Toolkit

A Toolkit for Manitoba Municipalities:

Addressing Anti-Government Hate and Harassment

Strong Cities Network

Association *of* Manitoba Municipalities

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Acknowledgements

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) worked with mayors and government partners to launch Strong Cities in September 2015. Since then, ISD has expanded and supported Strong Cities membership and has delivered its programming. ISD continues to host the Management Unit and contributes its research and expertise to meet the policy and practice needs of cities and local governments around the world.

Toolkit Supporters

Acronyms

AMM
Association of Manitoba Municipalities

CSO
Civil Society Organisation

ISD
Institute for Strategic Dialogue

LPF
Local Prevention Framework

NGO
Non-Governmental Organisation

P/CVE
Preventing and Countering
Violent Extremism

CAO
Chief Administrative Officer

CSSRP
Centre for Social Science Research and Policy

LLG
Local Leadership Group

MEL
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

NLC
National-Local Cooperation

Glossary

Civil Society: "The arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, that is created by individual and collective actions, organisations, and institutions to advance shared interests." (See Source).

Community: Individuals, social groups, and institutions that are based in the same geographic area and/or have shared interests. (See Source)

Disinformation: False, misleading or manipulated content intended to deceive or harm (See Source)

'Do No Harm': Through an understanding of the local context, relationships, and dynamics more broadly, this involves mitigating or avoiding negative, unintended consequences for the potential beneficiaries and implementers of prevention and seeking to influence these dynamics in a positive way. (See Source)

Elected Officials: Mayors, reeves, councillors and others who are elected by the public to serve at the local level.

Evaluation: "The assessment of whether project activities collectively achieved the objectives as intended or planned, and as articulated in a theory of change. Inherent to any effective evaluation effort is a clear understanding of the project objectives, the development of measurable and specific indicators, and access to reliable and relevant data." (See Source)

Hate Speech: Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are; in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor. Definitions and understanding of what hate speech entails – and the line between illegal and legally protected speech – typically vary depending on the country. (See Source)

Interventions: The actions that a city is taking with the intention of making a difference at any given level of prevention to address an identified challenge. This Guide uses 'interventions' to apply equally to

community-based efforts as well as individual interventions. (See Source)

Mandate: A local official's authority to enact and implement strategies, policies and programmes, create and fill positions, and coordinate horizontally and vertically across different offices and sectors.

Misinformation: False, misleading or manipulated content shared irrespective of an intent to deceive or harm. (See Source)

Monitoring: "The task of ensuring that activities are completed on time and within a prescribed budget and plan. It is the assessment of progress toward project implementation – the completion of key activities for intended beneficiaries, implementers, and partners – and the measurement of quantitative outputs such as the number of participants engaged in the activities." (See Source)

Municipal Officials: Both elected officials and municipal staff.

Municipal Staff: Chief administrative officers (CAOs), city managers, department directors and other relevant municipal employees.

Primary Prevention: Programmes and other measures designed to build community resilience against hate, extremism and polarisation and enhance social cohesion to resist these threats. These programmes target communities regardless of their vulnerabilities and come in a variety of forms. (See Source)

Secondary Prevention: Programmes and other measures that target individuals identified as being vulnerable to recruitment or radicalisation to hate- or extremist- motivated violence and seek to steer these individuals down a non-violent path. These interventions

might include psychosocial support, mentoring, family counselling, cultural or recreational activities, theological debate, education and vocational training and/or support. (See Source)

Tertiary Prevention: Programmes and other measures designed to support hate- and extremist-motivated violent offenders in their efforts to leave their milieus, disengage from violence, decriminalise and reintegrate into society. This can also include families, as well as those who have not entered the prison system but who may demonstrate some level of support for violence, including those who have returned from territory once held by Islamic State, for example. These programmes, which can take place within or outside of a custodial setting, may offer educational and vocational training, psychosocial or ideological counselling, housing and employment opportunities. (See Source)

Theory of Change: An approach for mapping how and why a desired set of changes are expected to happen in a particular context. It is typically presented as a narrative description accompanying an illustrative diagram. It can be presented in a narrative format, most simply as an 'if, then, because' statement explaining what effect certain actions, outputs and outcomes are expected to have and how they will combine to achieve a stated goal. This description is supplemented with a diagram which depicts the pathways of change arising from an intervention and will structure and guide how a city measures results across its effort(s). (See Source)

Whole-of-society approach: : An approach to prevention that envisions a role for multiple sectors at both the national and local levels, as well as civil society actors. (See Source)

About
This Toolkit

Strong Cities has partnered with the **Association of Manitoba Municipalities** (AMM) and the **Centre for Social Science Research and Policy at the University of Manitoba** (CSSRP) to produce a Toolkit for local elected officials and municipal governments in Manitoba with advice on how to address all forms and manifestations of anti-government and anti-establishment hate and harassment.

The Toolkit was informed by a variety of efforts to ensure the guidance is tailored to the Manitoba context and reflects promising practices from cities across the Strong Cities Network and beyond. These efforts include 1) in-person convenings during AMM's Spring Convention in April 2025 designed to allow AMM members to share hate-based and violent threats impacting local municipalities in the province, 2) an online survey of AMM members conducted by CSSRP, 3) an online survey of Strong Cities' members in North America and Europe, 4) consultations with subject matter experts and 5) research on good practices from municipal networks and associations and individual municipalities outside the province, including from across the Strong Cities membership.

In some cases, recommendations link to an existing practice outside of the province, and a more complete list of practices and sources can be found in the Appendices. This includes examples of municipal codes of conduct, social media policies and training programmes. The recommendations are designed specifically for surveyed elected local leaders and, more broadly, those working in municipal government in Manitoba. Thus, the Toolkit is specific to the context of Manitoba, where there is only one municipality with a population

greater than 60,000 and recommendations need to be actionable for rural and other small municipalities in the province, some of which have only a handful of full-time municipal staff.

Using the Toolkit

Toolkit recommendations are organised by topic, and each topic has a section for elected officials (mayors, reeves, councillors) and municipal staff (chief administrative officers (CAOs), city managers, department direictors and other relevant municipal employees). Some recommendations may require approval from the local council or city manager's office, and others may be undertaken by a single individual, such as a councillor, CAO or municipal staff member.

For ease of use, the Toolkit contains an *Issues Index*, which contains an alphabetical list of common issues faced by municipal officials in Manitoba drawn directly from surveys and in-person convenings. Each issue is linked to a specific, relevant recommendation or section of the Toolkit. It allows readers to quickly access the recommendations pertinent to their needs.

The Toolkit also contains a *Quick Reference Guide* for elected officials and municipal staff to see an overview of important recommendations. These overviews serve as an easy starting point for readers who are unfamiliar with the topic area.

The Toolkit is intended for use across Manitoba and its many varied populations and geographies. Therefore, not all components of this Toolkit will be relevant for all municipalities, municipal leaders or other officials, and guidance is presented so that specific topics

and content might be selected according to the needs of a given municipality or individual. Even if a recommendation may not apply in full in a given context, there may nevertheless be pieces of it that resonate.

This Toolkit will be hosted on Strong Cities' (online) Resource Hub and maintained as a 'living document' where examples, practice spotlights and learnings will continue to be added and updated.

These recommendations are informed by practices in local councils and governments from around the world. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Strong Cities (or its members), AMM or CSSRP, but are instead distillations of observed policy and practice that appear relevant to the Manitoba context. All recommendations should be considered within the context of what is legally permissible under Manitoba and Canadian laws. Municipal councils and leaders and other officials are encouraged to consult with legal counsel or AMM before taking forward any recommendations contained herein that they believe might be inconsistent with such laws.

Contents

Foreword

By Kathy Valentino, President, Association of Manitoba Municipalities; Councillor, City of Thompson

and Denys Volkov, Executive Director, Association of Manitoba Municipalities

In the spring of 2025, when we initially commissioned Strong Cities to produce a toolkit on addressing anti-government hate and harassment against elected officials, we knew that this was a problem facing municipalities across Manitoba. Our members reported disrupted council meetings, hate-filled comment sections on municipal social media pages and threatening language directed at council and staff simply trying to serve their communities.

Regrettably, in the intervening months since this toolkit was commissioned, the environment for public service in Manitoba has only gotten worse. Online forums have become even more toxic. National and international political discourse has continued down its path of incivility. And threats to officials have only grown in both quantity and severity. It is into this environment that we release this toolkit, and it could not be more timely.

The AMM Strong Cities Toolkit for Manitoba Municipalities: Addressing Anti-Government Hate and Harassment aims to provide both local elected officials and municipal staff in Manitoba with actionable steps they can take to prevent, counter and respond to this hate and harassment. It addresses not only the hate and harassment itself, but also the underlying environment that leads to it. Recommendations range from actions a single individual in local government can take to suggestions that call for deep municipal collaboration. Not all will be relevant for your municipality, but we hope that something in this toolkit speaks to the challenges you are facing, and you feel inspired and supported to take action.

This toolkit is inspired by promising practices

already underway in some municipalities across Manitoba and informed by approaches taken by municipal governments and local elected leaders across the Strong Cities Network's 285+ member cities.

We are grateful to the many AMM members who shared their experiences and stories with us to guide this work. We know that no municipality is new to the problem of anti-government hate, and each reader will come with their own lived experiences and perspectives. For many, this is a deeply personal topic. We hope this toolkit can provide some support and guidance to help you through these challenging times, and AMM remains committed to providing support beyond the bounds of this toolkit.

Despite the challenging times in which we serve, we must not be discouraged. Local government is at the very centre of what makes our communities thrive, and it would not be possible without the dedicated service

of each and every local elected official and municipal staff person in Manitoba. Protecting these public servants is central to AMM's goal to provide the support and leadership needed to promote strong, functional councils that truly represent the order of government 'closest to the people', and as such we are pleased to introduce this much-needed Toolkit from Strong Cities.

Kathy Valentino

President, Association of Manitoba Municipalities

Councillor, City of Thompson

Denys Volkov

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Background

Survey Results

Across North America (and beyond), municipal councils and local governments are experiencing threats, disruption and harassment from members of the public. Spurred by rising anti-government and anti-establishment sentiments coupled with global spikes in extremism, social polarisation and intolerance, municipal officials and staff increasingly find themselves the target of hate and harassment. Examples include abusive emails and social media posts, verbal altercations in public, doxxing and threats of physical violence. Local council meetings have also been disrupted through the hijacking of public comment periods, 'zoom bombing' of online proceedings, protest and physical altercations at gatherings.

Leveraging its membership of more than 285 cities, Strong Cities conducted a survey of municipal officials and staff from across Europe and North America to obtain a broader context for anti-government sentiment. The survey revealed that online and in-person harassment, discriminatory slurs or attacks and sharing of false information were the most commonly observed incidents and that the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, growing public distrust and a lack of clear prevention and response protocols were the biggest challenges in addressing these incidents. Notably, one-third of respondents reported that no measures had been taken to address these incidents. Across all survey respondents, only two reported that anti-government hate had no impact on the functioning of local government. Most reported experiencing minor disruptions to the function of local government, but others still felt anti-government hate led to noticeable challenges in being able to perform their duties.

In Canada, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has asked the federal government for assistance in lowering the temperature of local politics and making the job of local government officials safer as they continue to report high levels of harassment. Some local elected officials in Canada have begun choosing not to seek re-election. In some parts of the country, increased attention is being paid to growing racism and online hate targeting public officials with racialised identities and the implications for local democracy. The INSPIRE Report from the Foundation for a Path Forward and the Centre for Civic Governance in British Columbia found that these incidents were "not merely a series of personal grievances, but a pattern" that specifically targets those "who have historically been excluded from power" and subject them to online attacks, challenges to their legitimacy and institutional cultures that marginalise their voices. The report concluded that "if left unchecked, this hostile environment will dissuade capable, passionate people from running for office or continuing to serve".

A Manitoba-focused survey, commissioned by CSSRP as part of the research for this Toolkit, revealed that municipalities in the province are not exempt from these trends, with local officials and staff across the province reporting similar incidents of hate and harassment experienced elsewhere. The survey targeted a mix of councillors, heads of council, mayors, reeves, city manager and chief administrative officers. The 66 survey responses confirmed that both elected officials and municipal staff in Manitoba are subject to hate and threats with the vast majority of threats reported by survey respondents, including harassment and sharing of false information. Most respondents said that these reports have had a moderate impact on the functioning of local government, with even more reporting that these incidents have influenced decisions regarding municipal policies or leadership practices. Although

respondents noted that council meeting disruptions were, as of yet, not a large concern in the province, they expressed concerns about the misinformation and disinformation campaigns related to council activities.

CSSRP survey respondents identified the lack of training for both municipal and elected officials as a notable gap in current municipal approaches to countering these harms. Roughly nine in ten respondents reported that they have not received any training on how to navigate hate and threats of violence. Further, no respondent identified having received a threat briefing for their own or neighbouring municipality.

Lastly, the majority of elected officials CSSRP surveyed reported that anti-government sentiment and political partisanship are the types of hate or extremism that motivate council disruptions in their municipality when they did occur. Full survey results are available in Appendix C.

In-Person Consultations

To better understand the local context in which Manitoban municipal leaders and officials are operating, Strong Cities organised a gathering of more than 100 mayors, reeves, councillors and municipal administrators from 40 municipalities across the province in April 2025 – on the margins of the AMM Spring Convention in Winnipeg – to gain insights into their experiences. Participants shared personal testimony regarding the emotional toll anti-government hate brought to their lives. Many spoke about how the anonymised nature of social media allows people – including 'keyboard warriors' – to more easily spew hateful rhetoric and personal attacks that made them feel unwelcome and unsafe in their communities. Beyond the emotional toll these comments take, participants also found the toxic online environment makes it difficult to discern if aggrieved posters have a legitimate issue with local governance or if they merely want disruption for disruption's sake.

