



**2024 | ANNUAL
ICMA | CONFERENCE**

SEPTEMBER 21-25 | PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

The Declaration of Ideals and the Managers Role in Community Leadership

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Today's Conversation

Common understanding of the history of Council-Manager Government

- Foundational Documents
- Historical Discussions on the Role of the Manager
- The Community Leader – Administrative Technician Continuum

The current context

- Politics
- The National Conversation

The future of our profession

- Our Recommendations

2023 National Conversation – What is Community Leadership



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The Politics/Administration Dichotomy

Determine “purpose,” scope of services, tax level, constitution issues

Pass ordinances; approve new projects and programs; ratify budget

Make implementing decisions (e.g., site selection); handle complaints; oversee administration

Suggest Management changes to manager; review organization’s performance in manager’s appraisal



Advise (what city “can” do may influence what it “should” do); analyze conditions and trends

Make recommendations on all decisions; formulate budget; determine service distribution formula

Establish practices and procedures and make decision for implementing policy

Control the human, material & informational resources of organization to support policy and administrative functions

ICMA CODE OF ETHICS

The mission of ICMA is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide. To further this mission, certain principles, as enforced by the Rules of Procedure, shall govern the conduct of every member of ICMA, who shall:

1. We believe professional management is essential to effective, efficient, equitable, and democratic local government.
2. Affirm the dignity and worth of local government services and maintain a deep sense of social responsibility as a trusted public servant.
3. Be dedicated to the highest ideals of honor and integrity in all public and personal relationships in order that the member may merit the respect and confidence of the elected officials, of other officials and employees, and of the public.
4. Serve the best interests of all community members.
5. Submit policy proposals to elected officials; provide them with facts, and technical and professional advice about policy options; and collaborate with them in setting goals for the community and organization.
6. Recognize that elected representatives are accountable to their community for the decisions they make; members are responsible for implementing those decisions.
7. Refrain from all political activities which undermine public confidence in professional administrators. Refrain from participation in the election of the members of the employing legislative body.
8. Make it a duty continually to improve the member's professional ability and to develop the competence of associates in the use of management techniques.
9. Keep the community informed on local government affairs. Encourage and facilitate active engagement and constructive communication between community members and all local government officials.
10. Resist any encroachment on professional responsibilities, believing the member should be free to carry out official policies without interference, and handle each problem without discrimination on the basis of principle and justice.
11. Manage all personnel matters with fairness and impartiality.
12. Public office is a public trust. A member shall not leverage his or her position for personal gain or benefit.

Adopted by the ICMA Executive Board in 1924, and most recently revised by the membership in April 2023.

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Declaration of Ideals

Members of the International City/County Management Association dedicate themselves to the faithful stewardship of the public trust and embrace a shared ideal of management excellence.

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) was founded with a commitment to the preservation of the values and integrity of representative local government and local democracy and a dedication to the promotion of efficient and effective management of public services. To fulfill the spirit of this commitment, ICMA works to maintain and enhance public trust and confidence in local government, to achieve equity and social justice, to affirm human dignity, and to improve the quality of life for the individual and the community. Members of ICMA dedicate themselves to the faithful stewardship of the public trust and embrace the following ideals of management excellence, seeking to:

1. Provide an environment that ensures the continued existence and effectiveness of representative local government and promotes the understanding that democracy confers privileges and responsibilities on each citizen.
2. Recognize the right of citizens to influence decisions that affect their well-being; advocate a forum for meaningful citizen participation and expression of the political process; and facilitate the clarification of community values and goals.
3. Respect the special character and individuality of each community while recognizing the interdependence of communities and promoting coordination and cooperation.
4. Seek balance in the policy formation process through the integration of the social, cultural, and physical characteristics of the community.
5. Promote a balance between the needs to use and to preserve human, economic, and natural resources.
6. Advocate equitable regulation and service delivery, recognizing that needs and expectations for public services may vary throughout the community.
7. Develop a responsive, dynamic local government organization that continuously assesses its purpose and seeks the most effective techniques and technologies for serving the community.
8. Affirm the intrinsic value of public service and create an environment that inspires excellence in management and fosters the professional and personal development of all employees.
9. Seek a balanced life through ongoing professional, intellectual, and emotional growth.
10. Demonstrate commitment to professional ethics and ideals and support colleagues in the maintenance of these standards.
11. Take actions to create diverse opportunities in housing, employment, and cultural activity in every community for all people.

