Using Goal Setting to Improve your City Budget

Iowa League of Cities Annual Conference – 2025

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Effective Elected Officials

Updated on October 26, 2021 Posted on December 14, 2016

Those elected to serve on a public body have a tremendous responsibility to help resolve issues and improve their community. City council members and mayors have the ability to shape the future of their city. Having a good understanding of their role in the process can lead to an effective term.

Leadership

- Lead by example. Be honest, consistent and flexible. Don't play games.
- Use common sense.
- Don't be stampeded into action by the strong demands of special interest groups. Your job is to find the long-term public interest of the entire community.
- Sometimes we underestimate the potential impact of an elected official's leadership. Use the dignity of your office to help the community get past contentious issues.
- There is a tremendous amount of discomfort in making very public decisions. It's easy to fear the political consequences, but it is important to take a long-term approach, weigh everything and reach good decisions.
- You won't be able to satisfy all people, and you have to know that. Listen fairly, listen thoughtfully and then do what is right.

The Team Concept

- Policy-making is a team activity. An individual council member only has power when the council gathers together as a group at an official council meeting. Each council member sees issues differently and has his/her own concerns. A majority vote is needed to accomplish anything.
- City government is complicated. No city, however small, is so simplistic that one person can master every phase. Individual council members have no choice but to look to their colleagues for counsel and support.Teamwork is a natural and necessary part of serving on the council.
- Teamwork does not mean that all council members need to agree on every issue or that they like each other on a personal basis. It does mean they must respect each other's opinions and learn to deal with each other on the basis of mutual honesty. Don't act rashly and assume that only you know the best way to accomplish things.

- City staff members are an important part of the team. Get to know the staff and what they do. Treat them with respect –they are a valuable asset and can assist you in accomplishing your goals. They can have some valuable historical perspectives and help "fill in the gaps" for a new council member. Likewise, take advantage of your city attorney – the city attorney can help you avoid pitfalls that could end up being extremely detrimental to the city.

Goal Setting

- Effective planning is essential to smooth operations in city government. The mayor and city council should take time to think about the future direction of the city.
- The goal setting process establishes a basic framework for action. By setting goals and deciding which are most important, the council can define what the city will try to achieve over a given period of time. Without priorities the council is likely to find itself drifting from issue to issue, crisis to crisis.
- Council goal setting is valuable for staff members. Council goals and priorities can provide direction to staff as to what the council is trying to accomplish. Without clearly defined goals, staff may get conflicting signals and not meet the council's expectations.
- Goal setting is essential to other important functions. Effective goal setting should be integrated into the city's processes for developing the annual budget, capital improvements program and implementation of the comprehensive plan.
- Goal setting can provide a useful evaluation tool. Once goals have been established, the city council will have a framework for determining how well the staff is doing in achieving priorities.

Stay Informed

- Familiarize yourself on the issues and trends affecting municipal government. Some of the best training and education can be secured at programs offered by the Iowa League of Cities and its affiliated regional leagues and organizations.
- Ask for help when you need it. Don't be afraid to use outside resources (your city attorney, the League, Iowa State University Extension, a neighboring city).
- Find an experienced mentor in city government. Ask for advice when you need help. You'll get empathy and a clearer vision from someone who has been there.
- Use information from the League and have staff conduct research through their professional organizations.Network with others. You will find that most city officials are very willing to share information and expertise. There are formal and informal networks among mayors, council members and staff. These networks can provide support and new ideas.

Other Suggestions from Veteran Elected Officials

- Listen to everyone. Listen until your ears fall off. Soak it up. After six months in office, you will round out the picture of the complexities of city government and your role.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions. You are not expected to know all the answers immediately.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- Don't make promises you can't deliver. Most major decisions and actions require approval of the city council.
- Gear your mind to process a tremendous amount of seemingly conflicting information.
- Don't enter office with an unmovable set agenda. Learn as much as you can before taking on a major program or effort.
- Don't be strangled by campaign promises that were made without sufficient information.
- Acknowledge legal restrictions. Keep in mind that your city's adopted ordinances must be followed until the council takes action to amend them. And that's just the beginning – the number of federal and state laws and regulations that also govern your actions can be mind-boggling. If you are unsure of your responsibilities or authority in certain areas, be sure to seek clarification from your city attorney.
- Take it slow. Resist the urge to recommend drastic changes in the organization before you know how it really works. While some methods may appear to need an immediate overhaul, it pays to observe before trying new methods. Give yourself at least six months to learn the fundamentals of city operations.

