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Thom Reilly MSW, PhD

To cite this article: Thom Reilly MSW, PhD (2007) Management in Local Governments, Administration in Social Work, 31:2, 49-66, DOI: [10.1300/J147v31n02_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J147v31n02_04)

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J147v31n02_04



Published online: 23 Sep 2008.



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Management in Local Governments: An Evolving Landscape

Thom Reilly, MSW, PhD

ABSTRACT. Local governments (counties and cities) are important providers of almost every type of service imaginable. Many social workers interact with local governments on a daily basis and therefore, understanding how local governments operate is critical. This article provides an overview of local government management issues including the changing skill-set managers must possess, the different decision-making and governing structures, service delivery, human and financial issues, the role of local government and future challenges. Implications for social service administrators are advanced. doi:10.1300/J147v31n02_04 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Local governments, decision-making, human and financial management

INTRODUCTION

Local governments (counties and cities) are critical in determining who gets what from government. This level of government is generally

Thom Reilly is County Manager for Clark County, Nevada (the Las Vegas Valley), a local government that provides both regional and municipal-type services. He has an MSW from Arizona State University, and a Masters and Doctorate in Public Administration from the University of Southern California. He is Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration.

Address correspondence to: Thom Reilly, Clark County, Nevada, 500 South Grand Central Parkway, Las Vegas, NV 89155-1111 (E-mail: thomr@co.clark.nv.us).

Administration in Social Work, Vol. 31(2) 2007
Available online at <http://asw.haworthpress.com>
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doi:10.1300/J147v31n02_04

seen as the most responsive form of government because it is the one that is closest, and most accessible, to citizens. Counties and cities are important providers of almost every type of service imaginable including municipal-type services such as police, fire, utilities, garbage collection, planning and zoning, business licenses, animal control, building and code inspections, and parks and recreation services; and regional or urban-type services such as air quality, water, sewage and solid waste disposal, energy management, natural resource conservation, housing, urban development and flood control. Additionally, in many states, they are also providers of traditional services such as health, welfare, and human services (including child welfare services), the courts and legal system, adult and juvenile justice and correction services, public works, tax assessment and collections, and airports and hospitals.

Increasingly, local governments have been operating in the face of a drop in revenues from state and federal sources, a faltering economy, taxpayers' revolt, and increased service demands (Berman, 2005; Kearney, 2005). In response to this fiscal stress and uncertainty local government managers grapple to determine the priorities of local government. This includes the results that matter most to citizens and the methods to measure that progress. Effectiveness, efficiency, and equity, often at conflict with one another, are at the forefront of discussions about local government management. In addition, managers of local governments are tasked with providing open and transparent governance where citizens have clear and accessible information, and ensuring that residents are actively involved in decisions that affect their lives. The landscape of local government continues to evolve and the ability to provide services has become much more reliant on a complex network of public, private and non-profit organizations (Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Salamon, 2002). The evolving role of local government presents dramatic and far-reaching implications for local governmental managers.

In this paper, I discuss some of the basics of management at the local government level including the changing skill-set managers must possess, different decision-making and governing structures, human and financial management issues, the role of local government, and future directions and evolving landscape. I have drawn illustrations from my experience as the County Manager/CEO for Clark County, Nevada (the Las Vegas Valley), one of the fastest-growing areas in the country, for the application of these skills. Since many social workers interact with local governments on a daily basis, understanding how local governments operate is useful for both the practitioners and administrators.

CLARK COUNTY, NEVADA (THE LAS VEGAS VALLEY)

Clark County is home to the world-famous Las Vegas Strip with a population of 1.8 million residents, and host to over 44 million visitors a year. For the past decade, more than 5,000 people have moved to Clark County each month, and, on average, 11 new schools are built every year (Clark County School District Facilities Division Capital Improvement Program, 2006). As County Manager/CEO, I am responsible for the executive oversight of a local government that provides traditional regional services to the entire Southern Nevada population, as well as municipal-type services to citizens living within the boundaries of unincorporated Clark County. I am charged with carrying out the policies established by a seven-member Board of County Commissioners (elected from geographical districts on a partisan basis for staggered four-year terms) and am responsible for the fiscal management of the County's \$6 billion dollar budget and administrative oversight for 38 diverse and geographically dispersed departments (including McCarran International Airport and University Medical Center), and close to 12,000 employees.

***PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS
OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGERS***

Historically, the professional backgrounds of city/county managers have tended to be more technical in nature, with engineers and rational technocrats dominating the field in the 19th and early 20th century. Since most human problems were addressed with physical and technical solutions (i.e., water and sewer systems, garbage collection, street-paving, pollution control, public transportation, and electricity), these efficient experts, consisting of sanitary surveyors, landscape architects, and civil engineers, were seen as providing the best fit in managing local governments. Skills in long-range comprehensive planning were soon sought after as urban communities began to grow in the 20th century (Schultz & McShane, 1978; Watson & Hassett, 2004).

By the 1960s and 1970s, the problems of local government required a new skill-set of managers in order to address complex social issues and needs of low-income populations. Managers found themselves needing to shift their attention from physical and technical problems to social problems (Mulrooney, 1971; Schultz & McShane, 1978; Poster & Streib, 1989).

Today, a professional group of managers dedicated to the field of public administration, that is more generalist in nature, has emerged. Communities find themselves in need of managers possessing a wide range of skills to carry out duties such as: appointing department directors; providing administrative oversight to staff and programs; preparing and managing annual operating and capital budgets; providing accurate and timely information to councils and the public; making recommendations on policy, administrative and financial needs of the local governments; forecasting and providing strategic planning for future needs of the municipalities; and ensuring that services are delivered in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner. Although managers must understand the breadth of their organization's responsibilities and the interrelatedness of different areas, it is also critical that they provide opportunities for specific departmental expertise to manage particular service area issues.

I began my professional career in the human service and child welfare field as a child welfare worker. I was later employed as policy analyst and social service administrator. I earned an MSW as well as a Masters and Doctorate in Public Administration. I have also served in the capacity of the County Chief Administrative Officer responsible for administering and planning the county's legislative initiatives, franchise agreements, emergency management, policy and program development, and strategic planning initiatives. Prior to my appointment as County Manager, I was an Associate Professor at a university, teaching in both the Social Work and Public Administration departments. This opportunity allowed me to conduct research in both practical and theoretical innovations in those fields. Unlike many of my counterparts, I did not envision myself as a County Manager at the onset of my career, but the culmination of my education, experience and talent as a manager led to my appointment as County Manager of Clark County.

GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Clark County operates under a form of government known as a council-manager form of government (as opposed to a strong-mayor type of government). Under the former, the elected council or commission serves as policymakers, and they in turn hire a professional manager to administer the local government. Under a strong-mayor type of government (which tends to be more common in larger municipalities) an elected mayor or chairman serves as the chief executive officer overseeing staff and budgeting. The council-manager type of government is the primary

form of government in the United States (ICMA Municipal Year Book, 2005). Due to dissatisfaction with ward-based, political patronage, and corruption in government exemplified by political machines in cities across the country, this form of government was developed to ensure objectivity and fair governance in decision-making (Sommers, 1958). The council-manager form of government combines the policymaking responsibilities of the elected official with the technical expertise of professional managers. This allows ordinary citizens to be elected to represent the broad policy concerns of citizens while assuring that the implementation of these policies are carried out by trained professionals. Although the aforementioned are the two basic forms of local governments, there are many other structural combinations by which local governance manifests throughout the United States (Cligermayer & Feiock, 2001; Frederickson, Wood, & Wood, 2004).

Clark County operates under the council-manager form of government whereby the Board can only hire and fire the County Manager. The Board has no authority over any other staff persons in the organization. While council-manager forms of government attempt to separate the policy role (elected) from the administrative role (professional manager), elected officials do get involved in administrative issues, while managers are often involved in influencing policies. However, Councils or Commissions that step over the line and get too involved in administrative issues can negatively impact organizational operations. In fact, when I was first appointed as the County Manager, it was not uncommon for elected officials to strongly suggest which department directors should be appointed and which staff should be fired. It took over a year for the Board to accept, and grow into the most effective role it should play, focusing on policy issues and leaving the administrative apparatus to professionally trained employees. While I have sole authority to hire and fire department directors, I am required to have my appointments ratified by the Board. In the five years I have operated as County Manager, and after 20 appointments of department directors, I have always enjoyed strong support from the Board, demonstrated by unanimous votes on my appointments.

