Eight Strategies for Effective Council-Manager Relations

Vaughn Mamlin Upshaw

Introduction

North Carolina's local governments operate under the council-manager[1] plan. Under this form of government, the elected board appoints a professional manager who is responsible for administering the local government. Elected officials may organize local government as they like, but they must govern as a body to set policy; adopt budgets; and appoint, direct, and fire the city or county manager. Section 160A-151 of the North Carolina General Statutes (hereinafter G.S.) prohibits an elected official from serving as manager or interim manager.[2] State statutes set forth complementary—but not duplicative—legal responsibilities for managers and elected officials. This ensures that comprehensive policy and administrative functions are in place for city and county governments (G.S. Chapters 160A and 153A). The council-manager form of government operates effectively when professionals and elected officials collaborate, respect, and support one another as they fulfill their individual responsibilities. When public managers use their professional knowledge and skills to help elected officials govern well, they enhance their own performance as well as that of the local government.

Public management developed over a century ago as part of an effort to move away from political corruption and cronyism toward a more independent administrative structure for local government.[3] Local governments were established to provide for and protect public interests in their communities. In 1913 Morganton, and Hickory, North Carolina, were the first cities to

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1. This bulletin uses the term "council" to refer to both city and county elected boards. The term "manager" refers to both city and county professional managers and administrators.

2. Vaughn Mamlin Upshaw, "County and City Governing Boards," in *County and Municipal Government in North Carolina,* 2nd ed., Frayda Bluestein (ed.) (UNC School of Government, 2014).

3. Craig M. Wheeland, Christine Kelleher Palus, and Curtis Wood, "A Century of Municipal Reform in the United States: A Legacy of Success, Adaptation, and the Impulse to Improve," *American Review of Public Administration* vol. 44 (2014).

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be chartered under the council-manager plan. Now, all 100 counties and a majority of North Carolina cities with populations over 2,500 have full-time managers making North Carolina known as a "good government" state.[4]

Public managers benefit when councils recognize and support their professional role and respect the shared governance responsibilities set forth under the council-manager structure. Working with an elected board or council is political in nature, and requires professional managers to negotiate power relations. Working with elected officials is, nonetheless, an essential responsibility for managers, but there is little written guidance to assist managers in this process. Professional managers and elected councils must work cohesively to serve and create value for their communities as well as foster the effectiveness of the local governing body.

Nearly all city and county managers in North Carolina are members of the North Carolina City and County Management Association (NCCCMA), a state association that serves and promotes the profession. NCCCMA is an affiliate of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), which has identified eighteen specific practices for improving leadership skills at the local government level.[5] The eight strategies described in this bulletin complement the ICMA practices by focusing on what public managers can do to create effective working relationships with their local governing boards.

Strategy 1: Modernize Processes and Build Organizational Capacity
Processes That Create Public Value
Professional managers provide value to their communities by wisely directing the use of resources and activities to achieve specific public purposes. Public managers and elected officials use public hearings and community forums to engage citizens and other stakeholders in identifying public challenges, proposing goals, and prioritizing options.[6] Public managers play a facilitative role in helping elected officials recognize and promote partnerships, public engagement, and collaboration in accomplishing public goals, addressing community needs, and providing local services.[7]

Managers demonstrate value to their councils and citizens by modernizing and strengthening the capacity of local governments to address public priorities. The process of implementing strategic goals is enhanced by the involvement of professionals who know how resources, programs, and services address current and future community interests.[8]

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4. Carl Stenberg, "County and City Managers," in *County and Municipal Government in North Carolina*, 2nd ed., Frayda Bluestein (ed.) (UNC School of Government, 2014).

5. See "Practices for Effective Local Government Leadership," ICMA University, accessed March 17, 2007, http://icma.org/en/university/about/management_practices.

6. John B. Stephens, Ricardo S. Morse, and Kelley T. O'Brien, *Public Outreach and Participation* (UNC School of Government, 2011).

7. John Nalbandian, "Facilitating Community, Enabling Democracy: New Roles for Local Government Managers," *Public Administration Review* Vol. 59, issue 3 (1999): 187–97.

8. Jean Hartley and Maria Allison, "The Modernization and Improvement of Government and Public Services: The Role of Leadership in the Modernization and Improvement of Public Services," *Public Money and Management* vol. 20, issue 2 (2000): 35–40.

