

President's Summit Highlights



 **Alberta
Municipalities**
Strength
In Members

President's Summit on Civility
March 5, 2025

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A Note from the President

First and foremost, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you who attended the President's Summit on Civility on March 5, 2025. Your presence and willingness to engage in meaningful, and sometimes challenging, conversations made this event possible. When we come together with open minds, we create opportunities for growth and build stronger, more connected communities.

When selecting a theme for this year's summit, I wanted to focus on something both timely and impactful. Civility immediately came to mind. We all strive to make our communities better places to live, work, and thrive—but the last few years have tested us in many ways. By fostering a space for learning and self-reflection, my hope is that we can not only improve our own interactions but also inspire others to do the same.

Incivility has touched all of us—whether through social media, in public discourse, or even in conversations with colleagues. The question is, how do we address it? That's why we gathered a team of experts to share insights, strategies, and actionable steps for handling difficult situations with grace and effectiveness.

This report provides a summary of key takeaways from the Summit on Civility. For the over 300 people who attended, it serves as a valuable refresher. And for those who couldn't join us, it offers an inside look at the discussions and strategies shared. I encourage you to explore these insights and consider how we can all contribute to a more respectful and constructive dialogue in our communities.

Tyler Gandam

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tyler Gandam', with a stylized flourish at the end.

President, Alberta Municipalities

Common Ground Toolkit

Dr. Jared Wesley and the Common Ground Team

The Summit kicked off with the launch of [Town Square](#), a board game that allows participants to navigate polarized discussions and practice disagreeing without being disagreeable. Town Square was developed by the [Common Ground](#) team at the University of Alberta in early 2025.

The Common Ground project involves research on the views of average Albertans using surveys and holding focus group discussions in communities across Alberta. Findings suggest that most Albertans have similar values but those values are not always accurately presented in our political discourse because of polarization.

One of the goals of the Common Ground initiative is to create toolkits that help people discuss important and potentially divisive issues in a manner that doesn't alienate or disparage others and helps communities find common ground on what is important to them.

Common Ground team developed the TownSquare boardgame to help community-builders to understand the perspectives of those with whom they disagree and develop solutions to address problematic behaviours. With the theme of the Summit being civility, Town Square was the perfect game to highlight how to prioritize civil dialogue. The Common Ground team sees this game as an opportunity for councils to learn about their role in improving democratic discourse.

Many of the delegates asked how they could obtain the board game so if you think this game would be a great addition to your council orientation in 2025, contact the Common Ground Team at cground@ualberta.ca



From Discord to Harmony: Mastering Conflict in Local Government

Tracey Lorensen

Conflict is a normal part of the democratic process, however respectful disagreement and conflict resolution can be difficult to attain. Tracey Lorensen led a session on how to master conflict at the council table, focusing on creating a safe environment for disagreement with one another. As Tracey mentioned in her session, if you aren't disagreeing, why do you have a council? Disagreement on issues can lead to a healthy discussion which allows for better decision making.

Some of the key learnings we took from Tracey were:

- **Boundaries, Leadership, and Expectations:** Lead by example, maintain professionalism, and set clear expectations for conduct and engagement.
- **Circle of Control & Focus on Priorities:** Focus energy on what can be controlled or influenced, rather than being drained by distractions. Ensure efforts align with what matters most to the community.
- **Healthy Conflict & Trust Building:** Conflict can be productive when based on ideas, not personal attacks. Trust and understanding different conflict styles are key to a safe and effective council environment.
- **Role Clarity** Understand the difference between operations and governance—this will help you stay in your lane.

Promoting a Civil Social Media Landscape

Matthew Norburn, CAO, Town of Hanna

Jenn Rempel-Schmidt, Councillor City of Lethbridge

Marliss Weber, Parados Communications

Social media can be a daunting for local elected officials – but luckily, we had an amazing panel of experts who shared tips and tricks to make it easier.

Here's our five main takeaways:

1. **AI Utilization for Municipal Engagement:** AI can enhance communication, including de-escalating inquiries, quickly finding answers related to bylaws, and creating engaging social media content.
2. **Social media as a Leadership Extension:** social media should reflect your true voice and leadership style, while acknowledging that sharing opinions online will invite criticism.
3. **Effective Social Media Strategy:** To manage social media effectively, leaders should approach posts with empathy, provide context, clearly articulate their position, and prepare to address criticism constructively.
4. **Creating a Respectful Online Environment:** Setting a code of conduct for social media interactions, aiming for transparency, and responding to criticism thoughtfully can help maintain a respectful online space.
5. **Balancing Social Media and Real-Life Engagement:** Leaders should be clear about their social media use, set boundaries for online engagement, and build a professional and personal support network to manage online challenges and foster positivity.