SKILL-SETS OF MANAGERS

By far, the most important skill I have acquired is the ability to communicate: to the Board, other governmental bodies (federal, state, and local), staff, community partners (private, nonprofit, and faith-based groups), and the media. In fact, I believe that this was the primary rea-

son the Board selected me as the County Manager. It is impossible to become technically knowledgeable about the large array of programs under the County umbrella; however, understanding how these programs fit into a system of good governance and how to effectively communicate this to multiple parties and stakeholders is essential. Approximately 75% of my job boils down to communication. On a daily basis, I talk to the Board in person, by e-mail, or telephone regarding a multitude of issues. Not only do I offer advice but, as the implementer of their decisions, I need to know what they are feeling, and what concerns they have.

Communicating with the County workforce also demands a considerable amount of my time. Several ongoing venues have been established to open communication channels and exchange ideas, as well as to keep employees informed about current issues affecting the County and the community. For example, I send monthly Countywide e-mails to all employees, reporting on County events and issues; I hold bimonthly breakfasts to chat informally with randomly selected employees; and I visit departments regularly to meet with staff to discuss plans for the future and answer questions. In addition, I continuously communicate to the community via individual meetings, public speaking engagements, and by attending community events (including numerous lunches and dinners).

Finally, working with the media is critical. Like many communities across the United States, the media often plays a watchdog role, and often delights in informing citizens of government inefficiencies and scandals. This can lead to a deepening level of mistrust between government and the community. Managing the media is therefore very important. I make it a point to have breakfast with the editors of the two largest newspapers once a month to keep lines of communication open. In addition, in the spirit of open government, we have liberal policies on sharing information with the media. I even share my cell telephone number with local television and radio reporters, as well as the print media.

In addition to the importance of good management skills such as those outlined by Luther Gulick's famous major functions of government known as POSDCORB—(Gulick, Urwick, & Mooney, 1937) (Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, and Budgeting)—there are many skills that are best learned on the job. The ability to: effectively deal with and manage limited resources; manage uncertainty (ambiguous, intangible, unattainable, and conflicting goals); deal with unconventional problems; master skills in engagement, negotiations and persuasion; and learn how to operate in a political environment are all imperative management skills. Demonstrating political neutrality, particularly, is a unique aspect of managing local govern-

ment. The Clark County Board consists of four Democrats and three Republicans, affording little room to engage in partisan politics. Most of my education dealt with becoming skilled at rational planning, which espouses decision-making supported by perfect and complete knowledge, and follows a series of defined steps, including defining the problem, identifying solutions, selecting alternatives, even associating numerical values with alternatives, and thus selecting the best option to solve the problem. Unfortunately, organizations rarely, if ever, have access to complete and perfect information, and rather than following a scientific procedure to address problems, they are influenced and pressured by political and social implications of their decisions, which often obscures an immediate and direct course of action.

Skills in engagement, negotiations, and persuasion are essential as many local governments begin to redefine their core responsibilities from managing people and programs to coordinating resources that add value to the community. Instead of delivering the service themselves, local government managers and employees are more and more becoming facilitators, conveners and brokers who engage the community's talents to solve difficult and complex problems (Kirlin, 1996; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Newland, 2002; Salamon, 2002). The reality is that the private and nonprofit sectors are already embedded in almost every aspect of local government. From County development procedures that regulate the erection of a high-rise condominium project from start to finish, to providing an operational grant to fund a nonprofit organization's services to the homeless—all three sectors are interconnected and often complementary. The ability to get things done often depends on managing resources that are not always under local government control.

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Too often I hear, "What is government going to do to fix this problem in our community?" Given that the county government in Southern Nevada is involved in many aspects of citizens' lives here, it probably does not sound like such an odd question. Like many communities around the country, we have complex problems such as: affordable housing, child abuse, homelessness, traffic congestion, and air quality, to name a few; as well as relatively mundane issues such as having to pick up debris from neighborhood parks, airport noise, and responding to barking dogs. My interpretation of what the critical role of local government should be may differ from many of my colleagues.

