

January 2021 eNews

Mester's Message



Yes it is here! It is the new year, *2021* so now let's continue working together to make it the best! Why do we celebrate the beginning of the new year? Internet search found:

“The ancient Babylonians are said to have been the first people to make New Year's resolutions, some 4,000 years ago. They were also the first to hold recorded celebrations in honor of the new year, though for them the year began not in January but in mid-March,

when the crops were planted. During a massive 12-day religious festival known as Akitu, the Babylonians crowned a new king or reaffirmed their loyalty to the reigning king. They also made promises to the gods to pay their debts and return any objects they had borrowed. These promises could be considered the forerunners of our New Year's resolutions. Rosh Hashanah, which means the head of the year, symbolizes not only the New Year but also the escape of the Hebrews from Egypt. The holiday is celebrated in the early autumn, which was often viewed as the New Year because it was the beginning of the harvest period. The Roman New Year also originally corresponded with the vernal equinox, but years of tampering with the solar calendar eventually saw the holiday established on its more familiar date of January 1. Now a New Year's resolution is a tradition, most common in the Western Hemisphere but also found in the Eastern Hemisphere, in which a person resolves to change an undesired trait or behavior, to accomplish a personal goal or otherwise improve their life.”

Regardless of the time of year or the origin of resolutions, the common theme is setting resolutions to improve oneself and the community's quality of life. So as we kick-off 2021 let's set our resolutions by focusing on the VLGMA framework **G** = insisting on strong **Governance**, equity, equality and ethical in all public safety, public health and public services. This is informed by the ICMA Code of Ethics (adopted 1924, updated 2020), specifically two tenets to consider this month are:

- **Tenet 4.** Serve the best interests of the people.*
- **Tenet 12.** Public office is a public trust. A member shall not leverage his or her position for personal gain or benefit.*

*review associated Guidelines at: <https://icma.org/icma-code-ethics>

Let's continue to connect these tenets to the Declaration of Ideals (adopted in the early 1980s, <https://icma.org/declaration-ideals>) given relevancy to today's society, culture and community challenges. Of the eleven ideals two resonated with me this month as aligned with the above tenets:

- **Ideal 4.** Seek balance in the policy formation process through the integration of the social, cultural, and physical characteristics of the community.
- **Ideal 8.** Affirm the intrinsic value of public service and create an environment that inspires excellence in management and fosters the professional and personal development of all employees.

To translate these tenets and ideals into the intersection of our professional and personal roles consider answering questions such as:

- Are you revisiting and updating the governing body's pre-COVID-19 work plan?
- Are you strategizing how to assess all policies, programs as well as operating and capital budgets with a holistic equity lens?;
- Are you reprioritizing FY22 programs and services in response to pandemic economic revenue reductions? Are you considering how to blend virtual and in-person services to ensure health of all by mitigating COVID-19 impacts? Are you continuing telework and/or hybrid option for your organization?;
- Are you exploring ways to maintain organizational morale and restore professional development training programs while still responding to the pandemic?;
- Are you taking care of yourself and colleagues, both physically and mentally?; and
- Are you ensuring that your organization and community are staying the course to “Box in COVID-19”.... we are in the red zone so let's cross into the end zone and score safely and healthy?.

Now let's convert these questions into New Year Resolutions such as:

- We will develop an Equity Lens diagnostic tool for developing the FY22 budget as the City of Roanoke is piloting; other resources at: <https://www.transformgov.org/programs-and-projects/racial-equity-budgeting-tools> ;
- We will access ICMA's racial equity and social web page, <https://icma.org/race-equity-and-social-justice>, resources including links on "moral and ethical leadership";
- We will approach all challenges and opportunities with "Yes And" not "Yes But" (October 2020 DAO session, Ron Carlee);
- We will implement employee communication and morale opportunities, even in this virtual environment, such as video bi-weekly all-hands employee town halls, Shining Star e-card recognition, quarterly employee Zoom events with Bingo and Trivia interactive games (cool software applications), innovation idea awards, and/or service years award ceremony;
- We will implement COVID-19 refined wellness (physical and mental) programs such as a "Walking Club" www.fallschurchva.gov/walk, resources from VRSA (<https://www.vrsa.us/> and VACORP (<http://www.vacorp.org/> or mindfulness software application (i.e. <https://www.headspace.com/mindfulness>); and
- We will complete the VLGMA Civic Engagement Committee's survey (<https://forms.gle/sPxvFVZwEXTsxxtx5VLGMA> Civic Engagement Survey (google.com)) to share your community engagement best practices with your peers.

We start 2021 with continued commitment to Action of equity and stewardship of the public's trust. Worthy of a repeat from December eNews, wishing everyone a.....

2021 Joyous New Year!

;Feliz Año Nuevo! năm mới vui vẻ سنة جديدة سعيدة
 Joyeuse nouvelle année Vreugdevolle Nuwe Jaar Χαρούμενη Πρωτοχρονιά
 Joyous Neujahr Joyous Bliain Nua Koa Tau Hōu
 Radosny Nowy Rok Веселый Новый год سال نو شاد مپړا وا furaha
 Ulihelisidi Atse Udetiyvsgv Baa Hózhǫǫgo Nee Nínáadoohah
[From 2020 New Year to](#)

Welcome to our newest VLGMA members: Dorri O'Brien, Chief of Staff, County of Loudoun and Koffi Jean Narcisse Djaha, Student, Regent University.

