of the *County Leadership Handbook* there are 3,068 county governments in the United States, including 36 city-county consolidations. In addition, 42 “independent cities” perform county activities. Forty-eight states are divided into functional county governments (called “boroughs” in Alaska and “parishes” in Louisiana). Connecticut and Rhode Island are divided into “unorganized areas” for the purpose of elections, but they have no functional county governments. The number of counties per state ranges from 3 in Delaware to 254 in Texas. Counties range in area from 26 to 87,000 square miles. County populations range from 55 in Loving County, Texas, to 9.9 million in Los Angeles County.

Of the 3,068 county governments in the United States, 2350 are NACo members, representing 85% of the nation’s population. There are twenty states that have all counties as members of NACo. They are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

Restoring the Partnership

For decades, county and federal governments have worked together to answer the challenges facing the nation, but over the last twenty years that partnership has diminished. The federal government has ignored the needs of counties and the levels of government have become more isolated from one another with fewer opportunities to work together to solve common problems for the people they represent.

While every level of government has a role and responsibility for responding to needs of its citizens, county officials are leaders in their communities; they are the experts in health care, homeland security, infrastructure, land use, and community development. Only the coordinated efforts of all levels of government will effectively address the concerns and problems county officials face. To foster better coordination, NACo has launched a campaign to “Restore the Partnership” between the federal government and America’s counties. By restoring the partnership between cities, counties, states and the federal government, every official can better serve the American people.

U.S. County Elected Officials in Year 2008

County officials have served an average of 12.4 years in county government generally, with an average of 8.6 years in their current position. An overwhelming majority are male (82%) and 56 years old or older (74%). Most of them (69%) consider their position as “part-time,” although they spend an average of 30 hours a week on the job. Full-time county officials are most common in the West and least common in the Midwest.

Source: “Local Perspectives: A Report from the National Survey of County Elected Officials, 2008” by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, National Center for the Study of Counties in cooperation with NACo.



Table of Contents

- **Introduction and User's Guide • 8**
- **Leadership Perspectives • 9**
 - Your Role as Leader • 10
 - Demonstrating Leadership:**
 - Visionary • 11
 - Change Agent • 12
 - Consensus Builder • 13
 - Ethical Practice • 13
 - Personal Wellness • 15
 - Member to Member • 16
 - References and Resources • 16
- **Communications Know-How • 17**
 - Your role as Communicator • 18
 - Demonstrating Leadership:**
 - Working with the Media • 18
 - Meetings in the Public Eye • 23
 - Loving Lobbying • 24
 - Online Communications • 25
 - Member to Member • 22, 24
 - References and Resources • 25
- **Management and Administrative Savvy • 27**
 - Your role as Manager • 28
 - Demonstrating Leadership:**
 - Relationships and Responsibilities • 28
 - Managing for Results • 29
 - Liability and Risk Management • 30
 - Customer Service • 31
 - Collaboration • 31
 - Empowering Your Workforce • 33
 - Member to Member • 30, 32
 - References and Resources • 32
 - Types of Groups • 35
- **Information Technology • 37**
 - Your Role as Planner and User • 38
 - Shared Services • 38
 - E-Services • 38
 - The Mobile Workforce • 39
 - Enhancing Collaboration • 39
 - Geographic Information Systems (GIS) • 40
 - County Enterprise Architecture • 40
 - Member to Member • 39
 - References and Resources • 40
- **Finance and Budget • 43**
 - Your role as Budget Manager and Fiscal Leader • 44
 - What's In a County Budget? • 44
 - County Revenue Sources • 45
 - Budget-Related Policies • 45
 - Financial Policies • 46
 - Financial Reporting • 47
 - Budget Formats and Trends • 47
 - The Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) • 47
 - Debt Management • 48
 - Risk Management • 48
 - Member to Member • 46
 - References and Resources • 48
- **Appendices • 49**
 - State Associations of Counties • 50
 - NACo Affiliates • 53
 - NACo Calendar of Conferences (through 2012) • 54
 - NACo Resources • 55



Introduction and User's Guide

NACo and your state association are proud to present to you this County Leadership Handbook. It is a symbol of teamwork between your national and state organizations and of their deep commitment to your success. As a county official you will, we believe, enjoy the satisfaction of many achievements during your term. You will also face the countless challenges of working with diverse partners and leading in uncertain economic times. That is why the focus of this handbook is on leadership. A strong leadership perspective will inspire, guide and support you as you secure your county's future.

Because this handbook is written for a national audience it is, by necessity, general in its approach. We try here to share the most vital lessons from the experience of our members, our affiliates and our mentors. We also know that learning from each other provides some of the best encouragement, so we have included stories and tips from county leaders across the country. Here we recognize that each state is different in resources, needs and structure, and the terminology we use may not match exactly what is used in your state. You may even find that certain discussions are not relevant to your county's situation. This handbook, therefore, is best used as a complement to your state association's publications and training manuals.

This handbook is not intended as policy, legal advice, or recommendations from NACo or your state association. Above all, your state's laws, statutes and traditions determine your working environment.

Suggestions for How to Use This Handbook

This handbook is intended to offer an overview of critical leadership roles and to provide practical tips and tools as well as insight and wisdom from peers. Both newly elected officials and veterans will find something of value. Early reviewers have found the text "interesting, readable and a good reminder about what leadership really is."

The handbook is organized into five sections: leadership; communications; management; technology; and finance and budget. Through each section you will find common threads: key leadership responsibilities, standards, suggestions, member-to-member advice and examples, and a list of additional resources for your own study.

NACo and your state association have the following suggestions for how this handbook can be useful to you over time:

- as a guide to identifying education and training needs for you and your staff;
- as a starting point for discussions with other county officials;
- as a source for where to go for further information;
- as a useful place to insert new or updated information about specific topics such as advances in technology; and
- as a constant reminder that your leadership actions are essential to the effectiveness of your county's government.

NACo and the state associations also urge you to plan to attend state and national conferences and participate in seminars and institutes that comprise NACo's Leadership Series. Above all, NACo and your state association wish you success and personal fulfillment in your job as a county official!

Leadership Perspectives

Your Role as Leader

Demonstrating Leadership

Visionary
Change Agent
Consensus Builder
Ethical Practice
Personal Wellness

“An effective county commissioner can leave a legacy of good works and make an impact on people’s lives. It is the closest level of government to the people and one that provides the greatest challenge and creates leaders for the future.”

-“What Do County Commissioners Do All Day,”
NACo publication

County government today is America’s most vibrant, innovative and effective means of delivering comprehensive services that address all the needs of contemporary community life. Behind that generality lay the personal skills, hopes, and experiences of thousands of people like you—people who have sought, and earned, leadership positions in their own county governments.

County governments vary widely in their structure and in the powers they can wield. Officials wear a wide variety of titles: supervisor, council member, commissioner, and freeholder, among others. Counties vary in size and condition – rural, small, large, urban, and suburban. But regardless of the details of individual circumstances, success in governing requires nothing less than a strong foundation in leadership.

Your Role as Leader

Since becoming an elected official, your role has changed. Before the election, you were an active and concerned member of the community. You worked on the sidelines to make your community better. Now having gained elected office, you are part of a new team and a new environment. Your perspective has undoubtedly changed, and the community is looking to you for direction as well as action.

The rules of leadership have also changed in the past two decades. The public’s expectation of elected officials has shifted. Instead of being told what to do, a diverse public now expects to have a strong voice, to be

routinely informed, and to be satisfied on many levels. They are looking to you to make things happen. At one and the same time you are expected to be both personally decisive about the issues that matter to them while still being collaborative and inclusive.

As an elected county official, you work in a more complex environment than your predecessors of even a few years ago. Most counties today are involved in far more than traditionally mandated services such as transportation, law enforcement and public records. Today’s county government juggles priorities and concerns in areas as housing, environmental protection, economic development, health and human services, homeland security, public safety and education. For these you must be as versatile in your skills as the demands are diverse.

Strengthening Your Leadership

Achieving county office may be the culmination of long effort for you, but you also need to view it as a beginning. You are starting out on a period of learning and growth that will make you a better leader as time goes by. You accomplish this by being alert to your leadership responsibilities in these five areas:

- developing a vision and mission for the county, engaging your board and your citizens in the process.
- fostering a spirit of risk-taking, innovation and entrepreneurship to support needed change.
- working toward achieving consensus when deciding on important matters.
- setting a personal example and ensuring that ethical behavior, policies and practices are in place throughout the offices and agencies of county government.
- learning to recognize and control stress and seeking a healthy balance in personal and professional life.



Demonstrating Leadership in Vision

“All humans possess an overpowering desire to understand and predict the future ...but a leader incarnates a dream for that future.”

-Warren Bennis,
Managing the Dream: Reflections on Leadership and Change

Visioning and planning are key leadership tasks. Understanding the challenges and the opportunities for your county in the next four years is the basis for developing a vision and direction for your leadership. Stop now and consider for several minutes: how do I want this county to look when I leave office?

The vision is not yours alone; leadership demands that you engage your citizens, boards and partners in the process of articulating a vision and setting goals. County officials have the opportunity to exert leadership by involving various publics in determining not just the future, but the *preferred* future for everyone in the community. The development of a commonly held vision and mission for the entire county is the first step in developing a strategic plan for getting to that desired future. Consider Colin Powell's advice, given to business leaders in San Francisco and quoted by CNET News:

“Good leaders inspire rather than motivate. Leadership involves developing a vision and conveying that vision to every single employee of the company or organization. Above all, leadership is about creating bonds of trust.”
(10/11/06)

Distinctions Between Mission and Management

It is a major oversimplification to say elected officials make policy and managers carry it out. This policy/administration distinction does not exist in the real world. Some seemingly administrative decisions (facility location, for instance, or adoption of new technologies) actually have profound policy dimensions. Similarly governing bodies adopting broad policy measures often also give managers explicit direction in how those measures are to be implemented.

Professor James Svava of the University of Arizona has proposed a continuum of four functions performed by government officials: mission, policy, administration and management. As county leader you may, at different times, act in any or all of these areas.

Additional Internet Resources

On Vision:

www.ncl.org- The National Civic League Web site. The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook is available for download.

www.leader-values.com- Theories, values and lessons of great leaders

www.greenleaf.org- The Web site devoted to the work of Robert K. Greenleaf, whose classic book, Servant as Leader (1970) continues to be a major influence in the study and practice of leadership.

www.heartlandcenter.info- The Heartland Center for Leadership Development in Lincoln, Nebraska specializes in leadership and community development for small and rural communities.

- **Mission:** Frame the basic philosophy and broad goals of the organization.
 - Example: growth or no-growth.
- **Policy:** Make basic decisions about how to allocate resources.
 - Example: add or eliminate a specific program.
- **Administration:** Decide how services are actually delivered.
 - Example: site selection.
- **Management:** Secure and utilize human, capital and information resources to provide services.
 - Example: hiring and firing.

This continuum can be seen in all of the most prevalent forms of county government organization.

In a Council-Manager System:

- The council is almost exclusively responsible for **mission**, although the manager may advise on feasibility and analyze basic conditions and trends.
- Responsibility for **policy** is shared by council and management. For example, the council sets budget priorities and adopts the final budget, but the budget itself is chiefly formulated by the manager.
- **Administration** is chiefly the manager's responsibility, although the council may legislate some aspects of how services are to be provided.

- **Management** is almost exclusively the manager's responsibility, though the council will review performance and occasionally suggest changes.

In a Council-Elected Executive System:

- Both the council and the executive play a role in establishing the county government's **mission**. The executive's role will reflect the powers granted to the position by the county charter, as well as the incumbent's personality and approach.
- **Policy** is also a shared function. While appointed managers receive budget priorities from the council, elected executives propose their own priorities for council consideration.
- In **administration** and **management** areas, the division of responsibility is very similar to the council-manager environment.

In a Commission System:

- The commission has almost total responsibility for establishing **mission**. Sometimes appointed assistants or professional department heads may provide some input.
- **Policy** is also almost exclusively the commission's job. Again, experienced professional staff may offer guidance and suggestions.
- The extent of the commission's involvement in **administration** and **management** depends on whether the county employs experienced professional staff. Where commissioners serve as department heads their involvement will be pronounced, while appointed department heads, where they exist, will assume many administrative and managerial responsibilities.

Demonstrating Leadership Through Change

"Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes."

-Joseph Rost,
Leadership for the 21st Century

Few subjects have prompted as much commentary as the pace of change in today's society. Since we know that in the 21st century change is the only constant, your role is to walk the tight-rope between the need for quick and fundamental change in all structures and agencies and the need to operate within the county's fiscal realities. It is also important to recognize that

change is not an end in itself. As a leader, one of your fundamental responsibilities is to anticipate, plan for, and direct change.