Employing Effective and Efficient Management Tools

Councils and managers work more effectively when everyone has access to good and consistent information about community issues. Public managers support effective council decision making by helping create a context for local government activities. Collecting and presenting political, technical, and community data allows managers to illustrate the extent to which local government's services and policies are fulfilling expectations.[9] Information technologies should be viewed as both (1) tools that can be used by managers and councils to communicate their priorities to the public and (2) tools that are democratic in nature and can be employed to learn how local governments can be more responsive.[10] Managers and councils will work together more effectively when they consider and agree upon why, how, and what information is used in policy and decision making.

Attracting and Retaining Talented and Motivated Personnel

The most valuable resource in any organization is its people. Public managers who support, recognize, and develop professionalism in each employee and every position across the organization add value to their communities. Managers are uniquely positioned to create a positive and professional tone with employees, councils, and the public. Organizations perform poorly when faced with employee turnover, wrongful termination lawsuits, or constant disciplinary actions.[11] By developing capacity for employees to do their jobs well, managers create opportunities for local governments and councils to better serve the public and produce value for their communities.

Implementing and Updating Business Practices and Processes

Managers build capacity within public organizations by implementing and updating business practices and processes, thereby assuring that the organization's procedures and tools are up to date and aligned with public interests and goals. Professional managers are expected to assure that local government operations run smoothly and routinely. Councils generally support managers who consistently ensure good customer service, make sure programs are well organized, and provide for seamless and continuous services across the community.[12] Public managers promote good practice when they work with elected leaders and senior management teams to adopt common metrics for success to achieve political, administrative, and community priorities.[13] By promoting modern management practices with the council, the community, and throughout the organization, managers contribute to high-quality, effective, and efficient public services.

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9. Martha S. Feldman and Anne M. Khademian, "The Role of the Public Manager in Inclusion: Creating Communities of Participation," *Governance* vol. 20, issue 2 (2007): 305–24.

10. Lawrence Pratchett, "New Technologies and the Modernization of Local Government: An Analysis of Biases and Constraints," *Public Administration* vol. 77, issue 4 (1999): 731–51.

11. Wendy M. Rahn and Thomas J. Rudolph, "A Tale of Political Trust in American Cities," *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 69, issue 4 (2005): 530–60.

12. Brenda Sullivan and Cheryl Estes, "Measuring Customer Service Quality in Local Government: Fulton County Human Services Shares Its Experience with Surveys and Recommends Ways to Use Them to Improve Customer Satisfaction," *Public Manager* vol. 36, issue 1 (2007): 37–39.

13. Feldman and Khademian, "The Role of the Public Manager in Inclusion," cited in full at note 9, above.

Strategy 2: The Manager Provides Valuable Advice to the Governing Body

Advising the Governing Body

The ICMA Code of Ethics[14] requires public managers to serve the public. Therefore, all professional recommendations made by managers must meet both legal and administrative standards. Council members are politicians who may or may not have the public's interest in mind when deciding which policy options to pursue. The professional manager is expected to promote objective and impartial evaluations of council proposals and provide professional recommendations and alternatives that meet legal, administrative, and ethical requirements. Professional managers must balance their policy leadership role with their need to comply with the will of the elected council.[15]

Balancing Political Interests and Feasibility

One best practice for an effective manager is to provide relevant background, along with potential costs and benefits, for each policy option he or she recommends to the governing body, including the option of maintaining the status quo. The manager's professional recommendation ideally helps the governing body balance what is politically desirable and what is administratively feasible based on available data, resources, and best practices.[16]

Making the Best Recommendation

There will be times when politically attractive options differ from what is ethically and/or administratively appropriate. As a result, the manager might make unpopular recommendations knowing that the council might not support them. As a professional, the manager is expected to provide recommendations and support the council while operating within legal, financial, professional, and ethical boundaries.

Supporting the Council's Decisions

Once a council has made a decision—whether in support of or in opposition to the manager's recommendation—a professional manager will support the council's wishes and will assure that others working within the organization do so, too.[17] As long as the council's decision is legal and conforms to established administrative standards, professional public managers will support it and make sure the organization fulfills the policies as directed by the governing board.

Explaining Policy Decisions to the Public

Managers forge stronger relationships between councils and communities by helping elected officials explain policy decisions to the public. Transparency is a fundamental value in a functioning democracy, and public managers bring value when they demonstrate transparency in

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14. The full version of the Code of Ethics (last amended in April 2015), including guidelines (last amended in June 2015), is available for downloading on the ICMA's website at http://icma.org/en/icma/knowledge_network/documents/kn/Document/100265/ICMA_Code_of_Ethics_with_Guidelines.

