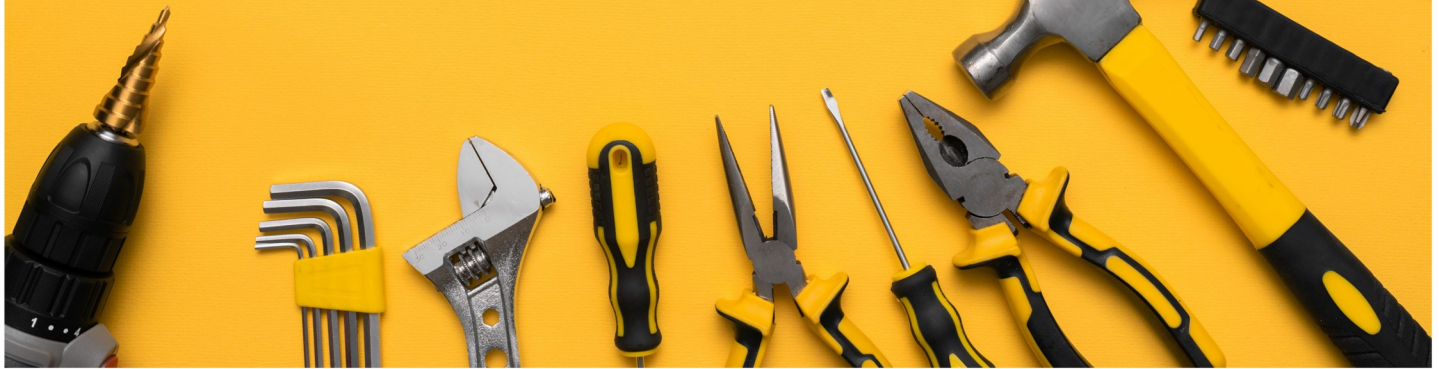


Tools to Build, or Rebuild, Your Community

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Association governing documents outline the duties of the board of directors and association members. The documents spell out specific actions the board shall and may take and how everyone is to play in the sandbox. In doing so, they create the framework for a fiduciary relationship. However, they are not designed to explain what it means to be a fiduciary, or to expand on the ethical requirements of a board member in their role as a fiduciary in a community association. Nor are they designed to get to the heart of what it means to be a community member or neighbor.

Two tools created by the Community Associations Institute can help fill the gap. The first is a "Model Code of Ethics for Community Association Board Members." The second is a "Civility Pledge" for community members. (Scan the QR Codes at the end of this article to access both tools.) These documents have been and continue to be valuable tools for communities in

establishing a baseline of expectations for board members' ethical behavior and in setting a tone for the community.

When Rebuilding Is Needed

Often, these tools come into play after a problem has reared its ugly head. The Code and the Pledge can help boards and community members elevate the collective dialogue. They provide a platform to get out of the weeds of specific situations and personalities and turn attention to the higher principles behind actions. The verbiage in the documents is unlikely to be controversial; they simply provide a framework to aim higher and to appeal to what Abraham Lincoln would have called "the better angels of our nature." Even in our fractured and increasingly coarse society, it's tough to argue with the statements: "Board members should...strive at all times to serve the best interests of the association as a whole, regardless of their personal interests," and "We believe all interactions in the

community should be civil despite any differences of opinion on a particular issue."

No, turning the tide won't always be easy once things have gone south. But for leaders, with persistence, patience, and principled decision-making, change is possible.

Proactive Leadership Pays Off

While these tools can help to fix problems, the best time to employ them is before any issues arise. When put to use, these tools can help a community work towards an important characteristic of any successful organization—an intentional and principled culture. Community associations that embed these tools into their adopted resolutions and operations position themselves for great success.

How?

CAI not only created the Civility Pledge but also provides practical guidelines for communicating the concept and encouraging

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participation. The website outlines a clear seven-step process for gaining buy-in and approving the Pledge. (Scan the QR Code at the end of this article to access the seven-step process.)

Adopting a Code of Ethics can be more involved. The devil, as they say, is in the details. Here are a few tips:

- **Frame it as a Resolution:**

The model code is just a starting point. It's most effective as part of a broader adopted resolution.

- **Start with Why:**

The preamble in a typical resolution format (the "whereases") gives you a great platform to explain the Why. But don't stop there. Make sure to include the Why in all communications about the Code. Elevate thought and avoid the weeds.

- **Make It Your Own:**

The code's wording can be tweaked to reflect nuances specific to your community. The Code can be part of a standalone resolution or incorporated into a larger document. I've seen the Code's elements woven into a "Board Charter." One community with a particularly positive and intentional culture embedded the principles in the model Code in a "Values and Goals" statement. Do whatever it takes to make the document feel alive and real for your community.

- **Remember, it's Voluntary:**

Many boards require new members to sign the document, but the association's governing documents will almost certainly not allow failure to sign to disqualify an owner from serving on the board. Like association rules, our goal and our focus should be willing compliance, not enforcement.

- **Weave It Into The Process:**

Sending the adopted Code or resolution with the annual call for nominations sends a powerful, positive message. Many associations use a standard statement of candidacy form. If that form includes the

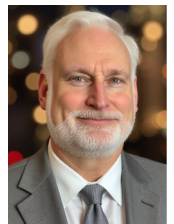
question: "Are you willing to sign the [Code or your document's name]?" and the answer is "no," unit owners will have valuable information when they cast their vote.

Go For It – You Will Be Glad You Did!

Adopting and using these tools has a huge upside. It will take some time and effort, but it will pay off. Done thoughtfully, the process and application of principles can build confidence and trust in leadership and the community as a whole. Your community association can enjoy the fruits of building a positive, inclusive, and intentional organizational culture. It can really lead your community to embrace CAI's theme this year — "love where you live."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas L. Willis, PCAM, has nearly 40 years of community association experience starting his journey as a business partner and evolving into roles as on-site manager, portfolio manager, management company executive, and consultant. He has been a frequent author, speaker and instructor for CAI National and local chapters. He currently serves on the Keystone Chapter Content & Communications Committee and on the Virginia Leadership Retreat Committee. Tom founded Association Bridge LLC with a simple mission: to share all he's learned in the trenches with as many as he can before he "croaks." Tom partners with his clients to



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