Change, no matter how positive, comes with a price. Most of us are resistant to change, especially if the hoped-for benefits are not going to be realized for some time. Use these suggestions for helping the community and staff embrace rather than resist change:

- Understand and be sensitive to the reality that change threatens a person's sense of security, including your own. Leading a change effort requires courage.
- Use every opportunity to explain why change is necessary. Emphasize that it is not because anyone has been doing a bad job or working on the wrong thing, but rather that external conditions and needs have changed.
- Articulate the anticipated gains for the community. Ask: What new opportunities will the proposed change offer us? What problems might be solved by the change?
- Help people understand the current environment of competition. If we do not change, someone else is likely to step in. For example, this may happen if you need to compete with surrounding areas for business development.
- Foster support by involving those most likely to be affected by the change in its planning and implementation.



Additional Internet Resources

On Change:

www.pew-partnership.org- The Pew Partnership for Civic Change provides tools and resources for community problem solving and citizen training for civic leadership.

mentation. In community-wide issues, involve as many people and groups as possible.

- Foster a spirit of innovation, creativity and risk-taking. Empower and encourage workers and managers to seek novel solutions.

Demonstrating Leadership Through Consensus Building

Striving for WIN/WIN Solutions

The best decisions are those made with the agreement of everyone involved. For practical reasons majority voting is still used in many situations where a community must make a decision. While this is lawful and effective, it still results in an unsatisfied minority. You will have “winners,” but you will also have “losers” to contend with.

Consensus building is a powerful decision-making method for helping community groups and factions find common ground. While it is a time-consuming process that requires patience and openness on your part, the result is a decision that everyone can be proud of.

A decision by consensus is useful when a community faces a complex issue and there are diverse viewpoints to be considered. A consensus process allows for all viewpoints to be heard, a variety of options to be generated, and agreements reached that all parties can accept. The National Civic League describes the benefits of consensus decisions in Solving Community Problems by Consensus, published by the Program for Community Problem Solving and reprinted here with permission:

Consensus decisions provide the following advantages:

- **Education:** groups and factions learn from one another.
- **Greater creativity:** groups generate more options for a solution.
- **Acceptance of the outcomes:** those who have been involved together in the decision making are less likely to challenge the outcomes.
- **Faster implementation:** when people see their interests are reflected, they will not block implementation.
- **Creation of new networks:** participants in consensus decision-making establish constructive relationships that last into the future.

Additional Internet Resources

On Consensus Building and Decision Making:

www.mcc.state.mt.us- The Web site of the Montana Consensus Council provides tools, publications, and useful links. Under tools, see “Decision-Making Continuum”, and “Checklist to determine if Consensus Building is Appropriate.”

Consensus building is useful when you are dealing with a complex issue that involves many individuals or agencies. The issues in question must be open to negotiation, and the participants must be willing to work within the process.

There are times when consensus building is not the preferred method for making decisions. This is true when:

- the community is facing an emergency.
- timing is not right in the event there is a lack of information, or limited time.
- a principle is the focus of the problem; e.g., the abortion issue, where there is a basic difference in values.
- you need legal clarification.
- your community is polarized, making face-to-face discussions impossible.

Demonstrating Leadership in Ethical Practice

Ethical behavior and ethical thinking are key leadership traits. As a leader you must assure that ethical standards, policies, and practices are the foundation of all county agencies and bodies. To model and support ethical behavior and thinking, be sure these resources are in place in your county:

- values and policies statements
- codes of ethics
- oversight committees
- communications strategies
- ethics training, monitoring and evaluation.

Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict of interest, threatens your ability to lead. This is true whether the supposed conflict reflects on your behavior or on an action by an employee or a relative. A potential conflict of interest often adds sensationalism to a news story; dealing with it appropriately will reduce the time and energy you need to spend on it and will keep your programs and platforms on track.

Depending on the situation, conflict of interest laws of most states can be simple or complex. The simple application is what to do when it's clear that a conflict of interest is present. In this case, you must do two things:

1. **Disclose** – immediately disclose the conflict in the official record; **and**
2. **Disqualify yourself** – “immediately and completely” refrain from participating in **any** manner as an officer or employee in a decision on a matter where the conflict is present.

Realize that having conflicts between your various interests is not a bad thing; what is forbidden is acting in your official capacity when you have a conflict.

The complex application occurs when you must first determine whether or not you have a conflict. Consider these when you review a situation with a potential conflict:

1. What are the statutory standards?

Prohibitions often apply to extended family. The statutory definition of “relative” is often different from – and much more sweeping than – the customary interpretation of that common term. For example, in Arizona the term is defined expansively to include “your spouse, child, child’s child, parent, grandparent, brother or sister of the whole or half blood and their spouse and the parent, brother, sister or child of a spouse.” A.R.S. 38-502(9).

And then ask...

2. How might this appear in the headlines, i.e., your local newspaper?

The following suggestions are excerpted with permission from a presentation by Tim Delaney, President, The Center for Leadership, Ethics & Public Service at NACo’s 2004 Annual Conference, “Complying with Public Service Ethics Laws,” and are reprinted with permission of the author.

“The best guideline is to avoid circumstances in which there may be questions about whether you are exercising independent judgment in the best interests of the public.

“Do what you can to avoid any possible questions about your actions, even if it means leaving the room when certain interests are discussed. Take seriously any advance cues about potential conflicts of interest that may be raised in meetings, in the press and in disclosure reports. When these present themselves, don’t feel guilty about declaring a conflict. In doing so you’re taking the lawful and correct steps, an action that will set a standard for your administration and ensure the trust of your citizens.

“Finally, pay attention to ‘sensitive items.’ These leave you open for negative newspaper coverage and include: use of credit cards, vehicles, letterhead and office equipment; travel – especially mixing business with pleasure; and the careless disclosure of privileged information.”



Additional Internet Resources

On Ethics:

www.ethics.org- The Ethics Resource Center, Washington, DC

www.icma.org- The International City/County Management Association Web site, offers an “Ethics in Action” training package.

www.josephsoninstitute.org- The Institute is a non-partisan advocate for principled reasoning and ethical decision-making.

www.miamidade.gov/ethics- An excellent example of a county government’s ethics programs and policies.

www.cityethics.org - Provides best practices, conferences, city/county projects, and links.



Demonstrating Leadership by Maintaining Personal Wellness

When asked “What are your five most difficult tasks as an elected official?”, Councilmember Hal Conklin of Santa Barbara, California answered:

1. Building coalitions.
2. Articulating a clear vision.
3. Gaining trust and respect.
4. Building bridges between diverse groups.
5. Having the time to do all of the above.

Excerpted from: Elected Official's Little Handbook, Len Wood: Balancing complex and conflicting demands is a key survival skill for all county officials. No definition of public service requires that you sacrifice your own emotional stability, or your family's well-being, for the sake of your job. Instead, you and your constituents will both benefit to the degree that you can keep your work life and personal life in a healthy balance.

Veteran county officials suggest the following 10 principles to keep in mind.

1. Recognizing stress and its causes is the key to managing it. Be alert to signs of stress in your own behavior, emotions and physical health.
2. Be realistic. There are only so many things you can do in a day, or a week. Focus on the fact that your concern and efforts make a difference, even when the outcome isn't what you had wanted.
3. Establish priorities. There will always be more to do than time to do it. Decide which items are really important at home, work and in the council. Be sure your top priorities get all the attention and time they require, before moving on to anything lower on the list. “To Do” lists may not be your style, but the exercise of organizing your tasks and establishing priorities is helpful.

Additional Internet Resources

On Personal Wellness:

www.mindtools.com- This Web site provides a wide variety of tools, questionnaires, examples, and exercises for managing time and stress, making decisions, planning projects, and improving your memory. This is a commercial site, but many of the tools are free to use.

4. Learn to say “no.” Identify what other people can do for themselves and let them do it. This builds self-esteem and self-confidence, and makes better use of your own time. It's also important to learn to “let go,” to delegate both responsibility and authority and allow other people to do things for themselves.
5. Understand how to relax and replenish your energy. Encourage fun and recreation.
6. Be assertive. Act in your own best interests, while respecting the views and needs of others. Stand up for your rights without fear or anxiety. You can do this without being overbearing or selfish.
7. Protect your health. Get regular check-ups and plan for enough sleep, exercise and relaxation.
8. Be as patient with yourself as you are with others. Allow yourself the time to learn and to change. Be ready for surprises and get accustomed to sometimes being a little confused.
9. Don't dwell on what you can't control. Accept the reality and move on.
10. Pick your battles wisely. Remember the advice of Jonathan Kozol: “Pick battles big enough to matter, small enough to win.”

Member-to-Member

Find Common Ground

Named “County Leader of the Year,” by *American City & County Magazine*, King County Executive Ron Sims was recognized at NACo’s Annual Conference in Jackson County, MO (Kansas City) in 2008.

“So much of leadership is creating a better future,” says Jim Lopez, Sims’s deputy chief of staff. “Ron’s leadership style takes us into the future. He takes us there, makes us imagine what it will be, and then designs plans to get us there. Such vision combined with action is a very important combination.” Quoted from *American City and County*, July 2008.

One way Ron achieves this is by looking for common ground. “No matter how contentious an issue, you can almost always find common ground,” says Sims. After more than 20 years in office, he’s worked with thousands of people on innumerable issues.

“If you’re involved long enough in a community, you almost always end up on the opposite side of some issue from someone you’ve worked beside on another issue. That’s life and that’s why it doesn’t pay to bully your way to a win,” says Sims. “When you find common ground, you get both sides looking to find positive solutions that everyone can live with. When everyone gives and gets something, they’re all much more vested in seeing a successful outcome that will last.”

His approach has worked from the smallest constituents to the most experienced. “It’s something I recognized when my sons were little and arguing over some toy or chore. Then I’d go to work and see the same kinds of disagreements between adults over much bigger issues,” Sims explains. “But the outcome was the same: both sides digging in and nothing being solved or accomplished. So I’ve always said ‘Kids argue and point fingers, adults find solutions.’ And it helps refocus people’s attention on the real problem and common ground instead of the emotion of it or the disagreements that are easy stumbling blocks to progress.”

According to Sims, another important approach for elected officials is to think about the long term implications of decisions or inaction, not just in years, but in generations. “We have lots of projects, negotiations and collaboration with Native American tribes in the northwest and one of their sayings is good to keep in mind no matter your nationality: ‘Have your grandchildren talk to my grandchildren.’ It’s a reminder that the decisions and choices we make today, or fail to make, have far-reaching implications. So think about how decisions will impact your successor, your kids, your community 25, 50, 75 years from now. It’s why I’ve made acquiring open space and forested land in our county a priority. 50 years from now, I don’t want my granddaughter to look out at the land around our region and see no open space, no urban forests, no environmental buffer for the growth we know will come.”

References and Resources

See the appendix for publications and services available for download or purchase through NACo’s Web site: www.naco.org

See NACo’s Web site for more information on these model county programs:

“See the Light, Be the Light”: The Process of Ethical Decision Making- San Diego, CA, 2007

For examples of vision, courage and willingness to risk, see NACo’s “2007 Center for Sustainable Communities Awards Program”

Communications Know-How

Your Role as Communicator

Demonstrating Leadership

Working with the Media
Holding Meetings in the Public Eye
Loving Lobbying
Online Communications

Whether making a key point at a council meeting, addressing a civic organization, advocating your county's interests in the state capital, or answering questions at a news conference, communicating is an essential part of your job.

You need to be accessible to your community and listen to their concerns and ideas. Their input will help you represent your constituents more effectively. It is your job to communicate actively with them, informing them of county programs and actions, answering their questions, and enlisting their support.

You may feel that some people are born with a "gift" for public speaking or persuasion, but do not let that stop you from improving your own skills. Anyone—and particularly anyone with the ambition and energy to seek public office—can learn to be an effective communicator. In this section we'll look at communications in four key areas of responsibility: working with the news media, conducting meetings, lobbying, and using online communications.

Your role as Communicator

"The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."

-Colin Powell

Communicating effectively is as much about how you nurture your relationship with the people you are talking with as it is about the words you choose. It is knowing where, when and how to use your language; it is understanding that your tone of voice, gestures, posture and facial expression constantly communicate to others; and it is knowing when to listen as well as when to speak. Your capacity and willingness to be alert to all of these factors will help you to use your words as powerful tools for reaching your leadership goals.

