

# Promoting Civility in Times of Heightened Partisanship and Polarization

**YEDFall2023**

**Wednesday, November 29, 2023**

# THANK YOU FOR JOINING



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# TOPICS WE'LL COVER

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## Leadership Principles & Operational Tactics

Interpersonal Strategies

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Organizational Strategies

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Governance Tools, Policies & Protocols

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Meeting Design & Management Techniques

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Additional Resources

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Q&A

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*Disclaimer: information presented **does not** constitute official legal advice.*

# ABOUT ILG & SETTING THE STAGE

# NON-PROFIT, NON-PARTISAN AND HERE TO HELP

- The Institute for Local Government is the non-profit training and education affiliate of three statewide local government associations
- Together with our affiliates, we serve over 2,500 local agencies – cities, counties and special districts
- We provide practical and easy-to-use resources so local agencies can effectively implement policies on the ground



**California Special  
Districts Association**  
*Districts Stronger Together*

# ILG'S PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

## Program Areas

Leadership & Governance

Civics Education & Workforce

Public Engagement

Sustainable & Resilient Communities



## Services

Education & Training

Technical Assistance

Capacity Building

Convening

Our mission is to help local government leaders **navigate complexity, increase capacity & build trust** in their communities

# LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE



Elected leaders and staff cannot effectively address the many challenges they face without a strong foundation of good government:

- **Trust**
- **Accountability**
- **Responsiveness**
- **Transparency**

Our goal is to help you build that foundation, develop leadership skills and increase public trust.

# INSTANT POLLING

- ① Open smartphone browser
- ② Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com)
- ③ Enter participant code **37369932**



*In a recent survey, more than*

**57%**

*of local governments are experiencing an increase in **incivility**, **divisiveness**, **misconduct** & bad behavior in public meetings.*

war in Ukraine

drought masks

insurrection

social media social unrest

pandemic crt

national political polarization edsj social

school shootings unrest

george floyd murder monkeypox economy

isolation police reform

zoom fatigue

proud boyz

# LEADING WITH OUR VALUES



Trust

Collaboration

Service

Commitment

Equity

Inclusion

# INTERPERSONAL STRATEGIES

# IT'S UP TO ALL OF US

Rebuild trust in  
local  
government

Model civil,  
productive  
engagement  
with the public

Increase  
connection and  
trust within our  
communities

Reinforce &  
remind about  
local gov't  
impact on  
everyday  
people

“

Civility is not about dousing strongly held views. It's about making sure that people are willing to respect other perspectives.

JIM LEACH

”

# HOW TO LEAD WITH CIVILITY IN MIND

Embrace diverse  
points of view

Commit to civil  
discourse

Practice active  
listening

Disagree  
respectfully

Separate the  
'people' from the  
'problem'; never  
attack the people

Prioritize  
relationships

Focus on  
building trust

Strive to find  
shared values &  
common ground

# UNDERSTANDING DIALOGUE VS. DEBATE

<b>Dialogue = Collaborative: Working toward common understanding</b>	<b>Debate = Oppositional: Attempting to prove each other wrong</b>
Goal: Finding common ground	Goal: Winning
Listen to understand, find meaning and find agreement	Listens to find flaws and to counter the arguments.
Expands and possibly changes points of view	Affirms your own point of view
Reveals assumptions for reevaluation	Defends assumptions as truth
Causes introspection	Causes critique
Assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution	Assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it
Remains open-ended	Implies a conclusion

# COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS FOR BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Be attentive

