

Establishing International Programs:

A Guide for State Municipal Management Associations



January 2019

Prepared by the ICMA International Committee

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government management worldwide through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics. Through expansive partnerships with local governments, federal agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic funders, the organization gathers information on topics such as sustainability, health care, aging communities, economic development, cybersecurity, and performance management. It also collects data on a variety of local government services. All these activities support related training, education, and technical assistance.

ICMA provides support, publications, data and information, peer and results-oriented assistance, and training and professional development to more than 12,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world.

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The ICMA International Committee advises the ICMA Executive Board on international issues. Committee members serve one, two, or three years and include representatives from each of ICMA's international affiliate organizations. Through subcommittees, the body focuses on the following initiatives: (1) affiliate relations; (2) knowledge base exchange; (3) capacity building and advocacy; (4) membership and governance; and (5) communications. For information about the committee or ICMA global projects, contact global@icma.org.

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The Importance of THE “I” IN ICMA

In February 2017, the ICMA Executive Board adopted the Envision ICMA Strategic Plan. This plan reinforces and integrates the international component throughout ICMA programs and initiatives and modifies ICMA's vision statement to reinforce the importance of the “I” in ICMA. In fact, embracing and promoting the international perspective was identified in the strategic plan as a critical driver affecting ICMA members, the profession, and the organization.

“Today, with more than half of the world’s 7 billion inhabitants living in cities, and with projections showing that continued urbanization will increase this to two-thirds by 2050, the “I” in ICMA is more relevant than ever. The urbanization megatrend, if well managed, will have enormous economic, political, demographic, social, public health, and ecological benefits for all. Given this and other global trends, it is crucial that ICMA strengthen relationships with international affiliates and approach all its programs and services with a global perspective. There are similar issues facing communities around the globe including integration of refugees into communities, climate change, limited resources, unfunded mandates, and there are lessons to be learned from each other. By partnering with our international affiliates, ICMA can provide a network of solutions and enable faster adoption of best practices around the world. ICMA is well positioned to contribute to global efforts in partnership with our affiliates to ensure that our communities are places in which citizens can enjoy safe, prosperous, and productive lives.”

ICMA Mission and Vision

ICMA Mission: To advance professional local government through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics.

ICMA Vision: To be the leading association of local government professionals dedicated to creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.

“It is the responsibility of each ICMA member to contribute to the effort of achieving the ICMA mission and vision by seeking opportunities to become involved in the international outreach programs of ICMA.”

–Greg Bielawski
ICMA Senior Advisor
and Former Illinois Manager

The Case for Creating an International Component WITHIN STATE ASSOCIATION PROGRAMS

It really is a small world after all, and quickly getting smaller. Persistent advances in communication and transportation technologies have brought the world, literally, to our fingertips. In the time it takes to type on a keyboard or press a few buttons, we can leap thousands of miles across the planet to transact business, talk with friends, or tackle common problems by teaming together. At the same time, the subsequent proliferation of data through media channels has brought us closer to our global neighbors by fostering intercultural dialogue and awareness.

More than communication ties us to the rest of the world. Through advances in communication we have become part of a new global economy. Never before in history have markets accelerated as they do now, with new venues for commerce and production opening across widely disparate locations each day. We have arrived at a point in the postindustrial world where the vitality of a local economy depends greatly, sometimes exclusively, on its place in international markets. These global relationships mean that we have a moral and professional duty to cultivate improved methods of management in local governance: we and our constituents benefit when we open relationships with international partners.

What does this mean? How should government adapt? Above all, how can we make the shrinking world work to the advantage of local and regional government?

Municipal problems are comparable the world over, and we have a great deal to learn from each other. A budget manager in Charlotte, North Carolina, will encounter many of the same logistical challenges as her or his counterpart in Central Europe. A watershed manager in Santa Fe, New Mexico, could swap notes with administrators in Tel Aviv, Israel. Planners in Buenos Aires, Argentina, looking to revitalize their downtown, might visit Portland, Oregon, to see how others have done it.

San Pedro de Marcoris, Dominican Republic, and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in the U.S. initiated peer-to-peer exchanges as part of a larger USAID program in an effort to address climate change through improved land use planning processes. The two communities committed to tackling this challenge together and learning from each other.

Broad differences in language and culture cannot obstruct the shared sense of purpose among government managers; it is this shared purpose that molds the foundation of fresh solutions to old problems. By collaborating with international partners on universal issues, we reap the benefits of new approaches by sharing best practices.

State Association SURVEY

In 2016, the International Committee conducted a survey of state associations to identify existing international programs, explore why some associations do not participate in international programs, and learn what support those associations would need in order to consider participating. The survey built on a similar survey conducted in 2002 by the ICMA Task Force on International Affiliations. The 2016 survey was emailed to the presidents of 48 state associations, and 20 of them responded.

Here is a summary of the 2016 survey results:

Associations with a Current Program: The first series of questions asked about current international programs. Four of the associations responded that they currently have in place some type of an international program for their membership.

Program Components: Two of the associations, Pennsylvania and Minnesota, provided additional information regarding their program components.

Pennsylvania

- Exchanging information with municipal associations or other local government support institutions in other countries.
- Highlighting international best practices or case studies in publications, website, and other information programs.
- Providing a scholarship to support participation in ICMA's International Management Exchange Program or other international exchange programs.
- Inviting and/or hosting international colleagues at the annual conference or at other association events.

Minnesota

- Organizing study tours to other countries or organizing study tours in the United States for local government managers from other countries.

Associations without a Current Program: The second series of questions asked those associations that do not currently have international components in place why they don't have a program and, if they would like to start one, what resources would assist them.

Reasons for Not Participating in International Programs: 80% of the participating state associations responded that they do not have an international component. The reasons provided are shown in Figure 1. Many participants indicate that international engagement is not included in their association mission (8 responses) and that it is not a priority for their organizations (9 responses).

Information/Support Needed to Consider a Program: Figure 2 indicates the types of information and support state associations are seeking in order to engage in international activities. Many of the participating associations are seeking examples of international activities, with some interested in information about international professional development opportunities and assistance with setting up an international exchange program.

