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COUNCIL-MANAGER

FORM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT



The Council-Manager form of government is used by more cities, villages, townships, and counties than any other form. It is a system of local government that combines the strong political leadership of elected officials in the form of a governing body, with the strong managerial experience of an appointed local government manager. The governing body, commonly known as the council, as a whole may also be referred to as the commission or the board. The Council-Manager form establishes a representative system where all power is concentrated in the elected council and where the council hires a professionally trained manager to oversee the delivery of public services.

It's Responsive

In council-management government, the mayor or chairperson of the governing body and council members are the leaders and policy makers elected to represent the community. They focus on policy issues that are responsive to citizen's needs and wishes. The manager is appointed by the governing body to carry out policy and ensure that the entire community is being served. If the manager is not responsive to the governing body's wishes, the governing body has the authority to terminate the manager at any time. In that sense, a manager's responsiveness is tested daily.

It's Adaptable

Not all Council-Manager governments are structured the same way. One of the most attractive features is that the Council-Manager form is adaptable to local conditions and preferences. For example, some communities have councils that are elected at large while other councils are elected by district or by a combination of an at-large and by district structure. In some local governments, the mayor or chairperson is elected at large by the voters; others are elected by their colleagues on the governing body.

It's less expensive

Local governments have found that overall costs actually have been reduced with competent management. Savings come in the form of reduced operating costs, increased efficiency and productivity, improved revenue collection, or effective use of technology.

Council-Manager vs. the Strong Mayor

Nearly 90% of all communities use either the Council-Manager or the Strong Mayor form of government. When viewed together, the overwhelming advantages of the Council-Manager form become apparent. It encourages neighborhood input into the political process, diffuses the power of special interests, and eliminates partisan politics from municipal hiring, firing, and contracting decisions.

Neighborhoods Strengthen Their Voice

The Council-Manager form encourages open communication between citizens and their government. Under this form, each member of the governing body has an equal voice in policy development and administrative oversight. This gives neighborhoods and diverse groups a greater opportunity to influence policy.

Under the "strong Mayor" form, political power is concentrated in the mayor, which means that other members of the elected body relinquish at least some of their policy-making power and influence. This loss of decision-making power among council members can have a chilling effect on the voices of neighborhoods and city residents.

The Power of Special Interests is Diffused

Under the Council-Manager form of government, involvement of the entire elected body ensures a more balanced approach to community decision making, so that all interests can be expressed and

heard – not just those that are well funded.

Under the “strong-mayor” form, however, it’s easier for special interests to use money and political power to influence a single elected official, rather than having to secure a majority of the city council’s support for their agenda.

Merit-Based Decision Making Vs. Partisan Politics

Under Council-Manager government, qualifications and performance- and not skillful navigation of the political election process - are the criteria the elected body uses to select a professional manager. The professional manager, in turn, uses his or her education, experience, and training to select department heads and other key managers to oversee the efficient delivery of services. In this way, Council-Manager government maintains critical checks and balances to ensure accountability at city hall.

Under the “strong mayor” form of government, the day-to-day management of community operations shifts to the mayor, who often lacks the appropriate training, education, and experience in municipal administration and finance to oversee the delivery of essential community services. Also, under the “strong-mayor” form, there is the temptation to make decisions regarding the hiring and firing of key department head positions – such as the police chief, public works director, and finance director – based on the applicant’s political support rather than his or her professional qualifications.

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