

William C. Statler

Fiscal Policy ■ Financial Planning ■ Analysis ■ Training ■ Organizational Review

TRAINER EXPERIENCE

Bill Statler has provided highly-rated management and financial training for many years, both in the “third act” of his career as a consultant, author and trainer, and when he was the Director of Finance & Information Technology for the City of San Luis Obispo. The following summarizes training agencies and topics, followed by program descriptions.

Agencies

As outlined below, I have provided training for a broad range of agencies, including:

- League of California Cities
- Institute for Local Government
- California Debt and Investment Advisory Commission
- Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA)
- California Society of Municipal Finance Officers (CSMFO)
- Municipal Management Assistants of Southern California and Northern California
- Probation Business Managers Association of California
- National Federation of Municipal Analysts
- Humboldt County
- California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions
- American Planning Association

Topics

The following provides an overview of the financial, management and leadership topics I have presented, followed by a short program description for each.

- Financial Analysis and Reporting
- Fiscal Health Contingency Planning
- Effective Project Management
- Providing Great Customer Service in Internal Service Organizations: The Strategic Edge
- Strategies for Strengthening Organizational Effectiveness

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- The Power of Effective Meetings in Achieving Your Organization's Goals: Smart Uses of Electronic Scheduling
- Multi-Year Budgeting
- Telling Your Fiscal Story: Tips on Making Effective Presentations
- Effectively Using Visual Aids in Making Great Presentations
- Effective Report Writing
- What Happened in the City of Bell and What We Can All Learn from It
- Transparency in Financial Management: Meaningful Community Engagement in the Budget Process
- Preparing for Successful Revenue Ballot Measures
- 12-Step Program for Recovery from Fiscal Distress
- Strategies for Downsizing Finance Departments in Tough Fiscal Times
- The Power of Fiscal Policies
- Debt Management: Taking a Policy-Based Approach to Protecting Long-Term Fiscal Health
- Top-Ten Skills for Finance Officers
- Financial Management for Non-Financial Managers
- Financial Management for Elected Officials
- Long-Term Financial Planning
- Budgeting for Success Among Uncertainty: Preparing for the Next Downturn
- Top Challenges Facing Local Government Finance Officers
- Integrating Goal-Setting and the Budget Process
- Benchmarking: Key Tool for Measuring Performance and Assessing Organizational Effectiveness
- Fiscalization of Land Use
- Taking a Policy-Based Approach to Setting User Fees

Program Descriptions

Financial Analysis and Reporting

This program provides practical advice, with helpful examples, on how to improve your analysis of financial information and effectively present the results, in both annual reporting (such as comprehensive annual financial reports) as well as interim financial reporting. Depending on the time available, this could also include an overview of generally accepted accounting principles, which form the basis of annual reporting.

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Fiscal Health Contingency Planning

Drawing on the experience of the City of San Luis Obispo, this program presents the value of preparing plans for responding to adverse fiscal circumstances before they hit. While the City was certainly not immune to financial downturns, having a strategy in place allowed it to navigate through very tough fiscal times in a way that just would not have been possible without it: the City was able to maintain its long-term fiscal health while preserving its organizational vitality.

Effective Project Management

While it may seem like project management is the domain of the engineering staff, the fact is that finance officers are responsible for developing and executing projects all the time, including new financial management systems, audits and annual report preparation and the budget process. It may be cliché, but it's true: failing to plan is planning to fail. When projects go badly, it is due to one of two causes (or a "perfect storm" combination of both): poor planning or poor implementation of the plan. This session will provide practical tips on how to better manage projects through more effective planning and follow-up execution of the plan.

Providing Great Customer Service in Internal Service Organizations: The Strategic Edge

We often think that customer service happens by the "operating departments," and that internal service organizations like finance, human resources and information technology only touch on the periphery of this mission at best. However, the fact is that internal service organizations should be the vanguard of any organization-wide customer service improvement efforts. Stated simply, no one in the organization is going to take "external" customer service efforts seriously if they receive poor customer service internally. This session provides tips on how internal service organizations can lead the way in delighting their customers with the services they provide while also meeting internal control and fiscal health responsibilities.