To be an effective communicator, make use of these practices:

- Be continually visible and accessible at community meetings, forums, and other gatherings. Never miss an opportunity to build awareness and support for your ideas, or to keep in touch with what constituents are thinking.
- Develop a cooperative working relationship with the various media in your community.

- Follow your state's laws governing the conduct of public and open meetings.
- Encourage, listen, and respect citizens' views and concerns. Ensure that both formal and informal mechanisms are in place for gathering citizen input.
- Bolster and support your image as a leader by continually improving and perfecting your speech-making skills.
- You are the link between your community and state and national legislatures. Lobby on behalf of your county and its citizens.

Working with the Media

The news media are a fact of life for county officials. Their presence can be as modest as a single writer for a local newspaper, or it can embrace dozens of reporters from daily newspapers, television and radio stations, and national publications. Your interaction with their representatives can take the form of a public speech covered by the media, a news conference with a number of journalists, a planned one-on-one interview, or a so-called "ambush" encounter in which you may feel caught off guard.

Since the media are pervasive and exist in many forms – print, radio, broadcast and cable TV, or Internet – your best strategy is to look upon them as an opportunity. They can become your allies in disseminating information and helping to build an image of responsible government. The building of this partnership, however, begins with you. The first step is to understand the motivations and needs of media representatives and how they differ based on type: broadcast, print, or on-line.

The Alabama Government Training Institute at Auburn University suggests you keep in mind the functions of the media. The media exists to:

- give the public an account of the day's events.
- serve as a watchdog of government and to protect the public interest.
- provide a historical record of a community.
- inform the public so it can participate in the democratic process.
- entertain.
- give the public access to the medium's ability to communicate.
- provide useful and practical information for daily living.

When is Something “Newsworthy?”

Many public officials, and others, often complain that media representatives don't share their opinions about what should be covered, or how prominently. Most editors base their determination of a story's importance on these factors: **immediacy, locality, impact, magnitude, prominence, conflict, out-of-the-ordinary, human interest.**

When do you have a good relationship with the media? The Alabama Government Training Institute suggests you judge your own approach to the relationship by the “Five F's”—that is, **Be Fast, Be Factual, Be Frank; Be Fair; Be Friendly.**

Top Ten Ways to Have Good Media Relations

- Always think BEFORE you speak.
- Make an effort to understand the environment of the newsroom and the pressure that reporters face.
- Never, ever lie.
- Never, ever say “This is off the record” or “I have no comment.”
- Treat media contacts as opportunities, not as punishment for being in public office.
- Remember the media shall ALWAYS have the last word.
- Remember the chain of command in the newsroom.
- Respect the media and the role it plays in our government.
- Remember you need them more than they need you.
- Learn to roll with the punches.

Here are some guidelines to help you strengthen your media relations in common situations.

The Speech

When you are making a speech, you should always assume it will be covered by the local media and that whatever you say is on the record. Assume this even if you do not know it for a fact in advance. This assumption will help you structure your speech for maximum impact. Preparing for the media will help you organize your thinking, remove extraneous words, and express your thoughts more succinctly and clearly than you might have.

In fact, why not make each speech you give a communications opportunity by inviting the media to cover it? First, be sure it is agreeable to your host organization. Then call, email or fax the local media with the particulars. This is a great way to get added value out of a speaking engagement, and build a stronger media relationship as well.

The News Conference

When planning a news conference, pay attention to a few basics. When should it be held? This depends, in part, on the deadline cycles controlling your journalists' lives. The best time to hold a news conference is usually around 10 a.m. on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Whenever possible, you want to deal with reporters whose regular beat is county government. They will know the issues and the people, ask better questions and be better prepared to understand your answers. To be sure of attracting these people; do your best to meet their schedules.

Daily newspapers can usually accommodate events held at any time during the day, since their editorial deadlines tend to be in late afternoon. Likewise, radio stations, with their hourly news breaks, can fit items in on short notice. But the evening television news generally will require more lead time, because in addition to the reporter's story being written, tape has to be edited and prepared for broadcast.

Internet and on-line news services present their own set of pressures, since they are published continuously.



Additional Internet Resources

www.toastmasters.org- An international organization with local chapters devoted to helping anyone become a good speechmaker.

While these services make it easier to get breaking news out quickly, they also make it dangerously easy for incorrect reports and rumors to spread at “net speed”—a risk to keep in mind.

Selecting the right venue for the news conference again depends on how many people you can realistically expect to attend and whether TV or audio recording equipment needs to be accommodated. Your council meeting room may be ideal. It probably provides ample seating and good sight lines for the TV cameras. Moreover, you may have the use of a direct audio feed from podium microphones, or the opportunity to record the event as a permanent record. Bear in mind, though, that the council chambers may not be appropriate for events of an explicitly political or advocacy nature.

You might announce a subject for your news conference, but you cannot control what questions will be asked. Be prepared to address a much wider range of topics than the announced agenda.

Try to identify the public’s interest in whatever you are saying. Remember what your ultimate audience (the citizen) cares about and try to keep all your comments focused on it. Devise compelling, quotable ways to make your points and avoid using jargon. The best answers to any question are always direct, short, and clear.

Members of NACIO, the National Association of County Information Officers, (a NACo affiliate), suggest these tips for conducting the news conference itself:

- Designate a staff person to keep track of time. Decide in advance how long to let the event last—a half hour, perhaps. When that time limit comes, have your designated person announce it in a form like: “Just one more question, please.”
- Use your own judgment to end the conference. Sure, time may be up, but you might also be in the midst of a very valuable and productive series of questions. If you do not want to cut it short, don’t. Have your timekeeper prepped to interrupt again in three or five minutes. Or, whenever you are satisfied that the current topic has been covered, you can simply refer to the announced time limit and call the event to an end without fielding another question.
- Do not answer rhetorical questions. Speak only about the facts and, where you deliberately want to express them, your own opinions. Be careful to identify your opinions as such.



Additional Internet Resources

<http://thomas.loc.gov>- The Library of Congress's complete site for legislative information and contacting committees as well as individual members.

www.nacio.org- Visit the National Association of County Information Officers (NACIO) for tips on all aspects of media relations.

www.fema.gov- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) also provides training for local officials who may have to deal with the media in the event of an emergency.

- Do not hesitate to ask questioners to make their queries more specific. Speculating on vague possibilities is not only unproductive, but can lead to other problems.
- If you get a question that seems belligerent or “loaded,” pause a moment before firing back. If you feel you must correct or rebut some premise in the question, do so...but with facts, taking the opportunity to restate the basic message of the news conference.

The Interview

Many of the same principles apply to one-on-one interviews. But the interview can also provide an opportunity to get into a subject more deeply and to build your relationship with an individual reporter. Here are a few suggestions from interview veterans.

- Try to find out in advance what kind of story the reporter is working on. The reporter may be looking for fast facts and opinions for a breaking news story, or doing groundwork for an extended weekend feature on a broad subject. It makes a difference in your preparation. Journalists will usually be willing to give you at least a general idea of the subjects they want to pursue.
- Decide if you need to bring in a subject matter expert—a county engineer, perhaps, or a department head—to provide facts and knowledge you may lack.

- Decide on your own message. What element of county policy or action is central to this interview, and what do you want the public to know about it? Make up a list of critical points you want to make, and put it on a “cheat sheet” that fits in the palm of your hand.
- Try to influence the setting for the interview, especially for television. Suggest backgrounds and visuals that help convey your message or reinforce your identification with the county government.
- Practice a little before the interview. Have three key points that you will emphasize throughout the interview.
- Have facts available to support your answers or provide the reporter with more details. Bring copies of key government reports or other resources to the interview, or prepare a brief fact sheet expressly on the topic of interest. Reporters will always appreciate having a concise document that provides correct spellings, titles, budget numbers, county demographics, or whatever other facts are relevant.
- Be on time for the interview. Listen to each question carefully and let the reporter finish. Make sure you understand the question, and don’t hesitate to ask for a re-phrasing if it’s unclear.
- Always look for opportunities to return to your main points and restate your main message.
- Do not argue. If a reporter’s facts are wrong, you can correct them, as long as you have the right facts at your disposal.
- Do not let reporters restate or paraphrase your answers to change their meaning. They may be fishing for a tighter or more colorful quote, not maliciously trying to misrepresent you. You may be willing to say the same thing again in different words, but don’t let the reporter alter your meaning.
- When the interview is over, it is over. Avoid casual comments on the way out the door, assuming they are “off the record.” They are never off the record.
- Follow up. Get in touch with the reporter later on to see if any further questions have come up, and to make sure all promised information has been received.

The Ambush

It’s unfortunate, but it happens. Some reporters will try to catch you off guard on your way home or in the corridor between meetings, and pop an unexpected question. The key to this situation is to stay calm and treat it the way you would any other interview. All the basic rules apply. Be sure you understand the question. Correct factual errors, but avoid an argument. Do not restate the reporter’s incorrect premise. Phrase your answers in a positive way, stressing what you are, rather than what you are not.

Dealing with Gaffes, Blunders and Misstatements

This advice is courtesy of Member Relations, County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania: No one is immune from making a mistake; but a mistake is not necessarily a gaffe unless you make it one. If a statement is made that is incorrect or embarrassing, correct it immediately. Don’t let it escalate into something worse. A response to a factual gaffe should clarify or expand upon the statement, restate the comment or put the remarks in context. A political or insensitive remark deserves an immediate apology.

Being prepared is the best way to reduce your chances of saying the wrong thing to the media. Be familiar with the facts surrounding an interesting or controversial issue. Memorize some “talking points” about the facts so you will be ready to address the basics of the issue if you are caught “off guard.”

Having a coordinated communication plan will help avoid gaffes. Designate one spokesperson to be responsible for making all official statements. Make sure that person is well prepared with all pertinent facts.



Keeping a good working relationship with the media will also minimize the risk of bad press. Never argue with a reporter. It has been said, “Never pick a fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel and paper by the ton.”

Crisis Communications

No one can predict when disaster may strike. Be it an earthquake, terrorist attack, or even a scandal, you, as a public leader must be able to calmly respond to the media and assure your citizens that everything will be dealt with.

Because of the unpredictability of when a crisis will occur, it is important to develop a crisis communications plan, so you are ready to deal with the barrage of questions that will come from the media and the general public. Schedule frequent training, with refreshers, for your staff and have the plan readily available for reference. Include a list of contacts, both of the media and of your internal audiences, so the right parties will be informed as soon as possible.

Linda Langston, County Supervisor from Linn County, IA, was forced to mobilize her emergency communications plans during the devastating floods in her county in 2008. Interviewed by NACo’s County News, she said, “If you are not doing drills, you need to. If you have not done training in NIMS (National Incident Management System), you need to. If you don’t have relationships and processes set up ahead of time, it impairs your ability to secure people’s safety.”

The Do’s and Don’ts of Dealing with a Crisis

- The key point to remember is to tell the truth, and to tell it quickly. Lying and/or stalling will only further exacerbate the situation.
- Designate a spokesperson, immediately. This could be your Public Information Officer (PIO), another member of your staff, or even you. Make sure the spokesperson is informed about the issues and is comfortable in front of a camera.
- Prepare a key contacts list so that all your angles are covered. Have phone numbers, cell numbers and e-mail addresses available so you can access any person at any time.
- Establish a position. Don’t waffle on your responses, and try to remain calm and composed.
- Inform the media. This goes back to having a strong designated spokesperson. By setting up daily briefings, you may limit the media’s desire to “snoop” around for outrageous quotes or stories.
- Shoot down rumors and innuendos. Do not be forced to respond to conjecture. If you do not know the answer to something, say so.
- Prepare yourself for tough questions.
- Have collateral materials on-hand to back up your statements.
- Update the media. As frequently as you get information, disseminate that information. An informed public is a more content public.

Member-to-Member

Relationships in Crisis

I remember speaking to Governor Vilsack (Iowa Gov. 1998-2006) and asking him what advice he was given when he began in office. Long-term governors told him to be prepared for disasters. I took that advice to heart and participated in emergency preparedness drills. I learned many things in those drills and developed relationships with a broad array of people in the community. Those drills helped me get to know people better during low key times and understand the part that we all play in our respective fields. The relationships I developed and the communications have always been valuable, but never more so than when our community experienced a disaster of epic proportions. Over the course of two days of unprecedented flooding we evacuated a jail and a hospital. I relied heavily on relationships I had built in calmer times. I relied on knowledge gained by asking questions. I relied on lessons learned by thinking about best practices. I relied on skills developed in media relations and relationships that had been built up over time. Being a county official encompasses a broad number of duties and tasks and, whether in times of calm or crisis, it all ultimately comes back to our ability to communicate and use our relationships to get things done that our citizens expect to get done.