Rampant misinformation and disinformation, pertaining to local, provincial, national and

global issues, motivates much of this online hate in Manitoba. Participants reported that it sometimes spills into offline forums with individuals arriving at council sessions to voice grievances about policies they heard about online that in reality have been misrepresented or do not even exist. They shared how council meetings can also be subject to protests and organised disruptions fuelled by out-of-town protesters and regional activist groups that disrupt meetings across municipalities. Some AMM members lamented how all of this leads to losses in productive council time. They reflected on a feeling of helplessness and feeling as though they could do no right as even seemingly uncontentious council decisions regarding, for example, where to locate a new road, playground, public park or housing development led to unexpectedly vocal and aggrieved responses from community members.

This Toolkit was commissioned to help elected officials and municipal staff across the province. It offers a set of practical steps that these local actors can take to prevent and respond to these threats, taking into account the specific concerns of those wor`king in local government as well as the general political environment in Manitoba. It does so by suggesting ways to address the underlying drivers of anti-government hate in Manitoba

Issues Index

Quick Reference Guide for Local Elected Officials

Elected officials, such as mayors, reeves and councillors, are often directly at the centre of targeted anti-government hate and harassment. As such, they require tools, skills and support to protect themselves from these threats. Due to their position in local government, they are also able to help their municipalities prevent and respond to this hate and harassment as a collective. This overview contains references in **bold** to specific Toolkit recommendations, which contain a hyperlink to their full description.

To address anti-government hate and harassment

- » Engage community members to understand the drivers of anti-government sentiment and encourage the council to **develop a comprehensive anti-hate and anti-discrimination plan** to address these drivers of hate

- » **Communicate strategically** and take a proactive approach to communications around prevention and response with a plan to engage residents about anti-hate efforts

For candidates/officials running for local office

- » **Protect campaigns from hacking** and **scrub social media** of personal details that could compromise safety

- » **Prepare for difficult conversations** by practising having confrontational encounters and **keeping composure**

For officials experiencing harassment or targeted hate

- » **Create a safety checklist** to assess risks early and maintain control of potentially volatile situations

- » **Develop relationships with local law enforcement** to reduce barriers to reporting and action

- » **Keep and share a record of harassment** to track repeat offenders and identify patterns in harassment and ensure to **report serious threats to the police**

To reduce online harassment

» **Decide if you want to maintain a social media presence**, and if you do, **separate your personal and official social media accounts** so you can exercise more control over who has access to your content

» **List clear expectations** on public accounts as to what content is prohibited and set engagement policies, such as 'I welcome questions via email' and 'abusive content will be removed'

» **Practise good digital citizenship** by modelling positive behaviour online, **avoiding amplification of harmful content** and **limiting the sharing of personal information on public accounts**

To address the spread of misinformation and disinformation online

» **Encourage residents to bring conversation offline** where more detailed discussion and personalised responses are possible

» **Engage with facts** when interacting online, scrutinise your own sources and **highlight positive stories** and achievements to drive engagement away from misinformation and disinformation

» **Remember online narratives often do not accurately represent public opinion.**

To help prevent and manage meeting disruptions

» Encourage council to **adopt a code of conduct** both for public comment periods and for elected officials that ensures public safety while safeguarding freedom of speech

» **Anticipate contentious meetings** and be **prepared both with facts and procedures** ahead of time to prevent escalation

» **Set a positive tone** and **greet residents as they enter** council chambers to humanise yourself and the council

» **Call for a recess** when needed or **move the session to an online meeting** if physical safety becomes a concern

To prevent identity-based targeting

» **Make colleagues feel welcome**, as feeling backed by colleagues can help them make it through difficult periods and **set a welcoming tone in council meetings** to encourage others to do the same

» Use your platform to **draw attention to all forms of identity-based hate** and highlight the serious issue of identity-based hate targeting local elected officials

Quick Reference Guide for Municipal Staff

Municipal staff, such as CAOs, city managers and department heads, may experience an increased emotional toll as they perform their day-to-day work amid growing politicisation of municipal processes and are in need of support to continue performing their duties effectively. They are also positioned to be leaders in designing and implementing policies, programmes and partnerships to prevent and respond to anti-government hate and harassment. This overview contains references in **bold** to specific Toolkit recommendations which contain a hyperlink to their full description.

To address anti-government hate and harassment

» **Construct multi-actor frameworks** to create sustainable responses to all forms of hate and extremism, including that targeting local government

» **Expand partnerships and coordination** both at the local level with community involvement and civil society organisations and at the provincial and federal levels

To protect candidates for local office

» **Remove barriers to running for council** and promote the **realities of what local government can and cannot do,** based on its jurisdiction and mandate, so candidates are prepared to serve and understand the role of municipal government

» Offer **training sessions** to candidates along with **external reference materials** on de-escalation, personal safety and strategies for engaging with agitated residents to prepare candidates for threats they may encounter while campaigning

To support officials and staff experiencing harassment or targeted hate

» Get ahead of harassment by **creating a threat assessment team** or relying on regional threat assessments to stay informed about emerging threats and to **assess your municipality's vulnerabilities**

» Conduct **regular check-ins for** municipal officials to share experiences, identify threats in common and to receive **guidance on what constitutes a credible threat**

To reduce online harassment

» **Create clear social media content policies** that outline the goals of social media engagement by the municipality, the types of content that are prohibited and specify the consequences for violations

» **Draft an internal social media plan** so staff know when to report offensive content or **disable comments**

» **Encourage departments to have their own social media accounts** to increase overall reach and engagement within the community

To address the spread of misinformation and disinformation online

» When misinformation and disinformation appear in the community's online ecosystem, **respond with corrections** and **issue social media packets to explain council decisions**

» Build trust in your platforms through **non-political, positive content, partnering with trusted community voices** and **focusing on transparency**

To help prevent and manage meeting disruptions

» **Explore non-traditional ways for council to engage with residents** that are less likely to result in confrontation and **make policies accessible** (in all relevant languages) to the public ahead of meetings so conduct expectations are clear.

» **Offer de-escalation training** and **practise disruption procedures** to ensure everyone has the confidence to enact their specific roles and responsibilities during disruptions.

To prevent identity-based targeting

» Publish and disseminate a municipal **anti-discrimination policy statement** that outlines clear expectations for respectful conduct in all municipal spaces and interactions

» **Develop an action plan** that operationalises the public statement, taking steps like removing exclusionary language from municipal documents, establishing oversight mechanisms and ensuring inclusive service delivery.

» **Commit to hate crime prevention** and to **improving hate incident** reporting to build community resilience and address harmful behaviours before they escalate

Chapter 1
Rising Anti-Government Sentiment

Anti-government and anti-establishment sentiment affecting municipal officials is being driven by interconnected factors rooted in wider social, political and technological change. Breakdowns in social cohesion within communities have eroded the trust and shared civic values that traditionally support constructive dialogue between residents and their elected representatives. The proliferation of extremist content online has amplified anti-establishment narratives, providing platforms for conspiracy theories and hostile rhetoric to spread rapidly and take root in local political discourse. Political polarisation at national and provincial levels has filtered down to municipal politics, transforming previously non-partisan local issues, such as park planning and construction permits, into ideological battlegrounds. Youth grievances and disaffection serve as key drivers of hate, extremism and polarisation and younger generations facing economic uncertainty and social challenges may be particularly susceptible to anti-government messaging that offers simple explanations for complex problems. Addressing these underlying conditions requires collaboration across sectors and engaging a cross-section of municipal-level government and non-governmental stakeholders as co-producers of public safety and social cohesion, which is essential for (re)building trust and maintaining or restoring community cohesion. The following recommendations provide approaches for municipalities to mitigate these factors. Many of these recommendations are adapted from Strong Cities guides and resources available on the Strong Cities online resource hub, with links to sources provided where applicable.

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #1: Understand what lies behind anti-government sentiment

The drivers of anti-government sentiment vary and can arise through different pathways, including extremist communities, social isolation, hyper-partisanship, online radicalisation and dissatisfaction with local policies. Recognising that anti-government sentiment itself is a precursor to hate and harassment directed at government officials, and understanding what might lie behind this sentiment, are critical to developing effective strategies to prevent and mitigate the impact of this hate and harassment. Taking steps to address anti-government sentiment and its underlying drivers, decreases the likelihood that any such hostility will manifest direct harassment or threats against elected (or other local) officials.

Recommendation #2: Examine the local council's and wider municipality's mandate to address hate, including through existing mandates to promote community safety and well-being

Examine how the bodies, structures and resources that fall within local council's mandate – including those related to community safety, education, sports, culture and/or social well-being – can be leveraged to advance prevention objectives and enhance the resilience of the municipality to

these threats. Emphasising the concept of community-connectedness and demonstrating that the municipality is committed to ensuring that all residents feel welcome and included can serve as a foundation for council action against all forms of hate, including that driven by anti-government sentiments.

Recommendation #3: Recognise the value of 'networked' responses

Develop greater awareness of how to design and implement 'networked' responses: ones that leverage the comparative advantages of diverse local actors that work in and with communities, including municipal departments, commissions, task forces, agencies, community-based organisations and faith leaders. Coordinate efforts to avoid duplication of prevention-related interventions and other programmes, such as law enforcement hate crime training, increasing hate crime reporting and sustaining networks of community-based practitioners.

Recommendation #4: Communicate strategically

Take a proactive approach to communications around prevention and response to anti-government (and other forms of hate) by developing and implementing a comprehensive plan to engage residents and other key stakeholders about anti-hate efforts and the contributions they can make to them. Keep residents informed through multiple channels and actively reach people who might miss out on traditional communications. This includes historically marginalised or racialised communities that may be the most likely targets or subjects of hateful messages. Be prepared to respond quickly and effectively in the event of an extremist or hateful incident, with pre-drafted messages that can counter harmful narratives while reassuring the community and reinforcing municipal values of inclusion and respect.

Recommendation #5: Seek out knowledge exchanges

Municipality-to-municipality knowledge exchanges bring awareness to practices that are working in other municipalities facing similar challenges, ensuring you have access to the most innovative and effective approaches and tools available. Regional sharing is particularly important for issues like anti-government sentiment that are not restricted by municipal boundaries. Further, national and international learnings too yield value because, while contexts differ between municipalities, drivers of hate, extremism and rising levels of polarisation are common across provinces and countries.

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #6: Understand the challenges and existing assets

Map the challenges and identify the threats affecting the municipality. Determine what is currently being done to address the drivers and identify what gaps in policies, programmes and partnerships exist. Identify key stakeholders and partners, both institutional and in the community; be consultative, participatory and representative; and include outreach to and perspectives from historically marginalised and racialised groups and communities.

Recommendation #7: Construct multi-actor frameworks

Adopt a whole-of-society model by mapping key actors and communities and building on existing infrastructure and mechanisms to create sustainable responses to hate and extremism targeting local government. Tap into local resources, experience and trusted relationships to mobilise this multi-sectoral response. Build local multi-disciplinary leadership group to develop and deliver a comprehensive local prevention framework addressing the drivers of anti-

government hostility. Such a group should include community-based organisations, law enforcement, social workers, mental health professionals, educators and faith leaders, as well as municipal staff.

Recommendation #8: Develop/strengthen local mandate for national-local cooperation

Cooperation among different levels of government, or what Strong Cities refers to as national-local cooperation (NLC) is an essential component of effective and sustainable efforts to prevent and respond to hate and social polarisation. As a practice, NLC encompasses the structures, resources and approaches that support both national strategies and local needs. In the Canadian context, this includes the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government, which need to work collectively and collaboratively to maximise the impact of prevention and response efforts.

Recommendation #9: Expand partnerships and coordination

Support community involvement and strengthen partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs); build trust across communities, especially with historically marginalised and other vulnerable groups, including women and young people and minorities; and strengthen information-sharing where relevant and possible. Understand which communities are already well-connected to municipal services and which ones need more connection through building partnerships.

Recommendation #10: Engage and empower youth for prevention

Expand meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in civic processes and democratic decision-making, including youth engagement units where feasible. Such opportunities could involve promoting civic education programmes that teach young residents about local government while strengthening youth-police relations through positive community interactions.

Enhance mental health support and wellbeing services specifically designed for young people, recognising that early intervention can prevent radicalisation to violence and other anti-social behaviour. Leverage digital platforms for positive engagement with youth, creating online spaces where young residents can constructively interact with municipal government rather than encountering only negative or extremist content about local officials.

Recommendation #11: Use urban design to promote social cohesion

 Leverage urban design and planning as tools to promote tolerance, increase public safety and build social cohesion within your community through thoughtful space creation. Design public spaces that serve as platforms for positive social interaction, bringing together residents from different backgrounds in welcoming, accessible environments.

Recommendation #12: Monitor progress on social cohesion efforts

Utilise data-driven insights and monitoring systems to measure progress in social cohesion efforts, helping policymakers understand demographic trends, map social interactions and identify areas of inequality. Engage regional research partners like universities and colleges to assist with data collection and analysis where possible.

City Practice: Albuquerque (New Mexico, United States)

To address threats to social cohesion including hate, extremism and polarisation, Albuquerque developed a local prevention framework through a Strong Cities' pilot programme that involved the co-design (involving local government and communities) of tailored city-led prevention strategies grounded in public health principles. Working with Strong Cities from October 2023 to July 2025, the municipality convened a local leadership group of community actors, conducted a community survey on the hate and targeted violence landscape, and created a framework outlining key priorities, including:

• Establishing collaborative forums where community leaders and local government officials meet to discuss concerns regarding hate, targeted violence and polarisation and strategise collective responses.