Strategies for Strengthening Organizational Effectiveness

Given the resource constraints facing us in the "new normal," being effective and efficient in the delivery of services is more important than ever. An added pressure in doing so is the retirement of baby-boomers and related need for succession planning. This session will present practical tips that you can begin using right away in strengthening your organization's effectiveness.

The Power of Effective Meetings in Achieving Your Organization's Goals: Smart Uses of Electronic Scheduling

Organizations exist to bring groups together to achieve goals that cannot be accomplished by individuals working alone. Groups working together looks a lot like ... meetings. Yet, we all tell stories around the campfire about how we hate them! The fact is that meetings – employees working together – are essential for organizational effectiveness. This session will focus on how to make meetings more effective and rewarding for the participants, with a special focus on how e-calendaring applications like Outlook can be effective productivity tools (instead of the time-wasters they can often seem to be).

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Multi-Year Budgeting

The City of San Luis Obispo prepared its first two-year Budget and Financial Plan in 1983, and has continued to use it as one of its core tools for fiscal planning and budget decision-making ever since, both in good times and bad. This session will describe the City's thirty-plus years of experience with this approach, including:

- What are the benefits of multi-year budgets?
- What are the potential downsides?
- What underlying concepts need to be in place to realize these benefits?
- What should other agencies consider in moving to a multi-year budget?

Telling Your Fiscal Story: Tips on Making Effective Presentations

An essential part of an effective finance officer's job is communicating complex numbers to elected officials, senior managers, the organization and the community. The secret to success is simple: don't try to communicate complex numbers; instead, communicate what they mean. This program will present "8 Tips" in making more effective presentations and better telling your fiscal story, both orally and in writing.

Effectively Using Visual Aids in Making Great Presentations

Visual aids can make almost any presentation more compelling – if it's the right visual aid, used in the right way. A picture is worth a thousand words – if it's the right picture. Effective use of visual aids is more than just PowerPoint. This session presents key tips on the right kinds of visual aids to use given the circumstances, and how to use them most effectively in telling your story.

Effective Report Writing

Whether it's a report to the governing body, senior managers, your boss or an email to your fellow employees, being able to effectively communicate in writing is an essential skill at all levels of the organization. This is especially true in the public sector, where transparency is critical – and clear writing is the window into how and why decisions are made. This program will provide tips on how to make your report-writing more effective in "telling your story."

What Happened in the City of Bell and What We Can All Learn from It

Bill Statler received the Cal-ICMA Award for Ethics for his service to the City of Bell in the aftermath of well-publicized scandals. This session will provide an overview of what happened in Bell, its journey of recovery and "lessons learned" for all us from his experiences there.

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Transparency in Financial Management: Meaningful Community Engagement in the Budget Process

A smart city manager once observed: “With trust, anything is possible; without it, nothing is.” An important component in building trust – and being accountable for the public resources that have been entrusted to us – is being transparent in our stewardship of agency finances and meaningfully engaging the community in the fiscal decisions that affect them, like the budget process. Effective public involvement encourages residents and businesses to better understand the hard choices that budgeting entails and provides policy-makers with a better understanding of the services that the community values. Moreover, increased public understanding about local agency finances and challenges, can lead to greater support for budgetary decisions as well as for measures to increase effective use of local revenues. This session will provide tips based on the successes of a wide range of communities in improving transparency and effectively engaging their communities in the budget process.

Preparing for Successful Revenue Ballot Measures

This session will provide key tips on strategies used by local agencies throughout the state in preparing for successful revenue ballot measures.

12-Step Program for Recovery from Fiscal Distress

The GFOA has developed a “12-step” program that provides a practical road map for agencies to recover from fiscal distress, leading to fiscal sustainability. This program will describe the GFOA’s 12-step program, using the City of San Luis Obispo’s Fiscal Health Contingency Plan as an example of how this can be an effective tool for recovery and sustainability.

Strategies for Downsizing Finance Departments in Tough Fiscal Times

In the wake of retirements and budget shortfalls, finance officers are being asked to reduce staffing and other operating costs in their own departmental budget while at the same time taking a leading organization-wide role in coping with fiscal challenges. How can finance departments best meet their organization-wide leadership role in terms of how they propose and manage cuts within their own department? What are some “lessons-learned” by other agencies in making reductions strategically based on value-added services, rather than reactively via across-the-board cuts? And what are some strategies for finance departments in balancing cuts with internal controls and customer service?

