



Understanding the Political Climate


and how you can influence it!

Reflect - Renew - Revive
FRPA 2016 Annual Conference
John F. McCarthy

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Why even try to understand politics?

- As leaders in parks it is our job to *get things done*.
- *Things get done* when Elected leaders and Community leaders embrace strategies that make sense to them.
- To serve the community *you* must optimize your relationships and leverage partnerships.



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Introductions

Please share quickly...



- Who you are
- What you do and where you do it
- Why you signed up for this session
- What is your biggest political challenge?

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Learning Objectives

- Understand the nature, value and challenges of commission, council and advisory board relations.
- Explore the Fundamentals of strategic decision making and how to be nimble while considering hidden risks.
- Discuss and understand how a shared strategy can enhance long-term success, *for you, your agency and the community.*



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Aristotle's "politics"

- "The philosophy of human affairs"
- From the word "*polis*" meaning city
- Politics: "the things concerning the city"



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Politics at multiple levels

Global Politics

National Politics

State Politics

Local Politics

Neighbor Politics

Office Politics



It's how we govern

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What does your political environment look like?

County Commission
City Council



Advisory Boards

Chamber of Commerce

Sports Commission

Neighborhood Groups

Partner Organizations

Special Interest Groups



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My life in politics...

As Parks Director, I was responsible to:

- › One county commission
- › Three city commissions
- › One town commission
- › Four parks advisory boards
- › Several major homeowners associations
- › Dozens of user groups
- › 350,000 residents



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Your Political Universe

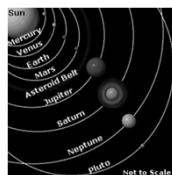
Worksheet No 1.

What political worlds do you work within?

List specific examples and role

Be prepared to share!

5 Minutes Please



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Group Activity

- › Compare notes from worksheet No 1.
- › Draw a picture of your political world

10 minutes and then report out.



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Know Your Leaders

Knowing the background and interests of elected leaders can help you to:

- › understand their perspective on issues and policies
- › be able to find common ground
- › gather support for your mission



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Getting to know the Commissioners

- › Where are they from?
- › Where do they live?
- › What occupation?
- › What are their non-profit interests?
- › What board actions are they involved with?
- › What kind of questions do they ask?
- › What puts a smile on their face?



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Knowing the expertise of board members

- You can expect attorneys to get into the details of legal documents
- You can expect insurance folks to be concerned about insurance details
- You can expect a former school teacher to be in favor of after-school programs
- You can expect someone from an under-served area to ask for more attention
- You can expect the board member whose husband is a plumber to be concerned about the costs of the new restroom.



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Know Your Leaders

Worksheet No 2.

What experience do they bring from the past?

What are they presently focused on?

What will be their legacy?

5 Minutes Please



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Work as a team to gather information

Pair up with someone and review how well you know your commissioners

Google up some intelligence to help you know them better.

Discuss how knowing a leader's interests can help you in your work.

10 minutes please!

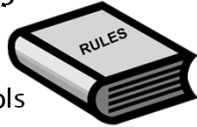


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Knowing our boundaries

Organizational policies

- Communication protocols
- County charter guidelines
- Management expectations



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Getting to know the movers and shakers

Its not (just) what you know, its *who you know!*

How do you cross paths with community leaders? Do you...

...belong to a civic group,
volunteer,
attend events?



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People I met under difficult conditions



- New Name – New Sign – by-passed staff, commission assumed staff in the loop, lots of issues, found another way to think about it, began a new relationship.
- Dock permit – frustrated owner, worked with him, patronized his root beer stand, now he is a commissioner!
- Eco playground controversy – Big Tom

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Community Power Brokers

- › These are the people who get things done in the community.
- › Some are highly visible, others are more behind-the-scenes.
- › They are often associated with a particular cause or initiative.
- › Having their support is valuable.



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Community Power Brokers

Worksheet No 3.



Who admires you in the community?

Who are some of your community's movers and shakers?

How do you invite them to participate?

5 Minutes Please

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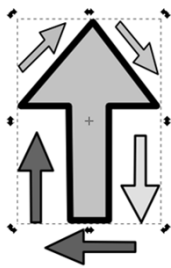
Group Activity

- › Compare notes from worksheet No 3.
 - › How can you use these relationships to advance your work?
 - › Discuss the benefits of having advisors
- 10 minutes and then report out.



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Shared Strategies



The Community
The Leaders
The Department
The Partners
The Community

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Strategy



A combination of wisdom, science and skill

First documentation of *strategy* "The Art of War" – 400 BC China

"Strategems" – "tricks of war" – 330 AD Greece

La Strategique – Count Guibert – 1799 France

"Corporate Strategy" – H. Igor Ansoff – 1965

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Strategy

The development of strategy requires the courage to accept uncertainty.

You will never have all the information you need.

Strategies can express a paradox

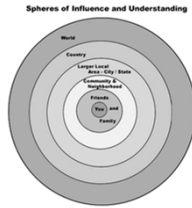
Tactics – shorter range actions



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Start with the community

- › What are the desires and needs of the community?
- › Community meetings to listen
- › Build relationships
- › Share results
- › Work together



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Be a diplomat!

- › Be open to community
- › Be known for open mind
- › Be friendly and firm
- › Know your boundaries (legal, ethical, policy)
- › Work toward solutions
- › Celebrate success by giving credit to others



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Strategic Communications

Keeping leaders in the loop

- › Each commissioner is provided the same information
- › Administration has the information first (no surprises)
- › Timing of information release can be critical
- › Keep good news in front of the board.