FIGURE 1 || Reasons for Not Having an International Component

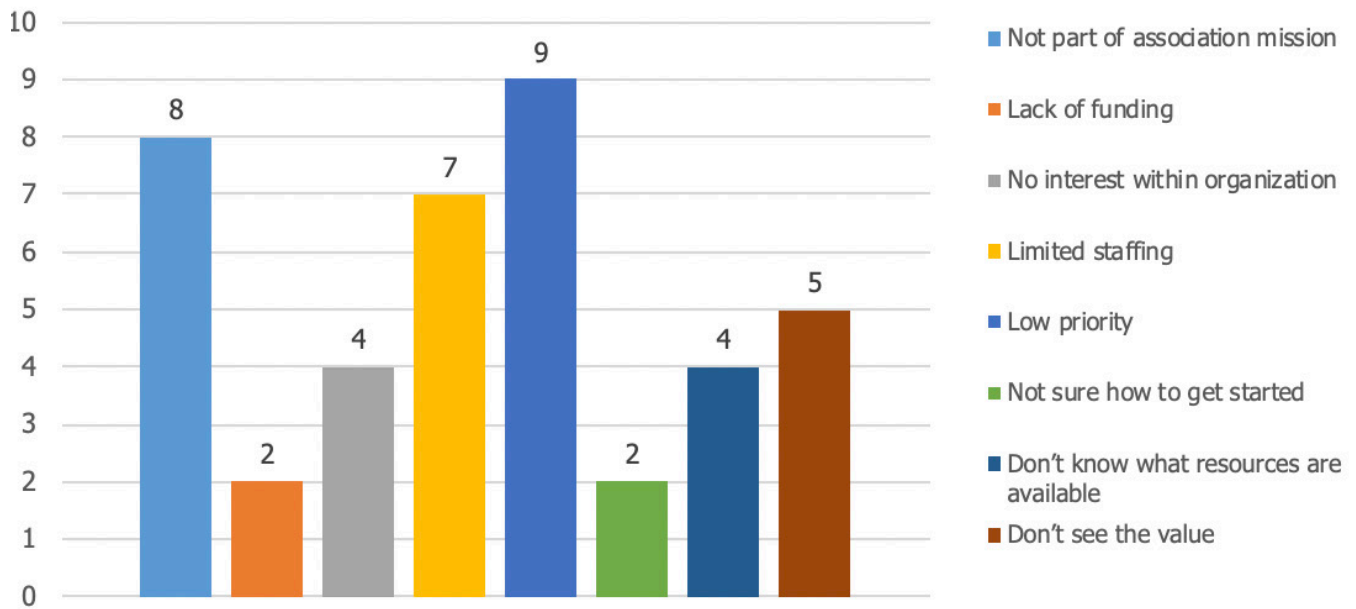
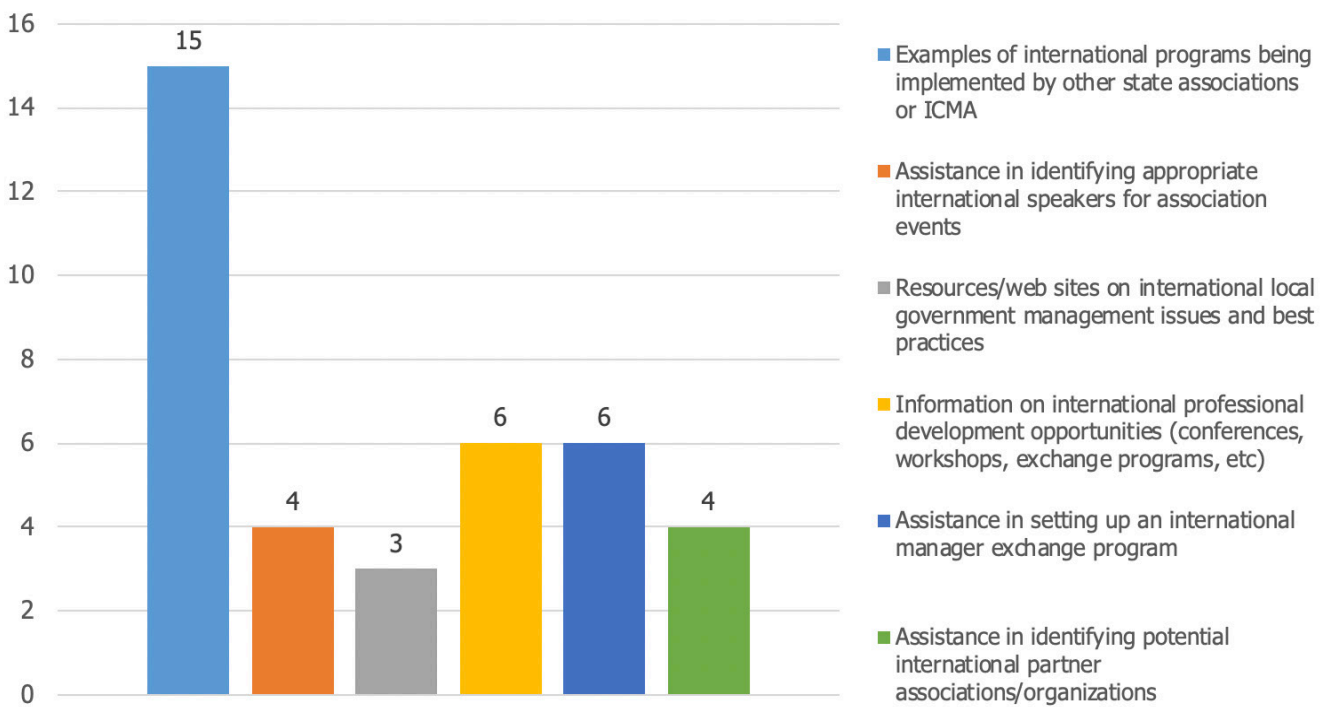


FIGURE 2 || Information and Support Being Sought



ICMA and State Program OVERVIEW

Operating a successful international program involves many logistical considerations that may require a tremendous amount of time and energy. Survey participants indicated that learning about resources available and examples of how state associations have implemented international program elements would provide valuable support to properly organize and establish a smoothly operating international program. In response to the survey results, the following information provides an overview of ICMA's international programs and scholarships, as well as examples of state association implementation of international components.

ICMA Programs

ICMA CityLinks

ICMA designed its CityLinks™ methodology in 1997 with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as a response to economic globalization, accelerated urbanization, and rapid decentralization across the globe. The goal of CityLinks is to improve the capacity of local governments and strengthen democracy through international municipal partnerships. CityLinks partnerships focus on enhancing the ability of local governments to provide services to their citizens. Partnerships have focused on environmental management, financial management, economic development, solid waste, water, climate change, and health. Since its inception, the more than 100 relationships forged through the program have proven highly successful, leading to real changes in city management in the United States and abroad.





Citylinks partnerships are flexible and adapt to local contexts and the needs of communities. ICMA helps match communities and facilitates the creation of a work plan, based on an initial diagnostic assessment of the partner city. Exchanges of staff from both partners are conducted in the interest of achieving the work plan goals. The program usually concludes with a final evaluation phase to assess best practices and lessons learned. U.S. participants often find that working in their international partner city unleashes creative solutions to challenges they face at home. Here are reflections from three managers following their CityLinks experiences:

“The trip to Chiang Rai was very informative and enjoyable and I am grateful for the Thai hospitality. What was so striking to me about Chiang Rai is its commitment to collaboration: to engaging and listening to what community leaders have to say about their experience and concerns, and how to learn and move forward together. This is a great model from which we can all learn.”