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Newly Elected Officials

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Following municipal elections, a city council often sees new members taking a seat. With varying levels of understanding of how a city government functions, it is important that new members learn about the different operations of the city, the legal requirements they must work under and the key issues facing the city. Getting new council members educated and aware of the responsibilities of their new position will help ensure they have a successful term in office.

Prior to Taking Office

- Take the oath of office.
- Obtain your "Certificate of Election" from the county auditor.
- Learn about Iowa's open meetings laws (Chapter 21 of the *Code of Iowa*).
- Become familiar with Iowa's ethics laws for elected officials.
- Check with the city clerk about being covered by a bond.
- If elected mayor, appoint a mayor pro-tem.
- File a campaign disclosure report in accordance with *Code of Iowa* Chapter 68A (if you accepted and spent funds during your election).
- Request that the city clerk send to you the same packet of information that is sent to the current city council.
- Request a copy of a detailed map of your city.
- Request and review a current copy of the city budget.

The First 60 Days in Office

- Obtain and review key documents, including:
  - Complete open meetings/open records training as required by state law and oversee by the Iowa Public Information Board
  - Current city budget

    - Capital improvements plan, equipment replacement schedule or other long-term projects lists if they exist
    - Most recent city audit and annual financial report
    - City code
    - City organizational chart
    - Staff roster and phone/email directory
    - Comprehensive plan and other important planning documents
    - Goals and priorities of your city (if they exist)
    - Council rules and meeting procedures
    - Calendar of important events
- Review the city ordinance or resolution that establishes your city council's committee system.
- Review city council meeting minutes from the previous three to six months.
- Request and review a list of city boards and commissions that shows who serves, their duties, the city code sections that establish them, and the term length of the members.
- Check to ensure that you are covered by the city's "errors and omissions" insurance policy.
- While adhering to open meetings laws, meet with the other elected officials and appropriate city staff members to review and discuss key policies, procedures and processes that your city has used, such as goal setting and strategic planning.
- Talk with your fellow policy leaders and key staff members about the processes and methods used to effectively work together.
- Schedule a tour of all city buildings and facilities, such as the city hall, police station, fire station, library, parks, water wells, wastewater facility, lift stations, etc.
- Determine whether you will be covered through the Iowa Public Employees' Retirement System (IPERS). Although elected positions are IPERS-covered, the law allows elected officials to opt out of coverage.

The First 90 Days in Office

- Review the job descriptions that are on file for city employees.
- Review the city's 28E agreements and written contacts.
- Review the city's policy manuals and employment contracts.
- Request a copy of the city's zoning district map for your reference.
- Consider scheduling a meeting with other city councils in your county to discuss common issues, problems and trends, or to just get acquainted.

- Review your city's civil defense plan and/or disaster preparedness and emergency response plan.
- Read your city's most recent water and wastewater inspection reports.
- Review your city's urban renewal plans or urban renewal district plans, if any exist.
- Review your city's comprehensive plan, if one exists.
- Review your city's insurance policies that shows the type of coverage, company's name, expiration date and annual premium.

Orientation Programs

An effective and timely orientation program can help provide newly elected officials with the kind of information they need to be knowledgeable and effective members of the city council. While these programs are often designed with a new council member in mind, they can also serve as a good refresher course for veteran officials. Here are 10 ideas to consider for your orientation program:

1. Encourage attendance at the Municipal Leadership Academy – The Iowa League of Cities' Municipal Leadership Academy (MLA) is a great opportunity to learn about council roles, municipal finance and budgeting, legal responsibilities, meeting procedures, council effectiveness and many other important issues.
2. Provide a copy of the Iowa Municipal Policy Leaders Handbook – The Handbook describes the functions and services of cities as well as the laws governing municipal activities. It helps city officials understand what is expected and required of them by explaining both the details and the big picture involved in being a municipal policy leader. It also contains tips and lists of resources useful to city officials. (Participants of MLA receive a copy of the Handbook as part of their registration)
3. Be prepared, and be timely – The orientation activities may take several sessions and a fair amount of time. Put together an agenda to make the best use of the available time. Prioritize the important points to be presented and have the right people at the sessions who can best explain the various issues.
4. Provide an organizational overview – The mayor, city manager, city clerk and/or key staff should provide important information about the overall organization and key city issues. Items that should be covered include the organizational structure, budget and finances, emergency preparedness, citizen complaint process, and current city issues.
5. Review council meeting processes and procedures – Set up a meeting with the mayor, city manager, city attorney and/or city clerk and the new council members to review and discuss important council meeting processes and procedures.
6. Provide important city documents – Provide documents such as the city budget, a detailed city map, staff directory, council goals and priorities, strategic plan, comprehensive plan, and