15. Yahong Zhang and Richard C. Feiock, "City Managers' Policy Leadership in Council-Manager Cities," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART* vol. 20, issue 2 (2010): 461–76.

16. John Nalbandian, "Professionals and the Conflicting Forces of Administrative Modernization and Civic Engagement," *American Review of Public Administration* vol. 35, issue 4 (2005): 311–26.

17. Zhang and Feiock, "City Managers' Policy Leadership in Council-Manager Cities," cited in full at note 15, above.

their own, in the council's, and in the local government's communications.[18] Once a council makes a decision, professional public managers can use their knowledge and understanding to help council members clearly communicate that decision to their constituents. Public managers can give elected officials the tools and talking points they need to champion the policies and priorities they believe best address the community's interests.

Strategy 3: The Governing Body and the Manager Collaborate to Provide Value and Service to Citizens

Providing the Best Possible Public Service

A professional manager is expected to be assertive in ensuring that the governing body and its contractors provide the very best services possible to the community. Managers demonstrate to the local government how to accomplish public priorities, which helps build effective relations with the council. Professional managers and their councils share accountability in deciding how services will be provided, whether by local governments or private contractors, and how best to meet fiscal, political, administrative, and/or community interests.[19]

A Culture of Responsiveness and Performance

Professional managers develop the capacity of the council to support good practices by fostering an organizational culture that recognizes and supports efficiency, innovation, and quality performance. Public managers promote innovation and manage risk throughout the organization, assuring that citizens are served well and that broader public interests are being met either by government itself or through collaborative networks.[20] Managers build effective council relations when they focus on mission and strategic priorities and assure that local systems are in place to handle routine requests and unexpected events.

Personal Risks and Professional Accountability

Managers need to be able to take personal risks on behalf of employees and be accountable to the council if something goes wrong. Unexpected things happen—situations change, people make mistakes, and disasters occur. When there are problems, professional managers are expected to coordinate responses among multiple actors. They make sure legal and administrative guidelines are followed, communicate with the council and the public, and assure that those affected receive the support they require.[21] Managers model effective leadership for councils and local governments by coordinating with other levels of government and with partners across the community to creatively address crises and unexpected problems.

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18. Jenille Fairbanks, Kenneth D. Plowman, and Brad L. Rawlins, "Transparency in Government Communication," *Journal of Public Affairs* vol. 7, issue 1 (2007): 23–37.

19. Germà Bel, Robert Hebdon, and Mildred Warner, "Local Government Reform: Privatisation and Its Alternatives," *Local Government Studies* vol. 33, issue 4 (2007): 507–15.

20. Dan Chenok, John M. Kemensky, Michael J. Keegan, and Gadi Ben-Yahuda, "Six Trends Driving Change in Government," IBM Center for the Business of Government, Special Report Series (2013).

21. Carole Lalonde, "Crisis Management and Organizational Development: Towards the Conception of a Learning Model in Crisis Management," *Organization Development Journal* vol. 25, issue 1 (2007).

Providing Vital Information

Councils serve citizens in a variety of ways, and managers support council members in serving their communities and constituents. A manager can help the council understand choices about how best to serve citizens on a daily basis and into the future. Constituent services, public infrastructure, long-term land use, and economic development all contribute to a community's well-being. Managers and council members collaborate to clarify what value local government will produce in addressing the community's current and future needs. Professional managers enhance relations with council by providing facts, analysis, and options that are politically and administratively feasible and desirable.[22]

Guiding Citizen Concerns and Problem Solving

In a council-manager government, council members should refer citizens directly to the manager when they reach out directly for assistance, unless there is a clear agreement to do otherwise. Depending upon the issue, council members may prefer to contact other employees directly. Professional managers benefit themselves, their employees, the council, and the public by crafting explicit agreements about lines of communication and lines of authority. Local government environments are complex, and managers must make critical choices between options and work with elected councils to identify boundaries for administrative action.[23]

Strategy 4: Careful Management of Elected Officials' Relationships with Employees

Chain of Command and Administrative Responsibilities

Public managers have a legal responsibility to administer the city or county government and its employees. Council members are expected to observe legal and administrative rules and establish a chain of command within the organization, but the line between policy and administration is often blurred.[24] Both the manager and council benefit from collaborating on written procedures that clearly outline what authority rests with the council and what is within the purview of the manager and the administration.

