



*ICMA International and Professional
Local Government Worldwide*

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Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

ICMA is the premier local government leadership and management organization. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advocating professional management of local government worldwide. ICMA provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 8,500 city, town, and county experts and other individuals throughout the world.

The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect more than 100 million individuals in thousands of communities—from small towns with populations of a few hundred, to areas serving several million.

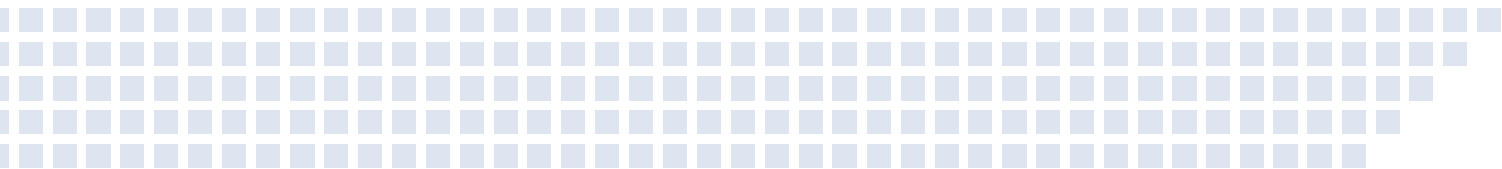
In 1989, ICMA created ICMA International to leverage the experience of local government practitioners and veteran international consultants to further the ICMA mission. ICMA International works in the following areas:

- Accountable governance, leadership, and citizen involvement;
- Sustainable local economic development;
- Transparent financial management, accounting, and budgeting;
- Efficient and effective municipal service delivery and environmental management;
- Performance measurement and program evaluation;
- Local government association management and advocacy;
- Policy analysis and development;
- Local government ethics and anticorruption facilitation.

Working within these areas, ICMA International has successfully designed, implemented, and evaluated more than 500 international projects, using a practical, hands-on approach to solving global challenges locally.

For more information, please visit our Web site at icma.org/international.

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ICMA International is committed to carrying out the ICMA mission: to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide. This paper describes the emergence of the local government profession in the United States, the role of ICMA in the forefront of the profession, and the contribution of ICMA International to local governance in both developed and developing countries around the world.

The emergence of local autonomy on a global scale

Just a few decades ago, it was inconceivable that a shift toward democratic governance, together with unprecedented decentralization, would produce democratic governments in 60 percent of all nations (121 of 193, according to Freedom House)¹ and significantly more independent² local governments worldwide. It was not so far back when many cities and towns around the world were generally administered as part of a larger, centralized political system, often with little or no participation from citizens. Often within a centralized system, leaders responded to the social and economic needs that they saw and experienced directly, and people living within the capital benefited from those efforts. But the further out people lived, the less likely they were to benefit from government programs and development efforts.

As democracy has spread, local governments in many countries have assumed greater decision-making powers and responsibilities than ever before.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, democratization and decentralization spread not only to European nations such as Portugal, Spain, and Greece, but also to Turkey, most countries in central Europe and the former Soviet Union, most of Latin America, much of Asia (starting with the Philippines and spreading even to Nepal), South Africa, and many other African nations.³ By the 1990s, democracy—a system of government in which the people choose their own leaders at regular intervals through free, fair, and competitive elections—had become a global phenomenon and the only widely accepted form of governance.⁴

As democracy has spread, local governments in many countries have assumed greater decision-making powers and responsibilities than ever before. And in accordance with the principle of *subsidiarity*—that each level of government retains the resources, functions, and power to provide the programs and services that can be most effectively and efficiently handled at that level—increased responsibility at the local level can, and usually does, lead to increased accountability, better services, and a higher quality of life.

Core beliefs of ICMA

The core beliefs of ICMA, as articulated in the organization's strategic plan adopted in July 2000, are as follows:

We 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 form⁶
- The value of international association
- Ensuring diversity in local government and in the association.



But globally, professional local government management is still in its infancy. In newly decentralized countries, government leaders and citizens are often slow to recognize the kind of expertise needed to undertake their new responsibilities. Moreover, because of a limited tradition of independent governance, an acceptance of poor services by citizens due to years of negligence by the central government, and no previous access to decision making, information about how to acquire such expertise is lacking.