calendar of council meetings and other city events.

7. Tour city facilities – A tour of city buildings and operations can be very informative and useful to newly elected officials. They can observe city operations and ask questions about different aspects of city activities. Tours can also provide the opportunity for new council members to meet many of your city employees in an informal setting.
8. Start providing new members with council materials right away – Even though their terms may not start until January, provide new members with complete council information packets right away. Inform them about new developments and issues. Many cities hold goal setting or budget planning sessions in November or December – be sure the new members are invited to participate.
9. Continue orientation and training opportunities – No matter how comprehensive the orientation program, it is not possible to provide a complete briefing on all facets of city issues, activities and programs. Take advantage of additional training opportunities from the Iowa League of Cities, regional leagues, councils of governments, etc. Encourage new members to ask questions – they cannot be expected to know all the answers immediately.
10. Treat all new members equally and maintain neutrality when providing information about city operations.

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Council Teamwork and Effectiveness

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The city council is the policy arm of the municipal government and is responsible for determining the direction of the city. The council performs this role by adopting legislation, approving plans and programs, and establishing city policies. But the city council can only exercise its powers when acting as a group in an official meeting and a majority vote is needed to accomplish anything. Council decision-making is, therefore, a group activity and as such requires a team approach to be effective. The team concept has many important benefits in achieving council effectiveness:

- Blending individual talents can produce better problem-solving and enhance the quality and quantity of results.
- The scope and magnitude of the issues and tasks confronting the city are complex and greater than any one person can handle.
- A team approach can focus the energy of the group on critical issues and maximize benefits within the constraints of limited resources and time.
- The team concept can yield more productive meetings and enhance communications between the team members.

Teamwork has been defined as an organization functioning effectively as a group. Here are a few methods by which city councils can become effective teams.

Mutual Respect
Show respect to all team members at all times. Recognize the value and importance of individual contributions. Trust each other's abilities and listen carefully to what is being said. Put aside personal differences and consider without prejudice the particular issue or situation. Remember, city staff is also an important part of the team and should be treated respectfully. Staff members are valuable assets and essential to accomplish the council's goals.

City Council Goal-Setting
By establishing a shared sense of direction and determining goals and priorities, the city council as a team identifies what it wants to accomplish within a specific time period. Council goal-setting provides a clear message as to what the council wants to accomplish as a group, as well as to the staff, other governmental jurisdictions and the public. It also provides valuable direction for developing the annual budget and capital improvements program, allocating staff resources,

evaluating performance and other important city functions.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

A major impediment to effective teamwork can be role confusion or conflicts among team members as to the appropriate roles and expectations of various team members. It is, therefore, essential that the roles and responsibilities of the team members are well understood by all. The team, including elected officials and key staff members, should periodically review and discuss the various roles and responsibilities of all the team members. It is especially important that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood when new members become part of the team.

Rules of the Game

Developing and agreeing to rules can help policy leaders work together and avoid unnecessary conflict. For those cities that have previously developed council rules of procedure, those policies should be reviewed and discussed with the team. Compliance with these rules should become a routine part of council operations – not just reserved for "special occasions" when a particularly contentious issue is on the agenda. Some important areas that should be part of council rules of conduct are:

- Insistence on civility
- Meeting management practices and roles
- Setting the agenda
- Rules of order
- Use of consent calendar/agenda
- Use of work sessions
- Conflicts of interest
- Confidentiality
- Guidelines for representing the council
- Guidelines for citizen input

