

Be Proactive in Managing Municipal Affairs

Introduction

Leading the team that operates your municipality demands a lot. You have to juggle competing interests, set priorities among equally important matters, and communicate difficult realities, all while addressing the countless needs that arise in your community. When the to-do list piles up, it is easy to become **reactive** rather than **proactive** in your approach to municipal management. Being proactive – looking ahead to anticipate needs and identify problems before they occur – allows your municipality to operate efficiently, minimize stress among your team, and avoid emergencies. Being proactive can also help your municipality save money and safeguard public assets.

As a municipal leader, you should build proactive practices into your municipality's daily, monthly, seasonal, and annual operational cycles. This guidance offers some key areas to think about.

Audits

Confirm that relevant staff members and departments know their respective responsibilities in preparing for planned audits. Adopt a response plan to address deficiencies identified through audits.

Continuity planning

Long-term employees are valuable to an organization, and their departure or extended leave can have a significant impact. Adopt a proactive approach to continuity planning to anticipate the permanent or temporary departure of key employees. Keeping information siloed is never a good idea, so train staff to back up their colleagues, particularly for mission-essential tasks. Prepare operations manuals to supplement your policies and procedures for each department. Documenting employee responsibilities and key tasks is a sign of strong organizational leadership and should be approached in a way that avoids signaling that positions are at risk. Be sure to build staffing forecasts into your budget planning.

Insurance coverage

Maintain a list of municipal assets. Whether your municipality is self-insured or has commercial insurance (or a mix of both), conduct a periodic review to align your coverage with your needs so that you are neither overinsured nor underinsured.

IT updates and upgrades

Your IT staff should be constantly monitoring the effectiveness of the software and hardware systems that your municipality depends on for its day-to-day operations. Check that your IT department is tracking software updates to avoid any lapses that would pose risks to your basic functions or cybersecurity. Plan to periodically upgrade your hardware systems before their risk of failure causes you sleepless nights. As you do for other assets, keep an inventory of your software licenses, expiration dates, and pricing.

Reporting due dates

The beginning of the year is a great time to confirm when key reports or other documentation is due to local, state, and federal partners. A due date that takes you by surprise can lead to last-minute operational stress, reporting errors, and late submissions. To ensure timely compliance with reporting requirements, make certain that each municipal department designates a person to track due dates.

Staff training

When budgets and time are tight, dedicating resources to training might seem discretionary and secondary to other concerns. But make every effort to prioritize training for your staff. Training improves your team's performance and demonstrates your commitment to professional growth and development. A well-trained staff is better prepared to carry out day-to-day functions, respond to emergencies, and plan for your municipality's future. Be proactive in identifying training opportunities for your staff, such as the [OIG Academy's Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official \(MCPPO\) Designation](#).

Website information

A visually appealing and easy-to-navigate municipal website is only as good as the information it provides. Your locality's website should provide efficient and essential tools for your constituents to access information and services. Implement a protocol for maintaining your municipality's website. Include the names and positions of those responsible for making updates. Also identify the departments responsible for periodic and ad hoc reviews of web pages for relevancy, accuracy, and completeness.

Conclusion

This list has hopefully prompted you to think of 10 other areas where forethought and planning will work to your benefit. Be proactive. Add your thoughts to the list above and take action.

When you can anticipate needs before they arise, you will act more effectively and transparently and will ultimately save time and money for your municipality.

*The OIG periodically issues **OIG In Your Inbox: Insights, Advisories and Alerts** as a way to succinctly share timely topics with key stakeholders, most notably the leaders within the Commonwealth's 351 local communities. The OIG hopes that **OIG In Your Inbox: Insights, Advisories and Alerts** will prompt dialogue and needed action on matters important to public entities.*

Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General

Visit Us At

www.mass.gov/ig