—Lisa Peterson, Deputy City Manager, Cambridge, Massachusetts

“We often think that the ‘developed’ world has the answers, or will be the ones to promulgate solutions, to major issues like climate adaptation in the face of rapid urbanization. What was apparent after speaking with my peers from the ASEAN cities is simply that we, here in the U.S., are not far ahead – if ahead at all – on adequately addressing these issues. There are many lessons we need to learn from our ASEAN peers. Only through collaborative efforts, like City-Links, will we create the understanding and tools to address the issues of climate adaptation on a global level.”

—Lee Feldman, City Manager, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

“Fort Lauderdale’s interaction with Legazpi [Philippines] has been and continues to be an opportunity to consider their climate adaptation issues and put them in the context of ours. It challenges our assumptions and, in doing so, makes us look at the situation differently . . . By changing the conversations, these partnerships are vital to expand our knowledge base by exploring useful solutions to strengthen our resiliency and ensure the long-term sustainability of our cities.”

—Nancy Gassman, Assistant Public Works Director, Sustainability Division, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

To learn more, download a free copy of *CityLinks in Review: Five Years of Fostering Partnerships*.

YSEALI Professional Fellows Program

Launched in 2013 by U.S. President Barack Obama, the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) provides knowledge sharing opportunities and exchange visits for bright young leaders aged 18-35 years from the ASEAN countries, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. ICMA manages a part of the program in which ASEAN Fellows travel to the United States and spend a few days in Washington, D.C., for an orientation, then travel to host communities for four weeks before returning to Washington for a Professional Fellows Congress. U.S. Fellows are selected through a competitive process from among those who host the international participants. U.S. Fellows travel to their counterparts’ organizations in Asia for two-week fellowships.



The goal of the program, funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, is to create long-term, institutionalized partnerships that support emerging leaders and their institutions in the ASEAN countries and the United States to inspire change in creating responsive, open, and accountable governance.

International Management Exchange Program

Through state associations, ICMA members may apply to participate in the International Management Exchange Program (IMEP) with counterparts in other countries. Each exchange generally lasts two weeks overseas in the locality of the host manager; in turn, the visit of the international partner generally coincides with ICMA's Annual Conference. Applications are usually due in January, with matching decisions completed around April. Find additional information about IMEP on the ICMA website.

ICMA Scholarships

ICMA offers several scholarship opportunities for ICMA members to complement funding that the state association may provide. These scholarships can help cover the expenses applicants incur for travel and lodging. We highly encourage state associations to dedicate some funding to assist members in participating in international opportunities. The ICMA International Committee evaluates all applications to the funds and approves disbursements.

John Garvey Scholarship Fund. The John Garvey Fund was established in 1995 following the recommendation of the ICMA International Committee to create a scholarship to assist ICMA members in gaining an international management perspective. The scholarship was named for John Garvey, who served as coordinator of the International Management Exchange Program for many years. A stated desire of the Committee was to increase the number of women, minorities, and young professionals participating in international activities.

Scholarship Fund in Memory of William H. "Bill" Hansell Jr. The Scholarship Fund in Memory of William H. "Bill" Hansell, Jr. supports participation by U.S. mid-career ICMA members in international activities. The fund was created in memory of Bill Hansell and to recognize the establishment of ICMA International during his tenure as ICMA Executive Director. The Hansell Fund assists recipients in gaining international experience and learning.

Tranter-Leong Fund. The Tranter-Leong Fund was established at ICMA in 2017 through a generous donation from ICMA Life Member Revan A. F. Tranter, past ICMA President and first chair of the International Committee, and Eugene Y. Leong. Each of these men served as executive director for the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) in California. Upon retirement from ABAG, they started a fund to support interns at ABAG, and the fund later evolved into the Tranter-Leong Fund at ICMA. Under ICMA's stewardship, the two donors and the leadership of the International Committee can use the funds to advance ICMA's commitment to international professional development.

State Programs

Some state associations have successfully drawn from organizations not affiliated with ICMA to develop an international program. These are additional options to consider.

California

The California association started a California/Australia Exchange Program in 1993, and it remains in place today. This program gives California managers the opportunity to attend the annual state conference of Local Government Professionals Australia (LGPA) in New South Wales or Queensland. Three managers are sent to the Sydney area and one stays in the Brisbane area to participate in the conference and see the local area. Typically, participants have been asked to present at the conference. The California International Committee supports this journey and has provided \$1,500 stipends to help with travel costs. Additionally, LGPA provides each award recipient with a complimentary conference registration and three nights of lodging at the conference hotel. Awardees are asked to help coordinate Australian exchange participants the following year when they attend the California state association conference.

Minnesota

Because of its large population of Scandinavian descent, it seemed only logical for the Minnesota City/County Management Association (MCMA), with the help of former New Brighton city manager Matt Fulton, to establish a relationship with the Association of Swedish City Managers and gain an international perspective on the people they serve. To launch the process, Mr. Fulton used relationships with international partners established in past mid-year meetings of the ICMA International Committee (Sweden, as well as New Zealand).

Once MCMA selected an international exchange partner, it invited Minnesotan city managers to apply to participate. Individuals selected for attendance were surveyed about the areas of Swedish administration they wished to explore--land development, for example, or sustainable practices. MCMA then relayed these surveys to the Swedish hosts, who used them to plan activities for the Minnesotan delegation.

In 2003, the MCMA sent a group of 21 city managers to Sweden for a manager exchange. Swedish city managers apprised their Minnesota counterparts on day-to-day public affairs and responsibilities. In turn, all the city managers agreed to host the Swedish administrators when they visit Minnesota in 2005 for the ICMA Annual Conference.