Ask clarifying questions

Let people know you  
are listening

Focus on interests, not  
positions

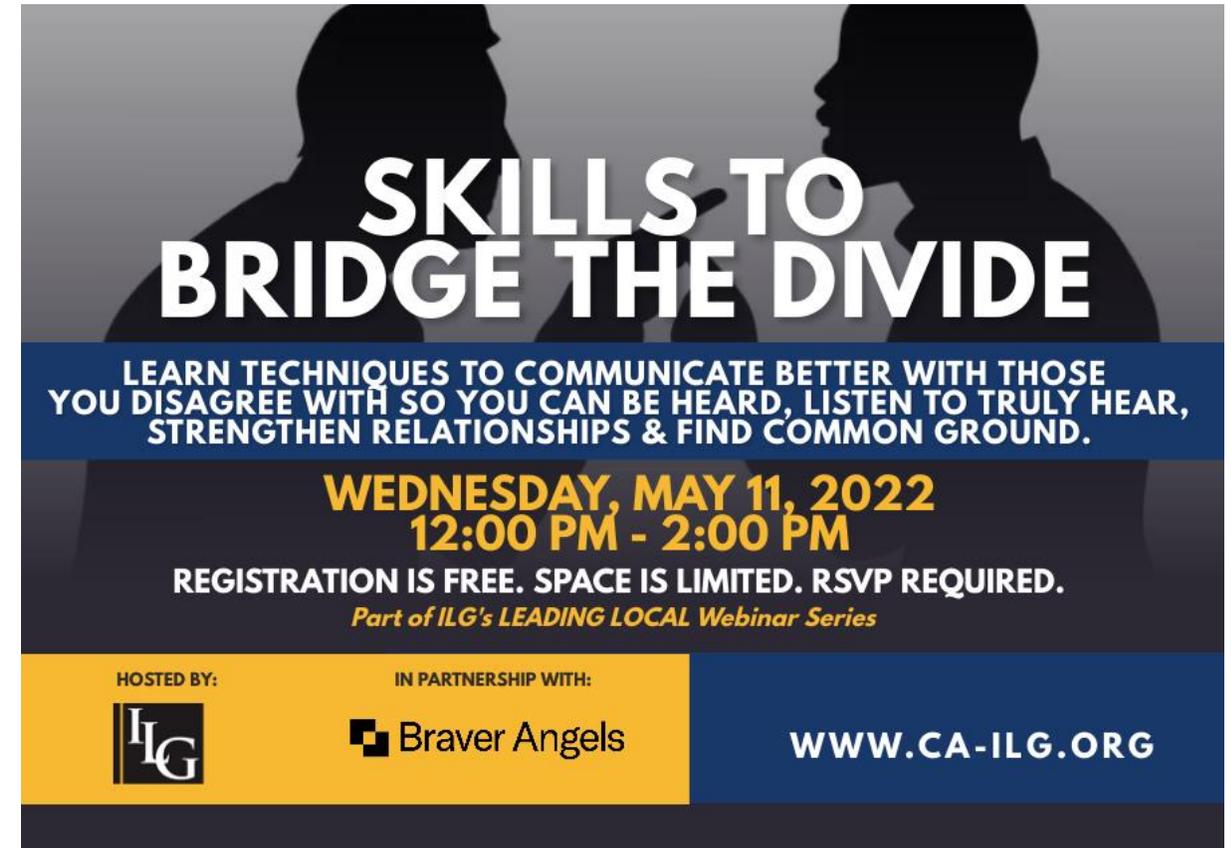
Identify options for  
mutual gain

Insist on using  
objective criteria

# LISTEN TO ILG'S BRIDGING DIVIDES SERIES FOR SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

- Tone-Setting Skills
- Speaking Skills
- Listening Skills
- Depolarizing Within
- Managing Difficult Conversations

[www.ca-ilg.org/post/ilg-webinar-archives](http://www.ca-ilg.org/post/ilg-webinar-archives)



**SKILLS TO BRIDGE THE DIVIDE**

LEARN TECHNIQUES TO COMMUNICATE BETTER WITH THOSE YOU DISAGREE WITH SO YOU CAN BE HEARD, LISTEN TO TRULY HEAR, STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS & FIND COMMON GROUND.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2022**  
**12:00 PM - 2:00 PM**

REGISTRATION IS FREE. SPACE IS LIMITED. RSVP REQUIRED.  
*Part of ILG's LEADING LOCAL Webinar Series*

HOSTED BY:  IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:  Braver Angels

[WWW.CA-ILG.ORG](http://WWW.CA-ILG.ORG)

# ACTIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES

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## Techniques for honoring all points of view

**Summarize** (repeat key points). “I think you are raising three issues here.” “You have done some solid thinking here.”

