

EXCHANGE



EXCHANGE is a quarterly magazine published by the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) of British Columbia. It's about sharing information, exchanging ideas on best practices, enhancing professional development and building networks. Reach us at lgma.ca.

Fall 2025

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The LGMA office is located on the traditional territories of the ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) Peoples, also known as the X̱məpsəm (Kosapsum) and Songhees Nations, whose relationships with the land continue to this day. We extend our gratitude to them and to the many Indigenous Nations on whose territories we work.

EXCHANGE

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With the next election a year away, experienced B.C. local government professionals provide insights on handling a range of challenges and issues.



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Case studies highlight the innovative work of local governments related to elected official orientations and public engagement.



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Ask a Mentor

Anne Yanciw, this edition's guest mentor, provides advice and shares lessons learned related to hiring consultants in local government.

IN THIS ISSUE

After a few months away, I'm back in my role as editor of *Exchange*, and I'm excited to immerse myself in the world of local government again. Thank you to Karin Mark for stepping into the role of editor in addition to writing articles and designing each issue. Her work behind the scenes helped us continue to bring timely content to LGMA members while I was away for parental leave.



I would like to introduce two new contributing writers whose work first appeared in the summer issue of *Exchange*. Cynthia Lockrey is a communications expert and writer who wrote the case studies for this issue, and Adrian Paradis is the author of the "Ask a Mentor" and "Volunteer Spotlight" columns. You may also know him as the LGMA Communications and Membership Manager.

Well, it's that time again. With the next local government election a year away, our fall edition of *Exchange* explores the issues, challenges and opportunities related to election preparation.

Local government experts with years of experience in planning and implementing local elections share their insights and tips on what to include in your election plan, how to keep organization priorities on track during election season, and strategies for community engagement and communication. We also learn about best practices for Council/Board orientation and the important relationship between the CAO and Corporate Officer.

Our institutions are a critical part of promoting and upholding our democracy, and our colleagues do the invaluable work of ensuring elections are well organized, fair and smoothly run.

If you have any questions or comments, please email me at editor@lgma.ca.

Manjot Bains
Editor

I write on the traditional and unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and am committed to solidarity with First Nations and pushing for change through my work and art.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Hello! I am honoured to write this column from the traditional territories of the ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) Peoples, also known as the Xʷsepsəm (Kosapsum) and Songhees Nations, whose relationships with the land continue to this day.



Even though it's been quite a few years since I've been a student (hey, not *that* long ago!), I always feel excited about learning when fall comes along. Each September I think about my journey as I continue to learn about reconciliation and reflect on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. I write this column as we prepare for the First Nations and Local Government Land Use Planning Regional Workshop, delivered in partnership with the First Nations Public Service Secretariat.

Aligning our work with the needs of the sector is a key priority for LGMA staff, who recently engaged in internal training and work planning. Staff focused on understanding our individual and collective leadership competencies; a good reminder that folks lead from and within different roles, and in different ways. We then rolled up our sleeves and looked at 2026 and the years ahead. The team strategized possible program delivery over a number of years, and identified upcoming priorities including updates to our election training and resources, the new IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility) On-Demand Course, and new approaches to existing programs. I am extremely proud of the LGMA staff team, the program advisors we are so fortunate to work with, and all of the contractors, volunteers and key subject matter experts that help us do this good work.

As always, our team is here to support you. Whether you're preparing for elections, onboarding new staff or navigating legislative changes, we are just a phone call or email away. We are proud to serve such a dedicated and resilient community of professionals.

Candace Witkowskyj
Executive Director

BOARD UPDATE

Hello everyone I write this column from the ancestral, traditional and unceded territory of the Okanagan Nation and the Syilx People where I am proud to live and work.

As we move into the final months of 2025, I know many of my colleagues around the province have begun preparing for the 2026 local government election season. For many of our members, this marks a period of transition, preparation and reflection. Whether you're supporting elected officials in their final year of term, preparing your newly elected official orientations, or anticipating the dynamic shifts that elections bring, this season is a reminder of the vital role local government professionals play in ensuring local communities are resilient in the years to come.

The LGMA is here to support you through this journey. Our staff team has been working diligently to update and enhance our election training resources, including the newly revised *Election Manual*, the on-demand election course and the Advanced Elections Workshops. These tools are designed to help you navigate the complexities of election season with confidence and clarity.

These efforts are directly aligned with our *2025–2030 Strategic Plan*, which prioritizes professional development and sector resilience. By investing in election training, we are investing in the strength and stability of local governments across British Columbia.

In addition to election readiness, LGMA continues to support local governments with responsible conduct resources. Building on the previous work of the Working Group on Responsible Conduct, alongside UBCM and the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, there are a number of resources to help local government professionals understand and implement best practices in this area. Guidance and tools are available at lgma.ca/responsible-conduct-of-local-government-elect.



As we look ahead, I encourage you to lean into the support of your LGMA community. Share your experiences, ask questions and connect with peers who understand the unique challenges and opportunities of this moment.

Thank you for all that you do. Your leadership matters and your commitment to excellence continues to inspire.

Keri-Ann Austin
President

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By Aidan Andrews
Civic Legal LLP

CASE of INTEREST

The Political-Administrative Divide

With British Columbia local elections one year away, here is a reminder of the interplay between non-political administration and the political electoral process, as it applies to local government employees seeking office and officials seeking re-election.

Employees Seeking Office

It is not uncommon for current and former local government employees to seek election to their regional district boards and municipal councils, to which they can bring valuable experience and knowledge of local government operations and issues. However, current employees need to be mindful of the legislative guardrails, as well as any rules that may apply to them under an employee conduct policy or collective agreement.

While the legislative rules are simple, they must be closely adhered to (although an inadvertent technical breach will not be fatal; see *Darcus v. Piamonte*, 2014 BCPC 349). The *Local Government Act* requires an employee seeking office to (1) notify their employer of their intention to accept nomination for candidacy; (2) take leave from the first day of nominations or the day on which they give notice, whichever is later, until their election result is settled; and (3) if elected, resign their position before making their oath of office (s. 82).

Because the rules are so basic, court decisions on employees seeking office are rare and focus on borderline issues, such as where an individual's status as an "employee" is unclear.

In *Baziuk v. Shelley*, 2012 BCSC 295, an unsuccessful council candidate alleged that his successful rival was disqualified because he was a municipal employee and had failed to take leave as required. Shelley was a "volunteer" firefighter for the Village of Harrison Hot Springs but received an hourly wage for training and responding. The Court sided with the unsuccessful candidate, finding that, despite his "volunteer" title, Shelley was an employee and therefore disqualified.

Courts have upheld the constitutionality of these types of employee restrictions and supported their underlying rationale (see, e.g., *Rheaume v. Ontario* (Attorney General), 1992 CanLII 7674 (ONCA)).

Elected Officials

Local governments' own codes of conduct – which, at time of writing, remain optional – rather than legislation, are the primary constraint on elected officials' use of local government resources. Often, codes of conduct will aim to enforce a distinction between the political and administrative elements of being an elected official in how they regulate their conduct.

