

How to Become a Professional Local Government Manager

ICMA's 100th anniversary celebration isn't just about looking back. It's about looking forward to encourage the next generation of students, local government employees, and individuals in other fields to consider a career as a professional city, town, or county manager. If you've ever wondered about what these local government leaders do and what it takes to become a professional local government manager, we've put together this quick resource guide on careers in this exciting field.



Choosing a Career as a Professional City, Town, or County Manager

A career in local government management is challenging--and extremely rewarding. Few other careers offer the opportunity to have such a positive impact on your community.

Professional local government managers, like other chief executives, are responsible for the overall performance of their organizations. As the top administrator, the manager organizes and directs a team of department heads, supervisors, technicians, and support staff to initiate and manage programs and deliver public services.



Professional city, town, and county managers are typically responsible for

- Working in partnership with elected officials to develop sound approaches to community challenges by bringing together the resources that make the right things happen and produce results that matter.
- Bringing a community-wide perspective to policy discussions that takes into consideration the past and future in addressing current challenges.
- Helping the governing body develop long-term visions for the community that provides a framework for policy development and goal setting.
- Encouraging inclusion and building consensus among diverse interests (including those of the elected officials, the business community, and citizens) by focusing on the needs of the entire community rather than the interests of only a few individuals.
- Promoting equity and fairness by ensuring that services are fairly distributed and that administrative decisions (such as hiring and contracting) are based on merit rather than favoritism.
- Developing and sustaining organizational excellence and promoting innovation.

What Kind of Career Preparation Do Professional Local Government Managers Need?

While professional local government managers come from a variety of backgrounds, there are trends and similarities. ICMA's 2009 State of the Profession Survey found that:

- Twenty-four percent of respondents held a four-year degree
- Sixty-two percent had earned an MPA, MBA, or other master's degree
- An additional five percent had earned either a law or doctorate degree.

City, town, and county managers also come from a variety of professional backgrounds, ranging from director of planning (4 percent) to director of finance (6 percent) to employment with the state/federal government (3 percent). The majority of managers surveyed (24 percent) indicated that they had held the position of assistant manager/chief appointed officer (CAO) prior to assuming their current CAO position.

How Do I Get Started?

The material above is just a sample of the many ICMA career resources available. Other good sources are described below.

ICMA Career Resources

This section of the ICMA website offers:

- Resources for job seekers, employers, students and teachers
- Information on internships, fellowships, and coaching and mentoring
- A selection of career guides, wikis, and documents, including ICMA's popular wiki on choosing a career in the field, [Careers in Local Government Management](#).

Life, Well Run

The [Life, Well Run](#) website, developed by ICMA as part of a larger public awareness campaign, offers a comprehensive look at what it means to be a professional local government manager and how the manager contributes to the quality of life in his or her community. The site contains useful resources, including a [description and qualifications](#) for becoming a professional local government manager.

National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA)

NASPAA is the membership organization of graduate education programs in public administration, public policy, public affairs, and public and nonprofit management. NASPAA's website offers comprehensive information on finding a school of public administration and earning a degree in the field.

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