

10 *Best Practices* for Newly Elected Officials

- 1. Learn.** Get to know all you can about your community, municipal structure and charter (if any). This includes municipal departments, staff, the local school system and quasi-municipal organizations, such as regional water and sewer districts and solid-waste authorities.
- 2. Cooperate.** You may have run for office as an individual. You may have advocated for municipal change. But you are part of a larger board now, part of a well-established organization. To get the best results, cooperation is essential.
- 3. Prepare.** It is common for new officials to underestimate how long it takes to prepare for meetings and workshops, and even to get ready for conversations with groups of citizens or business owners. Advance preparation will make you more confident and effective.
- 4. Be ethical and open.** You may be thinking, "Of course, I will do that!" But, circumstances may arise presenting potential conflicts of interest that you did not foresee. Challenges may surface that you or your board may be tempted to gloss over. Being 100% ethical, and as open as possible, prevents larger problems from developing.
- 5. Follow the money.** You will quickly come to realize that money and finances will become your most important area of focus. You will need to weigh the importance of providing, or expanding, municipal services versus the desire to keep fees and taxes as low as possible.
- 6. Promise little.** Sometimes, elected officials campaign on a promise or series of promises. Or, upon being elected, they make promises about what they will achieve while in office. This may include promises to campaign supporters, friends and relatives. Be careful with promises.



Maine Municipal Association

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7. **Meetings matter.** You will be judged by your actions at public and community meetings. Practice vigilant self-awareness. How did you look? What did you say? Did you listen as well as speak? Even your dearest friends will view you differently now that you are on the “other side” of the municipal dais.

8. **Be ‘judicious.’** Some of your duties include acting in a judicial capacity – as a hearing examiner or as a judge on matters such as business license applications and building requests. Maintaining impartiality is crucial in this role.

9. **Honor the organization.** Work through the system. If your town or city employs a manager, respect that role. Do the same with department heads. This is especially true with personnel matters. Your major areas of focus should be setting municipal policy and budget priorities, not managing people or details.

10. **Be resourceful.** Use the considerable resources at your disposal. Encourage your staff to do the same. Of course, the Maine Municipal Association tops this list! Other valuable sources of information include: state and federal government agencies and officials; municipal colleagues throughout the state; and, colleges and community colleges in your region, among others.

This handout should be used in conjunction with MMA’s “Municipal Officer’s Manual,” which is written by our Legal Services Department. The manual can be ordered by calling: 1-800-452-8786 and asking for Publications.

For more information:

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www.memun.org

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About MMA

The Maine Municipal Association (MMA) is a voluntary membership organization offering an array of professional services to municipalities and other local governmental entities in Maine. MMA is a non-profit, non-partisan organization governed by an Executive Committee elected from its member municipalities. Founded in 1936, MMA is one of 49 state municipal leagues that, together with the National League of Cities, are recognized at all governmental levels for providing valuable services and advocating for collective municipal interests.