

## **What is the Commission / Manager form of government, which is used today by so many cities, towns, and counties?**

**A Commission / City 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 Members of the, Commission, or Board. The governing body in turn hires a nonpartisan Manager who has very broad authority to run the organization.

Born out of the U.S. progressive reform movement at the turn of the 20th century, the Commission / City Manager system was designed to combat corruption and unethical activity in local government by promoting effective management within a transparent, responsive, and accountable structure.

Since its establishment, the Commission / City Manager form has become the most popular structure of local government in the United States. The form is also widely used throughout the world in countries such as Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

## **How does Commission / City Manager government work?**

The elected Commission or board 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 Commission / City Manager government benefit my community?**

A city, town, or county benefits from the Commission / City Manager form of government in a number of important ways:

1. Political power is concentrated in the *entire* governing body. The mayor and Commission share legislative functions.
2. 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
3. The Manager carries out the policies established by the elected governing body with an emphasis on effective, efficient, and equitable service delivery
4. Because decisions on policy and the future of the community are made by the entire governing body rather than a single individual Commission / City 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
5. The form is flexible enough to adapt to local needs and demands. For example, some communities elect their Commissions at large, while others elect them by district or by a combination of an at-large-and-by-district system.

Also, the Mayor can be directly elected by voters or selected by and from among the Commission or Board.

### **What is the role of the Manager under Commission / City Manager government?**

The Manager is hired to serve the Commission and the community and brings to the local government the benefits of his/her training and experience in administering municipal or county projects and programs. The Manager prepares a budget for the Commission's consideration; recruits, hires, terminates, and supervises government staff; serves as the Commission's chief advisor; and carries out the Commission's policies. Commission members and residents count on the Manager to provide complete and objective information about local operations, discuss the pros and cons of alternatives, and offer an assessment of the long-term consequences of their decisions.

Appointed Managers serve at the pleasure of the governing body. They can be fired by a majority of the Commission consistent with local laws, or any employment agreements they may enter into with the Commission. The Manager makes policy recommendations to the Commission for consideration and final decision. The Manager is bound by whatever action the

Commission takes, and control is always in the hands of the elected representatives of the people.

### **What is the role of the Commission?**

The Commission is the community's legislative and policymaking body. Power is centralized in the elected Commission, which, for example, approves the budget and determines the tax rate. The Commission also focuses on the community's goals, major projects, and such long-term considerations as community growth, land use development, capital improvement and financing, and strategic planning. The Commission hires a professional Manager to implement the administrative responsibilities related to these goals and supervises the Manager's performance.

### **What is the role of the Mayor or chairperson?**

Mayors or chairpersons in Commission / City Manager communities are key political and policy leaders, and their specific duties, responsibilities, and authorities depend on the organization's charter. In Commission / City Manager communities, typically the Mayor or chairperson is a voting member of the city Commission who presides at Commission meetings, represents the city in intergovernmental relationships, appoints members of citizen advisory boards and commissions (with the advice and consent of Commission, assigns agenda items to committees, facilitates communication and understanding between elected and appointed officials, and assists the Commission in setting goals and advocating policy decisions.

### **What value does a professional Manager contribute to a community?**

Professional Managers contribute value to a community because they:

- Work in partnership with elected officials to develop sound approaches to community challenges by bringing together resources to make the right things happen and produce results that matter
- Bring a community-wide perspective to policy discussions and strive to connect the past and future while focusing on the present. They help the governing body develop the long-term vision for the community that provides a framework for policy development and goal setting
- Promote ethical government through commitment to a set of ethical standards that goes beyond those required by law. Managers who are members of ICMA subscribe to the organization's Code of Ethics, which requires them to "affirm the dignity and worth of the

services rendered by government and maintain . . . a deep sense of social responsibility as a trusted public servant”

- Encourage inclusion and build consensus among diverse interests (including those of elected officials, the business community, and citizens) by focusing on the entire community rather than the centralized interests of one or two individuals
- Promote 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
- Develop and sustain organizational excellence and promote innovation. Professional Managers focus relentlessly on efficient and equitable service delivery, policy implementation, and evaluation. They align the local government’s administrative systems with the values, mission, and policy goals defined by the community and elected officials.

### **Does it cost more for a community to adopt the Commission Manager form and hire a professional Manager?**

Many local governments have found that their overall costs are actually **reduced** under competent management.

Savings can come from decreased operating costs, increased efficiency and productivity, improved revenue collection, and effective use of technology. The economic health of the community may also benefit from implementation of improved business development and retention strategies.

### **What kinds of communities use the Commission / City Manager form of government?**

In 2007, more than 3,500 (49 percent) of the 7,171 U.S. cities and towns with populations of 2,500 residents or more operated under the Commission / City Manager form. This structure is also used by more than 370 counties. More than 92 million people in the U.S. live in communities that operate under this form.

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