Stay safe, healthy and remain strong, Cindy

[Contact Cindy Mester](#)

Focus on the Future – A Look at VLGMA's Strategic Plan



Focus on the Future – A Look at VLGMA's Strategic Plan

By Craig Meadows, VLGMA President-Elect

Happy New Year! I hope you were able to find time to rest and recharge over the holidays, and that you are ready to begin the new year with a renewed sense of purpose and focus.

As we enter into 2021, I want to continue to review with you the VLGMA Strategic Plan. Why is it important that we do this? With all the challenges last year brought us (and the likelihood that 2021 will be full of challenges as well), it is critical that we "keep our focus" on the purpose and direction for our organization in 2021 ... and beyond.

[Contact Craig Meadows](#)

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Community Conversations



Community Conversations

Latiesha D. Handie, Executive Director, LGBTQ Liaison, Hampton Citizens' Unity Commission

Standing in Solidarity on behalf of our City

Many could say, both national and local governments alike were impacted by two pandemics in the year 2020, Covid-19, and Racial unrest indeed altered our world's course.

However, such obstacles created Hampton City's opportunity to amplify our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion for residents, employees, and stakeholders.

Hampton convened several community-wide drives and virtual panels to educate and inform the public on coronavirus updates and city operations and ensured the City remained welcoming, supportive, and inclusive during a time of broader racial tensions.

To discuss this concept further or ask questions contact Latiesha (Latiesha.handie@hampton.gov)

Have a topic for a future Community Conversations article to suggest?; please contact Cindy Mester (cmester@fallschurchva.gov)

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A DAO in the Life



A DAO in the Life

Glenda Bradley, Orange Assistant County Administrator
for Management Services

Goodbye 2020!

By the time you read this article, it will finally be over: 2020, that is! As I write, I wonder how it will feel to see it all in our rearview mirror: the pandemic, the crazy politics, civil unrest like we've never seen before. I've never thought of myself as a "Deadhead", but I've just got to say...what a long, strange trip it's been! As we greet 2021 with vaccines in sight, I wonder how living through the past year will affect us. Somehow it seems our perception of the world may forever be changed by these (I hate to say it) unprecedented times.

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Civic Engagement - Local Government Education Week



Local Government Education Week

Each year the week in April is designated as Local Government Education Week in the Commonwealth of Virginia. During this week I encourage all of you to make an extra effort to reach out to your community to see if you can get in front of various groups. We are all ambassadors of our profession, and this week is a great time to get in front of citizens to make sure they are aware of the wonderful things that we do in local government. Do not forget about our schools, some ways to get involved can be as simple as volunteering to read a book to an elementary class for story time, or as complex as hosting a high school government class for a day.

[Contact Michael Stallings](#)

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Institute of Government Update



The Virginia Institute of Government is excited to announce two new programs for the first quarter of 2021. VIG will be hosting a virtual training session on the topic of Succeeding as a First-Time Supervisor on Wednesday, January 27. This will be a live, interactive session from 10am to noon. If you or your staff have any questions about registration, please contact our training and research coordinator, Mike Scheid, at mike.scheid@virginia.edu.

[Contact Charles Hartgrove](#)

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Certificate News

The Local Government Certificate Program is preparing for Spring enrollment starting on January 19, 2021. We are gearing up for the Summer Semester and continuing our recruitment efforts and answering questions about the Local Government Certificate Program through a virtual webinar led by Dr. Stephanie

**THE Graduate Certificate
in Local Government
Management**



"Preparing the Next Generation of
Local Government Leaders"

Davis. The **Summer application deadline is May 1, 2021** with a \$25 application fee and students who work for local governments can apply for the Bob Stripling Scholarship program (more details below) for tuition assistance. For more information, please find our spring session below:

- **Thursday, February 18, 2021 12 pm – 1 pm**
Zoom: <https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/85993871400>
- **Thursday, March 18, 2021 12 pm – 1 pm**
Zoom: <https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/89307397976>
- **Thursday, April 15, 2021: 12pm-1pm**
Zoom: <https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/83551852911>

[Contact Stephanie Davis](#)

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Mel's Poetry Corner



January

This quiescent January interlude
is an essential gap between the old and the new.
The past, trailing all of history behind
lingering on the present time.

The future beckons loudly ahead –
attend to me instead!
I will occupy your mind
in a hypothetical, virtual time.

Instead indulge in a restorative retreat
and let January, its secrets, teach.
My gifts are cold, dark and pure
to be treasured even more.
For if love and beauty are experienced now,
it is possible all year round.

No virus can penetrate the immunity of
a heart engaged in the expression of love.

[Contact Mel Gillies](#)



Position Changes And Other Events

December 2020

- Aretha Ferrell-Benavides, Petersburg city manager since 2017, has resigned her position effective February 19. She has been appointed as the city manager of Duncanville, TX.
- Larry Barton has been appointed as Dickenson County administrator effective December 21. He previously served as the finance director for the Dickenson County public schools for the last 5 years.
- Lincoln Saunders, Richmond chief of staff, has been named acting chief administrative officer. He will fulfill this role while the current chief administrative officer, Lenora Reid, continues to recover from a medical event.
- Richard "Pete" Peters has been appointed town manager of Vinton effective January 1. He has been serving as interim town manager and previously as assistant town manager and director of economic development since 2015.
- David Moore, Dickenson County administrator since 2010, announced his resignation effective December 15. Before his service to the county, he served as a public accounting auditor for 11 years.

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