

Appendix VIII – B

Checklist

Manager/Council Communication

For effective communication with elected officials, here is a checklist of communication tips that have been used by managers.

- Pay attention to councilmembers' preferred methods of communication (written reports or memos, telephone calls, person-to-person contacts, email, etc.), and use them.
- Provide the same information to all members of the council. Keep all members equally informed at the same time.
- Do not assume that councilmembers will keep each other informed about the local government's business.
- Listen to councilmembers and residents carefully. Ask questions when you do not understand something.
- Ask councilmembers to identify solutions or answers to problems, when appropriate.
- Always remember that the mayor and councilmembers are the *bosses* and you are the *staff*.
- Do not get uptight if you lose an issue; sometimes, elected officials must demonstrate publicly who is the boss.
- Keep it short and keep it simple. Take the time that a subject requires.
- Maintain a daily-to-weekly contact with the mayor.
- Tell them ahead of time. Tell them! Tell them! Tell them again!
- Spend some informal time with councilmembers, for example, after council meetings. Get to know them on a personal basis. Serve coffee and Girl Scout cookies after meetings.
- Prepare a formal orientation program for new councilmembers.
- Encourage the use of a council committee structure to help get points across to other members of the council.
- Write as many things down as possible. Follow up a verbal report with a written memo to clarify the issue further.
- Always leave the council an option. Let it make a decision.
- Do not evaluate your efforts by the level of council approval of your recommendations.
- Avoid surprises! Plant the seeds for projects or actions. Go slow, and make sure the council is right behind you.
- Request decisions on issues. Do not assume that you know what the council wants.
- To help avoid surprises, submit weekly written reports to the mayor and council about matters not necessarily on the council agenda.
- Use a simple report format that can be identified easily as a council memorandum or project update.
- Pick up a phone and just call. Councilmembers appreciate periodic phone calls to get their opinions on upcoming issues.
- Communications should be delivered by placing yourself in the councilmembers' shoes. Remember that they are volunteers or part-time folks with limited time and/or information.
- Listen; do not lecture.
- Respect the mayor and council's professionalism.
- Follow up on requests for information or services.
- Be honest, especially about mistakes. The council usually will be much more understanding.
- Send the council's meeting agenda out with narrative included under each agenda item. This technique can cut down on confusion among multiple documents.
- Schedule one council meeting per month as a study session in which certain operations, programs, or projects are received, especially in the early stages. These sessions should be held only for discussion purposes.
- Request annual or semiannual performance evaluations for the manager.

Adapted from participants' comments at a March 1995 session conducted by the Iowa Municipal Management Institute, entitled "Effective Manager-Council communications."