A code may, for instance, explicitly prohibit the use of local government resources, such as employees, property, data sets, personal information, office space or websites for campaigning or fundraising activities. Other codes may be less explicit, noting that elected officials may use local government property, equipment and resources only for fulfilling their duties as an elected official and not for any personal purposes, including campaigning for re-election.

Even with a code in place, if an elected official loses their re-election bid, that loss may be their sole sanction. A code of conduct response at that stage may serve no purpose (see *Di Ciano (Re)*, 2019 ONMIC 14). However, elected officials could be subject to more consequential penalties if they are charged with theft or a similar criminal offence, sued by their local government, or prosecuted for an offence under the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act*, S.B.C. 2014, c. 18.

It is important that both sitting elected officials and local government employees mind the administrative-political gap, to protect local government resources from misuse and ensure employee candidates are not denied the chance to put their valuable experience to work.

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Preparing for Local Government Elections

By Karin Mark



VOTE
HERE

For B.C. local governments, elections are a marathon—not a sprint.

Voters across the province will head to the polls Oct. 17, 2026 to elect new Council, Board, school and park officials. And while Elections BC has established Jan. 1 as the start of the 2026 local election period, many local governments have already begun their preparations.

The list of election preparation tasks is immense: budgeting and procurement, staff training, booking of polling stations and equipment, compliance with mandatory deadlines and requirements, voter and candidate engagement, post-election orientations and many other duties.

Amidst all of this, the regular work of local government must continue.

It's a challenge that is well known to Elsie Lemke, a former Chief Administrative Officer and veteran of more than a dozen local elections in five communities. Now retired and out of the trenches, she can look back on those hectic times with perspective.

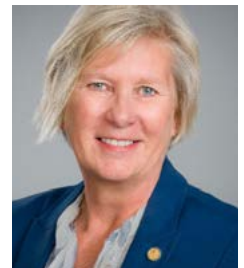
"One of my tips is to try to embrace the rhythm of elections every four years. It's going to be stressful, but it's part of the profession you've chosen," says Lemke, whose CAO roles in B.C. included the District of Peachland and Town of Osoyoos. "If you look for ways to embrace those challenges, you're going to find the process more enjoyable and rewarding."

Being armed with knowledge can help smooth the bends in the road. Here, local government experts provide advice and lessons learned on a range of election challenges including balancing workloads, improving voter turnout, and ensuring staff neutrality. Additional insights can be found in the case studies starting on page 16.

ADDRESSING WORKLOAD CHALLENGES

Election years require extraordinary preparation and organization. Regular duties must be accommodated while preparing for the election, and not all local governments have the resources to provide staff with additional support during this time.

"Try to embrace the rhythm of elections every four years. It's going to be stressful, but it's part of the profession you've chosen."



Elsie Lemke

Carolyn Mushata, currently the Director, Legislative Services and Corporate Officer at the City of Maple Ridge, has experienced this balancing act many times in her 35-year career in local government. Mushata has worked in 12 elections, including 10 times as Chief Elections Officer, for local governments ranging in population from 1,200 to more than 100,000.

For her, checklists and timelines are essential election planning tools.

"By no later than January of an election year, I create a timeline and work plan that aligns my tasks with ongoing responsibilities and identifies critical tasks that need to be prioritized," notes Mushata, who co-chairs the LGMA Elections Committee.

Examples of initial tasks on the list include creating an election budget, reviewing and updating election bylaws, securing voting tabulators and locations, and inventorying and ordering election supplies.

Early in the process, Chief Election Officers should also make themselves aware of any legislative changes affecting the election. For example, the adoption of Bill 13 this year will bring a variety of changes for the 2026 election, including how nomination documents can be submitted, candidate endorsements, information on ballots, candidate privacy, mail ballot voting and other changes.

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Staff recruitment is another early task. Mushata makes a point to cross-train so that people can step into different roles as needed. In addition to adding depth to the team, “it diversifies their skills and helps with succession planning,” she says.

She recounts how during the 2022 election at the District of Sooke, she allowed the Deputy Corporate Officer to take on more work and leadership responsibilities, under her supervision.

“If you are stepping into the role of Chief Election Officer, it’s a huge learning curve if you have not done that role before,” she says.

Communities can also work with neighbouring jurisdictions to share the workload and costs, including advertising, development of voter engagement materials, or hiring contract elections staff, she notes.



Carolyn Mushata

As well, she recommends that Chief Election Officers look for ways to delegate some of their responsibilities, either related to the election or their typical duties.

Local governments without experienced elections staff may also turn to the LGMA’s database of election officers available for contract work—while being aware that it is the local government that holds the ultimate responsibility for the election, Mushata says.

For the organization as a whole, election years can also pose challenges for keeping ongoing priorities and work on track. To keep plans from getting derailed, Lemke recommends establishing budgets, setting timelines and assigning staff.

In addition, “It’s important that you have broad input and support for any kind of plan. It’s not easy for an organization to abandon the plan then.”

At the same time, Lemke says staff need to recognize that each election has the potential to bring changes in policy and direction that affect existing plans. “It’s a four-year cycle that can’t be ignored.”

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IMPROVING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

With only about one-third of eligible voters turning out for local elections on average across B.C., it's clear there is room for improvement. A variety of factors can negatively affect voter turnout, including low civic engagement and barriers such as accessibility, geography and languages.

Improving Engagement

Communications staff can help improve voter turnout by making local government feel relevant and accessible, says Pardeep Purewal, Senior Manager, Corporate Communications & Public Engagement at the City of Maple Ridge.



Pardeep Purewal

“Municipalities are the order of government closest to people—we maintain the roads they drive on, the parks their kids play in, and the recreation programs they use. But for many, that connection isn’t obvious,” she says.

“Our job is to bridge that gap by showing how issues like housing, transportation, or recreation are directly tied to decisions made at the local level. We also have to make voting itself easy to understand: when, where and how to vote. By providing clear, accessible information and removing barriers, communications teams can encourage more residents to get out and have their say.”

Purewal has provided communications support for local government elections since 2011. Some of her tried-and-true approaches include:

- Using plain, jargon-free language and multiple formats (videos, infographics and web copy) to make the process clear and approachable;
- Providing translated materials in languages commonly used in the community;
- Posting visible “Get Out and Vote” signage at advanced voting and voting day locations to reach residents who may not follow online or traditional channels;
- Mailing information directly to homes and advertising where people are, whether that is on transit, in community centres or on social media;
- Framing information so residents understand how elections affect their daily lives; and
- Working with local cultural groups and non-profit partners to help reach diverse audiences.

“By providing clear, accessible information and removing barriers, communications teams can encourage more residents to get out and have their say.”

New strategies Maple Ridge will implement for the 2026 election include:

- Enhanced digital engagement with interactive tools and short, catchy videos;
- Youth engagement campaigns through schools and sports organizations;
- Storytelling campaigns featuring residents sharing why they vote; and
- Expanded partnerships with community, sports and cultural organizations to reach those who don’t see themselves reflected in local election communications.

