UNIT 1:
POLITICS 101

TERMINAL OBJECTIVE

The students will be able to describe the local political process used to establish public policy.

ENABLING OBJECTIVES

The students will:

1.   Define politics.

2.   Define public policy.

3.   Explain the fire and emergency service leader's role in creating and implementing public policy.

4.   Explain the local government political environment.

5.   Distinguish between a community's formal and informal power structure.

6.   Summarize strategies for maintaining political influence.

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**UNIT 1:
POLITICS 101**

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ENABLING OBJECTIVES

The students will:

- Define politics.
- Define public policy.
- Explain the fire and emergency service leader's role in creating and implementing public policy.

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ENABLING OBJECTIVES (cont'd)

- Explain the local government political environment.
- Distinguish between a community's formal and informal power structure.
- Summarize strategies for maintaining political influence.

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I. DEFINING PUBLIC POLICY

POLITICS DEFINED

- Politics is the art of building and using influence to achieve an individual or group public policy goal.
- Introduction to the concept of public policy and the relationship of politics to policy.
- The department head has direct responsibility for public policy and must be involved in the local political process.

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A. Politics defined.

Politics are the science and art of building and using influence to achieve an individual or group public policy goal.

1. Because politics involves human relationships, it is not a well-defined science. It is a skill that is learned through experience. This is the "art" of politics.

2. Politics require establishing influence through the building of relationships. **No relationships** = **no influence.**

3. Affecting public policy is ultimately the goal of local politics.

PUBLIC POLICY DEFINED

- Public policy is the set of laws, standards, policies, and procedures which direct the actions of public officials and employees.
- Embodies what the government does and does not do.
- Always political.

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B.   Public policy.

Public policy is the set of laws, standards, policies and procedures which direct the actions of public officials and employees.

1.   Public policy is developed by elected and appointed officials, including the department heads of emergency services agencies.

2.   Public policy embodies not only what the local government does but also by what it deliberately does **not** do.

3.   Public policy is always political in nature. It may not be the product of analysis, facts, or a rational approach.

PUBLIC POLICY AREAS

- Mission
- Funding
- Cooperation: regional and intergovernmental
- Staffing and compensation
- Facilities and equipment
- Working conditions and safety

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4.   There are six policy areas impacting most local organizations. The level of impact varies with local situations.

a.   Mission and range of services provided to the public.

b.   Funding.

c.   Cooperation: regional and intergovernmental.

d.   Staffing and compensation.

e.   Facilities and equipment.

f.   Working conditions and safety.

PUBLIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- Implemented locally.
- Officials exercise significant discretion in applying policies.
- Allows responsiveness but also inconsistency.

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C.   Implementation of public policy.

     1.   Policy is generally administered by local officials and employees.

     2.   Local officials typically exercise significant discretion in applying policies in day-to-day operations.

     3.   Discretion in application of policy at the "street level" allows officials to be more responsive to citizen needs, but this may result in greater inconsistency in service delivery.

LEADERS' ROLES IN PUBLIC POLICY

- Department head:
  – Provides technical information
  – Introduces policy
  – Forecasts future policy
  – Communicates citizen and community needs

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D.   Leaders' roles in public policy.

     1.   Department head's role.

          a.   Provide technical information and recommendations on policy issues, which pertain to the mission of the organization.

b.   Introduce policy for political consideration, which pertains to the mission of the organization. For example, updates of fire and building codes.

c.   Forecast future policy issues, which require planning.

d.   Communicate citizen and community needs to elected and appointed decisionmakers.

LEADERS' ROLES IN PUBLIC POLICY (cont'd)

- Department head (cont'd):
  – Effectively implements policy
  – Trains staff
  – Analyzes the impact
  – Advocates for policy consideration

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e.   Effectively implement the policy once it is adopted by elected officials.

f.   Train staff on the policy and how to implement it.

g.   Analyze the impact and effectiveness of current policies.

h.   Advocate for public policy being considered by State and Federal agencies, e.g., State legislation on fire-safety cigarettes.
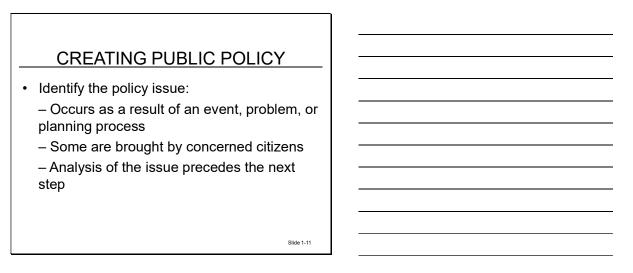

LEADERS' ROLES IN PUBLIC POLICY (cont'd)

- Company Officers (COs)/First-line supervisors:
  – Apply public policy to dynamic situations
  – Provide feedback to supervisors on how well the current or new policy is meeting its intent

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2. Company Officer (CO)/First-line supervisor's role.

    a. Apply public policy to dynamic situations in the field where it may be necessary to modify policy in order to better serve the citizens.

