

# Professional Local Government Management



**The Benefits to  
Your Municipality**

**ICMA**

*Leaders at the Core of Better Communities*

# Political Leadership and Professional Management in Today's Cities and Towns



**H**iring a professional administrator, appointed by the city or town's governing body, is a trend on the rise in municipal government. Historically, many cities and towns were governed by commissions, councils, or boards whose members had both legislative and executive responsibilities. This system functioned effectively when municipal government was smaller and limited in scope and complexity. With the expansion of the responsibilities of cities and towns however, the policy-making demands of governing bodies greatly increased, as did the need for technical competence in the management of the operation and delivery of services. Today's elected board members can better fulfill their legislative or policy-making roles and maintain their overall control of service delivery by delegating the day-to-day management of the municipality to an appointed professional administrator.

## Making the Change to Professional Management

Employing a professional manager or administrator frees elected officials from the administration of daily operations and gives them time to focus on the policy issues that will guide the future of the community. 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. The professional manager, appointed by the governing body, oversees the day-to-day operation and the implementation of policy.

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 in that they can adopt local ordinances, laws, or resolutions to create the position of city manager or administrator. 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.

## What Value Does a Professional Manager Bring to a Community?

**Professional managers bring value to a community because they:**

- Work in partnership with elected officials to develop sound approaches to community challenges by bringing together resources to make the right things happen and produce results that matter

- Bring a community-wide perspective to policy discussions and strive to connect the past and future while focusing on the present. They help the governing body develop the long-term vision for the community that provides a framework for policy development and goal setting
- Promote ethical government through commitment to a set of ethical standards that goes beyond those required by law
- Encourage inclusion and build consensus among diverse interests (including those of elected officials, the business community, and citizens) by focusing on the entire community rather than the centralized interests of one or two individuals
- Promote equity and fairness by ensuring that services are fairly distributed and that administrative decisions (such as hiring and contracting) are based on merit rather than favoritism
- Develop and sustain organizational excellence and promote innovation. Professional managers focus relentlessly on efficient and equitable service delivery, policy implementation, and evaluation. They align the local government's administrative systems with the values, mission, and policy goals defined by the community and elected officials.

## **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
- The professional manager or administrator brings to the communities they serve technical knowledge and experience, academic training, management expertise, and a dedication and commitment to public service.

## **Ethical Conduct: Honoring the Public Trust**

City and town managers or administrators who are members of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) are bound by its Code of Ethics, which states that every member of the organization shall act with integrity in all personal and professional matters so that they will merit the respect and trust of elected officials, employees, and the public. This stringently enforced Code specifies 12 ethical principles of personal and professional conduct, including dedication to the cause of good government. ICMA members believe in the effectiveness of representative democracy and the value of government services provided equitably to residents within a community. ICMA members are also committed to standards of honesty and integrity that go beyond those required by the law. For more information, contact ICMA or visit <http://icma.org/ethics>.

## **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 or administrator's responsiveness is tested daily.

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