Overall, Purewal cautions against creating information overload with content that is too lengthy or technical. She notes the importance of pacing communications over time, with a strong push leading up to voting day. As well, tailoring communications to different audiences—by age, cultural background or neighbourhood, for example—creates more impact than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Staying strictly non-partisan is also critical, she says. “Our role is to encourage participation, not to influence outcomes. Maintaining trust depends on being a reliable, neutral source of information.”

Increasing Accessibility

According to data from Statistics Canada, more than 28 per cent of British Columbians age 15 and up were living with a disability as of 2022. This percentage will increase over time as the proportion of older individuals continues to increase.

The Disability Alliance BC (DAB) 2024 election priorities position paper, entitled *Disability Rights is More than a Single-Issue Vote*, notes that the disability community has historically struggled with barriers to the electoral process, including inaccessible polling stations, all-candidates meetings and voter information.

For Mushata, a critical first task when planning an election is to secure polling stations and make sure they are accessible, including easy access from parking. Accessible voting machines are also available that help people with sight, hearing and other disabilities vote independently.

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Local governments may consider other accessibility supports such as:

- Mail and curbside voting;
- Voting information, ballots and candidate lists in accessible formats, such as braille and large print on light-coloured paper;
- Written and picture descriptions of the voting process, and videos with captioning;
- Magnifiers with lights, dark-coloured pencils or markers, and at least one booth with an additional light source;
- Sign language interpreters with advance requests;
- Room layouts with wide aisles and space to maneuver;
- Signage posted at eye level;
- Additional seating; and
- Training for election officials to greet and assist voters who need accessibility supports, including help marking ballots.

Local government accessibility committees, established through the *Accessible British Columbia Act*, are another potential source of insights and recommendations.

As an example, the Northern Rockies Accessibility and Inclusion Committee—facilitated by the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality (NRRM) in collaboration with the Fort Nelson Public Library and School District #81—has been working since 2023 to raise awareness and reduce barriers to participation.

While the committee had not yet turned its attention to election accessibility at time of printing, much of its work to remove barriers is transferable to other government services and functions, notes facilitator Hillary Sheppard, NRRM's Community & Social Development Coordinator.

One of the committee's far-reaching outcomes, she believes, is the deeper awareness its work has created in both the local government and community at-large. The more that

staff understand accessibility barriers, she says, the more they can prevent or mitigate them in their day-to-day work. As well, as awareness about accessibility grows, people who need support are more likely to ask for it, leading to benefits for everyone.

"In the most general sense, we're trying to drive home the point that accessibility improvements really are for everybody," says Sheppard, who is also the NRRM's representative on the Northeastern BC Accessibility Committee. "The more we can make our communities inclusive, the more that everyone can access services, participate fully in community life, build connections and feel belonging. It builds social resilience."

Some learnings from her work with both committees that may pertain to next year's election include:

- Make the main entrances of polling stations accessible to all voters. Don't force people with mobility issues to enter through the back or side of the building. Check for cracks or uneven sidewalks and pavement, and other mobility impediments such as snow and ice.
- Be aware that for some, lack of public bathrooms is a significant barrier to participation. If people need to travel considerable distances to access services, including voting, lack of accessible rest stops can be a deterrent.
- It's important to understand how font, colour and other design choices affect the accessibility of informational or marketing materials.

Sheppard notes that local governments can encourage a dialogue about election accessibility with their community by promoting the accessibility feedback tool they must offer as a requirement of the *Accessible British Columbia Act*.



Hillary Sheppard

Continued on page 13



The work of local government accessibility committees can have a positive impact on election participation, through both increased awareness of accessibility barriers and capital improvements (such as the new sidewalk letdown at left in the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality).

IMAGE COURTESY NORTHERN ROCKIES
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

Staff impartiality is important “to ensure integrity, fairness and transparency in the election process, build confidence in your election outcomes, and uphold the principles of democracy.”

Addressing Other Barriers

Communities with significant non-English-speaking populations may want to consider producing their voting materials in a variety of languages, or providing translators at some of their voting stations.

In remote communities with far-flung populations, Mushata notes that increasing the number of polling stations and expanding mail-in voting options can make a difference. Mail-in and other means of voting must be authorized by local bylaws and require significant lead time.

Targeted outreach may also be considered for Indigenous voters living both on and off reserves, clarifying their eligibility to vote in local government elections. See Tips & Tactics on page 22 for related resources.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEUTRALITY

In the months leading up to an election, a common challenge is ensuring staff remain neutral and treat all candidates equally, whether they are incumbents or not. This is easier said than done—particularly in smaller communities where everyone knows everyone else.

But given the increase in public vitriol toward government and the distrust of institutions—fed by social media—the perception of neutrality is more important than ever.

Staff impartiality is important “to ensure integrity, fairness and transparency in the election process, build confidence in your election outcomes, and uphold the principles of democracy,” notes Mushata.

Her suggestions for promoting a culture of impartiality among staff pre-election include:

- Training and educating staff and Council/Boards on the importance of neutrality;
- Developing and communicating policies that outline expected conduct and conflicts of interest;
- Cross-training election staff and rotating them through assignments; and
- Requesting those working the election to disassociate themselves from candidates, including on social media.

During Lemke’s time in local government, she says she made a point to explain to managers and staff, particularly junior staff, about the importance of impartiality and maintaining professionalism.

“You don’t know who’s going to be elected. You can put yourself in some very awkward positions as staff,” Lemke says. “It’s important not only during elections but year-round. You can be friendly with your elected officials but you’re not their friend. It’s an employee-employer relationship.”

An established culture of professionalism, supported by clearly defined policies, can help shield staff from unreasonable pre-election requests from candidates. There is also some fortitude required on the part of staff, and particularly managers, to respectfully but firmly decline requests that cross the line.

Lemke once had to shut down a mayoral candidate’s plan to interview all managers so he could determine if they were a good fit for their job. It’s also common for candidates to take advantage of question period and delegation opportunities.

At Peachland and Osoyoos, Lemke recalls, “six months prior to elections, question period was cancelled to prevent it from being abused. We just found it was getting relentless.”

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When it comes to incumbent candidates, establishing boundaries can sometimes be difficult.

“Some elected officials can be really persuasive, trying to convince us their request has nothing to do with their campaign. They may use their Council seat to talk about things related to being re-elected, or try to get staff to conduct research and get information for them,” Lemke says. “You definitely want to get ahead of the game and put policies in place to make sure it’s fair to everyone.”

Evolving candidate attitudes have presented another challenge for staff. Toward the end of her three decades in local government, Lemke saw interest in running for office rise while trust in government declined.

“Candidates seem to seek information from other sources rather than coming to staff, and those sources may or may not be reliable. There’s more mistrust of staff today,” she says. “That becomes a challenge for staff because it’s difficult to predict what kind of questions will be coming at you. You have to be really prepared and think on your feet.”