       - For example, local policy may prohibit a citizen riding in an apparatus. On the way back to the station during a hard rain storm an elderly woman is walking home, unprotected. In this situation the needs (welfare) of the citizen are more critical than the letter of the policy.

    b. Provide feedback to supervisors on how well current or new policy is meeting its intent.

CREATING PUBLIC POLICY

• Identify the policy issue:

– Occurs as a result of an event, problem, or planning process

– Some are brought by concerned citizens

– Analysis of the issue precedes the next step

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E. Creating public policy.

    1. Identify the policy issue.

        a. This generally occurs as a result of an event or recognized problem. It may be the result of a planning process where a future issue is identified.

        b. Some issues are brought to local government by concerned citizens. For example, trash accumulation in alleys which may be a fire and health hazard.

        c. Analysis of the issue is beneficial and should always be done prior to moving the issue to the next step.

CREATING PUBLIC POLICY (cont'd)

• Build a community agenda:

– "What does this mean to my constituents?"

– Meeting with stakeholders to create public support

– Department head may be the government official leading this process

– Most feasible solutions are identified and promoted

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2.   Build a community agenda around the issue.

a.   Political decisionmakers will judge the merit of a proposed policy in political terms, i.e., what does this mean to my constituents.

b.   In today's political environment, a community agenda involves meeting with stakeholders, having public discussions about the issue, and creating a support.

c.   When a policy issue has the support of the community and the stakeholders it is more likely to be supported.

d.   The department head's involvement in building the community agenda will depend on the relationship between the policy issue and agency. In some cases the department head will be the government official leading the process.

e.   It is during this process that the most feasible solution(s) to the issue is identified and promoted. These solutions are generally addressed by the public policy.

- For example, a change in the fire code may be a policy solution to an increase in fires caused by unregulated outdoor burning.

CREATING PUBLIC POLICY (cont'd)

- Adopt public policy designed to resolve the issue:
  – Follows the local laws
  – Department head involved in policy language
  – Consider cost
  – Identify expected outcomes

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3.   Adopt public policy designed to resolve the issue.

      a.   Policy adoption follows the local law for that jurisdiction. The policy may require approval by the elected board, a vote of the eligible voters, etc.

      b.   It is critical that the department head be involved in the policy language. This is to ensure that the policy is feasible and achievable. It also ensures the policy is general and department procedures/guidelines allow discretion and flexibility.

      c.   Consideration must also be given during this stage to the cost of the policy. Additional funding or resources may be required in order to meet the intent of the policy.

      d.   Part of this process should include identifying the outcomes expected from the policy. For example, a specific reduction in fire loss, reduction injuries, reduction in response times, and increase in services, etc.

CREATING PUBLIC POLICY (cont'd)

- Implement the policy:
  – Responsible to implement policy as it is intended
  – Policies may be difficult to implement in the "real world"
  – All staff must be trained and briefed

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4. Implement the policy.

    a. Once the policy is adopted, it becomes the responsibility of the organization to implement it as intended.

    b. There are instances when policies are adopted that become difficult to implement in the "real world."

    c. All staff that is part of the implementation must be briefed or trained on how to implement the policy. The training must include the reasons for the policy and the benefits to the community and organization.

CREATING PUBLIC POLICY (cont'd)

- Evaluate the outcomes:
  – Desired outcomes should have been identified earlier
  – Methods of measuring outcomes decided earlier
  – Outcomes should be communicated
  – Outcomes are used to make revisions
  – Policies involving social or cultural change may take years

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5. Evaluate the outcomes from the policy.

    a. Desired outcomes should have been identified earlier in the policy process.

    b. The methods for measuring the desired outcomes should have been considered and addressed during the implementation of the policy. For example, if an outcome is the reduction of fires in multifamily residential housing, there must be means for tracking data on residential fires.

    c. The outcomes should be communicated to the stakeholders, elected officials, and the staff of the department.

    d. The outcomes should be used to make any needed revisions to the policy. However, changes may be difficult depending on the policy.

    e. Policies, which involve social or cultural change, may require years to accurately evaluate the outcomes.

