

Elevating *Ethical Leadership*

How to **build trust** in organizations, community, and the profession | BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

Each March, we devote the contents of PM to ethics. We invite our members and experts in the field to share their perspectives, research, and techniques on building ethical competency at the personal and organizational level. This reflects ICMA's and the profession's commitment to the highest of ethical standards in public service.

We lead off this edition with some inspirational comments from four individuals who served on ICMA's Committee on Professional Conduct. From the vantage point of long careers in local government and service vetting ethics cases in their role on the committee, they offer their perspective on the value of the ICMA Code of Ethics.

Each is unique and inspirational so I would encourage you to read them all. Our colleague Rod Gould's comment, in particular, is very relevant in this era of waning trust in government: "Public trust is a tremendous responsibility that every local government leader must embrace and strive to enhance. The ICMA Code of Ethics is essential in earning and maintaining that trust."



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"ICMA's Code of Ethics is our North Star in guiding city and county professionals in how we are to build community and serve the public interest."

—Daryl Delabbio, PhD, ICMA-CM

Building trust with the public we serve is a steep challenge in these days where every issue is politicized and community is so polarized. While local government has historically been the level of government earning the highest trust among residents, that level of confidence is slipping. In his article, Michael Huling, a graduate research assistant at the Davenport Institute, makes the case that effective public engagement will promote trust and build relationships. Huling noted, "Public engagement is the key means by which local governments can earn the trust of their residents, be subject to public accountability, and implement more effective policies that advance the common good."

A key lesson from managing during a pandemic is that you can't build needed relationships in your community while knee deep in the crisis. Effective crisis management requires that those relationships be in place before you need to rely upon them. This message was reinforced in many a session held at conferences this last year as the profession reflected on how their communities and organizations reacted

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Public Management (PM) aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments in creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.



to the pandemic. The other lesson is that managing well during a crisis requires an unbreakable commitment to core values. Strategies and processes can and should be adapted to deal with the situation on the ground. But the best outcomes, including building trust and support with the community, are achieved when you lead with values. This is a point made clear by Cheryl Hilvert, ICMA's Midwest regional director, in her article exploring how three leaders navigated

emergencies in their community. As Hilvert noted, "Rarely is there a situation where our ethics should guide us more than when our communities are facing a crisis, disaster, or in recent times, a worldwide pandemic."

No leader, of course, is successful in managing any situation on their own. They must rely on teams of staff to deliver essential services, provide support to those teams, and ensure that all other elements of local government work.

Bringing out the best performance at the individual level requires that the leader build trust with his or her staff. John Hamm, an executive coach and advisor, addresses why trust is so pivotal in managing people. "When employees don't trust their leaders, they don't feel safe. And when they don't feel safe, they don't take risks. And where there is no risk taken, there is less innovation, less 'going the extra mile,' and therefore, very little unexpected upside. Feeling safe is a primal

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“Do not cave to political pressures that can come in all forms and levels. Your professional reputation is your currency, and it’s hard to retrieve once it’s compromised.”

— Michael Mallinoff,
ICMA-CM

recently awarded \$6 million federal grant for the location of a cruise ship terminal. While the outcome was successful in the long run, he encountered some interesting characters along the way as he navigated an ethical storm. One of the five pieces of advice he offers is, “Do not cave to political pressures that can come in all forms and levels. Your professional reputation is your currency, and it’s hard to retrieve once it’s compromised.”

Ending on a more upbeat note is a story that reminds us to take care of and support each other. In what can be a very tough profession, nothing is more motivating and powerful than knowing that your colleagues have your back. That, coupled with their knowledge and wisdom, can be beneficial to your success. For Matt Candland, currently the township manager for Upper Moreland Township in Pennsylvania, that support appeared in the form of colleagues who once sat in the office he was going to occupy. Upon accepting the position as the borough manager for Carlisle, Pennsylvania, he learned that three former managers lived in and around the community. Being candid, he writes, “I wasn’t sure if this was a good thing or bad thing, but I did worry a little that there might be problems ahead. Would these former managers be helpful or hurtful to my efforts? Would they inappropriately intervene with my elected officials and staff members? Would they write letters to the editor criticizing the elected officials or me? Would they run for office?” Those concerns are reflected in the reality that some former managers can’t let go. Rather than being a source of support, they behave in a way that undermines their colleague. Fortunately, Candland encountered truly outstanding individuals who reached out immediately to welcome him to the community with the offer of support if needed. Candland took them up on the offer, and in doing so, he encountered highly ethical professionals who were sources of friendship and support during challenging times.

I trust you will find these articles helpful in your quest to uphold the high standards of the profession. Please take the time to review the ICMA Code of Ethics with Guidelines—found on page 30—and reach out to ICMA’s ethics team if you need advice. **PM**

human need.” Hamm encourages leadership to be trustworthy and offers nine specific things they can do to build trust with their staff.

We close out this edition with the personal story of two managers. The title of Michael Mallinoff’s story, “Ethics and Unsavory Characters,” pretty much says it all. It’s a tale that will resonate with many a manager who arrived in a new place only to discover that the community culture was perhaps not as ethical as is optimal. In Mallinoff’s case, his first challenge was to use a



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March 11: Deadline for Local Government Excellence Award Nominations icma.org/awards

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