

Facing the Heat: Understanding and Addressing Conflict and Incivility in Municipal Politics

Developing AMO's Incivility and Anti-Harassment Strategy

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AMO is working to understand how to reduce the experience of hostile, uncivil and aggressive behaviours between members of the public and elected officials and staff, as well as between councillors, and between councillors and staff.

We are in the early stages of our work — looking to other jurisdictions and conducting dozens of interviews with researchers, elected officials, staff and association representatives.

Incivility and harassment are increasing... both online and in-person.

Politicians and especially municipal officials are particularly exposed.

The pandemic and the rise of social media have amplified grievance.

Women and racialized people are more likely to experience these behaviours.

Recipients are suffering and often feel isolated and powerless.

Good people are driven out of elected and staff positions.

Potential crisis... as it is in other jurisdictions.

63% of respondents said they had experienced some form of harassment during their current term or in the campaign period that preceded it.

— 2025 Canadian Municipal Barometer

60% of Canadians report moderate or high grievance
toward institutions.

— 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer

40% of Canadians approve of at least one form of hostile activism—online attacks, threats, or property damage.

— 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer

Almost 20% of tweets directed at
municipal candidates during the 2022 election were abusive.

— Samara SAMBOT

Economic precarity

Declining social capital

Sludge

Anonymity

Persistent antagonism

Efficacy

Civility isn't just about politeness — it's about the emotional habits and social norms that let large groups live together without constant confrontation.

From our interviews and research, these ideas fall into five broad categories...

1. Clear Rules and Standards
2. Better Measurement and Monitoring
3. Safer Reporting and Support
4. Training and Skills
5. Public Education and Engagement

Small group discussion and note-taking

Take 20 minutes to discuss :



What's fuelling the rise of incivility and aggression in municipal politics?

Think about local factors (e.g., contentious issues, social media dynamics, community divisions) as well as broader pressures (e.g., political polarization, economic stress).

Where do you most often see or experience incivility and aggression in your work?

Consider council meetings, online forums, public events, one-on-one interactions, or within your own teams.

Take 30 minutes to discuss :



What practical steps—big or small—could help reduce incivility and aggression in municipal politics?

Think about what could be done at the council table, in the community, online, with police or through local or provincial policies and training.

We will then open the floor for comments and report backs