

Local Government Recognition

The ICMA recognition process identifies local governments that, by ordinance, charter, or other legal document, have established positions of professional authority. Recognition means the community is identified as one that provides a legal framework conducive to the practice of professional management.

ICMA recognition falls into two categories: council-manager and general management. The criteria related to the council-manager government category are less flexible than those for the general management category. The reasons for this derive from the historical significance and the nature of the council-manager form.

Here are answers to some of the more frequently asked questions about recognition.

What is recognition?

Recognition is the formal acknowledgment by the membership and the ICMA Executive Board that a local government has established a position of professional management for its appointed executive.

How long does recognition last?

Recognition lasts as long as the legal basis establishing the position of professional management remains unchanged. A change in managers does not affect the recognition status of the local government; a change in the form of government does.

What kind of local governments are eligible for recognition?

Any general purpose city, town, village, township, borough, county, council of governments, or state/provincial association of local governments that has established by legal documents a form of government that satisfies the ICMA recognition criteria is eligible.

What is the basis for recognition?

Compliance with the ICMA recognition criteria is the basis. Evidence of meeting the criteria is either an ordinance, resolution, charter, special act of the state legislature, or another legal document establishing a position of professional management.

What kinds of recognition are there?

There are two kinds: recognition under the council-manager (CM) criteria and under the general management (GM) criteria. Councils of governments and state/provincial associations of local governments are always recognized under the GM criteria; local governments may be recognized under either CM or GM criteria, depending upon their individual features.

The criteria for the council-manager category are less flexible than for the general management category,

because of the nature of the council-manager form and its historical significance. It represents an easily definable form of local government with a limited variety of implementation. ICMA's origin rests on the council-manager form and its members have come to see it as the preferred form of governmental organization. Although it is not seen as the only means of providing for overall professional management, the intent is to recognize its contributions to local government by distinguishing it within the wide variety of administrative organizations in democratic governments throughout the world.

What happens after recognition?

The local government is listed in ICMA's [Who's Who](#) as a jurisdiction that provides for a position of professional management.

Criteria for Recognition of a Council-Manager Position

(Adopted October 11, 1969, and revised July 22, 1989)

Appointment

The manager can be appointed by the majority vote of the council for a definite or indefinite term and must be subject to termination by a majority vote of the council at any time.

GUIDELINE

It is recognized that the process for appointing the manager may include participation by others, in nominating or recommending candidates to be considered. However, the final responsibility or authority of appointment as well as dismissal of the manager must lie with a majority of the council.

POLICY FORMULATION

The position should have direct responsibility for policy formulation on overall problems.

GUIDELINE

Final authority for policy formulation rests with the council, but the manager should play an integral role in developing and analyzing alternatives for the council's consideration and be responsible for implementation of council-approved policy.

Budget

The manager should be designated by legislation as having responsibility for preparation of the budget, presentation to the council, and direct responsibility for the administration of the council-approved budget.

GUIDELINE

While the manager should have responsibility for preparing and presenting the budget to the council, it is recognized that many parties often participate in the budget process and may contribute to the development of the manager's recommended budget. Once approved by council, the manager is

responsible for implementing and administering the budget.

Appointing Authority

Legislation should delegate full authority to the manager for the appointment and removal of at least most of the heads of the principal departments and functions of the local government.

GUIDELINE

The manager's ability to independently select the most qualified personnel for key department head positions and remove them when necessary is essential to his or her administrative effectiveness. Within this context, it is recognized that a manager may choose to consult with and seek consensus from council on the appointment and dismissal of key department heads.

Though the preferred arrangement is for the manager to have independent authority to appoint and remove key department heads, recognition in the C-M category will also be extended to those communities in which council is given the authority by legislation to confirm, validate, or ratify such personnel actions, as long as responsibility for recommending them remains with the manager.

Organizational Relationships

The department heads the manager appoints should be designated by legislation as administratively responsible to the manager.

Qualifications

Qualifications for the position should be based on the educational and administrative background of the candidates.

GUIDELINE

Appointment to the manager's position should be based on professional experience, administrative qualifications, and education to ensure that the community is served by a competent, well-trained professional. Political affiliations should not in any way influence appointment.

Recognition of a General Management Position

(Adopted April 19, 1969, and revised July 22, 1989)

Appointment

The position should be filled by appointment made by an elected representative or representatives and shall be responsible to an elected representative and/or representatives.

GUIDELINE

Overall management is the link between the political leadership and program execution. It is essential that the person filling the position of overall management be appointed by and responsible for the legislative

body or the chief elected official of the local government.

Policy Formulation

(Same as for council-manager position.)

GUIDELINE

The position of overall management is responsible for creative initiative in the development of public policy alternatives and recommendations for consideration by elected officials throughout the spectrum of the local government's functions. Responsibility for policy formulation means that the person in the position has access to the council and works with its members even though s/he may report directly to the mayor. In the case of a council-appointed administrator, his/her access should be direct.

Budget

The position should have major responsibility for the preparation and administration of the operating and capital improvements budget.

GUIDELINE

Both elements should be present because it is through the administration of the operating budget that basic management control is exercised, and it is the budget preparation process that concerns itself with resource use. The term "major responsibility" refers to appointed positions and not elected positions. This may become critical in evaluating the work of a mayor-appointed administrator.

Appointing Authority

The position should exercise significant influence in the appointment of key administrative personnel.

GUIDELINE

The direct or legal appointive power will vary considerably. The fact that the position may have authority only to recommend the appointment of department heads should not in and of itself exclude the local government from recognition. Neither is there any fixed formula as to which or how appointments may be influenced.

It will be necessary to view this in the context of the position's total responsibility, particularly for the budget process. It is important that the position should have authority to appoint a sufficient share of the management staff to control budget preparation and administration.

Organizational Relationships

The position should have a continuing direct relationship with the operating department heads on the implementation and administration of the programs.

GUIDELINE

It is important that the position be recognized within the local government organization as the principal general management professional. The relationship is most clear if the position has direct supervision of department heads. The real issue, however, is the day-in and day-out influence the position has over department heads. At a minimum, it should be expected that overall management responsibility includes the status of first peer among administrative peers in a horizontal organization.

Qualifications

(Same as for council-manager position.)

GUIDELINE

This criterion simply means that the person should be chosen on merit and that s/he should have significant administrative experience and educational background. It excludes the strictly “political” appointment. It does not mean, however, that the person must have local government experience per se.

DOWNLOADS

[ICMA Recognition Application](#) (doc, 34 KB)