Building Consensus and Trust

A Workbook for Units of General Local Government

CREATED BY MIDWEST EVALUATION AND RESEARCH, LLC

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NAME

DATE

"A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Introduction

About This Workbook

For many units of general local government (UGLGs), disagreement among leadership can be a significant barrier to achieving high-priority goals. For example, a mayor and city council members may have competing visions for a city, or they could have the same vision but are unable to come to an agreement on the best strategy to pursue it. On the other hand, council members could be so focused on their district that the mayor or the council struggles to gain enough support for specific initiatives.

This workbook is designed to support UGLGs across leaders, departments, and roles in building consensus and trust inside their governments. The intended audience or users of this workbook are DCTA-eligible UGLG leaders serving communities with less than 50,000 people; however, any local government can benefit from using it. For more information on the DCTA program and to determine if your community is eligible, visit this web page: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/ota/distressed-cities-and-persistant-poverty-ta-program.html.

The content of this workbook will guide leaders through a series of concepts that are essential to building internal consensus and trust. The sections include best practices, tangible examples, and opportunities for reflection, as well as resources for implementation.

Leaders should feel free to start with the topic or concept of their preference, but the workbook will be most useful when worked through in its entirety. The workbook may be most beneficial when used at the beginning of a new administration; however, it can be used at any point. It is designed to be worked through over time and not in one sitting. In addition, utilizing the services of a technical assistance provider is highly recommended to support leaders through the process of building consensus and trust inside their UGLGs across leaders, departments, and roles. (A technical assistance facilitator guide is located in Appendix A.)

Baseline Definitions for Navigating This Workbook

Consensus Building

The process of consensus building occurs when members of a group come together to make a decision with which they are all comfortable. The result of a consensus decision, which is attained through thoughtful deliberation and a diverse set of viewpoints, may not be unanimous, but it should reflect the overall thoughts, feelings, and best interests of the group.

Trust

In general, trust refers to the belief in one's truth, reliability, strength, or ability. In the context of governance, trust is the belief that a person or institution will act consistently within reasonable expectations of positive behavior.

Key Stakeholders

In this workbook, key stakeholders refer to the individuals or groups within the government who have a role or vested interest in the operations, decisions, and policies of the government. They influence and are directly impacted by the internal workings and outcomes of the government's decisions and actions.

Why Build Consensus and Trust?

Building consensus and trust within UGLGs is fundamental to fostering collaborative and inclusive decision-making processes that serve the best interests of the community and ensure its long-term well-being. The process of building consensus and trust within UGLGs is crucial for several reasons:

Effective Governance

Consensus building ensures that decisions are made collectively and reflect diverse perspectives and interests. When people are considered, it leads to more effective governance and better outcomes for the community as a whole.

Legitimacy and Accountability

A government that operates with consensus garners legitimacy and trust from its community members. When decisions are made transparently and informed by those with diverse perspectives, the public is more likely to have confidence in the government and hold it accountable for its actions.

Policy Implementation

Building consensus facilitates the smooth implementation of policies and initiatives. When there is trust among decision makers, they are more likely to cooperate and collaborate, which streamlines the execution of projects and programs.

Conflict Resolution

Inevitably, conflicts arise within UGLGs due to differing priorities, interests, and perspectives. Building consensus and trust provides a framework for resolving these conflicts through dialogue, negotiation, and compromise rather than confrontation or deadlock.

A lack of consensus and trust in local governments can occur for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- Changes in administrations
- Lack of transparent processes
- Lack of open and consistent communication
- Inequities or perceived inequities
- Competing priorities and limited resources
- Past failures, shortcomings, or negative interactions
- Scandals or rumors
- Political polarization

***Individual Reflection**: What do you anticipate the biggest barrier(s) to building consensus and trust across leaders, departments, and roles in your UGLG will be?*

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Section 1: Establishing a Foundation

To effectively build consensus, it is important to first have strong practices firmly in place. These practices serve as the backbone of your UGLG's functionality and shape interactions with key stakeholders and community members. They lay the groundwork for fostering trust, collaboration, and inclusivity and can support leaders as they navigate challenges, cultivating an optimal environment for building consensus and sustainable progress.

Best Practices for New Administrations

When a new administration arrives, there is an opportunity to reset and change the culture of the UGLG for the better. This section provides recommendations and opportunities for reflection on how to make the most out of this time-sensitive opportunity to establish a strong foundation. Additionally, if you are not in the beginning of a new administration and these practices have not yet been established, there is no better time than now to start implementing them!

Foster open communication from the beginning and directly address staff members' uncertainties and anxieties concerning job security and leadership. Clear up any misconceptions and rumors within and about the government with your staff and members of your community, if needed. You should also strive to meet in person regularly with your staff and key stakeholders.

Individual Reflection: *What concerns, misconceptions, and/or rumors are at the top of your list to address?*

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Assess the baseline knowledge of staff and key stakeholders. In order to effectively work together, staff and key stakeholders must have a basic understanding of how your government functions, particularly regarding decision-making rights, resource allocation, and financial management.

