



CREATING EXCELLENCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
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## Association Overview

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ICMA is the professional and educational organization for chief appointed managers, administrators, and assistants in cities, towns, counties, and regional entities throughout the world. Since 1914, ICMA has provided technical and management assistance, training, and information resources to its members and the local government community. The management decisions made by ICMA's nearly 8,000 members affect more than 100 million individuals in thousands of communities--from small towns with populations of a few hundred to metropolitan areas serving several million.

### ICMA's Mission

ICMA's mission is to create excellence in local government by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide.

### Core Beliefs

During ICMA's strategic planning process in 2000, ICMA members reaffirmed the Association's core beliefs. ICMA members believe in

- Representative democracy
- The highest standards of honesty and integrity in local governance as expressed in the ICMA Code of Ethics
- The value of professional management as an integral component of effective local government
- The council-manager form of government as the preferred form
- The value of international Association
- Ensuring diversity in local government and in the Association.

### Association Activities

ICMA offers a wide range of services to its members and the local government community. The Association is an internationally recognized publisher of information resources ranging from textbooks and survey data to topic-specific newsletters and e-publications. ICMA provides technical assistance to local governments in emerging democracies, helping them to develop professional practices and ethical, transparent governments. ICMA assists local governments in the United States through programs such as the Center for Performance Measurement, the Smart Growth Network, and other programs that focus on specific areas of need.

Information about ICMA's many products and services is available throughout [icma.org](http://icma.org).

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- Health and Human Services
- Local Government Management/Administration
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- Performance Measurement
- Personnel and Human Resources
- Planning and Zoning
- Public Safety, Security, and Emergency Management
- Public Works
- School/University Relations
- Smart Growth
- Technology
- Telecommunications
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**Downloads**



[Executive Director's Report 2003](#) (Adobe Acrobat Document, 101 KB)

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## Professional Local Government Management

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Managing today's complex local government operations and providing residents with the services they need is no small chore. Most of us take for granted the public services our communities provide—from law enforcement and recycling, to emergency response and public transportation. While we often see the people who deliver these services—police officers, sanitation workers, paramedics, bus drivers—we may forget that there are others behind the scenes who help ensure that our public services operate smoothly and efficiently each and every day, 24 hours a day.

Building Communities  
**It's no small chore.**



**Working for the community and elected officials with a team of pros, professional city, town, and county managers get the job done.**

Professional city, town, and county managers are just such people. You may know them by various titles: city manager, county administrator, town manager, chief administrative officer. Their primary responsibility is to keep your community running smoothly. These highly trained, experienced men and women are committed to meeting the challenges described above every day. To do so, they work with a range of individuals involved in public safety, public works, community and economic development, and many other service areas. You can count on this team to make your community a great place to live!

**City, town, and county managers oversee a variety of operations, such as public safety, community development, and public works.**

Under a system of local government called the council-manager form, the elected officials are the community leaders and policy makers who establish a vision for their city, town, or county, and who hire

the manager to carry out policy and ensure that all residents are being equitably served. The manager coordinates the work of department heads and other employees, who help ensure the smooth and efficient delivery of services. By building public/private partnerships, managers target all of a community's resources to solve current problems.

While the council-manager form is the structure of government that is most supportive of successful professional management, city, town, and county managers work effectively in all types of communities.

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**What skills do professional managers bring to their communities?**

As the needs of our communities have become more complex, so has the job of city, town, and county managers. In the early years, many professional managers were recruited from the ranks of civil engineers, who were trained to build and maintain the community’s infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, and water systems.

Today’s managers must also possess the management “know-how” to build strong communities, if not from the ground up, then by ensuring the continuous improvement of community services. Many of today’s city, town, and county managers hold bachelor’s degrees in public administration, political science, or business. Increasingly, these individuals enter the profession with a master’s degree, often in public administration.

City, town, and county managers draw on a wealth of experience and a multitude of skills to get the job done. The job includes:

**Administration of personnel**—providing direction and leadership to department heads and those who provide direct services to the community.

**Management of public funds**—ensuring the cost-effectiveness of programs, balancing budgets, and securing the financial health of the community.

**Implementation of programs and policies**—working with elected officials and community leaders to achieve common goals and objectives for the community.

**Coordination of service delivery**—anticipating future needs, organizing work operations, and establishing timetables to meet community needs.

Above all else, today’s professional city, town, and county managers bring to the communities they serve a commitment to maintaining the public trust and confidence in local government, achieving equity and social justice, affirming human dignity, and improving the quality of life for all residents.

