

League Membership: An Investment in Our Cities' Futures

Can we, as city officials, afford our Florida League of Cities membership involvement? I would ask whether we can afford *not* to be active in the League.

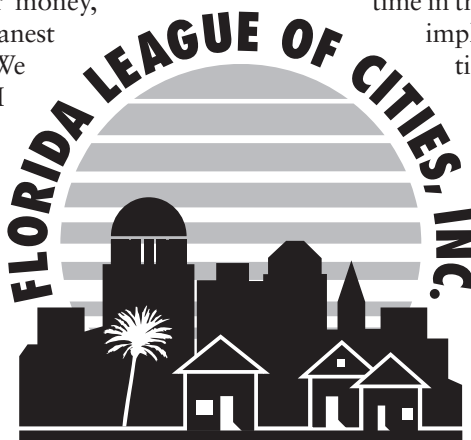
I have to ask, considering the pressures and tight fiscal conditions we now face in local government. We are competing for the delivery of essential municipal services with entities that regulate us. The state Legislature seems to take pleasure in villanizing local government to push passage of property tax reform and other issues. What's a community to do?

Often accused of wasting taxpayer money, Florida's cities actually operate as the "leanest and meanest" level of government. We purchase "big ticket" items from what I call the GPI (Government Price Index), not to be confused with the CPI (Consumer Price Index). For example, we buy capital construction, roads, bulk fuel and chemicals, heavy equipment, pensions, insurance, public safety equipment, utilities, community facilities and programs. We carry large work forces in order to provide the services to our residents at levels they desire.

A central source for solutions would be ideal. Combining the best in legal minds, communication practices and legislative strategies could help our communities bring home what is needed. We need a venue and forum where we meet our peers to discuss pressing issues of the day. In fact, we have these things and more through our membership in the Florida League of Cities!

If you have access to strategic, well-crafted instruction, investment and sound problem-solving, couldn't your community be successful at virtually anything? We see it all the time in the private sector: Businesses innovate and implement best practices and provide just-in-time delivery of needed components, and consequently satisfy a hungry market. They are rewarded with a loyal brand base, compensation and further investment.

Government is not entirely like private business. Government, after all, must do the right thing, regardless of the cost, complication, time invested and many other factors. The moment a better way is found or the people governed say so, we must shift gears and just do it. Local govern-



ments don't have the options to change their product line, market area or customer base, or even go out of business; they need best practices and economy of scale.

What are we to do, then? How can we cut through the clutter of this complex world of governance? Where do the answers lie? Are there really "one-stop shopping" resources for the challenges provided to the local official? After all, we are just trying to make our communities better places to live, work and play.

There is good news: We belong to the premier municipal membership organization in the country – the Florida League of Cities. The League historically has enjoyed a 99-percent membership among Florida's cities and a high rate of membership renewal each year. However, with last year's

As yet another example of the value of League membership, have you taken advantage of the stellar Institute for Elected Municipal Officials? Participating in the institute is like getting a degree in being a local municipal official.

What do "big government" issues have to do with you? You're expected to be an expert on virtually everything from the moment you assume office. Constituents want you to do things faster, better and cheaper, and solve community problems now. The Florida League of Cities' resources give you the tools to do so.

Do part-time officials have the time and energy to take advantage of these resources? Won't term limits and elections get them before they can? Let's not forget that the League partners with local and regional leagues across the

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revenue-reducing legislation and the passage of Amendment 1, local governments are facing tough financial decisions and myriad challenges. Memberships, training and travel usually are the first line items to be reduced or cut.

The League is unique – a proactive and effective organization with the needed tools for city officials to better their communities. All of the tools in the League toolbox help make it easier for a local official to contend with the challenges faced daily. Working collectively with our membership of like-minded officials from across the state gives us powerful advantages. Essentially, the Florida League of Cities is your all-purpose "Swiss army knife" – it has practical solutions for just about everything you need.

Critical tools that would cost any one city a disproportionate amount to create are available for the collective good at the League. Resources such as seasoned legislative lobbyists, financial analysts, expert legal opinions, technology solutions, protocols and processes, workshops in which municipal issues are fully vetted, and much more are just a few of the values of membership.

The League also has an archive of best practices, efficient processes, legislative acumen and sage advice to apply for the benefit of your community and residents. It has a rich tradition of intergovernmental cooperation, discourse and solutions to answer the question of what makes a livable and desirable community.

The presentation of government issues, technical speakers and workshop programming at League conferences is second to none. The League is a leader in intergovernmental relations, policy development, insurance products, capital and bond financing, legal arguments, policy papers and political acumen beneficial to you, all provided at a scale nearly impossible to replicate at home.

They hold networking meetings and programs that can help you get involved today. Your local league has the ability to hone issues to your local needs. Local leagues play an important role in helping cities to harness the resources of our great organization. Local leagues bring new talent, issues and introduce emerging local officials to the process. They offer mentoring, understanding and guidance to newly incorporated cities, towns and villages.

With all of these components working together, I guarantee positive outcomes! Ask any involved Florida League of Cities member today and they'll swear that just a few legal updates, best-practice tips from League meetings, timely presentations on complex issues at the conferences, or one-on-one technical conversations with seasoned League staff more than pay for the "price of admission" – their annual membership investment. The League's ability to amass pertinent information, edit for relevance and introduce expert solutions in a timely manner to its members is worth its weight in gold.

Our dedicated League staff members deliver useful, timely and applicable information and best practices to the membership every day. The League gives us priceless capabilities in making sense of and handling change in this intergovernmental world we must navigate. Our community's expectations of us are to understand all of our local issues, deliver solutions and perform at the top of our game each and every day. To that end, a better community can be achieved only through our ongoing active membership and commitment to the League.

All said, can we really afford *not* to maintain our Florida League of Cities membership each year?

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