Individual Reflection: *What steps can you take to gauge the current level of understanding among staff and key stakeholders regarding your government's operations, and how can you address any gaps in knowledge?*

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Commit to following through, fulfilling promises, and completing tasks in the manner and timeframe you have agreed upon. This step is crucial for building trust and is also a modeling opportunity to demonstrate for staff what you expect from them. Ensure that every meeting has a clear agenda and that minutes, including next steps, are distributed promptly after each meeting. (An agenda template is located in Appendix B.)

Individual Reflection: *What strategies can you implement to stay organized and hold yourself accountable to keep commitments?*

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Establish performance metrics and regularly monitor and evaluate staff members' performances against these metrics, providing feedback and support as needed to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. This could include utilizing probationary periods, providing incentives for high performers, creating a system to regularly check in on progress, or identifying gaps in skills and knowledge and providing training and professional development opportunities to address them.

Individual Reflection: *How can you ensure that your staff understand what is expected of them in their roles? How can you support them in meeting those expectations?*

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Implement transition planning, preparing in advance for staff turnover. One strategy is to cross-train staff to ensure that multiple people can perform essential job functions. You may also consider implementing a transition binder for each role to document the key knowledge, responsibilities, and information required to perform the role and carry on its projects. (An example of a transition planning template is located in Appendix C.)

Individual Reflection: *Which role(s) do you want to establish a transition plan for first, and why?*

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Take It One Step Further:
After engaging in individual reflection, it may be beneficial to extend this activity to your broader team to explore whether your thoughts align and uncover any potential oversights. Consider initiating a team-wide reflection session to share, validate, and challenge your individual insights as well as gather collective perspectives.

Promote a positive work environment, encouraging a culture of support and collaboration by recognizing and celebrating achievements, encouraging teamwork, and promoting work-life balance.

Individual Reflection: *What is one small way you can show appreciation for your staff this week? How can you be intentional about celebrating achievements as they come?*

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Section 2: The Basics of Consensus Building

Even after you have utilized the strategies in Section 1 to establish a strong foundation for trust, communication, collaboration, and inclusivity within your government, situations will arise internally in which you will need to reach consensus. This section provides tips and tools to use during the beginning stages of this process.

Operational Definition: Consensus Decision Making

A. I believe I understand your point of view.
B. I believe you understand my point of view.
C. Whether or not I prefer this decision, I support it because it was reached openly and fairly.

When to Use Consensus-Building Strategies

The strategies in this workbook are most useful for outcome-focused decisions, high-stakes decisions, or decisions for which a strong, united front is important. For example, these strategies could be useful if your UGLG is deciding whether to invest in a procurement system that will have long-term budget implications. On the other hand, operational decisions, tactical decisions, or minor decisions that affect relatively few people may not require a formal consensus-building process. For example, an operational decision, such as establishing guidelines for employees' remote work arrangements, may not require consensus-building strategies. While it would still be important to gather input from all impacted parties in this scenario, a formal process would most likely not be necessary.

Common Pitfalls

The following elements can bring consensus building to a halt and should be avoided, if possible:

- The "squeakiest wheel" or most assertive individuals—or those with the most perceived power—can often **dominate discussions**, leaving many voices unheard.
- **Overpacked agendas and unrealistic timelines** can cause a group to rush the consensus-building process.
- **Constantly revisiting or rehashing decisions** that have already been made can eliminate a group's sense of finality or progress.

Necessary Conditions for Success

The list below contains some of the qualities of a group that can successfully achieve consensus. Read through the list on your own and place a checkmark next to each of the conditions that you believe are consistently present in your UGLG's internal meetings and discussions.

- ☐ **Agreement on core values**: common beliefs that serve as the foundation for making decisions
- ☐ **Trust:** confidence in the intentions, abilities, and reliability of others
- ☐ **Patience:** tolerance in the face of challenging conversations
- ☐ **Succinct expression of views and concerns:** communicating in a clear and concise manner that is easily understood
- ☐ **Commitment to and belief in the process:** dedication and confidence with the overall approach
- ☐ **Active listening:** attentive and empathetic listening to understand each other, without interruptions or judgment
- ☐ **Sufficient time:** not feeling rushed, with time to discuss, reflect, and negotiate (This may vary based on the situation.)
- ☐ **Skilled facilitation:** intentionally guiding the process by managing the group dynamics and ensuring all voices are equitably heard in order to guide the group toward its overall goal(s)
- ☐ **Safe space:** an environment that promotes open conversation and clear boundaries
- ☐ **Interdependence:** recognizing and valuing the interconnectedness of stakeholders' interests, needs, and contributions

Individual Reflection: *In the meetings and discussions that you have participated in, which of these necessary conditions are consistently present? Which need the most work or support?*

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Continue the Process

Once you have completed the checklist independently, involve your entire team by organizing a group sharing and reflection session, in which you compare responses to confirm or challenge your observations and gain a comprehensive understanding from the group. This activity can help determine whether everyone's thoughts are in sync and identify any concerns that may have been overlooked. Consider facilitating the following activity with your team:

Step 1: Individual Review

- Have all participants complete the checklist independently.

Step 2: Compare Responses

- Pair up participants and have them share their checklists with each other, discussing any differences.
- Bring the group back together for a large group discussion.
- Questions to prompt group reflection:
  - Where are we most aligned with our observations, and where do we differ?
  - Which conditions on the checklist may need the most work or support going forward?
  - What next steps could improve these conditions?

