

From Campaign Trail To City Hall:

Practical Strategies For Newly Elected Officials

Congratulations! You have been elected to serve your community. Now what?

As consultants specializing in local government, we have worked with many new officials as they navigate the exciting and complex transition from candidate to elected leader. We have found that building strong relationships, understanding your role, and creating balance as key to success. Here are our tips to help you hit the ground running.



Build Strong Relationships

The skills that have served you well on the campaign trail may be less effective in your elected role. Campaigning is about making a case and focuses on an election result. Governing is about building consensus. Once elected, you become a voice among many. The focus is on moving policy forward that requires teamwork, listening and compromise.

With Other Elected Officials

Building relationships with other elected leaders is potentially the most important factor in your success. Without their support, your ideas will remain ideas; with their support, much can be accomplished. Shifting from a position of persuasion to a spirit of collaboration is essential. Leadership is not about winning arguments – it is about creating solutions.

To connect with other elected officials:

- Meet one-on-one with fellow elected officials and key staff.
- Ask about their goals, perspectives and concerns.
- Look for shared values and common ground.

With The Public And Staff

Strong relationships with constituents and staff will empower your ability to lead and implement change. Gaining their trust is foundational to elected leadership. You build trust through transparency, empathy and respect.

To connect with the public:

- Host listening sessions and stay accessible.
- Communicate in plain language – cut the jargon.
- Acknowledge concerns honestly, even when you disagree.

To Connect With Staff:

- Understand their roles and the limits of yours.
- Ask thoughtful questions and value their expertise.
- Praise in public; ask questions in private.

Understand Your Role

Governing is more than voting on issues – it is understanding how decisions are shaped, implemented and evaluated. Your responsibility is to set policy, not execute it – that is staff’s role. Respecting that boundary will strengthen your credibility and effectiveness.

As an elected official entrusted with making decisions for community benefit, you need to act with integrity, ethically and within the law.

To be an effective policymaker:

- Read your city’s codes and policies.
- Attend orientation sessions and trainings. If you cannot attend in-person, MML has online trainings available.
- Ask for briefings on current policies and upcoming projects.

To be an ethical and transparent policymaker:

- Review your jurisdiction’s ethics policies.
- Disclose potential conflicts of interest.
- Communicate clearly about your decisions and why you made them.

Create Balance

Your community needs leaders who are energized and grounded – not burned out.

You will quickly discover that information comes at you fast – emails, memos, reports, citizen input and media. You will have great demands on your time – meetings, community events, and constituent relations to name just a few. Without balance, you may feel like you are running from one place to another without being sufficiently prepared. You may wonder what you have gotten yourself into and why.

To Manage Information Overload:

- Develop an organization system that works for you.
- Request summaries of dense materials.
- Carve out time to reflect and prepare before meetings.

To Stay Healthy and Engaged

- Set boundaries around time and energy.
- Stay connected to life outside of politics.
- Keep your values front and center. Write them down, revisit them often, and let them guide your decisions.

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Final Thoughts

The transition from campaigning to governing is a powerful shift. It is not always easy, but it is deeply rewarding. By focusing on relationships, being clear on your role, and maintaining balance, you will not only lead effectively – you will help shape a stronger, more resilient community.

At Shockey Consulting, we believe that bold futures begin with leaders who listen deeply, act with integrity, and lead with

heart. You have been entrusted with a great responsibility. Step into it with confidence – and know that you are not alone. 🍀

Beth Quindry and Molly Saunders are consultants at Shockey Consulting, where they specialize in local government planning and public engagement. They bring firsthand experience guiding newly elected officials through the transition from campaigning to governing. Learn more at ShockeyConsulting.com

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