• Increasing City-led communications – including through trusted community messengers and outlets – to all communities about residents' rights

• Promoting social cohesion through community-building efforts, particularly across particularly across demographic, cultural and ideological divides to strengthen a shared sense of belonging

• Incorporating hate and targeted violence prevention objectives into existing local community violence intervention and school safety programmes

• Working towards an appropriate provision of social and health services for those at risk of mobilizing to violence and those violent offenders reintegrating into the community.

This local prevention framework has already delivered concrete results including targeted violence prevention trainings for Albuquerque Public Schools, Community Safety and Police Department; training and peer learning opportunities for the mental health community; and a collaborative platform for future convenings with the University of New Mexico's Project ECHO. By building a collaborative prevention ecosystem, Albuquerque has established relationships, partnerships and systems to mitigate impacts from future threats to social cohesion and other shocks and crises.

Chapter 2
Protecting Candidates for Local Office

The increasingly toxic political environment, made more hostile through increased anti-government hate and harassment of elected and municipal officials, can have a chilling effect on an individual's desire to run for local office. Potential candidates can be deterred by the constant scrutiny, hostility and potential to alienate themselves from their community and the impact that this can have on one's mental health, not to mention the increased targeting of the private residences and family members of local officials as reported by officials at the AMM Spring Convention. In addition, candidates who are new to the political sphere may not have the tools, knowledge and experience necessary to navigate this challenging environment. Moreover, from encountering agitated residents while canvassing to being mired in a flood of online misinformation and disinformation to being targeted by foreign entities and facing coordinated online smear campaigns, candidates for local office can face significant threats to their safety and reputation. The following recommendations provide guidance to help new candidates for local elected office navigate some of these challenges.

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #13: Create a list of reasons why you are running

Before launching a campaign, write down the values, motivations and connections to community that led you to seek office. This list can serve as a guiding document throughout your campaign, giving you something to return to during difficult times and helping you stay centred.

Recommendation #14: Make your intentions clear

Be transparent with residents about why you are running, sharing your goals and motivations through authentic interactions. Clear communication builds trust, helps residents see your commitment to public service and reduces suspicion or resentment that can contribute to tensions or disruptive behaviour.

Recommendation #15: Protect your campaign from being hacked

When running for public office – even at the local level – you may be a target of cyberattacks and hacking attempts designed to access your personal information, compromise your campaign communications or damage your reputation. Any account you have online can be a target for malicious actors seeking to disrupt your campaign or access sensitive information. Practise good password etiquette by using strong, unique passwords and enabling two-factor authentication, applying security updates promptly to mobile devices, computers and applications and remaining vigilant for phishing and spear-phishing messages attempting to steal your credentials. Store campaign data securely and establish reliable back-up procedures to protect against data loss or ransomware attacks.

Recommendation #16: Scrub your social media

Before running for office, review your social media for personal details that could compromise your safety, such as your home address, photographs of children or posts that reveal daily routines. However, remember that nothing is ever completely erased from the internet. Adjust privacy settings and remove sensitive content where possible. Set up campaign-specific accounts if possible.

Recommendation #17: Prepare for difficult conversations

Prepare to have difficult conversations with residents, understanding that they sometimes may turn aggressive. Practise having confrontational conversations, in order to learn how to remain calm no matter how heated the other person/side may become. If you encounter animated policy disagreements, be prepared with facts, questions and statements you know by heart, so you are not searching for words in the moment. If you encounter agitated residents while going door to door or otherwise on the campaign trail, exit conversations calmly, do not escalate. Thank the resident for their time and be on your way. Before approaching a house, be prepared with an exit strategy from the street and, where relevant, always keep track of where you are in relation to your car.

Recommendation #18: Take care of your mental health

Be aware of the burden running for office can take on your mental health and that of those close to you. Do not shoulder this burden alone, particularly as harassment toward elected officials has increased. Seek professional mental health support if needed and consult with trusted friends and family who can provide perspective and encouragement.

Recommendation #19: Refrain from language that vilifies other candidates

During campaigns, treat all candidates with respect, recognising that your words influence how residents perceive new candidates for office. Avoid negative or vilifying language, and instead model professional, constructive discourse. Setting a positive example fosters a healthier electoral environment and encourages civility in the broader community.

Recommendation #20: Stand strong against spikes in hateful and dehumanising language

Hate crimes and incidents often rise during election season as political rhetoric can amplify extremist beliefs. This makes it especially important for elected officials to speak out against hate and intolerance – regardless of its source or target – demonstrating a clear and consistent commitment to community safety and cohesion.

Recommendation #21: Formal mentorship for new councillors

Pair new councillors with experienced members to provide guidance, answer questions and offer support as they adjust to the role. A formal mentorship programme helps newcomers navigate complex responsibilities, build essential relationships and have a trusted colleague to turn to when challenges arise.

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #22: Remove barriers to running for council

Use public messaging campaigns to highlight the value of public service and the positive impact councillors can have in their community. Provide clear guides on what is required to begin a campaign and emphasise the support available from the municipality

to help prospective candidates navigate the process. Reach out specifically to those who may be discouraged from running or are underrepresented in government. See the AMM Towards Parity campaign to learn more about removing barriers to running for council.

Recommendation #23: Make clear the jurisdiction and mandate of local government

Residents may view local government as the focal point for all political concerns, bringing grievances about provincial, federal and international matters that cannot be addressed at the municipal level. To help manage expectations of those running for council, include explanations of the role (and limitations) of local government and council in Manitoba in public-facing materials, clearly outlining what falls within and beyond municipal authority. These communications should also articulate expectations for councillors, emphasising their responsibility to represent all constituents regardless of differing views, including on issues outside local jurisdiction or mandate.

Recommendation #24: Offer training sessions to candidates

Offer training sessions for candidates that focus on de-escalation, personal safety and strategies for engaging with agitated residents. Rely on external organisations to provide trainings where capacity is limited. Trainings can also cover online safety and strategies for handling harassment on social media. These sessions can introduce candidates to local law enforcement officers, helping them feel more comfortable reporting incidents and ensuring they know what support is available. These training opportunities should be made available to all candidates, not just those who seek them out.

Recommendation #25: Inform law enforcement of new candidates

Ensure local police are made aware of new candidates for municipal office so they can be included in threat assessment tracking. This helps law enforcement authorities monitor potential risks more effectively and provide timely support if safety concerns arise.

Recommendation #26: Increase engagement with potential voters

Anti-government hate can have a chilling effect on voter turn-out, so municipalities should commit to bolstering engagement with voters in order to help mitigate this risk. This can include a) embedding local voter registration opportunities throughout municipal services, thus making it convenient for residents to register when accessing municipal programmes or facilities; b) setting municipality-wide goals for voter participation and c) implementing strategies to remove transportation and other barriers that can prevent residents from accessing polling stations during elections.

Recommendation #27: Ensure staff time is allotted to new councillors

Allocate dedicated staff time to support new councillors. They can benefit from tailored guidance to learn procedures and carry out their responsibilities effectively. Providing this support early helps build their confidence and ensures they can contribute fully to council's work.

Recommendation #28: Include a threat briefing in induction materials

Incorporate a threat briefing into new councillors' induction to ensure they are aware of community-wide risks and aligned with the rest of the council. Include information on past incidents, common warning signs and strategies used by previous officials to navigate threats. Early exposure to this knowledge helps elected officials respond confidently, consistently and safely when facing challenging situations.

City Practice: Auckland (New Zealand)

To protect candidates for local office from harassment, abuse and intimidation, Auckland Council developed a dedicated Staying Safe During Election Campaigns webpage within its Vote Auckland website. By creating a focused, non-partisan resource separate from general election information, the Council ensures candidates can easily access critical safety guidance without navigating through broader campaign materials. This dedicated page:

- Addresses privacy considerations by warning candidates about risks from publicly available information including social media accounts, election branding and personal details that could lead to phishing attempts, unauthorised access or public sharing of family information.

- Provides practical security measures such as enabling privacy functions on personal accounts, creating separate campaign email and social media profiles, and using strong passwords with two-factor authentication.

- Guides personal security planning by helping candidates assess risks to themselves, supporters and the public, including considerations for home and workplace security, travel safety and managing increased public recognition.

- Links to national resources including the Electoral Commission for security advnice, the National Cyber Security Centre for online impersonation issues and the Privacy Commission for breached privacy concerns.

The webpage demonstrates Auckland Council's recognition that candidate safety requires proactive institutional support rather than leaving individuals to navigate threats alone. By providing brief, accessible and topic-focused guidance alongside broader election resources, the Council normalises safety planning as an essential component of standing for office and equips prospective candidates with tools to participate in public life with greater confidence.

Chapter 3
Harassment of Municipal Officials

Local elected leaders and municipal staff leaders are increasingly encountering hate, harassment, threats, abuse and intimidation simply for carrying out their duties. Harassment can escalate beyond policy disagreements to personal attacks on officials' character, families and livelihood. This harassment poses a danger to both personal safety and the effective functioning of local government. Many officials feel they do not have the support they need, leaving them feeling unprepared to manage escalating hostility. The following recommendations are relevant for addressing all degrees and forms of harassment.

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #29: Assemble a team

Have a 'team' around you that includes trusted family, friends, allies and local partners, which you can rely upon for support and guidance in challenging circumstances. Know whom you can depend on and check in with them frequently rather than shouldering the emotional burden yourself. When something does happen, talk to a partner, trusted advisors and peers first and resist the temptation to turn first to social media.

Recommendation #30: Seek peer support

Build constructive relationships with other local elected officials as a proactive mitigation strategy for dealing with threats and harassment. Form personal connections with those you work with to create a sense of solidarity, reduce isolation and strengthen collective responses. Provincial, federal and private and not-for-profit organisations and platforms that bring together officials from across municipalities and communities can provide a means for local officials to build supportive relationships, especially for those who do not have pre-existing local networks. There is value in speaking with those who have gone through similar experiences and can offer practical advice and emotional support.

Recommendation #31: Develop relationships with local law enforcement

Form relationships with local police so that, before any incident occurs, they are trusted partners if you are harassed or otherwise targeted. Having personal relationships with individuals in the department can help ensure your concerns are taken seriously and receive appropriate attention. Strong relationships may reduce your hesitation to reach out when incidents occur. After experiencing threats, local police can, where appropriate, conduct 'drive-by' patrols of your home or escort you from your car when you arrive at the council chambers. Have the phone number for officers on duty and request they come to meetings to support you when needed.

Recommendation #32: Create a safety checklist

Create a series of questions and prompts to check in with yourself when dealing with confrontational members of the public. Being mindful can help you assess risks early and maintain control of potentially volatile situations.

Creating a Safety Checklist

The UK Local Government Association has developed a list of questions to guide the creation of a safety checklist which includes:

- Are council staff/friends/family aware of where I am? Will they check on me if this meeting takes too long? Do they know how to contact me?

- How do I call for help if I need to? Have I got my mobile phone with me, is the battery charged, and can I get a signal?

- Am I sat at their level and using eye contact and open and gestures to display a helpful attitude?

- Is my chair nearest the door, so I can get out quickly if I need to? Am I aware of the quickest way out of the area or building and is there a safe location identified for me to go in case of any issues?

Recommendation #33: Ensure home security

Home security is important if you are a public official, especially in smaller communities where your address is more likely to be known than if you are working for a large municipality. Make clear boundaries between public and private space around your property. Remember to lock your garages, outer buildings and sheds, ensuring they have high-quality and secure locks. Add extra locks if you are particularly worried about security. Obscure the view into your home by fitting blinds, curtains or film, including on glazed exterior doors, or use landscaping to obscure sightlines. Avoid labelling keys where possible to maintain security if they are lost or stolen. Install good external lighting to identify visitors at night to illuminate all external doors, car parking and garage areas and footpaths leading to your home.

Recommendation #34: Practise good physical safety habits

If you are afraid of a potential confrontation, including during an ongoing high-profile incident, vary your daily routines such as leaving and returning home at different times or taking alternate routes. Ensure your spouse,

partner, friend and/or relative has information about your activities and whereabouts. Keep your mobile phone charged at all times and consider purchasing a personal alarm or whistle for additional security. Remember that these are stopgap measures only and should be combined with consultation with law enforcement if threats escalate.

Recommendation #35: Keep a record of harassment

Councillors are encouraged to keep a detailed record of any intimidating or harassing communication or behaviour they experience. Document phone numbers, get names and addresses, if possible, and note the date, time and location of each incident. Record the specific language used, threats made and issues raised. Pass this information to municipal staff and law enforcement to create an official record. This documentation is important for tracking repeat offenders and identifying patterns in harassment that may not be immediately obvious. Detailed records can lead to discovery of organised harassment campaigns, reveal whether multiple officials are being targeted by the same individuals or groups and help identify specific issues or decisions that are driving harassment towards municipal officials.

Recommendation #36: Offer to escalate a resident's concerns

If you are being harassed about a particular issue, offering to escalate the resident's concerns to council or the appropriate body within local government may diffuse the situation by demonstrating that you are taking their concerns seriously and providing a constructive path forward. This approach can, at the very least, end the immediate interaction by redirecting their energy towards the proper channels rather than continuing to target you personally. It may also transform unproductive harassment into more productive interactions that are more likely to lead to the resident's concerns being addressed through official processes. When you do escalate concerns, warn the receiving body that you have done this to prepare them for potential contact from the individual and provide context about the nature of the harassment you experienced.

Recommendation #37: Report serious threats to the police

If you have reason to believe harassment you faced rose to the level of a crime – this includes cases involving threats to life or of other violence -- you should formally report the matter to council leadership and/or the police.

Recommendation #38: Request to record phone conversations

If you are receiving harassment while on a phone call with a resident, where consistent with the municipality's privacy obligations and applicable law, consider asking for permission to record the conversation for record keeping and reporting purposes. For municipal staff and elected officials, recording without warning may breach public-sector privacy notice obligations and your municipality's policies even if it is compliant with the criminal law, so consult local legal guidance first. In some instances, simply asking to record the conversation may stop the harassment on its own.