Step 3: Address Areas Needing Improvement

- Determine together which conditions require the most work or support.
- Brainstorm how to address these areas of concerns. (Following this activity, create a clear action plan to improve the identified areas, outlining specific steps and assigning responsibilities.)

Establish a Vision and Shared Values

Before you can build consensus, you must articulate a clear identity and direction for your UGLG; a clear vision and shared values serve as the cornerstone for building consensus. When leaders and stakeholders have a shared understanding of the community's direction, they are better equipped to identify common ground, communicate openly, and work together toward mutually agreed upon goals.

Guidelines for Developing a Vision Statement

The simplest way to establish your UGLG's vision is to distill your ideas into a clear, concise vision statement. Effective vision statements have the following three qualities:

- **Clarity:** Ensure the vision statement is clearly written and easily understood by all and that it aligns with your strategic plans and goals.
- **Ambition:** The vision statement should be aspirational and provide inspiration to strive for excellence, reflecting your long-term goals and endeavors.
- **Inclusivity:** Make the vision statement inclusive by incorporating diverse perspectives. It should resonate with all levels of the local government.

Tip: Once you have developed your vision statement with your team, start each meeting with a reminder of your shared vision and refer back to it to aid decision making.

Here is an example of a vision statement suitable for a UGLG:

"Together, we strive to create a vibrant and sustainable community where every resident thrives."

Individual Reflection: *What is your vision for your community?*

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Defining Core Values

After you have established your clear vision, you can begin to determine your (more specific) core values, which can also help to guide decision-making processes. The group exercise below can help your group define your core values together.

Individual Reflection: *What values resonate the most with you? Why?*

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Try This Group Exercise

Step 1: Facilitate a Brainstorming Session

Gather your team and generate a list of potential core values. Examples of core values include:

- Integrity
- Follow-through
- Data-informed decisionmaking
- Inclusivity

As you brainstorm, encourage participants to reflect on the vision statement you have already created.

Step 2: Prioritize the Values

- Use a group voting or ranking exercise to prioritize the list of potential values.
- Use visual aids such as flipchart paper or a projector to display the list of ideas.
- Discuss as a group the most popular values and how they align with the vision statement.

Step 3: Finalize the List of Core Values

- Agree on the most essential core values based on your group's discussions.
- Aim to select 3–5 values.

Step 4: Determine How to Reinforce the Values

- Decide how you will remind each other of these values. For example, you could:
  - Add the values to your government's website.
  - Post them on an office bulletin board.
  - Start each meeting by reviewing the list of values.

Build Trust and a Sense of Team

Building trust, especially when there is a history of complicated interactions, requires time, commitment, and dedication to building relationships. Many of the foundational concepts introduced in Section 1 will contribute to the process of building trust, such as:

- Establish open communication
- Model the behavior you seek
- Establish accountability
- Support growth
- Show appreciation and celebrate small wins

It is important to meet people where they are, show empathy and give grace, and be vulnerable while building or repairing relationships.

Individual Reflection: *What is one way you can be flexible and meet people where they are this week?*

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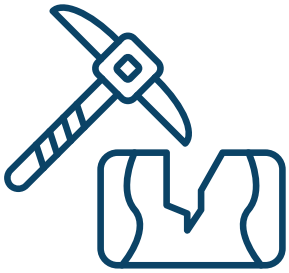
Strategies to Build Trust

To further invest in building trust intentionally within your team, try incorporating collaborative, team-building activities into your regular meetings. Taking the time to engage in brief, fun activities can help to connect people on a deeper level, allowing them to get to know each other—and you—in an engaging and low-pressure way. This could be as simple as prompting the group with an icebreaker question or activity at the beginning of each meeting. A quick online search for team-building activities will provide you with many different options to fit your needs.



Another strategy, though it may involve more time and financial resources, is planning an annual team retreat. Retreats can be effective because the informal setting, lack of distractions, and dedicated time and space away from the office can allow individuals to let their guards down, fostering deeper connections and a sense of camaraderie that can positively impact teamwork and productivity upon returning to the workplace.

Tip: Icebreaker questions and activites are more likely to build trust when they are inclusive (Everyone can answer regardless of experience.), positive, and personal while still being professional and respecting boundaries.

Facilitation

An effective facilitator is arguably the biggest indicator of whether a consensus-building process will be successful. Facilitation is a skill in which a designated person guides the group through discussions. Facilitators take a nonpartisan or neutral stance. Here are some examples of actions of an effective facilitator:

- Creates a safe and productive environment, reminding the group of their established **ground rules or group agreements**
- Effectively manages the group's time by helping members stick to the agreed upon agenda
- Utilizes feedback techniques to understand group members' thoughts, ideas, and opinions
- Summarizes and recaps discussion points, ensuring that these points are accurately framed with context
- Ensures key points of agreement and disagreement are captured (using visual aids, as needed)

Ground rules, or **group agreements**, are collaboratively created behavioral guidelines that help establish a desired environment for group interactions.