While government should be held accountable for spending citizens' money efficiently, enhancing the welfare of people and places, there are some issues a government probably should not be involved in at all, and others that are far too complex for government to solve alone. Nonetheless, we have evolved to the expectation that government is the solver of all problems. When this expectation is not met, both government and citizens are frustrated.

I would suggest that how managers view government is pivotal. For example, I believe the central role of local government is not necessarily to deliver services, but to create opportunities that encourage collective action among individuals, groups and organizations (Kirlin, 1996). Government's ability to bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information to address community problems is a powerful tool, and one that is often under-utilized. Of course, this requires a change in how both government and citizens behave.

Government needs to be more open as to how it conducts its business; provide balanced, comprehensive, and accurate information on issues of shared concern; be willing to share power with citizens by delegating more decision-making; and create genuine ways to involve citizens in community issues. Symbolically, government needs to begin referring to residents as citizens, instead of "customers." While citizens deserve and should expect to be treated with dignity, competence and respect, referring to them as customers relegates them to a passive role or a "we complain and you deliver" type of governance (King, Feltey, & O'Neill, 1998). On the other hand, citizens are not exempt from responsibility. They need to be more attentive, informed, and engaged in community debates that go beyond their own special interests to include issues that affect the larger community and common good.

The complex nature of many issues facing our community requires the collective effort of government, businesses, civic groups, faith-based organizations, and citizens. The emphasis on viewing government as a "convener," instead of the solver of all problems, can have the added benefit of promoting constructive community decision-making and a necessary trust between government and citizens.

MANAGING PEOPLE

Human resource management is an important and one of the most time-consuming aspects of my job. Clark County employs 12,000 people situated in 38 geographically dispersed departments throughout the

County (the county covers over 8,000 square miles or about the size of the state of New Jersey). The senior management team is a diverse group of individuals in terms of ethnicity, gender as well as diversity of thought. I have learned it is important to surround myself with individuals who think differently and who will not always agree with each other or with me. The management team consists of three Assistant County Managers, each overseeing departments corresponding to their areas of expertise including: justice-related departments; social service; and development-related departments. Additionally, I directly supervise the Chief Administrative, Financial, Public Communication and Information Officers, the Internal Auditor, Diversity Officer, the Aviation Director, and the CEO of the public hospital. We communicate and interact daily on a variety of issues as well as meet formally as a group every Monday morning at 8 to discuss important issues and plan, and coordinate the week's activities. I rely on the senior managers as well as the department directors to run their functional areas, and to advise the Board and me on a host of issues in each department's corresponding area.

Recently, Clark County has revised the way it compensates employees and has placed a greater emphasis on performance. For example, we have eliminated automatic cost-of-living increases for all managers, attorneys and staff physicians, and have replaced them with a compensation system based on merit, performance pay and bonuses. Managers who do not perform satisfactorily are subject to salary deductions during their annual evaluation. In addition, we have implemented a pay-for-performance system with our employee unions.

To further enhance County performance, all managers are required to have a signed performance contract and participate in a 360° assessment. The 360° assessment is a tool that provides confidential feedback to the manager and his/her supervisor from an array of different individuals he/she interacts with such as supervisors, direct subordinates, internal and external stakeholders, peers, and community partners. This has been implemented due to the realization that achieving organization goals most often requires the effort of teams of individuals and groups, inside and outside the agency. In Clark County, not only is the feedback used for the evaluatee's own personal and professional reflection, but it is also integrated into year-end performance discussions where both the evaluatee and his/her supervisor review the results. This new design provides a complete review of managers and is designed to evaluate employee interaction in accordance with the Clark County Guiding Values and Principles. In 2003, the Board of County Commissioners adopted a set of guiding values and principles describing the County's commitment

to citizens and employees. These include Accountability, Excellence, Innovation, Integrity, Open and Inclusive Government and Respect. Cash awards are given away on a yearly basis at the employee luncheon recognizing those individuals who demonstrate exemplary commitment to these values (nominations are made by employees and judged by outside community leaders). As County Manager, I also have a Performance Contract and participate in a 360° evaluation, which is shared publicly and conducted in an open meeting during my yearly evaluation with the Board of County Commissioners.