Linda Langston, Supervisor, Linn County, IA

August 2008

- Make a media list to keep track of those media members covering the story. This way, you can follow-up with them individually, if desired.

Remember, crises cannot be averted, but your ability to communicate effectively to the press and general public will go a long way in ensuring that you have control over the situation.

Holding Meetings in the Public Eye

Open meetings have the potential for being a great public relations success or a disaster. First and foremost, know the laws in your state – often referred to as sunshine laws – and what the rules are for conducting public and open meetings. Second, keep in mind that as a board member you want to be responsive to citizens' concerns, but, as a responsible steward, you must constantly keep in mind the general public good. You must balance the need to conduct the board's business in ways prescribed by law and also welcome citizens' comments and complaints. The two operative words here are information and involvement.

If your council meetings are broadcast live on cable TV, remember that this is a great opportunity to get information out to a large number of people and to project an image of responsible government in action.

Tips and Good Practices for Managing Public Involvement

These tips are reprinted by permission of the Institute of Government, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They appeared in the article "Public



Additional Internet Resources

www.fema.gov/emergency/nims- National Incident Management System

www.teexweb.tamu.edu/nerrtc- The National Emergency Response and Rescue Training Center (NERRTC) is a resource for local level training free of charge. It is endorsed and supported by the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Domestic preparedness. Located within the Texas Engineering Extension Service they provide training nationally.

Comment at Meetings of Local Government Boards Part One; Guidelines for Good Practices," in Popular Government magazine, Vol. 62, No. 4, Summer 1997. The authors are John Stephens, A. Fleming Bell, II, and Christopher M. Bass:

Before the Meeting:

- Prepare enough copies of the agenda and other important materials for everyone in the audience.
- Provide an information sheet about the conduct of regular business meetings.
- Prepare a question-and-answer sheet.
- Have a comment sheet available.

During the Meeting:

- Identify which topics are of interest to which members of the audience.
- Announce the limits of public comment.
- Estimate when topics of interest will be considered.
- Provide background information.
- Listen actively: maintain eye contact, be aware of body posture, verbal feedback.
- Be careful in saying what will be done about a concern or a complaint.
- Thank each speaker for his or her views.

After the Meeting:

- Clarify what follow-up steps are needed in responding to citizens' comments and who will respond.

Community Forums/Town Hall Meetings/ Other Forms of Public Participation

Public participation encourages a problem-solving approach to an issue as opposed to a confrontational or highly partisan one. Once you have a clear definition of the public's concerns and issues, you will encounter fewer charges that the council has made decisions in an inappropriate way.

Elected officials may feel concerns about public participation, including the danger that extensive public participation may undercut the representative system of government, replacing it too often with direct democracy. Moreover, you may feel your hands are tied if a clear public consensus on an issue differs from your approach. Even so, if opponents are highly visible and active, and this prompts supporters to present their own case more effectively, the decision-making process generally benefits. Dealing with opposition during an open process is usually better than facing it in court after a decision is made.

Loving Lobbying

Lobbying is not a dirty word nor is it solely the responsibility of highly paid folks in the state capital and in Washington. As a county official one of your major roles is as a spokesperson and advocate, representing your citizens' interests before local and state legislators. At the federal level, you have a unique and valuable advantage in your direct connection to voting constituents—the country's grassroots.

It takes time and effort to learn how to influence, but if you are successful you will gain the respect of legislators and will increase your effectiveness in your community. You will also find that lobbying can be exciting and rewarding.

The NACo Web site and your state association's Web sites are invaluable resources for learning about how to lobby on key legislative issues and priorities that affect counties. On the NACo web site under "advocacy" you will find training documents on "How to Influence Congress Without Leaving Home;" and "Legislative Advocacy Tools". You will also find testimony, speeches, and fact sheets on a variety of issues.

The Basics

Before you can influence a legislature, you must know the legislators. Become familiar with their voting records. Determine who will be a strong supporter, an ally, an uncommitted, a vocal or a quiet opponent.

Inside vs. Outside Lobbying

These two types of lobbying activity must work together in order to be successful. "Inside" lobbying refers to activities that take place in the Capitol, such as meetings with lawmakers and their staffs, testifying before a committee, providing information to committees and legislative offices, and negotiating with policymakers.

"Outside" lobbying is aimed at shifting the politics and public pressures surrounding an issue. These efforts include media relations, constituent visits to legislators, letter writing campaigns, and such grassroots activities as rallies and marches.

Member-to-Member

They're Just Like Us

George Enneking, once county commissioner in Idaho County, often had to advocate for local concerns and issues before the state legislature. In the process, he learned some basic lessons about dealing with these officials.

Enneking once said, "One key is to remember that the folks elected to the legislature are just like us. When they first come into office, they may not know much about your local conditions and issues, but they learn, and eventually you can get to where you're speaking off the same page."

After all, Enneking noted, state legislators are also elected to represent local districts, so all have community "roots" just like county commissioners. "What I've found really works best with legislators is always to be very up front," Enneking advised. "Tell them what's up. Be really sure they know what you're after, and that your own facts are straight. In that way, you'll eventually gain their respect and trust."

Six Practical Tips on How to Lobby Your State Legislator and Staff

- Establish your agenda and goals.
 - Know before meeting with a legislator just what you'd like to accomplish through the meeting. Is it purely informational? Are you asking for a vote on your side, or even for a public statement? If you are lobbying as part of a group, decide who will speak on its behalf, and which points to stress. Be clear, and focus on one or two issues, not a whole “laundry list.”
 - Listen well. Much of lobbying is listening. Look for indications of the legislator's views and identify the issues or points that matter most to him or her.
- Be prepared, but don't feel you need to be an expert. Most elected officials are generalists, and they understand if you are not necessarily a technical expert, either. Do your homework, be prepared with answers for anticipated questions, but do not be afraid to say “I don't know.”
 - Don't stay too long. Try to reach a conclusion. If you hear the answer you hoped for, express your thanks and leave. Even if you are disappointed, thank the legislator for meeting with you and leave promptly.
 - Remember, you are building a relationship. The guideline is, “no permanent friends, no permanent enemies.” You may not agree fully today, but some day things may be different.
- Follow up
 - Be sure to send a note of thanks after your visit. If commitments were made during the meeting, be sure they are promptly fulfilled. If staff members were present, include them in your thanks. They can often be important allies.

Ways to Make Your Voice Heard

Letters

Writing a letter to a public official does have an impact. To maximize that effect, be sure your letter is brief, concise and specific. Use examples from the operations of your county or the lives of your citizens to illustrate the effect of pending legislation or a problem that needs to be addressed.

Visits

You can achieve quite a bit by bringing a group of concerned citizens to see your state legislator or other official. Keep the group reasonably small (perhaps a

maximum of four or five people) and discuss in advance who will speak and how to handle the meeting. Leave some informational material with the official. It's often a good idea to arrange for the target official to visit your own sites—a local school, clinic, library, or other facility. This kind of experience can make your issues and concerns vividly real.

Establish a relationship with staff. Many elected people have professional staff you can contact. These staff have great influence in helping to get your message through and may be more accessible.

Online Communications

How familiar are you with your County's Web site? How good is it? Are you taking full advantage of the opportunities available through the Web site and email accounts? Have you wondered whether a blog could be a useful communications tool? These are important questions to consider in your role as communicator.

Effective online communications start with the official county Web site. Your first step is to check it out for yourself. Approach it like a constituent: Try to find the county parks' summer recreation schedule. Try to find the hours of operation for the county's recycling and solid waste facility. Try to send an e-mail to your own county e-mail address. If you have difficulty finding this information, it is likely many others will too. Government Web sites today are much more than a directory of department addresses and phone numbers. They provide easy and convenient access to countless government services and information.

Fortunately, you do not have to reinvent the wheel when considering how to improve your county's Web site. Look at what other nationally recognized counties are doing with theirs. A great place to start is the Center for Digital Government, a national research and ad-

References and Resources

See the appendix for publications and services available for download or purchase through NACo's Web site: www.naco.org

NACo's “Members-Only” section of its Web site has a complete Media Relations Guide for Counties available. Copies are also available by calling NACo at 202/393-6226

visory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government. Each year, NACo and the center recognize the best county government Web sites across the country. Recent winners include: San Diego County, Calif., Loudoun County, Va., Frederick County, Md., and Charles County, Md. Visit www.centerdigitalgov.com for more information.

Beyond the basic functions and services of county government, county Web sites provide another valuable opportunity for county officials: an effective communications vehicle to present your unfiltered positions, activities and accomplishments. Even if you struggle to get your message into the local newspaper, having it posted on the county Web site - precisely the way you want it - has the potential to reach many people. At a minimum, your Web page should have your contact information, your bio, your district boundaries, and your news releases and speeches. But there is more. What are your constituents most concerned about? Is there a brewing controversy out there? Address it on your Web page where it can be seen.

Do you actually read your e-mail? Do you respond to it? This can be a daunting task as more and more households come online and engage their elected representatives. At a minimum, make sure that your con-

tact information is easily found and let your Web page visitors know that you intend to respond in a timely manner to local concerns.

Blogs (Web logs) are still a new phenomenon for most local government officials. If you are a veteran county official and a savvy communicator and computer user, your blog can be a great way to stay in close contact with engaged constituents. Not so sure? You could try it for a specific purpose or event. For example, NACo members have used blogs to report their activities at conferences or out-of-county meetings. Still not sure? Check out some existing government blogs to see how others are using them. One place to look is the Blog from the U.S. Government section of USA.gov.

The most recent and noteworthy online communications tool is video. Think YouTube videos - short, interesting clips that usually convey a single message. More and more counties are experimenting with online video to promote effective county programs and services. Search the Web for examples on how counties are using video.

No matter how comfortable you are with the various online communications tools, take the time and consider all available options. Then decide on a plan that best meets your needs.

Management and Administrative Savvy

Your Role as Manager

Demonstrating Leadership

- Relationships and Responsibilities
- Managing for Results
- Liability and Risk Management
- Customer Service
- Collaboration
- Empowering Your Workforce

Submitted by Oregon State Association Executive Director Mike McArthur: When asked, “So, what does a county commissioner do?” former County commissioner Robert Johnstone of Yamhill County, Oregon, replied “We run the county.” He then elaborated, “Commissioners must become adept at dealing with state and federal officials, advocating for the interests of local government at the Legislature, nurturing the organization that is county government and addressing the concerns of everyday citizens. The variety and complexity of issues facing county government daily make the job of being a county commissioner interesting, frustrating and rewarding all at the same time.”

Your Role as Manager

From neighborhoods to the county courthouse, the statehouse, and Washington, DC, the effort is underway to make government more effective, efficient, responsive, and participatory. You are ultimately responsible to the public for the effectiveness of county agencies and other government services. While not typically involved in the day-to-day operations of agencies, you may hire and direct the work of county managers.

Joe Torre, while with the New York Yankees, frequently described his major responsibility as manager to be “getting talent to perform.” A textbook definition expands this to “getting people to work together to accomplish group goals.” An effective manager is equally sensitive toward the contributions of individuals and the timely completion of tasks.

This usually entails:

- Planning – setting goals and objectives
- Organizing tasks – developing a logical sequence and a time frame for completion
- Delegating responsibilities and resources
- Monitoring progress – using benchmarks and intermediate goals to keep on track
- Adjusting – using the information from interim reports to adjust tasks, time and resources to move toward the objectives

Administration, on the other hand, is the performance of operations, and is more process-oriented than people-oriented. An effective administrator develops and assures the execution of policies and procedures that honor the laws, the standards and commitments of your county. Because we work in systems that protect the public interest, these procedures are often rig-

idly defined and bureaucratic. Bureaucracy provides the structure and sets of regulations designed to exercise reasonable controls. These may be formal- even complex- but they are also intended to be consistent and just. Because regulations are difficult to change, there is often tension between bureaucracy and innovation. Respecting the tension will help you manage it.

Relationships and Responsibilities

The relationship, roles and responsibilities of an elected county official differ depending on the form of county government you have. And, there are many “in between” areas when roles and responsibilities are blurred. This can lead to confusion, frustration and competition among board and managers, complaints about “micro-management”, and disillusionment on the part of the public.

Officials in rural and small-population counties may also face special administrative challenges. In these jurisdictions most or all administrative functions may be the responsibility of other elected officials. These officers, including clerks, auditors, registers of deeds, sheriffs and the like, are directly elected and responsible to the public, but they may also be the only professional “staff” available to carry out county responsibilities. This type of situation is often cited as a problem by state legislators and other “reformers” seeking to consolidate county governments or restrict counties’ authority.