Nebraska

Some years ago, in consideration of Nebraska's growing Latino population, the Nebraska City/County Management Association (NCMA) turned to ICMA's programs to foster cultural awareness and better serve their constituents. The association participated in a collaborative effort with ICMA staff in Mexico to arrange a hands-on visit. The state association evaluated the eligibility of interested exchange candidates by set criteria:

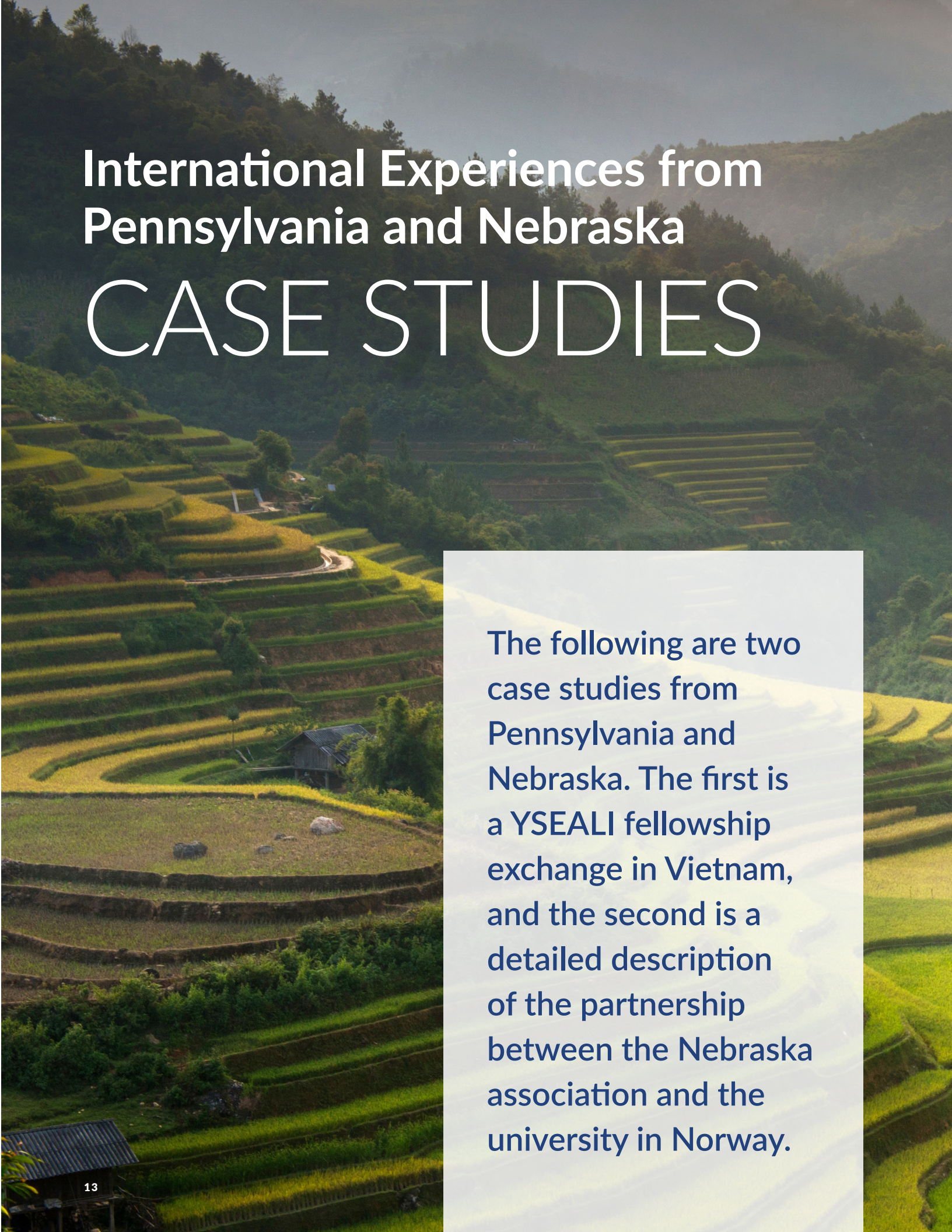
- Percentage of Latino population in candidate's community
- Rate of Latino population growth
- Level of active participation within the NCMA
- Time of service within the city
- Length of the remaining term of service a candidate has towards her/his community
- Receipt of previous subsidies.

NCMA and the ICMA's Mexico staff then put together a five-day trip, arranging hotels, transportation, and an itinerary that included meetings with Mexican officials. They visited Cuautla, Ayala, and the Municipal Development Institute of the State of Morelos. The city managers returned to Nebraska achieving their intended goal of gaining a better understanding of the Latino population residing in Nebraska.

Most recently, the Nebraska City/County Management Association established a partnership with the University of Agder in Norway. Through this partnership, several Nebraska managers traveled to Norway on a study tour and met with a group of Norwegian managers. The objectives of this delegation were as follows:

- To establish a formal relationship between NCMA and the Norway group to initiate ongoing communications and exchange of members
- To determine if any technical assistance can be exchanged
- To pursue possible Sister City relationships with Norwegian communities of similar size and characteristics of NCMA member communities
- To explore whether a joint initiative can be developed to establish a relationship with a Lithuanian City Management Group
- To engage in study tours of nearby communities to determine if best practices might be introduced to the NCMA Membership.





International Experiences from Pennsylvania and Nebraska

CASE STUDIES

The following are two case studies from Pennsylvania and Nebraska. The first is a YSEALI fellowship exchange in Vietnam, and the second is a detailed description of the partnership between the Nebraska association and the university in Norway.

CASE STUDY:

Association for Pennsylvania Municipal Management YSEALI Fellowship Exchange to Vietnam

By Denise Fitzgerald, ICMA-CM, Township Manager, Scott Township, Pennsylvania



Program Highlights

On Monday, February 22, 2016, after my debriefing at the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam, I met with the Director of the Center for Environmental and Community Research (CECR, Ly Ngyugen. She was kind enough to explain to me what CECR does and how its goal is to help the environment. She also had us meet with different provinces in Hanoi for me to visually see what projects they are working on in cleaning up their lakes in Hanoi. Ly was also accompanied by Tara, who is from the U.S. Embassy in Thailand. They recently funded a five-year project to clean up the lakes in Hanoi. One very important item I will be bringing back to my municipality is how they interact with their community and how they are able to have better participation in their events and projects. I will be working more closely with our school district in the future.

At CECR I also reconnected with Hoa Thanh Lo, who had participated in the program in a YSEALI exchange in our community earlier, learning about how our local government operates and interacts with other forms of government in Pennsylvania. She was my point of contact in Vietnam for the two weeks and allowed me to work with her at her place of business CECR.

Progress achieved in accomplishing project goals and objectives

My goal was to better understand the Vietnamese culture and to gain a broader understanding of the government structure and how it works. I have traveled within Halong Bay to remote provinces such as Ban Sen, which had a total of twenty homes that can only be accessed by boat and met with many people within the city of Hanoi. After several meetings with the residents and government officials in Hanoi, I have been fortunate to learn both the similarities in their government along with the differences. Their government begins with wards which are similar to our townships, then the district, which is similar to the county level, followed by province, then central, which includes their National Assembly. Their National Assembly parallels our federal government. In Vietnam, they set up target groups for participation in issues such as environmental. These target groups help and assist in implementation of projects such as improving water quality.

