

**Report of Ad Hoc Committee**  
**“The Manager’s Role in Community Leadership”**  
**November 11, 2024**

**Background**

In 2019, the [National Academy of Public Administration](#) issued a call to all government professionals to address the “[Grand Challenges](#)” facing our nation. In response, Issaquah Washington City Administrator Wally Bobkiewicz convened an ad hoc group of local government professionals around the country. This group began meeting in 2020 to develop actionable projects to meet these Grand Challenges. This larger group became known as the “Local Government Big Thinkers.” In 2021, an organizing committee was established to help guide these grass roots discussions.

A key issue raised by this group is the local government manager’s role in fostering public conversations of significant issues of community concern. In 2022, a group of interested professionals met at the ICMA Annual Conference in Columbus, Ohio to discuss this topic and while those gathered did not arrive at any actionable conclusion there was an understanding that this topic, needed further exploration, understanding and discussion.

The organizing committee reconvened in early 2023, and seized upon this belief that work still needed to be done to focus attention of managers on leading change in their organizations and ultimately influencing and shaping community conversations and evolution. Another consistent concern expressed was that interest in this work varied widely in different parts of the United States.

A consensus emerged to gather representatives from each of the state local government management associations at the 2023 ICMA annual conference in Austin, Texas to further these discussions. An ad hoc group of interested local government professionals met in May 2023 to further the discussion and imagine the design this convening.

In 2023, ICMA published the fourth edition of “[The Effective Local Government Manager.](#)” Included among its many excellent chapters is one written by Valerie Lemmie, Thomas Bryer and Timothy Shaffer, “[Achieving Effective Community Leadership in the Future.](#)” This chapter discusses the broader need for local government managers to take an active leadership role on significant issues facing our communities.

The organizing committee for the discussion agreed to use this chapter as a launching point for the discussions. Representatives from each of the state local government management associations were invited to attend a meeting at the 2023 ICMA Annual Conference in Austin. This meeting attracted representatives from 38 states. [Julia Novak, Executive Vice President, Raftelis](#) facilitated the discussions. The group that met in Austin agreed to continue these conversations through 2024 by convening interested managers at state association meetings. Preparation for the Austin convening including reading articles by James Svava, currently a Fellow of the University of North

Carolina School of Government, that posed questions around the local government manager's role in shaping and influencing policy conversations with their elected officials and thereby acknowledging that there is no escaping the reality that local government managers are influential community leaders.

The group that met in Austin was also asked to review the ICMA Declaration of Ideals. This document was adopted by ICMA in 1982 as a statement of members of the faithful stewardship of the public trust and embrace a shared ideal of management excellence. The Declaration of Ideals has not been revised since its adoption.

With that as a backdrop, the following questions were discussed:

- What is community leadership?
- How do we define the role of the manager in contemporary community leadership?
- What role does data serve in identifying issues that should be advanced in the community?
- Who are the partners that should be engaged in these discussions?
- What is the definition of "neutrality" in the actions of local government managers?
- What can we do individually and collectively to balance the tension of being both politically neutral and a reformer?
- What does the ICMA Declaration of Ideals mean to today's local government managers?
- Should the Declaration of Ideals be amended to reflect current challenges?

Formal discussions were conducted at state meetings in Maine, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Kansas, Virginia, Washington, Alaska, Alabama, Illinois, California and the Northwest Regional City Management Conference.

The group met again at the ICMA Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with representatives from 35 states. During this discussion, the origins of professional local government as part of the Reform Movement of the early 1900's was discussed and demonstrated how navigating the tension of being part of a profession whose DNA is reform AND the mandate to be politically neutral is a challenging role for local government managers. The group reviewed the input received from the state discussions and the historical context of the role of professional local government manager, and came to the following findings as well as recommendations to the ICMA Executive Board and boards of the state local government management associations:

## Findings

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.
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.

### **Recommendations to the ICMA Executive Board**

1. Form a task force made up of representatives from state local government management associations, affiliate organizations and academic thought leaders to engage the membership in a conversation about the Declaration of Ideals. The task force would:
  - Reflect on the purpose behind the development of the Declaration of Ideals in the 1980s.
  - 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.
  - Propose any changes/additions/revisions to the Declaration of Ideals.
2. Convene meetings with leadership of the National League of Cities and 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.
  - Identify opportunities for ICMA to assist NLC and NACo in facilitating discussions on these issues with its members.
3. Provide training opportunities on facilitation, mediation and convening skills for members.