Often politics, political favoritism, and policy decisions at the central level—by the government or the party—dominate local government, retarding the development, emergence, or application of needed skills. And even at the local level, the perception may exist that local politicians can, by virtue of being elected, handle all the responsibilities of service delivery without the benefit of professional management. But despite the honest efforts of dedicated elected officials and their teams, the pressures of party politics or other biases make it difficult to succeed in the absence of professional skills and management experience.

Globally, professional local government management is still in its infancy.

Clearly, as local and regional governments gain autonomy, they must grow stronger institutionally to meet the challenges that autonomy brings. If they are not able to respond effectively to those challenges, they not only risk failing citizens by not improving services but also stand to lose their increased independence. The answer lies in skilled human resources, continuity among staff and services, continual learning, and

ICMA's Green Books

Known informally as the "Green Books," ICMA's textbooks have been, for more than fifty years, the authoritative source on local government management for practitioners, college faculty, and students in thousands of cities and counties in the United States and abroad. The Green Books deal with the entire range of local government functions—from police and fire management, to finance, to planning and emergency management. Each book is an indispensable reference in its field, offering authoritative managerial coverage. The texts link the broader perspective of the latest theories and research to specific examples of day-to-day decision making and the nuts and bolts of management. The Green Books serve as the basis for ICMA University self-study and group courses. They are also used by many universities as textbooks for college courses, as well as by police, fire, and other local government professionals in preparation for promotional exams.

proven practices. These are the tools that local governments need in order to fully exploit the principle of subsidiarity, demonstrate their capacity to serve their communities, and improve their citizens' quality of life. These are the tools of professional local government management.

ICMA and the profession of local government management

The American tradition of democracy and local self-government⁵ with citizen input created the profession of public administration at the local level nearly 100 years ago. Since that time, professional local government management has evolved alongside the political process, while remaining independent of it.

ICMA, the premier local government leadership and management organization, has represented and supported the professional local government manager since the inception of the profession. Founded in 1914, ICMA has a long tradition of and commitment to identifying excellence in local government service delivery, financial management, and performance measurement; sharing information and tools to increase local government performance and build institutional capacity; and promoting nonpolitical, skill-based professional management as a key component to successful local governance.

ICMA documents innovation and improvement in all aspects of local government through its publications, which include textbooks, self-study workbooks, training manuals, technical reports, case studies, e-newsletters, and a monthly magazine. Many materials are designed for practicing professionals; others serve as fundamental texts in local government management courses that are a part of public administration programs.

The research and information are disseminated in an effort to provide high-quality learning and networking opportunities for its members. Conferences, seminars, and workshops as well as online communities bring local government professionals together to learn about and share leading practices in the profession.

Local government reform in the United States

ICMA was established in the United States at a time when industrial growth, increasing migration to urban areas, unreliable basic services (water, roads, electric), and growing citizen frustration with local corruption pointed to the need for innovation at the local level.

A new profession

In the early twentieth century, the Progressive Movement in the United States called for reforms that would improve the living conditions for millions of urban poor, eliminate corrupt voting practices at the local level, and increase citizens' influence on government. In 1894, at a gathering of more than 100 educators, journalists, business leaders, and policy makers to discuss the future of U.S. cities, the National Civic League⁷ was founded. Its goal was to make city governments more honest and efficient by creating a national network of local reform groups that could learn from each other's successes and failures. Thirty years later, the National League of Cities (NLC) was formed to link state leagues throughout the United States and to provide a voice in the nation's capital for cities and towns. Today, the NLC's membership includes forty-nine municipal leagues and represents more than 18,000 cities, towns, and villages throughout the country. The league serves as a natural vehicle for communication and information among local governments and other levels of government, and acts as an advocate on issues of importance to the level of government closest to the people.⁸



In the U.S., a distinct profession of municipal management was established in 1899.

It was also just before the turn of the century that state-level municipal leagues—associations of local governments—were formed in the states of California, Indiana, Iowa, and Wisconsin, with many others established subsequently. In 1899, the secretary of the California League of Municipalities called for the establishment of a **distinct profession of municipal management** in the same way that there are professions of doctors, lawyers, accountants, and so forth. The purpose was not to displace elected officials, but to increase local government capacity in service delivery. By using managers with professional qualifications and skills, local governments were able to improve services and increase

citizens' trust in government. Such successes eventually led to increased recognition and esteem for professional management.