Notable success stories

I was fortunate to attend several meetings throughout the provinces of Vietnam with their public officials regarding environmental issues they are faced with and how they are handling them. We shared experiences and project accomplishments on environmental projects.

Engagement with U.S. Embassy

Met with Ngo Dinh Quynh, Cultural Affairs Specialist, to discuss the similarities and differences in the Vietnamese culture with the United States. We had a knowledgeable discussion on the Vietnamese having a hierarchy mentality and how I am to show equality to everyone when in a group. This was very helpful at some of my functions while staying in Vietnam. He also stated that the Vietnamese people tend to be very inquisitive and to not take it offensively. Again, this was very helpful because some of the questions posed to me at my presentation at the Embassy's American Center were "how much do you make?" and "how powerful is your position in town?" He also stressed to me the importance of proper attire when visiting pagodas, temples, and places of importance. The Vietnamese people are generally modest about clothing and it is important to keep your arms and legs covered.

After my meeting with Quynh, I met with Fenghua Wang, the Information Resource Officer for Vietnam. We reviewed the presentation that I was going to make at the American Center the following week. Fenghua asked that I modify the presentation to a much simpler form as I would be presenting to young students who are just learning about how the American government works.



Potential for ongoing cooperation

After my presentation at the American Center, I had a few questions from the group. I exchanged business cards with some of the participants and they requested a copy of my presentation. I have also offered to assist CECR in reviewing grant applications when applying to the United States.

Difficulties encountered

I only encountered one difficulty and that was with the reservations at the hotels. There was a language barrier that we could not seem to get through at all three of the hotels in which I stayed. However, once the reservation issues were settled, the hotels were very helpful in assisting me in obtaining taxis to where I needed to go.

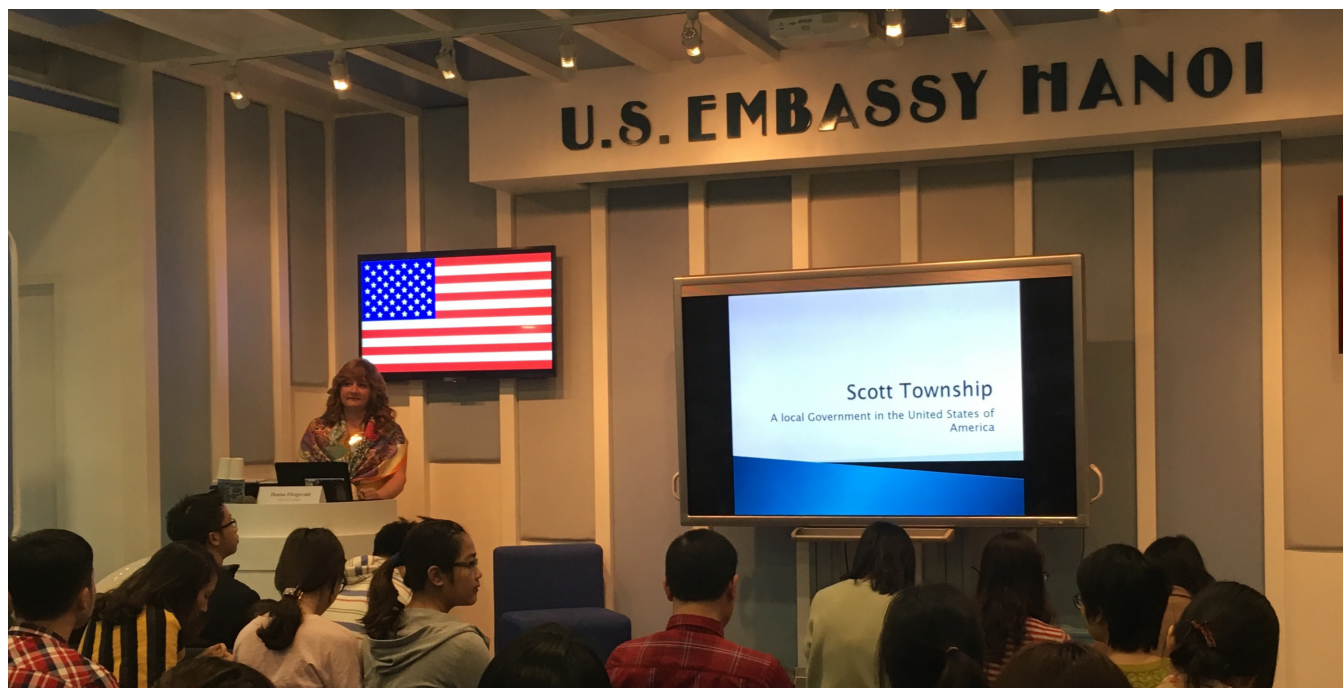
What were your reasons for participating in this Fellowship? Did the program meet your expectations? Why or why not?

My reason for participating in the Fellowship was to increase my understanding of different cultures and how they are similar to or different from ours in the United States. I also wanted to see the differences in local government compared to local government in another country. This program exceeded my expectations because I have obtained knowledge in both plus more. I had the opportunity to interact with the residents, try all different types of food, and even take in a traditional water puppet show. On the government side, I was able to meet with local government officials and speak at the U.S. Embassy's American Center where I was posed a few questions by the audience that lasted over an hour. Our government was just as intriguing to them as their government structure was to me.

What was very interesting to me is that you must work your way up through the levels of government to attain a higher position. I explained that in the United States you can decide tomorrow that you want to run for a state or even federal office and you have the right to do that. This was very surprising to them. What was surprising to me is how involved the residents of the wards got in the environmental projects.

How has your experience changed your outlook on your host country? Home country?

Vietnam, especially Hanoi, is a very busy, small business-oriented city. I will never complain about traffic again.



Hanoi is very congested and busy due to rapid urbanization. However, it is still very easy for a foreigner, like me, to get around by taxi. Also, in the city of Hanoi, the government is trying to improve the traffic issues by putting in new streets and placing traffic police at certain intersections. In my country it's not customary to sit outside on the side of a street on a small plastic chair and eat something a vendor just made, but in Hanoi it's traditional and common practice. The food was always extremely fresh and very good. Halong Bay was a beautiful part of their country that I had the pleasure of visiting during my stay. Halong Bay is in Northern Vietnam by the Chinese border and is one of the world's natural wonders. The bay is dotted with 1,600 limestone islands and inlets. I was able to visit small provinces within Halong Bay and was able to see how the people of the province fish to support their families.



What professional experience did you gain from the exchange?

What was the most important aspect of the exchange? Most importantly, we strengthened our ties with Vietnam and will continue to build the relationship we have with Hoa and the members of CECR. I have a better understanding of the issues they face, especially at an environmental level. The environment is important to everyone in the United States and Vietnam, and working together with new ideas and sharing old ones will help us both in the future.