Recommendation #39: Focus on your mental health

In-person and online harassment can have a significant impact on your mental health and overall wellbeing. If you feel anxious or worried, or if harassment is affecting your daily routines such as sleeping or eating patterns, speak to a mental health professional who can provide appropriate support and coping strategies.

Recommendation #40: Maintain your composure

It is inevitable that you will meet some residents who will be angry or upset about municipal decisions, policies or services. Maintaining a calm presence in the face of antagonistic behaviour will help both you and residents by preventing escalation and creating space for productive dialogue.

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #41: Invest in prevention

Collaborate on whole-of-society solutions to push back on the climate of hostility and the normalisation of threats over the long-term rather than only responding reactively to incidents. Explore introducing city-wide programmes that focus on promoting civility, tolerance and respect, even with those you might disagree. These can include workshops on constructive dialogue and conflict resolution for community members. Implement public messaging campaigns using physical and digital advertisements that promote respectful engagement with local government and highlight the importance of civil discourse in democratic processes. Identify and support community champions of public discourse who can model positive engagement and help shift cultural norms around how residents interact with elected officials and participate in local democracy.

Recommendation #42: Assess your municipality's public safety vulnerabilities

Conduct a comprehensive assessment to identify potential security risks and safety gaps in municipal operations and facilities as well as the vulnerabilities of neighbouring municipalities. Consider improving public safety measures, refining intervention training for security officers and, where necessary, explore metal detectors and glass partitions to protect municipal officials.

Recommendation #43: Create a threat detection and mitigation team

Establish a threat detection and mitigation team as an effective proactive and protective measure designed to prevent threats before they escalate into actual violence or serious incidents. Track threats online through social media monitoring and, if possible, on encrypted platforms like Telegram where extremist activity may occur. Consider partnering with an external organisation like the Institute for Strategic Dialogue to benefit from their threat monitoring and analysis expertise and broader capabilities. Monitor community sentiment around controversial issues to identify when tensions may be building toward potential confrontations. At the most basic level, ask existing threat assessment teams that may operate in the municipality or region, like those at law enforcement agencies or local institutions operating in communities, such as hospitals or universities, to specifically track threats to elected officials.

Recommendation #44: Provide guidance to municipal officials on what constitutes a credible threat

Offer guidance to help councillors distinguish between legally protected speech and threats of violence, as this difference can be difficult to assess in heated situations. Help municipal officials and local elected leaders learn to assess whether individuals are just 'keyboard warriors' or also willing to commit real world violence. Provide training that covers what types of threats are actionable by law, what constitutes illegal hate speech versus

protected political criticism or other speech. Deliver this information through workshops and easy-to-use reference guides that councillors can consult during incidents; then, establish clear avenues for councillors and local officials to get their specific questions answered by municipal legal staff or law enforcement when they encounter ambiguous situations that may cross legal thresholds.

Recommendation #45: Create standard procedures for responding to harassment

Create procedures to follow should a councillor or staff person feel they are being publicly harassed to ensure that officials do not have to advocate for support during already stressful situations. Procedures should consider relevant recommendations from this guide and be put in place before incidents occur. Categories could include: a) immediate support for the targeted official, b) clear pathways to report incidents to law enforcement, c) having a template for public statements condemning harassment, which can be quickly adapted and released following each incident and d) documentation requirements for tracking patterns of abuse. Having predetermined responses can help reduce delays and uncertainty when harassment occurs and ensures consistent institutional support for all officials regardless of their political party or positions or the controversial nature of issues they may be addressing.

Recommendation #46: Organise regular check-ins

Regular check-ins for all municipal officials to share experiences and concerns can both identify persistent offenders and explore council-led solutions to harassment. These sessions provide a dedicated space for processing difficult experiences and building solidarity. Creating routine opportunities for discussion lowers the barrier to sharing incidents with fellow councillors when they do occur, as officials may be more likely to report harassment when there is a structured forum rather than having to initiate difficult

conversations individually. These briefings can be conducted with or without law enforcement present, depending on the nature of the concerns being discussed and whether immediate action or investigation is required.

Recommendation #47: Designate a law enforcement officer to respond to hate and harassment

Work with local law enforcement to identify an officer who will be responsible for handling serious threats to councillors and staff and advising on personal safety and security. This designation gives councillors a specific person to reach out to when incidents occur, eliminating potential confusion about proper reporting channels. Having one officer working across multiple cases helps identify patterns of harassment that might affect several officials and helps ensure consistent response protocols. An official relationship between the designated officer and council helps streamline permissions for security measures and creates opportunities for proactive threat assessment rather than purely reactive responses. Establishing special pathways for councillors to report safety concerns helps ensure faster response times and prioritised attention when elected officials face harassment or threats.

Recommendation #48: Take mental health seriously

Recognising that psychological support may be necessary for officials dealing with intimidation or threats, ensure that councillors who are harassed have access to mental health services. Allow for mental health leave when councillors need time away from their duties for their wellbeing and safety, particularly following serious incidents of harassment.

Recommendation #49: Make public forums outside of council safe

When holding public forums away from the council chambers, ask security professionals at the municipality or with law enforcement to conduct safety assessments beforehand to ensure the venue provides adequate security measures. If possible, a separate and comfortable waiting area for constituents allows for a preliminary assessment of attendees before they enter the main meeting space. Consider the layout of the room carefully, ensuring councillors have a clear path to the door.

City Practice: Cheshire (United Kingdom)

To protect councillors from direct threats and harassment, Cheshire East Council developed a comprehensive Councillor Safety Protocol following a survey revealing that over a third of members had considered resigning due to abuse. This protocol provides accessible guidance and clear support structures for elected officials facing intimidation, and

- Establishes formal reporting pathways through a Nominated Officer for Councillor Safety who serves as a sounding board for concerns and coordinates with dedicated police contact for serious incidents.

- Creates strategic oversight via a Member Champion for Councillor Safety who maintains partnerships with police and ensures protective measures remain prioritised across the authority.

- Establishes strategic partnerships through regular meetings between the Nominated Officer, the Force Elected Official Advisor from Cheshire Police and the Member Champion for Councillor Safety to strengthen protective processes.

- Delivers targeted training on conflict prevention and wellbeing to instil a culture of zero tolerance towards abuse through reaffirming commitment to the Local Government Association's Debate Not Hate campaign

By combining immediate support structures with longer-term cultural change, the protocol aims to protect democratic participation and ensure councillors can serve their communities without fear of abuse, harassment or intimidation.

Chapter 4
Online Harassment

Municipal officials are increasingly targets of online hate and harassment because of their public roles and the increasingly toxic political environment surrounding government service at all levels. These take many forms, including doxxing (publishing personal information), swatting (false emergency calls to officials' homes), abusive language, character assassinations and credible threats of violence. These attacks can originate from within the local community due to personal or political grievances as well as from outside actors who may be motivated by broader anti-government sentiment or coordinated harassment campaigns. The persistent and public nature of online harassment, with hateful rhetoric amplified through social media which enables organised targeting of public officials, makes it particularly difficult for officials to insulate themselves from it entirely. It creates constant stress that makes it difficult to serve effectively and can sometimes put their lives and those of their families at genuine risk. Unlike in-person interactions, which are limited by physical proximity and social norms, online harassment can be relentless, anonymous and far-reaching in its impact. The following recommendations provide strategies for preventing, managing and responding to online hate and harassment while maintaining a commitment to freedom of expression.

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #50: Be intentional with when to engage online

Remember that you are not required to monitor online spaces constantly or maintain a presence on social media at all. Municipalities and elected officials do not need social media accounts in order to carry out their duties effectively. Instead, you can rely on official government websites to provide residents with information and direct them to appropriate channels for engagement.

Recommendation #51: Create and maintain personal social media and other online accounts when engaging online

If you choose to have a personal online presence, keep it separate from your official accounts. Holders of personal social media accounts have more latitude in what they can do to limit public access than those who manage government accounts and have to avoid taking steps that might impinge on free speech. Limitations can include blocking or muting the accounts of specific individuals or organisations, keeping one's account private and limiting who can comment or message you directly. This separation helps with both privacy and giving you control over what content you are regularly exposed to. Where possible, have staff manage your public official accounts as another way to insulate

yourself from online hate and harassment. Keep personal email addresses separate as well so you can block problematic email addresses without affecting official municipal communications or limiting legitimate public access to your office.

Recommendation #52: Set expectations on public accounts

Encourage the CAO, city manager and/or the council to develop a social media policy for official accounts that includes moderation rules, make it public and follow it consistently across all platforms. Clearly state the general purposes your individual public account will serve and include disclaimers in your biography that views expressed are your own as an individual councillor and may not represent the council's official position. Establish clear limitations on user interactions, including restrictions on true threats, obscenity, off-topic content and excessive commenting from individual users. Set out your response and engagement policies, such as 'I welcome questions via email' and 'abusive content will be removed' so followers understand how you will interact with comments and what behaviour is acceptable. Specify how you will address policy violations, such as removing inappropriate comments or blocking repeat offenders. Ensure all limitations are reasonable, viewpoint-neutral and enforced consistently to maintain credibility and avoid claims of censorship or political bias in your content moderation.

Recommendation #53: Consider what you share on public accounts

Limit sharing personal information, images of friends and family and details of daily routines on social media for both personal safety and identity security. You can search for yourself online to check what information about you, your family or business appears in the public domain. Monitor these search results consistently so you can identify problematic content and request removal or edits when

necessary to maintain your privacy and security as a public official.

Recommendation #54: Practise good digital citizenship

Model positive behaviour online by avoiding negative engagement and prioritising constructive interactions. You are best positioned to determine whether a post or interaction constitutes harassment, so report problematic content to platforms when it violates terms of service and label abusive material clearly so both perpetrators and other viewers understand such behaviour is unacceptable. Be aware that some hostile accounts may be bots or automated systems rather than actual community members. Do not react emotionally to provocative comments - instead, take time to craft thoughtful responses, stay on topic and steer off-topic or negative discussions to private channels when possible.

Recommendation #55: Keep a record of online harassment

Keep records of online abuse even if you are not overly concerned or intend to ignore it, as documentation may be needed if incidents escalate in the future. Take screenshots of problematic posts on your phone, tablet or computer to preserve evidence. Consider warning the accounts that you are keeping records of all messages and may refer them to appropriate authorities, which may discourage further comments or prompt them to delete existing ones. Store these records systematically with dates and context to build a comprehensive picture of harassment patterns over time.

Recommendation #56: Avoid amplification

Deciding to engage, even to correct misinformation, can amplify the post's reach both to your audience and through signalling to the algorithm that the post is getting traction. Choosing not to engage with posts can be an effective mitigation strategy because the user does not receive the satisfaction of a response from you. Leaving harassers without

engagement may cause them to lose interest and move on.

Recommendation #57: Consider 'counter speech' when online responses are warranted

When choosing to engage with misinformation and disinformation or extremist content that appears in your online community, reply with links to reliable sources that challenge hate speech and cyberhate narratives as a form of counterspeech. Ensure harmful content does not exist in a vacuum by offering alternative perspectives and credible sources. This approach is not about reaching the user who posts harmful content but about helping others who come across it by providing context and factual information.

Recommendation #58: Issue public statements calling out and condemning harassment

Depending on the context, it may be worthwhile devoting time in council to call out online harassment targeting municipal officials and the threat it poses not just to its target(s), but to local democracy more broadly. Well-timed public statements can help establish clear boundaries about acceptable conduct, demonstrate institutional support for targeted individuals and promote civility in public discourse. However, one should **be wary of giving these issues too much airtim**e, as excessive attention can sometimes amplify the problem or encourage copycat behaviour.

Recommendation #59: Join campaigns to disagree better

Join local, national and international campaigns focused on improving public political discourse and promoting constructive disagreement in democratic processes. Participate in initiatives that provide resources and training for the community on how to engage respectfully across political and other differences

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #60: Create clear content policies

Develop and clearly display the municipal government's content policies on municipal social media pages that outline the municipality's social media engagement goals, the types of content that are prohibited and specify the consequences for violations. Consider implementing a warning system that informs offenders about their conduct and allows them to remedy behaviour before posts are removed. State clearly that government accounts are not monitored 24/7, which can reduce harassment attempts as users may realise their posts will not immediately reach local officials. Utilise built-in content moderation features such as Facebook's ability to block specific words and set profanity filters to automatically screen problematic content before it appears publicly on your pages.

Recommendation #61: Exercise caution and follow applicable laws and regulations when removing offensive comments

Decisions to remove posts should be taken where consistent with applicable laws and regulations and focus on the content of the posts rather than targeting specific users to avoid claims of bias or censorship. Never remove comments solely for expressing opposing political opinions, even if they are critical of council decisions or policies. Use comment removal sparingly and primarily in cases involving direct threats, harassment targeting individuals, or content that clearly violates platform terms of service. Maintain consistent standards for removal to demonstrate fair and impartial moderation of your official social media channels and ensure consistent application

Recommendation #62: Draft an internal social media plan

Create an internal social media plan that

The City of Chino (California, United States) Social Media Policy

City of Chino social media sites may be used as a supplement to the City of Chino website for marketing and community engagement purposes; emergency communication; and, to communicate items of community interest and important City information quickly to a broad audience. The City reserves the right to reject any post it deems objectionable. Following are examples of materials that are prohibited and that will be automatically deleted from the City's Social Media Sites:

- Profane language or content;
- Content that, for a reasonable person, promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination or a hostile attitude or gives offence on the basis of race, colour, citizenship, age, religion, ancestry, gender, marital status, national origin, veteran's status, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Commercial solicitations;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Messages that bully, threaten and/or defame any person or organisation.

outlines the municipality's goals for online engagement and establishes clear success measurements to evaluate effectiveness. Determine which platforms best meet these objectives and provide guidelines for consistent messaging and interaction standards. Having a comprehensive plan helps guide online interactions and avoids the need to evaluate situations on a case-by-case basis, ensuring municipal social media use remains strategic, professional and aligned with broader communication objectives.