MEASURING SUCCESS OF
PUBLIC POLICY

• The outcome from the policy initiative:
– Was the policy adopted, were the
outcomes achieved, and needs addressed?
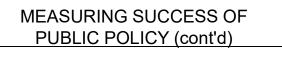• Did the community and stakeholders:
– Participate and become involved?
– Promote the policy and advocate for the
policy?
– Achieve better relationships?

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F.   Measuring success of public policy involvement.

    1.   The outcome from the policy initiative.

        a.   Was the policy adopted by the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ)?

        b.   Were the desired outcomes from the policy achieved?

        c.   Were the needs of the community and stakeholders addressed, i.e., was the original issue which created the policy addressed?

        d.   Was the organization or agency staff able to successfully manage the policy?

    2.   Community and stakeholder involvement in the policy initiative.

        a.   Did the community or stakeholders actively participate in identifying the policy issue and creating a community agenda?

        b.   Did the community and stakeholders promote the policy to the elected and senior appointed officials?

        c.   Did the initiative result in improved relationships with the community members and stakeholders?

        d.   Did the community and stakeholders advocate for the policy during implementation?

MEASURING SUCCESS OF
PUBLIC POLICY (cont'd)

• Relationships with officials and leaders:
– Is credibility enhanced?
– Is there a better understanding of the issue and emergency services role in it?
– Did officials and community leaders support the policy initiative?
– Are these relationships improved?

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3.   Relationships with elected and senior appointed officials and community leaders.

a.   Is the credibility of the department head enhanced as a result of the policy initiative?

b.   Do the officials and community leaders have a better understanding of the issue and the emergency service agency's role in addressing it?

c.   Did officials and community leaders support the policy initiative?

d.   Is the relationship between the department head and the officials and community leaders improved as a result of the initiative?

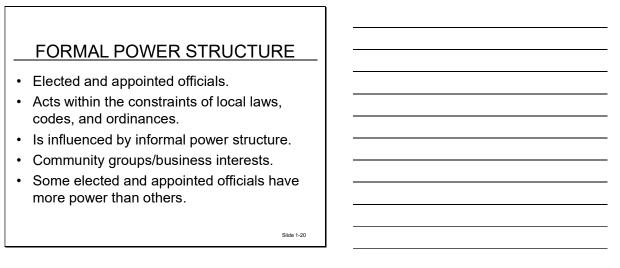## II.   UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

POLITICAL POWER AND
INFLUENCE

• Politics is based on the use of power and influence.
• The chief must work within the local political environment to achieve goals.
• Power and influence vary with each community.

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A.   Political power and influence.

1.   Politics is based on the use of power and influence to advance goals and meet specific needs. This may be a small issue or a large policy issue, which requires voter approval.

2.   The chief must be able to work within the local political environment--the world of power and influence--to achieve organization policy goals.

3.   Power and influence varies with each community. It may also vary within the same community depending on the policy issue.

a.   Specific stakeholders who are impacted by the issue.

b.   Impact of the issue on the community.
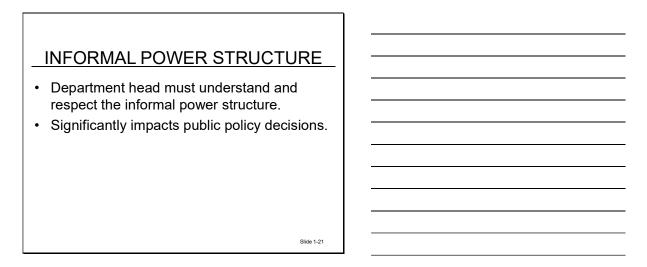
c.   Internal versus external policy.

ESTABLISHING POLITICAL INFLUENCE

- Visibility
- Interaction
- Involvement in policymaking
- Ethical behavior
- Performance of the organization

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B.   Establishing political influence.

1.   Visibility--The department head must be visible in the community and be recognized by citizens, officials, and community leaders as the leader and person in charge of the organization.

2.   Interaction--The department head must interact with decisionmakers, elected officials, and community leaders. This can be in the normal course of business, community groups, etc.

3.   Involvement in policymaking process--The department head is expected to be involved in this process as the organizational leader. This involvement allows him/her to build credibility with officials. Credibility is critical to gaining influence.