Additional Internet Resources

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb/performancemanagement/BasicManual.pdf- For more information on “Measures Up.”

www.goodlocalgovernment.org- The website of Professor John Nalbandian, former city councilman and mayor in Lawrence, Kansas, currently at the Department of Public Administration, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS. You can read articles and view power point presentations from his workshops on a variety of issues in local government, including “Contemporary Trends in Local Government”.

Many small and rural counties have tackled the difficult transition from an environment of elected officers to one of appointed department heads. It's an exercise that demands sound judgment and shared vision.

Managing for Results

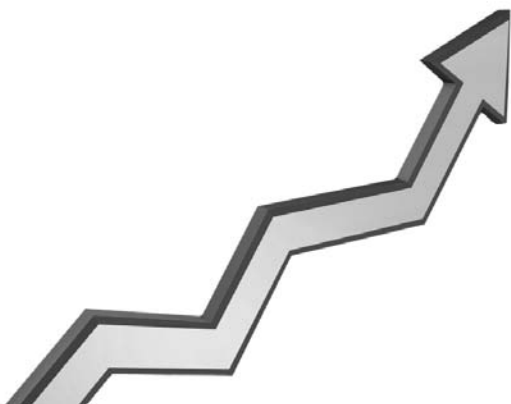
“The most powerful reason for measuring performance is that citizens are continually demanding more responsive and competitive government.”

-“Measures Up,” Fairfax County, Virginia

Fairfax County instituted a performance measurement system to balance limited revenue growth against the high expectations of its citizens for quality service. “Measures Up,” the county’s Manual for Performance Management, defines the process this way:

“Performance management is the regular collection of specific information regarding the results of County services. It includes the measurement of the kind of job we are doing, and addresses the effect our efforts are having in our community. Together with strategic planning, benchmarking and continuous improvement, performance measurement forms the nucleus for managing for results.” Fairfax County, Office of Management and Budget

Articulating a clear description of expected outcomes is the first step toward reaching them. Once stated, these outcomes become a common goal uniting your staff while moving you toward the benchmarks that mark your progress.



Performance Measures

Performance measures are generally divided into five types: input, output, outcome, efficiency, and service quality. (From NACo’s Issue Brief, *Performance Measurement*).

The following definitions and examples demonstrate the effective use of measurements:

Type	Measure	Example
Input	The resources used to produce services. These can be human, financial, material	Total expenditures for fire prevention occupancy inspections
Outputs	The goods and services produced by a department or program	Number of completed occupancy inspections
Efficiency	Cost per unit of goods/services produced	Staff hours per complete occupancy inspection
Service Quality	Customer satisfaction with quality or timeliness of service	Number of complaints related to timeliness of inspections
Outcome	The quantified results, or impacts, of government action on the community. These can be intended or unintended	Value of single family homes remains stable

Another way of measuring performance that counties are using is benchmarking. Effective benchmarks have several characteristics:

- They emphasize results rather than effort or expenditure.
- They allow comparability. They compare with similar measures in other jurisdictions or within your own agency at different times.
- They have long-term reliability. You should be confident that your benchmark measurements will be reliable and meaningful through periods of one, five, even ten years.
- They’re documented. Benchmarks should come from sound sources, and you should make clear exactly which sources you’ve used in deriving your benchmarks.

Liability and Risk Management

The purpose of risk management is to reduce the likelihood that a harmful event will occur and/or the amount of harm it will cause if it does occur. This extends to personal liability as well as to risks to your county at large. Your attention to risk management needs to be directed in two ways: actions to protect your county and actions to protect yourself.

As a public official, you may have a variety of very clearly defined legal responsibilities, as well as others that are not so clear. Likewise, your county government may be subject to litigation under some circumstances. Other specific conditions may produce personal liabilities on the part of county employees, including elected officials.

These factors vary from state to state. Most states provide some measure of **sovereign immunity** for local government employees against tort actions arising from the performance of their jobs. A key variable is how your state regards cases involving negligence on the individual's behalf. In some instances, negligence may reduce or remove the immunity, while in other states it does not. Some states, in fact, provide complete immunity for employees of local governments.

County governments may choose to obtain liability insurance to protect themselves against a wide range of potential risks. Even in instances in which the county



Additional Internet Resources

www.riskinstitute.org- The Public Entity Risk Institute (PERI) serves public, private and non-profit organizations with a clearinghouse, training, grants and research projects. As part of their "Community Leadership in a Risky World" initiative you will find a [Risk Management Starter Kit](#), developed with the National Center for Small Communities (www.smallcommunities.org)

www.primacentral.org- The Public Risk Management Association, PRIMA. A membership organization offering practical education and training for the public sector.

may lawfully have no liability, it may be seen as "good public relations" to provide some measure of compensation to citizens wronged by the county or its employees. These decisions are guided by both law and policy. You should discuss the entire matter with your county attorney.

Member-to-Member

Customer First

A good example comes from Boulder County, Colorado. Its Land Use Department accepted the "Customer First" challenge and created and implemented a 3-year "Values-Based Public Service Training Initiative." In this county of 280,000 people, the department has approximately 600 interactions with the public each day in addition to 1,000 Land Use Dockets and 1,825 building permits annually. Over the years, the department had received public criticism.

The three-year training program was designed to provide a common set of tools for improved communication and teamwork between employees and the public. In addition, the initiative served as a mechanism to promote accountability between divisions and individual employees. A key component of the training was to develop a common understanding of public service values and ethics. From that, the department identified and implemented 274 recommendations for improved resident response and improved internal functions. A department Intranet Web page keeps information about results, procedures, and commitments accessible to all employees for reference or review.

Here's an example of customer feedback the department has received. "Working with you has not been like working with others in the past. You seem to really care about what you're doing. That is notable and appreciated."

Note: In the summer of 2004, Boulder County's Land Use received a NACo Achievement Award and was designated "Best of Category" in the program category of Personnel Management, Employment Training and Employee Benefits.

A sound first step into the broader realm of risk management is to conduct a thorough assessment of the risks your county currently faces, and the potential losses these risks may create. These risks may include everything from thefts at vehicle impoundment facilities to human resource issues to personal injuries caused by icy sidewalks in front of the courthouse. Begin by asking these questions:

- How much money has the county paid out in the last several years from risk-related causes?
- How can these risks be removed or reduced?
- What insurance are you required to carry?
- How will you handle claims or judgments exceeding the level of your insurance?
- Is self-insurance an option? For which liabilities?

The answers to each of these questions will generate actions you will want to take – everything from purchasing insurance to participating in an insurance pool to launching safety campaigns and training your staff in safe practices.

Customer Service

Anticipating the Democratic National Convention in Denver in August 2008, *PARADE* magazine asked Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper how owning a restaurant prepared him to govern. His response appeared in papers across the country:

“I think it should be required training for any elected executive. You never have enough money, you have a diverse group of people, and the public is always angry about something. You learn very quickly that there is no profit in having enemies, and no matter how unreasonable customers may be, you learn to listen to them, respect them, and find consensus.”

Putting the “Customer” First

American businesses have made great progress in improving the quality of their products in the last twenty years. Happy consumers, however, are now raising their expectations and demanding better service from their local, state and federal governments as well. To accomplish this, governments have adopted the business mind-set of the citizen as “customer.” This powerful notion of “the customer first” assumes that the citizen is ultimately the person who defines quality and success. Two questions become the driving forces in helping to set direction and restructure services:

- What do our customers need and expect from our agency?
- How can we meet and exceed their expectations?

Collaboration

Counties that involve stakeholders and follow the “customer first” principle often discover that services to the public are duplicated by various agencies. Inter-agency collaboration can eliminate duplication, save money, and provide greatly improved services. For example, a unified approach to supporting children and families can bring together the expertise and resources of schools, departments of public health, welfare, law enforcement, libraries and museums, and businesses.

Keys to Successful Collaboration Knowing Your Board

As an elected official, you must build a relationship with key groups in the county. First and foremost is with colleagues on the county council. It is the responsibility of each member and of the group collectively to work together as a governance team to make the best decisions that will serve all county residents. There are some unique challenges of the board – both for individuals and the board as a whole. Members must maintain their individual identities as the persons voters elected. At the same time, they must participate as team members and learn to respect the variety of backgrounds, styles, and viewpoints. While the potential for conflict is high, the uniting force is often the commitment to



Additional Internet Resources

www.performanceweb.org/stateandlocal/index- The Web site of the Center for State and Local Government Performance that provides tools, strategies, best practices, and lessons learned in management and performance measurement.

www.dca.state.ga.us- The Web site of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs provides useful information on community indicators and improving service delivery in more than 450 communities.

www.regov.org- The web site for a “Community of Government Innovators”, sponsored by the Public Strategies Group, St. Paul, Minnesota, features an on-line collection of essays, opinions, and transformation references.

serve and the acceptance of accountability to the public for results.

10 Habits of Highly-Effective Governing Bodies

The 10 Habits are reprinted with permission from © Carl H. Neu, Jr., Center for the Future of Local Governance™ www.carlneu.com:

- Think-act strategically
- Understand and demonstrate elements of team and teamwork
- Master small group decision-making
- Have clearly defined roles and relationships
- Honor the governing body-staff partnership
- Conduct systematic evaluations of policy implementation
- Allocate governing body time and energy appropriately
- Have clear rules and procedures
- Get a valid assessment of public's concerns and evaluation of the board's performance.
- Personal learning!

Your county's form of government determines to a large extent the relationship you and your board have to other elected or appointed officials, how programs and services are coordinated, and the degree to which the county board has help in carrying out its work. Some of these officials, e.g., the sheriff, attorney, clerk/recorder, assessor, and treasurer, may lead constitutionally mandated departments. If they are elected, they have functional authority independent of the governing board.

In some states, for instance, the elected county clerk is responsible for court functions, elections administration, and recorded documents. Sometimes the clerk's responsibilities also embrace motor vehicle titling and registration. They can also provide assistance to the board in developing agendas for board meetings and can play a key role in budgeting and auditing processes.

Clearly these are complex and diverse functions, and the particular mix of responsibilities will vary from county to county and state to state. Having both an elected board and independently elected officials that support county services presents unique challenges to everyone involved. The realities of shared administrative authority can make day-to-day decision making difficult and can also lead to lack of coordination and fragmentation of county services.

Member-to-Member

Collaboration with Partnership

Counties across the country have successfully collaborated with outside agencies through the development of formal partnerships. A five county partnership in Southeastern Michigan came about from the remarks of one local farmer, "Something needs to change in the agricultural economy or we'll all go out of business." The coordinated response to that observation became the Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP) formed by Jackson, Lenawee, Monroe, Washtenaw and Wayne Counties. The partnership began by articulating shared goals:

- to improve the viability of the agricultural sector
- to provide revitalization opportunities for metropolitan Detroit
- to improve consumer understanding of the food system
- to improve producer understanding of consumer needs

With a 7 member board of directors, a 30 member Leadership Team from county government, county organizations, agriculture, food businesses and resource providers, and a few staff, FSEP now operates from a strong position that represents the perspectives, values and information of all partners. As a result there are more than 60 new business plans under development, a significant increase in the amount of local farm foods in schools, and a strong network of participants attending annual conferences. In the words of one conference participant,

"The FSEP Conference is a great example of how government sparks private sector entrepreneurship which should be pointed out to those who think government should shrink and lower taxes. Our taxes have helped FSEP happen." For more information on this partnership, visit the FSEP Web site at www.fsepmichigan.org.

To avoid this, it is incumbent on you and your colleagues to work together to develop mutually-agreed-on goals, develop rapport, and clarify working relationships. Equally important is the working relationship with staff.

Good advice comes from Dan McCain, Chief-of-Staff for a Cook County, Illinois, Commissioner. Dan notes:

“Understanding the role of staff is often crucial to understanding the philosophy of office that any particular elected official promotes. We do the day-to-day, first point of contact, and analytical work that promote our boss’ projects and positions that ultimately lead to votes that influence the lives of those we serve. As chief-of-staff, my county board commissioner relies on my input across the whole range of issues and contacts that we are working on. Staff often transcend the elected by surviving through electoral changes; that is, we become the institutional anchors when there is a change in administration due to election upsets.”

Encourage “bottom up” solutions from the top down. The most successful collaborations thrive on community involvement. But there needs to be a structure in place so groups can begin to talk with one another. Strategic direction and coordination need to come from agency officials and county policy-makers, leaving the actual work of collaborating and getting things done to the workers and community. Successful collaborations shift the emphasis from individual programs to the broader array of support systems that helps the citizens. This provides a “systems solution,” key to eliminating duplication and redundancy and filling gaps in services.