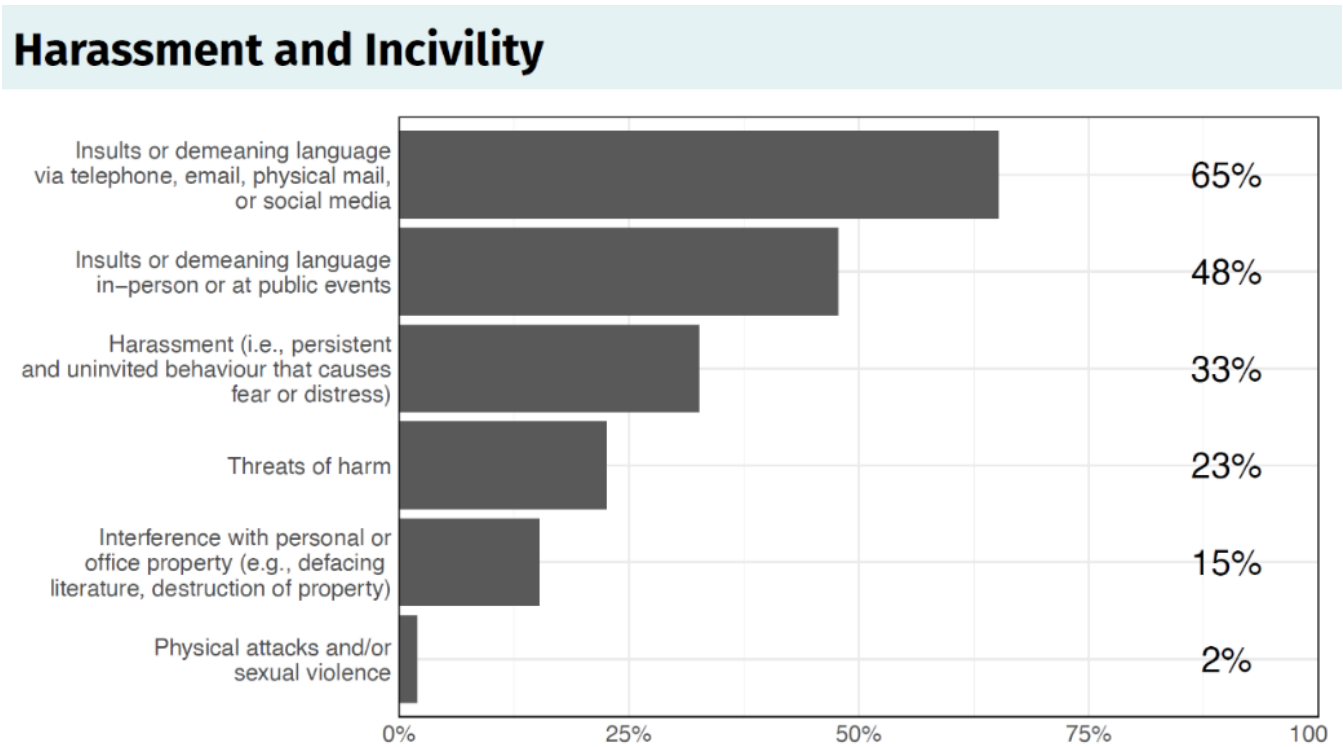
Want to hear more about social media use as an elected official? Later this spring, ABmunis will release a social media toolkit which includes best practices, tips, tricks and guidance on navigating social channels.

The Canadian Barometers Project

Dr. Jack Lucas

The Canadian Municipal Barometer (CMB) is a research initiative focused on enhancing municipal democracy in Canada. It brings together universities, policy organizations, and researchers to study key areas such as representation, elections, governance, and public policy. Through annual surveys of mayors and councillors, public opinion research, and qualitative studies, CMB provides insights into local government challenges, political engagement, and policymaking. The project aims to support municipal leaders and inform the public by offering data-driven analysis on issues like intergovernmental relations, election trends, and councillor job satisfaction.