A new form of government

During the same years, local reformers concerned with the effective and efficient provisions of services at the local level established the council-manager form of government as a way of separating politics and policy making from the day-to-day management and administration of local services. In this new form of government, which was modeled after the relationship between a company's board of directors and its chief executive officer (CEO), the council members, who are directly elected by the voters, make all policy and management decisions, and the local government manager, who is appointed from among the council members, is given the authority to manage all aspects of local government and ensure that the council's decisions are carried out.

Today, career professionals exist at all levels of local government and have expertise in many areas of specialization.

The early managers in the United States were often engineers, because at that time, infrastructure was a fundamental issue that had to be addressed in any efforts to improve service delivery. Over the years, however, as services have grown more complex and as more professional staff members have been hired by local governments, managers have increasingly come from public administration and general management backgrounds. Also, the role of the professional manager has expanded; far from being almost exclusively a part of the council-manager form of government, managers now have a role to play in "strong mayor" forms of government as well.⁹ Today, career professionals exist at all levels of local government and have expertise in many areas of specialization, including economic development, community outreach, and solid-waste management.

The creation of ICMA

In 1914, the first appointed city managers came together to share their experiences. In the interest of improving their own skills and the quality of service provided to their communities, they established the City Managers' Association. Soon after, new members from Canada and Europe led the U.S.-based association to reconsider itself as an international organization, and in 1924 the word *International* was added to the name, thereby affirming the commonalities among managers and the problems they face daily in the United States and abroad.¹⁰ Through the years ICMA and other prominent public interest groups, including the



NLC and the National Civic League, have continuously played an important role in the local government sector in the United States.

In 1924, ICMA members established for themselves a code of ethics that represents and promotes the highest level of commitment to successful local government service delivery. Members are required to commit themselves to this code, and enforcement is peer-based. In the late 1920s, ICMA and its members began measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of local government service delivery. This important work continues today through the standards set by the ICMA Center for Performance Measurement.

Although the U.S. was a world leader in the formation of a professional management career in local government, many other countries have since followed suit. In the 1960s England redefined the role and position of the city clerk into that of the chief executive officer, or city manager. The city management profession is well established throughout Australia and New Zealand. In Germany, professionals trained in local government management and public administration serve their communities as chief executives. In the 1990s, as local governments gained control of more resources and were able to manage services more directly, the position of a professional manager or administrator was explored and often adopted in many countries. Throughout the world, the role of a professional manager with skills to handle the important services provided by local government is increasingly recognized as crucial to success.



Local governance sector

In the United States and elsewhere, professionalism in local government management and service delivery has stimulated the development of not only associations of local governments and their professionals, but also of university programs and courses, as well as a wide range of specialized consulting services. In addition, local governments have increasingly recognized the importance of citizen involvement beyond the vote, promoting participatory methods that allow citizens to contribute productively to decision making. And increased professionalism has benefited inter-governmental relations, allowing local government associations (LGAs) to represent the interests of those governments that are closest to the people.

When working in emerging and transitional democracies that are undergoing decentralization and are in the infancy of professional local government, the approach of ICMA International is to consider the local governments themselves in the context of the entire local governance sector. Taking into account how local governments and the environments in which they operate evolve, ICMA International has identified this sector as including local governments, citizens (individuals and organizations, including the business community), legal framework, LGAs, academia, and service providers. Each component and its connection to the other components have a profound impact on the ability of the local

The local government sector

Local government

This level of government, which is closest to the people, includes cities, towns, municipalities, villages, counties, districts, etc. The functions of independent local self-government are as follows:

- *Policy making.* Policies are made by elected officials with citizen input.
- *Service delivery.* Services provided by local government usually include potable water, wastewater treatment and/or removal, solid-waste collection and management, roads, public lighting, public parks, cemeteries, and a central market. They may also include economic development, strategic planning, health, and education.
- *Management.* The effective and efficient provision of services is based on sound finance and budget practices, transparency, and accountable governance by elected officials and staff.

Citizens

In a democracy, the people are the government and have the following rights:

- *Voting.* Citizens elect officials to represent and make policies.
- *Participation.* Individually or through community groups and organizations, including the business community, citizens participate beyond the vote on a direct and continual basis through mechanisms (often initiated by local government) such as committees, town hall meetings, public forums, task forces, etc. Citizens also participate by paying taxes and fees that cover the cost of services.
- *Access.* Citizens have a right to local government information because it is public information. Such information includes the status of municipal activities, including the budget. Citizens should also have access to decision-making processes.
- *Oversight.* Citizens and their representative organizations (e.g., nongovernmental organizations) monitor local government and help ensure that it is running properly.