ETHICS AND IDEALS

The Declaration of Ideals

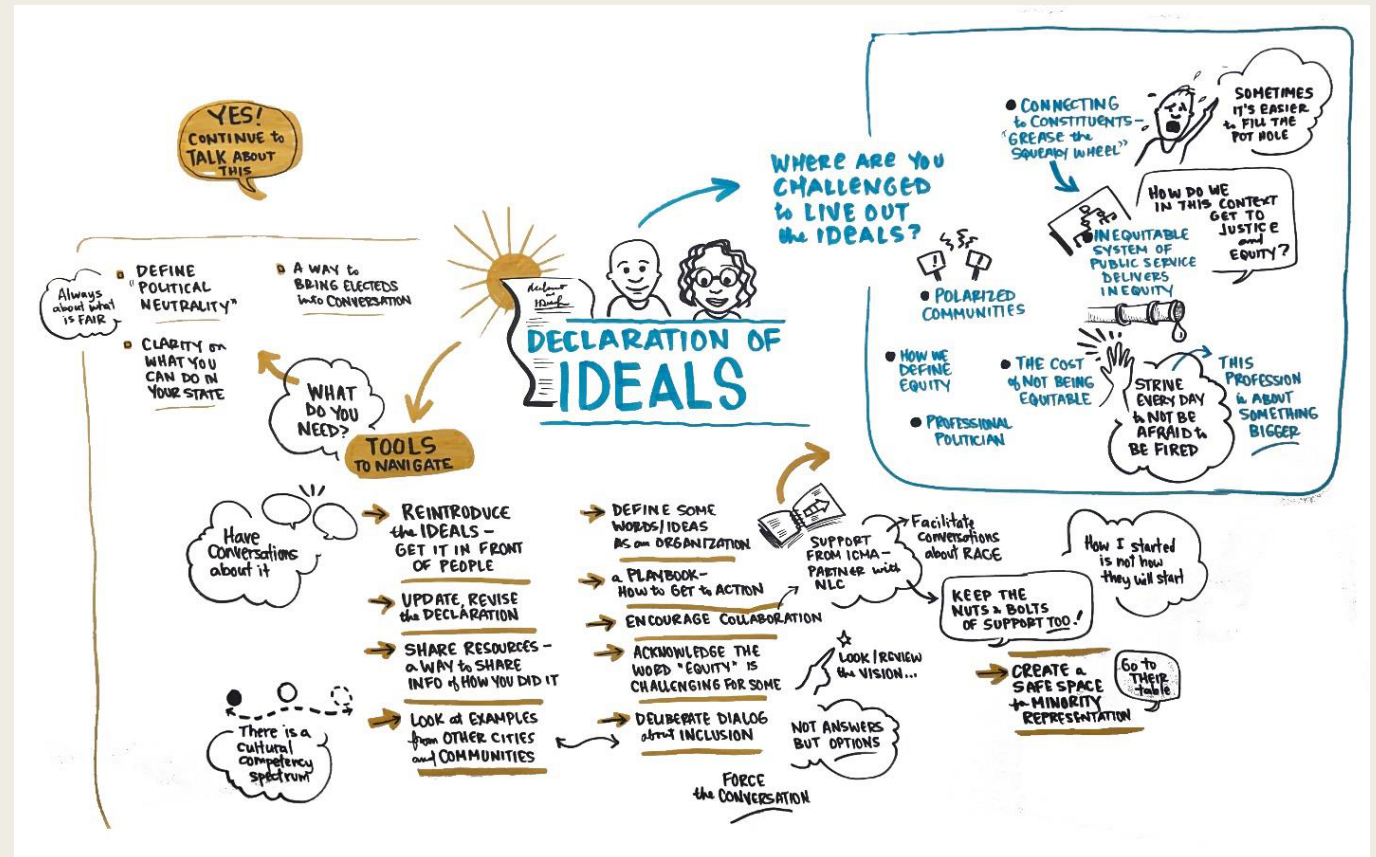
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The Role of the City Manager

Historical Perspectives

There are two distinct roles that have been evident since the inception of the profession, each ebbing and flowing over time.

The Policy Activist

- **Community Leadership:** Actively engage with citizens and community organizations.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Initiate and advocate for policy proposals to the city council.
- **Public Participation:** Promote and facilitate citizen participation in decision-making processes.

The Administrative Technician

- **Implementation:** Execute policies without engaging in political debates or advocacy.
- **Technical Expertise:** Provide factual and technical advice to the city council.
- **Behind-the-Scenes Management:** Focus on internal administration and maintaining organizational efficiency.

1908

The Council-Manager form emerged as way of combining the political leadership of an elected board and the professional leadership of an appointed administrator.

1919

Richard Childs, author of the Council-Manager Form, urged managers to be bolder: "Some day we shall have managers here who have achieved national reputation, not by saving taxes or by running their cities for a freakishly low expense per capita, but managers who have successfully led their commissions into great new enterprises of service.

1924

ICMA's Code of Ethics articulated the responsibility of city managers to "strive to keep the community informed of the plans and purposes of the administrations, remembering that healthy publicity and criticism are an aid to the success of any Democracy" (tenet 9).

