

RETREATS

Retreats provide an opportunity for city councils to come together, apart from the regular meetings, to prepare for the future. The focus may be on teamwork, goal setting, or other city concerns. Each retreat is tailored to meet the individual city's needs. Credit is given for city council retreats facilitated by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Some cities have an annual retreat, but 6 hours credit toward the Training Institute certificate is given for a maximum of two retreats.

What is a retreat?

A retreat is an opportunity for the governing body to come together and prepare to better meet the needs of the community. The philosophy behind retreats is that elected officials must function as a team to achieve results. The focus is not so much on getting along as getting results! Unlike most regular meetings, there is plenty of time to discuss issues and concerns. The atmosphere is relaxed and informal.

What would we do at a retreat?

Each retreat is unique and is structured to meet your community's needs. Some retreats focus on team building where elected officials discuss ways to work better together. Other retreats plan for the future, with officials setting specific goals to accomplish during their term of office. Other topics could include financial planning, managing change, conflict resolution, and communicating with the public and media.

What is a facilitator and why do we need one?

A facilitator will assist you in planning and conducting the retreat. The Governmental Training, Education, and Development Division of the Institute will provide a staff member to be your facilitator. The staff member is familiar with the issues and problems you confront as an elected government official. The facilitator's job starts prior to the retreat. He or she will work with you to plan a process to meet your specific needs. At the retreat, the facilitator will provide structure to keep things moving, but will remain flexible and open to all ideas that emerge. The facilitator, a neutral person not involved in or connected with your community, chairs the meeting. This allows everyone to participate fully and equally in the retreat. The facilitator understands it is your retreat and wants to make sure your needs are met.

Where would we have the retreat?

The decision of where to meet is made by your group. We suggest that you consider meeting away from your local community. Participants are able to focus their attention on broader issues and concerns when they are away from the day-to-day distractions and interruptions that occur "back home." They also are more attuned to their relationships with each other. The simple fact that participants take the time and trouble required to travel to a different site demonstrates a commitment to invest themselves in the retreat process.

Who should attend the retreat?

Ideally, a retreat requires the participation of the entire governing body. In order to build

an effective team, all members should take part. The council/commission and the manager/administrator should be at the retreat. Other key staff members such as the attorney and department heads may also attend. Who attends depends on what you want to accomplish.

How long is a retreat?

Although the exact length depends on the objectives for your time together, most retreats last from one and one-half to two and one-half days. An underlying assumption is that if participants get to know each other better outside the daily work environment they will be able to work better together for the good of the community. You will not only participate together in work sessions but in group meals and social activities. We conduct retreats during the week and on weekends in order to best meet your specific needs.

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