

HELP WANTED:

Young People *for* Public Service

by Frank Benest, Ed.D.



Stop and listen. Do you hear the silence? It's the sound of nobody following in your footsteps. The baby boomers dedicated to public service are quickly approaching retirement age, and far fewer young people are following in their footsteps, creating a large "replacement gap" in the public sector. This gap is particularly pronounced in the professional and managerial ranks, where fewer entry- and mid-level employees are available to step up and lead public organizations into the future.

Young people in Generations X (born 1965–85) and Y (born after 1985) are not nearly as attracted to public service as their baby-boomer predecessors. This is particularly a problem for local government. According to the *Government Employment Report*, local government employs five out of every eight public sector employees.

We in public leadership roles are beginning to address this disheartening trend and are designing ways to draw Generations X and Y young people into the public sector. Elected officials can play a critical role in this effort to attract young people to government service.

What's Behind the Problem?

A number of demographic, political and value issues are converging to create this "quiet crisis" in the public sector. What are these mega-forces at work?

- **Fewer numbers of mid-career professionals.** As baby-boomer managers retire from government, there are demographically fewer young professionals to take their place. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that by 2006, there will be 151 million jobs in the U.S. economy but only 141 million people in the workforce to fill them. Across all sectors, but especially in the public sector, the greatest turnover in aging workers will be in the executive, administrative and managerial areas. In fact, according to the General Accounting Office, 53 percent of the federal workforce will qualify for retirement by 2004.

Frank Benest, Ed.D., is city manager of Palo Alto.

Attracting bright and talented young people to public service is a critical business issue for government.

- **An anti-government bias.** In the 1960s and early '70s, many baby boomers were brought up to consider public service as an honorable, even noble, calling. My mother was a public school teacher and a VISTA volunteer. As a baby boomer growing up, it never occurred to me to select any career other than government service. However, for more than two decades, our national leaders have denigrated public service, creating an anti-government bias. Government work is now seen as bureaucratic, mind-numbing and generally second-rate. Our "best and brightest" have not been encouraged to select public service as a career. *The Wall Street Journal*, for example, recently reported that in the 1963 class of Harvard Law School, 30 percent of the graduates selected government service; in the Class of 2000, only 2 percent did.
- **Different values.** Generations X and Y young people exhibit different values than their older baby-boomer managers. They put more emphasis on having a balanced life and are less open to sacrificing family and other personal interests for career advancement. According to focus groups conducted by the League's City Managers Department, aspiring managers in local government perceive that many senior managers are often singularly focused on work, overwhelmed and abused.

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What Can Elected Officials Do?

A working group of the League's City Managers Department has been focusing on the issue of "preparing the next generation" of public managers. In addition to better grooming younger employees already serving in government agencies, there is a critical need to increase the number of young people entering the "pipeline." The working group identified these strategies for local elected officials:

Stop Bashing Government. For more than 20 years, incumbents as well as first-time candidates for local government office took their cue from national leaders who ran against government in general and public employees ("bureaucrats") in particular. Elected officials need to demand excellence. However, demanding great performance is a far cry from "running against city hall" — which has become the norm in campaigns — and bashing staff is common in many council chambers.

If our elected leaders tear down government, what bright, talented young person today would prefer to work for the public?

Young people don't consider public sector careers because "no one asks them."

Insist on Civility. Elected leaders are role models. Mayors and their council colleagues must act in public with civility and decorum even when there are policy disagreements. Democracy demands public discussion and debate about policies. And, yes, democracy can be messy. But the rough and tumble of a public debate in council chambers should not be an excuse for council members or citizens to personally attack each other. Elected officials must model appropriate policy debate and insist on

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Seven Ways for Elected Officials To "Hook" Teens on Public Service Careers