**What professional managers do**

- Work with elected officials as they develop policies. The manager may discuss problems and recommendations, propose new plans, or discuss issues that affect the community and its residents.
- Ensure that laws and policies approved by elected officials are equitably enforced throughout the city.
- Seek feedback from residents and members of the business community to address and solve problems.
- Prepare the annual budget, submit it to elected officials for approval, and implement it once approved.

**Economically strong, high-quality-of-life communities don't just happen. They need a lot of planning and professional management.**

- Supervise department heads, administrative personnel, and other employees, and supervise top appointees.
- Solicit bids from contractors and select or recommend the

appropriate individual(s) or organization(s) to perform the work.

- Investigate citizen complaints and problems within the administrative organization and recommend changes to elected officials.
- Manage the day-to-day operations of the city, town, or county.

**For more information about the local government management profession, use the menu at the top of this page.**

**If your school or community group is interested in learning more about local government and the role of professional managers, send an email to [publicawareness@icma.org](mailto:publicawareness@icma.org).**

ICMA members who would like more information about the public awareness campaign or who would like to request or download presentation materials should visit the [Public Awareness Campaign section of icma.org](#) under Member Benefits and Information.

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## Professional Local Government Management

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### Hiring a Professional Local Government Manager

Hiring a professional manager or administrator frees elected officials from the administration of daily operations and gives them time to focus on policy-making duties. It empowers elected officials to provide leadership, develop a vision for the community, determine what services to provide citizens, lobby the state legislature on the community's behalf, and communicate and forge new relationships with constituents. An educated, highly trained professional oversees the day-to-day operations.

Before a professional manager or administrator can be hired, a municipality's structure of government must be modified to provide for the position. The process of creating a position of city or town manager or administrator can vary from state to state. Some municipalities have the authority to act on their own initiative to adopt local ordinances, laws, or resolutions to create the position of city manager or administrator appointed by the elected governing body. In states where municipalities may write their own charter under home-rule provisions, a number of municipalities have taken advantage of that opportunity to create a professional administrator position. Some states have enacted statutes providing for alternative forms or optional charters for local governments to adopt. Lastly, structural change can also be accomplished in some states by obtaining charters through special legislation adopted by the state legislative body.

### How Your Municipality Would Benefit from Hiring a Professional Administrator

- The appointed manager or administrator is charged with carrying out the policies established by the elected officials and with delivering public services efficiently, effectively, and equitably. Elected officials, in turn, have more time to concentrate on creating a vision for the community's future.
- Day-to-day operations are managed by a professional who is educated and trained in current city and town management practices, state and federal laws and mandates, and cost-effective service delivery techniques.
- Responsiveness to citizens is enhanced by centralizing administrative accountability in an individual appointed by the elected governing body.
- Professional managers or administrators bring to the communities they serve technical knowledge and experience, academic training, management expertise, and a dedication and commitment to public service.

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**Duties of an Appointed Manager or Administrator**

- Carries out the policies adopted by the elected officials.
- Manages city or town services, which may include public works, public safety, planning and economic development, parks and recreation, libraries, youth services, resource recovery and recycling and utilities.
- Prepares a comprehensive annual budget and capital improvement program.
- Ensures fiscal responsibility and modern accounting practices.
- Develops performance measurement systems for city or town services.
- Applies for and administers federal, state, and private foundation grant funding.
- Recruits, hires, and supervises the workforce of the city or town, including key department heads.
- Prepares council or board meeting agenda materials.
- Develops long-range plans with guidance from elected officials and assists in the achievement of common goals and objectives.
- Facilitates the flow and understanding of ideas and information between and among elected officials, employees, and citizens.

**Ethical Conduct: Honoring the Public Trust**

City and town managers or administrators who are members of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) agree to abide by a strict Code of Ethics. The ICMA Code of Ethics specifies 12 ethical principles of personal and professional conduct, including complete dedication to democracy and the fair and equitable delivery of services to all residents. These standards go well beyond those required by law and include the provision that members shall refrain from participating in the election of the members of the employing legislative body as well as refraining from all political activities which undermine public confidence in professional administrators. The professional administrator must demonstrate ethical and legal awareness in personal and professional relationships and be dedicated to the highest principals of honesty, integrity, and excellence in management.

**Responsiveness to Citizens**

City and town managers or administrators are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the elected legislative body. They generally do not have guaranteed terms of office or tenure. They are evaluated based on their responsiveness to the elected legislative body and to the community and on their ability to provide efficient and effective services. If the administrator is not responsive to the elected officials, he or she may be terminated at any time. In that sense, the manager's or administrator's responsiveness is tested daily.

**How to Hire a Professional Manager or Administrator****Consider your municipality's unique demands and needs**

Many managers and administrators have studied local government management at the graduate level and have held positions of increasing

authority. Beyond the basic education and experience requirements of the position, you should develop a job description that encompasses your expectations and outlines measurable objectives that you want to accomplish. You should also develop a management profile of the administrator that matches your expectations.