To manage the uncertainty, regular communication between staff is critical, she says. “You have to talk to each other frequently to make sure the information you’re releasing is consistent. You need to do daily debriefs to discuss what’s happening and who’s talking to who. It’s important to ensure there are always those opportunities for check-ins.”

GETTING A HEAD START ON COUNCIL/BOARD ORIENTATIONS

It can be helpful to kick off some aspects of the elected official orientation process far ahead of the election, starting with the candidates.

Mushata has been a strong proponent of candidate information sessions since she introduced them more than a decade ago. “One of the biggest reasons is setting expectations for the election process, and informing candidates of what will be expected of them should they become elected,” she says.

Topics for candidate sessions may include the election timeline and key dates, eligibility, how to submit nomination documents, regulations governing elections, and the obligations of and compensation for the role.

Judging by the number of people who attend the candidate sessions compared to those who ultimately submit nomination papers, these sessions can help weed out single-issue candidates or those who don’t fully understand the work of local governments.

“Some candidates may not understand where the authority comes from, and what their limitations are,” Mushata says.

Preparation for the post-election orientation should also begin months before the votes are cast.

Mushata believes that a robust orientation for the new Council or Board members is essential to a smooth transition, both for newcomers and incumbents. “It’s important so they can make informed timely decisions, participate in relationship-building and collaborate with their peers.”

Continued on page 15

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The orientation will fill gaps in government knowledge for newcomers and serve as a refresher for incumbents.

Mushata recommends including all department heads as well as key managers who will be presenting to and working with the new Council or Board. “It helps to build that trust relationship, so they know they can trust the information that staff is bringing them.”

Common topics for Council/Board orientations include:

- An overview of local government structure, legal obligations and legislative framework;
- Conflict of interest and the Code of Conduct (or obligations to consider a code if one does not exist);
- Department functions;
- Budgeting and finances;
- Facility tours;
- Media training and communications; and
- Resources and sources of information.

For her part, Lemke advises that orientations should also review existing budget commitments and discuss the potential financial and taxation impacts of new budget items.

“When new projects come on board you have to staff and fund them, so you also need to consider which projects you will drop and the impact of doing that,” she says.

“On the other hand, it’s extremely important that newly elected officials get the opportunity to make their mark and not just be corralled into past decisions that were made. It’s important for them and their supporters, and it’s important for the experience they’re going to have as an elected official.”

Lemke’s approach was to invite the new Council/Board to share their own priorities after they understood the lay of the land, and then discuss opportunities to implement them.

“It’s a balancing act, and every election is different depending on how many new people come in and their personalities.”

LEVERAGING ELECTION OPPORTUNITIES

While elections have their challenges, they also bring opportunities. They offer a chance to review plans and consider new ideas and approaches, as well as educate staff about the election process, their role in it, the importance of impartiality and other aspects of working in local government, Lemke says.

“I always find that if people learn something beyond their department, and seize that, it’s a chance for us to get another person hooked on local government. I’m absolutely passionate about local government. I love it when I see the light go on,” says Lemke, who has held many volunteer roles over the years on LGMA’s committees, Board and MATI programs.

She adds that managers should be aware that not all staff will embrace the changes and challenges that come with elections.

“Be there for your staff and make sure they get whatever support they need to get through election years,” she advises.

ELECTION RESOURCES

The LGMA has been working on a variety of resources and supports to help local governments prepare for the 2026 election.

The Corporate Officer Forum recently hosted a Pre-Forum Workshop on the 2026 General Local Elections.

Upcoming activities include a 2026 local government elections resource page, updated *BC Local Elections Manual*, updated *Elected Officials Orientation Resource Kit*, on-demand online elections course, advanced elections workshops, and three townhalls.

The LGMA Elections Committee also recommends connecting with peers—such as LGMA Chapter colleagues—to share ideas and resources, and explore cost-sharing opportunities.

See Tips & Tactics on page 22 for these and other election resources, and page 16 for election-themed case studies featuring B.C. local governments.



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CASE STUDIES:

Creative Approaches to Election Planning and Engagement

By Cynthia Lockrey

Approaching election planning and Council orientation from a different angle can make all the difference in successful community engagement and Council-staff relations.

Here, three local governments share their insights, starting with the City of Cranbrook's orientation model, which helps Council members clearly understand the role of politicians versus staff. Youth engagement is at the centre of the District of Sooke's Council Club, where children get involved in civic politics. And at the City of Greenwood, a well developed strategic communications strategy led to higher community engagement and voter turnout.

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE THROUGH ROLE CLARITY IN CRANBROOK

Every four years, local government administrators are tasked with onboarding the new Mayor/Chair or Council/Board. This is a process Mark Fercho has refined with staff at municipalities in Alberta and British Columbia, based on the needs of the organization and elected officials.

"Since joining the City of Cranbrook as CAO, I've been fortunate to have a staff member, Tina Babuin, who has taken our Council orientation package to the next level," explains Fercho. "At the beginning of each term, mayor and Council receive a binder that covers everything about their role, and a structured week-long in-person training program."

Fercho believes the key to a successful working relationship between Council and staff begins with a strong Council orientation.

"People get elected wanting to make a positive difference in the community, often with operations experience from outside of government," says Fercho. "Few come with a solid understanding of governance and have clarity on the roles of elected officials and staff. This is why it's so important to help them understand the complexity of local governments and their role. Our job is to ensure they have the tools needed at the beginning of their term to be successful."

"There's a saying: 'If you train your Council to change the lug nuts on a loader, don't be surprised if they want to change the lug nuts on the loader.'"

Role Clarity

The structure of the Council orientation depends on the goals of the organization as well as having a crystal ball in anticipating turnover. What's most important is ensuring there's a strong focus on understanding role clarity.

"Many local governments show too much operational detail and don't nail role clarity," explains Fercho. "When a community is struggling with a Council being too focused on operations and you look back at their orientation, they may have not been given a good overview of their role or too much time was spent introducing Council to operations. As a result, they naturally become operational."

"There's a saying: 'If you train your Council to change the lug nuts on the loader, don't be surprised if they want to change the lug nuts on the loader.' If you can get some of the Councillors to understand their role, they can work together as a group to help the others," adds Fercho.

"The best run communities have a strong political level who know their political role and strong staff who know how to operate the organization."

Field Experience

While it can be easier to hold all the orientation sessions in Council chambers, Fercho says it's more impactful to get out into the community. Wanting to strengthen Indigenous relations and move towards meaningful truth and reconciliation, the 2022 orientation had a full day hosted by ʔaḡam (Aqam), a member community of the Ktunaxa Nation.

This event was held at St. Eugene, a former residential school reclaimed by the Ktunaxa people, who turned it into a resort and conference centre. The day included learning about the Nation's history and creation story.

Continued on page 17

Council members toured the former residential school, hearing from an Elder who provided an explanation on the history of the rooms, stories and more. Time was also spent on building valuable relationships by meeting face-to-face with Nation members.

Recognizing the newly elected Council would be making major infrastructure decisions and undertaking a comprehensive Official Community Plan (OCP) update during their term, their orientation also included field trips with staff to the areas of town that Council would be making OCP decisions about.

