



Councillor's Guide to Learning Application

**Companion to
Training for Elected Leadership Series**

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FOREWORD

The results of training needs assessments conducted by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) have clearly demonstrated that training needs of local-government elected officials, mayors and councilors and other local politicians are among the most urgent world-wide and yet remain the least attended areas of capacity-building for local development and municipal management.

A number of countries as varied as Nepal and Poland, Uganda and Paraguay has recently embarked, for the first time in several decades, or for the first time ever, on a process of electing their councilors and mayors. Training needs of local-government elected officials are also at the top of the agenda in established municipal democracies such as Ecuador, India, Belgium and the United States of America.

To respond to these needs, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has developed and tested a series of training handbooks to assist councilors to represent the citizens, provide civic leadership and effectively work with central government and with the management, technical and professional staff in local authorities and other local institutions. The handbooks cover policy and decision-making, communication, negotiation and leadership, attending, managing and conducting meetings, councilors' enabling and facilitating activities, financial management and other related needs.

This *Training for Elected Leadership Series*, originally published in 1996 at the time of the Habitat 11 Conference, has been translated and adapted by UNCHS partners into over a dozen languages and has been used to train thousands of elected local government officials in Africa, Asia, America and Europe. As impressive as these numbers may be, they are still just a drop in the sea of training needs, and only the beginning of a global campaign.

Based on this broad testing experience and responding to the demand of trainers and participants of these workshops, the Centre is now publishing the *Councillor's Guide to Learning Application* as a companion to the *Training for Elected Leadership Series*. This Guide contains reading materials, instructions and forms designed to facilitate the learning process, to support the use of new knowledge and skills and to maximize the impact of training on improved performance of local government councilors and other local leaders.

It is expected that this Guide will further contribute to strengthening the capacity of local governments through the introduction of good leadership practices, one of the major objectives of the UNCHS Global Campaign on Urban Governance.

I wish to thank Dr. Fred Fisher and Mr. David W. Tees for preparing this and other handbooks in the series in collaboration with Dr Tomasz Sudra of the UNCHS (Habitat) Training and Capacity-Building Section. Preparation and printing of this series of manuals has been supported by the Government of the Netherlands within the Centre's Local Leadership and Management Training Programme. I also wish to acknowledge the contribution of the trainers and local government officials in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Hungary, India, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and several other countries who assisted in the field-testing of these training materials.

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WHERE TO FIND IT IN THIS HANDBOOK

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	3
Where to find it in this Handbook	4
How to use this Guide	5
Part 1 - Essay, The Councillor and Learning Application	6
Definition	6
Summary	6
Why Be Concerned About Learning Application	6
Councillor Training: A Case in Point	6
An Example of Successful Learning Transfer	7
An Example of Unsuccessful Learning Transfer	8
Reflection	8
Barriers to Learning Application	9
Lowering the Barriers	9
Reflection	10
Planning for Learning Transfer	11
Pre-Workshop: Readiness Assessment	12
In-Workshop: Planning for Learning Application	12
Post-Workshop: Putting New Skills to Work	14
Reflection	15
Final Thoughts	16
Part 2 - Workbook, The Councillor and Learning Application	16
Section 1 - Trainer's Note	17
Individual Performance Assessment Questionnaire	18
Instructions	18
Section 2 - Trainer's Note	20
Participant Learning and Planning	21
Workshop Learning Notes	21
Peer Planning and Coaching	23
Feedback notes	24
Planning for Learning Application	26
Section 3	29
Learning Application Progress	29
Notes on Learning Application Progress	29
References	32

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Guide contains materials for your use in preparation for, during, and following each of the workshops in the ***Training for Elected Leadership Series***. It is designed to help you think about and plan ways to incorporate new knowledge and skills into your work as a local official. The Guide comes in two parts.

Part 1 is an essay that is intended for self-instruction. All you need is a quiet place to think, some time, and something to write with. For best results, we encourage you to write down your answers to the questions raised from time to time in the essay. The learning value of the information is multiplied many times for the reader who takes the time to do this.

Part 2 is a workbook consisting of questionnaires and worksheets to be completed during and after each of the workshops in the ***Training for Elected Leadership Series***. We supply the actual worksheets to be completed with detailed examples of how the materials can be used to best advantage during and after a workshop. The workbook is in three sections.