ICMA can offer your municipality materials to facilitate this process. ICMA's *Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator* contains tips on recruiting applicants, determining finalists, and interviewing techniques. To locate a downloadable copy of this document, go to <http://icma.org/pdf/recruitment2.pdf>.

### **Begin your search**

Determine whether you want to conduct your own search or work with an executive recruitment firm.

Prepare and place advertisements in the appropriate publication (e.g., the *ICMA Newsletter* and state association publications).

### **Make the selection**

Review resumes and identify potential candidates based on their experience and the criteria you developed earlier.

Select the top candidates and schedule interviews with your evaluation panel.

Upon reaching a decision, negotiate the terms and conditions of employment with your new manager or administrator and formalize a written agreement.

At this time, it is important to develop mutually agreed-upon goals and establish an annual review process through which the elected body and the manager or administrator can discuss performance.

### **Downloads**



[Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator](#)  
(Adobe Acrobat Document, 204 KB)

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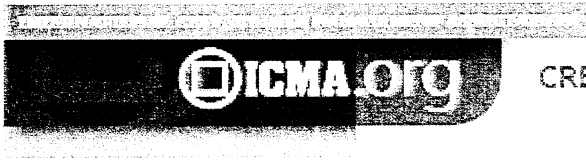
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ICMA : Professional Development : **Management Practices**

## Practices for Effective Local Government Management

In 1991 the ICMA Executive Board convened the Task Force on Continuing Education and Professional Development to identify the competencies and skills required of an effective local government manager. During a process facilitated by the task force, ICMA members agreed that the following Practices are essential to effective local government management. For convenience, the Practices were originally organized into eight groupings. With the development of the Management Practices Assessment, it became clear that for professional development purposes the practices more clearly fall into 18 "core content areas," as shown below. These are the same Practices that members developed and approved. They are simply organized differently.

**1. Staff Effectiveness:** Promoting the development and performance of staff and employees throughout the organization (requires knowledge of interpersonal relations; skill in motivation techniques; ability to identify others' strengths and weaknesses). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **COACHING/MENTORING** Providing direction, support, and feedback to enable others to meet their full potential (requires knowledge of feedback techniques; ability to assess performance and identify others' developmental needs)
- **TEAM LEADERSHIP** Facilitating teamwork (requires knowledge of team relations; ability to direct and coordinate group efforts; skill in leadership techniques)
- **EMPOWERMENT** Creating a work environment that encourages responsibility and decision making at all organizational levels (requires skill in sharing authority and removing barriers to creativity)
- **DELEGATING** Assigning responsibility to others (requires skill in defining expectations, providing direction and support, and evaluating results)

**2. Policy Facilitation:** Helping elected officials and other community actors identify, work toward, and achieve common goals and objectives (requires knowledge of group dynamics and political behavior; skill in communication, facilitation, and consensus-building techniques; ability to engage others in identifying issues and outcomes). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **FACILITATIVE LEADERSHIP** Building cooperation and consensus among and within diverse groups, helping them identify common goals and act effectively to achieve them; recognizing interdependent relationships and multiple causes of community issues and anticipating the consequences of policy decisions (requires knowledge of community actors and their interrelationships)

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- **FACILITATING COUNCIL EFFECTIVENESS** Helping elected officials develop a policy agenda that can be implemented effectively and that serves the best interests of the community (requires knowledge of role/authority relationships between elected and appointed officials; skill in responsibly following the lead of others when appropriate; ability to communicate sound information and recommendations)
- **MEDIATION/NEGOTIATION** Acting as a neutral party in the resolution of policy disputes (requires knowledge of mediation/negotiation principles; skill in mediation/negotiation techniques)

**3. Functional and Operational Expertise and Planning** (a component of Service Delivery Management): Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **FUNCTIONAL/OPERATIONAL EXPERTISE** Understanding the basic principles of service delivery in functional areas--e.g., public safety, community and economic development, human and social services, administrative services, public works (requires knowledge of service areas and delivery options)
- **OPERATIONAL PLANNING** Anticipating future needs, organizing work operations, and establishing timetables for work units or projects (requires knowledge of technological advances and changing standards; skill in identifying and understanding trends; skill in predicting the impact of service delivery decisions)

**4. Citizen Service** (a component of Service Delivery Management): Determining citizen needs and providing responsive, equitable services to the community (requires skill in assessing community needs and allocating resources; knowledge of information gathering techniques)

**5. Quality Assurance** (a component of Service Delivery Management): Maintaining a consistently high level of quality in staff work, operational procedures, and service delivery (requires knowledge of organizational processes; ability to facilitate organizational improvements; ability to set performance/ productivity standards and objectives and measure results)