When identifying who will be your facilitator, consider the following:

- Level of experience and comfort with facilitation, change management, and conflict resolution
- Ability to stay impartial
- Emotional intelligence (ability to stay calm and not let emotion take over)
- Confidence and assertiveness
- Communication skills
- Organizational skills

While some people may be natural facilitators, it is a skillset that anyone can learn and improve through practice. If you do not have an experienced facilitator on your team, it is ideal to bring in someone who can model quality facilitation, observe the facilitation, and provide feedback and coaching to both the individual and the group. There are many options for professional development in this area, including hands-on trainings that provide opportunities to practice facilitation skills. (See the Conclusion and Recommendations section for examples.)

Mediators vs. Facilitators

Mediators and facilitators do not have the same role. Mediators may need to be implemented if there is a strong disagreement that goes beyond the scope of a facilitator's role. Mediators may be utilized before, during, and sometimes after face-to-face meetings, depending on the nature of the disagreement.

Depending on your situation, you may want to consider hiring a facilitator (or mediator) as a contractor. There are positive and challenging aspects to both internal and external facilitators. Internal facilitators may have great contextual knowledge and deep rapport and trust from the participants, but may lack the ability to be completely neutral or may lack experience with this type of facilitation. Meanwhile, an external facilitator may be able to stay impartial with a completely untainted perspective and be an expert facilitator, but may delay the process due to scheduling—or may come at a financial cost. It is important to weigh the pros and cons of your unique situation before selecting a path. You may also consider requesting technical assistance from DCTA. DCTA technical assistance providers can help coach an internal facilitator and your entire UGLG through the consensus-building process.

Section 3: Eight Steps to Build Consensus

While there are many variations to what a formal consensus-building process could look like, the following eight steps encompass the most critical elements aimed at helping disagreeing parties to reach consensus. This process will prove to be invaluable when divergent viewpoints among staff and across leaders, departments, and roles hinder progress or when there is a need to ensure alignment on critical matters. The eight steps are:

1. **Identify the Problem**
2. **Determine Relevant Stakeholders**
3. **Prepare to Convene**
4. **Develop Process Design**
5. **Define and Analyze the Problem**
6. **Explore Alternative Solutions**
7. **Adopt a Solution**
8. **Gain Approval**

Your UGLG's Structure

It is essential to understand the organizational framework of your UGLG, which may significantly shape your consensus-building efforts and impact the level of trust among members of your group. This framework provides a structure for individuals' responsibilities, including elected officials, administrative bodies, and external agencies. The structure of your UGLG can influence how you collaborate and negotiate to build consensus, along with the level of autonomy you have in addressing your community's needs.

1. Identify the Problem

Identify the problem and make the decision to engage in the process of building consensus. This decision can be made by one or more leaders and may be the result of a recommendation made by a neutral third party.

Example Problem: The city government of Websterville is facing significant gridlock and inefficiency in making decisions due to persistent disagreements between the mayor and city council members regarding the prioritization of funds. Currently, they cannot agree whether they should prioritize road repairs or the construction of a new community center. After months of mounting frustration and stalled progress, Mayor Evans, along with several council members, recognize the urgent need to address the underlying issues causing internal discord. They acknowledge that without improved collaboration and alignment, the city's ability to effectively serve its residents will continue to be compromised. The decision to engage in a consensus-building process is reached through collaborative discussions, led by the mayor. While it may have been initiated by Mayor Evans, it gains traction through the support of the city council members who also recognize the importance of finding common ground.

Individual Reflection: *Identify the most pressing disagreement or problem that you are experiencing within your UGLG that could be addressed through the consensus-building process. Who within your UGLG may have similar observations and would be willing to assist in this process?*

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2. Determine Relevant Stakeholders

Identify all relevant internal stakeholders, including those with varying levels of influence who may not be as visible. Consider all government departments, officials, and personnel impacted by the decision or capable of obstructing it. Once stakeholders are identified, government leaders may need to engage them individually or in group settings to secure their participation. Common barriers to engagement include competing priorities, internal politics, and concerns about confidentiality. To gain participation, prepare a persuasive presentation or pitch outlining the benefits and why participants should engage in this process. A quality pitch will:

- Use a respectful and appropriate tone
- Emphasize that this process is low-risk, highlighting the freedom to withdraw and pursue other options
- Address concerns about time, effort, confidentially, and the potential need to compromise
- Highlight potential benefits, such as improved relationships and opportunities for stakeholders to voice their perspectives and advocate for their interests

Example Pitch: "Good afternoon, esteemed colleagues. As we gather today, I'd like to address a critical issue that has been hindering our city's progress and potential. It's no secret that we've encountered significant challenges in aligning our collective visions and strategies for the betterment of Websterville. I stand before you not just as the mayor, but as a fellow advocate for our city's prosperity and well-being. I understand that each of you has unique interests and perspectives, and it's precisely this diversity that makes our collaboration essential. I recognize that your time is valuable, and the commitment to participate in a consensus-building process may seem daunting. However, I assure you that this is a low-risk opportunity for us to come together, meaning you are not committing to any particular decision or direction by deciding to participate. By engaging in this process, you'll have a meaningful platform to voice your concerns, advocate for your priorities, and contribute to the collective decision making that shapes our city's future. Your involvement is not just beneficial; it's necessary for us to overcome the obstacles that have impeded our progress thus far. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to embarking on this journey of collaboration and consensus building with each of you."