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**Mirror** (repeat speaker words verbatim, deescalating the tone, if needed)

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**Paraphrase** (demonstrate that a speaker was heard/understood). “It sounds like you are saying..” “Let me see if I am understanding you” “Is this what you mean?”

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**Draw people out** (learn about root causes). “Can you give me an example?” “Tell me more?” “What do you mean by...?”

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Source: Sam Kaner *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*, 3d ed.

# ACTIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES

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## Techniques for honoring all points of view

**Clarify.** *“Help me understand...” “I want to make sure that I am following you. Do you say...”*

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**Ask Questions.** *“ I hear that you are overwhelmed with the changes in the neighborhood, what are you hearing?” How do you think you could have responded differently?*

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**Reframe from judgment.** *“I can only imagine...” “ I totally hear and respect your position.”*

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**Acknowledge feelings.** *“From your tone of your voice you sound very upset. Is it true?” “This topic seems to bring up some feelings for you. Are you upset?”*

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Source: Sam Kaner *Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*, 3d ed.

# PRACTICE EXERCISE

## RESPOND TO A SAMPLE SCENARIO

- *Ensure that participants are heard*
- *Reframe and deescalate the situation as needed*

# SCENARIO 1

*A complex issue has been working its way through multiple community task force meetings and finally seems ready to be voted on by task force members. Then someone who skipped most of those meetings shows up at the last meeting and brings up a bunch of concerns (e.g., the cost seems too high, the group historically has had weak follow-through on things like this, and so on).*

***What do you say?***

## SCENARIO 2

*The Planning Commission governance committee has just presented their plan for how decision-making will be handled from now on. The committee did a lot of research and gathered a lot of input before making the proposal, so it was quite solid and most members at the meeting seem pleased with it. Dusty, however, starts bringing up a bunch of nitpicky concerns. He goes on for some time into more and more detail...*

***How do you respond?***

# BODY LANGUAGE IS KEY

## In person

- Have an open **posture**. Be relaxed, but don't slouch!
- Maintain good **eye contact**.
- Avoid **touching your face**.

## On camera

- Set up your **camera** up correctly.
- Maintain eye contact with the speaker whenever possible. **Look into the camera**. On the group call, look around the participants.
- Use **friendly facial expressions**. Maintain a slight smile throughout. Raise your eyebrows to show engagement and avoid frowning.



Project  
openness &  
genuine interest

# YOUR BEHAVIOR CAN SET THE TONE FOR CIVIL DISCOURSE

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## Be sure to

Respect and support **good governance and engagement** models that include members of the public in decision-making

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Promote and encourage **public participation**

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Value **public input** as part of the decision-making process

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**Show respect** to staff, officials and the public; use affirming words & engaging body language

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Be **informed** about issues being discussed and come with an **open mind**

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Demonstrate appreciation for **varied opinions**

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Behave in a civil manner and **act with decorum**

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# ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

# LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO CIVILITY

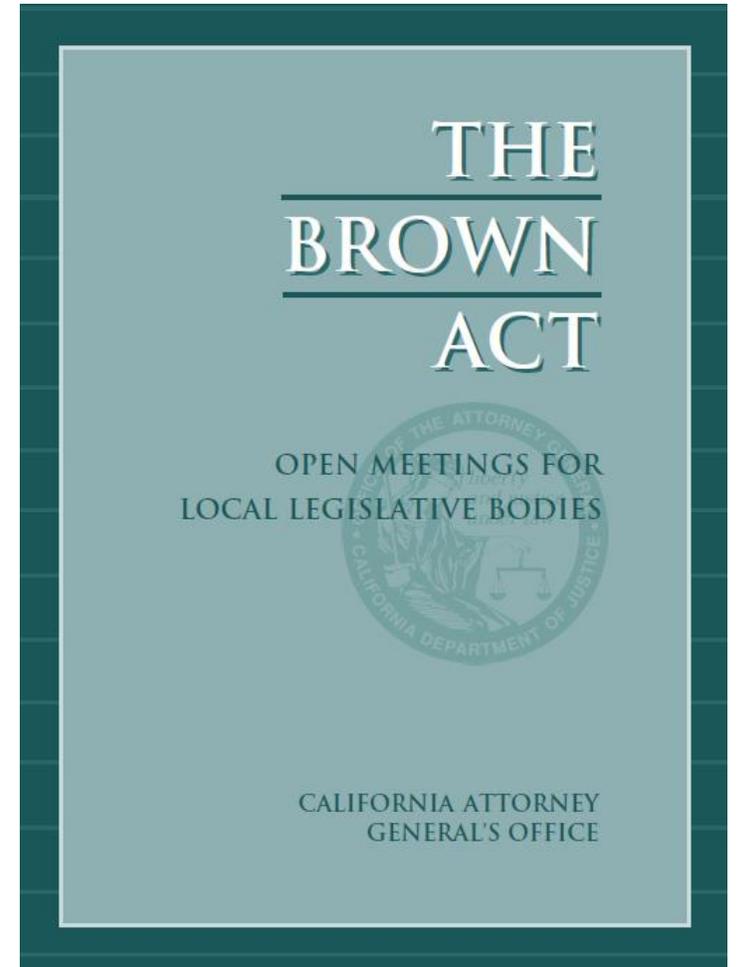
Open Meeting  
Laws

Social Media  
Considerations

When in doubt, consult your agency counsel!

# PURPOSE OF THE BROWN ACT

- Provide public access to meetings of California local government agencies
- Promote transparency and public participation
- Open to the public
- See Bagley-Keene Act for State government agencies



# DEFINING TERMS

Public  
Meetings

**VS.**

Public  
Workshops

**VS.**

Community  
Event or  
Activity

# KEY MILESTONES & ACTIONS

*Preparation*

*Facilitation*

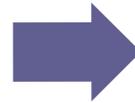
## Annually

- Adopt/review/revise policies
- Develop norms
- Goal setting
- Team building
- Orientations



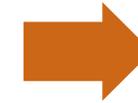
## Throughout the Year

- Apply norms
- Meeting facilitation training
- Understand community issues
- Build relationships with stakeholders



## Before Major Meetings or Issues

- Agenda placement
- Meeting design
- Scripting
- Enforcement Plan development



## During the Meeting

- Active Chairing & Facilitation
- Enforcement Plan Implementation

# POLICIES TO CONSIDER

**Codes of  
Conduct**

**Ethics  
Codes**

**Civility  
Policies**

**Group  
Norms**

# SAMPLE GROUP NORMS

- Work together, modeling teamwork and civility for our community
- Demonstrate honesty & integrity in every action
- Share information & avoid surprises
- Disagree agreeably & professionally
- Work for the common good, not personal interest
- Strive for win-win – work toward for consensus and seek common ground
- Honor “discussion” before “decisions” – reserve formal motions until initial discussions have taken place



# TIPS TO PROMOTE CIVILITY IN PUBLIC BOARD & COUNCIL MEETINGS

Establish process in advance

Manage expectations with the public by explaining opportunities to engage and the limitations of responses

Make sure your chair understands meeting process and options

Use scripts as appropriate

Take a break when things get heated. Ejection is a last resort

Explore public comment options

# TIPS TO PROMOTE CIVILITY IN PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

Be strategic about meeting design & facilitation

Establish facilitation & governance process in advance

Make sure staff and officials understand key roles & responsibilities

Rehearse and draft scripts for challenging topics & scenarios

Define conduct expectations and ground rules for all participants

Understand public comment options, timing, etc.

Remember to consider language access

# GENERAL MEETING FACILITATION TIPS

## DURING THE MEETING

- Manage expectations (e.g. explain process, meeting design and timelines)
- Outline conduct expectations (e.g. appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior, consequences, etc.)
- Formalize/codify ground rules for applause, heckling, etc.
- Publicly clarify roles and responsibilities of staff vs. electeds
- Assure people they will be allowed to speak; if appropriate, have staff available to meet offline with upset public member(s)
- Offer multiple formats for comment (written, verbal, etc.)
- Have a clearly defined and rehearsed/scripted plan for dealing with continued disruptive behavior up to and including removal if required.
- Take breaks as needed to reset
- **For Public Workshops:** Also consider using an outside facilitator

# MANAGING PUBLIC COMMENT

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## Tips

Set **parameters** for how officials engage during public comment – understand in advance what you can and cannot say

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Clearly define how public comment will be managed and state it at the beginning of the meeting

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Publicly explain the **transparency** reasons for public comments, especially with regard to what can and cannot be responded to

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Be **consistent** with commenter speaking times and applause, etc.