References and Resources

Managing for Results: The Key to More Responsive Government- A 3-part video series that provides firsthand experiences of city and county managers, administrators, and elected officials in measuring performance and managing for results. The video can be ordered on-line at www.icma.org

University of Minnesota Extension: Committees that Work www.extension.emn.edu/community/ for information on ULead and UConnect training programs.

Most collaboration is accomplished through planned meetings – those with an agenda, outcomes and a written record. You will find definitions and functions of various work groups on page 35. These were developed and submitted with permission by the University of Minnesota Extension Center.

Empowering Your Workforce

Empowering your staff requires a shift in style from telling to involving, a shift in control from the top of the agency to its front-line workers. This doesn't happen overnight. The terms “government bureaucracy” and “empowered workforce” are at opposite ends of a continuum, yet the latter will be the norm in the 21st century. The key to empowerment is to acknowledge that the employee doing the job knows the most about that job. The agencies of your government, whether they deal with roads or public safety, libraries or cable television, are staffed by people who know their jobs and can perform at a high level if given the opportunity to do so. When top management is committed to empowering these employees, the results can be impressive. Developing and sustaining an empowered workforce requires a flexible, responsive and participatory organizational structure in which information flows in all directions, top-down, bottom-up, between and among.

What do empowered employees do? They:

- have the authority to make decisions, respond to citizens, and take action to solve problems.
- have a clear understanding of the purpose of their job and sees how the results of their work benefit the citizens of the county.

- are comfortable recommending changes.
- participate in work groups that solve problems and make improvements.
- are motivated by a sense of personal control.

What can you do to move your staff toward empowerment? You begin by establishing frequent, 2-way lines of communication between yourself and your staff. Empowering your staff does not mean that you give them all equal authority in decisions. But it does mean that you have a lot to gain from getting their input to a problem or a project. You make time and occasions to ask their advice and to listen. You encourage innovation and, within reason, risk taking. Finally, you provide opportunities for continued staff development, especially in team building, diversity training, conflict resolution and negotiation.

Succession Planning

“Counties prepare for baby boomer exodus.” This was the headline that appeared in NACo’s *County News* HOT TOPIC issue in December 2006. Challenges and opportunities presented by the baby boomer generation have only increased. For some counties the impact has been high levels of staff retirement and, with that, a loss of knowledge—both technical and institutional. In other areas, baby boomers are staying on the job longer, expanding the diversity of perspectives, values and interests across two or more generations of workers. Several key strategies help to build your county’s capacity to attract and retain the people and the skills you need.

Keep these in mind:

Recruitment – Have a strong plan to fill vacancies as quickly as possible. Consider attracting younger workers through internet social networks such as MySpace, Facebook and YouTube. Fairfax County, Virginia, offers a good example of the effectiveness of the YouTube site. Their most popular video on YouTube is a police department recruiting video that has been viewed 2000 times in 4 months.

In recruiting and retaining the older worker, check your staff for bias about age by asking, “How old is too old?” Include “age diversity” in your discussions on gender and ethnic diversity. Post notices in senior citizens journals, senior centers and professional societies.

Training and Retraining – Develop a consistent orientation plan that transfers critical information to new staffers and a career training plan that will prepare staffers to assume more responsibility as vacancies occur. Use older workers as trainers and mentors. Provide retraining for veteran employees in information technology and communications – areas that are critical and dynamic.

Work Arrangements – Offer alternative work arrangements to provide flexibility that older employees may find attractive. Talk to your potential retirees to learn what arrangements might appeal to them. Consider flexible hours, job sharing, extended leave time and reasonable adjustments to the work environment. Emphasize fitness in your health and wellness initiatives and review options for spousal care/elder care.

Types of Groups

Source: Scheffert, D.R., Rasmussen, C., Liepold, M., Laeger-Hagermeister, M. & Hennen, Mary Ann G. (2008). *Committees That Work*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension. www.extension.umn.edu. Reprinted with permission.

“It always takes a group of people working together with a common purpose in an atmosphere of trust and collaboration to get extraordinary things done.”

- James Kouzes and Barry Posner

The basic purpose of committees is to inform operations and share the work and responsibilities in a group among many people. Below are some typical descriptions of different structures or types of formal and informal groups. While this workbook is relevant to all committee types, it is useful to recognize the wide variety of forms committees can take. The type of group that is chosen should match the unique needs and circumstances of its purpose.

Ad hoc committee: Members are appointed on an as needed basis to deal with specific assignments and business that is routine to the group. When such committees finish their assignment, they are dissolved.

Appointed body (public or private board, commission, steering group): Formal group of people selected to represent and make decisions on behalf of some larger group. Formal or semi-formal leadership structure. Nature and duration of participation is determined by formal agreements, rules, or adopted by-laws. Members may or may not represent particular functions, geographic areas, or subgroups.

- **Coalition:** A typically temporary alliance or union of individuals, groups, or organizations working toward a common purpose. Coalitions may vary in their formality.
- **Collaborative:** Relatively long-term and formal group of individuals working toward a common purpose. Group may be large or disparate and may require active maintenance.
- **Committee or subcommittee of larger body:** A relatively formal group with a common pur-

pose usually connected to a larger organization. Members may be representative.

- **Community of place:** Very loose grouping of people defined by location; dealing with and discussing multiple issues.
- **Elected body (public or private council, commission, board, legislative position, judicial position, etc.):** Formal group of individuals elected to represent and make decisions on behalf of the electorate. Formal leadership structure. Nature and duration of participation is determined by law or the electorate. Members often represent particular functions, geographic areas, or subgroups, and some may be elected at-large.
- **Issue or interest group:** Loose grouping of people, perhaps without any face-to-face meetings, interested in the same issue or topic to discuss or exchange information or views. Not necessarily task oriented; members are self-selected.
- **Partnership;** Long-term and formal, often represented by a small number of people; working together toward a common purpose.
- **Permanent work group or team:** A formal group dedicated to accomplishing some objective over a substantial period of time. Often a formal leader is designated and formal reporting relationships are defined.
- **Standing committee:** Long-term, formal group that handles affairs that are a continuing part of the structure and business of the organization.
- **Steering committee:** Group overseeing some major effort within or between organizations; members may be from inside or outside the organization.
- **Task force:** Set up by an individual or organization external to the group for a specific purpose; time-limited. Members often chosen because of their experience or expertise.
- **Task-specific work group or team:** Set up within an organization for a specific purpose. Members often chosen because of their experience or expertise. Typically of shorter duration than a permanent group or team.

Management and Administrative Savvy

For Your Notes:

Information Technology

Your Role as Planner and User

Demonstrating Leadership

Shared Services

E-Services

The Mobile Workforce

Enhancing Collaboration

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Enterprise Architecture

Information technology is essential to planning for the delivery of all county services today. Officials no longer look at technology as separate “projects.” Instead, all county departments, including Information Technology, focus on operations that deliver business value to the citizens. In each of these operations, technology is one of the essential ingredients.

Your Role as Planner and User

The scope and speed of changes in the field of technology present challenges in your planning for regular upgrades in applications and staff training. Even as technology changes rapidly, citizens’ expectations and demands for improved services rise just as quickly. Being open to opportunities and prepared to make changes in how you conduct county business will only increase your effectiveness as a leader.

The basic functions of technology in county offices are to provide

- accurate, secure data collection and storage,
- timely reports,
- rapid communications between and among staff, citizens, and other agencies,
- electronic generation and storage of documents, and
- project tracking.

As technology has advanced, all of these are now available from remote locations.

While your county’s Chief Information Officer (CIO) or IT Director may be responsible for developing and supporting technology, your role in approving the plan includes knowing the uses and benefits of new developments.



Additional Internet Resources

www.centerdigitalgov.com- Names Top-10 Digital County Governments

www.esri.com- ESRI, NACo Premier Technology Member, provides user needs assessments, data inventory and system design and implementation considerations

www.pti.org- Public Technology Incorporated provides updates on policy, management and technical issues

Shared Services

Shared services are collaborative efforts by multiple entities that benefit citizen needs. These services, deployed across governments, result in major savings on support services and allow for the redeployment of resources to other front-line, citizen-facing services. Shared services make it possible for smaller jurisdictions to provide services to citizens through partnership with other jurisdictions in ways that they could never afford to do on their own.

E-Services

In our 24x7 Internet age, citizens are increasingly expecting 24x7 services from government offices. They have become accustomed to receiving 24x7 services from companies such as Amazon.com, and they are expecting to receive similar levels of service from their county government. So, in addition to providing in-person services during scheduled business hours, your county might be expected to provide “self-help” on-line services around the clock. Examples of how counties are using this capability to improve services include sending community service alerts over the Internet and conducting the business of permit applications and payments of taxes and parking tickets on line.

Issues Facing the Mobile Workforce

Mobile technologies have improved productivity and enhanced service delivery by enabling county employees to work from remote locations. For this to work, staff needs connectivity and access to county networks.

Having wireless bandwidth available at a reasonable cost without sacrificing security is one issue to be faced. You will need to adapt devices and applications to be as mobile as your workforce.

None of this happens without a shift in your thinking and in the culture of your county that will make it more conducive to a mobile workforce. Counties without mass transit systems are finding remote access (i.e., working from home) a reasonable response to the increased costs of transportation.

Enhancing Collaboration

The Internet is changing. It used to be that Web sites provided a one-way stream of content from Web site owner to Web site visitor. In that model, Web site owners and their visitors each had distinct roles. Web site owners had the more active role of creating --or at least sourcing-- the content and putting it online. Meanwhile the visitors had the more passive role of browsing and downloading the content they were interested in. This has changed dramatically. Today the most popular sites implement "bi-directional content streaming." In this model, users are no longer only consumers of con-

tent, but producers as well. Users create content, share this content by publishing it online, and react to each other's content. The result is a continuous dialogue between the owner of the site and its visitors.

Applying the next generation of web-based services and applications, known as "Web 2.0," enables counties to enhance their business value by:

- providing better business agility. Using Web 2.0, organizations can react quickly to emerging situations by rapidly obtaining the required expertise and information to respond to constituent needs.
- cultivating community collaboration and information sharing to reduce the possibility of fragmenting information.
- enhancing collaboration and strengthening fruitful working relationships with citizens.

The term "Web 2.0" has become the buzzword when referring to the next generation web. Rather than just a static repository for data, the Web has become a platform for applications and the enabler for:

- on-line participation,
- collaboration,
- harnessing collective intelligence ...and so much more.

Member-to-Member

Shared Services

Harris County, Texas, models an effective use of shared services in its Regional Radio System. Harris and its surrounding counties developed the system over the past decade with investments in excess of \$250 million. The result is an impressive regional communications network with 133 channels and 17 tower sites serving Harris and parts of eight other counties. The system supports approximately 32,000 users and 512 agencies in an area larger than most states. Two new counties are expected to join the system in 2008, increasing the user base to 35,000 and 550 agencies. Regional subscribers include federal, state and local public safety and law enforcement agencies, fire departments, public works departments, cities, counties, public schools and university systems, as well as the Texas Medical Center and private air ambulance services. The system proved to be an invaluable resource in 2006 during both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, when federal, state and local officials communicated seamlessly.

Steve Jennings, County Information Officer of Harris County, notes, "We're looking for a holistic management system...We built this system on the concept of sharing and pulling resources and frequencies so that we can base all frequencies across multiple infrastructures to provide the most enhanced function and use of frequencies." Commenting on the disaster response, Jennings adds, "No single entity can address a major catastrophe by itself. We all have to rely on each other for resources and expertise. The key ingredient in that reliance is the ability to communicate with each other."

Web 2.0 depends on the key concepts of participation and interaction. Its pages have three major characteristics:

- they are dynamic (e.g., incremental updates),
- interactive (e.g., maps),
- and they support collaboration (e.g., wikis, blogs).

Three types of Web 2.0 collaborative tools are particularly important to counties:

- **Blogs** (Short for web logs): Blogs are user-generated web journals that offer opinions and information. They may also include text, images, and links to other blogs and web pages. Some blogs are confined to personal expressions, but others make provision for reactions and comments from readers. An example of a blog is the Official Google Blog, which contains news of new products, events and glimpses of life inside Google.
- **Wikis**: Wikis are Web sites that allow visitors to add, remove, edit, and exchange content about a word or topic, usually without requiring registration by the visitor. A “wiki” also allows linking among any number of pages. This ease of interaction and operation makes a wiki an effective tool for mass collaborative authoring. An example of a wiki is Wikipedia, the biggest multilingual free-content encyclopedia on the Internet.
- **Mashups**: Mashups are Web sites or other applications that integrate content from more than one source into an integrated application (e.g., combining data on a topic of interest with geographical data). An example of a mashup is Starbucks Coffee Finder, which integrates Starbucks coffee locations with Google Maps.