Protecting Planned Workflow

These agreements are used to promote effective council relations and improve overall council performance and support for local government activities. The manager can help remind the council of their agreements by establishing a regular time to review and assess procedural performance. For example, as part of annual retreats, managers and councils should review and update their code of ethics, rules of procedure, and standards for behavior. Maintaining these agreements after they have been established takes practice. Regularly reviewing and communicating written procedures provides managers and council members common criteria against which to manage shared governing responsibilities.

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22. Zhang and Feiock, "City Managers' Policy Leadership in Council-Manager Cities," cited in full at note 16, above. John Nalbandian, "Politics and Administration in Local Government," *International Journal of Public Administration* vol. 29, issue 12 (2006): 1049–63.

23. Donald F. Kettl, "Managing Boundaries in American Administration: The Collaboration Imperative," *Public Administration Review* vol. 66, special issue (2006): 10–19.

24. James H. Svara, "The Shifting Boundary between Elected Officials and City Managers in Large Council-Manager Cities," *Public Administration Review* vol. 59, issue 1 (1999): 44–53.

Council Requests and Council-Employee Interaction

These workflow-protecting administrative rules also enable employees to perform well and the organization to operate effectively and efficiently. The general rule under the council-manager form of government is that council members do not direct the work of employees. Council requests should be handled via the manager's office so the manager can identify how best to respond without disrupting employees' focus on their responsibilities. Employees will prioritize a council member's request over other assigned duties. This arrangement builds effective relations with the council by ensuring that the organization operates smoothly and efficiently.

Taking Action on Substantial Requests

In some jurisdictions, managers and council agree that there are times when it is okay for council members to contact employees directly. These managers and councils talk about what constitutes a "routine inquiry," and managers regularly remind employees and council members of established boundaries. Specific agreements about council-employee interactions depend upon the size, complexity, and culture of the organization, as well as the history between the manager and council. If a council member makes a request that exceeds what is considered routine, employees are required to contact the manager and ask the manager to follow up with the council member directly. To respect the council's role, the manager brings to the entire council any individual request that impinges upon time or resources allocated to other priorities. If a council majority supports an individual member's request, the manager can then redirect employee effort and resources.

Strategy 5: The Governing Body Acts as a Body and the Manager Respects It as a Body

Governing as a Body

The manager serves an important role in helping the council carry out its policies. The council is legally required to govern as a board, and only a majority of the board directs the manager's (and organization's) activities. Once a council adopts policies and priorities for the organization, the manager is expected to pursue these goals. Managers help the council mark progress toward goals by promoting strategic plans and then establishing common metrics for measuring progress and performance on goals. Managers also welcome suggestions from individual council members that don't conflict with established council policy. In this model, managers and councils jointly provide value to their communities by establishing clear priorities and goals and then tracking project milestones that lead to tangible results.[25]

Equal Treatment for Council Members

Effective managers strive to treat all members of the council equally to promote positive relations and to avoid aligning with one or more members. Managers typically send all council members the same information at the same time. Managers and councils should agree in advance as to the order of phone calls if and when the situation requires telephone contact. For example, if the manager calls the mayor or board chair first, who gets the next call? Establishing

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25. Richard C. Feiock, Moon-Gi Jeong, and Jaehoon Kim, "Credible Commitment and Council-Manager Government: Implications for Policy Instrument Choices," *Public Administration Review* vol. 63, issue 5 (2003): 616–25.

these rules in advance can help avoid unnecessary conflict later. Many managers welcome opportunities to meet with individual members of the council. This practice must be carefully managed, however, to assure equitable access for all members. If the manager meets personally with an individual council member every week, can others expect the same access? The general rule is what is done for one member is done for all.

No Surprises

Managers want to avoid having council members caught off guard or surprised on an issue. Managers build trust with the council by assuring transparency on issues that may become controversial and by communicating early and often with the council. The reverse also holds true. Surprising the manager or other staff—especially in a public setting—is unprofessional and demoralizing. When these unexpected or inappropriate moments occur, the manager should approach the council member directly and provide clear guidance on appropriate ways for providing feedback to employees. If the issue persists, the manager can ask a mayor or an entire council to craft and/or revisit standards of behavior and codes of conduct.

Parity of Information and Understanding

Newly elected council members and newly appointed managers often lack context and background on major initiatives. Newly appointed managers can foster effective relations by asking experienced members of council and staff to provide context for ongoing issues and past decisions. Similarly, established managers can alleviate suspicion and mistrust among newly elected council members by providing context and background history on important issues and available options. Veteran council members and experienced managers both promote stronger relationships with others by offering perspectives on community values, history, and challenges. Council members and managers should have a common appreciation for the historical challenges, opportunities, and context that shape the community's present and future.

