



# THE HALTINGWINTER PROJECT

The Work That Builds Belonging

*A movement to restore pride, purpose,  
and participation in local government.*

**Seth Winterhalter**

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Host of *The HaltingWinter Podcast*

## The Crisis of Disconnection

Every day, local government keeps life moving.

Water flows. Trash is collected. Parks are opened. Calls are answered.

While the rest of the world debates politics, **local government quietly holds cities, counties, communities, and our country together.**

But we're facing a crisis, not of performance, but of perception.

Young people grow up believing "government" means Washington, D.C., a place of gridlock, partisanship, and power plays.

They don't know that their city hall, public works yard, or parks department might be the most direct path to a career where **passion meets purpose.**

At the same time, the **toxicity of federal and state politics has trickled down**, poisoning what should be the most apolitical level of government.

The shouting gets louder. The trust gets thinner.

And the people holding it all together, from city clerks to county managers, are left unseen, undervalued, and exhausted.

## The Truth We've Forgotten

Local government isn't bureaucracy.  
It's **community in motion.**

It's the unseen infrastructure of belonging: the work that turns plans into parks, budgets into safety, and ideas into impact.

It's where decisions are felt immediately, where accountability still means something, and where leaders look the residents they serve in the eye.

There are **no government shutdowns in local government.**

When the water main breaks, someone shows up.  
When the snow falls, someone drives through the night to clear the road.  
When the community hurts, someone organizes, listens, and acts.

This is not a system to complain about.  
It's a mission to be proud of.

## The Invitation

*The HaltingWinter Project* was born from one simple belief:

If we can **restore pride** in local service, we can **rebuild trust** in government itself.

By telling the **inspiring stories** of the people behind America's towns and cities—their courage, their creativity, and their compassion—we can shift the national conversation from cynicism to celebration, from division to belonging, and from them to us.

## The Vision

Through captivating storytelling *The HaltingWinter Project* exists to:

- **Highlight** the extraordinary work of local leaders and public servants.
- **Inspire** young people to pursue careers in city halls, departments, and communities across the country.
- **Reconnect** residents to the people and systems that make their daily lives modern and enjoyable.

Because when local government thrives, **communities thrive.**

And when we rebuild pride at the local level, **we begin to heal the nation from the ground up.**

## The Call

This is more than a project; **it's a movement.**

It is a call to remember that the true work of democracy doesn't happen in D.C.

It happens on our streets, in our schools, and across the desks of those who serve with passion and purpose.

**This is the work that builds belonging.**

# THE THREE PILLARS OF THE HALTINGWINTER PROJECT

## Turning Vision Into Action

### 1. The Podcast

#### Telling the Stories That Shine the Spotlight

*The HaltingWinter Podcast* is where the movement began, a national platform sharing the journeys, lessons, and impact of those who lead in city halls, county board rooms, and communities of all shapes and sizes across North America.

With over 250 episodes and tens of thousands of downloads, each week, Seth Winterhalter sits down with city managers, county administrators, department directors, and other local government leaders to talk about the challenges, triumphs, and turning points that define their work.

From small towns rebuilding after tragedy to large cities leading innovation, every episode captures the humanity, heart, and hope that fuel local leadership.

The podcast amplifies the unseen and celebrates the people who keep our communities moving.

It's storytelling with purpose, restoring pride in the work of public service and inspiring the next generation to join it.

## 2. The Speaking

### Inspiring Leaders and Awakening the Next Generation

Through keynotes and workshops, Seth Winterhalter brings a message of courage, clarity, and conviction to those serving in local government and to those who might one day join them.

These experiences are designed to remind public servants why they started, to reframe the challenges they face, and to help them rediscover pride in the work that matters most.

For students and young professionals, they offer a vision of public service not as politics, but as purpose: a calling that shapes lives, families, and communities for generations.

From city halls, college campuses, and statewide conferences, each event is an invitation:

to lead with empathy,  
to serve with excellence,  
and to believe again in the power of local government and leadership.

Because when leaders grow, communities grow.

And when people find belonging, the culture of communities changes for the better.



MoCCFOA





“Eye-opening. Sometimes we just need someone to remind us to pause and reevaluate how we’re really showing up as professionals and as people.”

Shawna Davis, City Administrator



“Seth reframed ‘work-life balance’ in a way that actually works – tension instead of equilibrium. The rubber band illustration? Brilliant!”

Greg Camp, City Manager



“He truly gets Public Works. This wasn’t a generic talk. It felt tailored to our mission and our challenges.”

Sameh Basta, Chief Public Works Engineer



“Seth’s presentation was engaging, inspiring, and challenging.”

Daron Jordan, City Manager



“Inspiring, thought-provoking, and highly relevant to where I’m at as a leader. I left hungry to grow.”

Cesar Roldan, Public Works Director



“Seth’s keynote helped me reflect deeply on my work-life tension and left me with practical steps to improve both.”