FINANCIAL AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The budgeting process is done on a yearly basis and operates on a fiscal year that starts in July. State law or regulations of the Nevada Department of Taxation govern many of the financial policies under which the County operates. Nevada local governments are afforded little, if any, authority to raise revenues or increase taxes or fees. Nevada is not a home rule state, which means the central government does not grant powers to the regional or local level governments. On the other hand, local governments are not prohibited from establishing fiscal policies that are more restrictive than those outlined in State statute. In 1993, the Board of County Commissioners adopted a Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, which sets forth certain policy statements, and guides county fiscal affairs. This includes provisions that restrict increasing tax rates without a vote of the people or legislative enactment; a prohibition against deficit spending; a budget cap that limits the cumulative growth in operating expenditures to combined growth in population and the consumer price index; the benchmarking of average salary and benefit increases for County employees to those of the private sector; and the implementation of a zero-based budgeting process. Under zero-based budgeting the base budget is not assumed and requires justification for every expenditure.

The complex and broad scope of County operations translates into a financial structure that is equally complex. The County's annual budget includes more than 200 separate funds that are needed to properly account for the organization's wide-ranging activities. Clark County provides certain services to all Clark County residents while also providing municipal services to only those residents of the unincorporated area. The County's revenue structure has remained fairly consistent throughout the past decade, with over 70% coming from sales tax, vehicle privilege tax and/or property taxes. The County's expenditures have also remained

fairly constant, with public safety being by far the largest function included in the budget, consuming slightly more than 40% of available resources. This is followed by general government resources (20%), Capital & Debt service (12%), Judicial (12%), Health & Welfare (10%), Parks & Recreation (3%), and Public Works (3%). Like many communities, the Las Vegas Valley is faced with rising needs and costs, especially in the areas of nursing home care, and indigent health care. In Clark County, nursing home care has increased from \$14 million to \$21.6 million in the past four years (a 54% increase or an average of 13.6% per year). Indigent health care costs have increased from \$26.6 million to \$65.2 million during the same period (a 145% increase or an average of 36.3% per year) (Clark County Budget Presentation, November 21, 2005).

The annual budgeting process for the fiscal year begins in early October and is approved by the Board of County Commissioners in June of each year. Departments work with assigned financial analysts from the Finance Office and their corresponding Assistant County Manager to prepare their operating, technology and capital requests. Technology requests are processed through their respective communities-of-interest. There are five communities-of-interest: justice, development, social services, public safety, and internal. These are designed for users who often require compatible systems and are in need of a joint governance structure. Capital requests go through a Long-Term Planning Committee and position requests follow a several-step process that includes presenting position justifications to other department directors as well as to a committee made up of the three Assistant County Managers, Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Financial Officer. The County's ability to fund new positions has fallen short over the past five years, with staffing patterns continuing to decline. Staffing levels are measured nationally by comparing the ratio of employees to every 1,000 residents. The number of full-time equivalents or FTEs per 1,000 residents has dropped from 3.5 in 2000 to 2.4 in 2005, representing approximately a 30% decrease in staffing levels. Allocating positions is a very difficult and painful process because the needs are so great across county departments. For example, last year there were 550 requests for critical positions and the County was only able to fund 137. As part of the budgetary process, department heads are required to present their supplemental positions and justifications to each other.

Good organizations and good governance do not just happen; there is a focused effort to develop a clear vision with measurable results. The County recently has initiated an enterprise management and measurement program to ensure that the County's services, strategic plan, bud-

get, performance and results are integrated. A series of workshops with the Board are held on a yearly basis to develop and refine the County's Strategic Plan. This has resulted in a set of 10-12 Strategic Priorities that are used by management to provide focus for allocating resources in the yearly budgeting process. Each department has developed a set of core services, and a set of performance outcomes and measures that are tied to the budgeting process. In addition, public budgeting forums are held to reach out to citizens and inform them of the County's financial structure and policies, and to answer questions and receive feedback.

