

Council-Manager Form of Government

What is 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 the members of the council, commission, or board. The governing body in turn hires a non-partisan manager who has very broad authority to run the organization.

Born out of the US 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. The first City to adopt the council-manager form of government was Staunton, Virginia in 1917.

How does council-manager government work?

The elected council represent their community and develop a long-range vision for its future. They establish policies that affect the overall operation of the community and are responsive to residents needs and wishes.

To ensure that these policies are carried out and that the entire community is equitably served, the governing body appoints a highly trained professional manager on the basis of his/her education, experience, skills, and abilities (and not their political allegiances). If the manager is not responsive to the governing body, it has the authority to terminate the manager at any time.

How can council-manager government benefit my community?

A city can benefit from the council-manager form of government in a number of important ways:

- › Political power is concentrated in the entire governing body. The mayor and council share legislative functions
- › Policy making resides with elected officials, while oversight of the day-to-day operations of the community resides with the manager. In this way, the elected officials are free to devote time to policy planning and development
- › The manager carries out the policies established by the elected governing body with an emphasis on effective, efficient, and equitable service delivery
- › Because decisions on policy and the future of the community are made by the entire governing body rather than a single individual, council-manager governments more often engage and involve their residents in decision making. Residents guide their community by serving on boards and commissions, participating in visioning and strategic planning, and designing community-oriented local government services
- › The form is flexible enough to adapt to local needs and demands.

Source: International City/County Management Association (ICMA)