Individual Reflection: *Draft your pitch here.*

3. Prepare to Convene

After the necessary parties have committed to the process of building consensus, you can move forward with planning the convening, where the discussion will take place. This process typically involves five steps, depending on the situation:

- **Select a facilitator:** As discussed in Section 2, one of your biggest keys to success is selecting the right facilitator. A facilitator is responsible for guiding the consensus-building process. Their role is to create an environment conducive to productive dialogue. Facilitators should take a neutral stance and do not typically offer their opinions or solutions.
- **Select a mediator, if necessary:** A mediator is a neutral, third-party individual who may need to be brought in if there is deep conflict between two or more parties that goes beyond the scope of a facilitator. Unlike facilitators, mediators may actively engage in the substance of the dispute, helping parties identify common ground, explore options, and overcome obstacles. Mediators often have specialized training in conflict resolution techniques and may employ strategies such as shuttle diplomacy (i.e., communicating separately with each party).
- **Select a convener:** This is the person who plans the logistics of the meeting. This person should be organized and a good communicator. The convener can be, but does not have to be, the same person as the facilitator. For example, the mayor could serve as the convenor, while the facilitator may be a third-party individual.
- **Secure funding, if necessary:** If you are using outside technical experts to help facilitate the process, you may need to secure funding. Whenever possible, secure funding though grants or other outside funding opportunities.
- **Determine location:** The convening location should be neutral, conveniently located, and ADA accessible, as well as large enough to comfortably accommodate all parties and allow for breakout groups, if necessary. Consider attendees' comfort, including AC/heat, seating, and refreshments. Round tables work best to facilitate discussion rather than a long, rectangular table. You may also need to consider remote participation and the impact, additional planning, and coordination that this would require.

What location(s) in your community would be best suited for this type of gathering?

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4. Develop Process Design

The facilitator should guide the group through drafting the process design. The group's involvement at this stage will promote ownership and buy-in. The process design includes establishing ground rules and group agreements, setting the agenda(s), and, if applicable, determining the order in which issues should be addressed. The development of group agreements is essential for the consensus-building process to be both productive and enjoyable. Depending on the topic of your conversation(s), this process may be completed in one or multiple meetings.

Example Group Agreements: Avoid side conversations, do not interrupt people, express disagreement in a constructive and respectful manner, participate and engage with meeting attendees, be respectful of others' time, and minimize cell phone use

5. Define and Analyze the Problem

This step goes beyond identifying the problem and involves digging deep into the issue(s) and the many ways in which individuals define the problems that will be addressed. Facilitators should help participants frame the issue(s) in terms of their interests, which are usually negotiable, rather than needs or positions, which are more concrete in nature. By reframing the problem in terms of interests, a wider variety of solutions that had not been readily apparent before may present themselves.

Individual Reflection: *List five group agreements that you think are most essential to creating a constructive environment for building consensus.*

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Example Problem Definitions:

- **Framed in terms of position:** Mayor Evans takes the position of advocating for the repair of roads rather than a new community center, asserting that the deteriorating road infrastructure poses immediate safety risks to residents and visitors. She highlights the consequences, such as heightened traffic congestion, increased accidents, and vehicle damage, resulting from the deteriorating condition of the roads. Mayor Evans emphasizes the urgency of allocating funds toward road maintenance and repairs, stressing the importance of prioritizing public safety and infrastructure maintenance.
- **Framed in terms of interest:** To frame the issue in terms of interest rather than a fixed position, Mayor Evans can emphasize the broader benefits of prioritizing infrastructure improvements for the city's transportation network. She can highlight the shared interest in ensuring the safety and accessibility of roadways for all residents and visitors, promoting a sense of community well-being and satisfaction. Additionally, she can connect road repairs with the city's long-term economic development goals, emphasizing how improved transportation infrastructure supports local businesses, attracts investment opportunities, and enhances the city's overall appeal to residents and businesses alike.

Individual Reflection: *Write the issue that is important to you.*

Is it framed in terms of ***position*** *or* ***interest****? (Circle one.)*

If the issue you have written is framed in terms of position, rewrite it in terms of interest.

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6. Explore Alternative Solutions

Before committing to a course of action, explore as many solutions as possible. Encourage creativity and utilize your favorite brainstorming techniques. If you have a large group, consider breaking out into small groups and coming back together for a large group discussion. Review the suggestions, weighing the pros, cons, benefits, costs, and any potential barriers to implementation. In order to make an informed decision as a group, it is important for everyone to work from the same set of facts; therefore, relevant data may be needed for the group to reference. Consider what existing data is available to support and inform decision making.