Legal framework

The legal framework encompasses the laws under which the local government operates. This framework, when created and managed on an ongoing basis in a transparent and equitable manner, serves the needs of a whole community, not just a favored few. To achieve this goal, the framework should

- Be clear and flexible
- Allow for sufficient autonomy
- Provide adequate funding and/or the right to raise funds for service delivery
- Enable local governments to operate and provide services
- Set standards as needed to ensure environmental protection
- Make available fair and adequate education.

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Local government associations

Local government associations (LGAs), which may be regional or national, are member-driven organizations that offer the opportunity for peer-to-peer exchange and collaboration. Their services include

- *Membership.* Members include local governments and/or professionals; membership is voluntary.
- *Advocacy.* LGAs bring together local government members to identify common issues and goals so that they can represent themselves within society. Often their major roles are to serve as a counterbalance to national policies and politics and to facilitate change.
- *Information sharing.* LGAs provide a network for exchanging information among peers to help them to improve their performance and professionalism in their jobs.
- *Member services.* LGAs serve the professional and developmental needs of members through training and publications and also provide services that may be a cost savings, such as insurance programs, Internet support, and joint purchasing.

Academia

The academic sector, which includes university courses, programs, and research to further the profession of local government management, supports the local government sector through

- *Education.* Formal education for the next generation of local leaders and managers includes diverse courses relevant to service delivery and local government management not typically found within public administration or other programs that are focused only on the central government.
- *Research and analysis.* Academic research can support advocacy efforts, identify ways to improve operations and management, contribute to policy dialogues, and monitor citizen perspectives.
- *Special programs.* Short courses and postgraduate skill-building and refresher programs may be offered by universities in collaboration with the local government association.

Service providers

As local governments become more capable of efficiently and effectively administering services, there may be myriad special materials and skills that the local government may need to purchase or contract.

- *Consultants.* Consultants are often the early adaptors of innovation and improved management techniques, which may be transferred to and applied more quickly by local government when consultant services are accessible.
- *Vendors.* In instances when it may be a savings to outsource some services to private vendors, well-managed local governments will procure those services competitively and work with vendors to get the best price and quality.



government as an institution to operate as a service provider, which is its primary responsibility.

ICMA and international development

As noted previously, ICMA has been internationally active just about from its inception, and the association reserves a position for an international member on its board of directors. In the 1950s, ICMA participated directly in postwar activities in Europe by conducting several study tours funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); these tours were a part of the postwar reconstruction and stabilization activities. Exchange programs among members from different countries have been a part of member services since 1979.

Since 1989, ICMA's international activities have become much more extensive. ICMA has members in more than 27 countries as well as professional affiliations with other local government associations in 15 countries. With funding from the U.S. government and some multilateral agencies, ICMA has been able to dramatically increase its efforts to pursue its mission—to create excellence in local government by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide.

Today, countries throughout the world increasingly recognize the autonomy of local government and rely upon local officials and managers to develop policies, provide quality services, facilitate economic development, meet citizen needs and expectations, and effectively and efficiently manage the public's funds.

Conditions in the early decades of professional local government management in the United States were similar in some ways to those faced by such countries as Thailand, Nigeria, South Africa, and Croatia in terms of fighting corruption, defining better systems, and seeking to improve service delivery. Thus, ICMA's strength in its approach to international development in countries with emerging democracies is based on nearly one hundred years of experience as an institution, as well as on the experience of its nearly 8,200 members around the world. Accordingly, it has made its cumulative knowledge and experience available through formal programs devoted to supporting the development and improvement of the local governance sector in transitional and developing countries.

Today, countries throughout the world increasingly recognize the autonomy of local government and rely upon local officials and managers to develop policies, provide quality services, facilitate economic development,

meet citizen needs and expectations, and effectively and efficiently manage the public's funds. This means that increased capacity at the local level is essential. But for developing and transitional countries, there are many problems and challenges as they work to improve their system of governance and service delivery.

- They must clarify newly acquired responsibilities within a legal framework that is often inconsistent and ill-defined.
- They must tackle structural problems—for example, government salaries, low education, poverty—that impinge upon the ability of local government leaders and others to make progress.
- They must provide services despite limited resources, environmental obstacles, and other challenges.
- They must help whole populations—including leaders, citizens, and organizations—adjust to new definitions and roles wherein citizens are expected to participate and leaders are expected not only to lead but also to facilitate and listen.
- They must identify and define how transparency and accountability contribute to service delivery when society's norms require corrupt practices as a matter of getting business done.