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Allow groups to speak as one **using a designated speaker**

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Diffuse angry speakers using active listening techniques

# LISTENING TO PUBLIC COMMENTS AT BOARD & COUNCIL MEETINGS

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## Tips

Listen for **substance** behind emotion.

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Suspend your **assumptions**. Be aware of personal biases and preconceived notions.

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Practice **curiosity**.

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Put into **historical perspective** of racial, economic and social injustices.

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Pay attention to **nonverbal** communication.

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**Reframe**. Complaints can also reveal what otherwise remain hidden.

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# ACTIVITY: PUBLIC WORKSHOP VIDEO

## WATCH, HEAR, OBSERVE AND SHARE:

- *How do comments and public emotions differ during and after the workshop?*
- *What suggestions do you have for managing and responding to community concerns?*
- *What goals do you think the public hoped to accomplish during this meeting?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiR6Wn9N7P0>

# SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

- *Share a time when you had to deal with challenging behaviors in a public meeting.*
- *What actions did you take, and how did you respond?*
- *Reflecting on the situation, what went well? What could you have done differently?*

# AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# WHAT IS “AUTHENTIC” PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

Inclusive

Ensuring reach is focused to include traditionally marginalized communities

Accessible

Overcoming the unique challenges from the community

Dialogue

Ensuring two-way communication

Culturally Competent

Relevant materials/messaging reflective of the community

# ENGAGEMENT TIPS

Be clear on your goals and resources for engagement and use this to guide your engagement approach.

Ensure public engagement is integrated into the larger project goals so that it truly informs policy and program development.

Equity is achieved by incorporating the voices of marginalized populations in decision-making. Ensure your public engagement achieves this.

Use a mix of virtual and in-person outreach and engagement strategies to reach your targeted populations and solicit the kind of input you seek.

# INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

**T.I.E.R.S.  
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TRAINING FOR  
LOCAL GOV'T**



**WEDNESDAY, JULY 26 & THURSDAY, JULY 27  
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM  
Virtual Training**

**ILG** SPACE IS LIMITED - REGISTER TODAY!  
[WWW.CA-ILG.ORG](http://WWW.CA-ILG.ORG) 

Next Training  
TBD – Likely  
Early Spring

# WRAP UP & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

# QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION



# ILG CAN HELP WITH YOUR LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE NEEDS



- ILG's **Leadership & Governance** pillar helps local government leaders develop leadership skills and increase public trust.
- We offer a wide range of **virtual and in-person trainings, facilitated discussions & workshops:**
  - Effective Councils and Boards
  - Goal Setting/Strategic Planning
  - Civility in Public Meetings
  - Governance Tools: Policy Handbooks and Codes of Conduct, Ethics and/or Civility Policies
  - Building Trust through Public Engagement
  - Roles and Responsibilities
  - Team Building
  - Communicating for Success

# RESOURCES

## ILG L&G Resources:

- Sample Codes of Conduct & Civility Policies
- Good Governance Checklist
- Key Ethics Law Principles for Public Servants
- Archived Webinars

## ILG Public Engagement Resources:

- TIERS Public Engagement Framework and Training
- Preparing for Successful Public Meetings: Checklist for Before, During and After
- Increasing Outreach – Language Access, Partnering with CBOs, and more

## Peer Networks

# JOIN OUR WIDESPREAD NETWORK OF LOCAL GOV'T LEADERS



58 Counties

482 Cities

2,500+ Special Districts

20,000+ Local Agency Leaders

[www.ca-ilg.org/stayinformed](http://www.ca-ilg.org/stayinformed)



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# Thank you!



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