The CMB, lead researcher, Dr, Jack Lucas, shared preliminary results from the annual survey. One of the most striking findings was the percentage of elected officials that experience harassment and incivility in various settings.



Over the coming months the CMB will release further findings from the survey and develop a research agenda to delve deeper into the issues municipalities face. Want to hear more? Visit <https://www.cmb-bmc.ca/>.

Harassment in Council Chambers and the Workplace

Steve Christie, Canadian Standards Association

Andrew Skeith, Reynolds Mirth Richards & Farmer LLP

Michael Solowan, Kingsgate Legal

Trevor Daroux, Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Although the President's Summit was focused on civility, you can't discuss the solution without discussing the issue. Harassment can occur between councillors, councillors and staff and between councillors and the public. To address some burning questions about harassment, we brought together a panel with two lawyers, the RCMP and the Canadian Standards Association to chat with members. Some of the key takeaways from this session include:

- Notify the RCMP of any incidents of concern, even if they are not necessarily criminal matters, as the RCMP should be aware of any potential threats to public safety.
- Harassment includes any unwanted behaviour – when this occurs, begin documenting it as soon as possible.
- If you are being harassed by a member of the public, you can explore legal options. Speak to your CAO and a lawyer to find the best solution.
- If you are being harassed by someone on your council, look to your procedural bylaws first. Codes of Conduct should be a last resort.
- When looking to de-escalate a situation, the RCMP suggested: Avoid further debate, lead with empathy and find an exit strategy.

ABmunis is committed to this topic and will continue this discussion into the Fall 2025 Convention.

Looking After Yourself and Your Colleagues

Michael Green, Canadian Mental Health Association

With increasing harassment and more difficult municipal issues, it is challenging for elected officials to prioritize their mental health and support their colleagues. To help shed some light on how elected officials and ABmunis can better support community leaders, we brought the Canadian Mental Health Association to share some strategies and resources for mental health.

Here are three practical tips from the Compassion Fatigue Workshop Workbook to help manage and prevent burnout and compassion fatigue:

1. Use the "Big 4" Resilience Techniques

- SMART Goal Setting: Set clear, realistic, and measurable goals.
- Visualization: Mentally rehearse success before facing a stressful situation.
- Self-Talk: Replace negative thoughts with constructive, positive affirmations.
- Tactical Breathing: Practice slow, deep breathing to calm your nervous system.

2. Set Clear Work-Life Boundaries

To prevent burnout, create strong boundaries at work:

- Schedule self-care breaks during the day.
- As elected officials, you may never be fully off. Make time to spend with your support system when possible.
- Prioritize things that keep you going! Whether it's a good cup of coffee or a short walk after council meetings.

3. Personalize Your Self-Care Plan

Balance your well-being by incorporating activities from six key dimensions:

- Physical: Exercise, hydrate, and prioritize sleep
- Emotional: Express emotions through journaling or talking to a friend.
- Mental: Engage in non-work-related hobbies like puzzles or reading.
- Spiritual: Meditate, pray, or spend time in nature.
- Social: Connect with loved ones and build a support network.
- Practical: Organize finances, meal prep, and declutter your space.

Interested in the Compassion Fatigue Workshop Workbook, or missed your copy at the Summit? Contact our advocacy department to get your copy.

Preparing Alberta's Municipal Leaders

Shannon Dean, Mayor, City of Chestermere

Janelle Sandboe, Councillor, City of Chestermere

Rudy Friesen, Vice President, Local Government

Administration Association of Alberta, and CAO, Brazeau County

With the 2025 municipal election forthcoming, preparing for new councillors will be key to many elected officials' roles this year. Our panel came together to discuss some of the things to consider when moving into the new term in October.

- Council should form a team environment – you don't have to agree on everything, but you need to develop strong communication skills, so you are able to make tough decisions for your community.
- Being a team isn't easy, you need to consciously choose this approach. There is a contract between yourself, and the council and you need to remind yourself of this to make it work through strife and disagreement.
 - To build this environment you can take a break during council meetings to have a meal together and over-communicate to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- Although the election is exciting, the current council still needs to finish strong. The community still requires strong leadership through the election period. The CAO can help by revisiting the strategic plan and accomplishments with council.

The municipal election is fast approaching. With these tips your council can finish strong! If you are looking for additional information on the election and support with promoting the election to candidates, check out our [Running For Municipal Office](#) page!



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