

DEPARTMENTS

Ethics Inquiries

Seeing Red over Lobbying Work

Scenario: A town government has a strict sign policy that town officials believe helps the community retain its historic image and charm. Recently, a city manager in a nearby community was hired by a major sign company to lobby this town's council to change its sign ordinance. The town manager was frustrated by the lobbying effort by his colleague, particularly since the lobbyist/city manager approached individual members of the town council to press for changes in the ordinance.

The town manager found out that his colleague was lobbying for sign changes from one of the town's elected officials. Is the nearby city manager's lobbying work consistent with the values in the ICMA Code of Ethics?

Response: While consulting is the sort of outside employment that can be compatible with work as a city or county manager, there are a number of problems with this particular consulting job. A guideline for the ICMA Code of Ethics stipulates, "When members advise and respond to inquiries from elected or appointed officials of other local governments, they should inform the administrators of those communities."

The town manager has a right to expect his colleague to let him know about his lobbying work, rather than let him hear about it from a member of the town council. In addition, the city manager would be expected to seek permission from his own governing body before pursuing consulting work. To avoid any harm to the profession, ICMA members should avoid outside employment involving a politically sensitive matter.

Ethics advice is a popular service provided to ICMA members. The inquiries and advice are reviewed by the Committee on Professional Conduct, the ethics committee of the ICMA Executive Board. Some of the inquiries are revised and published as a regular feature in *PM*, to give guidance to members in the big and little ethical decisions they make daily. If you have a question about your obligations under the ICMA Code of Ethics, call Elizabeth Kellar at 202/962-3611, e-mail, ekellar@icma.org or Martha Perego at 202/962-3668, e-mail, mperego@icma.org.