Geographic Information Systems

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and related technologies have become critical to the functioning of county governments. GIS information is geographically referenced (geocoded) and has considerable capabilities for data analysis and modeling. GIS is used heavily in

- land-use planning and decision making,
- in routing school buses that pick up children,
- tracking the spread of diseases,
- dispatching emergency and public safety personnel (police, fire, EMS),
- routing county vehicles (public transportation, vehicle fleets, garbage and recycling), and
- water and sewer applications.

County Enterprise Architecture

Enterprise architecture (EA) is based on the understanding that technology exists to fulfill your county's operations requirements. A county's EA is a strategic asset that defines technology components needed for your operations as well as the infrastructure needed

References and Resources

NACo Information Technology Committee- The Information Technology Committee is comprised of elected and appointed county officials, as well as Premier Corporate Members, that focus on the application of technology to solve county business problems.

National Association of Counties Information Technology Executives (NACITE)- NACITE's mission is to educate County elected leaders on relevant technology-related issues that enable them to make informed business decisions. NACITE provides a forum for the exchange of information among public sector IT professionals by providing access to peers who understand and manage similar challenges and issues.

NACo Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Committee- The GIS Committee consists of county GIS professionals and elected and appointed officials committed to advancing GIS applications to solve county business problems.

to implement new technologies. It starts with the idea that the county official should plan technology purchases and development ahead of time, and that you and your staff, not the technology people, should determine what is needed.

One of the key things to know about EA is that it is not “just a technology matter” – it involves the review and updating of your county’s processes and procedures. No one wants to spend resources to build applications and an infrastructure that simply automate disorganized or inefficient processes. Defining, revising and documenting current county processes are the first steps in a full EA undertaking.

Enterprise Architecture is a multi-layered plan that typically includes the following information technology (IT) architectural components:

- Application and Data
- Platform
- Network
- Internet
- Security
- Benefits

Use your EA as the roadmap to technological solutions to processing problems. In addition to resolving a problem, the architecture is flexible enough to allow expansion and change as requirements evolve or as technology becomes obsolete. Architecture allows counties to understand how new requirements and technological changes will affect its operations. It also improves the efficiency and effectiveness of technology investments by reducing redundancy and promoting the sharing of knowledge and best practices across the county.

An Example

Fairfax County, Virginia has been an early adopter of EA, making EA an essential component of their IT plan. Fairfax County’s IT environment builds on an enterprise architecture that includes standard platforms and tools that support a variety of needs and a portfolio of systems. To view their IT Plan, go to www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dit/itPlan/.

For Your Notes:

Finance and Budget

Your Role as Budget Manager and Fiscal Leader

Demonstrating Leadership

What's in a County Budget?

County Revenue Sources

Budget Related Policies

Financial Policies

Financial Reporting

Budget Formats and Trends

The Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB)

Debt Management

Risk Management

Your Role as Budget Manager and Fiscal Leader

One of the most important duties of a county commissioner is to consider the competing needs and interests of different segments of the community, including other county officials. At budget time, it is not uncommon for each department head to insist that he or she needs additional resources to do a proper job.

At the same time, some constituents may be clamoring for new or expanded services like green space, advanced technology or new roads, while others are demanding that taxes be cut. Sometimes the same people asking for expanded services are also the ones seeking lower taxes! Clearly, something has to give.

Who is responsible for sorting out and balancing these competing interests? It is, of course, the county commissioners. You, as a county commissioner, are charged with making sense of it all, and then with accepting responsibility for an outcome in which it is likely that nobody will be completely happy.

In Section 1 of this handbook, we discussed your leadership role in developing a strategic plan for the county. Without a strategic plan and vision for the future, your yearly budgeting process has no direction. That plan and vision provide the rationale for the critical financial decisions you make.

Budgets are living documents, not one-time events, and the budget process and monitoring should go on year 'round. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) has composed an excellent summary of general parameters for sound budgeting that includes these characteristics.

- incorporates a long-term perspective;
- establishes linkages to broad organization (county) goals;
- focuses budget decisions on results and outcomes;
- involves and promotes effective communication with stakeholders;
- provides incentives to government management and employees.

Your county's budgeting process is also governed by state law and by your form of government, also discussed in Section 1. You and other board/commission members will work closely with and rely on the county's Chief Finance Officer.

What's In a County Budget?

Every county's budget and budgeting process are unique. However, all counties should have two budgets – an Operating Budget and a Capital Budget.

The **Operating Budget** contains revenues and expenses for operating county departments and services; enterprise funds; contingency funds; and debt service. Often, the largest portion of the operating budget is in employee salaries and benefits.

Enterprise Fund: A fund established to finance and account for the acquisition, operation, and maintenance of governmental facilities and services that are wholly or partially supported by user charges/fees. Examples: hospital, airport, public utilities.

Debt Service Funds: A fund used to repay the principal and interest on long-term debt.

Contingency Funds: Funds set aside for unexpected expenditures. A rule of thumb is that 10-20% of a budget is an appropriate amount.

The **Capital Budget** includes multi-year planning for new infrastructure projects such as bridges, schools, buildings, courthouses, and jails.



Additional Internet Resources

www.cviog.uga.edu - The Web site of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia has a publications catalog and other information about its research and training projects. The National Center for the Study of Counties, located at the Carl Vinson Institute, is a collaboration of NACo, the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), the National Association of County Administrators (NACA), and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

County Revenue Sources

According to general principles of taxation and public finance, governments should have a revenue base that captures the growth of an expanding economy but maintains stability during economic downturns. Counties use several different revenue sources to fund their general operations. Nearly all counties reported general fund revenues from property tax, and this and other taxes and fees are the most important revenue sources. The following list, from County Revenues, A Survey of Authority and Practice, prepared for NACo by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government in September 2001; shows other common revenue sources your county may be able to rely on.

- Property taxes
- Sales and use taxes
- Excise and use taxes
- Gross receipts and business taxes
- Penalties and interest on delinquent taxes
- All other taxes
- Licenses and permits
- Intergovernmental revenue (state & local)
- Intergovernmental revenue from other sources
- Fees and charges for services
- Fines and forfeits
- Miscellaneous revenues

Your county's particular revenue "mix" depends on many factors, including state law and your own board actions.



Budget-Related Policies

As suggested earlier, county commissioners must address many important questions as they assume their budget-making responsibilities. A few of these are presented here. A prudent board of commissioners is one that develops agreed-upon responses to such recurrent questions and, further, formalizes its responses in policy statements intended to guide future actions.

Must the Budget Balance?

State laws vary regarding balanced budgets. When the budget is balanced, revenues must equal expenditures. However, there may be several scenarios in which revenues and expenditures need not be equal.

1. when the county is trying to accumulate resources, usually for cash flow, capital items, or unforeseen emergencies; and
2. when the county has incurred a deficit fund balance in prior years and wishes to eliminate this problem. (Note: a deficit fund balance is often not allowed.)

How Much Should a Fund Balance Be?

Accountants define fund balance as the difference between the assets and liabilities on the balance sheet, or between revenues and expenditures. Accounting rules allow counties to reserve a portion of a fund balance – i.e., not available to spend. There is no easy answer or right answer to how large a fund balance should be.

Additional Internet Resources

www.gfoa.org- The Web site of the Government Finance Officers Association contains detailed information about "Best Practices in Public Budgeting" as recommended by the National Advisory Council on State and Local Budgeting. Also available from GFOA are publications from the GFOA Budgeting Series, which provide guidance based on real-world examples, and other publications such as "An Elected Official's Guide to Multi-Year Budgeting" and "An Elected Official's Guide to Government Finance."

Do Appropriations Lapse at the End of the Fiscal Year?

When a portion of a county's adopted budget remains unspent at the end of the year, what happens to the amount? Again, your state's laws are your guide. The most common policy is that any unspent appropriations at the end of the fiscal year are not carried forward and must be re-appropriated in the next year.

Financial Policies

Financial policies are the rules that govern financial decisions in a county. County commissioners adopt these policies and follow them when making financial decisions about the future of their counties. Once county commissioners adopt financial policies, most subsequent financial decisions are simplified because the issues have been deliberated during the policy adoption phase.



Member-to-Member

Fiscal Health and Wellness

Jefferson County, Colorado, staffers Chris Fabian and Jon Johnson presented their strategy for dealing with a fiscal crisis at NACo's 2008 Annual Conference in Jackson County, Missouri (Kansas City) at a workshop for members entitled "Achieving Fiscal Health and Wellness."

In their approach, "wellness" means maintaining fiscal health into the future. An organization achieves fiscal health by:

- identifying the symptoms causing the imbalance,
- diagnosing the root cause,
- and prescribing treatment to achieve desired outcomes.

Charged with addressing Jefferson County's financial crisis, they developed these five indicators of fiscal health to guide its assessment:

- Spend within our means.
- Establish and maintain reserves
- Understand variances. For example, before this initiative the county had a carry-forward in its capital budget of some \$75 million to \$85 million.
- Be transparent about the true cost of doing business, and
- Translate a stabilization plan to county commissioners so they can make effective decisions.

Achieving fiscal wellness in the future requires setting priorities – determining the outcomes government wants based on a ranking of values, programs and services. Prioritization also enables government to better understand why certain programs exist and which ones can be funded at a lower level while still meeting desired outcomes.

Reprinted from *County News*, August 4, 2008

Additional Internet Resources

www.uscommunities.org- This Web site provides information about bulk volume discounts for public agencies for a variety of products. Joint sponsors in addition to NACo are The Association of School Business Officials (ASBO), The National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP), the National League of Cities (NLC) and the US Conference of Mayors (USCM).

Counties might adopt financial policies covering the following topics:

- operating budget and equity (fund balance) reserves
- capital improvements plan or program (CIP)
- debt
- revenue
- accounting, auditing, and financial reporting
- purchasing
- cash and investment

Financial Reporting

Financial reports and statements are prepared annually and during the year on a regular basis by county finance officers. Financial reports vary according to their content and purpose for which they are issued and how they will be used (internal or external) and when they are completed (interim or annual). Most counties issue some type of interim report to assist with their day-to-day management. Annual financial reports are designed for external readers, such as citizens or bond rating services.

Generally, governments prepare two types of financial statements: balance sheets (sometimes called statements of net assets) and operating statements (sometimes called statements of activities). Balance sheets

are financial statements that present what the county owns, what it owes, and its worth (i.e., fund balance or net assets). Operating statements are directed toward control over revenues and expenditures in the primary operating funds.

A budgetary operating statement should be most useful to county commissioners, particularly during the year, because it compares budgeted revenues with actual revenues and budgeted expenditures with actual expenditures. This kind of statement allows commissioners to monitor spending and to determine if revenues are being received as projected.

All financial statements and reporting formats are governed by generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). GAAP provide a set of uniform minimum standards and guidelines for financial accounting and reporting.

Budget Formats and Trends

Traditional Line-item Budgets begin with a department's or agency's last year's costs and then make adjustments based on inflation or new priorities and plans.

Program Budgets identify and classify expenditures and revenues by activity or program and cut across traditional department/agency boundaries.

Budgeting for Results, Performance Budgeting focuses on delivering quality services that citizens value. Expenditures are allocated and prioritized to best accomplish the results that really matter. (See also Section 3, Management and Administrative Savvy, Results and Performance Measurement)

The Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB)

The mission of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board is to establish and improve standards of state and local governmental accounting and financial reporting that will result in useful information for users of financial reports and guide and educate the public, including issuers, auditors, and users of those financial reports.

As such, counties that keep their records in accordance with generally accepted accounting standards are required to comply with GASB statements. For instance, GASB Statement 34 significantly changes financial reporting by state and local governments. Under this standard, anyone with an interest in pub-

lic finance - citizens, the media, creditors, and others – will have more and easier-to-understand information about their governments. Your county's finance officer is responsible for ensuring compliance. In another example, under GASB Statements 43 and 45, counties are required to report their liabilities for post-employment health expenses. For more information on GASB visit: www.gasb.org.

Debt Management

Counties have the power to finance many activities by borrowing from the capital markets. Because counties are tax-exempt entities, they generally can borrow at favorable tax-exempt rates. There are two general categories of debt that a county can enter into:

- general obligation bonds – a pledge of the county's full faith and credit
- revenue bonds – a pledge of future monies the county is to receive

Investors will generally loan the county money at interest rates they determine based on the purpose of the financing, the financial ability of the county to repay the debt, and, frequently, the ratings that result from the analysis by one or more of the national debt rating agencies.

