

# **PROFESSIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT: THE BENEFITS TO YOUR MUNICIPALITY**

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

Hiring a professional administrator, appointed by the city or town council or board, is a logical and necessary evolution 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 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 administration 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**

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.
- 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.

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

## **How to Hire a Professional Manager or Administrator**

### **1. 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>

### **2. 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).

### **3. 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.

## **Resources**

### **International City/County Management Association (ICMA)**

777 N. Capitol St., NE, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20002-4201  
292/289-ICMA fax 202/962-3500  
Website <http://icma.org>  
email: [membership@icma.org](mailto:membership@icma.org)

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) promotes excellence in local government through professional management. ICMA provides an information clearinghouse, technical assistance, and training and professional development to nearly 8,000 chief appointed administrators, assistant administrators, and other individuals throughout the world. ICMA's *Responsive Local Government Package* packet gives citizens an overview of the benefits of professional city or town management. To obtain a free copy of this document visit ICMA's website at <http://icma.org/formofgovt> or send an email to [formofgovt@icma.org](mailto:formofgovt@icma.org).

### **National Civic League (NCL)**

1145 Market Street, Suite 300  
Denver, CO 80202-1728  
303/571-4343 fax 303/571-4404  
Website: [www.ncl.org](http://www.ncl.org)  
Email: [ncl@ncl.org](mailto:ncl@ncl.org)

The National Civic League is a nonpartisan citizens organization founded in 1895. Its purpose is to serve as a clearinghouse for information on methods of improving state and local government; to encourage citizen participation in state and local government; and to provide guides, model charters and laws on specific local government topics. The *Model City Charter* was specifically prepared to give municipalities a general plan of structuring their local government based on the principles of the council-manager form. For more information about National Civic League publications, visit [www.ncl.org](http://www.ncl.org). Several publications are also available through ICMA's online bookstore at <http://bookstore.icma.org>.