As local and regional governments gain autonomy, they must grow stronger institutionally to meet the challenges that autonomy brings.

The twenty-first century promises to be the century of local self-government throughout the world.¹¹ But in order for local self-governments to be able to take advantage of their more independent position, they themselves must be prepared, and the other elements of the local government sector have to support them. In its efforts to increase the professional capacity of local government managers and administrators worldwide, ICMA International recognizes that each country must be considered individually to determine its degree of decentralization, its local government decision-making and revenue-generating power, and its responsibilities for service delivery. Thus, it approaches each international development program or project in support of local government by first analyzing the overall health of the entire local government sector and the ability of sector components to communicate with and support one another. Even though the focus of the specific program or project may actually address only one of the above areas—and even then may be more narrowly focused on a specific function such as economic development, revenue generation, advocacy, or fighting corruption at the local level—ICMA

International brings to bear its knowledge and experience of the roles and responsibilities, the strengths and weaknesses, of the entire sector onto the project it has undertaken.

ICMA International represents ICMA's serious commitment to increasing and expanding professional local government worldwide. Through technical assistance and training projects, ICMA has worked with hundreds of local governments in sixty countries. In addition to ICMA staff and consultants, its members and their staff—including city managers, finance directors, economic development experts, policy analysts, educators, sanitation engineers, and public works directors—have contributed their expertise by providing more thousands of hours of their time to assist their international colleagues address the management challenges they face. Improved efficiency and effectiveness of local government services increases the quality of life of citizens. Thus it is a crucial component of an effective governance system. ICMA stands ready to continue and expand its support of leaders around the world, contributing to the betterment of their communities.

Endnotes

- 1 Freedom House is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that supports the expansion of freedom in the world; go to www.freedomhouse.org for more information on their activities and publications.
- 2 Local governments are independent to varying degrees, but all are recognized to have some autonomous decision-making authority and responsibility.
- 3 Democracy and decentralization differ, in form or degree, depending on the country and its sociopolitical climate and cultural values, but in all cases, the direction has been similar.
- 4 Larry Diamond, "Universal Democracy?" *Policy Review*, no. 119 (Hoover Institution, June-July 2003), available at www.policyreview.org/jun03/diamond_print.html.
- 5 Local self-government is the term used internationally to refer to local government as clearly distinguished from government at the local level that is not independent. In this text, when local government is used, it is referring to independent local government.
- 6 It should be noted that in the United States, the council-manager form of government has traditionally been considered the preferred form, but in recent years ICMA has broadened its membership base to include chief administrative officers who exercise the professional management role within other forms of government, such as the strong mayor form. Internationally, ICMA recognizes and respects the diversity in local government systems, and encourages and supports professionalism in local government management no matter the form of government.
- 7 Originally called the National Municipal League.
- 8 Membership information from the NLC Web site at www.nlc.org.
- 9 In the United States at the local level, the citizens of a community vote on the form of government they want; the choices are provided by state enabling legislation. Today, the council-manager form and the mayor-council (strong mayor) forms are the most prevalent. In the strong mayor form, the mayor and council are all directly elected. The mayor serves as the chief executive and the council as the legislators. Often the mayor appoints, with council approval, a chief administrative officer to manage many of the same functions as the city manager.
- 10 ICMA changed its name from the International City Managers' Association to the International City Management Association in 1969, and to the International City/County Management Association in 1991.

ICMA International staff and ICMA member local government professionals are proud to have worked with and supported colleagues around the world in the following countries.

Afghanistan	Macedonia
Albania	Mali
Argentina	Mexico
Armenia	Mongolia
Bolivia	Montenegro
Bosnia	Morocco
Botswana	Mozambique
Brazil	Nicaragua
Bulgaria	Nigeria
Chile	Panama
Colombia	Paraguay
Costa Rica	Philippines
Croatia	Poland
Czech Republic	Romania
Ecuador	Russia
El Salvador	Serbia
Ethiopia	Slovakia
Georgia	South Africa
Guatemala	Sri Lanka
Guyana	Suriname
Haiti	Swaziland
Honduras	Thailand
Hungary	Tunisia
India	Uganda
Indonesia	Ukraine
Iraq	Venezuela
Jamaica	Vietnam
Jordan	Yugoslavia
Kazakhstan	Zambia
Kenya	Zimbabwe
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