



How CAOs and Municipal Leaders Can Use the Resident's Guide

A CAMA Resource for Public Education, Governance &
Respectful Engagement

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Developed by the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA), this Residents' Guide is written in plain language for the public to explain how local government works, clarify roles, and set realistic expectations around municipal services and decision-making.

At the same time, it is intentionally designed as a practical governance and communications tool for Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) and senior municipal leaders across Canada.

Why CAMA Developed This Guide

Municipal administrators across the country report increasing pressure from:

- role confusion between Council and administration
- uncertainty about which level of government is responsible for specific services or decisions
- misdirected service requests
- social media escalation and misinformation
- public frustration with timelines, budgets, and legal limits

This guide supports municipalities by providing a neutral, nationally informed baseline that CAOs can use to educate residents and reinforce respectful, informed engagement – without staff having to repeatedly explain the same issues.

How CAOs Can Use This Guide

- **Public Education & Transparency:** Post the guide on your municipal website or share it through newsletters and community channels as a trusted reference that explains municipal roles, responsibilities, and limitations.
- **Quick Facts for Residents (Standalone Version):** Part 1 of the Residents' Guide – *Understanding Your Municipality: Quick Facts for Residents*, is also available as a stand-alone document. Municipalities may choose to share this shorter version independently as a quick reference for residents, new community members, public meetings, or community education initiatives.
- **Support for Council & Elected Officials:** Provide the guide to Councillors as a shared reference they can use when responding to residents, during public meetings, or in community conversations. It helps reinforce consistent, non-political explanations.
- **Orientation & Onboarding:** Use the guide to support onboarding for new residents, advisory committees and boards, and new Councillors as a complement to Council orientation.
- **Reducing Incivility & Misdirected Requests:** Clear explanations of how issues should be raised, who handles what, and why processes take time can reduce frustration and support a safer, more respectful environment for staff and elected officials.
- **Governance & Education Conversations:** CAOs may reference excerpts, tables, or graphics from the guide during governance training, Council discussions, or community education sessions as a shared, neutral foundation.

Customization Checklist for Municipalities

This guide is designed to be used “as is” or lightly customized to reflect local context.

Optional Local Customizations

- Add municipal logo and contact information
- Insert links to service request portals and emergency alerts
- Update local terminology (Mayor / Reeve / Warden / Chair; CAO / City Manager / SAO)
- Confirm local oversight bodies (Integrity Commissioner, Ombudsman, complaint processes)
- Adjust references to services that vary by jurisdiction (policing, public health, social services)
- Retain only the appendices relevant to your municipality

Tip: To maintain the neutrality and integrity of this national resource, municipalities are encouraged to limit customization to local information (such as contact details, links, and terminology). **The core educational content developed by CAMA should remain unchanged when the guide is distributed using the CAMA name and branding.**

A Final Note from CAMA

This guide is not intended to replace direct communication between municipalities and residents. Rather, it supports clearer conversations by establishing a shared understanding of how local government works.

By educating residents upfront, municipalities can spend less time addressing misunderstandings and more time focusing on leadership, service delivery, and long-term community wellbeing.