1. Materials in Section 1 are to help you *set priorities* on your participation in elected leadership workshops and to decide on what you hope to gain in knowledge and skill.
2. Materials in Section 2 are to provide you with an organized way to keep track of things you experience *during* a workshop that might have important implications for a meaningful change in your performance and the performance of your council.
3. Materials in Section 3 are to assist you *after* a workshop to fulfill your commitments to apply what you have learned about improving your performance as a local leader and to prevent a "relapse" (i.e., retreating to old habits to avoid the discomfort associated with trying out new practices or ways of behaving).

From time to time in the workbook you will find information under the heading of "*trainer's notes*." You are welcome to read this information. However, it is meant to be used by workshop facilitators to help you make the best possible use of what you are learning when you return to your councillor position.

PART 1: ESSAY

COUNCILLOR'S GUIDE TO LEARNING APPLICATION

Definition

Application: An act of putting to use. With respect to training for councillors, application refers to councillors making conscious and deliberate use of insights and skills acquired during an elected leadership training workshop to improve the performance of their duties and responsibilities.

Summary

This Guide is designed to provide you with information and aids to help you make the most productive possible use of the various elected leadership workshops in which you will be participating as a councillor. If you have much experience as a workshop participant, you probably know that there are many barriers to the transfer of knowledge and skill from the learning environment into the day-to-day work environment. It is not our position that these barriers can be eliminated entirely. However, we do believe that much can be done before, during and after a new learning experience to encourage application for improved work performance. We also believe the successful learning application requires conscious and deliberate effort by workshop participants themselves, assisted by their facilitators, and supported by their peers both during the workshop and later back in the work environment.

Why be concerned about learning application

Training is the accepted strategy throughout the world for workforce development. But, training is expensive. In order to preserve and enhance their huge labor force investment, local governments are investing more and more in formal training workshops. Good value for money invested in training is assured when: (1) the training addresses real performance discrepancies and skill needs; (2) the training is competently designed and delivered by experienced trainers; and, (3) those who have attended the training apply the knowledge and skill gained in training to improved work performance. All of these factors must be present for training to meet the expectations of those who invest in it. But it is the third that is the most problematic. Good training that addressed real needs and is skillfully designed and conducted will accomplish nothing unless those who are trained make the effort to use what is learned to correct discrepancies or to modify or change their behaviour.

There is growing recognition today of a gap between what is expected from training and what actually occurs. Researchers are finding that much of the skill development from training conducted in and for organizations does not result in improved work performance. In the 1980s, researchers Timothy Baldwin and Kevin Ford conducted a comprehensive survey of the literature on the transfer of learning from formal training into the workplace. In one study reviewed in the Baldwin and Ford survey, it was reported that only 40% of the content of the training programs being conducted was transferred to the work environment immediately after training. Even more disturbing, only about 25% was still being applied six months later and - the true bottom line - a mere 15% was still being used at the end of the year.¹ These findings reveal that organizations, including local governments, are spending huge sums of money on training each year that is not being fully used on the job.

This Guide is meant as an aid to trainers and participants at properly designed and delivered workshops in the *Elected Leadership Series* to get far better results from training than those reported above in terms of better individual performance and council leadership in general.

Councillor Training: A Case in Point

It would be absurd for us to suggest that elected leadership training is any less vulnerable to the learning application problem than any other type of training. But, what are the pressures, pro and con, for you to make full use of what you have learned from training in elected leadership to improve your council effectiveness.

On the positive side, you have invested time and money in the training. The Elected Leadership programme is well designed, and the workshop you attended was conducted with thoroughness and enthusiasm. You see the value in much of what you have learned in making you and your council more productive and responsive. You also realize that the investment

made by your local government in training for you has value only to the extent that it converts what you have learned into improved performance in your various roles as an elected official.

On the negative side, the workshop is over now. You are back at work now and confronted by the same challenges that faced you before attending the training. "No problem," you may be thinking. "This training is good; I ought to start using it right away to be a better councillor." Certainly your intentions are the best. But old habits are strong, and it takes time, patience, and self-confidence to develop new ones.

On your first week back from training, for example, you find yourself in a meeting of city officials and citizens who have been working for months in vain on a plan for the redevelopment of a deteriorated area of the community. Donning your "*facilitator*" hat, you suggest a simple problem solving process to get the group moving again. It works! Your ability to help the struggling group is directly related to what you learned about the role of the councillor *as facilitator*.

But, what if it doesn't work? Perhaps your efforts are ignored. You may even be ridiculed for suggesting a process that seems out of character for you or for someone who occupies an elected official role. Should this happen, you have reached a critical crossroads in the learning process. Either you can continue to practice with the new councillor behaviours in the belief that the benefits over time will outweigh the immediate discomforts and risks. Or, you can abandon the application effort, writing it off as an interesting but not very practical experience.