Risk Management

Although risk management is discussed in Section 3 of this handbook, it also must be acknowledged when it comes to covering the risk of financial loss. Counties have several options for coverage:

- purchase general liability insurance from a private carrier;
- self-insure by setting aside funds for liabilities, or reserves, for losses as they occur;
- participate in state-wide risk pools;
- a combination of self-insurance and private carrier insurance

References and Resources

Another money-saving program sponsored by NACo is the Debt Collection Program, which helps counties more effectively manage their receivables. More information can be found on NACo's Web site – www.naco.org - under County Resource Center.

Other NACo Web site links (www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=Publications&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=25862) to a study of how some counties are responding to the GASB 45 requirements.

NACo and many state associations of counties endorse a Post Employment Health Plan that is administered by Nationwide Retirement Solutions. The PEHP program can be part of a solution to the GASB 45 requirements. Contact the NACo Financial Services Corporation for more information.

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Appendices

State Associations of Counties

NACo Affiliates

NACo Calendar of Conferences (Through 2012)

NACo Resources

**Association of County Commissioners of
Alabama, Montgomery, Alabama**

Phone: (334)263-7594 Fax: (334)263-7678
www.acca-online.org

Alaska Municipal League, Juneau, Alaska

Phone: (907)586-1325 Fax: (907)463-5480
www.akml.org

**County Supervisors Association of Arizona
Phoenix, Arizona**

Phone: (602)252-5521 Fax: (602)253-3227
www.countysupervisors.org

**Arizona Association of Counties
Phoenix, Arizona**

Phone: (602)252-6563 Fax: (602)254-0969
www.azcounties.org

**Association of Arkansas Counties
Little Rock, Arkansas**

Phone: (501)372-7550 Fax: (501)372-0611
www.arcounties.org

**California State Association of Counties
Sacramento, California**

Phone: (916)327-7500 Fax: (916)441-5507
www.csac.counties.org

Colorado Counties, Inc., Denver, Colorado

Phone: (303)861-4076 Fax: (303)861-2818
www.ccionline.org

**Delaware Association of Counties
Lewes, Delaware**

Phone: (302)645-0432 Fax: (302)645-2232

**Florida Association of Counties
Tallahassee, Florida**

Phone: (850)922-4300 Fax: (850)488-7501
www.fl-counties.com

**Association County Commissioners of Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia**

Phone: (404)522-5022 Fax: (404)525-2477
www.accg.org

**Hawaii State Association of Counties
Lihue, Hawaii**

Phone: (808)270-7760 Fax: (808)270-7639
www.hawaii-county.com

Idaho Association of Counties, Boise, Idaho

Phone: (208)345-9126 Fax: (208)345-0379
www.idcounties.org

**Illinois Association of County Board Members
Springfield, Illinois**

Phone: (217)528-5331 Fax: (217)528-5562

Illinois Counties Association

Phone: (217)528-3434

**United Counties Council of Illinois
Springfield, Illinois**

Phone: (217)544-5585 Fax: (217)544-5571

Metro Counties of Illinois, Libertyville, Illinois

Phone: (847)816-0889 Fax: (847)247-9915

**Association of Indiana Counties
Indianapolis, Indiana**

Phone: (317)684-3710 Fax: (317)684-3713
www.indianacounties.org

**Iowa State Association of Counties
Des Moines, Iowa**

Phone: (515)244-7181 Fax: (515)244-6397
www.iowacounties.org

Kansas Association of Counties, Topeka, Kansas

Phone: (785)272-2585 Fax: (785)272-3585
www.kansascounties.org

**Kentucky Association of Counties
Frankfort, Kentucky**

Phone: (502)223-7667 Fax: (502)223-1502
www.kaco.org

**Policy Jury Association of Louisiana
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

Phone: (225)343-2835 Fax: (225)336-1344
www.lpgov.org

Maine County Commissioners Association
Augusta, Maine
Phone: (207)623-4697 Fax: (207)622-4437

Maryland Association of Counties
Annapolis Maryland
Phone: (410)269-0043 Fax: (410)268-1775
www.mdcounties.org

**Massachusetts Association of County
Commissioners, Dedham, Massachusetts**
Phone: (781)461-6105 Fax: (781)326-6480

Michigan Association of Counties
Lansing, Michigan
Phone: (517)372-5374 Fax: (517)482-4599
www.micounties.org

Association of Minnesota Counties
Saint Paul, Minnesota
Phone: (651)224-3344 Fax: (651)224-6540
www.mncounties.org

Mississippi Association of Supervisors
Jackson, Mississippi
Phone: (601)353-2741 Fax: (601)353-2749
www.masnetwork.org

Missouri Association of Counties
Jefferson City, Missouri
Phone: (573)634-2120 Fax: (573)634-3549
www.mocounties.com

Montana Association of Counties
Helena, Montana
Phone: (406)444-4360 Fax: (406)442-5238
www.maco.cog.mt.us

Nebraska Association of County Officials,
Lincoln, Nebraska
Phone: (402)434-5660 Fax: (402)434-5673
www.nacone.org

Nevada Association of Counties
Carson City, Nevada
Phone: (775)883-7863 Fax: (775)883-7398
www.nvnaco.org

New Hampshire Association of Counties
Concord, New Hampshire
Phone: (603)224-9222 Fax: (603)224-8312

New Jersey Association of Counties
Trenton, New Jersey
Phone: (609)394-3467 Fax: (609)989-8567
www.njac.org

New Mexico Association of Counties
Santa Fe, New Mexico
Phone: (505)983-2101 Fax: (505)983-4396

New York State Association of Counties
Albany, New York
Phone: (518)465-1473 Fax: (518)465-0506
www.nysac.org

**North Carolina Association of County
Commissioners, Raleigh, North Carolina**
Phone: (919)715-2893 Fax: (919)733-1065
www.ncacc.org

North Dakota Association of Counties
Bismarck, North Dakota
Phone: (701)328-7300 Fax: (701)328-7308
www.ndaco.org

County Commissioners Association of Ohio
Columbus, Ohio
Phone: (614)221-5627 Fax: (614)221-6986
www.ccao.org

**Association of County Commissioners of
Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**
Phone: (405)524-3200 Fax: (405)524-3700
www.okacco.com

Association of Oregon Counties, Salem, Oregon
Phone: (503)585-8351 Fax: (503)373-7876
www.aocweb.org

**County Commissioners Association of
Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**
Phone: (717)232-7554 Fax: (717)232-2162
www.pacounties.org

**South Carolina Association of Counties
Columbia, South Carolina**

Phone: (803)252-7255 Fax: (803)252-0379
www.sccounties.org

**South Dakota Association of County
Commissioners, Pierre, South Dakota**

Phone: (605)224-4554 Fax: (605)224-4833
www.sdcountries.org

**South Dakota Association of County Officials
Pierre, South Dakota**

Phone: (605)224-1968 Fax: (605)224-9128
www.sdcountries.org

**Tennessee County Services Association
Nashville, Tennessee**

Phone: (615)532-3767 Fax: (615)532-3769
www.tncounties.org

Texas Association of Counties, Austin, Texas

Phone: (512)478-8753 Fax: (512)478-0519
www.county.org

**Utah Association of Counties
Salt Lake City, Utah**

Phone: (801)265-1331 Fax: (801)265-9485
www.uacnet.org

**Virginia Association of Counties
Richmond, Virginia**

Phone: (804)788-6652 Fax: (804)788-0083
www.institute.vaco.org

**Washington State Association of Counties
Olympia, Washington**

Phone: (360)753-1886 Fax: (360)753-2842
www.wacounties.org

**Washington Association of County Officials
Olympia, Washington**

Phone: (360)753-7319 Fax: (360)664-2812
www.wacounties.org

**County Commissioners' Association of West
Virginia, Charleston, West Virginia**

Phone: (304)345-4639 Fax: (304)346-3512
www.polsci.wvu.edu/ccawv/

**West Virginia Association of Counties
Charleston, West Virginia**

Phone: (304)346-0591 Fax: (304)346-0592
www.wvcounties.org/index.html

**Wisconsin Counties Association
Monona, Wisconsin**

Phone: (608)663-7188 Fax: (608)663-7189
www.wicounties.org

**Wyoming County Commissioners Association
Cheyenne, Wyoming**

Phone: (307)632-5409 Fax: (307)632-6533
www.wyo-wcca.org

IAEM

International Association of Emergency Managers

IAFC

International Association of Fire Chiefs

NACA

National Association of County Administrators

NACAP

National Association of County Aging Programs

NACBHDD

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

NACCA

National Association of County Civil Attorneys

NACCED

National Association for County Community and Economic Development

NACCHO

National Association of County and City Health Officials

NACCTFO

National Association of County Collectors, Treasurers and Finance Officers

NACE

National Association of County Engineers

NACHFA

National Association of County Health Facility Administrators

NACHSA

National Association of County Human Services Administrators

NACIO

National Association of County Information Officers

NACIRO

National Association of Intergovernmental Relations Officials

NACITA

National Association of County Information Technology Administrators

NACITE

National Association of County Information Technology Executives

NACP

National Association of County Planners

NACPRO

National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials

NACRC

National Association of County Recorders, Election Officials, and Clerks

NACS

National Association of County Surveyors

NALBOH

National Association of Local Boards of Health

NAVPLG

National Association of Volunteer Programs in Local Government

NCCAE

National Council of County Association Executives

NWA

National Workforce Association

NACo Annual Conference

Davidson County (Nashville), Tennessee
July 24-29, 2009

Washoe County (Reno), Nevada
July 16-20, 2010

Multnomah County (Portland), Oregon
July 15-19, 2011

Allegheny County (Pittsburgh), Pennsylvania
July 13-17, 2012

Western Interstate Region Conference

Umatilla County, Pendleton, Oregon
May 21-23, 2009

County Leadership Institute

**New York University – Wagner Graduate School
of Public Service**
May 27-30, 2009

Legislative Conference

Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, DC
March 7-11, 2009

Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, DC
March 6-10, 2010

Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, DC
March 5-9, 2011

NACo offers a variety of resources for enhancing your effectiveness as a county official. These are listed on the NACo website at www.naco.org and include:

- Publications Catalog
- Model Programs
- Current and archived issues of County News
- Training and Technical Assistance on a wide range of topics
- Peer Advice
- Legislative Action Center
- Leadership Development

Publications

The following publications relate directly to the content of this handbook. See the publications catalog for details.

- Alphabet Soup – a guide to Acronyms in government
- Assessing County’s Readiness for Economic Development
- Best Practices – Responsiveness to Special Crisis Situations
- Civic Education and Public Information
- Community and Economic Development
- Counties: Foundation for a Sustainable Future #2, Public Participation beyond the Ballot Box
- County Government Overview
- Creating a County Code of Ethics, Mission and Values Statements
- Emergency Management and Response
- Emergency Preparedness Survey
- Emergency Notification
- Financing Economic Development
- Funding County Services
- Getting Started: Business Development for Small and Mid-Sized Counties
- Glossary of Public Finance Terms
- Local Tools for Smart Growth – Practical Strategies and Techniques to Improve our Communities
- Making Collaboration Work

- Media Relations Guide
- NACo Membership Information Packet
- Performance Measurement: A Tool for Managing County Governments
- The Right Way to Run a Meeting
- What Do County Commissioners Do All Day?
- When It Comes to Running a Board Meeting, There are a Few Rules

Leadership Development at NACo

The County Leadership Handbook is available online in the “Members Only” section.

Advanced Leadership Training (ALT) seminars offer training and updates in five “Areas of Practice” that are critical to effective leadership: Communications, Advocacy, Catalyst (Change Agent), Strategic Governing and Principled Practice. Watch for announcements of seminars within the Legislative and Annual Conference programs.

County Leadership Institute (CLI) is an intensive, residential 3.5 day program offered in collaboration with a nationally known graduate school of Public Administration. The program addresses skills in collaborative thinking, coalition building, public positioning and political balancing. Enrollment is by nomination by the state association and is limited to 30 people each year.

Issues and Interest Areas

NACo supports research and advocacy in the issues listed below. See the NACo Web site for information on platform and opportunities for your participation in:

- Agriculture and Rural Affairs
- Community and Economic Development
- Environment, Energy and Land Use
- Finance and Intergovernmental Affairs
- Health
- Human Services and Education
- Justice and Public Safety
- Labor and Employment
- Public Lands
- Telecommunications and Technology
- Transportation



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