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Presenting for understanding

- › Earn respect at the podium
- › Provide information in a way that everyone can understand
- › Listen carefully to questions
- › Do not try to judge questions/don't get defensive
- › Provide an upbeat message
- › Be open and flexible where you can



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Put your best foot forward

- › When asked status...we often feel pressured to just answer the question
- › I find it helpful to provide background (not too much)
- › Answer question directly – then add more they need to know.
- › Often they are not asking the right question
- › So get them the information they need, even if they don't know it.



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Commissioners often just need a place to hang their hat

- › Make sure the commissioners have the answers to the questions that are being asked.
- › Provide them with several reasons why
- › Every social event they attend is an opportunity for people to try to pin them down
- › Be timely with requests for information
- › Give what you can – follow-up with more
- › If you delay too long...lose control



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Strategic Elements

Choosing your battles



- Sometimes you have to not sweat the small stuff...
- Look for ways to influence the outcome
- Build a relationship even if you don't get what you want.



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Be aware of what else is going on

- Too many issues at once (examples)
- Need to think about how that one controversial move relates to other issues.
- Staff may not be looking beyond their unit
- Managers may not be looking beyond PR
- Managers and directors need to keep eye on entire county, and other counties!



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You are in the drivers seat...until you are not!



- Do all you can to address issues and build relationships so folks won't feel the need to "take it higher"...
- When a division can't resolve issues escalate to director - with precious little time to act, decision may not be popular with everyone.
- But whoever is complaining "lost control"

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What political challenges do you face?



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Political Challenges

Worksheet No 4.

Biggest Challenge

What is your biggest political issue?

What direction is it moving and what is your role?

Be prepared to share!

5 Minutes Please

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Group Activity



- Compare notes from worksheet No 4.
- Is there any commonality among the issues?
- Are there any patterns?

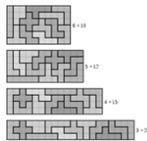
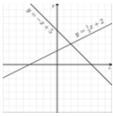
10 minutes and then report out.



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Strategic solutions

- › Who is involved?
- › What are the options?
- › What are the strength and benefits?
- › Create win - win - win solutions



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What did I do?

- › Listened to commissioners to understand what their interests were
- › Worked to understand each commissioner's sensitivities/sensitive issues
- › Recognized that while we only needed "3 votes" it was better to have all votes.
- › Maintained close communication with administration



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Political Sustainability

- Understanding the timing of things
- › "its an election year"
 - › Things get crazy
 - › Scrambles to "get things done"
 - › Requests for "what's going on" (so they can share the good stuff with groups)
 - › Great opportunity to draw attention to parks
 - › Groundbreakings - grand openings



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The Budget Cycle



- › Be mindful of the budget cycle
- › Our commissioners used the budget workshop to talk about whatever was on their mind – the latest emails..
- › Minimize crisis leading up to budget
- › Endear them so they don't cut you so much

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Be a Translator

- › May have to dig deeper to really understand where people "are".
- › Conversation is one of the only ways to do that.
- › Find what you have in common
- › Develop a plan with multiple outcomes
- › Be clever



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Be a Connector

Develop broad connections in the community

Get to know people through:

- › Public presentations
- › Participating in organizations
- › Getting involved with projects
- › Being in the media!



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Be a Diplomat...

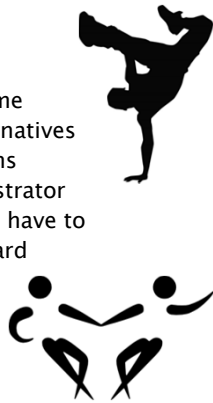
- › Always take the high road
- › Always be courteous
- › Put your foot down when you must (Payne Park Holiday)
- › Approach opposition and keep conversation going
- › This way you build relationships
- › Earn respect
- › Engage processes that are fair



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Be Nimble

- › Know when to turn on a dime
- › Know when to provide alternatives
- › Explore intermediate options
- › Keep an eye on the Administrator
- › Know when to let go, if you have to
- › Learn to dance with the board
- › Know when to stand firm



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Be a Facilitator

- › Orderly processes for engaging opinions
- › Maintain respect for all participants
- › Do not get defensive
- › Be open to new ideas
- › Look for win - win- wins



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You need some help!



Support for director and staff in presentations

- Monitor public email – now you know why someone is asking – and maybe you now know how to respond.
- Have someone to scrutinize where you are going.
- Think ahead and have some options approved through Administration/Legal etc. May not be final, but have some sense of viability.

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Strategic Solutions



Worksheet No 5.

What information do you need?

Who can help?

What is the range of options

What do leaders need to support?

Be prepared to share! 5 Minutes Please



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Group Activity



- Compare notes from worksheet No 5.

- What strategy will you employ to address one of your issues?

10 minutes and then report out.



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Expanding Your Brand

Worksheet No 6.

Civic Involvement?

Dress?

Thought Leadership?

You are known for...

Be prepared to share! 5 Minutes Plea



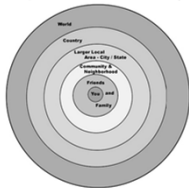
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Growing your influence

- › Network in the community
- › Earn trust from community leaders
- › Accomplish more for your community



Spheres of Influence and Understanding



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Developing your brand

- › How you are known
- › How you interact
- › How your dress
- › Who you associated with
- › How people know you
- › Social Media Presence
- › The professional park manager
- › Worksheet – expanding your brand...



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Help your Commissioners feel the Power of Parks

- › South Venice Gardens playground
- › Opened eyes to how much the community valued, thus commissioner became more of an advocate.
- › Soon, support for more park projects
- › Parks are one of the most popular ways for commissioners to relate to their constituents.



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Long-term success

- › Focus on good listening
- › Get to know the players
- › Build relationships each day
- › Build your role in the community
- › Use strategy to solve your problems
- › Provide value to the commissioners
- › Use your influence to make things better in your community!



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