



50 Questions for #CAMA50

Mike Dolter
Representative for Nova Scotia and
Prince Edward Island
Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Truro, NS

CAMA is looking toward the next generation of local government leaders. How do you help to cultivate young and aspiring leaders in your own organization?

I think one of the best ways to develop leaders is to demonstrate trust in their abilities and give them meaningful work where they have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills. It is equally important to be prepared to guide them when needed but not to interfere in their process.

For this to work, it's essential that you be open to innovative ideas and solutions and not simply something that follows your own way of thinking. It's essential that they get the due credit for their work either with Council or with the public.

As young leaders gain the confidence that you are there to support them, they will continue to bring new and fresh ideas forward making the organization more vibrant and responsive to the community.

How has your time on the CAMA Board helped you in your own municipality?

The sharing of ideas and perspectives with my fellow Board members has been excellent in allowing me to look at issues in my community with a different lens. We need to all recognize that as a CAO you are not alone as you have a network of hundreds that are there to support you.

With any issue we are facing there is another community out there that is facing the same thing or has even come up with a solution that you can learn from. We are stronger together. The Board has also allowed me to be able to look at some of the broader issues

that we are facing in Nova Scotia and work with my fellow Board members to develop solutions. The goal is always how we can help each other to make our municipalities better.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way you lead your organization?

The nature of the pandemic required me to become a better communicator in many ways. Meeting with both Council and my Senior staff became more frequent to ensure that we all had the same information and that everyone had a complete picture of the ever-changing situation. It was also critical to provide all levels of staff with the autonomy to make decisions in key areas that were impacted by the pandemic and the restrictions we were operating under.

We also had to be mindful of the overall mental health of the organizations as well as individual employees that were all coping in their own ways. Finally, we all now realize that there are other options available to us other than our once rigid structure of working from the office and physically meeting together. As an organization, the virtual meeting and remote work is now another tool available to us to meet organizational objectives.

In your opinion, what are the top three most significant issues facing local governments in the next decade?

- ***Dealing effectively with the infrastructure and fiscal deficits.*** Our continued reliance on property tax as our main source of revenue and the insufficient fiscal flexibility within most provincial government acts provides us with a constrained ability to deal with our ever aging infrastructure. The fiscal relationship with the provinces and the federal government needs to change to better reflect how services are delivered at the local level. Fiscal capacity and responsibility must be reconciled if municipalities are going to provide the services being demanded of them.
- ***Attracting and retaining talent.*** Municipalities will be increasingly competing for a limited pool of professional talent. We must address how we become employers of choice for new graduates. This will require a greater focus on identifying and marketing the great careers that exist throughout Canada at the municipal level.
- ***Balancing power and authority with provincial and federal governments.*** We need clarification of the power and responsibility of modern municipalities. We need the resources, autonomy, and institutions appropriate to deliver on our shifting roles.

What is your favourite overall CAMA memory?

It comes from the 2015 Conference in Jasper. For the Casual Night Out, we were down on the beach with a bunch of activities going on and the feeling of camaraderie and sharing the experience with all my colleagues really has stayed with me through the years. The annual Conferences all have that type of impact on me as they really remind me why I joined CAMA in 2005 and why I was so interested in being part of the Board of this great Association.