4.   Ethical behavior--The department head must behave ethically, both on and off duty. Ethical breaches, even when it is just the public's perception, challenges the department head's influence.

5.   Performance of the organization--The community and elected and appointed officials expect the organization to be effective in meeting their mission. The community holds the department head accountable for that effectiveness. An effective organization increases influence.

FORMAL POWER STRUCTURE

- Elected and appointed officials.
- Acts within the constraints of local laws, codes, and ordinances.
- Is influenced by informal power structure.
- Community groups/business interests.
- Some elected and appointed officials have more power than others.

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C.   Formal power structure.

1.   The formal power structure involves elected and appointed officials who are tasked with managing public policy, and in some communities, it involves the recognized community leaders, such as officers of public organizations like the chamber of commerce.

2.   The formal power structure acts within the constraints of local laws, codes, and ordinances.

3.   Formal power structure is influenced by the informal power structure.

4.   Community groups, business interests, etc., strongly influence the formal power structure when focused on specific local issues.

5.   Typically there are specific elected and appointed officials who have more political influence than others. This may be due to tenure in office, popularity with citizens and interest groups, the constituency represented, etc.

6.   The department head should understand the individual values and goals of each elected and appointed official. This provides insight into how each will respond to different public-policy issues.

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│  INFORMAL POWER STRUCTURE           │
│                                     │
│  • Department head must understand  │
│    and respect the informal power   │
│    structure.                       │
│  • Significantly impacts public     │
│    policy decisions.                │
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D.   Informal power structure.

      1.   In order to be effective politically, the department head must understand **and respect** the informal power structure within the community.

      2.   In each community, there is an informal political power structure which significantly impacts public policy decisions.

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│  INFORMAL POWER STRUCTURE           │
│            (cont'd)                  │
│  • May include:                     │
│    – Prominent business leaders     │
│    – Former elected officials       │
│    – Affluent citizens              │
│    – Community and special interest │
│      groups.                        │
│    – Professionals                  │
│    – Community members with interest│
│      and aspirations                │
│                          Slide 1-22 │
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      3.   The informal power structure may include the following.

           a.   Prominent business leaders.

           b.   Former elected officials.

           c.   Affluent citizens.

           d.   Community and special interest groups.

e.   Professionals, i.e., accountants, attorneys, physicians, etc.

f.   Community members with political aspirations.

INFORMAL POWER STRUCTURE
(cont'd)

- Department head has access through community activities, groups, and relationships.
- Any external public policy initiative must have the support of the informal power structure.
- Informal power structure may be a benefit or an obstacle to the policy agenda.
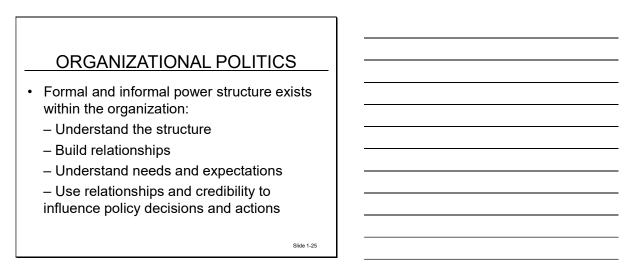
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4.   The department head may have direct access to the informal power structure through community activities, groups, and relationships.

5.   Any external public-policy initiative must have the support of the informal power structure. The formal power structure waits to determine the position of the informal power structure prior to taking political action on the issue.

6.   Just as the informal power structure may be a great benefit to the department or agency's policy agenda, it can also be a strong obstacle to the policy agenda if it is viewed as detrimental to the members of the power structure.

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY
NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

- Department head must engage actively with the community and leaders to understand needs and expectations.
- Align programs and services.
- Failure reduces the department head's credibility and influence.

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E.   Understanding community needs and expectations.

1.   To be effective politically, the department head must understand the needs and expectations of the community and its various groups. This requires the department head to be actively engaged with the community and its leaders.

2.   A key role politically and administratively for the department head is to align the programs and services of the organization with the community's needs and expectations.

3.   Failure to align programs and services with needs and expectations reduces the department head's credibility and political influence. It may actually put the department head's employment at risk, depending on the issue. For example, failure to provide equitable services to a lower-income area of the city when that group is well organized and able to bring pressure on elected officials.

ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS

- Formal and informal power structure exists within the organization:
  – Understand the structure
  – Build relationships
  – Understand needs and expectations
  – Use relationships and credibility to influence policy decisions and actions

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F.   Organizational politics.