1. Work with your counterparts on the school board to offer class credit for students who volunteer in local government or other community service. Develop a community service requirement for graduation. Provide a mayor's certificate and an additional graduating tassel of a different color for those who volunteer for public service.
2. Involve young people as campaign volunteers. Orient them to the issues of the campaign. Assign them to develop issue papers of interest to young people. Make it fun and promote it as a resume-builder for college.
3. Recruit one or several young people to intern for you during the summer. Use unspent campaign funds to pay a stipend, or students can use the experience on their resume.
4. Ask the personnel department to develop a list and descriptions of typical local government careers offered through your city. Hand out the list during your next talk to students. Pair up for the presentation with a young professional on staff who can talk about his/her job and how it is possible for young people to also work someday for the public.
5. Organize with city staff a Student Day in Government. Challenge participating students to develop proposals that address a real-life problem troubling the community.
6. Ask your city manager if you can address all the summer recreation leaders and lifeguards at the beginning of their summer orientation. Promote the joys of service and careers in local government.
7. Involve scout groups in local government projects. Encourage scouting groups to offer a badge in government service.

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civility by the public. In fact, council members should go beyond civility to promote a "culture of respect."

Again, why would any young person aspire to a public service career when they perceive that the public's work is often times hurtful and even ugly?

Promote the Rewards of Service.

Elected officials, as well as city managers and other senior managers, don't do a good enough job of promoting the rewards and joys of public life. Public officials do the public's work because, deep in our hearts, we want to build community, improve everyone's quality

of life and simply make a difference. This is especially the case at the local government level, where we can readily see the positive results of our efforts as public servants.

If our elected leaders tear down government, what bright, talented young person today would prefer to work for the public?

The problem is that young people do not perceive these rewards. While a number of recent surveys (including recent studies by Hart-Teeter and the Pew Foundation) strongly indicate that the Net-savvy younger generation wants to contribute to the community, most young people consider only the non-profit sector — not the public sector — as the place to make a difference. Elected officials need to consciously articulate the benefits of public service if we are to attract a new generation of employees.

Reach Out to Students. The recent poll by the Hart-Teeter firm suggests that young people don't consider public sector careers because "no one asks them." Therefore, elected and appointed officials need to reach out to both high school and university students and discuss:

- The nature of local government;
- Careers in local government; and
- The rewards and benefits of public service.

According to the curriculum administrators in my local school district, by the time young people graduate from high school, they have received only a minimal amount of formal instruction in local (as opposed to federal and state) government. The curriculum standards in most states do not require formal

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instruction, and state tests do not assess any knowledge of local government. We must change that. Moreover, most students do not fully realize that local governments employ a large number of clerks, accountants, engineers, human resources professionals, and general administrators as well as the police officers, firefighters, librarians and other professionals normally associated with local government.

Therefore, elected officials are needed to visit classrooms, discuss local government careers and present the wonderful possibilities of public life.

Introduce Teens to Public Affairs and Service. Many public sector professionals were originally introduced to local government through youth involvement and youth service programs operated by city governments. Tried-and-true programs include:

- Volunteer service programs for which students receive high school credit and/or recognition;
- Student Day in Government;
- Youth representatives serving on city commissions and boards;

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Torrance Pilots Volunteer Leadership Training for Teens

The City of Torrance Parks and Recreation Department continues to find "out of the box" solutions to some very challenging issues in today's work environment. During the past few years, it has been increasingly difficult to fill recreation leader positions within the department.

In the summer of 2002, the department piloted a Volunteer Leadership Training class that targeted all high school students in Torrance. This summer class was designed to provide each student with critical job skills and focused on preparing them for a job in a recreational setting.

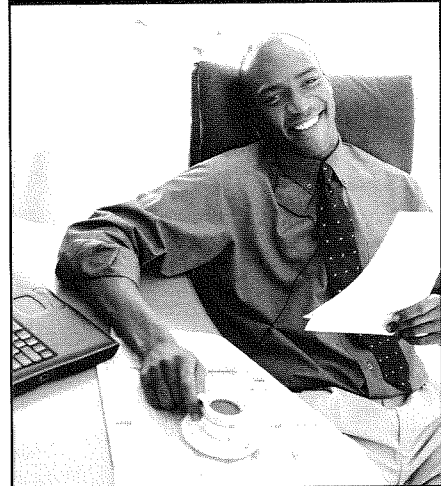
The nine-week summer course provided one to two weeks of intensive training on department rules, policies and procedures; first aid and CPR; how to organize and present a variety of arts and crafts, games and sports activities; improving communication skills; and tips for working with children and adults in various recreational settings. In addition, each student was taught how to prepare a resume and fill out a job application.