OPEN GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Involving the community in issues that affect their lives is essential; however, public participation efforts can be extremely time-consuming and expensive. The County partners with citizen groups in a very open and inclusive manner to solve especially complex problems, and has experienced a good deal of success. For example, the County assembled a diverse group of citizens and groups with opposing views to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of growth, and its impact on the Las Vegas Valley. The Growth Task Force was formed and over an 18-month period, several tangible recommendations for dealing with growth and shaping the Valley's future were presented and adopted by the community for implementation. One of the tangible outcomes that emerged from the citizen's task force work was the establishment of community indicators. These indicators track the community progress on a host of issues including, but not limited to, transportation, public safety, housing, education, social, health, cost-of-living, and consumer confidence indices. This Web-based system stores historical data on these quality-of-life measures and provides information to citizens, business leaders, non-profits and governmental organizations in order to trend and forecast. This information is fundamental in making crucial service and funding decisions with limited revenues.

Another example of the County initiating citizen involvement to address a complex problem was the creation of the University Medical Center Citizens' Taskforce. Following a financial crisis at the community's only public hospital, a Citizens' Task Force was formed and over a two-year period, developed a set of strategies to preserve the hospital. Numerous cost-containment measures were developed for a financial recovery program that did not affect quality of care nor abandon the mission to serve the uninsured.

Feedback from people who interact directly with the County is invaluable in enhancing its ability to meet diverse needs. A Customer Participation Committee comprised of construction industry representatives reviewed the County's development review process, which had been cumbersome for years. The Committee's work resulted in the merging of functions from three County departments into one Development Services Department and the streamlining of review processes. The work of this ongoing committee made significant progress in reducing cycle times, including cutting three months off the overall approval process. After the County experienced a 40% increase in the number of children needing shelter due to abuse and neglect, it partnered with business, gaming, faith-based groups, organized labor and the entertainment industry to launch the Foster/Adoptive Parent Recruitment Campaign. During the campaign period, a total of 2,145 inquiries were received from Clark County citizens, which is an average of 357 inquiries per month compared with an average of 150 inquiries per month prior to initiating the campaign. The regional collaboration among County and city jurisdictions, police departments, and nonprofits to address homelessness has resulted in the first-ever regional plan to address homelessness. The County has currently formed two other citizen/community groups—one dealing with Affordable/Workforce Housing, and the other to address the Valley's fuel delivery system and to determine viable options to strengthen future fuel supplies. All of these are examples of providing opportunities for citizen engagement resulting in successful solutions to many of the region's problems, and direct feedback from the public to (re)prioritize efforts and target spending. Encouraging genuine opportunities for citizen participation is just one of the characteristics that makes managing government unique and challenging. Local government managers need to be flexible and prepared to adjust and adapt to the increasingly complex and dynamic nature of the issues that face communities. The community practice skills and knowledge earned from my social work education have proved useful in working with citizens and community groups. The following section describes challenges confronting Clark County, and those that undoubtedly surface in many jurisdictions across the United States.

CHALLENGES

Observations on the challenges confronting local governments are based on individual experiences, readings in the field of public administration, conversations with local government managers and information

gleaned from workshops, and presentations from professional public administration organizations. The observations may not be valid for certain sizes and types of local governments. Nonetheless, management in many local governments will face the following challenges in the next decade.

COMPENSATION AND RETIREMENT

Public sector compensation and retirement benefits generate a great deal of debate due to underfunded retirement/pension plans and assertions that governments provide enhanced increases in employment and compensation of workers compared to the private sector (Bloom, 2004). Employee wages and benefits make up a significant portion of local government budgets, and compete with levels and quality of service delivery when governments are faced with budget deficiencies. Decisions about retirement benefits, including enhanced benefits, incentives to early retirement, and payment of retiree health care have implications for the future generations of public officials and citizens, and pose yet another challenge to local government management in one of its most important duties: ensuring that equity and fairness are incorporated into public sector compensation practices (Reilly, Schoener, & Bolin, in press).

GOVERNMENTAL ACCOUNTING REQUIREMENTS

Municipalities are not only constrained by economic burdens such as funding pensions and health care costs for employees and retirees, but the recent requirement to disclose “other post-employment benefits” (OPEB) required by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) presents an additional strain. The new accounting rule, issued in 2004, requires governmental employers to account for post-retirement healthcare benefits actuarially (a calculation of risks and premiums) rather than on a “pay-as-you-go” basis, which had been the accepted practice. OPEB includes medical, prescription drug, dental, vision, life and long-term care benefits for retirees. Having to include both current expenses, as well as costs that will be realized in the future, increases the general liability of the entity and adversely affects its debt to revenue ratio and subsequently its bond rating. This means that when the entity pursues financing options to fund a capital project, for example, the cost to do so will be significantly higher due to higher interest rates associated with its weaker bond rating.

