

Governance Symposium

Introduction to the Local Governance Symposium

Douglas M. Ihrke – University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

It has been an honor to work on putting together the first local government governance symposium for the *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs* (JPNA). The idea of bringing together a group of papers on this important topic had been germinating in my mind for a number of years, and it is exciting to have it come to fruition with this edition of JPNA. While we know a great deal about what does and does not work with regard to the day-to-day running of local government, we know relatively little about governing our local institutions, and hopefully this symposium can shed light on successful practices when it comes to governing.

The paper that I wrote with Mike Ford attempts to look at governing “models” used by school boards. We surmise that the vast majority of school board members know little, if anything, about different models of governing, but our hope was that, by asking them questions about the processes they used to make decisions on their boards, we could begin to develop a measuring tool based upon what the literature informs us are basically models of governing. Admittedly, the two of us had to borrow from the nonprofit literature to make this happen, and, while we think our findings are interesting, we know we need to do more work in developing our measures of the use of different governing models by local governments.

The second paper, written by Karl Nollenberger and James Simmons, examines the continuing evolution of the structural forms that communities across the country are adopting to help them govern. Here these authors look at the unique case of Wisconsin municipalities, which have adopted mainly the mayor–council with administrator form instead of the pure council–manager form. This adaptation of the mayoral form has produced most of the desired results expected by the reform movement. While the council–manager form of government constitutes only a small minority in Wisconsin compared with over half of U.S. cities, the adoption of a professional administrator in the mayor–council form constitutes two-thirds of state municipalities compared with one in six cities nationwide. Thus, with the adoption of various forms of adapted professionalism in its cities, Wisconsin has managed to achieve many of the substantive objectives of municipal reform without all of its formal structural features.

The third and final paper, written by the late Vera Vogelsang-Coombs, William Denihan, and Melanie Baur, offers a unique look on two mayoral-led public–private partnerships designed to renew good government in Cleveland, Ohio: Mayor George Voinovich’s Operations Improvement Task Force (OITF) (1979–1982) and Mayor Frank Jackson’s Operations Efficiency Task Force (OETF) (2006–2009). The Voinovich OITF public-private partnership enabled Cleveland to “come back” after the city’s 1978 default. The Jackson OETF public–private partnership successfully right-sized Cleveland in relationship to its much smaller population needs during challenging economic times without disruptions in service. The case studies highlighted in this paper on governing through public–private partnerships are important, as they offer lessons for scholars and practitioners interested in learning more about how to collaborate in times of fiscal constraint and divisive politics.

Each of the three papers in the symposium looks at different aspects of governing in our local communities. Each paper has a different emphasis on governance, yet all three provide useful lessons for those of us trying to understand governance and why it matters to the future of our communities. More research needs to be done in each of the major areas of governance covered

by these papers, and my hope is that readers will be inspired to build off these works in their own research.

Again, it has been an honor working on this local government governance symposium for JPNA. Should you have an interest in participating in future symposia on this topic, do not hesitate to contact me with your ideas.

Sincerely,
Douglas M. Ihrke
JPNA Symposium Editor