During the remaining seven weeks, each student was given a job assignment in different areas of the department to gain job experience and use the skills they had been taught. A job coach worked with them to establish goals and objectives, then monitored and evaluated each student on a weekly basis.

The class culminated with a special graduation ceremony held at the city's teen center. Accomplishments were highlighted in a slide show, and each student received a certificate of completion signed by the director of the Parks and Recreation Department. The cost of the class was \$125 per student, and each student was required to volunteer 100 hours during the nine-week class.

For more information, contact Debbie Reed, senior recreation supervisor, City of Torrance; phone: (310) 618-2949; e-mail: <dreed@torrnet.com>.

Work Smarter, Not Harder!



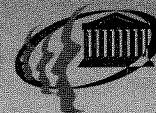
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- Youth commissions;
- Paid and unpaid internships of all kinds;
- Explorer programs tied to police, fire or other departments; and
- "Volunteer" programs, in which teens receive a stipend for volunteering in city programs during summer months.

The League of California Cities and the National League of Cities (NLC) have an inventory of successful youth involvement and service programs. Elected officials can ask city management to contact the League or NLC to do a search of exemplary efforts.

Recently, the working group on "Preparing the Next Generation" conducted focus groups of young local government professionals. These young professionals often were "hooked" into their public sector careers through an internship or a summer job in recreation. (I got my start in public service as a junior recreation leader at age 14.) Consequently, as part of a larger university liaison program, the working group is in the process of developing and promoting a statewide network of internships offered by local governments, so interested university students can get a taste of local government work.

continued

Author Benest To Conduct Session at Annual Conference

Author Frank Benest will speak at a session titled "Strategies for Preparing the Next Generation of Managers" on Tuesday, Sept. 9, 3:30-4:45 p.m. at the Sacramento Convention Center. Enhance your city's future youth recruitment by attending this panel discussion on succession planning, led by Benest. For more information, visit www.cacities.org/ac.

J O B O P P O R T U N I T I E S

CITY OF SANTA CLARITA

The City of Santa Clarita (pop. 160,000) is searching for a Director of Administrative Services. Located just north of Los Angeles, Santa Clarita regularly ranks in the top five safest cities in the nation, and is a premier community for raising families and building businesses. The City has approximately 300 FTEs. The current budget is \$163M, of which \$58M is the General Fund, with an investment portfolio of \$70M.

This position is a key member of the City Manager's Executive Team and has general oversight of Finance, Purchasing, Investments, the City Clerk's Office, and the Landscape Maintenance District. This individual will serve as the chief financial advisor to the City Council, City Manager and other department heads. Candidates should possess a BA/BS Degree (Masters preferred), be creative in finding fiscal resources to fund major capital projects, and have knowledge of municipal bonds. Experienced municipal financial managers at a department head or division level are encouraged to apply.

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DIRECTOR OF LIBRARIES

The City of Palo Alto

has an excellent opportunity for a qualified professional with a successful track record in public library administration and management.

Reporting to the City Manager, the Director of Libraries is responsible for planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating citywide library and information service programs within a five-branch library system. The Library operates within a highly visible, service-oriented municipal organization. Therefore, the new Director is expected to develop and implement new operating techniques and programs to enhance the current level of performance. Specific responsibilities will include collaborating with City departments and the Library Advisory Commission to successfully manage the library system; providing leadership and vision; promoting employee development & retention; managing 54 employees; and developing/administering the Library budget (\$5.0 million annual budget).

Qualified candidates will have a Master's degree in library/information science or related field along with ten years of increasingly responsible public library experience, five of which must have been in a managerial capacity. The ideal candidate will possess outstanding organizational, leadership and interpersonal skills with the ability to effectively interact with people. Experience with, and an understanding of, technology applications in a public library setting are essential. The Director will have the abilities to manage several projects concurrently and to analyze/interpret the needs of the community in order to provide the highest level of library services and resources. Successful candidates will also possess a proven track record implementing new programs and services.

