



Meetings with Managers: What Are They Saying?

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Russell Allen, Raleigh City Manager

You may remember that I am visiting with the managers from the largest cities and counties that have paid their local government membership dues. The purpose of these meetings is to thank them (so much) for paying their dues, and to ask them about ways in which the School might help them meet their most pressing needs. Beth asks them to think about that question when she schedules the meetings. I also manage to let them know in our meeting how important it is for them to continue sending people to our programs and buying our publications. The conversations are designed to be wide ranging and I plan to ask the managers about issues that have come up during our strategic planning process.

My first meeting was with Russell Allen, City Manager for Raleigh and a graduate of our MPA Program. We talked about the impact of the economic climate on Raleigh. He did a good job of anticipating the coming crisis and froze hiring in July 2008. The city eliminated 85 positions as a part of its budget cuts, but their hiring freeze allowed them to use vacant positions and avoid any layoffs. Russell has not imposed an across-the-board ban on travel for Raleigh employees. There is discretion in permitting people to attend training, but it may need to be more than just regularly



attending a conference—permission is more likely to be granted for people who need to maintain certification requirements, for example, or if they are officers in the sponsoring organization.

In terms of issues facing Raleigh and other local governments, Russell believes that many are going to need help addressing issues of environmental sustainability. Raleigh is far ahead of most North Carolina cities, but this issue is not a fad and he believes that there will be increased pressure on local governments to become more sustainable. Russell indicated that local governments will need to develop their capacities in several areas as they move to greater sustainability—he mentioned collaboration skills in working with other governments, private businesses, and nonprofits. His experience is that working on sustainability in Raleigh also raised different legal issues. Russell also praised our municipal and county administration courses, and he gently requested space in the course for a third person from Raleigh. He believes that the MPA Program is good and more important than ever given the increased difficulty of managing in the public sector. Finally, Russell believes that local governments are going to need the School's help in preparing to manage in unionized environments. His view is that they will need our help, especially in the law enforcement area, and that the need is coming sooner rather than later.

I also took the opportunity to ask Russell about *Popular Government* and mentioned that we were evaluating it as a part of our strategic planning. He indicated that he does not have time to read the magazine, but was unsure whether other city employees at different points in their career might read it. Russell believes that it is too “academically oriented” and that it does not contain “good, practical information.” At the same time, however, he urged caution in how we go about eliminating it. His point was that *Popular Government* is an “iconic brand” and that officials could perceive a loss of services even if they never read the magazine.