Recommendation #63: Disable comments

If vitriol on a local government page becomes overwhelming or unmanageable, consider turning off comments until temperatures lower and more constructive dialogue can resume. Balance the role comment sections play as an avenue for public input and the need to protect municipal staff from harassment.

Recommendation #64: Follow up when warranted

Respond to legitimate questions from residents and avoid engagement with

individuals who are clearly harassing or trying to provoke confrontation. Always reply from the official municipal page rather than from personal accounts. When appropriate, follow up with direct messages for more detailed responses or sensitive matters that may benefit from private discussion rather than public comment threads.

Recommendation #65: Encourage departments to have their own accounts

Allow municipal departments to host their own social media pages, where feasible, to increase overall reach and engagement with community members. Departments should still follow municipality-wide social media guidelines. Multiple departmental accounts enable a higher volume of positive posts on relevant topics and create opportunities to coordinate responses across accounts to flood negative content with positive messaging. Collaborate with other municipalities to amplify constructive content and share successful strategies for managing online discourse, creating a broader network of supportive voices that can help counter harassment.

Recommendation #66: Document frequent users who disrupt online pages

Track patterns of disruptive behaviour from repeat users across municipality social media platforms to identify accounts that may warrant blocking or reporting. Monitor what types of content generate the most negative responses so you can adjust your communication strategy, anticipate problematic reactions and prepare appropriate responses when posting about sensitive topics that historically attract hostile engagement.

Recommendation #67: Develop social media guidelines for municipal staff

The Canadian federal government provides guidance for its public servants on how to operate online as individuals while remaining professional, non-partisan and impartial. The federal framework emphasizes key principles like maintaining confidentiality, practicing non-partisanship and considering how posts might be perceived by the public or impact professional reputation. Municipal staff can adapt these federal guidelines to develop their own social media policies that balance personal expression rights with professional responsibilities.

Recommendation #68: Offer online training courses to residents

Provide municipality-endorsed online training courses and anti-hate speech and anti-cyberhate campaigns to residents that teach how to recognise hate and stand up to harassment. If capacity is a concern, rely on AMM, Strong Cities or other external partners to design these courses and campaigns. Utilise existing educational tools provided by digital and media literacy organisations to this end.

Recommendation #69: Empower residents to be active participants in the betterment of online discourse

Offer resources that help community members explore and critically reflect on current events while promoting respectful dialogue and civic engagement that can improve the overall tone of public discourse in your municipality. Design prevention campaigns to challenge bias and build ally behaviours by supplying people with constructive responses to combat hate they encounter online. This support empowers residents to be forces for positive engagement online, countering negative narratives.

Recommendation #70: Ensure council receives threat assessments

Establish formal arrangements for law enforcement to regularly share digital threat assessments with councillors, helping to ensure elected officials are aware of emerging risks and potential security concerns. Schedule regular briefings to keep council informed about online threats, harassment patterns and broader security trends that may affect municipal operations or individual officials. Formalise these processes to ensure threat assessments are provided consistently rather than only during crisis situations, allowing for proactive rather than reactive public safety planning.

JOIN
Credible and efficient distribution of messaging: Participate and connect where community is already formed and functioning.

STORYTELLING
The human experience: Demonstrate progress through experiential shifts and learning.

CONTINUITY
Demonstrating progress: Tie transitions and new developments together; evolution as opposed to change.

CORE MESSAGING

COMPELLING WHY
Demonstrating progress: Take time to understand the value-based reasoning behind decisions and outcomes.

HUMANIZING
The human experience: Put people – their faces and experiences – at centre stage.

PARTNERS
Credible and efficient distribution of messaging: Connect with other communicators; benefits from their tools and relationships.

From the Alberta Municipal Guide to Social Media:

City Practice: Burlington (Ontario, Canada)

To create solidarity among elected officials facing online harassment, Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward founded the Elect Respect campaign in June 2025 as a grassroots movement committed to upholding democratic service free from threats, abuse or intimidation. The campaign has mobilised local governments and community organisations to take concrete action through:

- An online pledge inviting elected officials, candidates and citizens to commit to respectful behaviour, speak out against abuse and support those targeted by harassment.

- Council resolutions passed by municipalities across Ontario that reject targeted harassment and personal attacks and focusing debate on ideas and policies rather than individuals.

- Cross-sector endorsement like by the Burlington Chamber of Commerce, recognising that respect underpins both strong democracy and thriving economies.

- Multi-level support with Halton Regional Council endorsing the campaign and local municipalities across the region bringing resolutions to their councils.

The initiative addresses rising toxicity that discourages qualified candidates from seeking office and drives current officials to consider resignation. By providing a platform for the many voices who value respect over hostility, the campaign creates environments where elected officials can serve their communities without fear. Mayor Meed Ward emphasises that even though jurisdiction over harassment may be limited, officials can use their voices and commit to modelling respectful behaviour themselves.

Chapter 5
Online Misinformation and Disinformation

Social media platforms have become hotbeds for both misinformation and disinformation targeting municipal governments with false or misleading information spreading rapidly through online networks. Local policies, council decisions and official communications are frequently intentionally misconstrued, or in some cases fabricated in their entirety, creating confusion and eroding trust. While some of this content is shared unintentionally, much is deliberately designed to mislead residents and provoke anger or hostility. Misinformation impacts the ability of local government to function effectively, sowing distrust in official communications and leading residents to be misinformed about the challenges facing their community. The problem is exacerbated by national, regional and/or international misinformation and disinformation campaigns that drive broader anti-government narratives and hate that spill over into local political discourse. The following recommendations provide tools for municipalities to combat misinformation and disinformation, including by promoting accurate, transparent communication with their residents.

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #71: When engaging, engage with facts

Refrain from responding to users with personal attacks and instead engage directly with the information they have shared, addressing factual inaccuracies or providing alternative perspectives. Remember the phrase "take the cue not the bait" that some municipalities have adopted to guide online interaction. Provide credible sources and links, when possible, to support your corrections or offer additional context for complex issues. Even when you cannot provide specific facts, encourage more critical thinking by asking thoughtful questions or suggesting residents consider multiple viewpoints before drawing conclusions.

Recommendation #72: Consider your own online behaviour

Review your own social media posts to ensure you are not sharing facts without credible sources or making claims that could be misinterpreted or taken out of context. Avoid questioning other officials publicly in ways that could unnecessarily sow distrust in democratic institutions or create divisions that undermine effective governance.

Recommendation #73: Encourage residents to talk to council

Encourage social media users to engage with government through in-person or other official channels. Direct residents to bring their questions and concerns to council meetings, public forums or scheduled office hours where more detailed discussion and personalised responses are possible. This approach displays a willingness to engage rather than a desire to shut down residents.

Recommendation #74: Warn about foreign interference and the risks it poses

Encourage the municipality to raise awareness among local residents of intentional foreign

interference campaigns from countries like Russia, China and Iran that may target local communities with disinformation designed to sow division and undermine trust in democratic institutions. Even if your community is not directly targeted by these campaigns, their broader effect on national political discourse can still impact local political conversations and community cohesion. Educate residents about recognising these campaigns and encourage critical evaluation of inflammatory content that appears designed to divide communities along political or cultural lines.

Recommendation #75: Highlight positive stories and achievements

Regularly share positive developments, resident success stories and examples of community progress through your online presence. These posts are less likely to be co-opted, misrepresented or targeted by online agitators. Highlighting achievements provides community members with a more positive experience online and helps balance out the negative narratives that often dominate digital spaces.

Recommendation #76: Remember online narratives often do not accurately represent public opinion

Remember that online narratives can distort the reality of community sentiment. The rapid spread of misleading narratives online can make it seem as though an entire community is oriented against the municipal council, obscuring the fact that, in reality, it is just a few agitators, often from outside the municipality, driving the narrative. Councils should resist reacting solely to online noise and instead ground decisions in broader community engagement.

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #77: Use a layered communications strategy

Utilise varied types of engagement that

run parallel to municipal social media accounts to ensure information reaches residents in multiple ways, making it hard for false narratives to take root. Take time to understand the specific value and landscape of different social media platforms, recognising that each serves distinct purposes and reaches different audiences. Be willing to trial and pilot new ideas for communication, evaluating what works best for your community

Recommendation #78: Respond with corrections

Respond to misinformation with factual corrections in a timely manner, as getting responses near the top of comment threads is important when content begins to go viral. Early engagement helps reduce the spread of incorrect information and ensures accurate details are visible to users encountering the post. Reply once with clear corrections and avoid getting mired in back-and-forth exchanges that can amplify the original misinformation or create additional controversy.

Recommendation #79: Create a centralised listing of government communications' channels

Creating such a listing of all official municipal communication channels, including websites, social media accounts, email addresses and phone numbers, makes it easier for residents to know where to access reliable information from the municipality. Regularly update this list and promote it through various channels to ensure community members can distinguish official sources from unofficial or potentially misleading accounts that may spread misinformation and disinformation about municipal activities or decisions.

Recommendation #80: Include libraries as partners

Partner with local libraries to provide media literacy training that gives residents tools to navigate the online world and critically

evaluate information sources and, more broadly, promote information integrity. Libraries can play a role in maintaining social cohesion by functioning as public commons within communities, bringing residents together across differences in trusted, safe environments for neutral venues for civic engagement and dialogue.

Recommendation #81: Partner with trusted community voices

Identify and partner with influential community leaders and other members and community-based organisations who are trusted by the public to help amplify municipal communications, raise awareness about threats to community safety and well-being and counter misinformation and disinformation. These partners are particularly important for enabling the municipality reach residents who may be sceptical of direct government messaging. These trusted voices can serve as authentic community validators for municipal information and help build broader public confidence in official communications.

Recommendation #82: Mix in relatable content

Posting factual information online is not enough if residents do not see it. Municipal accounts should make an effort to earn follows from residents to ensure that government posts will appear in their feed before the misinformation and disinformation do. This can be done through sharing relatable content such as light-hearted posts, local community highlights and appropriate pop culture references. Be careful not to go too far with informal content, as government accounts must still be viewed as unbiased and maintaining official credibility.

Recommendation #83: Be prepared for common misinformation

Create lists of common misconceptions about municipal services, policies and decisions that regularly circulate in your community. Prepare standard responses to types of misinformation you frequently encounter, allowing for quick deployment of accurate information when false narratives emerge.

Recommendation #84: Model positive social media engagement

If you choose to respond to posts containing misinformation and disinformation, consider a light-hearted, formulaic post in order to demonstrate the municipality stands against misinformation and disinformation and encourage others in the community to respond as well. Proactively modelling positive engagement can normalise constructive discourse, help shift the tone of online spaces toward trust and civility and subconsciously empower residents to mirror positive behaviours in their own interactions

Recommendation #85: Explore AI tools to understand online narratives

Consider partnering with organisations that provide artificial intelligence tools designed to understand online narratives through data aggregation and analysis and assist municipalities in proactive engagement. These technologies can help track the spread of misinformation and disinformation and identify which issue areas are particularly vulnerable to false narratives. Understand the risks and limitations of AI integration, including privacy concerns and the potential for misuse

Recommendation #86: Make access to communications training a priority

Ensure all municipal officials (elected or otherwise) can access communications training offered by the municipality or external organisations to ensure all councillors (and municipal staff) have the skills to operate effectively in today's environment where misinformation and disinformation can quickly take hold. Not everyone comes to council or municipal government with the same background and experience. Consistent training helps level the field, so members and municipal staff share a common approach to addressing misinformation and disinformation, engaging with residents and explaining

council decisions clearly. Sessions can include practical skills such as how to correct misinformation and disinformation without repeating false claims, how to communicate on social media in a professional way, and how to prepare fact sheets or talking points for contentious issues.

Recommendation #87: Issue social media packets to explain council decisions

After making decisions that may be divisive or subject to misinformation and disinformation, issue quick fact sheets and infographics that residents can easily share online to counter false narratives. Include common misconceptions alongside clear explanations of what the decision does and does not do. These materials empower community members to share factual information and help prevent misinformation from taking hold in public discourse about municipal decisions.

Recommendation #88: Release documents for transparency

Where possible, release budget and planning documents for transparency. This helps counter false narratives that capitalise on uncertainty and provides credible source documents for fact-checking. Making these materials readily accessible in all relevant languages demonstrates accountability and empowers residents and local media to verify claims with official information.

Recommendation #89: Collaborate with local media

Build strong relationships with local media outlets to ensure journalists have accurate information about council statements, decisions and municipal operations. Make councillors available for comment and appearances and ensure municipal staff can answer technical questions from reporters. These relationships and communication are especially important while misinformation and disinformation are spreading. All of this helps improve the quality of information reaching residents and the overall information supply.

Recommendation #90: Collaborate with non-governmental organisations

Explore partnerships with non-governmental organisations that specialise in digital and media literacy efforts, This includes organisations that produce educational tools and resources and/or provide skill-building for both youth and adults, particularly retirees. Look also for groups that focus on productive civic participation, as their expertise can help residents engage more constructively with local government. To expand municipal capacity, identify online tools these organisations offer that you might introduce into your municipality and consider partnership opportunities to develop resources tailored specifically to your local context.

City Practice: Calgary (Alberta, Canada)

To build long-term resilience against online misinformation and disinformation, the Calgary Public Library developed the Info Investigators youth initiative that teaches essential digital and media literacy skills to students before harmful information habits take root. Recognising libraries as valuable partners in upstream prevention, this initiative:

- Provides interactive online resources through a self-directed Kahoot quiz introducing four essential media literacy concepts: lateral reading, critical observation, reverse image search and geolocation verification.

