

# **Summary of the League of Minnesota Cities and Minnesota City/County Management Association Joint Task Force Report on Civility**

## **What contributes to incivility?**

- Lack of Community Vision or Conflict Among Visions
- Specific Development or Redevelopment Issue
- Financial Crisis
- Hidden Agendas
- Role Confusion and Power Conflicts between Mayors (or County Board Chairs), Other Governing Body Members, and Staff
- Lack of Respect for the Breadth of Responsibilities of the Office
- Lack of Mutual Support between Elected Officials and Staff
- Personal Power and Individual Aggrandizement
- Ideological Commitment and Partisan Politics
- Illegal or Unethical Behavior by City Officials
- Politics and Media
- Odd Year Elections
- Smaller Catalysts: These include a lack of good interpersonal and communications skills to downright rudeness, the intrusion of personal mobile devices into the council or board meeting setting, differences in generational values, diminishing resources that require increasingly difficult tradeoffs in service or program delivery, a lack of transparency and timely communication between the city and residents, and the ripple effects from personal and organizational devastation caused by the Great Recession.

## **What are the costs of Incivility?**

- Cities and counties are unable to function effectively and efficiently in dealing with routine business, much less new and important community priorities.
- Incivility at city hall or the county courthouse can spill over into the community itself creating a toxic political environment that makes it even more difficult to find the consensus necessary to address urgent priorities.
- Local governments do not approach each other for collaboration because of loss of trust.
- Lack of citizen and media trust and confidence in their own local government or local governments in general.
- Lack of citizen willingness in running for and serving on a local governing body – the “who needs that?” factor.
- Loss of talented staff that are fired or just resign in frustration. Subsequent difficulties in recruiting replacement staff that have the necessary skills and competencies.
- Lack of interest by talented young people in working for the particular city or county, or even in pursuing a career in local government at all.

- Action by the legislature or even Congress to mandate or limit future local government actions based on the misfeasance of a few.
- Loss of private investment, new business locations, grant opportunities, and lowered bond ratings in a locality that is perceived as potentially hostile or politically unstable or where people are uncertain that the usual norms for fair decision-making are operating because investors perceive there will be too much work and time required to navigate the issues.
- Neglect of infrastructure investment and maintenance or a loss of time to address important issues when the behavior of certain individuals prevents the governing body from proceeding.
- Issues of personal health and well-being for city and county officials, staff and others caused by the stresses of incivility.
- Actual monetary losses when the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust (LMCIT), or the Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust incur losses when one of their members is suffering from excessive conflict. According to LMCIT, cities in this situation consume a disproportionate share of staff time, including underwriting and claims support, but also research, human resources, and other services for which LMCIT bears a share of the cost.

### **What steps can Local Governments take?**

- Make sure the elected officials, and city or county staff clearly understand their respective roles, responsibilities, and authorities
- Support, don't undermine, the role of the chief presiding officer (mayor or county board chair) at meetings of the governance body
- Set an expectation of civility for all who participate in governing body meetings
- Build the City Team
- Continually bring community attention to the issue of incivility
- Get better at telling the city story, and in talking publicly and early about both accomplishments and potentially controversial projects
- Adopt effective citizen engagement strategies and take time to build a broad base of support for city projects
- Consider adopting a code of ethics and/or a statement of aspirational values for the city or county
- See that the chief executive officer has understanding and training in the role that he or she can play to prevent incivility or, equally important, how to help resolve it once it happens.

**The full report, including recommendations to the League Board, is available on the League's website at: [www.lmc.org/civility](http://www.lmc.org/civility)**

**A new collection of resources on preventing incivility, identifying its root causes, and address it is also available.**