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Gathering Member Feedback on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the ICMA Code of Ethics
February 25, 2022 Virtual Meeting

Background

The membership voted to adopt the ICMA Code of Ethics in 1924 and over the years members have approved amendments to the tenets many times to ensure consistency with contemporary norms. As background, the tenets in the Code describe the principles of the profession, i.e., honesty and integrity, serving the public equitably and governing body members equally, political neutrality, merit-based personnel decisions, respecting the role and contributions of elected officials, keeping the community informed, supporting and leading employees, and seeking no favor from a local government position.

When ICMA sanctions a member for conduct that violated the Code, this is based on the finding that the member's conduct did not uphold the principle as outlined in the tenet. The Executive Board adopted guidelines for some tenets in 1972 to provide members with additional advice to better understand and interpret the tenets in the Code.

Ensuring the language in the Code reflects the values of the profession has been a long-standing priority for ICMA. In July 2021, ICMA re-launched its review of the Code to focus on better integrating the profession's ethical commitment to equity and social justice into the 12 tenets. To date, this review has included the following steps:
- Conducted an environmental scan to learn how other professional associations are addressing equity and racial justice in their codes;
- Convened two virtual focus groups;
- Facilitated two in-person member feedback sessions during the 2021 ICMA Annual Conference; and
- Launched a series of virtual meetings open to all members. The first was held on January 7, and there are additional virtual meetings scheduled on February 25 and April 29.

ICMA's Executive Board has prioritized robust dialogue with members during this review of the Code and we are continuing the effort to gather feedback in 2022. This feedback will help shape the next phases of this review: (1) developing a member survey to gauge ways to strengthen the Code's commitment to equity and social justice and the ethical responsibility of members to serve the best interests of everyone living in their communities; and (2) preparing potential revisions to the language in the Code.

Definitions

ICMA hired the University of North Carolina's School of Government (UNC SOG) as consultants to assist in this Code review. UNC SOG recommended the following definitions we will use during this discussion:
- **Diversity** is about empowering people by respecting and appreciating differences.
- **Equity** means fairness that is achieved by recognizing that each person has different characteristics and circumstances and therefore resources may need to be allocated differently depending on those circumstances and characteristics in order to ensure that processes and outcomes (both intended and unintended) are fair.
- **Equality** means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities.

- **Inclusion** refers to organizational efforts and practices (intentional acts) in which different groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed and equally treated.
- **Engagement** includes actions that encourage active involvement of residents in community governance.
- **Social Justice** means a commitment to assure that fair and equal treatment, full exercise of rights, and opportunity to participate in public affairs are promoted for all groups in society. Social justice is advanced by actions that promote equity, diversity, inclusion, and engagement.**Agenda for Today's**

Discussion

12:00-12:10 p.m. US Eastern Molly Mehner, Deputy City Manager in Cape Girardeau, Missouri (ICMA Midwest Senior Vice-President and Committee on Professional Conduct Chair), will provide an introduction and overview of this effort.

12:10-12:45 p.m. US Eastern Breakout room discussion on four tenets members had previously identified as areas where the language could be strengthened to reflect the profession's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The discussion questions are provided below. ICMA staff or a representative from UNC SOG will facilitate the conversation in each virtual breakout room and take notes. The discussions today will not be recorded.

12:45-1:00 p.m. US Eastern Brief reporting on the conversation in each breakout room, sharing next steps in this review effort, and Q&A.

Tenet 1: We believe professional management is essential to efficient and democratic local government by elected officials.

- Equity has been recognized as one of the pillars in modern public administration since 1968. Should "equitable" be added to this statement on the core values promoted through professional management in local government?
- The other pillars are economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. Members approved streamlining the tenet language in 2019 and the reference to effective was removed. Should "effective" be returned to Tenet 1?

Tenet 4: Serve the best interests of the people.

Guidelines:

Impacts of Decisions. Members should inform their governing body of the anticipated effects of a decision on people in their jurisdictions, especially if specific groups may be disproportionately harmed or helped.

Inclusion. To ensure that all the people within their jurisdiction have the ability to actively engage with their local government, members should strive to eliminate barriers to public involvement in decisions, programs, and services.

- Does Tenet 4 make the appropriate statements about the profession's commitment to equity?
- Are revisions to the tenet language needed?
- Is "the community" a more appropriate term than "the people"?

- The guidelines discuss how to implement the principle of serving the best interests of the people. Do the current guidelines need to be revised? Are additional guidelines needed?

Tenet 9: Keep the community informed on local government affairs; encourage communication between the citizens and all local government officers; emphasize friendly and courteous service to the public; and seek to improve the quality and image of public service.

- What do you think about the tenet language?
- What elements in the tenet language do you think support diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- Is "the people" a more appropriate term than "the community"?
- Is a guideline needed to support the principle of this tenet?

Tenet 11: Handle all matters of personnel on the basis of merit so that fairness and impartiality govern a member's decisions, pertaining to appointments, pay adjustments, promotions, and discipline.

Guideline:
Equal Opportunity. All decisions pertaining to appointments, pay adjustments, promotions, and discipline should prohibit discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, political affiliation, disability, age, or marital status.

It should be the members' personal and professional responsibility to actively recruit and hire a diverse staff throughout their organizations.

- The tenet language has not been reviewed with membership since 1995. Do you think the language promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion? Do you think the language should be revised?
- The principle outlined in the tenet language is to emphasize fairness and impartiality in making personnel decisions although it does not state there is an obligation to think about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Is this a shortcoming in the current language?
- The guideline was added in 1972 and was last revised in 2009. What recommendations do you have for changes to the existing guideline? Are additional guidelines needed?

Additional Resources
- ICMA Code of Ethics and associated guidelines: https://icma.org/icma-code-ethics-guidelines
- ICMA's Declaration of Ideals: https://icma.org/documents/declaration-ideals
- ICMA's website for this review with project updates and more information: https://icma.org/icma-code-ethics-review-focusing-diversity-equity-and-inclusion
- ICMA Executive Board June 2020 statement on systemic racism: https://icma.org/blog-posts/icma-executive-board-statement-regarding-systemic-racism

Members with questions, comments, or wish to share specific feedback are encouraged to contact Jessica Cowles, ethics advisor, at jcowles@icma.org or 202-962-3513; or Martha Perego, member services and ethics director, at mperego@icma.org or 202-962-3668.