



Bridging the Gap

The Importance of Roles, Values, and Different Perspectives in Creating Effective Governing Bodies



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The Ideal Governing Body



Julia D. Novak and Dr. John Nalbandian, 2017

- 1 Community:** Uses their office to convene conversations that matter and recognizes that a primary role is to build, maintain and preserve community.
- 2 Brand:** Protects and enhances the value of the brand of their community at all times.
- 3 Majority:** Understands that their most important constituents are other members of the governing body—nothing gets done without a majority.
 - Focuses their energy on doing things as a governing body.
 - Recognizes that compromise and negotiation are the tools of the political craft.
 - Seeks to bring their colleagues into the majority, even when another vote is not needed.
- 4 Unique Power:** Understands that they (the governing body) have the power to do things that no one else in the community can do.
- 5 No Right Answers:** Understands the inherent values conflict at play when making decisions AND respects that there are no absolutes—no “right” answers (even theirs).
- 6 Dual Roles:** Is aware and respectful of the different roles they play and understand they serve as both a representative of constituencies and a trustee of the public good.
- 7 Respect:** Understands that respect can be earned by:
 - Speaking on issues only when they have new insights that further debate and understanding;
 - Asking genuine questions of others; and by
 - Exercising their strengths in a way that others value.
- 8 Partnership:** Respects and values the partnership between the governing body and their appointed staff.
- 9 Acceptable and Sustainable:** Understands that what can be done must be both politically acceptable AND administratively sustainable.
- 10 Outcome-focused:** Is adept at creating useful policy goals and boundaries that allow professional staff flexibility in achieving outcomes.



Governance Roles



Julia D. Novak and Dr. John Nalbandian, 2016



Strategic, Vision: Big Picture Thinker

- Focus here is on decisions that can have significant impact on the city. Can be long term or short term.
- Often focus is on the future and what might make a significant difference.
- Seeing possible connections and relationships.
- Thinks beyond present data and constraints.



Trustee: Steward

- While listening and respecting constituent views, the trustee feels responsible to the city as a whole and to future residents.
- The trustee will make uncomfortable decisions that may run counter to constituent wishes because the decision is in the greater good.



Representative: Constituent Advocate

- In this role, the council member acts as a “customer service representative.”
- The council member is a conduit between citizens and city services.
- Often, citizens see this council member as most responsive to their individual concerns.



Community Builder: Bringing People Together

- In the community builder role, the council member focuses on relationships and consensus building.
- The community builder fosters relationships and is able to work through differences.
- Community is not just a casual word to the council member who gravitates to this role.



Decision Maker

- The decision maker sees his/her role much like a judge.
- Information is presented, and the decision maker votes it up or down.
- This is not an easy role, but often it is a fairly passive role in contrast to that of the community builder.



Oversight

- In this role, the council member retains a measure of distance from the staff.
- The focus is on accountability of staff to the council.

Public Service Values



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Frequently, when we think of values, qualities like honesty, reliability, love and sincerity come to mind. These are values—deep-seated beliefs that lead to judgments about right and wrong—but they have to do with individuals and how we lead our lives individually.

Public service values influence public policy development, implementation, evaluation, and governance design, as opposed to the lives of the individuals who make policy and program decisions. The primary public service values in our culture in response to public wants and needs are accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, social equity, diversity, and justice.

Accountability/Representation:

Government and public service providers answer to the will of the people. In government, there is a deep seated belief that the wishes of citizens should be represented by elected officials in governing bodies. In other types of public service providers, such as nonprofit organizations and public service enterprises, managers and decision-makers are held accountable to their trustees and governing bodies according to their public service mission. If a public policy or public program is going to have an impact on a group of citizens, that group should have the opportunity to be heard. Regardless of the accountability mechanisms, either through representative or trustee, public expressions of preferences are to be acknowledged. And, public involvement in the governing process is essential for legitimacy of governing processes.

- Homeowners say, “We have a petition signed by 20 residents on our block requesting a stop sign at 4th and Elm.”
- A group of citizens who supported you in your last election remind you, “You pledged to hold the line on taxes and now you are talking about raising taxes. That’s not what we elected you for.”
- A group of citizens says, “The city ought to be paying more attention to the welfare of its children. We’ve heard teenagers say they have no place to go at night. For their well-being and that of the city as a whole, we should build a teen center.”

Efficiency and Effectiveness/Professionalism:

Citizens expect public service providers to be run prudently and for programs and policies to achieve intended outcomes, not only in the short run but also in the long run. This is accomplished through cost-consciousness and rational, analytical decision-making and through an emphasis on expertise and professionalism, planning and merit. As such, this value goes beyond financial sensitivities and emphasizes the need for policymakers and program managers in public service organizations to be responsive to diverse outcome expectations of the public and also be good stewards of public resources.

- Staff says to the council, “At your request, we now have available a comprehensive parks and recreation master plan, and for your consideration we would like to develop a five-year capital improvements budget to implement it.”
- A budget shortfall leads the chief administrative officer to consider layoffs. One of the alternatives presented to council is to make any layoffs based on job performance of the employees.
- The public works director is having a difficult time with the city’s director of neighborhood development on a road project. The public works director argues that according to the engineering consultant’s design, the best route will take the road parallel to 11th street. The director of neighborhood development argues that the preferred route will split an existing neighborhood.



Social Equity and Diversity:

Frequently, citizens are differentiated by physical conditions, ethnical, economic, work, age, gender, and social background, as well as by political, social, and cultural preferences. Public service providers are expected to respect these differences and treat all citizens equally in policymaking and program implementation and strive to provide equal opportunities for all.

