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A Recipe for Getting the Finances Right.

COMMENTARY | Cities across the country are currently finalizing their budgets. But budgeting is just one ingredient in a city's financial success.

In a 1957 speech, Dwight D. Eisenhower shared a lesson he'd learned in the Army that he said worked for the whole of government. "Plans are worthless," the president said, "but planning is everything."

Like so much about Ike, there was a lightness to what he was saying that made the central paradox a little easier to digest. The fact is governments often have to change their plans on the fly. And that means long-range plans tend to fall by the wayside, putting leaders in a reactive position rather than the driver's seat.

You can see this indirectly in the way arguments over city budgets seem to suck up all the oxygen in the room. For the past several months, mayors and city councils have been going back and forth over budgets. Right now, in Minneapolis, Mayor Jacob Frey and the city council are butting heads over a $1.5 million grant for a homeless advocacy group. In Houston, policymakers are debating whether to raise property taxes to help close a $129 million deficit. And in Seattle, Mayor Bruce Harrell has released his proposed budget to close a $250 million budget gap.

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Route Fifty

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