1927

Historian Leonard White observed managers' involvement in policy matters: "The office of the city manager has become the great center of initiating and proposing (but not deciding) public policies as well as the sole responsible center of administration."

1933

A survey of managers revealed that 24% viewed their role as "the active, aggressive administrator, trying to acquire dominance in determining policies" as opposed to remaining in the background, "pushing the council forward."

1934

The City Manager Profession by Clarence Ridley stated that "city government is becoming more and more technical" and called the manager the council's "technical adviser and consultant." Further, the manager should not "let himself be driven or led into taking the leadership or responsibility in matters of policy."

1938

The revised Code of Ethics stated in the foreword that "municipal policy shall be determined exclusively by a legislative body," and tenet 5 stated that the manager should be "in no sense a political leader."

1940

A Study by Stone and Price noted it was "generally impossible for a city manager to escape being a leader in matters of policy."

1948

C.A. Harrell (1948), an ICMA President, identified the manager as a "community leader" who should be a "positive, vital force in the community. He asked why managers should "hesitate to initiate policy proposals and submit them to the council." He argued that when the manager "shies away from such leadership the community stands still and important matters are allowed to pass by default.

1952

The Revised ICMA Code of Ethics acknowledged that the manager was a "community leader" who "submits policy proposals to the council and provides the council with facts and advice on matters of policy to give the council a basis for making decisions on community goals."

1952-1962

ICMA's PM Magazine published 18 articles that indicated the manager should be a "policy leader or innovator."

1963

Scholars concluded that managers are "almost inevitably the major source of policy proposals to the city council."

1977

Richard Stillman, public administration scholar, argued "Managers cannot totally embrace either role of professional or politician." He believed they should "cautiously and continuously tread a middle ground between the two poles of politics and expertise."

1982

Declaration of Ideals is adopted.

1984

Sylvester Murray, ICMA's first Black president, noted "It is often said that an "ideal" is something unachievable, the highest star to reach for, knowing that you will never do it. That is not the case with our organizational ideals. Our ideals are achievable. Each of us ought to be committed to achieving the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Ideals. Our cities would be better off, our organization would be better off, and we would be better off as individuals."

2012

ICMA's State of the Profession Survey demonstrates the city managers are involved in significant policy activity, with only 2% indicating they only occasionally or never perform these activities.

EARLY YEARS

DEPRESSION AND WARTIME

POST-WAR ERA

MODERN DEVELOPMENT

The Depression and Wartime (30s-40s)

- **Economic constraints in this period forced city managers to focus on maintaining essential services, curbing the expansion of the role into the realm of policy.**
- **1933:** A survey of managers revealed that 24% viewed their role as “the active, aggressive administrator, trying to acquire dominance in determining policies” as opposed to remaining in the background, “pushing the council forward.”
- **1938:** The revised Code of Ethics stated in the foreword that “municipal policy shall be determined exclusively by a legislative body,” and tenet 5 stated that the manager should be “in no sense a political leader.”
- **1940:** A Study by Stone and Price noted it was “generally impossible for a city manager to escape being a leader in matters of policy.”

The City Manager Profession, 1934

By: Clarence Ridley
(executive director of the
ICMA) and Orin Nolting

The book stated that "city government is becoming more and more technical" and called the manager the council's "technical adviser and consultant." Further, the manager should not "let himself be driven or led into taking the leadership or responsibility in matters of policy."



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Post-War Era (50s-60s)

- **The return of prosperity and the building boom created a landscape of rapid change in local governance, ushering in new opportunities for city managers.**
- **1952:** The Revised ICMA Code of Ethics acknowledged that the manager was a “community leader” who “submits policy proposals to the council and provides the council with facts and advice on matters of policy to give the council a basis for making decisions on community goals.”
- **1952-1962:** ICMA's *PM Magazine* published 18 articles that indicated the manager should be a "policy leader or innovator"
- **1963:** Scholars concluded that managers are "almost inevitably the major source of policy proposals to the city council."

C.A. Harrell (1948), an ICMA President, identified the manager as a "community leader" who should be a "positive, vital force in the community. He asked why managers should "hesitate to initiate policy proposals and submit them to the council." He argued that when the manager "shies away from such leadership the community stands still and important matters are allowed to pass by default.



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Modern Developments (70s – Present)

- **Acceptance for "activist city manager cities" grows as academics and practitioners reject the premise that the council-manager form was founded on the separation of politics and administration.**
- **1977: Richard Stillman, public administration scholar, argued "Managers cannot totally embrace either role of professional or politician," He believed they should "cautiously and continuously tread a middle ground between the two poles of politics and expertise"**

1982: Declaration of Ideals is adopted.

1984: Sylvester Murray, ICMA's first Black president, noted in 1984, when the Ideals were promoted to the membership, "It is often said that an "ideal" is something unachievable, the highest star to reach for, knowing that you will never do it. That is not the case with our organizational ideals. Our ideals are achievable. Each of us ought to be committed to achieving the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Ideals. Our cities would be better off, our organization would be better off, and we would be better off as individuals."