From time to time in this essay we provide you with an opportunity to reflect on what you have just read and to make some notes in response to the questions we pose for you to consider. We have included such an opportunity below. Before that, and to help you reflect more deeply on the idea of learning application as applied to your role as an elected leader, please read the two situations that follow. One describes a councillor with a successful experience applying an idea from an Elected Leadership workshop to her own council role. The other is an unsuccessful experience owing to a councillor's disregard of the application assistance provided by the trainer. When you have read the two situations, take advantage of the opportunity to reflect before moving on.

An example of successful learning transfer

Councillor A attended a workshop in the UNCHS *Elected Leadership Series* on *The Councillor as Enabler*. During a presentation by the trainer, Councillor A got an idea from something the trainer said: "*although it is well understood that local governments are responsible for the provision of public goods and services, it is not necessary that they be directly involved in producing them.*"

Councillor A had never thought about public services being provided by another agency or organization. As she reflected on the statement, it occurred to her that few if any of her colleagues would agree with the notion that government's job is to steer the boat, not necessarily to row. So, she wrote the idea down on one of the worksheets provided by the trainer for use by participants to keep track of ideas they wanted to recall later.

Reading over her notes during a break, Councillor A made a preliminary list of councillor colleagues who would be supportive of the enabling concept and might entertain the possibility of partnering with other community groups in the delivery of some public services.

She was quick to try out the idea with another participant during a coaching session. Her partner urged her to examine the forces working for and against partnering as well as how to introduce the idea to her council. Councillor A incorporated all of these ideas into a plan of action that she intended to implement without delay on her return.

On returning home, Councillor A busied herself in gathering data on the experience of other local governments that had successfully partnered with other agencies and organizations in public service delivery. A plan for introducing the idea of partnering with other community groups in public service delivery began to take shape in Councillor A's mind.

An early step in her plan was to schedule a meeting with the mayor and several council members she had identified as like-minded on the idea of partnering to discuss her idea and research findings. From the meeting, Councillor A was surprised to learn that the idea of partnering had the support of those present. It was staff indifference to the idea that had prevented a serious discussion of it in the past.

Satisfied with the meeting results, Councillor A began to prepare a proposal to study several services currently provided directly by her local government that might be good prospects for alternative delivery through a partnership. And her name was on the list for the next workshop in the *Elected Leadership Series*.

An example of unsuccessful learning transfer

Councillor B attended the same workshop on The Councillor as Enabler attended by Councillor A. During the same trainer presentation, Councillor B was intrigued by the concept of partnering with other community organizations in producing services that his local government had always delivered with its own forces.

Like Councillor A, Councillor B had never thought about public services being provided by another organization or agency. As he reflected on the statement, it occurred to him that few if any of his colleagues would agree with the notion that government's job is to steer the boat not necessarily to row. Rather than use the worksheets provided by the trainer as Councillor A had done to avoid forgetting about the intriguing idea, Councillor B decided to make a mental note of the idea and to bring it up with the mayor and city council at an appropriate time after returning home.

When the idea of coaching was introduced by the trainer as an aid in learning application, Councillor B chose to use the time to look for some gifts to take home for his children. His back-home action plan did include a reference to a briefing for his council on the partnership idea but without any kind of implementation strategy.

Councillor B returned home after the close of the workshop. A couple of weeks after returning from the workshop, Councillor B, before a council meeting, mentioned the idea of partnering to another council member. As he had expected, the reaction was not positive: *"Are you kidding,"* said his colleague. *"The voters won't stand for it. Besides, using another agency to deliver a service would mean loss of jobs for city personnel. I could never favour anything like that. If you value your position on the council, you won't either."*

The intensity of his colleague's reaction was enough to discourage Councillor B from bringing up the matter with anyone else. He never bothered to investigate what other local governments were doing to develop partnerships either.

It does not appear that anything Councillor B was exposed to at the workshop ever translated into change for the better in his performance or the effectiveness of the council as a whole. There is also reason to believe that Councillor B might oppose future expenditures on training for himself or his colleagues on the council as a poor investment of public funds.

Reflection

What about you? Recall a situation in your own experience as a councillor when your efforts to try something new were met with resistance from others. What was the situation? What effect did it have on you and your performance? What might you have done to improve conditions for gaining the acceptance of others to your ideas?

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