“When it came to the major infrastructure updates needed, we took Council to tour the dam and reservoir, learn how drinking water reaches the town, and understand where it goes after use,” explains Fercho. “While it can be tempting to talk about operations, we focused on the process, to give them the information needed to help in the millions of dollars in infrastructure funding decisions they would make during their term.”

“It was important for Council to see the sites, walk the grounds and have conversations there instead of just sitting through a PowerPoint presentation in Council chambers,” adds Fercho.

Political Strength

Cranbrook’s orientation also spends time helping elected officials understand the work required to connect with the provincial and federal governments.

“Some people who get elected think programs, services and funding are distributed fairly and evenly to municipalities,” explains Fercho. “The reality is that municipal politicians need to be strong and get out there and make connections. They need to meet with provincial and federal governments, build relationships and push to get the support their community needs.”

“There are politicians who pride themselves on having low travel expenses. Staying home may save a few thousand dollars, but it may mean the community misses out on millions of dollars in funding.”

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Fercho knows the hard work it takes to build relationships to ensure your community is on the radar.

Having a former Councillor—rather than staff—speak to this in the orientation helps members understand the importance of political strength from a trusted voice who has sat in their seat.

Looking Forward

As every election brings new faces, challenges and opportunities, the City of Cranbrook is adjusting its 2026 Council orientation accordingly. Valuing the importance of role clarity and anticipating some new faces at the table, the focus of the first day will be on gaining a strong foundation by helping Council understand their role.

“Council’s role is to provide the political direction, which staff then implement through the complex systems staff manage,” explains Fercho. “This is much more efficient than a newly elected person inserting themselves into operations and causing chaos internally.”

While there is no universal approach to Council orientation, he feels there are common indicators of success.

“If Council as politicians can understand their role, stay in the political realm and resist the urge to be operational, then we can work more efficiently,” Fercho stresses. “When Councillors go outside of their lane it can cause internal conflict.”

His final piece of advice: Start preparing for your Council orientation now. The City of Cranbrook is already booking speakers and venues for their 2026 Council orientation week. Fercho is happy to share information on past orientations and the new Council orientation binder with other local governments, which they can adapt to meet their needs.

BUILDING TOMORROW’S LEADERS TODAY: SOOKE CONNECTS KIDS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Community engagement is a term that’s used a lot in local government, but it can sometimes overlook the diverse needs and interests of certain groups. While many governments focus their engagement activities on adults, the District of Sooke has taken a different approach—connecting with youth to foster a civic-minded foundation early on.



Raechel Gray

Launched in 2024, Sooke’s Council Club is a program primarily aimed at students in Kindergarten to Grade 3. Held in Council chambers, students spend a fun afternoon learning how people of all ages can engage with their local government.

“The idea of a Council Club was planted by our Mayor, Maja Tait, who is a mother of a young child and has always been involved with local schools,” says District of Sooke CAO Raechel Gray. “She is committed to making youth feel important and that their voice matters.”

After piloting the concept with a local teacher and class, staff created a process to offer Council Club widely to schools in the community.

“In our Council chambers we have two empty chairs at the Council table,” explains Gray. “One chair is for the future generation and the other is for the environment. These serve to remind Council that every decision they are making impacts future generations and our environment.”

A banner for the BC Municipal Safety Association. It features the BCMSA logo (a stylized 'M' with a mountain peak) and the text 'BC MUNICIPAL SAFETY Association'. Below this, it lists 'TRAINING | COR | FORUMS | RESOURCES' and 'virtual | in-person | online'. The main image shows a group of diverse people smiling and waving. Text on the left promotes the 'BCMSA & PWABC Joint Annual Conference & Trade Show' on October 5-7, 2026, and mentions 'BC Frontline Workers Occupational Awareness Training' and 'BCMSA Webinars'. Text on the right is titled 'ABOUT THE BCMSA' and describes its goal to create safer workplaces. Below that, it promotes 'BC FIRE FIGHTER OCCUPATIONAL AWARENESS TRAINING - LEVEL 3' and mentions the release of Level 3 of the BC Fire Fighter Occupational Awareness Training series. At the bottom, it says 'Building on the foundations of Levels 1 and 2, this new level presents seven compelling, real-life interviews with personnel from across the Fire Service, including Dispatch, BC Wildfire Service, Deputy Chiefs, Volunteers, and other key roles.' and shows a photo of firefighting gear. A registration link is provided at the bottom left.

Continued on page 19

Civic-Minded Citizens

This commitment to valuing youth is at the heart of Council Club. While Gray said it can be tempting to focus on sharing the work of local government, this isn't the main purpose.

"We want the time youth spend with us to be a memorable introduction to democracy and for them to leave with an understanding of their role in the community," says Gray. "Our goal is to build civic-minded residents who have strong ties to Sooke."

"Grounding our decisions in future generations is key to creating a safe, welcoming community."

A popular activity is a mock vote where students choose one of three takeaway items. They share their reasons for their choice, listen to others and then cast their ballots.

The item with the most votes wins—and everyone receives it—showing in a fun way how local elections work: every voice counts and the majority shapes the outcome.

"It's great watching them at a young age, seeing how they're already thinking about democracy and debating, but they don't know the words yet," explains Gray. "It helps them make the connection with what happens in Council meetings while bringing it down to something they can understand."

Gray said the Council Club is growing in popularity, with positive feedback from both students and teachers. The kids enjoy the mock voting and playful debates. Teachers value how it brings real-world learning into the classroom. Each student leaves with the group's chosen prize and a certificate for participation—something to proudly share at home to spark conversations with their families.

Community Connections

An unanticipated perk of Council Club is the ongoing connections made with the students. Gray said it's not uncommon for kids to come up to the mayor, Councillors or staff when they see them in the community or at events, remembering them from Council Club.

"This is another opportunity for us to engage with people in the community and an additional benefit of Council Club," says Gray. "Throughout the summer we hold pop-up events at the market as the foundation to our budget process, and at every event we have kids who come over to say hi. This allows us to connect with them again as well as their family members."

Building on these connections, the District incorporates youth-focused activities into broader community engagement. At market pop-ups, participants use stickers to vote on budget priorities.



IMAGE COURTESY DISTRICT OF SOOKE

Thank-you artwork from a participant in the District of Sooke's Council Club, where students learn about their local government and take part in mock votes and debates.

Youth receive a different colour sticker, allowing everyone to see what matters most to kids compared to adults—sparking curiosity and conversation amongst families and other community members.

"This gets them more engaged in our market events," Gray notes. "People love seeing the visual and it's a way to open up more conversations."

Ongoing Learning

In the coming months, Sooke's Official Community Plan (OCP) and the municipal election are going to be hot topics. As staff plan community engagement activities, they're looking for ways to not only engage adults, but youth as well.

"We want kids to understand that the OCP is for them as it plots the future of our community," says Gray. "With any engagement we're doing, we're cognisant on how we capture kids' voices in a way that people can see and track to ensure their voices are heard."