1.   Organizational politics is about using formal and informal influence and power within the organization to achieve a specific goal.

2.   Being successful in organizational politics requires the chief to act politically in the organization, in the same as way acting politically in the community.

a.   Understanding the formal and informal power structure within the department.

b.   Build relationships with leaders and stakeholders.

      c.   Understand the needs and expectations of the various groups within the department or agency.

      d.   Use those relationships and credibility to influence policy decisions and actions.

ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS (cont'd)

- Six guidelines for acting politically within the organization:
  1. Expand informal authority
  2. Find allies
  3. Stay connected to the opposition
  4. Manage involvement of senior officials
  5. Take responsibility for casualties
  6. Protect and engage the voices of dissent

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    3.   Six guidelines for acting politically within the organization.

      a.   Expand informal authority.

           - Strengthen relationships, especially with stakeholders. Score early wins on the policy issue. This increases credibility.

           - Sell the policy in small pieces. Take the process step by step.

      b.   Find allies for the policy issue.

           - Identify which stakeholders have the greatest to gain as a result of the policy.

           - Consider stakeholders with different perspectives but who are not opposed to the policy.

           - Recognize that even allies may have competing loyalties.

      c.   Stay connected to the opposition.

           - Identify stakeholders who have clearly different perspectives and stand to lose from the adoption of the policy.

           - Once identified, seek input from these stakeholders and listen to their reality.

- Resisters will be those who are most threatened by the policy.

- Avoid trying to "straighten out" the opposition.

  d. Manage involvement of senior officials.

- Prepare the elected and appointed officials for the unease that may be created by the organizational policy initiative.

- Read the officials for signals once the process begins. Be attuned to growing concern and diminishing support for the policy.

  e. Take responsibility for casualties.

- Accept responsibility for the casualties caused by the policy change. The casualties are those who lose something of value as a result of the new policy.

- This sends the message that the chief is accountable for their decisions and actions.

- This consideration for the feelings of others will help build respect from other groups.

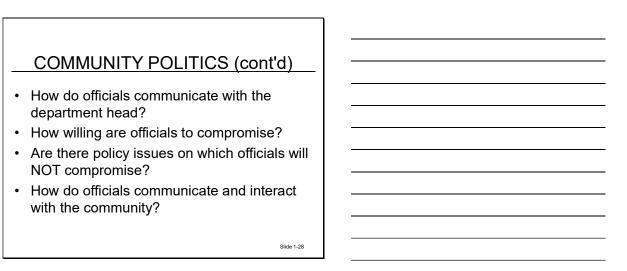 f. Protect and engage the voices of dissent.

- Protect the rights of those with different perspectives to be involved in the policy process.

- The feedback may provide valuable insight or recommendations.
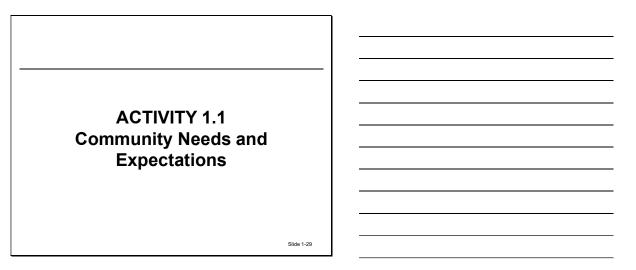

COMMUNITY POLITICS

- Understand how elected and senior appointed officials approach the political process.
- What is the official's personal approach?
- How do officials obtain and organize information?
- What are their motivations?
- What are the values, beliefs, and attitudes of each of the elected and appointed officials?

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G.   Community politics.

    1.   The department head must understand how local politics take place. This goes beyond the governmental process of policymaking. It is how elected and senior appointed officials approach the political process.

    2.   How do officials personally approach and react to policy issues? For example, are they quick to make decisions; do they seek alternative views, etc.

    3.   How do the officials obtain and organize information on a policy issue? For example, do they seek citizen input; rely on staff for information and recommendations; do research on their own; or meet with community leaders and stakeholders, etc.

    4.   What are the motivations of local officials? For example, what are they trying to accomplish with policymaking; do they have pet projects; what issues are they eager to support; etc.

    5.   What are the values, beliefs, and attitudes of each of the elected and appointed officials? For example, are they conservative, social advocates, etc.