The Power of Fiscal Policies

Good times come and go, but your values shouldn’t – which is what fiscal policies are all about. Setting clearly articulated fiscal policies builds a strong foundation for protecting your agency’s long-term fiscal health. As recent economic events have shown, no agency is immune to economic downturns. But agencies with clear fiscal policies in place with a tradition of following them have a significant strategic edge over those that don’t. Policies make tough decisions easier by providing guidance both when times are good by preventing problems to begin with, as well as when the inevitable tough times do arrive. This program provides practical insights and examples of how you can strengthen your agency’s financial condition and improve fiscal decision-making through the power of policies.

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Integrating Goal-Setting and the Budget Process

At the end of the day, by allocating limited resources, budgets determine what will get done, and perhaps more importantly in lean fiscal times, what won't. This will happen whether the process is intentional in achieving this result – or not. Stated simply, the fundamental purpose of an effective budget process is to link what the agency wants to achieve over the upcoming budget period with the resources needed to do so. Most agencies have adopted many long-term goals through a variety of policy documents and plans – such as the General Plan (and its many related elements such as land use, circulation and housing), water and sewer master plans, pavement management plans and other long-term plans. “Someday” the agency will accomplish all these goals. However, with limited resources, some process must be developed for evaluating priorities and determining which of these goals will be accomplished in the upcoming budget. This session will describe an approach used by a few local government agencies in linking goals with resources via the budget process, in both good times and bad, that:

- Identifies the most important things for the agency to accomplish for the community.
- Establishes organizational responsibility and reasonable timeframes for achieving them.
- Allocates the resources needed for programs and projects to implement them.

Debt Management: Taking a Policy-Based Approach to Protecting Long-Term Fiscal Health

As we've learned from the recent bankruptcies in California, appropriate use of debt in funding important services is a critical factor in ensuring your agency's fiscal solvency and protecting its long-term financial health. As a smart city manager once observed: “any idiot can borrow money; the genius part is paying it back.” This session will provide a policy-based approach to determining when taking on debt to finance important projects is appropriate – and when it isn't.

Top-Ten Skills for Finance Officers

Of course, councils and city managers are looking for technical competency in their finance officers. But they are also looking for finance officers who can bring strong leadership and other key “soft skills” to the table. This session presents the “top ten skills” that finance officers need in meeting the needs of their communities.

Financial Management for Non-Financial Managers

Finance departments are not the only group responsible for an agency's fiscal health and operations: this is an organization-wide responsibility. This session will not develop “subject matter experts” in local government finance. However, participants will leave with a basic understanding of the core principles of local government financial management and their stewardship responsibilities in protecting public resources and preserving their agency's long-term fiscal health.

Financial Management for Elected Officials

One of the most important roles of elected governing bodies is fiscal oversight of their agencies' financial operations – including one of their most important policy tasks: determining the highest priority uses of their agencies' limited resources via budget adoption. However, few elected officials come to their positions with an understanding of local government finance. Using the Institute for Local Government's publication *Financial Management for Elected Officials* as its framework, this session will provide elected officials with a practical introduction to their role in managing their agencies' fiscal affairs, covering topics such as:

- Overview of local government finance in California
- Budget development and monitoring
- Financial reporting and accounting
- Fiscal policies
- Long-term financial planning
- Cash management and investments
- Capital financing and debt management
- Purchasing and contracting practices

Long-Term Financial Planning

In these challenging and ever-changing fiscal times, it seems like it's hard to predict what's going to happen next week, let alone next year – or even more daunting, five or ten years from now. So, why should local governments take the time and effort to prepare long-term financial plans? Stated simply, because making good resource decisions today requires taking into account their impact on your fiscal condition tomorrow. Developing good solutions requires knowing the size of the problem you are trying to solve: you can't fix a problem you haven't defined. And in this economic and fiscal environment, looking only one year ahead is almost certain to misstate the size and nature of the fiscal challenges ahead of you. This training provides practical approaches for preparing effective long-term financial plans.