Lessons Learned

When asked what advice she would offer to other local governments considering a similar program, Gray cautions against making it too adult-led.

"Initially we did much more talking," Gray notes. "We quickly learned we needed more interaction. Now we talk while kids are doing an activity—such as getting their stickers ready. We've also pivoted from just doing mock votes to sticker budgeting and role playing, making it more meaningful, as kids need to think more about the issue instead of just raising their hand."

Continued on page 20

While the program is primarily aimed at the younger grades, Council Club has also been presented to a middle school class and high school students visiting from Japan. The same activities are used, but with deeper discussions.

Paying it Forward

When asked what the goals are for Council Club, Gray said she would love to see it integrated into all the schools in Sooke and expanded to other communities. Having seen the success of the program first-hand she knows it's a practical and fun way to educate and engage youth in their local government.

"I would love to hear about some student voting for the first time and saying, 'I remember doing this in Grade 2,' or better yet, running for Council," says Gray. "I'm hoping we can foster good community stewards who have a better understanding of their community and what goes into running it."

Gray is happy to share with other local governments what the District of Sooke has developed and encourages interested staff or elected officials to reach out to her.

BEYOND THE BALLOT: HOW STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TRANSFORMED GREENWOOD'S CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In the 2022 municipal election, almost 60 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot in the City of Greenwood—the ninth-highest percentage in British Columbia, according to CivicInfo BC. At a time of decreased community engagement and voter turnout hovering between 12 and 30 per cent in many municipalities, this was an impressive feat.

When asked about the key to Greenwood's success, CAO Dean Trumbley said it was going beyond traditional communications and connecting with the community.

"One of the benefits of being a small municipality is we have strong connections to local non-profits," Trumbley explains. "These groups helped share election information, increasing the reach beyond the municipality's channels."

"Our Council was also active in getting out and promoting the importance of voting. What tipped it over the edge was the personal touch of candidates encouraging people to vote for change. This included our high-profile mayoral race between two candidates who had prominent standing in the community, drawing increased attention to the election."

Strategic Communications

While the 2022 engagement was impressive, another positive impact was that it marked a turning point in how the local government communicates with its residents—not only during elections but also in its daily operations.

"When I started as CAO at Greenwood, the City had no communications strategy," explains Trumbley. "All of our communications were reactive. One of my first priorities was to develop a comprehensive strategy for how we communicate to the community on projects and day-to-day operations."

"Too often local governments underestimate and undervalue communications. We see it as something to do off the side of the desk. We don't look at how we can turn the narrative around and be more transparent and accountable. Fake news works because we aren't communicating. Many local governments are good at using words like transparency and accountability, but they don't always embrace 100 per cent open communication. This is at the heart of our strategy."

Trumbley strongly believes one of the most important budgets for any local government should be communications. Just like required communications for planning matters, being proactive in sharing the everyday stories about the organization also serves the community.

Multi-Generational Approach

Another key element was looking at the range of communications needs and interests of the multi-generational community. In developing the communications strategy, time was spent understanding how different generations communicate and their preferred tools.



Dean Trumbley

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IMAGE COURTESY CITY OF GREENWOOD
Greenwood, which had 60 per cent voter turnout in the 2022 local election, has introduced monthly townhalls as part of its work to engage people of all ages.

“This was a very eye-opening experience,” says Trumbley. “We realized we weren’t using the tools needed to connect with different generations. There’s no one-size-fits-all approach.”

Part of this learning was understanding that putting a post on the website, Facebook and an ad in the local newspaper wasn’t enough. The scope of communications tools needed to be expanded to meet the needs and interests of different generations, using two to three tools for each group.

New tools added include:

- Monthly townhalls where residents can learn more about municipal projects and initiatives, and have the opportunity to ask questions;
- Coffee chats with Council in the seniors’ hall, providing a more conversational forum; and
- A monthly newsletter that’s mailed to every resident in Greenwood. This has become a popular resource as residents appreciate that the information comes directly from the source instead of learning about municipal matters via a third party.

“As much as we’re in a technology age, there’s still value in face-to-face,” stresses Trumbley.

Social media and website posts help reach an online audience while digital display boards that are updated daily, provide quick highlights to city hall visitors.

“Our engagement has gone up significantly since creating and implementing our strategic communications plan,” says Trumbley. “Everyone from young families to seniors are now more engaged.”

Education Before Rhetoric

Looking forward to the 2026 election, the City of Greenwood is focusing on educating people on the issues prior to the election so they can cast an informed vote. These themes will be woven into all 2026 communications.

“One thing I’ve learned—as much as we think the public understands local government, they do not and we do a really bad job at communicating the work we do,” says Trumbley.

“When I first got here there was a lot of rhetoric on social media. That has stopped. The main reason is we’ve empowered the community with information. It’s hard to create a rumour when people are informed.”

Starting in January 2026, the City of Greenwood will focus on further educating the community on key areas of consideration when casting a vote. This includes asset management, budgeting, policy development, strategic planning and more.

“We’ll give our residents the tools to ask important questions and dive deeper into candidate platforms on core municipal issues,” explains Trumbley. “We want residents to know where candidates stand on these issues before they put an ‘X’ on the ballot.”

“It’s important to stop the popularity contest. Having informed voters also minimizes the engagement on rhetoric and rumours. It’s about going beyond ‘get out and vote’ and helping people understand why their vote matters and the difference it can make for the future of the community.”

Trumbley wants residents to attend all-candidates forums, ask the tough questions and see how much candidates truly know about key issues requiring leadership from Council.

“The City is hoping to shift the narrative from why your vote counts to what you should consider to make your vote count,” Trumbley explains.

This is a small shift that can have big outcomes in the makeup of Council and the future of the city.

Greenwood’s experience shows that when communications are treated as a priority—not an afterthought—communities become more engaged, informed and empowered. As the City prepares for the 2026 election, its focus on education and transparency is paving the way for a new standard in local government: one where residents don’t just cast a vote, but cast an informed vote. This is an investment well worth making.



tips & tactics

Election Resources for B.C. Local Governments

LGMA RESOURCES

- Local Government Elections Information resource page (to be updated by December 2025): lgma.ca/local-government-elections-information.
- Updated *BC Local Elections Manual* with insights, tips, checklists, legislated deadlines and other resources for new and experienced Chief Election Officers, available in December: lgma.ca/manuals1.
- Updated *Elected Officials Orientation Resource Kit*, available in early 2026: lgma.ca/elected-officials-orientation-resource-kit.
- On-demand online elections course in November/December including three townhalls (registration opening soon): lgma.ca/browse-by-topic.
- Advanced Elections workshops in April (registration to open in February 2026): lgma.ca/browse-by-topic.

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES

- Elections Canada polling place suitability checklist: elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=spe/checklist&document=index&lang=e.
- Elections BC Accessibility Plan: elections.bc.ca/docs/accessibility-plan-2023.pdf.
- Information about accessibility resources and funding for local governments: bcaccessibilityhub.ca/resources/resources-for-local-governments/.
- Disability Alliance BC's 2024 election priorities position paper, *Disability Rights is More than a Single-Issue Vote*: disabilityalliancebc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/DABC-Key-Election-Priorities.docx.