MANAGING GROWTH

Many communities throughout the United States, particularly the South and West, are experiencing record growth. Clark County, as one of the fastest-growing communities in the country for over 15 years, continually struggles with the challenges of providing road, water, sewer, and other forms of infrastructure to its ever-expanding visitor and resident population. Our fast-growing population places extraordinary demands on local government to deliver infrastructure improvements in a timely manner. Identifying funding sources and competing with the private sector for materials and labor also place pressure on the County's ability to complete capital projects. If the County is unable to keep up with the fast pace of development, not only does it adversely affect the quality of life of our residents (i.e., increased traffic congestion), but it also threatens to adversely impact the health of our local economy by slowing down the pace of growth.

CONTROLS ON GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Local governments are also threatened by various initiatives geared toward controlling government spending. Like many other states, Nevada over the past several years has undergone several major tax reforms intended to generate tax revenues needed to deliver critical services at all levels of governments. Public sentiment toward controlling government spending, as a means of limiting the tax burden carried by our residents, is on the rise. Petitions to limit annual increases in government spending to the combined increase of population and the consumer price index, and one to roll back and cap property taxes, are currently in circulation among Nevada residents and are expected to be on the ballot in September. If approved, these measures have the potential of greatly limiting the ability of local governments to effectively deliver critical services in a host of different areas.

INNOVATION IN TECHNOLOGY/E-GOVERNMENT/WIFI

Yet another challenge to enhancing the efficiency of and accessibility to local government operations, as well as the attractiveness of a place, is establishing electronic government (e-government) and public telecom or networking services such as municipally sponsored WiFi

programs. WiFi, short for 'wireless fidelity,' is a local area network that uses high frequency radio signals to transmit and receive data over a certain distance providing residents free, high-speed Internet connections (Reynolds, 2003). Offering any public telecom or networking services means competing with private companies, making it a divisive issue politically.

E-government is a tool that can improve the management and efficiency of government information technology resources. But it converges many management as well as regulatory issues such as privacy, the digital divide, public access to government information, service delivery, and information security (Seifert, 2003). E-government's proponents suggest it can improve the efficiency, reliability, and quality of services for government-to-government, government-to-business and government-to-citizen operations. Due to the technical, economic, and political challenges that e-government and publicly provided WiFi networks present, these initiatives take time to develop and can be expensive to pursue.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Many of the problems confronting local governments have become much more intractable, and complex. Government's ability to make inroads on issues such as affordable housing, poverty, traffic congestion, clean air, child abuse, and access to health care, among others, is limited. Resource restraints, political constraints, the blurring of boundaries and the impact of the global-political economy at the national, regional, and local levels compound these issues, making resolutions increasingly challenging. The ability to provide services has also become much more reliant on a complex mesh of private, public, and nonprofit organizations. This changing role of government, and the implications for governance, is discussed by Goldsmith and Eggers (2004), Newland (2002), and Salamon (2002), among others. They suggest that the role of government is being transformed from direct service provider to generator of public value. The implications this has for local governments are profound, and learning how to manage a government that does less itself, and more through third parties, is an important shift for local government managers. As a result, a different type of governmental employee is needed; traditional skills in management-planning, budgeting, directing, and human resources need to be supplemented by a skill-set

that includes negotiations, risk analysis, contract management, and decision-making in the face of uncertainty.

Social service agencies are important providers of services at the local level. As local governments continue their shift toward delivering services through third parties, social work administrators' understanding, and active involvement with local governments is critical. Additionally, social work administrators are already charged with administering complex human services organizations in both the public and private sectors. The skill-set gained by these administrators, including managing in turbulent environments characterized by chronic funding issues, shifting priorities, special interests, and charged political environments, coupled with skills in engagement, negotiation, persuasion, and community practice, ideally position them to assume lead positions in local governments.

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doi:10.1300/J147v31n02_04