The current maximum annual salary is \$130,020 with opportunity for additional performance compensation. In addition, the City of Palo Alto offers an outstanding benefits package. For more information regarding this opportunity or to be considered, please submit a cover letter with current salary and a resume to City of Palo Alto, Human Resources, Attention: Helen Del Grosso by Monday, October 20th at: 250 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94301; Phone: (650) 329-2376; FAX: (650) 329-2696; or email: helen.delgrosso@cityofpaloalto.org.

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A Legacy Issue

Involving young people in local government used to be a "nice thing to do." With dramatic declines in the total number of young people available or interested in working in local government, attracting bright and talented young

people to public service is a critical business issue for government. As the elected leaders of local government, council members need to think of their role in promoting public service, especially among young people.

Elected officials, as well as city managers and other senior managers, don't do a good enough job of promoting the rewards and joys of public life.

J O B O P P O R T U N I T I E S



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Located in the heart of Orange County, the City of Orange is known as the antique capital of Southern California. Orange is seeking an experienced Finance Director. The new Finance Director reports to the City Manager, and oversees the City's financial management programs, including managing investments, implementing fiscal policies, and establishing fiscal controls. The ideal candidate must have the background and ability to effectively oversee a large, complex Finance Department. Candidates must have at least seven years of progressively responsible experience in public accounting and related governmental financial management with at least three years at the Director or Assistant Director level. A Bachelor's degree in Finance, Accounting or a related field is required; a Master's degree and registration as a CPA are highly desirable.

APPLY BY: Thursday, September 30, 2003

Submit resume along with City of Orange employment application to:
City of Orange, Personnel Services Department, 300 E. Chapman Ave. Orange, Ca 92866

Employment application and flyer may be obtained by calling, (714) 744-7262 or by visiting www.cityoforange.org/personnel/jobs.htm. EOE

Community Services Director, City of Anaheim, CA

Founded in 1857, the City of Anaheim is one of the nation's premier municipalities and California's 10th most populous city. The City is currently searching for a new Community Services Director. The Community Services Director (CSD) will be responsible for planning, directing, managing and overseeing the operations of the Community Services Department including landscape management, recreation and human services, neighborhood services, golf operations, library services and capital improvements. The CSD reports directly to the Assistant City Manager. The Department's annual budget is set at \$42.3 million for fiscal year 2003/2004, including \$11.25 million in capital improvements. The ideal Community Services Director will be a talented manager and administrator. He/she must be a team builder who uses a flexible management style. Collaboration with other departments will be crucial in this role as will the ability to consider the perspective of other departments. A Master's degree in parks, recreation, public administration or a related field is desirable. Extensive and responsible management level experience involving the administration and management of a comprehensive community services program is required. The salary for the Community Services Director is \$112,913-\$150,513. Merit increases are based on performance. The City offers an excellent benefits package. If you are interested in this outstanding opportunity, please submit your resume to **Bob Murray, Bob Murray and Associates**, 735 Sunrise Ave. Suite 145, Roseville, CA 95661, (916) 784-9080, fax (916) 784-1985 or email to apply@bobmurrayassoc.com. Filing Deadline: September 26, 2003. Brochure available.



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Related Resources For Local Officials

Publications about related topics, including the book listed below, are available through CityBooks; phone: (916) 658-8257; online at www.cacities.org/citybooks.

A Guide to Careers in Community Development by Paul C. Brophy and Alice Shabecoff; item #1054; \$18. Community development is described as the economic, physical and social revitalization of a community, led by people who live in that community. This guide presents various career paths and a helpful overview of the field.

wouldn't it be a wonderful legacy for elected officials to engage a whole new generation of young people in public service? ■

New Guide Available Online

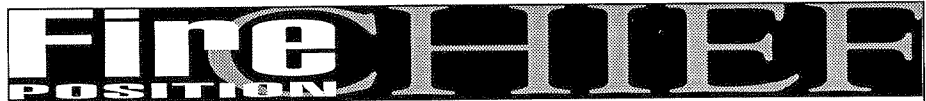
This article is included in a new publication, *Preparing the Next Generation: A Guide for Local Government Managers and Their Successors*, developed by the League's City Managers Department. The guide is being released by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) on Sept. 20, 2003, and can be downloaded free of charge at www.icma.org.

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This is an opportunity to become part of the executive management team of a true world class city. Additional information about Pasadena is available at www.ci.pasadena.ca.us

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