Strategy 6: The Manager and the Governing Body Give Each Other a Chance to Prove Themselves

Working with Changing Majorities

Within the council-manager structure, the manager works for the governing body, and majorities on councils and in governing bodies can change after elections. One of the most perilous times for managers is after an election in which a new majority of council members is elected. As soon as feasible, the manager should reach out and congratulate the newly elected officials and offer to meet with them and provide an orientation to the local government. Strident and skeptical individuals can become advocates when properly introduced to the value of what local government can provide.

Developing Working Relations

Developing positive working relations with new council members is vastly beneficial. Managers should give new council members the chance to learn and demonstrate their desire to serve the public. Managers can communicate how the council-manager form of government operates, as well as their statutory and ethical obligations to serve the council. These working relationships

are formed from a mutual commitment between managers and council members to collaborate and serve the public.

The Complexity of Governing, Leading, and Managing

Campaign slogans and rhetoric seldom stand up to the complexity of governing, leading, or managing. Managers promote effective governance by encouraging council members to set aside campaign rhetoric following an election. By laying out legal rationales, historical perspectives, and resource alternatives, managers can help new council members effectively transition into their roles as members of a governing body.

Earning Trust and Confidence

Local governments are trusted more than other levels of government, and council-manager governments are more trusted than mayor-council ones.[26] Seeking to develop relationships and learn why individuals ran for public office helps managers earn the trust and the confidence of new members. New council members are often eager to demonstrate to the public how they are doing things differently. The manager can strengthen relationships with the council by helping new members learn effective governing and how to work within the council-manager form of government to accomplish their goals.

Strategy 7: The Manager and the Governing Body Freely Give and Seek Feedback

Maintaining Open Communication

Managers and council members have to make an effort to foster and maintain productive relations, respectful communication, and open communication. Effective managers initiate communication with council members early and establish a climate of openness and professionalism. Managers expect council members to express policy opinions and propose options, which requires accurate information. Managers use administrative tools such as formal reports or proposals to provide the factual information, relevant data, and alternative courses of action to council members. Manager feedback about how the council's proposed initiatives and priorities align with existing policies, resources, and services is vital, and open communication is the key.

Constructive Criticism and Timely Feedback

When managers and council members communicate with each other on a daily basis, they may not be providing the kind of feedback that improves their working relationships. Managers often think council members will provide feedback as concerns arise and are often surprised when this doesn't occur. Council members might wait until an annual performance review to divulge their disapproval of a decision a manager made months before. Managers should encourage council members to ask questions, provide constructive feedback, and express their interests, positions, concerns, and ideas to the manager directly and in a timely fashion.

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26. Wendy M. Rahn and Thomas J. Rudolph, "A Tale of Political Trust in American Cities," *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 69, issue 4 (2005): 530–60.

Strategies and Benchmarks

Annual performance reviews provide the manager and council with an opportunity to examine the manager's work comprehensively and see how the manager is making progress toward larger, long-term goals. Annual reviews can clarify performance expectations across multiple functional areas and outline future priorities. The manager can then use these priorities to organize work and focus the council's feedback so that it supports improvements toward stated goals.

The Spirit of Continuous Improvement

Managers cannot succeed if council members behave irresponsibly. The manager and council periodically need to ask themselves, "How are we doing?" It is not the manager's job to police elected officials. The council must hold itself accountable for how it performs in relation to itself, the manager, the organization, and the community.[27] Council members and managers need to build trust and establish a culture in which all parties commit to respectfully govern and to strive for continuous improvement.

Strategy 8: The Manager and the Governing Body Work Together to Develop a Highly Effective Local Government

Setting Agendas for Council Meetings and Planning

Public managers are trained to lead and administer local governments, making them uniquely positioned to help council members understand the local government's challenges and strengths. Elected officials bring expectations, community values, and experience in local affairs to the local government. When managers and council members work together to adopt goals and establish priorities for the community, they provide a structure for establishing the council's meeting agendas. By regularly engaging elected officials in strategic planning, managers help councils maintain focus on major issues and strategic objectives rather than falling victim to micromanagement or the distraction of political opportunism, interest group demands, or trivial concerns.[28]

New Council Member Orientation

Managers and mayors or other veteran council members should have a process by which they welcome and orient new council members to the council.[29] New members of council need training and information to perform effectively as members of a governing board. Managers help new members learn how to be effective contributors to the council by encouraging them to participate and ask questions.