Budgeting for Success Among Uncertainty: Preparing for the Next Downturn

Good times come and go: how can local government agencies best position themselves for the next downturn? Following the Great Recession, most local government agencies have seen some recovery – and in many cases are seeing strong revenue growth. At this point, the economy is experiencing its second longest period of economic growth since World War II. But at some point, while difficult to predict when or how deep, bad economic times will return – and do so at a time of rapidly increasing pension and retiree health care costs. This session will discuss practical, effective measures that local agencies can take now in successfully navigating through uncertain times.

The key takeaway: starve operating costs, feed unmet infrastructure/facility needs and address unfunded pension and retiree health care costs. If you can't proactively deal with these in the best of times, when will you?

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Top Challenges Facing Local Government Finance Officers

Local government finance officers are facing a number of tough institutional, organizational and financial management challenges in the years ahead. The good news is that these also provide opportunities for stronger organizations and communities. This session will focus on Top Ten challenges facing finance officers and strategies for meeting them.

- Singular role as vicar of the General Fund
- Sustainability
- Four P's for success: policies, planning, performance measurement and public engagement and trust
- Soft stuff is the hard stuff
- Communication: Telling your fiscal story
- Delighting your customers
- Aligning resources with goals
- See the forest vs the trees
- Leadership role
- Remembering the business we're in

Benchmarking: Key Tool for Measuring Performance and Assessing Organizational Effectiveness

When carefully prepared, benchmark analysis can be a powerful tool in assessing a wide-range of topics, including fiscal accountability, staffing, performance, policies and organizational structure. However, making meaningful comparisons requires carefully selecting both the data that will be collected ("metrics") and the benchmark agencies to ensure they represent as close a match to the City as possible, recognizing that a "perfect" match is not possible. This session will present how benchmarking results can be powerful in identifying strengths as well as areas for improvement. It will also present critical success factors for effective benchmarking, such as:

- Establishing the benchmarks (what will be compared?)
- Identifying the benchmark group
- Collecting data (and ensuring its reliability/comparability)
- Analyzing your agency's current position
- Incorporating results into findings and recommendations

Fiscalization of Land Use

The fact is that different types of land uses can have significantly different fiscal impact on a local agency's financial condition. *Fiscalization of land use* refers to an overemphasis on a land use's fiscal impacts such that they outweigh other critical planning variables such as environmental issues and mitigations; best location and proper siting, including inter-jurisdictional competition (city vs county); a balanced community; and over-zoning for

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commercial uses, since residential, open space and parks are typically less-attractive from a fiscal perspective.

In short, land use decisions should be based on: what kind of community do we want to be? And as such the focus should be on creating and sustaining a good place to live, work and play – not fiscal impacts alone.

On the other hand, no community is obligated to grow themselves poor. Will the revenues from taxes and fees from new develop sufficiently offset likely costs to provide services and infrastructure? If not, without mitigation, services will be lower for both current and new residents, businesses and visitors.

This session will look at typical fiscal impacts from different land uses under the “rules of the road” in California; how these vary depending on the type of agency (city, county, special districts and school districts); why it makes sense to do fiscal impact analysis at the general or specific plan level, rather project-by-project; and strategies for overcoming adverse fiscal impacts from new development.

Taking a Policy-Based Approach to Setting User Fees

Of course, it is essential to have a strong analytical foundation in setting user fees for General Fund services like planning applications, building permits and recreation programs; and that they meet State requirements under AB 1600 and Propositions 218 and 26.

But this is not enough for effective fee-setting: this is best accomplished by taking a policy-based approach to determining appropriate cost recovery. Stated simply, services are either funded by general purpose taxes or some form of user fees. And setting user fees – determining cost recovery levels – is one of the few remaining areas for local elected official judgment. In setting fees, if there are areas where services fees are not assessed where they legitimately could be, then general purpose revenues are making-up the difference. The direct consequence of this is lower levels of service (and in tough times, deeper cuts) in essential programs that have no significant user fee potential, such as police, fire, streets, libraries and parks.

Full cost recovery is not warranted in all circumstances: there can be legitimate policy reasons for subsidizing some service. But those circumstances of partial or no cost recovery should be clearly articulated though adopted Council policy, along with those circumstances where the goal is full cost recovery. This program will present strategies for taking a policy-based approach to rate-setting that will result in a more effective and productive process for the Council, community and organization.

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