



# Presenting Your City's Budget to the Public

FLC University eLearning

Hosted by Dr. Scott Paine, FLC University

With Michelle Bono, Bono Communications & Marketing, LLC





## Why It Matters



## Fulfilling the Public Trust

Municipal revenues are public dollars

How they are spent is the public's business

Public officials have a duty to ensure the public knows and understands how their money is spent



## Building Public Support

Public support depends upon three elements:

- Trust
- Understanding
- Agreement/Acceptance



Increased understanding of the budget creates an opportunity to secure agreement (or at least acceptance)



## Framing the Budget Picture



## What is a frame?



Value based structures that shape the way we see the world (Lakoff)

Communication can activate frames:

- By the selection of images
- By the selection of words and phrases



## Your Budget Frame



Why do we pay taxes? Fees?

How do we make decisions about expenditures?



# Budget Comparisons: Plymouth, MN

## PLYMOUTH FINANCIAL EXTRA

### Plymouth's tax rate drops to lowest among comparable communities

Plymouth has historically compared favorably with similar communities... maintaining one of the lowest tax rates of Hennepin County cities with populations of 45,000 or more. But this year, Plymouth's tax rate has dropped to the lowest among comparable cities.

**Why Low Tax Rates Matter**  
Plymouth residents and businesses pay less in total property taxes than those in comparable cities. At lower tax rates, Plymouth's quality of life and great business environment is a competitive advantage.

"Low tax rates are a demonstration of strong market values and tax capacity, as well as careful spending," he said. "Administrative Services Director Luke Fischer." See also... continued page 4

#### Actual Debt vs. Statutory Debt Limit

Thanks to careful financial stewardship, Plymouth's debt level is well below state limits. In 2016, the statutory debt limit was \$237.2 million.

Note: In 2006, Minnesota law was revised to increase the taxable market value from 2 percent to 3 percent.

#### Tax Rate History

Plymouth's tax rate has historically compared favorably with other Hennepin County cities with populations of 45,000 or more.

#### Services Supported By Tax Levy

- Police - 32%
- Parks, Trails, Recreation - 18%
- Public Works Operations & Street Maintenance - 25%

#### Commercial Property Tax Dollar Distribution

State 27% County 18% City of Plymouth 18% School District 18% Other 4% Flood Disaster 3%

# Entertain and Educate: Round Rock, TX

## the PURRRRR-FECT budget video!

YouTube

The Purrrrr-fect Budget Video  
City of Round Rock 2,035 views

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# What are Services Worth?: Arlington, TX

The screenshot shows a YouTube video player. The video title is "FY 2017 Budget Video for Arlington, TX" with 17,808 views. The video content includes a woman speaking and a bar chart titled "PARKS & RECREATION". The chart shows two categories: "\$0-10" at 35% and "\$10 - \$20" at 21%.

Category	Percentage
\$0-10	35%
\$10 - \$20	21%

# You Balance the Budget: Leon County, FL

The screenshot shows a webpage for "Let's Balance!" from cms.leoncountyfl.gov. The page describes a budget simulation game. A quote from Mark Hoimes, Associate Editor of Tallahassee Democrat, is featured in a blue box: "If you get a chance, roll the dice and give it a try. It will give you new respect for what our officials do. And may wreck any chances you have of being elected."

The Commission is reminded that it does not operate in a vacuum when faced with budget impacts such as natural disasters and unfunded state mandates. These circumstances are simulated through Challenge Cards that are read periodically throughout the game.

If you are interested in bringing Let's Balance! to your organization or event, click on the following link to download all the necessary material. For more information regarding Let's Balance please contact the Leon County Office of Management and Budget at (850) 606-5100.



# Communicating The City's Budget



## Focus



It's always about the public.

It's never about the government.



## Core Communication Values

Concise  
Simple  
Factual  
Positive



## Words Matter

### **Avoid Technical Terms**

Millage rate

Infrastructure

CIP, CAPER, Enterprise Funds,  
Surplus, etc.

### **Use Descriptive Terms**

Tax on property to pay for  
core city services

Safe roads, clean water,  
reliable service

Describe what the funds do;  
explain being prepared for  
natural disasters, etc.





## The Right Emphasis



### Benefits to the community

- Not features of the budget

### What we can and will do

- Not what we can't or won't do



## Key Messages



What are the three things you want every person in your city to know about the city's budget?



## Remember Your Audience(s)

Who are you trying to reach?



What methods, images, and words best communicate to them?



## Conviction, Compassion, Optimism

(Vincent Covello)

People don't care how much you know,  
until they know how much you care

Show empathy – not sympathy

Use value-based words – equity, fair,  
balanced, heartfelt, meeting needs . . .

Be optimistic about the future – that's  
what we expect of leaders



## Questions???



## Links to Examples

Plymouth, MN: [www.plymouthmn.gov/home/showdocument?id=13655](http://www.plymouthmn.gov/home/showdocument?id=13655)

Roundrock, TX: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ipJTvQ663a4&feature=youtu.be>

Arlington, TX: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3-zHICgLA&t>

Leon County, FL: [https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=Fa7WSvZzNcE](https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Fa7WSvZzNcE)



## Upcoming FLCU Online Learning Opportunities

- August 10 – Leadership Lessons from the Safe Cities/Safe Florida Initiative
- August 30 – Preparing for Session: A Preview of the 2018 Legislative Action Agenda
- September 14 – The Partisan Divide (and How to Bridge It)
- September 19 – Engaging the Community: Grassroots Advocacy
- September 28 – Strengthening Relationships with the Media
- October 12 – Ethics Law Update – On Public Meetings



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## Upcoming FLCU and FLC Events

- August 16 – CMRI Symposium: Medical Marijuana and Your City: Facts, Fiction and Moving Forward
- August 17-20 – FLC Annual Conference
- September 7 – Social Media Training (Orlando Training Center)
- September 21 – Continuing Education in Ethics (Orlando Training Center)
- October 11-14 – FAST Fly-in
- October 13-15 – Institute for Elected Municipal Officials
- October 23-30 – City Government Week



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## FLCU Fall Summit Economic Development

September 29 - North Port  
October 6 – Panama City  
October 20 – Gainesville  
November 3 – Cutler Bay



## Join the Conversation #InspiringLeaders

- Blog – [DrScottPaine.com](http://DrScottPaine.com)
- Twitter - [@DrScottPaine](https://twitter.com/DrScottPaine)
- Facebook – [Dr. Scott Paine](https://www.facebook.com/Dr.Scott.Paine)



# Thank you

Michelle Bono  
Bono Communications & Marketing, LLC

Holly McPhail  
Florida League of Cities  
and

## You!



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