

II. City Council Research Assistant

The Setting

As is typical of many City Managers, the Local City Manager had a desk full of projects to be done with limited staff resources. He decided to engage two high school seniors to analyze and summarize data he had collected regarding the need to support funding for the local historical preservation society. He needed the data to be analyzed and put into a format which could be easily presented to and understood by the city council in order for them to take appropriate action regarding the funding need.

Comparable Settings

Communities with busy City Managers abound throughout the country. Projects that benefit the community and involve policy and/or action to be taken by the community governing board are plentiful. The key is to identify such projects and keep them within the scope of time students have to focus on such projects and within their academic capabilities to analyze.

The Work

The students took the information the City Manager had collected regarding how ten other communities either funded or did not fund their local historical preservation societies. The task was to interpret the data -- which, at first, was similar to comparing apples to oranges. The students interpreted the data and called the City Managers of other communities to insure that their understanding of the information was accurate. Then they developed a format for presenting the information in an easily-understandable manner for presentation to the City Council. They then presented their report to the City Council for action. While they were not asked for their recommendations at the start of the project, the students developed a set of recommendations and offered those recommendations during the question/answer session before the City Council.

The Learning

The students were engaged in a high-performance exercise with time constraints. They practiced their resource competencies by dealing with information that had been collected as well as supplementing it when needed through phone calls to other City Managers and they were forced to present only a limited amount of their data to the City Council in an easy-to-understand format. They practiced their information skills by focusing on what information they had to present and ensuring that such information was comparable from community to community. They practiced their interpersonal skills through working as a team and with members of the City Manager's staff. They practiced their systems skills by developing a process by which they could present information gathered from multiple sources effectively. They practiced their technology skills by using word processing and desktop publishing to prepare their oral presentation and written report.