Examples of relevant data that the facilitator may request prior to the convening in Websterville:

- Budgetary data
- Availability of federal, state, or private grants
- Local data related to each potential decision (e.g., accidents, frequency of roads used, maintenance costs, population demographics, crime statics, graduation rates)
- Literature review (research and studies that show the potential impact of each decision on the overall community)
- Case studies from comparable cities
- Qualitative data/input from community members

Individual Reflection: *Consider the disagreement or problem that you identified in Step 1. What relevant data might you need to reference in order to have a constructive discussion on the topic?*

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7. Adopt a Solution

Once you have a list of all possible solutions, it is time to narrow them down to one approach. This can be done in whichever way works best for or is preferred by the group. During this step, keep in mind that consensus building is different from a majority vote, in that everyone involved must agree and be able to live with the final decision. Consider the following strategies:

- **Single-text negotiation:**
  - Participants collaborate within one document to narrow down solutions, rather than exchanging competing proposals.
  - The facilitator often prepares the initial draft, and then participants review, provide feedback, and revise.
- **Fist to five voting:**
  - Participants rank their level of agreement with proposals on a scale of zero to five by raising hands: A fist (zero) means “I vote no and I will block consensus,” and five fingers mean, “I fully support this and I think it is the best possible option.”
  - This method can also be used beyond formal consensus-building processes and incorporated into regular meetings.

- **Dotmocracy:**
  - Participants use stickers or a mark of some kind to vote on their preferred options, which are displayed on a board or chart paper.
  - This method allows visual representation of group preferences and helps quickly identify the most preferred options.

Individual Reflection: *What internal work do you need to do to prepare yourself for the possibility that your position may not be the final consensus that the group lands on?*

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8. Gain Approval

The approval step involves the facilitator formalizing the group's decision. This may involve drafting a memorandum or having participants formally sign off to demonstrate their agreement and commitment. The group can also use this step as an opportunity to plan communication and determine next steps, either internally or to external stakeholders, if appropriate.

This significant achievement marks the successful conclusion of the consensus-building process. Now that decision(s) have been approved, it is time to celebrate your collective effort and dedication to finding common ground. You have created a replicable framework for resolving future disagreements and have made a notable improvement to the internal functioning of your UGLG.

Implementation

Implementing the decision(s) that were just agreed upon should be considered an entirely separate task, which can come with its own challenges and may require a change in management strategy. It is important that the consensus-building group is involved in this phase to ensure that their agreement comes to fruition as they imagined. Determine a monitoring structure and review roles and responsibilities prior to the resolution of the formal consensus-building process. You may want to capitalize on your current momentum and begin this work immediately.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Thank you for dedicating your time and effort to engaging with this workbook and taking a significant step toward enhancing your community's well-being. Investing in consensus building and fostering trust within your government is vital for serving your community's best interests, ensuring its long-term prosperity, and achieving your goals. You hold the reins in establishing a robust foundation and creating the conditions for success, and your commitment will undoubtedly pave the way for positive change and progress within your community.

If you are interested in future learning opportunities and professional development on these and related topics, here are some resources to explore. This is not an endorsement of any of the following resources or organizations, but rather a starting point for your continued education.

- Strive Together's Results Based Facilitation 101 course: https://thetraininghub.strivetogether.org/learn/courses/222/rbf-101-facilitating-to-create-space-for-belonging-results
- Strive Together's Training Hub: https://thetraininghub.strivetogether.org/lear
- Interaction Institute for Social Change: https://interactioninstitute.org/
- Interaction Associates: https://www.interactionassociates.com/
- Consensus Building Institute: https://www.cbi.org/
- Consensus: https://consensusgroup.com/
- Prosci Change Management: https://www.prosci.com/

This workbook was created by Megan Grau and Katie Amundsen, Midwest Evaluation and Research, LLC.

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Appendix A: Technical Assistance Facilitator Guide

This guide is intended to provide UGLG leaders with insight on how technical assistance (TA) providers, potentially through DCTA, could support them as they navigate this workbook. TA providers have the opportunity to play a pivotal role in aiding leaders on their journeys to foster consensus and trust within their UGLGs. They can significantly augment the efficacy of this resource by assisting leaders as they unpack and delve deeply into the concepts outlined within this workbook, acting as trainers, mentors, coaches, and facilitators. This appendix provides a detailed guide on how TA providers may effectively assist leaders who utilize the workbook.

Conduct Pre-Work

- TA providers will familiarize themselves thoroughly with the content of the workbook, including its objectives, structure, and key concepts.
- Providers will work to identify the UGLG's unique needs and challenges and may tailor their support to the specific context, priorities, and capacities of the leaders whom they are supporting.

Prioritize Foundation Building

- The best practices laid out in Section 1 will provide a foundation on which a functional government can be built. TA support to develop these best practices could include:
  - Debriefing responses to the reflection questions and identifying next steps
  - Assessing and addressing foundational weaknesses (e.g., major gaps in staff knowledge about how the government functions)
  - Providing tangible tools for implementation (e.g., transition planning templates, sample human resources policies)
  - Observing interactions with staff and providing feedback and coaching
- TA providers may also clarify any concepts or terminology in the workbook that leaders may find confusing or unfamiliar, and offer concrete examples and real-life scenarios to illustrate key principles.

Focus on Skill Building

- TA providers may facilitate capacity-building sessions to support the development of tangible skills that will promote leaders' abilities to build consensus and trust, tailored to the leaders' specific needs. Topics could include:
  - Effective communication, conflict resolution, and active listening
  - Meeting/convening planning and facilitation
  - Community engagement
  - Emotional intelligence and self-awareness
  - Cultural competence and inclusion
  - Change management and adaptive leadership
  - Team building

Support Implementation

- TA providers may support the planning and facilitation of sessions to establish a vision statement, clarify core values, plan a team retreat, etc., as needed.
- They may also attend meetings and convenings to model quality facilitation, when appropriate, and conduct observations to provide feedback and coaching.