- A representative of the neighborhood association argues that the city wants to build an addition to its motor pool on the east side of town because that's where the poor people live. The representative says, "You wouldn't think of putting it on the west side of town."
- The affirmative action officer reminds the city manager that a layoff policy based on "last hired, first fired" will have a disproportionate effect on minorities who were hired as part of the affirmative action program.
- The city council, elected at-large, wants a report from the city manager on the distribution of funds for infrastructure repair. There is some concern in town that more money is going to new development compared to the older parts of town.

Justice/Individual Rights:

Citizens are granted property rights and civil rights through ordinances, statutes and laws, and the constitution. They also have the right to due process that protects them from arbitrary decisions by majorities or by those who govern, and are to be treated equally before the legal system despite their individual background. Both elected and non-elected decision-makers are expected to respect these rights in the processes of policymaking, implementation, evaluation, and adjudication.

- A new road is being built and an environmental group argues that to preserve green space the city ought to require a significantly greater setback than it presently does. The land owners along the route indicate their displeasure saying, "If the people want my land for green space, they should buy it."
- The fire fighters union objects to layoffs based on performance because it gives too much discretion to supervisors who it contends will play favorites. Union spokespersons argue that employment decisions should be based on seniority.
- An angry group of parents confronts the city commission and says, "The city should put a crossing guard at 9th and Kentucky. Our children have a right to cross the street safely on their way to school."

While we cherish each value, it is a common observation that one cannot optimize all four values simultaneously. Thus, policymaking and managerial decisions focus not only on outcomes and policy goals, but also upon ways of accommodating these four values in order to connect what is politically and socially acceptable with what is administratively feasible and sustainable. One's political philosophy can be expressed as preferences for one value over another.

The Political-Administration Gap



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Political Acceptability		Administrative Sustainability	
CHARACTERISTICS	POLITICS	CAO and Senior Staff in the GAP Electeds*	ADMINISTRATION
Activity	Game/allocation of values		Problem solving
Players	Representatives/trustees		Experts/trustees
Conversation	“What do you hear?” <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passion• Dreams• Stories		“What do you know?” <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data• Plans• Reports
Pieces	Intangible: interests and symbols		Tangible: information; money, people, equipment
Currency	Power (stories), loyalty, and trust		Knowledge (deeds)
Dynamic	Constructive conflict, compromise, and change		Predictability, cooperation, and continuity



Local Governance System



Local Government Policy-Making Process, MRSC of Washington

	GOALS	ORGANIZATION	FISCAL	PERSONNEL	PROCEDURES	INFORMATION	
“WHAT”	Vision and values	Community	Bonds and tax levels	Service levels	Elections and initiatives	Newsletters, Television and press	POLICY LEVEL
	Strategies and goals	Board	Budgets and debt Management	Salary and benefits	Ordinances and resolutions	“State of the city”	
	Master work plan	Manager	Budget and Finance plan	Hire and fire	Policy and Procedures	Annual report	
“HOW”	Department Work plan	Department heads	Budget control	Training and Development	Standards and benchmarks	Monthly, quarterly Reports	ADMINISTRATION LEVEL
	Team work plan	Operations managers	Service delivery	Supervision and Discipline	Operating Procedures	Progress reports	
	Individual Work plan	Service employees	Individual Services	Personal Responsibility	Job checklist	Status report	
Effectiveness			Efficiency		Control		

Political-Administration Dichotomy



Jim Svava, Dichotomy and Duality: Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Policy and Administration in Board-Manager Cities, Public Administration Review, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp 221-232

COUNCIL'S SPHERE		
Determine "purpose," scope of services, tax level, constitution issues	MISSION	Advise (what city "can" do may influence what it "should" do); analyze conditions and trends
Pass ordinances; approve new projects and programs; ratify budget	POLICY	Make recommendations on all decisions; formulate budget; determine service distribution formula
Make implementing decisions (e.g., site selection); handle complaints; oversee administration	ADMINISTRATION	Establish practices and procedures and make decisions for implementing policy
Suggest management changes to manager; review organization's performance in manager's appraisal	MANAGEMENT	Control the human, material and informational resources of organization to support policy and administrative functions
MANAGER'S SPHERE		



Julia D. Novak and Dr. John Nalbandian, Preparing Councils for Their Work,
ICMA Public Management Magazine, Vol. 91, No. 7

Obstacles to Effective Governance

Although councils differ, three obstacles to council effectiveness are fundamental. First, councils that are willing to deal with big issues will have to confront conflicting political values. These values include representation, efficiency, social equity, and individual rights. Choices among values are not choices between right and wrong, and councils searching for “correct” answers to policy issues are bound to become frustrated.

Second, councilors must confront the difficult values work they are responsible for in the absence of hierarchy—the mayor is not the boss. How many jobs have you had where no one was in charge?

The third obstacle is the difference in perspective between council and staff—differences that are often difficult to understand because while council and staff use the same words, they speak a different language.

The tools we identify below are intended to enable a willing council to deal with difficult issues by building council capacity. An important piece of that capacity is an effective partnership with staff.

Tools to Build Good Governance

- Orientation
- Retreats and Goal Setting
- Regular 1-1 Meetings
- Appropriate Access to Department Heads
- Documented Business Practices
- The Council Must Manage Itself

In the end, the Governing Body must manage its own behavior and seek compliance from its own members.



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