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TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT CONSULTING

Building Bridges with Citizens

Strengthening Community Connections

Community Inclusion & Engagement Commission | City of Richardson, TX

July 16, 2026

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Founder & Managing Director | The Gatson Group, LLC

TODAY'S JOURNEY

01 The Foundation of Citizen Connection

02 Communicating with Empathy & Clarity

03 Navigating Difficult Conversations

04 Building and Sustaining Trust

05 Putting It Into Practice

OUR LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Foster positive relationships with diverse citizens

Resolve conflicts with professionalism and care

Build trust to enhance community satisfaction

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MODULE 01

The Foundation of Citizen Connection

What citizens need — and what gets in the way.

What Citizens Need From Their Commission

To Feel Heard & Respected

Citizens need to know their voice carries weight — that they are listened to, not just tolerated.

To Trust That Their Input Matters

Participation without impact breeds disengagement. Citizens must see that what they share makes a difference.

Accessibility & Approachability

The Commission must feel reachable — not distant, formal, or intimidating to the community it serves.

Common Barriers to Meaningful Connection

1. Assumptions about what citizens want or need
2. Communication styles that feel distant or dismissive
3. Lack of follow-through after citizen engagement

KEY TAKEAWAY

Positive citizen relationships are built on consistency, respect, and the genuine belief that every voice matters — including the ones that are hardest to hear.

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MODULE 02

Communicating with Empathy & Clarity

The words we use — and how we use them — make all the difference.

Communicating with Empathy & Clarity

Listen to Understand

Not to respond. When we are already thinking about what to say next, we stop hearing what is actually being said.

Acknowledge First

Validate feelings before offering facts or solutions. Citizens need to feel heard before they can receive information.

Clarity is Respect

Clear, plain language signals that you value the citizen's time and understanding. Jargon creates distance.

ACTIVITY | Empathy in Action

Here's how this works:

1. You will see two responses to the same citizen concern — one that misses the mark, and one that lands.

2. With a partner — or the people nearest to you — discuss what made the second response different.

3. What specific words, tone, or approach shifted the experience for the citizen?

You have 4 minutes — then we will hear from a few pairs.

ACTIVITY | Empathy in Action

THE SITUATION

"I came to three community meetings and nobody ever followed up with me. I feel like my input doesn't matter."

RESPONSE A

"We get a lot of feedback. It's hard to follow up with everyone individually."

RESPONSE B

"Thank you for sharing that — and I hear you. Your input absolutely matters. Let me make sure we connect you with the right person today."

What specific words, tone, or actions made Response B land differently for the citizen?

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MODULE 03

Navigating Difficult Conversations

How you show up in a difficult moment defines the citizen's experience.

A Framework for Navigating Conflict

1	2	3	4	5
PAUSE	ACKNOWLEDGE	CLARIFY	RESPOND	FOLLOW THROUGH
Resist the urge to react immediately	Validate the citizen's concern before responding	Ask questions to understand the real issue	Offer what you can, with honesty and care	The conversation doesn't end when it ends

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MODULE 04

Building and Sustaining Trust

Trust is built — or lost — one interaction at a time.

The Four Pillars of Community Trust

1 CONSISTENCY

Showing up the same way every time — regardless of who is in the room or how difficult the topic.

2 TRANSPARENCY

Being honest about what you know, what you don't, and what you're working on.

3 RESPONSIVENESS

Following through on commitments and concerns. Citizens notice when nothing happens after they speak.

4 INCLUSION

Ensuring every citizen feels their voice is genuinely welcome — not just tolerated.

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MODULE 05

Putting It Into Practice

All three objectives — integrated and applied.

GROUP ACTIVITY | Putting It Into Practice

Here's how this works:

1. Form a small cluster with the people nearest to you — no need to move around the room.
2. You will receive a scenario on the next slide. Read it together as a group.
3. Discuss the three questions as a team — drawing on everything we have covered today.
4. Choose one key insight from your group to share back with the room.

You will have 7 minutes once you see the scenario.

GROUP ACTIVITY | Scenario-Based Practice

THE SCENARIO

A longtime Richardson resident attends a CIEC meeting and expresses frustration — they submitted feedback twice through the City's online portal and never received a response. They feel ignored and are visibly upset.

YOUR GROUP'S DISCUSSION

1. How do you acknowledge this citizen's concern in the moment?
2. What communication approach would you use?
3. What would resolution or follow-through look like?

7 minutes to discuss — then one key insight per group.

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One thing I will do differently in my next interaction with a citizen is…

Take 60 seconds. Write it in your Participant Guide.

"Those commitments — small as they may seem — are exactly how trust gets built. One interaction at a time."

Thank You.

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