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27. Vaughn Mamlin Upshaw, *How Are We Doing? Manager and Board Evaluation* (UNC School of Government, 2014).

28. Wheeland, Palus, and Wood, "A Century of Municipal Reform in the United States: A Legacy of Success, Adaptation, and the Impulse to Improve," cited in full at note 3, above.

29. William A. Brown, "Board Development Practices and Competent Board Members: Implications for Performance," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* vol. 17, issue 3 (2007): 301–17.

Citizen Confidence in Local Government

How managers and council members behave encourages confidence in local government. As stated on page thirteen, above, local government is the most trusted level of government in the United States. Local elected officials, managers, and employees are known in their communities and the programs and services local government delivers are widely understood and valued. Managers help set a positive tone that demonstrates civility and respect when speaking publicly about the community, the council, local government, the manager, and employees. Creating a positive local government culture helps build public confidence and trust in government, elected officials, and public managers. However, the public's trust and confidence is fragile, and if the manager and council behave unethically, are at odds, or distracted from what people need, or if they fail to provide adequate services, citizens lose trust in local government.[30] Managers who model ethical behavior and promote quality services that produce positive public benefits will inspire trust in government and enhance the council's confidence in the manager.

Managers as Coaches

Keeping elected officials focused on operating as a high-performing council requires a manager's ongoing attention and effort. Managers should expect to remind mayors and council members of why it is beneficial to develop high-performing habits. Ways in which professional managers can assist elected officials in performing more effectively include:

1. Thinking and acting strategically in pursuit of a vision for the community's future;
2. Recognizing that local elected leaders share constituents with other jurisdictions at the local, state, and national levels;
3. Demonstrating teamwork on the council, within the organization, and in partnership with others in the community;
4. Mastering group decision-making skills and using these skills with the council and others;
5. Honoring the council-staff partnership by valuing council members' perspectives and recognizing employee contributions;
6. Allocating time and energy in four key areas—goal-setting retreats, study sessions, regular public hearings or meetings, and community relations;
7. Having and using clear rules and procedures for board or council meetings;
8. Obtaining objective feedback through systematic and valid reviews of resource use and progress toward objectives; and
9. Practicing continuous personal learning and leadership development as a professional and encouraging training and ongoing education for elected officials.

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30. XiaoHu Wang and Montgomery Wan Wart, "When Public Participation in Administration Leads to Trust: An Empirical Assessment of Managers' Perceptions," *Public Administration Review* vol. 67, issue 2 (2007): 265–78.

Summary

This bulletin explained the practical strategies public managers can use to establish effective relations with their elected council members. These eight strategies emphasize what managers can do to develop an effective, positive relationship with the elected governing board.

Public managers provide value when they bring administrative, technical, and strategic leadership to city and county governments. In council-manager governments, public managers work collaboratively with elected officials to lead and govern effectively. Managers use their understanding of local government to help elected officials promote community values, establish priorities for the future, and identify strategic issues. Managers also encourage elected officials to establish a culture of respect and to develop common expectations as they serve the community and assure that local government operates effectively.

In council-manager governments, managers and councils are jointly responsible for assuring that the local government serves the public while adhering to legal, ethical, and administrative standards. Managers and elected officials are more successful in serving their communities when people are well informed and operate according to agreements. Managers foster positive procedures by working with councils to develop good operating principles, codes of ethics, and standards for conduct.

Public managers are a bridge between the council and local government employees. The manager walks a line, helping council members achieve their political and policy goals on one side, and helping employees focus on organizational priorities on the other. The manager risks being seen by employees as an ex-officio member of the council and risks being seen by the council as aligned with traditional government agendas. Managers set a positive tone by treating all members of the council and employees with respect and demonstrating how employees' activities align with the council's priorities.

As newly elected officials join the council, the manager and veteran council members encourage productive relations by helping orient new members and explaining how the council-manager form of government works. New members benefit from understanding the role of the manager in serving the board majority, and the manager benefits from having an opportunity to demonstrate fidelity to the new council.

Public managers support council success when they help members clarify expectations and set goals around which to organize local government resources, administrative systems, and functions. Similarly, council members enable managers to be more effective when they recognize the manager's role in administering local government activities. When managers and councils commit to developing effective working relationships, they enable council-manager governments to provide high-quality service to citizens and communities.