



# Checklist: Is Your Municipality Practicing Modern Governance?

Best practices & tools for a virtual world

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The roles of publicly elected council members and local government administrators are frequently misunderstood, oftentimes even by those who choose to run for election. In well-functioning local governments, and in “normal” times, the discrete roles of *administration* (embodied by city/county managers and municipal employees) and *governance* (carried out primarily by council members/board members/commissioners) are easy to spot. The council/board sets policy and supports the administration in carrying out government business, setting the direction and priorities of the organization. The administration carries out day-to-day business and enacts the policies set forth by the council or board.

However, in times of rapid change or emergency, roles can flow and blend together. The COVID-19 pandemic has blurred the lines between administration and governance for many organizations. As office shutdowns and “stay at home” orders stretched from days, to weeks, and then months, government leaders have been pressed to find new ways to stay connected and informed. Many local governments have been forced to rapidly adapt to remote work and virtual council proceedings.

## Balancing Transparency and Data Privacy

The law and philosophy of local government promote transparency, but not all government documents can be made public. Health records of employees, certain legal actions and the personal data of council meeting software users are some of the types of information local governments may deal with that cannot be stored in the public domain. Information security and data privacy are always topics of concern. With the rise in remote work during the pandemic, cybercrime has risen four-fold<sup>1</sup>, and these issues have become critically important.

Layered on top of these challenges is the groundswell of global protests against police brutality and systemic racism. Citizens everywhere are calling not only for reform, but for greater transparency and participation in local budget decisions and funding priorities. The

demand for greater transparency and accountability comes at the same moment local governments are grappling with their long-term pandemic response, the shifting business landscape and workforce, and rapid digital transformation.

In times of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and high risk, only the most agile leaders and organizations can thrive. Modern governance is the path forward.

## Modern Governance: A Bulwark Against Risk and Uncertainty

Modern governance equips local government officials with the information they need to ask questions and address red flags. It protects a municipality’s important data and enables transparency within the community. It empowers officials with the technology, insights and practices required to fuel good governance. As local governments make dramatic changes to how they work, modern governance solutions help position them for success.

In this guide, you’ll find three sections—the three pillars of modern governance that provide a framework for today’s local government councils and administrations:

1. **Process & Efficiency**
2. **Security & Data Protection**
3. **Transparency & Access**

# 1. Process & Efficiency

In the urgency to adapt to a virtual world, local boards and councils are discovering efficiencies that enable them to be better stewards of the communities they serve and to improve their effectiveness overall. Local government officials are increasingly relying on “agenda management” or “board portal” systems that facilitate the rapid and secure sharing of meeting agendas, decisions and other crucial information.

When such a platform is in place, staff members can effectively and securely collaborate on items like meeting agendas, instead of resorting to methods like email. This reduces the likelihood of an oversight or mistake and ensures everyone is working with the same information and updates.

The searchability of such a system can also power better decision-making as council members prepare for meetings. Being able to gain knowledge about a topic in advance frees government officials and council members to better synthesize and analyze that information during meetings, increasing the opportunity for them to arrive at innovative solutions to their challenges.

Additionally, making financial forecasts and decisions in the wake of COVID-19 requires access to data and prioritizing needs. Effective boards leverage technology to track resource status and scheduling, which leads to more informed decisions. Likewise, onboarding new council members becomes more efficient and moves faster when data is available and organized.

Better systems and processes do not only benefit local officials. Community members, accustomed to frictionless data access in many areas of life, expect to be able to access government decisions and documents that affect them. Access to this information via strong search capabilities saves time and improves efficiency for administrative staff, council members and community alike. Data availability reduces Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, saving staff time and money. At the same time, the availability of information without added steps and frustration generates goodwill toward local government from citizens seeking to be informed.

## Process & Efficiency Best Practices

- Onboarding materials for new council members should reside in the system.
- Staff members should use automated workflows to compile agenda items.
- Council and staff members should research and review relevant policies and decisions from other organizations through a searchable database.
- Automate roll call, minutes, attendees and agendas.

## Process & Efficiency with iCompass

- Store onboarding materials.
- Automatically compile and approve agenda items.
- Get searchable access to other organizations' policies and decisions.
- Easily automate roll call, minutes, attendees and agendas.



## iCompass Product Features

**Tracking and Approvals:** Collaborate on agenda items and automate approvals. Track and manage processes such as staff reports, resolutions/ordinances, contracts, board applications, conflicts of interest and public requests.

**Minutes Manager:** Reduce minutes creation by up to 80%. Automated tools help record roll call, motions/votes, requests to speak and detailed notes.

**Document Center:** Securely store reference materials, organize documents into customized categories and access a searchable database of public information posted by iCompass clients to see how other organizations handle certain issues and topics.

## 2. Security & Data Protection

Effective boards and councils recognize the risks associated with unsecure document transmission and communication. Non-compliance and the premature (or illegal) disclosure of sensitive information leads to discontent, speculation and public mistrust.

One of the most prevalent risks currently is ransomware attacks. A ransomware attack can shut down servers, expose data, paralyze 911 centers, and interfere with traffic management systems. With their limited resources and aging infrastructures, many cash-strapped municipalities are ripe for attack—and the threat of ransomware attacks on cities, towns, and other public entities increased by more than 65% last year alone<sup>ii</sup>. While industry experts discourage paying ransoms for fear of encouraging this type of attack, many cities are left with no option but to pay the ransom to get back up and running. What once was thought to be a big city problem is leaving every local government vulnerable and it is on the rise.