Facilitate Peer Learning and Professional Development

- TA providers can offer opportunities for leaders to connect with peers facing similar issues, and they can facilitate peer learning sessions, networking events, or discussion boards where they can share experiences, insights, and lessons learned.
- They can also provide guidance regarding when to seek additional professional development and support from outside agencies.

Appendix B: Meeting Agenda Template

Next, you will find the first of two practical tools designed to support your UGLG in establishing foundational practices. The meeting agenda template is crafted to streamline administrative tasks and enhance organizational efficiency. By incorporating this resource into your governance practices, you can ensure more structured, productive meetings, ultimately fostering a more collaborative and trustworthy environment.

A well-structured meeting agenda template serves multiple purposes in building consensus and trust. First, it sets clear expectations for a meeting, allowing participants to prepare and therefore contribute more effectively. This transparency in planning demonstrates a commitment to organized and purposeful meetings, which can boost confidence among team members. Second, a consistent agenda format helps with tracking and documenting discussions, decisions, and action items. This continuity ensures that everyone is on the same page, which will reduce misunderstandings and promote accountability. A meeting agenda also encourages inclusivity by giving all participants a voice. By outlining specific topics and time allocations, it is more likely that all relevant issues are addressed and that meetings are not dominated by a few voices. Finally, regular use of a meeting agenda can highlight the organization's commitment to continuous improvement and effective governance. When stakeholders see a structured approach modeled in meetings, it can encourage them to adopt similar practices in their own tasks, leading to a more cohesive and efficient organization overall.

Meeting Name:

Date: **Time:**

Attendees:

Absent:

Purpose and Desired Outcomes: *State the purpose of the meeting. Also list the desired outcomes. Answer the question, "By the end of this meeting, what do we need to have achieved?"*

I. Agenda

Item	Time	Notes
Start-up	5–10 minutes	***Guidance for the meeting facilitator:*** • *Welcome participants and check everyone into the meeting* • *Facilitate an icebreaker or warm-up activity* • *Establish a shared understanding of the meeting's purpose and desired outcomes* • *Determine meeting roles: facilitator, scribe, timekeeper* **The meeting scribe will take notes here:**
Follow-up from previous meeting (if applicable)	5 minutes	***Guidance for the meeting facilitator:*** • *Review the status of the next steps identified in the previous meeting* • *Establish agreement on revised plan to complete any next steps that are still pending* **The meeting scribe will take notes here:**
Agenda Item:		***Guidance for meeting facilitator:*** • *The number of agenda items will vary based on what needs to be discussed and the amount of time available* • *Consider soliciting input on agenda items ahead of time from meeting participants* **The meeting scribe will take notes here:**
Agenda Item:		**The meeting scribe will take notes here:**
Agenda Item:		**The meeting scribe will take notes here:**
Closing	5–10 minutes	***Guidance for meeting facilitator:*** • *Establish agreement on the list of next steps, review the parking lot items, and discuss what worked well ("pluses") and what could be improved ("deltas")* • *Pro tip: email everyone a copy of the minutes following the meeting* **The meeting scribe will take notes here:**

II. Next Steps

This section outlines the specific actions and responsibilities assigned to participants within a timeframe. Tracking next steps helps to maintain momentum and track progress on decisions made during the meeting.

#	Who	Task	By When
Ex.	*Darla*	*Register for the software professional development courses that will take place in December in Selma.*	*11/01/24*
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

III. Parking Lot

This section is used to capture important topics or ideas that arise during the meeting but are not on the current agenda, allowing the group to stay focused while ensuring these items can be addressed later. This helps manage time effectively and ensures all relevant issues are eventually discussed.

#	Item	Revisit When?
Ex.	*Debrief grant proposal season to glean lessons learned for process improvement*	*End of Q3 2024*
1		
2		
3		

IV. Pluses/Deltas

This section is designed for participants to provide feedback on what worked well ("pluses") and what could be improved ("deltas") in the meeting, fostering continuous improvement in meeting processes and outcomes. This reflective practice helps enhance future meetings and team effectiveness.

+ What Worked	Δ What We'd Do Differently
Ex. The facilitator gathered agenda items from meeting participants ahead of time	*Ex. Limit the number of agenda items to ensure time for adequate discussion*

Appendix C: Transition Planning Template

Finally, you will find the second of two practical tools designed to support your UGLG in establishing foundational practices. The transition planning template is included to assist in the smooth transfer of responsibilities during changes in leadership or staff. This tool is designed to organize critical information and facilitate seamless transitions, reducing potential disruptions and maintaining continuity as one member of the team leaves their role and as one or more take over their responsibilities. Please note that this tool is meant to be used for one specific role, rather than the organization as a whole, so you may replicate the process of utilizing this tool as necessary for several of the most impacted and/or crucial roles.