Processes and Methods

Governance and teamwork are achieved through processes. It is important for all team members to understand those processes, to respect them and to improve them when necessary. Policy leadership requires the capacity to effectively use the processes that support the team's efforts and achieve the desired outcomes. Some key city processes include:

- Agenda development
- Information flow
- Program, project and financial monitoring and reporting
- Complaint handling

- Making requests of and giving directions to staff members
- Goal and policy implementation review
- Personnel policies and performance reviews
- Boards and commissions – contact and information
- Intergovernmental relations

Agree on the Decision-Making Process

For difficult, complex, or controversial issues, work together to agree on the process the council will use for decision-making. Frame the issue and determine what information is needed for the council to make an informed decision. Determine the process for citizen input. Give yourself adequate time to make a decision. Consider alternative actions, including the "do nothing" option. Work toward consensus and try to find areas of commonality. Recognize the need for compromise and the importance of reaching an agreement. Most importantly, respect the process and support the decision unanimously regardless of your own views.

Council Orientation

An effective and timely orientation program can help provide newly elected officials with the kind of information they need to be knowledgeable and effective members of the team. Items to include in the orientation are city organizational structure, review of significant city issues, goals and priorities, major city projects and initiatives, finance and budget, complaint process, council meeting processes and procedures, providing important city documents, and a tour of city facilities. All members of the team should take advantage of additional training opportunities through the Iowa League of Cities, regional leagues, councils of governments, etc.

Please visit the Newly Elected Officials page to see more information on city council orientation programs.

Personal Attributes

Every team member should commit to striving to achieve the following attributes:

- Mutual respect and trust
- Civility
- Ability to de-personalize issues or conflict
- Ability to see the other side of the issue
- Valuing differences
- Flexibility
- Professionalism

Bear in mind the admonition of the late Tim Shields, former long-time Director of the Institute of Public Affairs: "It takes an "I" to get elected, but it requires a 'we' to govern and lead."

CITY OF PEOSTA, IOWA
MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
CITY COUNCIL GOAL SETTING – 2025

Tuesday, July 29, 2025
5:00 PM

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Opening Comments and the Legacy Question
2. General Overview of the Meeting and the Goal Setting Report
3. Brief Review of City Accomplishments – Past Two Years – Exhibits A & B
4. Brief Review of Issues, Concerns and Trends – Exhibits C & D
5. Review and Ranking of Programs, Policies, and Initiatives – Exhibits E & F
   A. Review of Proposed Initiatives
   B. Clarification of Items
   C. Revisions, Additions, Deletions and Combinations of Items
   D. Ranking of Items – Placing of the "Dots"
   E. Review List of "Givens" or Ongoing Projects
6. Review and Ranking of Capital Projects & Equipment Purchase – Exhibits G & H
   A. Review of proposed projects
   B. Clarification of items
   C. Revisions, Additions, Deletions and Combinations of Projects
   D. Ranking of Items – Placing of the "Dots"
   E. Review List of "Givens" or Ongoing Projects
7. Review & Discuss - Team Work & Communications – Exhibits I & J
8. Final Report to the Mayor and City Council – 2025 Goal Setting Process
9. Questions, Comments, and Suggestions
10. Adjourn

MAYOR & CITY COUNCIL GOAL SETTING SESSION

GROUND RULES FOR THE SESSION

1. **Overall Participation**
   Everyone can and should participate in the discussions, but no one person should dominate during the session.

2. **Keep It Positive and Constructive**
   This is not the time to be overly critical of other ideas or suggestions. If you don't support a particular idea, then don't "vote" for it.

3. **Not Time For Long Debates**
   This is not the time to really "sell" or promote your suggestions. Those discussions can come in later meetings. It is the time to clarify and explain your suggestions, but not necessarily the time to debate.

4. **Respectful and Patient**
   Everyone needs to be respectful and patient of the ideas, suggestions, and comments of the other members of the Council.

5. **Brainstorming Session**
   Every idea or proposal is worthy of consideration. This is partially a "brainstorming session." All ideas will at least be listed in the final report.

6. **Time is Short**
   There should be a "free flow" of ideas, but the time is short. We do not have the time to resolve any one issue tonight.

7. **Silence means Affirmation**
   If we "call the question" and ask if anyone disagrees, and no objections are heard, it will be assumed that everyone is in agreement.

8. **Limit Sidebar Conversation**
   Side conversations should be held to a minimum so that everyone can be heard and understood.