**6. Initiative, Risk Taking, Vision, Creativity, and Innovation** (a component of Strategic Leadership): Setting an example that urges the organization and the community toward experimentation, change, creative problem solving, and prompt action (requires knowledge of personal leadership style; skill in visioning, shifting perspectives, and identifying options; ability to create an environment that encourages initiative and innovation). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **INITIATIVE AND RISK TAKING** Demonstrating a personal orientation toward action and accepting responsibility for the results; resisting the status quo and removing stumbling blocks that delay progress toward goals and objectives
- **VISION** Conceptualizing an ideal future state and communicating it to the organization and the community
- **CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION** Developing new ideas or practices; applying existing ideas and practices to new situations

**7. Technological Literacy** (a component of Strategic Leadership):

Demonstrating an understanding of information technology and ensuring that it is incorporated appropriately in plans to improve service delivery, information sharing, organizational communication, and citizen access (requires knowledge of technological options and their application)

**8. Democratic Advocacy and Citizen Participation:** Demonstrating a commitment to democratic principles by respecting elected officials, community interest groups, and the decision making process; educating citizens about local government; and acquiring knowledge of the social, economic, and political history of the community (requires knowledge of democratic principles, political processes, and local government law; skill in group dynamics, communication, and facilitation; ability to appreciate and work with diverse individuals and groups and to follow the community's lead in the democratic process). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **DEMOCRATIC ADVOCACY** Fostering the values and integrity of representative government and local democracy through action and example; ensuring the effective participation of local government in the intergovernmental system (requires knowledge and skill in intergovernmental relations)
- **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION** Recognizing the right of citizens to influence local decisions and promoting active citizen involvement in local governance

**9. Diversity:** Understanding and valuing the differences among individuals and fostering these values throughout the organization and the community

**10. Budgeting:** Preparing and administering the budget (requires knowledge of budgeting principles and practices, revenue sources, projection techniques, and financial control systems; skill in communicating financial information)

**11. Financial Analysis:** Interpreting financial information to assess the short-term and long-term fiscal condition of the community, determine the cost-effectiveness of programs, and compare alternative strategies (requires knowledge of analytical techniques and skill in applying them)

**12. Human Resources Management:** Ensuring that the policies and procedures for employee hiring, promotion, performance appraisal, and discipline are equitable, legal, and current; ensuring that human resources are adequate to accomplish programmatic objectives (requires knowledge of personnel practices and employee relations law; ability to project workforce needs)

**13. Strategic Planning:** Positioning the organization and the community for events and circumstances that are anticipated in the future (requires knowledge of long-range and strategic planning techniques; skill in identifying trends that will affect the community; ability to analyze and facilitate policy choices that will benefit the community in the long run)

**14. Advocacy and Interpersonal Communication:** Facilitating the flow of ideas, information, and understanding between and among individuals; advocating effectively in the community interest (requires knowledge of interpersonal and group communication principles; skill in listening, speaking, and writing; ability to persuade without diminishing the views of others). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **ADVOCACY** Communicating personal support for policies, programs, or

ideals that serve the best interests of the community

- **INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION** Exchanging verbal and nonverbal messages with others in a way that demonstrates respect for the individual and furthers organizational and community objectives (requires ability to receive verbal and nonverbal cues; skill in selecting the most effective communication method for each interchange)

**15. Presentation Skills:** Conveying ideas or information effectively to others (requires knowledge of presentation techniques and options; ability to match presentation to audience)

**16. Media Relations:** Communicating information to the media in a way that increases public understanding of local government issues and activities and builds a positive relationship with the press (requires knowledge of media operations and objectives)

**17. Integrity:** Demonstrating fairness, honesty, and ethical and legal awareness in personal and professional relationships and activities (requires knowledge of business and personal ethics; ability to understand issues of ethics and integrity in specific situations). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- **PERSONAL INTEGRITY** Demonstrating accountability for personal actions; conducting personal relationships and activities fairly and honestly
- **PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY** Conducting professional relationships and activities fairly, honestly, legally, and in conformance with the ICMA Code of Ethics (requires knowledge of administrative ethics and specifically the ICMA Code of Ethics)
- **ORGANIZATIONAL INTEGRITY** Fostering ethical behavior throughout the organization through personal example, management practices, and training (requires knowledge of administrative ethics; ability to instill accountability into operations; and ability to communicate ethical standards and guidelines to others)

**18. Personal Development:** Demonstrating a commitment to a balanced life through ongoing self-renewal and development in order to increase personal capacity (includes maintaining personal health, living by core values; continuous learning and improvement; and creating interdependent relationships and respect for differences).

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