4. Provide training for managers 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.
5. 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.
6. Request the ICMA staff to devote a 2025 issue of Public Management magazine to the topic of community leadership.

### **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.

**Manager's Role in Community Leadership  
Ad Hoc Committee**

	First Name	Last Name	Organization Name	Title
Alaska	Janette	Bower	City of Soldotna	City Manager
	Robert	Barr	City and Borough of Juneau	Deputy City Manager
Alabama	Gretchen	DiFante	City of Pelham	City Manager
Arizona	Gina	Montes	City of Phoenix	Deputy City Manager
California	Peter	Pirnejad	City of Los Altos Hills	City Manager
	Ed	Shikada	City of Palo Alto	City Manager
Colorado	Michael	Penny	City of Castle Pines	City Manager
	Jennifer	Hoffman	City and County of Broomfield	City and County Manager
Connecticut	Peter	Souza	Town of Windsor	Town Manager
	Matt	Hart	Capital Region Council of Governments	Executive Director
Delaware	Kristy	Rogers	Town of Milton	Town Manager
	Jamie	Burk	Town of Millsboro	Town Manager
Florida	Michael	Pleus	City of Deland	City Manager
	Jonathan	Lewis	County of Sarasota	County Administrator
Illinois	Phil	Kiraly	Village Manager	Village of Glencoe
Kentucky	Michelle	Smolen	City of Paducah	Assistant City Manager
	Brian	Dehner	City of Edgewood	City Administrator
Massachusetts	Melissa	Murphy Rodrigues	Town of North Andover	Town Manager
Maryland	Bill	Gardiner	City of College Park	Assistant City Manager
Maine	Christine	Landes	Town of Chelsea	Town Manager
	Jay	Feyler	Town of Union	Town Manager
Michigan	Mark	Washington	City of Grand Rapids	City Manager
Minnesota	Peyton	Mastera	City of Dilworth	City Administrator
	Cindy	Steinhauser	City of Rochester	Deputy City Administrator
North Carolina	Erris	Dunston	County of Guilford	Assistant County Manager
	Jodi	Miller	City of Garner	Assistant City Manager
Nebraska	Rick	Melcher	City of Aurora	City Administrator
	Wes	Blecke	City of Wayne	City Administrator
New Hampshire	Alex	Torpey		
Nevada	Tim	Sutton	County of Nye	County Manager
Ohio	Kenneth	Wilson	County of Franklin	County Administrator
Oregon	Martha	Bennett	City of Lake Oswego	City Manager
Pennsylvania	Centrice	Martin	Township of Ferguson	Township Manager
	Crandall	Jones	Municipal Administrator	Borough of Norristown
South Carolina	Teresa	Wilson	City of Columbia	City Manager
	Mike	Sell	City of Greer	Deputy City Administrator
South Dakota	Jameson	Berreth	City of Madison	City Administrator
	Justin	Weiland	City of Tea	City Administrator
Tennessee	David	Smoak	Town of Farrgaut	Town Administrator
Texas	T.C.	Broadnax	City of Austin	City Manager
	Michael	Goodrum	City of Sugar Land	City Manager
Utah	Kyle	Laws	City of West Point	City Manager
Virginia	Timothy	Fitzgerald	County of Augusta	County Administrator
Washington	Stephanie	Lucash	City of Kenmore	Deputy City Manager
Wisconsin	Steve	Volkert	City of Hartford	City Administrator
OBSERVERS	Dawn	Peters	ILCMA/WCMA	Executive Director
	Kimberly	Richardson	City of Peoria, IL	Assistant City Manager
	Nathan	Poore	City of Falmouth, ME	City Manager
	David	Swindell	Arizona State University	Associate Professor
	Matt	Fulton	ICMA	Midwest Region Director
	Autumn	Monahan	City of Issaquah, WA	Director of Administrative Services
	Anne	Lewis	Managing Director	Baker Tilly
	Kim	Nelson	U North Carolina Chapel Hill	Professor
	Lon	Pluckham	City of Vancouver, WA	Deputy City Manager
CONVENERS	Eric	Campbell	Executive Manager	Berkley Group
	Wally	Bobkiewicz	City of Issaquah, WA	City Administrator
	Julia	Novak	Raftelis	Executive Vice President

## 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.