9. **An Informal Session**
   This is your meeting....enjoy it and keep it "light." And of course, turn off cell phones.

10. **The Final Report**
    This process and the final report are not "cast in stone." It can be revised by a majority of the City Council members.

MAYOR & CITY COUNCIL GOAL SETTING

COMMUNICATING THE GOALS TO CITIZENS

1. **City Website.** After the Mayor and City Council have reviewed and formally adopted the Goal Setting Report, a copy of the report can be placed on the City's website for review by the citizens of the community.

2. **Newspaper Article.** The City could request that the local newspaper publish a list of the City Council's goals and objectives.

3. **Town Hall Meeting.** The City Council could schedule a town hall meeting or public forum to present a summary of the City's goals and objectives and to seek comments and observations from local residents.

4. **City Hall Posting of Goals.** The Council's goals and objectives could be posted in the lobby area at City Hall for any interested residents to review.

5. **Open Houses – City Facilities.** Annual "open houses" at various City buildings, such as City Hall, Police Station, Fire Station, Water Plant, Public Works Shop, Wastewater Plant, and Library could be held to inform the citizens as the upcoming city projects and programs that have been proposed.

6. **Community Leaders' Meeting.** The Mayor and City Council could schedule an annual or semi-annual meeting with the School Board, the Chamber of Commerce, and the County Board of Supervisors to review and discuss the City Council's goals and objectives. These meetings could also provide an opportunity to learn more about the projects, programs, and objectives under consideration by these same organizations.

7. **Presentations to Service Clubs.** The Mayor and Council Members could make brief presentations to local service clubs and organizations outlining the goals and objectives.

8. **Public Places – Reading Material.** A copy of the final report or a summary of the City's goals and objectives could be made available in public places, such as the Library, medical clinics, lawyer offices, etc. where local residents could read the report while waiting for appointments.

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MAYOR & CITY COUNCIL GOAL SETTING SESSION – 2025
PEOSTA, IOWA

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE
(Due – July 7, 2025)

Introduction

The Mayor and City Council of the City of Peosta will be conducting a goal setting session on Tuesday , July 29th at 5:00 PM, at City Hall. The purpose of the session will be to identify and prioritize the City's overall goals and objectives for the next two years. In order to prepare for this session, you have been asked to help identify key issues and potential objectives that will be reviewed by the Mayor and City Council prior to the ranking of any goals for the City. It is requested that you list your responses to the following questions.

I. Major Accomplishments

Please list the top five to ten major accomplishments of the City of Peosta over the past two years. These accomplishments could be as large as a street project or as simple as a newly adopted city policy. The items do not need to be in any particular order.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

II. Issues, Concerns, Trends, and Opportunities

Please list specific issues, concerns that you have regarding future city services, policies or operations. These issues or concerns can relate to such things as an aging population or loss of state revenues. You do not need to identify the potential answers or solutions to your concerns.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

III. Significant Initiatives, Programs or Policies

It is requested that you list any initiative, program or policy that you think that the City should consider in the next two years. Examples of such items from other cities have included such things as updating employee job descriptions, writing a policy on open burning, conducting an annexation study, reviewing water and sewer rates, etc. These suggestions should <u>not</u> include construction projects or equipment purchases, as these will be listed in the following section. These items do not have to be listed in any particular order.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

IV. Capital Projects / Construction Projects / Equipment Purchases

Please list the capital projects or equipment purchases that you think the City should consider over the next three years. These capital projects could include such things as street construction, public works equipment, public safety equipment, etc. If you have a rough estimate on the cost of such projects, please note it.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

V. Teamwork

In order to accomplish the selected goals and objectives, it is important that the City's elected officials work as a team and have good decision making skills. Please list some suggestions that the Mayor and City Council members could do in the future to enhance the Council's teamwork, decision making process, and ability to accomplish the stated goals and objectives.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Please designate your role with the City: _____ Elected Official ____ City Dept. Head

Return of Questionnaire

Please complete and return this questionnaire to Annette Ekhoff or Patrick Callahan (callahan.cmc@gmail.com) by July 7th.

Note: If it more convenient to list your responses to the questionnaire on separate sheets, you are welcome to do so. You can list the five headings and provide your comments under each of the topics.