New Commissioner/County Executive/County Council Member Checklist

Congratulations! You are now a county commissioner, county executive or council member responsible for the budgetary and administrative supervision of your entire county. So where do you start? With the breadth of issues inherent in county governance, we have compiled a list of the county functions with which to become familiar. It is neither exhaustive nor detailed, but rather intended to provide some guidance to newly elected officials – questions to ask and matters to pursue – as you assume office.

**ADMINISTRATIVE & GENERAL**

- Do you have the basic statistics for your county such as number of employees, payroll size, size of general fund, size of the county’s overall budget?
- How often does the board of county commissioners regularly meet with department heads, other county elected officials (i.e. judicial and row office leadership), state lawmakers, and other community leaders?
- What duties are vested with the clerk/administrator?
- What does the county’s demographic data look like? (Here is a good web site hosted by the State of Ohio which provides free county profile data: [http://www.development.ohio.gov/reports/reports_countytrends_map.htm](http://www.development.ohio.gov/reports/reports_countytrends_map.htm))
- Does the county have in place a process for handling media requests?
- Does the county have other forms for dissemination of information to the public such as a website, list serves, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and if so, how is it overseen and coordinated?
- Is the county’s record retention policy up to date? Are county staff properly trained in complying with public records requests? Are you aware of the state law requirement for elected officials to receive sunshine law training during their term of office? Are you aware of the reasons that a board or council may go into executive session? (The answers to these questions are covered in our new member training and are in the *Ohio Sunshine Law Manual* published by the Ohio Attorney General.)

**FINANCIAL**

- What are the county’s current tax bases and rates, including sales tax rate and special levies?
- What are the county’s historic and projected revenue and expenditure trends? What is the relative rate of growth in different budget areas?
- What did the county’s last audit reveal? Are there any management practices that need to be addressed?
What method of accounting does the county use?

What kind of carry-over balance and/or reserve balance does the county have?

What is the county’s bond rating?

What debt does the county have outstanding, for what purpose, at what rates, and for what duration?

What are the procedures being used for approval of purchase orders and invoicing?

Are there any outstanding budget issues with the judiciary or row offices?

When did the county last do a sexennial reappraisal or triennial update of property values?

What special funds exist, how much are they, and for what purposes can they be used?

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Who are the major employers and what are the major markets in the county?

Meet with the county economic development leaders to learn about programs and funding streams, including any Port Authority that serves the county.

What is the county’s local workforce investment area? How is the county’s OhioMeansJobs center (workforce development agency) working for the community?

How is the county’s relationship with the JobsOhio regional partner?

What does the county offer in the way of tax incentives for economic development and how are those decisions made?

How does the county distribute the Community Development Block Grant?

**HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**

Counties have four major functions in human services: public assistance programs (cash assistance, food assistance, Medicaid, etc.), child protective services, child support enforcement, and workforce development. How does your county administer these programs? Are they all performed by the County Department of Job and Family Services (CDJFS) or are there separate boards?

What are the major federal and state funds that run through the CDJFS?

Are any county general fund dollars used to support human services programs or functions, aside from the mandated share for public assistance? If so, how much, and for what agency(ies)?

What programs and services do county human services agencies provide to residents? How many residents receive these services?
What is the staff case load and turnover rate and how does this impact services?

What is the county’s Prevention, Retention and Contingency (PRC) plan? (PRC is funding that can be used to address barriers to employment)

What does the health survey done by the health department reveal about our county’s general health and workforce strengths or challenges?

Who do we contract with for human services and how are those contracts managed?

**COUNTY JAIL/COURT STRUCTURE/OTHER PUBLIC SAFETY**

Ask your sheriff about the jail population, cost drivers, and population trends. Particularly consider the unsentenced population awaiting trial, those serving a misdemeanor sentence, and those being housed for a probation violation or awaiting a transfer to prison for a felony.

Because length of jail stay has a big impact on cost, ask what the average length of stay in the jail is for the categories listed above.

Does the county have a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council in place or other advisory boards around reentry or other areas? These types of groups tend to help the criminal justice system operate more efficiently and effectively by bringing courts, law enforcement, probation and social service providers together to discuss important issues.

Does the county receive any Community Corrections Act grant funding? This funding is used for diversion programming that can save counties money and improve outcomes.

Meet with the chief adult probation officer to discuss supervision caseloads and other special programs (electronic monitoring, drug and alcohol services, etc.) aimed at reducing recidivism.

How are the common pleas and municipal courts structured? Are there any specialty docket courts?

What are the indigent defense operating costs, felony and misdemeanor caseloads, average cost per case and how have they changed over the past five years? Increasing the indigent defense funding contribution by the state is a CCAO priority, along with reforms to the public defender system.

How does the county enforce and administer Ohio’s dog laws? Who serves as the county’s Dog Warden?

**ELECTIONS**

What voting system does the county use? Are any upgrades necessary or under consideration?

How many precincts are in the county? How has that number changed over the past five years? On average, how many voters are in a precinct?

Does the county have a special fund for voting equipment and is money being put into that account?
Does the county provide health insurance benefits to board of elections members, as this is permissive by law (though such benefit cannot be removed during a board member’s term of office)?