- Delivers school outreach programmes designed for grades 4-6 and grades 7-9 that can be presented in person or virtually, focusing specifically on teaching lateral reading skills to verify information while consuming it.

- Complements existing curriculum by aligning with Alberta's educational standards and the library's school-aged strategy and promotes digital library resources as trusted sources and library staff as media literacy experts.

The programme, launched during Media Literacy Week in partnership with MediaSmarts, demonstrates how libraries serve as crucial partners in combating misinformation by investing in youth education as an upstream prevention tactic. It also displays the value in partnerships with digital and media literacy organisations like MediaSmarts, CIVIX and Digital Public Square. By investing in youth media literacy education, Calgary takes both short-term and long-term approaches to the misinformation and disinformation problem, building foundational skills that protect the municipality's information ecosystem long into the future.

Chapter 6
Meeting Disruptions

Council sessions have increasingly become subject to disruptive behaviour from attendees. Disruptions reported in surveys conducted and listening sessions organised to help inform this Toolkit range from abuse of public comment periods to spread of hateful or otherwise threatening rhetoric, refusals to yield the floor when asked to do so, sit-ins in council chambers and/or large-scale protests. Online meetings have similarly been subject to inappropriate and harmful rhetoric and are uniquely vulnerable to 'Zoom bombings' where disruptors can join en-masse, take over screen-sharing and display graphic content. The following recommendations offer a range of practical actions municipalities can consider to both prevent and respond to these disruptions.

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #91: Adopt a code of conduct for elected officials

Setting expectations for officials is important so that they model positive behaviour for residents, keep meetings on track and prevent disruptive behaviour among themselves. This can clarify expectations, provide a framework for accountability and ensure meetings run smoothly. Codes of conduct can include provisions for how councillors should act towards each other as well as towards the public, and they can make reference to the need for decorum and values elected officials should uphold. Example codes of conduct are included in Appendix B.

Recommendation #92: Adopt a code of conduct for the public's behaviour in meetings

Public codes of conduct are both preventative, as they discourage disruptive behaviour from speakers, and a means of response as they provide standing to take action if a speaker's conduct disrupts the meeting. Include both guidelines for speaker behaviour, like refraining from personal attacks, and structural policies, like limiting the number of times a person can speak on the same issue in a given time period. They should make explicit reference to expected behaviour of residents and make clear the process for when these expectations are violated. Consider making them short and memorable and easily accessible to increase readership of the codes. Example codes of conduct are included in Appendix B.

Recommendation #93: Engage outside of official/formal settings

Proactive engagement from elected officials with community members outside of formal council meetings can help reduce the risk of disruptions by addressing concerns before they are raised in and potentially escalate in council sessions. Keeping track of emerging issues in the community allows you to anticipate what topics may arise during council sessions and prepare accordingly. If there are residents who have disrupted meetings in the past, consider reaching out to them in advance of potentially contentious meetings to hear their thoughts and concerns in a more private setting. When residents feel they have had meaningful one-on-one connection with their elected representative and believe their concerns have been genuinely heard, they are often less likely to feel the need to make dramatic statements during or otherwise disrupt public meetings.

Recommendation #94: Include a briefing on a topic in the agenda that has been a target of misinformation or disinformation

For topics where misinformation and disinformation may be spreading, request staff or council to prepare a briefing that addresses common misconceptions and presents the facts surrounding the issue. Rely on local sources and information whenever possible, presenting the topic from the perspective of the municipality and its role in addressing it. Deliver this briefing before public comment to ensure accurate information is available to all attendees and to provide context that may prevent confusion or heated exchanges based on incorrect information or assumptions.

Recommendation #95: Be prepared both with facts and procedures

Know your facts and be truthful in all interactions, as credibility is a critically important asset when responding to challenging situations or contentious issues. Understanding the legal limits of what local government can and cannot do helps you provide accurate information to residents and manage expectations appropriately, preventing frustration that stems from misconceptions about municipal authority. Stay informed about issues that might cause disruptions, especially if similar topics have generated conflict in nearby municipalities, as this awareness allows you to anticipate potential problems and prepare appropriate responses. Familiarise yourself with rules and procedures for managing disruptions ahead of each session. This includes reviewing the proper language needed to call for a recess or adjourn the meeting.

Recommendation #96: Require speakers to register

Council can require anyone wishing to make a public comment to register their name and desired discussion topic in advance of council sessions. This pre-registration prevents individuals from showing up on the day of the meeting without prior notice,

allowing staff to better prepare for the meeting and reserving time for residents who truly want to participate and not disrupt. The registration process can serve as a natural deterrent by requiring potential speakers to formally state their purpose and topic in advance, which can discourage those who may have intended to cause disruption. Requiring speakers to commit to a specific written topic provides council with the authority to keep speakers focused and on-track during their allotted time, as they can be reminded of their stated purpose if they begin to deviate into unrelated or disruptive territory.

Recommendation #97: Limit speakers to residents of the municipality or province

In scenarios with repeated disruptions from outside agitators, limiting speakers to residents of the municipality or province can help to reduce planned and coordinated disruptions. However, restrictions on who is allowed to speak at council sessions should be narrow in scope, and be careful not to conflict with free speech rights, particularly given the province's requirement (under The Municipal Act) for open meetings.

Recommendation #98: Incorporate a response from council in the agenda

Designating a specific agenda item for the council to respond to public comment provides a formal mechanism for councillors to address questions, clarify misunderstandings or respond to concerns raised during public participation without interrupting speakers or engaging in back-and-forth exchanges during the public input period itself. Additionally, having this designated time slot gives the council the procedural authority to defer responses and redirect disruptive individuals who attempt to engage in debate during inappropriate portions of the meeting, as they can point to the upcoming response period as the appropriate venue for such interaction. This agenda item also provides a natural opportunity for emotions to settle if tensions have escalated during the public input portion of the meeting.

Recommendation #99: Communicate post-event

After hateful language is used or disruptive activity occurs at a council session, elected officials can use their visible position in the community to address potential residual and long-term impacts, foster healing and promote a safe environment for residents. When issuing a public statement, officials should denounce the hateful language or incident and the information shared should be timely, clear, concise, relevant, non-contradictory, accessible to all those impacted and generated from credible sources. To avoid repeating the harm, officials should summarise rather than say verbatim what occurred. For example, they should refer to it as an antisemitic, racist or anti-LGBTQ+ incident without repeating slurs or hateful phrases directly and avoid mentioning the name of the perpetrator. Effective communication requires utilising multiple channels, such as social media, press releases and conferences, community forums and public statements, to ensure the message reaches all community members and clearly establishes the official position on hate incidents within municipal proceedings. This response provides an important opportunity to reaffirm the local government's values.

Recommendation #100: Lead by example

Your behaviour towards other councillors, staff and the public should model the behaviour you expect from residents. Set a positive, constructive tone through respectful communication and professional demeanour. Model productive disagreement by demonstrating how to challenge ideas you might not agree with without attacking individuals, listening actively to opposing viewpoints and maintaining civility during debates and talking with other local elected officials about strategies for disagreeing better.

Recommendation #101: Consult with peers

Talk to elected officials from other municipalities that have experienced disruptions to learn from their experiences. Consult with them about specific practises that worked in their situations, including which de-escalation techniques were effective and which enforcement tools proved most useful. Use these peer relationships as a resource to share frustrations and challenges, as fellow elected officials understand the unique pressures of managing disruptive meetings and can provide both practical advice and emotional support.

Recommendation #102: Check in with yourself

As an elected official emotional and physical safety matters, so maintaining your wellbeing should be a priority during contentious council sessions. Regularly check in with yourself during meetings to assess how you are doing, particularly if you are feeling threatened or aggravated. Your tone and demeanour have a significant impact on the meeting atmosphere and can contribute to either escalating or de-escalating tensions. If you feel yourself becoming emotionally charged or losing composure, take a pause before responding. When you feel threatened or unsafe, call for a recess or recuse yourself from the proceedings to protect your wellbeing and maintain meeting decorum. If you notice another official who may feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed, check in with them privately and offer support.

Recommendation #103: Provide residents with different venues and opportunities for giving input

Ensuring residents have ample opportunity to engage with councillors throughout the year – and not simply during official council meetings – and to provide consistent feedback to councillors may prevent tensions from boiling over in a single council meeting by making residents feel more heard and valued in the process. To create ongoing dialogue between residents and their elected and other municipal officials, convene regular town hall meetings, online feedback portals,

office hours and community consultation sessions meeting residents where they are in community centres, libraries, local coffee shops and other common gathering places. Even accepting written comment alongside in-person public comment can make a difference. When residents have accessible channels to voice concerns and provide input on an ongoing basis, they are less likely to feel that a single council meeting is their only opportunity to be heard, which can lead to heightened emotions and disruptive behaviour.

Recommendations for In-Session Action

Recommendation #104: Greet residents as they enter council chambers

Greeting residents as they enter the council chambers serves to humanise both officials and attendees, fostering mutual respect and keeping people calm before proceedings begin. When residents feel seen and welcomed, they may be less inclined to engage in disruptive behaviour. This simple gesture also introduces an element of accountability, as individuals who have been personally acknowledged by officials may be more likely to maintain respectful behaviour throughout the meeting, knowing they have been recognised as individuals rather than anonymous members of a crowd.

Recommendation #105: Offer to report back on an issue

If an issue is continually raised at a session, ask staff to investigate the issue and report back at a future meeting. Additionally, if you do not know the answer to a question, be comfortable admitting this and offering to report back. This demonstrates that you take residents' concerns seriously rather than brushing them off, while also providing a concrete timeline for follow-up. Offering to provide more information may satisfy residents' immediate concerns at least for the time-being.

Recommendation #106: Enforce time limits for speakers

Time limits for public comment can help maintain order and ensure all speakers have an opportunity to be heard while preventing any single individual from dominating the discussion. Five minutes is a common time limit for individual speakers across councils, though some councils implement varying time limits based on how long the public comment period has gone on. Having the ability for a member of council or staff to mute microphones once the time limit has been reached is a key tool for enforcement. Without this ability, calling for order or reclaiming the floor may be able to interrupt lengthy speakers but cannot guarantee compliance and may lead to prolonged disruptions or confrontational exchanges that further derail the meeting.

Recommendation #107: Call a recess

If disruption to a session proves unmanageable or threatens to derail the meeting entirely, the council can call for a recess. A strategic recess can often restore order more effectively than attempting to power through disruptions. During a recess, the council should retreat to a previously determined safe space away from the council chambers, while the chambers are either cleared or law enforcement ensures the safety of everyone in the room. To properly enact a recess, a member of the council should first issue a warning. If disruptive behaviour continues, the meeting can again be called to order, and the council can motion for a recess, which should only be approved by majority vote. Recesses can have a pre-determined maximum time or be called until the disruption has passed.

Recommendation #108: Move to an online meeting

If the council chambers cannot be cleared or made safe, the council should have the back-up option of transitioning to an online meeting prepared and ready to go should the situation merit the switch. Having a

Cleveland (Ohio, United States) City Council Disruption Procedure Language

Warning language:

'This meeting's business has been disrupted. I call this meeting to order. Please refrain from disrupting this lawful meeting. Speaking out of turn and making loud utterances are in violation of the rules of this Council and interfere with the due conduct of this meeting. This is a warning that such activity is in violation of the Codified Ordinances and must immediately stop'.

Calling a recess::

'This Council cannot continue with its business due to the disruption. As a result, I move that we recess until the disruption has concluded'.

'Is the motion seconded?' 'Without objection, the motion is approved.'

'The motion passes. The Council stands in recess until the disruption has concluded. I request that the Director of Public Safety clear the room'.

Adjourning a meeting:

'This Council cannot continue with its business due to the disruption. As a result, I move that this session be adjourned. The incomplete agenda will be resumed during the following regularly scheduled council session'.

plan for online meetings that does not involve the use of the council chambers can be important in situations where disruptions render the chambers unusable. This contingency plan should include pre-established technical protocols, designated alternative locations for councillors to join from, clear communication procedures to notify the public of the transition and predetermined methods for managing public participation in the emergency online format.

Recommendation #109: Adjourn the meeting

If no other recourse is possible, council may choose to adjourn the meeting and resume business in the following council session. As with calling for a recess, ample warnings should be given before this option is chosen, and council should be prepared with a pre-written statement to ensure clear and consistent communication about the reasons for adjournment, the rescheduled meeting details and how unfinished business will be addressed, while maintaining a professional tone that avoids further escalation of any tensions.

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #110: Anticipate contentious meetings

By monitoring community sentiment, engaging in conversations with neighbouring councils anticipating and preparing for when an agenda might include a potentially divisive issue, council can proactively prepare for disruptions. Ensuring there is ample seating helps prevent overcrowding that can contribute to tension and frustration among attendees. Municipal staff should be prepared with back-up venues or online options in advance of the meeting. Councillors should be briefed before a potentially contentious meeting on the code of conduct, security measures and disruption response plan so everyone is on the same page should action need to be taken.

Recommendation #111: Explore non-traditional ways for council to engage with residents

Do not feel constrained by the public comment session formats in council meetings, which can be dominated by an individual speaking in front of a dais of councillors under a time limit. Explore new options for public comment such as small group deliberations, office hours, direct text-based outreach, live-polling technologies or civic engagement scorecards. By diversifying how residents can participate, municipalities may find that contentious issues are discussed more productively and that a broader range of community voices are heard.

Recommendation #112: Make policies accessible to the public

Codes of conduct, behaviour guidelines, registration requirements and time limits should be made publicly available and easily accessible in all relevant languages, so residents are not surprised by policies in the moment. Post these policies on the municipal website, share them on social media where applicable and have copies available at in-person meetings. Clear advance communication of expectations helps prevent conflicts that arise from misunderstandings about meeting procedures and gives residents the opportunity to prepare accordingly.