COMMUNITY POLITICS (cont'd)

- How do officials communicate with the department head?
- How willing are officials to compromise?
- Are there policy issues on which officials will NOT compromise?
- How do officials communicate and interact with the community?

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    6.   How do the officials communicate with the department head on policy issues? For example, directly, through the city manager, indirectly, through stakeholders or community leaders, in writing or in person, etc.

    7.   How willing are officials to compromise on policy issues?

    8.   Are there any policy issues on which officials will **not** compromise? Why will they not compromise? For example, any policy which increases taxes, any policy which increases regulation, etc.

9. How do the officials communicate and interact with the community? For example, do they attend local community meetings; use Web site or social media; or participate in local organizations, etc.

**ACTIVITY 1.1
Community Needs and
Expectations**

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ACTIVITY 1.1

Community Needs and Expectations

Purpose

To understand the difference between the needs and expectations of the community and the department's wants and needs.

Directions

1.   Answer the questions listed below, based on your community and organization. Be objective and honest with your answers.

2.   Review your answers from the precourse assignment, specifically numbers 5, 6 and 7. Avoid the temptation to minimize a lack of understanding of community needs and expectations.

3.   Be prepared to share your answers with the class. You have 10 minutes to complete the activity.

Questions

1.   How well do you understand the needs and expectations of the community you serve?

2.   How do you know if your organization is meeting their needs and expectations?

3.   Are your organization's programs and services specifically designed and intended to meet the community's needs and expectations? Why?

4.   How well do your organization's wants and needs, i.e., staffing, equipment, etc., increase the organization's ability to meet the community's needs and expectations?

ACTIVITY 1.1 NOTES

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MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE
POLITICAL INFLUENCE

• Maintaining political influence:

– Political influence can be maintained
regardless of the success or failure of a
policy initiative provided:

-- There was sound justification

-- There was community support
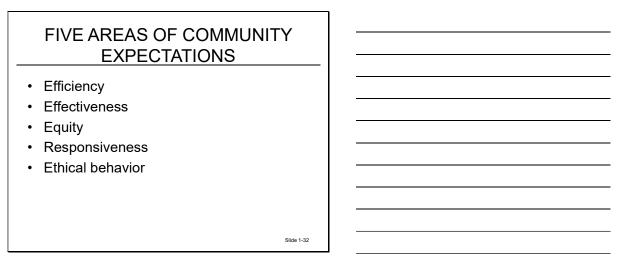
-- They acted in a professional and ethical
manner

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III.   **MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE POLITICAL INFLUENCE**

MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE POLITICAL
INFLUENCE (cont'd)

• Being politically correct:
– Means adapting the latest en vogue position
• Being politically astute:
– Understanding and working within the local
political system
• Tension of local politics:
– Public controversy
– Department head must maintain an objective
perspective

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A.   Being politically correct.

B.   Being politically astute.

    1.   Understanding and working within the local political system and culture.

    2.   This requires the department head to develop a thorough understanding of the local political environment, culture, and political leaders.

C.   Tension of local politics.

    1.   There is a tension associated with politics, especially with controversial policy issues.

2.   The political issues, which create public controversy, may result in the department head's leadership ability or decisionmaking being questioned. This makes the issue seem personal.

3.   The department head must maintain an objective perspective on the issue and the political process. This helps reduce the personal tension.

4.   Maintaining political influence.

FIVE AREAS OF COMMUNITY
EXPECTATIONS

• Efficiency
• Effectiveness
• Equity
• Responsiveness
• Ethical behavior

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5.   There are five areas of expectations that the community has for the organization. By ensuring the department meets these expectations, the department head enhances or maintains their political influence.

a.   **Efficiency.** The public expects the department head to wisely and prudently use the resources provided. Any waste, even if just perceived, is seen as an inefficient operation.

b.   **Effectiveness.** The public expects the organization to be effective during operations and service delivery.

c.   **Equity.** Citizens, especially minorities and economically disadvantaged, expect to be treated equitably. In other words, these groups expect to receive the same types of services and quality of services as any other group in the community.

d.   **Responsiveness.** The public expects the organization to be responsive to requests for assistance. This includes both emergency and nonemergency situations. This is something that is most affected by the individual companies in the neighborhood.

e.   **Ethical behavior.** The public expects all members of the organization to act ethically, especially the department head. A breach of ethical conduct can immediately destroy a trusting relationship and result in a loss of political influence.

