

## Chief Executive Evaluation: Key Things to Keep in Mind

*October 10, 2012 Version*

### Why to Do Them

**Communications Tool.** Performance evaluations are an important annual communications tool for the governing body and the chief executive. The evaluation process provides the governing body an opportunity to step back from day-to-day decision-making and communications to identify goals for the coming year, which is ideally consistent with overall goals and priorities set as part of the agency's strategic planning process.<sup>1</sup>

**Relationship Building.** Evaluations strengthen the chief executive/governing body working relationship and clarify the governing body's collective expectations. In addition, evaluations are the formal mechanism for the governing body to review goal accomplishment during the evaluation period and to discuss future goals for the next evaluation period.

### Resources on Maximizing the Success of Board/Chief Executive Relations

Companion pieces to this tip sheet are available:

- Governing Board Member Strategies
- Board/Executive Communication Strategies
- Chief Executive Strategies

Visit our website at:

<http://www.ca-ilg.org/Board-Chief-Executive-Relations>

### Acknowledgements

This resource reflects the insights and thoughts of a number of individuals, including Kevin C. Duggan, West Coast Director, International City/County Management Association, Pete Kutras, Retired County Executive, Santa Clara, and Principal Consultant, Municipal Resource Group, LLC, Richard A. Haffey, County Executive Officer, Nevada County, and William Chiat, Director, CSAC Institute for Excellence in County Government.

In addition, the following publications are helpful on this topic:

- International City/County Management Association and National League of Cities, *Working Together: A Guide for Elected and Appointed Officials*, 1999; and
- International City/County Management Association and National League of Cities, *Leading Your Community: A Guide for Local Elected Leaders* (2008).

Of the utmost importance, when goals are not accomplished, is a candid discussion taking into account organizational conditions that may have arisen during the evaluation period. Evaluations, while subjective, should strive to motivate performance along with agency and individual growth/improvement.<sup>2</sup>

## How to Do Them

**Agreement on Process.** A conversation to jointly agree upon evaluation process can be helpful. This conversation can include the evaluation's purpose, expectations, criteria, process and timing.<sup>3</sup>

**All Governing Board Members Participate.** Involving the entire governing body in the process from start to finish enables all members of the governing body to talk through expectations and assessments, which is part of the process of giving collective feedback and direction.<sup>4</sup>

**What to Cover.** The evaluation process can address both the "what" and "how" of the results the board has identified as being important for the agency.

- **What Results:** This can include achieving identified goals and priorities for the agency as a whole and for specific programs within the agency, effective use of resources, staff management, and relations with the community and media.
- **How Results Are Achieved:** This can include interpersonal skills in terms of building/maintaining relationships and the agency team, effective and accurate communication, acting consistent with organizational values, leadership qualities, commitment to the organization's success, good judgment, innovation, responsible risk taking, skills, and knowledge.

There are a number of evaluation forms available from the International City/County Management Association ([www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org)) that can provide food for thought on the scope of issues to cover in the evaluation process.

However, over-reliance on forms can impede the open dialogue and forthright communication that are central to maximizing the opportunities presented by the evaluation process.

### Note About Open Meeting Rules and Personnel Evaluations

California's open meeting laws allow the governing body to conduct the chief executive's performance evaluation in closed session.<sup>5</sup>

For more information on the scope of this exception to the state's open meeting requirements (see the discussion at pages 38-39) in *Open and Public IV: A User's Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act* (2010), available

at [http://www.cacities.org/Resources-Documents/Member-Engagement/Professional-Departments/City-Attorneys/Publications/Open-Public-IV -A-Guide-to-the-Ralph-M-Brown-Act-%28](http://www.cacities.org/Resources-Documents/Member-Engagement/Professional-Departments/City-Attorneys/Publications/Open-Public-IV-A-Guide-to-the-Ralph-M-Brown-Act-%28).

**Self-Evaluation Component.** Some of the most effective chief executive evaluation systems begin with a self-assessment. For example:

- Reflect on the goals set in the previous evaluation process;
- Explain steps the chief executive has taken to align staff activities with the board's expressed goals and priorities (with what results);
- Identify areas of perceived strength and weakness; and
- Suggest goals and tasks for the coming year.

**Timing.** Timing of evaluations vary. Some organizations try to time evaluations at the end of the fiscal year/budget process. Others do evaluations on a calendar year basis ramping up the review during the fall and prior to the beginning of the calendar year. Others look to evaluations in the spring as a way to prepare for next fiscal year goals and tie into the budget cycle. Whatever the selected timing, the key is to provide quality reflective time for the process and the communication.

**Staff-Level Participation.** Involving staff in the evaluation process can provide feedback to the board on communication and work product from the subordinate perspective.

Once an executive's evaluation is conducted, it should continue to be updated annually so the board understands trends and changes over time. This assessment may be helpful in understanding employee morale and in assessing productivity and communication methods.

## Next Steps

Building some agreement on next steps into the evaluation process is helpful, including what actions the chief executive and governing body will each take as a result of the process.<sup>6</sup> This can include a discussion of professional development activities.

### Suggestions Welcome

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For more information and to access the Institute's resources on Local Government 101, go to [www.ca-ilg.org/local-government-101](http://www.ca-ilg.org/local-government-101).

The Institute welcomes feedback on this resource:

- *Email:* [jspeers@ca-ilg.org](mailto:jspeers@ca-ilg.org); *Subject:* *Chief Executive Evaluations: Key Things to Know*
- *Fax:* 916.444.7535
- *Mail:* 1400 K Street, Suite 205 ▪ Sacramento, CA ▪ 95814

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## Resources and References

<sup>1</sup> See International City/County Management Association and National League of Cities, *Leading Your Community: A Guide for Local Elected Leaders* (2008) at 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Leading Your Community: A Guide for Local Elected Leaders* at 58.

<sup>3</sup>, *Leading Your Community: A Guide for Local Elected Leaders* at 58.

<sup>4</sup> See *Leading Your Community: A Guide for Local Elected Leaders* at 59.

<sup>5</sup> See Cal. Gov't Code § 54957 (b), which reads:

(b) (1) Subject to paragraph (2), nothing contained in this chapter shall be construed to prevent the legislative body of a local agency from holding closed sessions during a regular or special meeting to consider the appointment, employment, evaluation of performance, discipline, or dismissal of a public employee or to hear complaints or charges brought against the employee by another person or employee unless the employee requests a public session.

(2) As a condition to holding a closed session on specific complaints or charges brought against an employee by another person or employee, the employee shall be given written notice of his or her right to have the complaints or charges heard in an open session rather than a closed session, which notice shall be delivered to the employee personally or by mail at least 24 hours before the time for holding the session. If notice is not given, any disciplinary or other action taken by the legislative body against the employee based on the specific complaints or charges in the closed session shall be null and void.

<sup>6</sup> See *Leading Your Community: A Guide for Local Elected Leaders* at 59.

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