A transition planning template can be an invaluable tool in building consensus and trust. First and foremost, it provides a structured framework for capturing and transferring crucial knowledge and responsibilities. By systematically outlining tasks, contacts, ongoing projects, and key deadlines, the template ensures that nothing falls through the cracks during a transition. This thorough approach reduces uncertainty and builds confidence among team members that the government can handle changes effectively. Second, the transparency of transition planning promotes trust. When all parties involved can clearly see what steps are being taken and what is expected of them, it eliminates ambiguity and fosters a sense of security. Team members are more likely to trust the process and the incoming leadership when they see that there is a clear, organized plan in place. Moreover, a well-documented transition plan demonstrates a commitment to stability and continuity, even in times of change. Lastly, using a transition planning template as a standard practice underscores the organization's dedication to professional development and succession planning. It shows that the organization is prepared for the future and is committed to supporting its staff through changes. This foresight and preparation can inspire trust and loyalty among team members as they see the leadership's commitment to their success and the overall stability of the government.

Transition Planning Template

Role/Title:

Key Relationships: *Outline key relationships with both internal and external stakeholders who are essential to the success of the role.*

#	PERSON AND ACTIVITY	WHO TRANSFERS KNOWLEDGE	WHO RECEIVES KNOWLEDGE	STATUS	# OF HOURS	START DATE	END DATE	COMMENTS
Ex.	*Mayor Peterson: Schedule an introduction meeting with the Mayor*	*Mayor Peterson*	*Onboarding City Clerk*	*NOT STARTED*	*1.00*			*The meeting will include an ongoing plan for open communication and establish a clear understanding of expectations and priorities. The onboarding city clerk should schedule this meeting within a week of their start date, if possible.*
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								

Short-Term Deliverables: *Outline specific short-term deliverables that have been assigned, but not yet completed.*

#	DELIVERABLE AND ACTIVITY	WHO TRANSFERS KNOWLEDGE	WHO RECEIVES KNOWLEDGE	STATUS	# OF HOURS	START DATE	END DATE	COMMENTS
Ex.	*Policy Manual: Manual updates are in process and still require approval by the Board*	*Deputy Clerk*	*Onboarding City Clerk*	*IN PROCESS*	*20.00*	*6/3/24*	*8/6/24*	*The next Board meeting is scheduled for the first Tuesday in August. The deputy clerk will own this task through to completion. The onboarding city clerk should engage in a self-study and review the policy manual and reach out to the deputy clerk with any questions.*
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								

Transition Planning Template, Continued

Ongoing Deliverables: *Outline ongoing/reoccurring core roles' responsibilities/deliverables.*

#	DELIVERABLE AND ACTIVITY	WHO TRANSFERS KNOWLEDGE	WHO RECEIVES KNOWLEDGE	STATUS	# OF HOURS	START DATE	END DATE	COMMENTS
Ex.	*Annual Audit: Documents in process of being compiled to send to CPA*	*DCTA Provider*	*Onboarding City Clerk*	*IN PROCESS*	*15.00*	*6/17/24*		*DCTA provider is providing support and guidance in this process for this year. This task for this year will be completed prior to transition. The DCTA provider will train the onboarding city clerk in this process.*
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								

Trainings: Outline recommended and required trainings that are essential to the role.

#	TRAINING AND ACTIVITY	WHO TRANSFERS KNOWLEDGE	WHO RECEIVES KNOWLEDGE	STATUS	# OF HOURS	START DATE	END DATE	COMMENTS
Ex.	*Utility Billing System Training: Attend upcoming training in November*	*External Trainer*	*Onboarding City Clerk*	*NOT STARTED*	*6.00*	*11/19/24*	*11/21/24*	*Onboarding city clerk is responsible for registering for training and coordinating the necessary travel accommodations. Mayor Peterson is available to answer any questions.*
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								

Transition Planning Template, Continued

Meetings: *Outline regular, recurring meetings that are that are essential to the role.*

#	MEETING AND ACTIVITY	WHO TRANSFERS KNOWLEDGE	WHO RECEIVES KNOWLEDGE	STATUS	# OF HOURS	START DATE	END DATE	COMMENTS
Ex.	*Monthly DCTA Provider Check-in: Join the upcoming meeting in July and transition meeting ownership*	*Mayor Peterson*	*Onboarding City Clerk*	*NOT STARTED*	*1.00*	*7/31/24*	*7/31/24*	*Calendar invite has been sent. Following this meeting, the onboarding city clerk will be responsible to scheduling the meetings, coordinating the agenda, and taking and distributing minutes.*
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								

Threats: *Outline threats or risks that need to be addressed in order for the role to be successful.*

#	THREAT AND ACTIVITY	WHO TRANSFERS KNOWLEDGE	WHO RECEIVES KNOWLEDGE	STATUS	# OF HOURS	START DATE	END DATE	COMMENTS
Ex.	*CPA: Identify new CPA who is willing to complete regular required audits*	*Mayor Peterson/ DCTA Provider*	*Onboarding City Clerk*	*NOT STARTED*				*Contract with current CPA is ending at the end of 2024; Ms. Smith is not interested in renewing her contract with the city. Mayor Peterson is available to provide necessary historical context and guidance. DCTA provider is available to support as well.*
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								