**ACTIVITY 1.2
Maintaining Political Influence**

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ACTIVITY 1.2

Maintaining Political Influence

Purpose

To identify a strategy for maintaining political influence during an organizational or community issue.

Directions

1.   Working in your small group, discuss your assigned scenario. Answer the questions listed based on your discussions and the information from the scenario.

2.   For your assigned scenario answer the following questions.

   a.   What is the issue in the scenario? Be specific.

   b.   How does the issue pose a risk to the department head/organization's political influence?

   c.   What tension, if any, does this issue create inside the organization? Be specific.

   d.   What tension, if any, does this issue create with senior appointed and elected officials? Be specific. What tension, if any, does this issue create for the community?

   e.   What is your strategy for maintaining political influence?

3.   Select a spokesperson to present your answers to the class.

4.   You have 15 minutes to complete the activity.

Scenario 1

You are the fire chief of a combination department serving a community of 25,000. Your department staffing includes 7 personnel per shift staffing two stations, an assistant chief of training, fire marshal, and yourself; a total of 24 career personnel. You also have 20 volunteers. You report to the city manager who reports to the 7 person city council.

The economy in your community has declined. The two previous years you had to cut 3 percent and then 4 percent from your budget. This year the city manager has worked hard with council to protect the fire department from any cuts; however, you have been directed to cut $20,000 from the overtime budget.

For many years fire safety education has been a priority for the department and has been successful in reducing fires. In addition, it has gained praise from community officials, politicians, and community leaders. Two years ago, the department won a national award from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for a school-based program in the local elementary schools. Twice a week a firefighter goes to each elementary school to spend 2 to 3 hours with the kids. The firefighter eats lunch with the children, plays with them on the playground, and then helps teachers with tasks such as reading to the kids and teaching them fire safety lessons. This year is the 12th year for the program. The teachers love it and parents of the children, through neighborhood associations and the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), have provided political support for several initiatives over the years, including a sales tax initiative to build a new station and replace apparatus.

The firefighters who go to the schools come in offduty and are paid overtime. Most of the firefighters enjoy the program and there has never been a problem with staffing the program. Previous chiefs have sold the program to the city council based on the fact that onduty staffing is not obligated. Also, the teachers prefer the use of offduty firefighters since there is no chance of them leaving due to a fire call. The overtime cost for the program is approximately $22,000 annually.

After discussing the budget reduction with your senior officers, you've decided eliminating the school visits will meet the goal of $20,000 and have the least impact on emergency operations. In a preliminary presentation to the city council, several concerns were raised about cutting this program, especially by councilman Doug Wilson, who is a principal at one of the elementary schools. You have also received several calls from leadership of the PTA and the local Hispanic community advocate--38 percent of the students are Hispanic.

Questions

1. What is the issue in the scenario? Be specific.

2. How does the issue pose a risk to the department head/organization's political influence?

3.   What tension, if any, does this issue create inside the organization? Be specific.

4.   What tension, if any, does this issue create with senior appointed and elected officials? Be specific.

5.   What tension, if any, does this issue create with the community?

6.   What is your strategy for maintaining political influence?

Scenario 2

You are the fire chief in a rural community of 16,000. The fire department is volunteer based and also provides the EMS transport for the community and most of the unincorporated county. On your department you have 30 volunteer firefighters, 20 of whom are also emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and help on the ambulance. You also have 20 EMTs who only work on the ambulance. The ambulance makes approximately 850 runs a year, with 190 of those transfers to the hospital in the closest large community 90 miles away.

Interfacility transfers have increased by 150 percent in the past 3 years due to declining capabilities of the local hospital. Even though your volunteers are committed to the department, you've had a hard time staffing the transfers in the last 6 months. A single transfer takes 4 hours

and the volunteers say it is hard for them to be away from work and home that long. In the last 2 months you've had to turn down 11 transfers; as a result many patients have to be flown out. The city council has received numerous complaints by those patients about the cost of having to be flown because an ambulance wasn't available.

Some of the local doctors and the county commissioners (the hospital is owned by the county) are promoting that the hospital take over the ambulance service from the volunteer fire department. The members of the department are unanimously opposed to moving the ambulance. The city council is not taking a position, but has hired a consultant to study the issue.

Questions

1.   What is the issue in the scenario? Be specific.

2.   How does the issue pose a risk to the department head/organization's political influence?

3.   What tension, if any, does this issue create inside the organization? Be specific.

4.   What tension, if any, does this issue create with senior appointed and elected officials? Be specific.

5.   What tension, if any, does this issue create with the community?

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6.   What is your strategy for maintaining political influence?