Recommendation #113: Secure the surroundings

Consider the physical environment of the council chamber and how the layout, seating arrangements and exit routes may impact safety and crowd management during disruptions. Ordinances that create 'buffer zones' around public buildings can maintain public safety by controlling demonstrations and gatherings outside the facility. Evaluate policies about what items are allowed into the council chambers, such as signs, bags or recording equipment, and ensure staff know how to enforce these restrictions consistently.

Recommendation #114: Utilise online meeting features

Become familiar with advanced online meeting features like the 'permission to talk' feature that gives control to the host to turn participant microphones on and off, rather than allowing commenters to manage their own audio. The meeting host should also be prepared to disable attendee video feeds to prevent visual 'Zoom-bombing' disruptions. Make it clear which staff member is responsible for monitoring chat and other input features during meetings, and ensure they understand how to quickly moderate or disable these functions if needed. Waiting room and password features on online meeting platforms allow for more control over who can enter the virtual room. With waiting rooms, municipal officials can review attendees before they join the meeting, allowing for better preparation and identification of participants. As with microphones, the mute feature of online meeting platforms allows for the immediate

reclamation of time when a speaker disrupts proceedings or goes over their allotted time. These digital tools offer immediate control over the meeting environment, enabling quick and efficient responses to disruptions.

> **Recommendation #115: Offer de-escalation training**
>
> Provide formal training to help councilmembers and staff deal with disruptive residents at council meetings and on municipal property through professional de-escalation techniques. Implement conflict resolution training programmes that teach officials how to defuse tense situations, manage confrontational behaviour and maintain safety. Consider making this training mandatory for all councillors and municipal staff who regularly interface with the public or incorporating into existing council training sessions.

Recommendation #116: Assemble a meeting disruption team

Create a structure and a dedicated space to discuss meeting disruptions and hate and violence targeting municipal government in general. The team can consist of your municipality's mayor/reeve, chief executive, attorney, clerk, representatives from police and public safety departments and the staff person handling the A/V at in-person meetings or the video conference technology for virtual meetings. Creating this dedicated space ensures coordinated response protocols, clear roles and responsibilities for each team member during incidents, ease of communication between departments and regular review of procedures to identify gaps or improvements needed based on recent experiences.

Recommendation #117: Practise disruption procedures

Set time aside at least once per council term to practise disruption procedures and have language for decorum orders prewritten,

so that councillors are not searching for words in the moment. Practise scenarios ensure that all councillors and staff have the confidence to respond consistently and calmly and that everyone understands their specific roles and responsibilities during disruptions, preventing confusion or conflicting responses that could escalate tensions further. Regular practise is important to provide repetition to gain familiarity with procedures, especially for those who may not self-identify as being unsure of proper procedure. This preparation also helps identify any gaps in procedures or resources before they arise during a live meeting, so they can be addressed.

Recommendation #118: Have a law enforcement presence at council meetings

If there are indications that a specific meeting may grow contentious or if previous sessions on similar issues have resulted in disruptions, council can consider requesting a law enforcement presence at the meeting to deter inappropriate behaviour and provide immediate response capability if situations escalate beyond council's ability to keep under control. The presence of uniformed officers can serve as a visible reminder of the need for respectful conduct while reassuring both councillors and attendees that safety measures are in place. This approach should be implemented thoughtfully and proportionately, as the goal is to maintain a welcoming environment for participation, so council should be attuned to the ramifications of having uniformed officers present for all community members. Law enforcement personnel should be trained on the council's code of conduct and procedures, so they understand when and how to intervene appropriately.

City Practice: Boulder (Colorado, United States)

To elicit more productive resident feedback and reduce council meeting disruptions, Boulder City Council developed Community and Council Forums that reimagine traditional council meetings as spaces for structured dialogue rather than standard public comment periods. Developed as part of the Better Public Meetings Project, this forum format:

- Dismantles hierarchies through roundtable seating arrangements that replace the traditional dais structure, fostering equal interaction between officials and residents.

- Promotes diverse participation by intentionally recruiting demographically balanced participants and selecting residents and random selecting participants from an open registration list

- Facilitates dialogue through small breakout groups that combine councillors, municipal staff and residents in facilitated discussions on specific topics early in the decision-making process.

- Builds trust by creating opportunities for nuanced conversation rather than rushed time-limited comment periods, with post-event evaluation capturing feedback to improve future forums.

The initiative responds to research showing that residents frequently did not understand how their input influenced council decisions and policy, a common factor is escalating local tensions. Following the first forum, feedback improved across all metrics, with participants noting they felt genuinely heard and councillors reporting valuable dialogue with residents they might never have otherwise engaged. Learn more from the programme's partner, the National Civic League.

Chapter 7
Identity-Based Hate

According to the CSSRP survey, municipal leaders and staff who belong to protected or historically marginalised groups experience hate and abuse at higher rates than their peers. Intersectional identities can compound these risks, making public service unwelcoming or difficult, which can discourage talented individuals from seeking office or pursuing elected office and municipal careers. Particularly given the rising levels of hate targeting female local leaders and municipal officials from racialised groups and other protected groups under Canadian hate crimes and human rights legislation, municipal officials should be aware of how identify and address these and other forms of identify-based hate and harassment that targets municipal officials. The following recommendations suggest paths for doing so.

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #119: Make your colleagues feel welcome

Recognise that elected officials and municipal staff from marginalised communities or racialised groups often receive harassment and hate based on their identity both online and in workplace environments. Take an active role in ensuring all colleagues feel welcome and supported within municipal government, regardless of their background or identity. Feeling backed by colleagues can help individuals weather external abuse and maintain their commitment to public service despite facing targeted hostility.

Recommendation #120: Use your platform to draw attention to identity-based hate

Use your platform to highlight the serious issue of identity-based hate targeting local elected officials, particularly the prevalence and impact of online harassment. Draw public attention to how this type of abuse affects democratic participation and can discourage qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds from seeking office.

Recommendation #121: Highlight benefits of being a welcoming municipality

Leverage the speed and wide reach of social media platforms to spread positive messages about elected officials from marginalised communities or racialised groups. Encourage supportive community members to actively share positive content about diverse leadership and counter negative narratives with constructive engagement. Use these platforms strategically to highlight the valuable contributions of all councillors while building broader community support for inclusive democratic participation.

Recommendation #122: Set a welcoming tone

Ensure council meetings and municipal spaces are welcoming environments that demonstrate respect for all elected officials regardless of their background or identity. Set a tone of respect that extends into the broader community by modelling inclusive behaviour and civil discourse during public proceedings. Demonstrate public support for all councillors through your words and actions, showing residents that harassment or discrimination targeting any elected official is unacceptable and undermines democratic governance.

Recommendation #123: Rely on outreach to inform council

Utilise youth councils, women's forums, municipal commissions and other community engagement outreach as early warning systems for rising hate and harassment targeting elected officials within your community. Recognise that these groups often serve as the 'eyes and ears' of the municipality, identifying concerning trends and incidents before they escalate into serious threats. Create channels for these bodies to report harassment patterns they observe, enabling proactive responses to emerging problems rather than waiting for situations to reach crisis levels.

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #124: Publish a municipal anti-discrimination policy statement

Develop and publish a policy statement that outlines the municipality's commitment to equality and inclusion for all residents, officials and staff. This statement, approved by council and published online, should affirm the principle of equal treatment by the municipality and establish clear expectations for respectful conduct in all municipal spaces and interactions. By publicly articulating these values, the municipality signals its commitment to creating an environment where everyone can participate in civic life without fear of discrimination or harassment.

Recommendation #125: Develop a municipal anti-discrimination action plan

Develop a municipal anti-discrimination action plan that operationalises the public statement and outlines the steps the municipality will take to implement the above policy. This could involve, for example, reviewing all municipal policies, ordinances and codes to identify and remove language

that is biased or exclusionary; establishing independent oversight mechanisms to monitor implementation of anti-discrimination measures; and ensuring inclusive municipal governance and service delivery.

Recommendation #126: Implement staff workplace conduct training

Implement mandatory training and development programmes on respectful workplace conduct for all municipal staff and officials to create inclusive work environments. Ensure city officials receive comprehensive training on contributing to anti-hate efforts, including how to identify hate incidents, proper reporting procedures and appropriate responses to harassment targeting colleagues. These programmes should address both internal workplace dynamics and external harassment targeting municipal employees.

Recommendation #127: Commit to hate crime prevention

Focusing more broadly on hate crime prevention in your community can also serve to reduce the identity-based targeting of elected officials. Prevention programmes build community resilience and address harmful behaviours before they escalate. Programmes like the Canadian Race Relations Foundation's Building Bridges Workshops can support municipalities in this work at little to no cost to the municipality. See the Rising Anti-Government Sentiment section for more guidance on prevention.

Recommendation #128: Improve hate incident reporting

Hate crimes and incidents go underreported, which creates an inaccurate picture of how frequent these incidents are in a community and makes it hard to access resources for those in need. Establish reporting mechanisms for hate incidents that do not rise to the level of criminal offences but still create hostile environments for elected officials and community members. Empower law enforcement to investigate these incidents even when they fall below criminal

thresholds, enabling early intervention before situations escalate to more serious threats. Create pathways to unlock support services for victims of hate, ensuring officials have access to appropriate resources regardless of whether formal charges can be laid.

Recommendation #129: Increase representation

Increase representation of marginalised groups in municipal cybersecurity, policymaking and technology governance roles to ensure diverse perspectives are included in developing policies. Empower more people from underrepresented communities to participate in creating cyber policies and security strategies that address the unique challenges faced by different groups. Ensure that identity-based dimensions of digital security are fully considered when designing municipal technology systems, online safety protocols and harassment response procedures.

Recommendation #130: Take collective responsibility

Take collective responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of your colleagues. Everyone at the municipality should take responsibility for making on and offline spaces safe and respectful. Be proactive in addressing harassment and other threats rather than assuming that fellow officials or staff members are not being targeted. Collective responsibility creates more welcoming environments for all municipal employees and elected officials while demonstrating institutional commitment to protecting those who serve the public from harassment and intimidation.

City Practice: Vancouver (British Columbia, Canada)

To combat the impacts of identity-based hate in municipal government, Vancouver City Council established the Workplace Restoration Programme that provides staff with an alternative process to investigations when addressing disrespectful behaviours that may not rise to the level of harassment. Facilitated by the Equity Office, this programme:

- Repairs relationships through facilitated processes that focus on creating shared understanding of behaviour impacts rather than establishing fault or wrongdoing.

- Addresses disrespectful conduct by attending to root causes of conflict and building individual and collective capacity to respond to workplace harm.

- Complements formal processes by offering restoration as an option instead of, during or after investigation procedures.

- Prevents escalation through early intervention on behaviours that make staff feel uncomfortable or disrespected before they develop into more serious incidents.

The programme supports Vancouver's revised Respect in the Workplace Policy and forms part of the Municipality's broader anti-discrimination action plan. Learnings from the programme inform ongoing efforts to create a safer and more equitable workplace environment for all municipal staff.

Appendix A
Full List of Recommendations

Rising Anti-Government Sentiment

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #1: Understand what lies behind anti-government sentiment

Recommendation #2: Examine the local councils' and wider municipality's mandate to address hate, including through existing mandates to promote community safety and well-being

Recommendation #3: Recognise the value of 'networked' responses

Recommendation #4: Communicate strategically

Recommendation #5: Seek out knowledge exchanges

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #6: Understand the challenges and existing assets

Recommendation #7: Construct multi-actor frameworks

Recommendation #8: Develop/strengthen local mandate for national-local cooperation

Recommendation #9: Expand partnerships and coordination

Recommendation #10: Engage and empower youth for prevention

Recommendation #11: Use urban design to promote social cohesion

Recommendation #12: Monitor progress on social cohesion efforts

Protecting Candidates for Local Office

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials/Candidates

Recommendation #13: Create a list of reasons why you are running

Recommendation #14: Make your intentions clear

Recommendation #15: Protect your campaign from being hacked

Recommendation #16: Scrub your social media

Recommendation #17: Prepare for difficult conversations

Recommendation #18: Take care of your mental health

Recommendation #19: Refrain from language that vilifies other candidates

Recommendation #20: Stand strong against spikes in hateful and dehumanising language

Recommendation #21: Formal mentorship for new councillors

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #22: Remove barriers to running for council

Recommendation #23: Make clear the jurisdiction and mandate of local government

Recommendation #24: Offer training sessions to candidates

Recommendation #25: Inform law enforcement of new candidates

Recommendation #26: Increase engagement with potential voters

Recommendation #27: Ensure staff time is allotted to new councillors

Recommendation #28: Include a threat briefing in induction materials

Harassment of Municipal Officials

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #29: Assemble a team

Recommendation #30: Seek peer support

Recommendation #31: Develop relationships with local law enforcement

Recommendation #32: Create a safety checklist

Recommendation #33: Ensure home security

Recommendation #34: Practise good physical safety habits

Recommendation #35: Keep a record of harassment

Recommendation #36: Offer to escalate a resident's concerns

Recommendation #37: Report serious threats to the police

Recommendation #38: Request to record phone conversations

Recommendation #39: Focus on your mental health

Recommendation #40: Maintain your composure

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #41: Invest in prevention

Recommendation #42: Assess your municipality's public safety vulnerabilities

Recommendation #43: Create a threat detection and mitigation team

Recommendation #44: Provide guidance to municipal officials on what constitutes a credible threat

Recommendation #45: Create standard procedures for responding to harassment

Recommendation #46: Organise regular check-ins

Recommendation #47: Designate a law enforcement officer to respond to hate and harassment