Does your board of elections need assistance in recruiting poll workers?

**EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

- Have a conversation with your EMA Director to understand who does what in the event of an emergency in your county.
- How does the county communicate with the public in the event of an emergency?
- Become familiar with your countywide 9-1-1 plan, including such details as how calls are received and how emergency responders (police, fire, EMS, sheriff) are dispatched to an incident.
- How emergency responders communicate with each other when responding to an emergency is an important aspect to understand. Ask what radio system(s) are operated within the county and who operates them. Also ask if there other non-emergency service providers such as dog wardens, county engineers, parks and recreation, etc. using the radio system(s), as there may be strains on the system(s) that can have policy and budget implications.
- The state is examining how to move to a new platform for receiving 9-1-1 calls so that newer communication methods such as texts and videos can be received. Is the county planning for migrating to a NextGen platform which will be internet based and ready to accommodate new communication methods (referred to as P-25 standards for system design and NENA i3 PSAP operation standards)? As your county begins to migrate to this new platform, it is important that your county be compliant with these specific standards.

**INSURANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

- Does the county have a risk manager or loss control coordinator?
- Which risk sharing pool or insurance company provides property and liability coverage to the county? What risk management services does the risk-sharing pool or insurance company provide to the county? What are the deductibles, liability limits, and annual premium?
- Does the county have a written policy requiring license and insurance checks for employees and volunteers who drive on county business?
- Does the county have standard operating procedures for personnel, safety and loss control?
- Does the county routinely send staff to risk management and safety training?
How much does the county pay in Workers’ Compensation premiums? Are you part of a group rating or group retrospective rating plan? What is the county’s claims history? Who in the county manages the workers’ compensation claims?

PERSONNEL AND LABOR RELATIONS

Review the county’s personnel manual. How often is it updated? Is it adopted and used by all of the county elected officials?

Who is responsible for personnel and benefits administration?

Be familiar with public hiring and firing processes and review with legal counsel any anticipated personnel changes.

What collective bargaining units exist in the county?

What are the expiration dates of existing contracts?

Who is the county’s labor relations representative?

Who is classified or unclassified and on what basis?

Who is exempt from overtime requirements?

What is the process for layoffs/job abolishments/work hour reductions/furloughs?

What is the unlawful harassment policy and how are claims investigated?

Who is the EEO officer?

What health insurance is offered to county employees? How is it funded (insured, self-insured, risk pool, etc.)? What steps are taken to reduce claims and annual cost?

Does the county offer a deferred compensation plan for employees in addition to the state plan?

Are there employee training programs or recognition programs?

LEGAL

What legal actions are currently pending, both on behalf of and against the county?

What issues is the county currently facing in which legal action is anticipated?

Are there any legal services that the commissioners contract for rather than using the county prosecutor?
LEGISLATIVE

☐ Has the county established a meeting schedule and communications strategy with its state legislative and Congressional delegations as well as the Administrative branches?

☐ Are you receiving the CCAO Statehouse Report and Legislative Action Alerts? If not, please contact Mary Jane Neiman at CCAO to sign up for these valuable resources.

☐ If you have concerns with pending legislation or support legislation, please make the CCAO Policy Team aware. Also, if you have ideas for legislation, please reach out to the Policy Team.

☐ If you plan on visiting the Statehouse or testifying on legislation, please contact the Policy Team to help your experience and coordinate with the Association’s efforts.

PUBLIC WORKS, INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION

☐ Does the county have any permissive license plate authority in place?

☐ How many bridges does the county own and what is their condition? How many miles of county roads?

☐ Review other public works – roads, sewer, water, and landfill.

☐ Does the county have a capital improvement plan?

☐ What is the status of the county’s solid waste plan and recycling programs?

☐ What transit services does the county operate or fund?

☐ Does the county own or operate an airport?

☐ What transportation planning efforts are underway?

☐ Is the county under any EPA findings and orders?

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

☐ Is there zoning in any of the unincorporated areas of the county. Have individual townships adopted township zoning resolutions or is there any county rural zoning resolution administered by the commissioners?

☐ Do we have a county or regional planning commission?

☐ Do we have subdivision regulations?

☐ Does the county have a convention and visitors bureau and is there a county “bed tax” in place supporting the bureau?
Are there any council of governments (COGs) organized and operating in the county?

Does your county have a comprehensive land use plan?

**COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS**

- On what regional groups does the county participate (planning, transportation, workforce, economic development, COGs, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), etc.)

- What is the county’s overall relationship with cities, school districts, townships and other governmental entities in the county?

- Does the county have any intergovernmental agreements with other jurisdictions to provide services, share equipment or other provisions? Are there additional efficiencies that could be gained by further exploring options in this realm?

**TECHNOLOGY**

- What types of technology systems does the county have? Who is responsible for them?

- Does the county have a data processing board?

- Does the county have technology policies, such as e-mail protocols, passwords, social media, and internet access?

- Does the county have appropriate data security procedures in place?

- Do all technology systems have appropriate backup protocols?