Matt Fulton, ICMA Regional Director

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I truly enjoyed working with Seth Winterhalter! From the moment he learned our conference theme, “Come to the Table,” he immediately embraced it and customized his keynote to fit perfectly. As a foodie himself, Seth connected naturally to the topic and drew from a leadership book on hospitality called “Unreasonable Hospitality” to shape a thoughtful, engaging message that really resonated with our audience.

What stood out most was his willingness to go above and beyond. In the weeks leading up to our event, Seth interviewed several of our KLC League members on his HaltingWinter Podcast—a wonderful tie-in as we were launching our own podcast, KLC City Stories, at the conference. He even continued those conversations live from our podcast stage during the event!

Seth was flexible, enthusiastic, and all-in from start to finish. His attitude of “I’ll be there, so put me to work!” made him a true partner in our success. My entire experience working with him was extremely positive, and I highly recommend him as a keynote speaker and collaborator.

Amy Stout, Member Education Manager  
Kentucky League of Cities

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### 3. The Municipal Leadership Development Circle (MLDC)

#### Connecting and Cultivating Leaders Nationwide

The Municipal Leadership Development Circle (MLDC) is where leadership transformation meets belonging. It's a global community for city and county managers, department heads, and emerging leaders who want to grow together, not alone.

Each month, MLDC members engage with powerful ideas and insights from the bestselling leadership books, curated workshops led by local gov leaders, and mastermind sessions that turn insights into application. Every theme connects back to the realities of municipal life: navigating change, leading through tension, and sustaining personal well-being while serving the public good.

The MLDC isn't just about learning; **it's about connection**. Members build trusted relationships with peers who understand the unique pressures of leading in local government. Through monthly masterminds, peer webinars, and the "hot seat" experience, leaders exchange wisdom, sharpen perspective, and rediscover energy for the work that matters most.

For organizations, the MLDC serves as a bridge between personal growth and culture transformation. Cities and counties across the nation are using the MLDC to unify their leadership teams, strengthen collaboration, and build cultures where employees feel seen, supported, and inspired to serve.

The Municipal Leadership Development Circle exists to remind leaders that they are not alone and that the work of public service is deeply human, and that growth and belonging are possible, even in the hardest seasons of leadership.

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The MLDC consistently demonstrates a commitment to advancing the professional development of local government managers. Members are provided timely, informative content through a comprehensive and inviting format that actively fosters peer networking and collaborative learning. This is achieved through the easy to digest content in the daily podcast and the condensed articles, distilling essential information from the book of the week that can be absorbed on your own schedule. Led by Seth's exemplary leadership, the live discussions, and the chance to learn from other city managers have pushed me to lead with more clarity, confidence, and capacity.

- Bill Wagoner, City Administrator, Arcola, IL

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“What I appreciate most about the MLDC is how instantly applicable everything is. I've come to look forward to listening to the daily podcasts on my drive into work. Not only do they help me frame the day ahead, I've also used insights from the podcast episodes in Board meetings, staff conversations, and even tough one-on-ones. It's made me a better leader week after week.”

- Chris Garges, Township Manager, Solebury, PA

“I discovered the MLDC program through Seth's podcast, and after a thorough conversation with Seth, I was eager to explore further. At Parkland County, we have been on our own leadership and culture journey, and the MLDC program perfectly complements this. The program distills leadership and development books into relevant local government contexts, making it practical and applicable. Each day, participants are presented with scenarios that apply the book's theories to local government settings, providing valuable insights for City Managers, leadership roles, and all local government employees.

What sets the MLDC apart is its weekly discussion guides, which facilitate meaningful conversations within our teams. These discussions have enabled our leadership team to reflect on experiences and leadership theories through various lenses, fostering a deeper understanding and enhancing our individual leadership journeys. As we embark on the Leadership and Culture program in 2026, I am confident that it will promote engaging discussions and help us build an even more cohesive leadership team. The MLDC program is a valuable resource, and I highly recommend it to anyone seeking to strengthen their leadership skills and team dynamics.

- Laura Swain, CAO, Parkland County”

# THE WORK THAT BUILDS BELONGING

## A Movement Rooted in Purpose, Pride, and People

The HaltingWinter Project isn't just an initiative. **It's a movement.**

A movement to remind a nation where democracy truly lives.  
A movement to celebrate the leaders, the labor, and the love that keep  
communities connected.

Through its three pillars—the Podcast, the Speaking, and the MLDC—this project  
tells the impactful story of local government: the story of people who show up,  
who care deeply, and who lead with purpose even when the work goes unseen.

Every story shared, every community visited, every young person inspired is part of  
a bigger idea:

That the strength of a nation begins at the local level.  
That belonging is built, not promised.  
And that the best way to fix what's broken above is to invest in what's working  
below.

This is the next chapter of public service: one built on courage, connection, and  
community.

And it begins with all of us.

**Because this is more than government.**

**This is the work that builds belonging.**

# THE ROAD AHEAD

## 2026 Vision & Strategy

Our 2026 strategy builds on our Pillars:

### **1. Amplify the Storytelling Platform.**

We'll expand from audio to full video production, bringing The HaltingWinter Podcast to YouTube and creating short-form clips for social media that amplify municipal stories far beyond traditional channels. Live podcast recordings and city-based storytelling events will deepen connection and reach.