Recommendation #48: Take mental health seriously

Recommendation #49: Make public forums outside of council safe

Online Harassment

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #50: Be intentional with when to engage online

Recommendation #51: Create and maintain personal social media and other online accounts when engaging online

Recommendation #52: Set expectations on public accounts

Recommendation #53: Consider what you share on public accounts

Recommendation #54: Practise good digital citizenship

Recommendation #55: Keep a record of online harassment

Recommendation #56: Avoid amplification

Recommendation #57: Consider 'counter speech' when online responses are warranted

Recommendation #58: Issue public statements calling out and condemning harassment

Recommendation #59: Join campaigns to disagree better

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #60: Create clear content policies

Recommendation #61: Exercise caution and follow applicable laws and regulations when removing offensive comments

Recommendation #62: Draft an internal social media plan

Recommendation #63: Disable comments

Recommendation #64: Follow up when warranted

Recommendation #65: Encourage departments to have their own accounts

Recommendation #66: Document frequent users who disrupt online pages

Recommendation #67: Develop social media guidelines for municipal staff

Recommendation #68: Offer online training courses to residents

Recommendation #69: Empower residents to be active participants in the betterment of online discourse

Recommendation #70: Ensure council receives threat assessments

Online Misinformation and Disinformation

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #71: When engaging, engage with facts

Recommendation #72: Consider your own online behaviour

Recommendation #73: Encourage residents to talk to council

Recommendation #74: Warn about foreign interference and the risks it poses

Recommendation #75: Highlight positive stories and achievements

Recommendation #76: Remember online narratives often do not accurately represent public opinion

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #77: Use a 'layered' communications strategy

Recommendation #78: Respond with corrections

Recommendation #79: Create a centralised listing of government communications'

channels

Recommendation #80: Include libraries as partners

Recommendation #81: Partner with trusted community voices

Recommendation #82: Mix in relatable content

Recommendation #83: Be prepared for common misinformation

Recommendation #84: Model positive social media engagement

Recommendation #85: Explore AI tools to understand online narratives

Recommendation #86: Make access to communications training a priority

Recommendation #87: Issue social media packets to explain council decisions

Recommendation #88: Release documents for transparency

Recommendation #89: Collaborate with local media

Recommendation #90: Collaborate with non-governmental organisations

Meeting Disruptions

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #91: Adopt a code of conduct for elected officials

Recommendation #92: Adopt a code of conduct for the public's behaviour in meetings

Recommendation #93: Engage outside of official/formal settings

Recommendation #94: Include a briefing on a topic in the agenda that has been a target of misinformation or disinformation

Recommendation #95: Be prepared both with facts and procedures

Recommendation #96: Require speakers to register

Recommendation #97: Limit speakers to residents of the municipality or province

Recommendation #98: Incorporate a response

from council in the agenda

Recommendation #99: Communicate post-event

Recommendation #100: Lead by example

Recommendation #101: Consult with peers

Recommendation #102: Check in with yourself

Recommendation #103: Provide residents with different venues and opportunities for giving input

Recommendations for In-Session Action

Recommendation #104: Greet residents as they enter council chambers

Recommendation #105: Offer to report back on an issue

Recommendation #106: Enforce time limits for speakers

Recommendation #107: Call a recess

Recommendation #108: Move to an online meeting

Recommendation #109: Adjourn the meeting

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #110: Anticipate contentious meetings

Recommendation #111: Explore non-traditional ways for council to engage with residents

Recommendation #112: Make policies accessible to the public

Recommendation #113: Secure the surroundings

Recommendation #114: Utilise online meeting features

Recommendation #115: Offer de-escalation training

Recommendation #116: Assemble a meeting disruption team

Recommendation #117: Practise disruption procedures

Recommendation #118: Have a law enforcement presence at council meetings

Identity-Based Hate

Recommendations for Local Elected Officials

Recommendation #119: Make your colleagues feel welcome

Recommendation #120: Use your platform to draw attention to identity-based hate

Recommendation #121: Highlight benefits of being a welcoming municipality

Recommendation #122: Set a welcoming tone

Recommendation #123: Rely on outreach to inform council

Recommendations for Municipal Staff

Recommendation #124: Publish a municipal anti-discrimination policy statement

Recommendation #125: Develop a municipal anti-discrimination action plan

Recommendation #126: Implement staff workplace conduct training

Recommendation #127: Commit to hate crime prevention

Recommendation #128: Improve hate incident reporting

Recommendation #129: Increase representation

Recommendation #130: Take collective responsibility

Appendix B
Sample Municipal Codes and Policies

Code of Conduct for Officials at Council Meetings

Barnstable (Massachusetts United States, Unites States)

Belmont (California, United States)

Caln Township (Pennsylvania, United States)

Colchester (Nova Scotia, Canada)

City of Cambridge (Massachusetts, United States)

City of Leicester (United Kingdom)

Toronto (Ontario, Canada)

List of further examples

Code of Conduct for the Public at Council Meetings

Bryan (Texas, United States)

Chicago (Illinois, United States)

Franklin (Tennessee, Unites States)

Harrisonville (Missouri, United States)

Montgomery County (Maryland, (United States)

Niagara Falls (Ontario, Canada)

North Vancouver (British Columbia, Canada)

Parramatta (New South Wales, Australia)

Sacramento (California, Unites States)

San Carlos (California, Unites States)

Seattle (Washington, United States)

Vallejo (California, United States)

Vaughan (Ontario, Canada)

West Jordan (Utah, United States)

Wollongong (New South Wales, Australia)

Council Disruption Protocols

California (United States)

Cleveland (Ohio, United States)

Liege (Belgium)

Sydney (New South Wales, Australia)

General Advice

Internal Municipal Social Media Policys

Alberta (Canada)

Chittering (Washington, United States)

Oakville (Ontario, Canada)

Waterloo (Ontario, Canada)

External Social Media Policies

Barrie (Ontario, Canada)

Bonney Lake (California, United States)

Chino (California, United States)

McDougall (Ontario, Canada)

Inclusivity Policies

Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Camden (United Kingdom)

Luton (United Kingdom)

Melbourne (Victoria, Australia)

Appendix C
Survey Results

CSSRP Survey Results

The University of Manitoba Centre for Social Science Research and Policy (CSSRP), in partnership with the Association of Municipalities of Manitoba and the Strong Cities Network, conducted a survey of AMM membership, which represents all of Manitoba's incorporated municipalities. Conducted by University of Manitoba researchers at CSSRP, this survey was fielded from April 22, 2025 to June 6, 2025. The total sample included 72 responses, all of which provided consent to participate in the study, and 66 of the 72 responses indicated that the research team may still include their responses in the aggregate analysis. The key themes described below identify the hate-based and violent threats targeting local governments in Manitoba, the disruptions to council and to the functioning of local government more broadly and the approaches these local governments are taking to prevent and respond to these threats. The data are observational and descriptive, providing insights into what threats local governments in Manitoba are experiencing not why these threats are occurring. It is worth noting that incomplete surveys and a low response rate overall also mean that the response per question may be low on any specific question.

The sample was composed of municipal staff and elected officials, with the majority of the sample indicating they were either a Councillor (31.82 percent) or a City Manager or Chief Administrative Officer (34.85 percent). Eight Heads of Council, Mayors or Reeves participated in the survey (12.12 percent).

Frequency of threats and their impact

The survey asked similar and unique questions for both local elected leaders and municipal staff. Respondents either reported receiving reports of threats (58.83 percent) or, in the case of elected officials, personally being targeted by threats (55.17 percent). For municipal staff, the vast majority of threats reported included harassment — either online or in person from the public — (36.66 percent of all mentions) and sharing of false information (32.72 percent of all mentions). At the same time, elected officials also reported these two types of incidents as most common (32.34 percent and 29.73 percent, respectively).

Turning to the functioning of local government, municipal staff report that, together, misinformation and harassment (67.90 percent) have mostly impacted the functioning of local government. Most municipal staff say (38.90 percent) that these reports have had a moderate impact on the functioning of local government, and even more municipal staff report that these incidents have influenced decisions regarding municipal policies or leadership practices (72.72 percent).

Disruptions to council functioning

Strong majorities of both municipal staff (89.19 percent) and elected officials (66.67 percent) note that council meetings have not been disrupted by threats, protests or hate-driven actions. That said, when disruptions do

occur, municipal staff report physical threats to councillors or staff occur infrequently (7.69 percent of all mentions), while verbal interruptions, coordinated group protests and spreading mis/dis-information during meetings all occur more often. Elected officials report a similar distribution of occurrences, with physical threats or violence mentioned infrequently amongst responses. About 7 in 10 municipal staff within the sample (72.41 percent) report that current protocols and procedures in their office are effective in managing these disruptions. Elected officials, however, are split. Of the 8 respondents, 50 percent felt the current protocols and procedures were effective, while 50 percent did not.

Misinformation and disinformation and public trust

About 60.60 percent of municipal staff report that their office has been involved in managing misinformation and disinformation campaigns related to council activities. At the same time, a considerable number of the 22 elected officials who provided a response (N = 15, 68.18 percent) report that they or their Council have been targeted by misinformation and disinformation campaigns. During these campaigns, three types of misinformation and disinformation were spread, according to elected officials: false claims about policies or decisions, personal attacks or false statements about councillors and misrepresentation of council actions in media/social media. Each of these types of misinformation and disinformation comprised about a third of the mentions collected from elected officials. Municipal staff mentioned these types of misinformation and disinformation about approximately the same rate, although misrepresentation of council actions in media/social media was reported considerably more (35.19 percent) than personal attacks or false statements about councillors (22.22 percent).

Four measures appear to be implemented to deal with these incidents, according to municipal staff: 1) public awareness campaigns (23.90 percent of all mentions); 2) social

media monitoring and rapid response (19.56 percent of all mentions); 3) engagement with community partners (19.56 percent); and 4) collaboration with local media (16.31 percent). Most often, elected officials mentioned that public awareness campaigns were utilised (24.49 percent) – similar to their municipal colleagues – however they mentioned social media monitoring and rapid response, collaboration with local media, and engagement with community partners less often.

Regardless of the type of misinformation and disinformation that is spread or the tactics used to deal with these incidents, a majority of elected officials stated that misinformation and disinformation have had either a minor or moderate impact on public trust (58.30 percent).

Support, training, and additional measures

Almost all (87.50 percent) of municipal staff advised that they have not received any training on managing reports of affected councillors. A similar amount (90.32 percent) of municipal staff indicate that their municipality does not provide any trainings for councillors and other local officials affected by hate, threats and violence, and that they (100 percent) have not received any threat briefings for their office or for neighbouring municipalities. Their municipality, according to most municipal staff (90.00 percent), also does not provide threat briefings to councillors and other local officials.

Eleced officials reported a similar reality. A considerable percentage of these officials report that they have not received any training on handling hate threats or council disruptions (82.61 percent), and all elected officials who provided responses indicated that they have not received any threat briefings from law enforcement for their or neighbouring councils (100 percent). Given this reality, these officials note that public awareness campaigns on disinformation, training on crisis communication and de-escalation and legal support for addressing threats

and harassment may help elected officials address these threats. Their colleagues in municipal administration mentioned the same top three possible solutions: public awareness campaigns on disinformation (29.86 percent of all mentions), training on crisis communication and de-escalation (22.99 percent of all mentions), and legal support for addressing threats and harassment (18.39 percent of all mentions).

Unique experiences of elected officials

A slim majority of elected officials (60 percent) did report that they believed they were targeted due to part of their identity. Few respondents (N = 3) reported which identity they believed they were targeted for.

On the issue of public service, 53.85 percent of elected officials report that hate, harassment, misinformation and disinformation or threats of violence have not impacted their ability to fulfil their mandate as an elected municipal official. Predictably, then, a slight majority (55.55 percent) report that hate, harassment, misinformation and disinformation or threats of violence have had either no impact or a slight impact on their ability to fulfil their mandate.

When it comes to elections and campaigns, 62.96 percent of elected officials surveyed reported that hate, harassment, misinformation and disinformation or threats of violence have not impacted their decision to either stay in office or run again.

The majority of elected officials surveyed (74.10 percent) report that anti-government and political partisanship are the types of hate or extremism that motivate council disruptions in their municipality, with only two respondents (6.45 percent) indicating that disruptions were a result of ethnic or religious hate. When disruptions did occur, according to the elected officials, almost two thirds (63.63 percent) advised that the Head of Council or Meeting Chair called for order.

Considering their unique role, most elected officials (70.83 percent) somewhat agree that they know what to do if they are targeted by hate or violent threats, and a similar amount (62.50 percent) indicate they somewhat agree that they would know what to do if their Council was targeted.

Suggestive of a concern about electoral integrity, a majority of elected officials surveyed (54.17 percent) disagree – either somewhat or strongly – with the idea that their municipality is concerned about potential disruptions to the upcoming 2026 local elections. Relatedly, 37.50 percent of elected officials sampled somewhat or strongly did not agree that their municipality is proactive in preventing targeted hate and violent threats. That said, many elected officials somewhat or strongly agree that law enforcement provides adequate support when threats occur (54.17 percent); though, about 1 in 4 respondents were neutral (25 percent) and 20.83 percent did somewhat disagree with that characterisation of law enforcement.

Demographics

To better understand the sample of respondents, demographics were also collected. Almost 80 percent (79.99 percent) of municipal staff within the sample were from a municipality with a population of under 5,000 people. Many of these municipal staff (58.33 percent) have also been in their current role for longer than 4 years, and 60.60 percent identify as female.

For their part, 70.84 percent of elected officials within the sample were from a municipality with a population of under 5,000 people, and many of these elected officials (58.33 percent) had been in municipal office for more than one term (greater than four years). Just under two-thirds (63.63 percent) of the surveyed elected officials identify as female.

Appendix D
Recommended Resources

Strong Cities Resources

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