These attacks often begin with an email—with links or attachments that seem benign but give the hacker access to that single system followed by the network. The recent shift to “work from home” brought on by the pandemic has more local government officials routinely working remotely without access to IT and to security

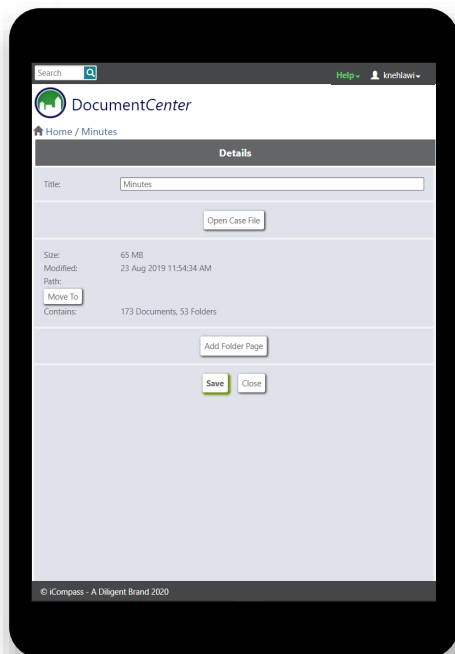
patches and updates. Yet local governments are invested in maintaining security due to the high level of sensitive information they store and the number of systems they use to share data with state and federal government programs.

### Security & Data Protection Best Practices

- When preparing board materials, use a secure collaboration platform that collects information from permissioned users.
- Look for a system that presents backup agenda materials with the confidential data accessible only by council members and high-level administrators.
- Use a web-based agenda management system that does not rely on email to transfer documents.

### iCompass Security & Data Protections

- Set user permissions for board material collaborations.
- Back up confidential data and limit access to appropriate users.
- Manage agendas in a secure, cloud-based system without relying on email.



### iCompass Product Features

**Internal Security Controls:** Dual security fields separate backup documentation into public and private access depending on permissions and authorizations.

**Data Security:** iCompass data centers are ISO 270001 certified. All data in transit, as well as passwords and login information, is encrypted.

**Workflow Security:** Collaborate on agendas without relying on personal or business email for document transfer.

### 3. Transparency & Access

In a time of uncertainty, transparency and access is more important than ever. As some local government meetings shift to in-person gatherings, others remain remote, and still others land in a hybrid format. It is even more essential that documents be readily accessible anywhere.

Modern governance encourages interaction between the community and the municipal system. That requires meeting the needs of all constituents—telecommuters, the visually impaired and those working multiple shifts in a day, to name only a few. All these stakeholders deserve ready access.

Transparency and communication are key. Stakeholders expect access to be easy and convenient. Municipal leaders create a culture of openness and transparency by utilizing the proper technology, so constituents have access to the information they need, when they need it. That in turn fosters trust in local government, its elected officials and its employees.

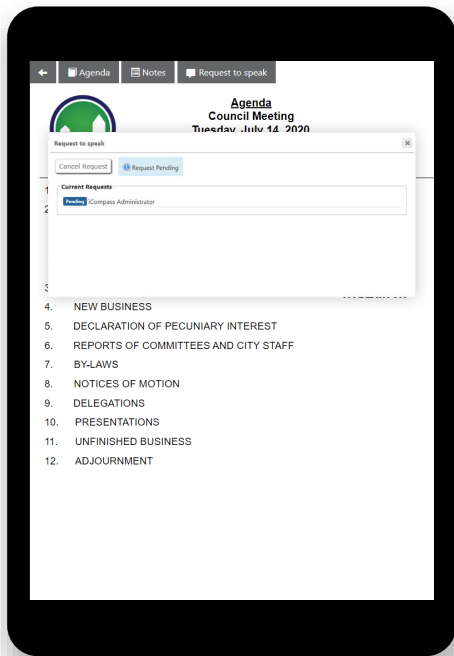
Then, when a crisis arises—and it will—the community turns confidently to a local government that they trust is making decisions in their best interest.

#### Transparency & Access Best Practices

- Make backup material for agenda items available to the public to the extent possible.
- Ensure that agenda materials and pertinent documents are ADA-compliant.
- Keep documents like the annual budget and strategic goals in a place of ready access.
- Ensure the lines of communication remain open and readily accessible.

#### Transparency & Access with iCompass

- Easily make agenda items and relevant backup information available to the public.
- Provide ADA-compliant agendas and other relevant material.
- Quickly access annual budgets, strategic goals and other important documents.
- Easily publish items to the public Portal.



#### iCompass Product Features

**Action Tracker:** Track action items such as conflict of interest declaration submissions, contracts and agreements, and public records requests. Set reminders for upcoming critical dates or tasks, manage progress of requests internally, and easily publish for public access.

**Document Center:** Leverage a secure document storage area for reference materials, organize documents into customized categories, easily publish documents to the public Portal, and access a searchable database of public information posted by iCompass clients to see how other organizations are handling certain issues and topics.

#### Save money. Save time. Make a difference.

iCompass helps people in local government with limited resources and limited time excel at serving their citizens. Learn more about the endless possibilities in modern governance for government: [www.icompasstech.com](http://www.icompasstech.com)

We can help you find the right solution to suit your municipality's needs. [Schedule a demo today.](#)

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.zdnet.com/article/fbi-says-cybercrime-reports-quadrupled-during-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/08/business/ransomware-attacks-trnd/index.html>