### **2. Strengthen the Leadership Network.**

Through the MLDC, we'll provide citywide and countywide memberships, monthly leadership workshops, and peer masterminds to help leaders grow together, not alone. A key 2026 focus: member-led webinars that showcase the unique strengths, experiences, and insights from local government leaders themselves.

### **3. Empower the Next Generation.**

The HaltingWinter Foundation will partner with MPA programs, universities, and high schools to fund scholarships, internships, and mentorship opportunities, helping students see local government not as a fallback, but as a first calling.

### **4. Partner for Greater Reach.**

We'll collaborate with corporate sponsors, state leagues, and professional associations to co-produce content, events, and resources that multiply visibility and elevate the profession of local government.

### **5. Measure What Matters.**

Our impact reports will track reach, engagement, and leadership outcomes, ensuring every partnership translates into measurable progress: more connection, more belonging, and more pride in public service.

### **YOUR PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION**

Every partnership fuels tangible outcomes: new episodes, expanded access, and a leadership pipeline that solves the crisis at hand. Together, we're not just funding a project; we're shaping the future of local government leadership.

# WHO I AM

## AND WHY I CARE ABOUT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

I didn't start in local government. I found it.

As an **orchestral conductor**, I was invited to join the West Olympia Vision Group, a coalition with a dream to build a 20-acre park in West Olympia through a public-private partnership. The goal was to give a community known mostly for its shopping centers a real sense of soul. I was asked to oversee the amphitheater aspect of the project, and in the process, I discovered the quiet brilliance of public servants who make big visions a reality.

As a **lead pastor**, I served as a chaplain to the Washington State Senate and House of Representatives, hosting weekly dinners that brought legislators together for conversation and collaboration while in session. At the same time, I worked alongside the Olympia Mayor on complex challenges like homelessness and foster care, seeing up close the human side of local governance and the burden carried by those who lead.

As an **executive coach**, I worked with the Director of Solid Waste for King County on a project to increase employee engagement and satisfaction coming out of the pandemic. That experience opened my eyes to the extraordinary commitment of local government employees who, even through the impact of COVID, continued to show up, day after day, to serve their communities with humility and heart.

Out of these experiences came *The HaltingWinter Podcast*, shaped from a five-part series called *The Municipal Tightrope*. What began as an exploration of city management—interviewing over 50 city managers and administrators across the country about the unique challenges and opportunities for their cities as well as the personal toll of their role—quickly grew into a national platform. Today, the podcast has released **more than 250 episodes**, each one shining a spotlight on the leaders who make our cities and counties thrive.

I'm incredibly inspired by the work of **Mike Rowe** and what he's done to elevate the trades. Local government needs a similar voice: a storyteller who celebrates the profession, champions its people, and reminds us all that belonging begins at the local level, with those who serve.

# YOUR PARTNERSHIP POWERS THE MOVEMENT

## How to Stand With Us

### 1. Local Government Leaders

You are the heartbeat of your communities, leading where decisions are felt immediately and accountability still matters. But leadership in local government can be isolating, and the demands rarely stop.

That's why the Municipal Leadership Development Circle (**MLDC**) exists: to support your growth, strengthen your network, and sustain your purpose. The MLDC is a nationwide community designed for leaders like you, those who want to grow together, not alone.

**Every membership fuels this movement:** it funds The HaltingWinter Podcast, amplifies stories of impact, and helps inspire the next generation to join the work of local service.

#### **How You Can Partner:**

Join the MLDC today to invest in your own growth and help elevate the voice of local government nationwide. Your story matters and it may be the next one we share to inspire leaders across America. [Learn more at HaltingWinter.com/MLDC](https://HaltingWinter.com/MLDC)

### 2. National & State Associations

You are the backbone of professional local governance.

Your partnership can help amplify this message to your members, connect us to your conferences and networks, and co-create resources that build leadership capacity nationwide.

#### **How You Can Partner:**

Collaborate with us to tell the story of local government on a national stage.

Sponsor a podcast series, integrate our keynotes and workshops into your events, or partner on leadership and culture initiatives that strengthen your membership.

# PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

## 3. Corporate Sponsors & Industry Partners

You build the tools that help cities work smarter.  
We tell the stories that help them lead better.

Together, we can create visibility, credibility, and trust within the municipal space, connecting your brand with purpose-driven leadership.

### **How You Can Partner:**

Become an official sponsor of The HaltingWinter Podcast.

Align your brand with the stories, leaders, and innovations shaping the future of local government.

## 4. Higher Education & Civic Institutions

You prepare the leaders who will shape the next generation of public service.

Through partnership, we can connect your students to internships, mentorship, and national storytelling opportunities that bridge education with experience.

### **How You Can Partner:**

Partner with us to bring the HaltingWinter Tour into your auditoriums and classrooms.

## Join the Movement

Together, we can rebuild trust in government, not from the top down, but from the ground up.

Join us in funding **the work that builds belonging.**

# READY TO PARTNER? CONTACT US.

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[Schedule a Virtual Meeting Here](#)