CIVICINFO BC RESOURCES

- Register for CivicInfo BC's discussion forum for local election officials (limited to election staff): civicinfo.bc.ca/forums
- Local election results: civicinfo.bc.ca/elections.

PROVINCE OF B.C. RESOURCES

- B.C. Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs circular on legislative changes affecting the 2026 local elections (posted on Strathcona Regional District website): agenda.strathconard.ca/SRDAttachments/SRDBoard/Open/BRD/25-Jun-25/186662_ADM_-Local-Elections-Amendments_signed-final.pdf.
- Provincial Government local elections webpage: gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/governance-powers/general-local-elections.
- Provincial website and guide for Indigenous voters living on reserve: gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/governance-powers/general-local-elections/voting-local-elections/electors-on-reserve.

ELECTION BC RESOURCES

- Elections BC 2026 General Local Elections page and resources: elections.bc.ca/local-elections/2026-general-local-elections/.

The CAO/CO Marriage: A Blessing?

By George Cuff

A theme that has caused me to write rather extensively has been that of the role of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and why it is often misused and confused, undermined, ignored or relegated by some municipalities, often to their disadvantage. That the role is central to the normal performance of local government is clear to most observers, but not all.

The CAO role's principal value, overlooked by many, is as an advisor on policy (i.e., major) issues to their Council. A wise Council would never think of undertaking any major decision without looking for the report on that topic authored by their CAO. They turn to their CAO for advice based on the latter's wisdom, overall experience, proven competence and capacity for seeing and deciphering the big picture.

Among other factors, the confidence of a quality CAO depends on access to quality minds who are trustworthy, competent and loyal. A CAO without the support of their management team becomes a one-note bugler, i.e., some noise but very little music. The key to understanding how this should unfold is the role(s) played by the Corporate Officer (CO). COs are thoroughly steeped in policy, process, codes, and legislation. Their training and ongoing access to useful courses equips them to offer sage counsel to their CAO (and Council).

Competent, professional experienced CAOs and COs are a dynamic duo when each understands there is only room for one in each role and that the support of the other is critical to the longevity of their colleague.

A CAO will take note of their CO who has the fortitude to stand where others might cave, who resists the pressure to become a friend of a member of Council. The CAO will appreciate the support shown by a CO who can readily attest to the zeal for good management exhibited by their CAO through how they chair management team meetings and how they deftly and competently address any sign of unethical behaviour.

A quality and thick-skinned CO will know the key sections of the legislation (and where to find the rest) but will also understand that how these are interpreted is often a reflection of the personality of the CAO.

This is a condensed version of George Cuff's insightful article on this topic. For the full version, please go to <https://ow.ly/nB8150Xfjah>.

Is the latter proactive or reactive? Will the CAO turn to the CO and ask "is there another way by which this section might otherwise be translated?" or will the CAO simply realize that their CO is risk averse and not inclined to seek out a broadly-minded legal counsel who will better answer the question "how can we do this?" as opposed to "are we forbidden by legislation from doing this?"



Thus, the natural inclinations and style of both leaders is often what is at the centre of such discussions. What results from "iron sharpening iron" is the best from both worlds. That is, rather than subservience, a well-placed case of mutual respect can emerge wherein a proactive, high energy and very professional CAO will look with admiration at their CO who has just responded to a query from a persistent member of Council known to be adversarial to management. The CO, always respectful, will adhere to their professional code of ethics and carefully explain what the legislation says and why that is important.

The CO will, where possible, speak in support of the CAO fully understanding that the latter must have a reputation based largely on confidence if decisions are to be made without reliance on a rear-view mirror.

This relationship, based on well-deserved mutual respect, works and is a beauty to behold. For being a witness to that, I am grateful.

—

My consulting career has taken me across North America for the past 45 years and has resulted in over 700 seminars and 450 studies, largely related to local government. This body of experience lies at the heart of what I write and from which I garner some insight into what drives the behaviour of those elected to govern and manage our municipalities.



ASK A MENTOR?



In this regular feature, your questions are answered by local government leaders who share their insights and wisdom. If you have a topic or question you would like a mentor to discuss, please email us at editor@lgma.ca.

GUEST MENTOR ANNE YANCIW

Anne Yanciw has worked in local government for longer than she cares to admit, and has learned many of the lessons the hard way. She enjoys taking a complicated problem and untangling the knots until it makes sense and a solution emerges.

She has been a longstanding supporter of the LGMA and its members, and currently sits on the 2025-2026 CAO Advisory Committee.

What are the positives and negatives of hiring consultants? What advice or lessons learned would you offer?

There are several positives:

- They bring expertise you may not have internally.
- They add capacity you may not have internally.
- It usually results in a more polished final product or document.
- A consultant provides an outside perspective that may not be included if the work is completed internally. They also help us check our biases.
- A report, process, study or recommendation from an outside organization is usually perceived as more objective and accurate by Councils, Boards and the public.

The negatives of hiring a consultant include:

- The cost.
- The time to procure, arrange contract documents, guide and manage the consultant, provide the consultant with municipal information, and review the work.
- Did I mention cost?

My advice is to be as clear as possible in the terms, schedules and deliverables. Review them with the consultant prior to signing a contract. If they seem to be going in a different direction than what you are looking for, address it immediately. Keep in regular contact and get updates.

Make sure the contract clearly gives you ownership of the final documents, and that they are in a format you are able to edit.

What types of projects or challenges have you typically brought consultants in to help with?

Compensation and organizational reviews, CAO performance reviews, technical procurement processes, facilitating Community to Community events (C2Cs) and public consultation, Council governance training, Indigenous awareness training, respectful workplace training, economic recovery, conducting studies, drafting master plans and many more.

What advice would you give to a new CAO/local government manager hiring a consultant for the first time?

Be prepared for the amount of time it will take. Managing the sourcing or procurement of a consultant, defining the scope of work, getting signed contracts in place, guiding and managing the consultant, and reviewing the work produced can be very time consuming. Use your own contract template, not the consultant's and be prepared for the costs.

Overall, it is generally worth it to hire a consultant. Whether you need a professional process, or you need the work to be perceived as objective and professional, or you need to build capacity, or you need expertise, it is generally worth it to work with a consultant.

Have you ever regretted not hiring a consultant? Why?

Yes. I wanted to change a volunteer Fire Chief position to a paid position, and reorganize how the department was structured. Council was skeptical of my rationale, despite benchmarking, solid analysis and methodology in reviewing that role. It was a good reminder that an objective perspective would have been better.



Volunteer Spotlight

Each issue, we profile an LGMA volunteer who is making an impact in our local government communities.



