

## **The Council-Manager Form of Government**

Council-manager government combines the strong political leadership of elected officials with the strong managerial experience of an appointed manager or administrator. All power and authority to set policy rests with an elected governing body, which includes a mayor or chairperson and members of the council, commission, or board. The governing body in turn hires a nonpartisan manager who has very broad authority to run the organization.

Born out of the U.S. progressive reform movement at the turn of the 20th century, the council-manager system was designed to combat corruption and unethical activity in local government by promoting effective management within a transparent, responsive, and accountable structure. Since its establishment, the council-manager form has become the most popular structure of local government in the United States. The form is also widely used throughout the world in countries such as Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. (c. ICMA - FAQs)

### **The Council-Manager Plan**

The Council-Manager form of government is used by more cities, villages, townships, and counties than any other form. It is a system of local government that combines the strong political leadership of elected officials in the form of a governing body, with the strong managerial experience of an appointed local government manager. The governing body is commonly known as the council. The Council-Manager form establishes a representative system where all power is concentrated in the elected council and where the council hires a professionally trained manager to oversee the delivery of public services.

### **It's Responsive**

In Council-Manager government, the mayor of the governing body and council members are the leaders and policy makers elected to represent the community. They focus on policy issues that are responsive to citizens' needs and wishes. The manager works to carry out policy and ensure that the entire community is being served.

### **It's Adaptable**

Not all Council-Manager governments are structured the same way. One of the most attractive features is that the Council-Manager form is adaptable to local conditions and preferences. For example, some communities, like Livingston, have Council Members that are elected at large, while other councils are elected by district or by a combination of an at-large and by district structure. In Livingston, the mayor is elected to a one-year term by his/her colleagues on the Council.

### **It's Less Expensive**

Local governments have found that overall costs actually have been reduced with competent management. Savings come in the form of reduced operating costs, increased efficiency and productivity, improved revenue collection, or effective use of technology.

### **Council-Manager vs. Strong Mayor**

Nearly 90% of all communities use either the Council-Manager or the Strong Mayor form of government. When viewed together, the overwhelming advantages of the Council-Manager form become apparent. It encourages neighborhood input into the political process, diffuses the power of special interests, and eliminates partisan politics from municipal hiring, firing, and contracting decisions.

### **Neighborhoods Strengthen Their Voice**

The Council-Manager form encourages open communication between citizens and their government. Under this form, each member of the governing body has an equal voice in policy development and administrative oversight. This gives neighborhoods and diverse groups a greater opportunity to influence policy.

Under the Strong Mayor form, political power is concentrated in the mayor, which means that other members of the elected body relinquish at least some of their policy-making power and influence. This loss of decision-making power among Council Members can have a chilling effect on the voices of neighborhoods and city residents.

### **The Power of Special Interests is Diffused**

Under the Council-Manager form of government, involvement of the entire elected body ensures a more balanced approach to community decision making, so that all interests can be expressed and heard not just those that are well funded.

Under the Strong Mayor form, however, it's easier for special interests to use money, pressure and political power to influence a single elected official, rather than having to secure a majority of the township council's support for their agenda.

### **Merit-Based Decision Making vs. Partisan Politics**

Under Council-Manager government, qualifications and performance – and not skillful navigation of the political election process – are the criteria for selecting the professional township manager. The professional manager, in turn, uses his or her education, experience, and training to select department heads and other key managers to oversee the efficient delivery of services. In this way, Council-Manager government maintains critical checks and balances to ensure accountability at town hall.

Under the Strong Mayor form of government, the day-to-day management of community operations shifts to the mayor, who very often lacks the appropriate training, education, and experience in municipal administration and finance to oversee the delivery of essential community services. Also, under the Strong-Mayor form, there is the temptation to make decisions regarding hiring or firing key department head positions based on an applicant's political support, rather than on his or her professional qualifications.

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