Give specific examples of activities or impactful meetings you had while in your host community.

There were many activities and meetings; however, I will list a few. The project CECR has been working on targeting local people in five wards (O-Cho-Dua Ward, Kim-Lien Ward, Quang-An Ward, Ngoc-Khanh Ward, and Hoang-Van-Thu Ward) and students in Hanoi to improve the water quality of their lakes. We had several meetings with two different wards in their target group. The first meeting took place in the ward of Kim-Lien. They took us to Lake Kimlien, where they are working on improving the water quality. Over the past five years, they have promoted water clean-up days, community participation, and community involvement via their student union, which is a powerful group of young residents involving themselves in these projects. Students from the Water Resources University donate their time on projects such as these. There were 150 1st and 3rd year students coming from different universities in Hanoi that were recruited and trained for these clean water projects.

The second meeting was in Ward O-Cho-Dua, where government officials took us to Dong Da Lake where they continue to work on clean water projects but hope to obtain funding to purchase paddle boats to oxygenate the water. Hoa set up meetings with YSEALI alumni and future selections for the Fellows program so that we could share experiences with them.

I also met with individuals who wanted to learn about local government in the United States. We met at the American Center at the U. S. Embassy where I presented how my community fits into the U.S. government system. It went extremely well with a question and answer period lasting over an hour.

What advice or information would you give future Fellows?

The best advice I can give a future Fellow would be to research your host community before you get there. Have a couple of things already in your mind that you would like to do or see. Talk to your host before you get to the host community on what their expectations are of you during your stay with them and what you are expecting to get out of your experience in their country.

How will you continue to stay involved?

Hoa, Ly, and I have exchanged emails and will continue to do so on environmental issues that are going on in our communities and I have also agreed to assist them in the proofreading of future U.S. grants to help them obtain funding for their important projects. We plan to continue to communicate through WhatsApp and Skype so that we may continue to stay involved in each other's community interests/needs.

Any additional comments?

On a personal note, aside from the professional aspect of this program, I feel that I have had the opportunity to submerge myself in the Vietnamese culture thanks to this program and I have learned so much about the people of Vietnam. I had the opportunity to visit beautiful pagodas and Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum and Museum. The Temple of Literature was the first university of Vietnam, built in 1070. Only the best and the smartest were permitted to attend. With five spectacular courtyards, each having significant meaning, it was breathtaking to see. Ho Chi Minh was the most iconic leader of their country, and I was able to see how they honor him. Architecture such as the one pillar pagoda and Buddhist temples could be seen throughout Hanoi.



CASE STUDY:

Nebraska City/County Management Association (NCMA) Partnership with University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway

By Chris Anderson, City Administrator, Central City, Nebraska



How did the partnership get started?

Professor Robert Blair of the University of Nebraska at Omaha had an ongoing relationship with the University of Agder and specifically with Professor Dag Olaf Torjesen. Together they had an idea to facilitate a professional exchange between their two public administration departments and the constituencies they serve. Bob Blair contacted Chris Anderson, city administrator in Central City, Nebraska, to develop a proposal for such an exchange to the NCMA membership. The original proposal appears as Appendix B at the end of this document. While our final activities varied somewhat from the proposal, the outcomes exceeded our hopes for the project.

Itinerary for NCMA visit to Norway

Our initial visit to Norway was in August 2014 and included four city managers plus Dr. Blair. The structured portions of our schedule are summarized below:

Monday, August 11

The NCMA study tour started in Kristiansand. We were welcomed at City Hall and heard presentations on economic development, international relations in Kristiansand, sustainable development, urban development, the Norwegian municipality sector, and the role of city managers. The city hall program was followed by a welcome dinner.

Tuesday, August 12

We separated for a “safari” to three municipalities in the Agder district: Songdalen, Flekkefjord, and Arendal. Local city managers hosted us overnight in their homes.

Wednesday, August 13

After returning to Kristiansand from “safari” visits on a regional bus, we had lunch at the University of Agder campus at Gimlemoen and visited the Faculty of Social and Political Science. The director of faculty and former mayor in Kristiansand spoke on the relationship between political leadership and administration/rådmenn. We also heard from the chair of political science and management. After dinner at a local restaurant, we walked to the Odderoya Lighthouse for lodging.

Planning the Visit

Starting without any template, the process of planning the visit was long and sometimes frustrating. While existing relationships were in place, there are still issues of language translation, cultural intent of offers and invitations, time zone differences, and the fact that university faculty take several months off during the summer. There was great value in reading online tips and suggestions about visiting another country – what to bring for gifts, do’s and do-not’s, etc.

Reciprocation

A group of four city managers and two University of Agder professors were invited to visit Nebraska in a reciprocal trip. They attended the League of Nebraska Municipalities annual conference, visited the communities of those who previously travelled to Norway, then made the short trip to Kansas City for the ICMA Annual Conference.

Budget and Expenses

NCMA provided a \$2,000 stipend to each member participant. Dr. Blair had expenses covered by university funding. The city of Kristiansand provided free housing for four nights at the Odderoya lighthouse residence as shown in the picture on page 22. City managers opened their homes to us the remaining night. Several meals were taken in private homes, and our hosts provided all ground transportation. While NCMA participants had some out-of-pocket expenses, the amount was very reasonable.

For the reciprocal trip, each city manager had an NCMA host. Our communities covered two hotel nights for our guests during our Nebraska conference and we hosted one night in our homes. We covered all ground transportation and most meals. Our guests had out-of-pocket costs for their two nights in Kansas City during the ICMA Conference.

Takeaways

Nebraska has a strong Scandinavian heritage from the settlement of the state in the mid-1800s. Most participants commented on how easily and naturally we made connections with each other. This can be considered a benefit due to the ease with which the exchanges took place or could be criticized for our group not being “stretched” or having the experience of a substantially different culture.

Coming from the United States, we may naturally assume we have the answers and everyone else wants to hear how we do it. We have a lot to learn from other countries and in the case of Norway in particular, how government can be conducted in harmony with our residents rather than in an adversarial capacity.

The trips exceeded the hopes and expectations of all those who participated. While there was some initial skepticism about the value of the initiative, all found it to be an extraordinary experience.

At the time, ICMA had a formal affiliation agreement with the Norwegian Forum of Municipal Executives. Unfortunately, none of the Norwegian participants, or others we met in Norway, had any familiarity with that agreement. They were almost entirely unfamiliar with ICMA. This caused me to question the value of our

international affiliate agreements if there is no personal contact, if there is no follow up, or if the entity affiliated with conducts no outreach to its membership to advocate for ICMA.

