Presenting today....

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Polling Questions
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

**Identify** “best practice” messaging techniques for communicating during times of fiscal stress

**Examine** content and design components for crafting a Budget in Brief

**Discuss** requirements for and strategies to implement public participation in the budgeting process
Communicating During Times of Fiscal Stress
KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Journalists, Employees, and the Public

Your communication techniques . . .

will be similar among target audiences, but with a few key differences

if successful, can lead to employees and the public being your strongest advocates
EXPLAINING THE BUDGET

Budgetary and Service Decisions

Will I continue to receive services or have to pay more in taxes?

- Link decisions and values
- Confirm continuation of services and tax levels
- Clarify spending cuts in terms of service levels
- Acknowledge possible changes
- Assure timely updates and transparency
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Match the platform to your targeted audience

Deliver content that is factual, concise, and empathetic

Speak in terms of solutions

Invite Q&A

Anticipate and prepare for negative feedback

STAY ON MESSAGE
Don’t . . .

- be evasive or say “no comment”
- use jargon or technical terms
- speculate on the future
- allow a vacuum of information
- assume people don’t care because they’re silent
Journalists will . . .

- want advance notice
- report on “pocket book” issues
- review budget in full
- ask in-depth questions
- appreciate graphics
Employees need . . .

- advanced knowledge of impact
- in-depth information
- responses to all questions
- explanations of how leadership is mitigating negative impact(s)
DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE

Select a **key person** to be the primary Communicator

Choose a Communicator your target audience knows

Choose a Communicator your target audience respects

Choose a Communicator who speaks with confidence

Ensure that **everyone** is on the same page

Update talking points when necessary
WEBSITE PLATFORM

- Dedicate a portion of your website to the budget
- Tier information from highlights to details
- Provide a brief message from your government representative
- Post links to the complete budget and the Budget in Brief
- Display key graphics and budget highlights
- Include Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
**PRINT PLATFORM**

- Craft your message so that it’s easy to read
- Ensure your words and images align
- Incorporate white space by keeping your words and images to a minimum
- Display data using complementary colors
- Make content more effective by using more images than words
- Utilize online graphic design resources
SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

- Use it to expand your audience
- Use it to direct people to your website
- Write posts with context in mind
- Keep public officials on the same page
- Consider advertising on Facebook and Instagram
- Become proficient with its use before a fiscal crisis occurs
Using a Decision Tree

Comment Posted
Is it positive, factual, and unbiased?

Yes
No

"Troll"
Does the comment violate the City Social Media Policy?

Yes
No

"Rant"
Is the comment a rant, rage, joke or satirical in nature?

Yes
No

Share Success
Do you wish to share the City's perspective?

Yes
No

Let Stand:
Let the post stand. No response.

Monitor Only
Avoid responding to specific post. Monitor the site for relevant information and comments.
--often other uses will correct these comments

"Inform"
Do you wish to respond with factual information?

Yes
No

"Off Topic"
Is the comment unrelated to the focus of your page?

Yes
No

"Incorrect"
Are there erroneous facts in the posting?
Crafting a Budget in Brief
PROVIDING A BUDGET IN BRIEF

Purpose and Design

Developed for public consumption

Intended as a supplement to the main budget

Designed using highly summarized and condensed content

Recommended by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)
# PROVIDING A BUDGET IN BRIEF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Limits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easily understood</td>
<td>Static in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively little extra work</td>
<td>Requires some effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases public knowledge</td>
<td>Lacks some context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves transparency and accountability</td>
<td>Can lead to more questions from the public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Trading off accessibility for detail / context*
PROVIDING A BUDGET IN BRIEF

What to Do

- Be concise and think “highlights”
- Focus on what the public is interested in
- Partner with PIO for help in creating and advertising
- Create a professional look
- Make the information easy to understand
- Limit narratives and focus on graphics
- Provide access to the complete budget for in-depth information
PROVIDING A BUDGET IN BRIEF

What NOT to Do

Don’t attempt to summarize the entire main budget

Don’t overload with numbers by adding too many charts, tables, and other forms of data display

Don’t use multiple paragraphs to explain data

Don’t fill white space by adding too many graphics

Don’t try to make the document look “cute.” Keep it professional.

Don’t use a lot of jargon or technical terminology
Public Participation in the Budgeting Process
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

What it IS in the Budget Process

A process that allows stakeholders to provide meaningful input into budgetary decisions

An opportunity for government to ensure that financial decisions reflect public priorities

A recommended practice by the GFOA
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

What it ISN’T in the Budget Process

Government information sharing

A means for the public to make final budgetary decisions

A method for public input to take precedence over policies, ordinances, state and federal laws, and previously contracted obligations

A replacement for expertise and objective data
PUBLIC INFORMATION SHARING

Common Methods

- Newsletters
- Public hearings
- Public notices on social media
- Information posted on a website
- Public reports
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One-Way

budget hearing (if public comments are heard)

survey

• phone

• paper

• web

• social media

Interactive

town hall or community meeting

focus groups

neighborhood council

budget advisory board

budget simulations
### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

#### Types of Public Participation Methods Used in GFOA Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public hearings</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public comments at regular meetings</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen advisory boards</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet feedback</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to neighborhood associations</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to local civic clubs</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood focus group</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail-in coupons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Challenges

- Lack of citizen interest
- Ensuring participation is reflective of the community
- Time for the participation event(s) and education
- Resources to hold public participation event(s) and to process event information
- Being receptive to what you hear at participation events
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Benefits

- Improves resource allocation decisions
- Increases legitimacy and trust of government decisions
- Grows department performance
- Enhances fairness and justice
- Increases accountability to the public
- Serves as a budget and financial education forum
- Reduces the “free lunch” perception
## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

### Design Considerations

- Ensure a diversity of opinion and broad spectrum of participation
- Identify what group might be most affected by budget decisions
- Solicit public input at the beginning of the budget process or at the evaluation stage
- Can be government-wide or focus on one program/department
- Incorporate public input into the decision-making process
- Communicate how public information will be and was used
- Get support from elected body and senior management
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Considerations During Times of Fiscal Stress

- Legitimacy of decisions is never more important
- Solicit public input for priorities for reducing expenditures or increasing revenues
- If the budget is already passed, participation can be used if major budget changes are needed mid-cycle
- At a minimum, keep the public informed over the fiscal year
CONCLUSION

Communicating the New Normal

Communicate the budget by linking decisions with your community’s values.

Deliver content that is factual, concise, and empathetic.

Understand the nuances of each communication platform to maximize its potential.

A Budget in Brief can be an excellent communication tool during fiscal stress.

Public participation can increase legitimacy of the government and budget if done well.
Questions?
REFERENCES and RESOURCES

People and Organizations

People
Courtney Alford-Pomeroy, Carl Vinson Institute of Government: cpomeroy@uga.edu
Christy Fricks, LickSkillet Public Relations: www.lickskilletpr.com
Jeff Montgomery, Athens-Clarke County: Jeff.Montgomery@accgov.com
Roger Neilsen, Carl Vinson Institute of Government: nielsen@uga.edu

Organizations
Government Finance Officers Association: www.gfoa.org
Institute for Public Relations: https://instituteforpr.org
REFERENCES and RESOURCES

Further Reading


There are extensive literatures on crisis communication and on public participation in government budgeting. What is presented here is just the beginning. Web searchers will also provide a wealth of articles to review.
INSTITUTE of GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

To download resources and access webinar recordings, go to
https://cviog.uga.edu/covid-19-resources.html
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