Transparency Through Technology:

How City Managers Can Leverage Agenda and Meeting Management Software to Improve Public Trust and Civic Engagement

City managers in local government are facing a greater set of demands and challenges than ever before. Tight budgets, consequences from state governments, conflicts around planning and development, strained relationships with union groups, and managing conflicting priorities top the list of complex issues that city managers face every day. Using research and insight from the community, city managers serve as advisors to the city council and the mayor.

City managers are responsible for directing a variety of administrative processes that keep the city running. On any given day of the week, you'll find the city manager attending to managing the budget, overseeing city departments, handling internal affairs or interfacing with the community to develop new programs. Depending on the size of the city, city managers may have some number of staff members to help them with their workload. City managers prepare budget reports regarding the fiscal state of the municipality, deliver the information to city leaders and make it available for public viewing.

With so many responsibilities on their plates, it's vital for city managers to do their jobs as efficiently and as transparently as possible. Agenda and meeting management software are vital tools in today's busy local governments. Despite the efficiency and other benefits of utilizing technology to help manage the many important facets of city management, a lot of local governments are hesitant to take the first step away from inefficient paper processes in favor of the multitude of benefits the technology offers to city managers and the communities they serve.

Agenda and meeting management software is the key to improving transparency, inclusivity and civic engagement. By providing ways to enhance citizens' relationships with their local governments, city managers will enjoy a boost to their reputations and heighten the reputation of their local governments.

Paper Processes for Meeting Management Are Outdated, Non-Secure and Inefficient

The major issues of efficiency, transparency, inclusivity and security are exceptionally important to city managers. These are the very issues that suffer most when local governments lag behind the times and forgo the benefits of technology that can help them reap the rewards of the future.

The biggest issue with outdated paper processes is that the workflow lacks consistency, causing inefficiency. If you think about it, each person does what they need to do to get tasks completed. They empty one basket and another one fills up. Each staff member gets their tasks done in their own time as they have the time. Time is a very important commodity in a fast-paced local government office. If a document is in process, there's no way to know exactly where it is in the process because there's no way to track it. Local government staff can waste precious hours tracking down just one document.

City clerks spend many days and weeks putting board meeting packets together for board meetings. If there's a last-minute addition or correction, the clerk must begin all over again — reprinting and re-collating dozens or hundreds of documents. The costs in labor, paper, ink, copier maintenance and other office supplies for putting the books together is excessive. It's not worth the taxpayer's money when there's a far less expensive, more accurate and more secure way to put board books together.

There are risks of human error in making mistakes and concerns over publishing information that wasn't yet approved for public viewing. Once documents get filed, it can be difficult and time-consuming to find the paper copy. If an important document gets misfiled, it may never be found at all.

Transparency is something that gives city managers credibility. That's harder to come by when citizens are trying to get ahold of certain documents, and it becomes painstaking. With paper processes, there's no easy way for citizens to get current or past copies of council meeting agendas or meeting minutes without having to call the city clerk's office and wait until they have time to find them. Once the document has been pulled, citizens have to wait for a call to pick it up or wait for it to arrive in the mail.

City managers also must consider that there are many individuals in the community who aren't able to attend council meetings or to be as engaged or involved as they'd like to be because of disabilities or other hindrances. Council meeting materials may not be available in their native language. Some citizens may lack ADA-friendly transportation to get to council meetings. Those who are blind or deaf may not be able to read documents or hear the discussions in the council chambers. These are all issues that pertain to inclusivity in local government.

The lack of efficiency is a great hindrance for city managers who have not yet made the switch to using technology in their daily work. While the lack of efficiency starts at the top, it trickles down to the other staff members, and ultimately, hinders them all.

The Importance of Transparency in Local Government

The citizens of today expect transparency in local government. By giving citizens access to local government documents, it builds trust in city managers and other local government leaders because it proves they have nothing to hide.

Advancements in technology have made it possible for local governments to ensure full public visibility. Digital solutions for local government are easy to navigate and easy to use, and they're geared especially for differently abled members of the community. The programs have full search capability using a public portal where all the documents, meeting materials and updates get posted in real time for maximum transparency. Citizens can view meetings online using any mobile device. Multilanguage transcripts are also available for citizens whose first language is something other than English.

Agenda and Meeting Management Software Support Inclusivity in Local Government

Digital software solutions support city managers because they support inclusivity. Some people with disabilities have become accustomed to having limited access to local government. Giving veterans, the elderly, and those with physical, hearing or vision impairments access to local government documents and other information helps them to feel and be a greater part of the community in which they live. Digital solutions meet or exceed ADA accessibility standards. In fact, accessibility is the core of the product.

Software solutions for local government encourage accessibility and community participation in council meetings as well as in real-time collaboration for teams on boards, commissions and the council. City managers who demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and expanding engagement through the use of technology prove that they have the best interests of all citizens at heart.

Software solutions for local government offer citizens the advantage of having access to a public portal where all documents, meetings and updates get automatically posted publicly and updated in real time for maximum local government transparency. The citizen portal enables remote access for differently abled citizens who cannot attend council meetings in person. Constituents even have the option of setting up the program so they receive automatic notifications in their inboxes whenever a new agenda or other document is posted for public viewing.

Agenda and Meeting Management Software Create Efficiency

Agenda and meeting management software gives local government staff the ability to drive the workflow in a predictable and transparent manner. Smooth workflows encourage responsiveness from staff. Automatic notifications let them know the status of documents, making it easier for them to follow up on tasks. Automation makes the board and council process much more efficient and effective overall.