Each party was eager to show off their localities and the other party was eager to soak it in. My son and I participated in an unforgettable sailboat race in the fjords. My Norwegian guest watched his first American football game as I explained how it worked from the stands at our local high school game. We appreciated fantastic local museums in both countries and much more.

Having a couple of champions for the project is essential. There were many opportunities for the ball to get dropped, but you need one or two advocates on both sides who will push as hard as it takes to keep it moving.

NCMA Update, August 2018



NCMA continued its exchange program with another visit to the Kristiansand area in August 2018.

Monday, August 13

We visited Arendal municipality, where we were welcomed by the mayor. A boat then transported us to the old port, Pollen, to participate at the Arendalsuka—the largest national political gathering in Norway, held annually since 2012. The event has a clear mission to strengthen the belief in political empowerment and democracy through an open debate and involvement.

Tuesday, August 14

We visited “New Kristiansand”—Søgne, Songdalen, and Kristiansand municipalities, which will merge by January 1, 2020. We heard from elected and appointed officials and advisors about the political background and leadership in the merger project, the practical aspects of organizing and accomplishing a merger in just two years, including information sharing and communication. After lunch in City Hall we took a “city walk” through Bystranda – Otterdalspark to the Fishmarket, visited the concert hall, and enjoyed a sailing regatta in Søgne.



Wednesday, August 15

Today was a workshop at the University of Agder, covering the following:

- Nordic and Norwegian local government – welfare municipalities and the decentralized Nordic model – challenged but still viable?
- Public Service Motivation among Danish, Norwegian, and US local government CEOs, a comparative research project – city managers in Denmark and Norway
- Comparative city management: Norway and Scandinavia versus U.S.
- Drivers and barriers of inter-municipal cooperation

Thursday, August 16

Today we visited Vest-Agder, the western part of the county--Lyngdal and Flekkefjord—and heard about the “amalgamation” (consolidation) process between Lyngdal and Audnedal Municipalities, “Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture.” The day was capped by a visit to Kvåsfossen Waterfall and the Salmon Staircase.

Summary

We enjoyed the opportunity to continue our friendships and professional exchange with our Norwegian peers. Our discussion focused heavily on the municipal consolidation process underway across Norway. The concepts of consolidation, mergers, cost efficiencies, and the like are common across cultures. Maintaining the momentum of our exchange with pending retirements and natural turnover in positions is an ongoing concern. We are identifying key individuals on both sides who are tasked with either keeping the program alive or bringing others up to speed to do so.



Suggestions for Initiating an INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

Developing a global perspective in managing a local community is becoming increasingly relevant and important. Yet it typically starts small and will evolve over time with consistent, and persistent, leadership. Initiating an international program begins with the simple appreciation of the importance of establishing, promoting, and adopting a global perspective regarding professional local government management. Experience has demonstrated that initiating a program only depends on making it a priority. Most local government executives understand the importance and relevance of having an international perspective; it simply doesn't get the attention it needs amid other daily pressures. That is why it is important to reach out and request assistance from other available local, regional, and state resources. It is also critical, and surprisingly easy, to reach out to colleagues in other countries through ICMA and its state and international affiliates.

What follows are some steps on how to organize and establish an international program within your state.

Step 1: Identify Interested and Experienced Managers to Form a Committee

- Identify and solicit the interest of managers with international experience, preferably managers who have participated with ICMA or other professional exchange programs in the past.
- Schedule an informal opportunity at an annual managers conference to solicit thoughts and input from colleagues about the importance and benefit of having an international perspective in the work they do. Inquire about how an international perspective might benefit multi-national companies located in their communities.
- Managers with an international background and experience better understand the benefit, needs, and objectives of an international exchange. Find a way to have them become champions in the conversation.

Step 2: Identify Program Objectives through Committee Leadership

- Work with state association leadership to establish a committee focused on the development and promotion of an international program. Establish a workplan that integrates the identification of international best practices and new perspectives in the association's marketing material. Conduct an environmental scan of the association membership that identifies local issues or projects reflecting an international perspective in local service delivery or economic development activities.
- Maintain awareness of possible resources available through ICMA and/or USAID that support international activities or opportunities for colleagues to travel abroad and engage in international community-building. Exchange programs are a wonderful way to help build an international program and expand on the benefits of having an international perspective.
- Develop a budget that considers the material costs of establishing an international program as well as a workplan that will help advance a formal strategy based on costs and benefits of an approved strategic plan and workplan. These goals will be key in securing grants or financial assistance from organizations like the state association, ICMA, or USAID.

Step 3: Allocate Funds from the State Association Budget to Accomplish Objectives

- Work with the leadership of your state association to establish a formal budget for supporting an international program.
- Establish a scholarship program that supports professional opportunities to engage internationally. It is not unreasonable to ask managers to assist in financially supporting the costs associated with an international opportunity. In many situations, the host managers will help with lodging costs. Consider the best way to allocate what will likely be a limited amount of scholarship proceeds for those managers interested in participating.
- Motivate the state association by encouraging active participation.

Step 4: Utilize ICMA Resources to Help with the Program

- Consider which ICMA program will best help accomplish state association objectives for an international exchange (i.e., waived conference fees for visitors and/or making connections with USAID).
- Take advantage of international programs and activities that take place during the ICMA Annual Conference. You should certainly reach out and introduce yourself to members of the international delegation. You will find the international conference attendees to be interested in meeting you as well! It could be the start of a rewarding and exciting international program.



Some Final CONSIDERATIONS

Westwood, Massachusetts, Town Administrator Mike Jaillet offers the following “lessons learned” for those interested in pursuing their own international exchange programs. These valuable insights speak to the practical aspects of an international program from the perspective of a participating/hosting town manager.

Publicity

Often, managers and administrators feel reluctant to become involved in international exchange programs because they do not recognize the benefits for the community they serve. It is important to publicize the activities of the program, simply by inviting all members of the media to events (the local paper, regional paper, radio station, or cable or regional television stations). This provides reporters with an opportunity to cover the event and to speak directly with the participants. The press always treats this as a positive story set apart from the local political coverage. In one instance, the Montenegrin Mayors visiting as part of a Resource Cities (now called ICMA CityLinks) program attended a traditional annual town meeting. Sitting to the side (with an earphone through which an interpreter could explain the process), they viewed firsthand the meeting for about an hour. The press stories that flowed from this event overwhelmed the actual issues covered in the town meeting.

Awards

These international programs require a significant investment of time and effort to coordinate and conduct. State associations should acknowledge individuals who have made this contribution by presenting them with an award or some type of accommodation at one of its meetings. ICMA in the past has also acknowledged state associations that have participated in a successful international exchange program.