VOLUNTEER PETE NELSON-SMITH

Meet Pete Nelson-Smith, the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) for the Village of Zeballos. Pete resides in Port McNeill with his wife and long-time local government mentor, Heather Nelson-Smith. They have one adult child and three Australian shepherds who attend to the cheese tax. Pete was born in Prince George and over the years has found

himself in exciting locations such as Metro Vancouver, Port Clements in Haida Gwaii, and Alert Bay prior to settling in Port McNeill.

How long have you worked in local government?

By sheer chance, I was given an opportunity to work in the public works as a seasonal employee starting in 2002.

Can you describe your current role?

In the smallest municipality in B.C., my role is very versatile. I hold all of the statutory positions (plus many other non-statutory positions), yet still answer phones and provide museum tours. In communities this small, it's much like being a backhoe—able to do everything.

How does your role differ as the CAO of a small municipality?

There is a much greater “hands-on” approach, as the availability to delegate responsibilities does not exist. This can support a much more organic connection to the people you are serving and provide a personal, in-tune understanding of the challenges and victories.

What other roles have you filled in local government?

I started in public works as a seasonal assistant to the superintendent. After moving to the role of public works superintendent myself, a path I followed for many years, I supported a regional district with some contract project management services. From there, I moved into municipal harbour management and tourism, eventually moving into a Deputy Corporate position, which led to where I am now, as a CAO.

What roles have you filled as an LGMA volunteer?

I have served as Vice-President of the Vancouver Island LGMA (VILGMA) chapter, a member of the 2020 LGMA CAO Forum preparation committees, and I presented at the 2025 LGMA CAO Forum.

Can you share a highlight from your experience volunteering with LGMA?

Seeing the success of VILGMA's 2025 conference—the first one since 2019—I am so proud to work with a group of people who, despite their already busy schedules, are able to take the time to organize an event like this. And then seeing the turnout of local government professionals from around the island.

What is the most fulfilling part of volunteering with LGMA?

Despite the geographical complexities of B.C., the most fulfilling part is that everyone I meet in local government is like family. I have gained many friends who, year after year, offer their support without reservation. And like true friends, when we see each other, we can pick up where we left off like there was no break.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I have far too many hobbies, mostly involving outdoor recreation, but the one that keeps me the busiest, and arguably the most satisfied, is woodworking. My wonderful wife has endured my “shop glitter” for many, many years without complaint and supports this passion, as well as my use of the garage.

Is there a book you read or a movie you watched recently that you loved and would recommend?

I'm currently re-reading *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series by Douglas Adams, a series I enjoyed as a youth and that has not lost its charm as I read it again. For anyone who needs a little silliness in their day, this series is a great way to escape for a bit.

What meal or dish can you eat over and over again?

Heather's Baked Chicken Pesto Tortellini.

MEMBERS PAGE

MEMBER MOVEMENT

Tracy Forster, Director of Corporate Services, District of Elkford. Formerly Deputy Corporate Officer, District of Sechelt.

Vicki Gannon, Deputy Director of Human Resources, District of Oak Bay. Formerly Director of Human Resources, Township of Esquimalt.

Michelle Hunt, CAO, District of Oak Bay. Formerly Deputy CAO, City of Coquitlam.

Dianna Plouffe, Director of Corporate Services, District of North Saanich. Formerly Director of Corporate Services, District of Oak Bay.

Carly Rimell, Manager of Community Planning, City of Port Coquitlam. Formerly Senior Planner, District of Oak Bay.

Donny van Dyk, City Manager, City of Vancouver. Formerly City Manager, City of Delta.

Andrew Young, CAO, Village of Sayward. Formerly CAO, District of Invermere.

RETIREMENTS

David Trawin, CAO, City of Kamloops

2025 LGMA EVENTS & PROGRAMS

November 5-7
Admin Professionals Conference
Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel, Richmond

November 5, 12, 19, 26
Coaching Essentials
Online

November 18, 25, December 2
Minute Taking
Online

November 23-28
MATI® Community Planning*
Harbour House, Salt Spring Island

2026 LGMA EVENTS & PROGRAMS

February 17-19
CAO Forum
Westin Wall Centre, Richmond

February 20-25
MATI® The Successful CAO*
Harbour House, Salt Spring Island

April 12-17
MATI® Advanced Communications*
Harbour House, Salt Spring Island

April 26-May 1
MATI® Leadership*
Bayside Resort, Parksville

May 3-8
MATI® Managing People*
Harbour House, Salt Spring Island

June 9-10
Tradeshaw
Penticton Trade and Convention Centre

June 9-11
Annual Conference
Penticton Trade and Convention Centre

Dates may change. Confirm at lgma.ca/programs-training.

* These MATI® programs are delivered in partnership with Capilano University.

IN MEMORIAM

The LGMA was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of two of our local government colleagues. Add your comments or memories here: lgma.ca/remembering-ron-neufeld and lgma.ca/remembering-ken-dobell.

REMEMBERING RON NEUFELD

This dedication was provided by the City of Campbell River, where Ron was most recently the Deputy City Manager:

“Ron Neufeld—a dedicated public servant, long-time City employee, colleague and friend to so many—passed away on August 2, 2025.



Ron devoted over 25 years of his life to serving the Campbell River community, leaving behind a legacy of leadership, integrity and unwavering commitment. Beginning his career in 1992 as an engineering technician, Ron steadily rose through the ranks to become Deputy City Manager. He played a pivotal role in shaping the City and the community before retiring in 2022.

Throughout his nearly three decades of service, Ron was instrumental in advancing major infrastructure projects, guiding thoughtful community planning and development, and championing community resiliency. His countless impactful initiatives and contributions continue to shape and serve Campbell River.

Ron's legacy is not only one of professional achievement but also of personal dedication. He was known for his loyalty, humility and genuine care for the people he worked with and the community he served.”

REMEMBERING KEN DOBELL

Ken will be remembered for his warmth, humour, love of music, and his deep care for people. Over the course of his distinguished career, Ken served as Vancouver City Manager, Deputy Minister to the BC Premier, Secretary to Cabinet and Head of BC Public Service. His influence can be seen in transformative projects such as the creation of the E-Comm emergency communications system, and the building of the Vancouver Public Library. He is also known for working on infrastructure projects such as the Vancouver Canada Line, Pacific Gateway Project, the Vancouver Convention Centre, and the 2010 Olympics and Paralympics.



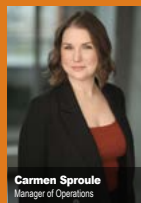
He took a large part in resolving conflicts over the Great Bear Rainforest and the softwood lumber industry. Known for his intellect, compassion, and dedication, Ken inspired those around him to approach public service with integrity, curiosity and heart.

In 2008, the LGMA Board of Directors honoured Ken's remarkable contributions by establishing the Ken Dobell Public Service Education Fund Scholarship. Supported by the LGMA and managed by the Vancouver Foundation, this scholarship encourages students in BC to pursue studies in government administration, Indigenous relations and reconciliation.

At Ken's request, instead of flowers, donations in his memory can be made to the Canadian Diabetes Association or the Vancouver Foundation Ken Dobell Public Service Education Fund.



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