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Modern Developments (70s – Present)

- 2012: ICMA's State of the Profession Survey demonstrates the city managers are involved in significant policy activity, with only 2% indicating they only occasionally or never perform these activities.

Perceptions of Managers on Role Importance and Time Allotment

	Managers' Perception of Most Important Role		Managers' Time Spent on Various Roles		
	Wright (1969)	Ammons and Newell (1989)	Ammons and Newell (1989)	French & Folz (2004)	French (2005)
Management role	37.0%	38.5%	50.8%	56.0%	56.0%
Policy role	22.0%	55.8%	32.2%	30.6%	30.0%
Political role	33.0%	5.8%	17.0%	—	13.0%



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The Declaration of Ideals

- “The Declaration of Ideals approved by ICMA in 1982 gives voice to the aspirations of the profession in many aspects of the manager’s activities. These statements do not, however, go far enough in describing the responsibilities of the manager as a comprehensive professional leader in city government.” James Svara, *Ideal and Practice in Council-Manager Government*, 1995



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Findings

Findings from State Conversations

1. Local government managers are called upon to be **courageous** in their difficult role of providing leadership in their organizations and communities.
2. Local government managers play a critical role in building and maintaining **trust** among staff, elected officials and members of the community.
3. Skills in **facilitation, mediation and convening** are critical for local government managers to work with staff, elected officials and community partners when discussing community challenges

“The manager should know what the issues are, what issues are coming, and how to creatively and efficiently deploy the resources of their community to solve problems and create scenarios where the community can thrive.”

- Alabama Discussion



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Findings from State Conversations (cont.)

4. Being a skilled **communicator** is essential for community leadership. Managers must develop and maintain good regular avenues of communication with their elected officials (individually and as a group), staff and members of the community. **Listening** is a key element in communication.
5. Local government managers have an obligation to foster regular **goal setting** with their elected officials and the identification of organizational and community **values**. Managers must help ensure that all voices in the community are heard during discussions of goals and values.
6. Local government managers must understand and embrace their role in **presenting data** and advocating for policy direction **as neutral leaders**. Managers have responsibility for developing complete **definitions for complex problems** and **understandable language** to explain different policy options.



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2024 Conference Conversation - Additional Observations

- Governance and the process of how we work together is broken
- Managers are pushed to act. The complexity of how our communities communicate with us can push us to act too quickly or not thoughtfully enough
- Facilitation and mediation can take on different forms. We need training to recognize when these interventions are needed or when it's our role to do it vs. our role to seek it on behalf of our community
- Resiliency and a sense of steadfastness is just as important as courage. You have to stay the course in the face of headwinds.
- Ensuring everyone has a voice. Sometimes you are the advocate for the process and creating a process to ensure that all the voices are included



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Recommendations

To the ICMA Board

Declaration of Ideals

Request that the ICMA Board ask State and Affiliate Organizations and academic thought leaders to form a Task Force to engage the membership in a conversation about the Declaration of Ideals.

- **Reflect on the purpose behind the development of the Declaration of Ideals in the 1980's**
- **Discuss how the Declaration of Ideals provides guidance to members regarding their leadership role in today's context and how they navigate the Policy/Administration Dichotomy**



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Engage Other Organizations

- Request that ICMA convene meetings with the leadership of the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties to:
 - Discuss these findings and discuss the role of professional management in our communities
 - Identify how local governments can engage community leaders in promoting civil discourse and civic responsibility



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Additional Training at ICMA Conferences

- Provide training opportunities on facilitation, mediation and convening skills for members.
- Develop training for Manager's who enter professional local government administration from other professions that highlight the uniqueness of Council-Manager governance; their role and the history of the profession



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Additional Recommendations

1. Request the ICMA Senior Advisors to initiate a dialogue in the profession on the role of courage in being a local government manager. Much is asked of a local government manager and it is important that ICMA support individual managers as they are asked to make courageous decisions. Request the Senior Advisors to report the Executive Board on these discussions at the 2025 ICMA Annual Conference.
2. Request that ICMA devotes a 2025 issue of Public Management magazine to the topic of community leadership.

Recommendations

To State and Local Government Management Associations



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Recommendations to State Local Government Management Associations

1. Create a task force to consider the findings and recommendations of this initiative to consider strategies that could be used in the state to further these conversations.
2. Convene meetings with leadership of state leagues of cities and counties to discuss the findings and recommendations of this project and develop strategies to share these issues with their elected members.
3. Develop sessions at state association meeting specifically to address the role of local government managers of being courageous and fostering trust in their organizations.



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Professional Local Government Management

Our Profession

Thank you!
Resources are available at
www.localgov2030.com/leadership

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