Two-Way Exchange

The participants in any exchange, whether as a host or a visitor, can benefit significantly. The differences in approach to addressing and resolving local issues vary more significantly between countries than they do between regions within countries. Therefore, it is imperative that both parties of an exchange share and compare similarities and differences. For example, when Irish government officials visited a New England community, a lengthy discussion commenced about how different library services in the United States differed from library services in Ireland and Northern Ireland. As a result, both the hosting and visiting communities reached a more complete understanding of how they could provide specific services differently.

Itinerary

It is extremely important for the hosts to obtain a clear understanding of what the visitors would like to see and learn about as far in advance as possible. The visiting officials should prepare a memorandum for their host on the purpose of the exchange and the issues they wish to learn about. This report should include, as an addendum, the resume of each participant and a brief community summary.

Transportation

There are a variety of ways to handle in-country transportation. In some instances, it simply makes sense to rent a large van for the period of the exchange. On other occasions, as a cost-effective alternative, the various participating communities can coordinate transportation. Many communities have recreation or senior vans or

buses that they may use to transport the groups to sites and/or between communities.

Keep It Real

When officials visit another country, they are interested in and impressed by physically seeing the differences. Therefore, avoid the common mistake of bringing groups into a meeting room, like the meeting rooms in their own country, to hear and receive a presentation, even if it includes pictures. Rather, take them to a site under discussion and show them.

Food

Individuals traveling on an exchange program will usually be offered food at each stop in their travels. For instance, a traveling group may start out with a breakfast at their hotel before transferring to a community where they will eat after a presentation, and then transport to another community, only to be fed again for an afternoon break, followed up by dinner. On prolonged exchanges, participants may even gain several pounds from overeating.

Information Overload

Hosts provide visitors with lots of international material at each stop along the way. Often the material provided is never again used and left in the participant's hotel room. So instead, make handouts available near the exit of meeting rooms along with a bag and encourage the individuals to take what information they want.

Gifts

Communities and associations, either hosting or visiting as part of an exchange program, should prepare to exchange gifts. The international communities often give a community coat of arms, flags representing their country, or some other memorabilia or handicrafts. Since most American communities do not naturally prepare well in this regard, each should spend some time and money on similar representations of their community that they can exchange with the visitors or hosts (i.e., mounted city/town seals, pens, postcards or pictures, local crafts, etc.).

Entertainment

Often visiting groups are well occupied during normal working hours with site visits and presentations. However, especially on weekends, very little happens in the way of organized entertainment during their down time. The hosting community or communities can arrange with local sporting organizations, museums, and other attractions to provide the visitors with free or discounted admission. The visitors often would like an opportunity to shop for gifts for family and friends as well, and hosts should plan for that.

Perspectives from OUR COLLEAGUES

“Somewhere in the world there is a community—or more realistically many communities--that shares your culture or shares your challenges but has a different perspective on solutions than you do. Don't you owe it to yourself and to your community to seek them out and share ideas and solutions? Everyone benefits, and with today's technology, email communications, social media, and online translation services, sharing globally is much easier. Find your soulmate community across the world and work together. It will be worth it personally and professionally.”

–Michele Meade, *2018-2019 ICMA International Committee Chair and Former ICMA Northeast Vice President*

“One the most enriching experiences from my public service career thus far has been the international experiences. I've learned abroad about new approaches and structures to public services. There are always new ways to approach similar objectives. Doing international work stretches you and challenges the established mindset of what is possible. I've met amazing people and made friends with whom I will stay in touch.

“I have also come home to appreciate aspects of my 'regular' work. The way we do things and work together is not so bad with some perspective. I keep seeking international experiences for these reasons while I continue my work in USA city management and will do so long into the future.”

– Clay Pearson, *Former ICMA International Committee Chair*

“Interacting, traveling and working with municipal officials from around the world has been truly enriching. As we attend graduate school and then come up through the field we learn the various nuanances of the American public/political arena, but until you get the international perspective you don't genuinely understand public service. No matter who you interact with or where you travel to, public officials across the globe are striving to improve the livelihood for their respective residents and ensure a safe environment while doing so. My international experience has definitely been a significant highlight in my career.”

–Victor Cardenas, *John Garvey Scholarship Recipient and former member of the ICMA International Committee*

Appendix A: NCMA International Initiative

SUBMITTED PROPOSAL

Dr. Robert Blair, University of Nebraska, School of Public Administration, and Chris Anderson have been working to develop an NCMA International Initiative to facilitate learning and professional exchanges in Europe. The initial objective was establishing a relationship in Lithuania. The strategy has evolved to initially establish a working relationship with local government professionals in Norway, which is near Lithuania. This shift has occurred due to concerns about unstable local government political considerations and the desire to enlist assistance from the Norway delegation.

Lithuania is like Nebraska in its size, rural character, and existence of many smaller communities. The country has struggled with establishing professional management as we know it while transitioning from being a Soviet controlled State. Current events and news media reports show that Russia continues to exert influence in the country and desires to bring them back into a close economic relationship. Their efforts toward democratization could be enhanced through a better understanding of the democratic principles our profession promotes. University of Nebraska Omaha currently has a working relationship with Siauliai University in Lithuania and is exploring ways to collaborate. In the future professional exchanges of local government administrators is an option, but there is still significant work to do in this area.

Proposal

Blair & Anderson would propose to establish this initiative with an NCMA delegation traveling with Dr. Blair to Norway in June of 2014. Dr. Blair has established relationships with Adger University in Kristiansand, Norway, and with Stale Stormark who is organizing a group of city managers in Norway. They propose to send a delegation of 4 NCMA Members to accompany Dr. Blair with the following objectives:

1. To establish a formal relationship between NCMA, Stale, and the Norway group to initiate ongoing communications and exchange of members. Stale is also active with the International Committee of ICMA.
2. To determine if any technical assistance can be exchanged.
3. To pursue possible Sister City relationships with Norwegian communities of similar size and characteristics of NCMA member communities.
4. To explore whether a joint initiative can be developed to establish a relationship with a Lithuanian city management group.
5. To engage in study tours of nearby communities to determine if best practices might be introduced to the NCMA membership.

Funding Request

Participants will need transportation from Nebraska to the Kristiansand, Norway, airport. They will also have some lodging, transportation, and food costs in the country. A request of \$2,000 per participant is requested for a total of \$8,000. Dr. Blair will obtain funding independent from NCMA.

Appendix B:

RESOURCES

ICMA Resources on the Web

- ICMA: <https://icma.org/>
- ICMA International Management Exchange Program: <https://icma.org/international-management-exchange-program-imep>
- ICMA CityLinks Program: <https://icma.org/what-citylinks>

Other Resources

- Sister Cities International: <http://www.sistercities.org/>
- Rotary International: <http://www.rotary.org/>
- CLAIR Japan Local Government Center: <http://www.jlgc.org/>



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