

January 2008 Questions and Answers

Looking to Network

I'm working at an entry level position in a local government. I understand the importance of making connections in order to learn and grow professionally. However, I don't have all the opportunities to attend conferences that would allow me to meet executive level managers. Please advise some other ways to make connections with managers outside of those in my own city. "Looking to Network"

Dear "Looking to Network"

Most counties have monthly manager's meetings where the manager's get together to discuss ideas and issues. This would be a good meeting for you to attend with your manager. **Michael Pleus**

Remain grounded with FCCMA, visit the ICMA website, and network at area chamber of commerce meetings, particularly the government affairs committee. **Anna Lightfoot-Ward**

Probably the best way to connect with managers outside your own City is to participate in the FCCMA Coaching program. There are a variety of resources for networking. First, you can go to the Coaches Gallery and make a connection with any of the managers listed in the gallery. All of these managers are willing to share their experiences and network with those entering the profession. Another option is to participate on the phone panel discussions. This is a great way to hear from the experts, ask questions and then follow up with an email to start networking! Also, there may be a local public managers association in your area. Find out, join and participate. Better yet, volunteer for a committee. You'll get to meet the managers, network and grow your reputation. **Sue Hann**

Breaking the Ice

I often hear that networking is very important, especially for young professionals. I, however, don't know how to break the ice when I meet someone for the first time. I respect experienced managers, and would like to learn from their experience. However, I find myself intimidated by their reputation and experience. I don't know how to keep them interested in a conversation. Please advise. "Breaking the Ice"

Dear "Breaking the Ice"

Oftentimes, I try to see people as equals in general; that they are just as interested in meeting and learning about me as I am interested in meeting and learning about them. If you keep this simple approach in mind, generally the icebreaker and conversation will take care of themselves. The idea is not to impress but merely to converse and allow common interests opportunity to arise.

Anna Lightfoot-Ward

I too had this experience myself. My best advice is to be yourself and to not show off. Ask them about how they got started in the profession. You will find that their experience is probably very similar to yours. Our profession is very kind to young professionals. You will find that most managers enjoy the opportunity to mentor and help those who are interested in public administration.

Michael Pleus

Great question! If you know in advance that you'll be meeting some experienced managers, see if you can find out a little about them or the issues in their community before you meet them. Break the ice by asking about something familiar to them – such as “I read that you had some issues with your fire union, can you tell me more about that?” Or, you can have a few generic questions ready - such as “I'm new to the profession and would like to learn more about how to handle Council relations – can you give me some advice?” Most managers are more than happy to share their experiences – just get the conversation started and you'll learn a lot from them! ***Sue Hann***

Fretting about the Future

In Florida, local governments are going through a difficult time due to the property tax reform. Resources are anticipated to be tighter in the years to come. Many cities and counties have put on a hiring freeze. Being a senior working on my public administration degree, I am worried about my career prospects. I was wondering if I should change my major in my last year so that I feel more comfortable about securing a job upon graduation. “Fretting about the Future”

Dear “Fretting about the Future”

Stop fretting. These cycles come and go and with the number of retirements fast approaching, there will be opportunity for those confident in both themselves and their enthusiasm for the profession. Notwithstanding, know that there are no guarantees in life but what is certain is that everyone should live in purpose, and with the thought that it is not a job but a career of service that is most important.

Anna Lightfoot-Ward

Don't fret – focus instead. Focus on building your skill set to make you a stronger competitor in the field. Do that by volunteering at your local

government, taking some extra classes, or otherwise building your knowledge and experience. Local governments will always need managers, but with tight times ahead, a manager will need to be able to handle more diverse responsibilities. Also, the skills and knowledge you are acquiring in public administration will likely serve you in many other fields – such as non-profit management, teaching, consulting, lobbying and even business management. Even if you can't find a job working for a local government, consider widening your search to occupations that work with local government – so at least you are gaining valuable experience towards a longer term goal of public sector management. ***Sue Hann***