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Scenario 3

You are the chief in a volunteer fire department with 20 members. Your community has about 3,500 people. You respond to about 75 calls a year, most of which are grass/wild land fires. Your bylaws require volunteers to attend at least 4 hours of training a month. Your training officer provides training on 2 different nights a month plus 4 hours on one Sunday afternoon a month. The bylaws also state that if a member misses training for 3 consecutive months they are dismissed from the department.

It is becoming harder and harder to get the volunteers to come to training. Most of the members have been on the department more than 10 years. Eleven of the members are only averaging 2 hours of training a month over the last year. However, those same 11 are responding to 87 percent of the calls. Eight other members are only averaging between 3 to 4 hours a month but also respond to most calls. Because you can count on them responding to fires, you have not been enforcing the training requirement.

Your community recently went through an Insurance Services Office (ISO) evaluation. Your ISO rating dropped from a five to a six. A lack of training was cited as one of the reasons. The mayor and city council are very concerned with the situation at the fire department. The mayor, who appointed you fire chief, has given you 3 months to get all 20 volunteers to meet the bylaws requirement for 4 hours of training a month.

Questions

1.   What is the issue in the scenario? Be specific.

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2.   How does the issue pose a risk to the department head/organization's political influence?

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5.   What tension, if any, does this issue create with the community?

6.   What is your strategy for maintaining political influence?

Scenario 4

You are the EMS director for a city-owned advanced life support (ALS) ambulance service that serves a community of 35,000. There is a large segment of the community that is retired. The local economy has been very strong for several decades and has allowed the city to subsidize 45 percent of the overall cost of prehospital care. The EMS service has provided services such as taking patients home from the hospital at no cost, providing wellness checks for community organizations, working with the health department to provide immunizations, etc. Because of the "value added" services provided to the community, quality of patient care, and the low cost of transport, EMS has the highest customer-satisfaction rating of any city department.

The economy has declined in the last 2 years. Also, the political climate has changed on the city council with a push towards full cost recovery on city services such as trash collection, building inspections, EMS, etc. The city council has directed you to reduce the subsidy from 45 percent to 20 percent in the next budget year. You have submitted your proposed budget to the city council for approval. In order to meet the budget with a reduced subsidy, fees must be increased 40 percent and the "value-added" services eliminated. The proposed fee increases would take effect in 90 days. Local senior citizen groups are up in arms about the fee increase.

Questions

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2.   How does the issue pose a risk to the department head/organization's political influence?

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5.   What tension, if any, does this issue create with the community?

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6.   What is your strategy for maintaining political influence?

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Scenario 5

You are the fire chief of an all-career department in a community of 40,000. There are 6 other fire departments in your county, all of which are volunteer. You work closely with the volunteer departments and provide assistance when you are able. Most of the county residents shop in your community, adding significantly to the sales tax revenue.

There is a state-wide initiative to adopt county-wide mutual-aid agreements. Several counties have established response teams. Counties, where 100 percent of the department adopts a mutual aid agreement, receive special operational grants for the volunteer fire departments. The commissioners in your county are pushing for a county-wide mutual-aid agreement so that the volunteer departments can receive the operational grants.

The proposed mutual-aid agreement does not allow a member department to charge for their response. You and the city manager have a concern about this, as your department is called to provide mutual aid more than all the other volunteer departments combined. When your department responds to a mutual-aid call it requires a callback to staff the empty station(s). Last year the overtime cost for mutual-aid responses was $27,000. Last year you never had a need to call for mutual aid from any of the volunteer departments. The city council has tentatively been supportive of your concerns.

Fire chiefs from the volunteer departments have communicated their disappointment with your stance to the county commissioners. They believe that the sales-tax revenues, generated by their citizens shopping in your community, more than make up for the overtime costs of the mutual aid. They also believe that, as the only career department in the county, you have a responsibility to share your resources when they are needed.

The local chamber of commerce has stated they are in favor of the mutual-aid agreement. The president of the chamber shared with you privately that she and the other chamber members are afraid that not supporting the agreement may result in the citizens from the smaller communities shopping in other cities.

Questions

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6.   What is your strategy for maintaining political influence?

ACTIVITY 1.2 NOTES

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IV. SUMMARY

SUMMARY

- Defining public policy
- Understanding the political environment
- Maintaining effective political influence

Slide 1-34