

Challenges in City Management: A Case Study Approach

by **Becky J. Starnes**

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Challenges in City Management: A Case Study Approach is a scenario-based, novice-level text for aspiring local government workers and public administration educators. As the title suggests, each chapter contains one or more case studies on eleven topics of city management. The goal of the book is to provide a “tool the reader can use to link academic principles with practice” (p. 2).

Each chapter introduces a theory and then presents a relevant case study. The chapter asks questions that help readers recognize and evaluate the theory in the context of the case study. Often, one chapter’s scenario leads into the following chapter’s scenario. All case studies are from real-life situations in the city of Clarksville, Tennessee. Some chapters focus on issues of internal city management and others on external issues that involve interacting with citizens; instructors and students can thus choose the chapters best suited to their needs.

The following chapters deal with internal city problems. Chapter 2, “City-State Relationships

and City Charters,” gives an example of Dillon’s Rule and home rule when issuing a new city charter. This chapter is a good introduction to city charters. Chapter 6, “Personnel Management,” covers two pay schemes the city has come up with to either retain and reward employees or allow them to leave for other cities, and it counsels decisions on this process. The chapter gives a good rendition of what cities go through when budgeting for human resources. Chapter 7, “Electric Utilities,” has two cases dealing with the hiring of board members for the city electric company. The chapter shows how conflict of interest and board procedures should be handled. Chapter 9, “Funding for Nonprofit Organizations,” discusses whether and how the city funds nonprofit organizations when there is no pre-plan for distributing such funds. Chapter 10, “Housing and Shelter,” details how the city handled multiple issues with a low-income housing project and with the city’s homeless population. The chapter is useful for understanding both what and what not to do. Chapter 11, “Finance and Accounting Management,” looks at two cases: one of irresponsible

accounting procedures and another of funding a municipal airport. This chapter confronts fraud and waste in the airport's management as well as intergovernmental funding problems that can occur with inaccurate accounting.

The following chapters concern how a city handles problems directly related to its citizens. Chapter 3, "Urban Development," discusses eminent domain and citizens' rights in the context of city economic development, showing both the city's and citizens' perspectives. Chapter 4, "Authority and Power," digs deeper into Chapter 3's eminent domain question. Chapter 5, "Policy Making," traces two cases. The first walks through the steps of creating policy for synthetic drugs that have become problematic both for public health and in terms of policing unregulated substances. The second case details formation of the city's policy on noise pollution, discussing both the citizen and business sides of the debate. Chapter 8, "Traffic Congestion," also deals with two scenarios: building a new road through private farmland to curb future traffic and handling port expansion in the form of a new transportation hub. Both situations involve citizen and business wants and needs as well as the needs of the community. Chapter 12, "Airport Authority," is a follow-up to Chapter 11, as both deal with the management of a municipal airport. However, Chapter 12 describes issues surrounding the airport's purchase and later sale of a mobile-home park. Lastly, Chapter 13, "Animal Welfare and Control," involves how the city tried to control unlicensed pet shelters and breeders, walking the line between legality and citizen concerns.

Each chapter cites scholarly references and recommends further reading (books, articles, and websites). An overall glossary of terms helps readers understand terminology used throughout the book, and an index is useful for quick reference. The author has a good grasp of what real-life situations readers may encounter while working for a local government. The text is thus a good resource for undergraduate management courses as well as a helpful supplement for graduate-level students. The book's recent publication in 2013 is also of value, because

it was written post–Great Recession and is not yet outdated.

The book is well written, but as mentioned above, it should be used only in undergraduate courses or as a supplementary text for instructors or graduate students. The case studies are not as detailed one would want in a graduate-level class. Most of the case studies are fairly short and provide only a springboard for discussing larger, more complex management issues. Depending on the course, the instructor may want to provide additional materials to make the case studies more intriguing and challenging for students.

Overall, the book is recommended for use in theoretical and introductory management courses, especially as a supplement or in-class group text. The use of theory in each chapter makes the book especially useful for instructors of management studies, as an aid to clearly and practically communicating otherwise complex subject matter.

REFERENCES

Starnes, B. J. (2013). *Challenges in city management: A case study approach*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

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