One of the greatest advantages of agenda and meeting management software is that it streamlines meeting preparation drastically. Beginning with the agenda, meeting management software pulls in basic information from past agendas and automatically prefills information and formats it. This saves hours in typing every new agenda from scratch.

As information is ready to be added to the board packets, clerks can easily input it electronically and the program updates it in real time. Agenda and meeting management software alleviates the need to print dozens of pages for reports. The program uses a secure electronic file-sharing program that enables clerks to attach documents of any size to the council meeting agenda. If there's a mistake or last-minute addition, the clerk can insert it at the appropriate location and the program will automatically adjust the pages to accommodate it and update the agenda and board books in real time. Clerks can essentially print an entire board meeting packet with one click of a mouse if they choose.

Meeting management software makes taking council meeting minutes a snap. The electronic format for the meeting minutes automatically follows the online agenda. Clerks can update meeting minutes during the meeting. Once the meeting is over, it takes just minutes to clean up the notes and get them approved after the meeting. Automation means that citizens can access the same documents that council members get in a more timely manner.

Local government meeting software contains internal controls so that the right materials get published to the right individuals or groups at the right time.

Real-time updates mean that internal team members and citizens can find archived or previously noted items easily by using an online search.

Mobile accessibility is another valuable feature of agenda and meeting management software that benefits city managers, council members and citizens.

A meeting management software program makes it possible for city managers, clerks and council members to access or edit council meeting documents from any electronic device that has internet access — whenever they choose, wherever they are. Users can also annotate and review documents before the meeting using any electronic device. The software has a modern and intuitive design so that users can enjoy a seamless experience on a laptop, tablet or smartphone.

Members of the public will appreciate having the ability to log in and find the latest updates in real time. The general public can also use the software to view live meetings from any device in real time. It's the closest thing to being there.

Agenda and Meeting Management Software Improves Public Trust

Governments have a long history of fraud, corruption and general bad behavior, which has caused vast mistrust of governmental practices among citizens. People simply can't trust government staff and elected officials when they don't know what's going on.

Agenda and meeting management software gives the public the opportunity to get a firsthand look at the very same materials their government representatives have access to, once they've been approved for public viewing. Having easy access to materials empowers citizens to ask questions and to get involved.

A Modern Governance Approach Ensures Security in Local Government

Good governance is an advantage in today's complex, digital world. Modern governance is the practice of empowering state, provincial and local government leaders with technology, insights and processes to fuel good governance in order to thrive in today's fast-paced digital age. City managers must face governance deficits like visibility, security and speed. When a crisis hits, citizens want to know where the city manager was when it was happening.

According to the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, around 34% of local governments fell victim to cyberattacks in 2018. About 60% of local governments don't keep track of the number of cyber breaches. Just under 60% of local governments don't even know who is out there and ready to attack.

Community by Diligent Creates Transparency Through Technology

Community by Diligent Corporation is a fully secure, digital streamlined solution for meetings that supports agenda management, document collation with status updates, and publication of final meeting materials and minutes.

City managers and council members will appreciate the benefit of having a seamless experience where they can perform all their tasks using one, highly secure platform. Community is a mobile-first design, which is a huge asset for city managers who are constantly on the go. City managers can access Community's platform using a laptop, tablet or smartphone at any time of day or night, regardless of their location. City managers and council members can also use the platform to share cross-platform annotations. Community by Diligent gives hours back to busy city managers by automating routine processes and freeing them up to tend to more important matters within the community.

Without a doubt, agenda and meeting management software makes the decision-making process in local government more effective.

One of the many reasons that city managers may be hesitant to make the switch to technology is that they're afraid it will cause too much downtime for training staff on the program. The program designers at Diligent Corporation considered this when they set up the program, which has updated UX and UI based on extensive customer research. UX refers to user-experience design and UI stands for user-interface design. Essentially, that means that Community by Diligent is intuitive and user-friendly. Local government staff and council members will quickly get acquainted with the program and local governments won't have the worry over unnecessary downtime.

Community by Diligent is a game-changer for city clerks. The platform will save them hours, days or weeks in preparing council meeting materials and meeting packets. City managers, council members and other council meeting participants can all access their board books online, which also cuts way down on mailing and distribution costs. Community alleviates the concerns over attaching lengthy reports or having papers come loose and getting lost. Many local governments have chosen to provide electronic tablets to their council meeting attendees. Having the ability to make annotations and share them directly online means that council meetings can proceed using a totally paperless process. Meeting participants can easily find archived documents and previously noted items using the search function.

Some local governments find that it's helpful to have at least one completed paper copy of the council meeting board book. Where that is the preference, clerks can print the entire board packet with one click.

Community also features internal controls so users can be sure they're always posting to the right group at the right time. There is less risk of human error.

The public will enjoy the many benefits of being able to access documents and meeting materials from the comfort of their own homes or anywhere else they happen to be. The mobile-first technology makes that possible. Community surpasses the concept of accessibility to focus on inclusivity, which encourages full community engagement. Community by Diligent surpasses WCAG 2.1AA compliance requirements, which is the new standard for accessibility. This feature means that Community is fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Community by Diligent is the Modern Governance Approach to Transparency Through Technology

The most efficient, mobile and inclusive modern governance solution to better serve your community is Community by Diligent. It's a secure digital platform that enables city managers, council members and local government staff to achieve excellence in modern governance. It supports responsiveness to their constituencies through an integrated set of technologies, insights and processes that leverage Diligent's deep experience in offering digital governance solutions to public and private organizations of all sizes.

To learn more about Community by Diligent, contact us today:

Call: 800-407-0141
Email: Community@diligent.com
Visit: www.diligent.com/community