

# Practices for Effective Local Government Leadership

*ICMA delivers the latest research in the 14 core areas critical for effective local government leadership and management.*

ICMA University is the premier resource for local government leadership and management training. Our programs are designed to advance your career, enrich your community, and contribute to your professional fulfillment. ICMA's online workshops and programs bring the latest research from leading experts to your office. Our conferences and in-person workshops allow you to network with colleagues and exchange ideas. All ICMA University programs are drawn from the 14 core competencies that members have determined are essential to local government leadership and management.

ICMA's professional development programs encourage local government professionals to think in terms of leading the organization and not just managing the organization. Leadership is engaging with and inspiring others to participate in developing, achieving, articulating, and embodying a shared set of values, shared sense of purpose, and shared vision of the desired community outcome. Leadership requires professionals who are highly interpersonally competent as well as self-aware.

ICMA also recognizes the leadership role of local government managers in creating and maintaining resilient and livable communities. Through the responsible stewardship of public resources, our communities will retain the economic, environmental, and social capital needed to prosper for future generations.



## 1. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY

Being fair, honest, and ethical in all personal and professional relationships and activities

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Fostering ethical behavior throughout the organization through exemplary personal actions
- Ensuring the decision-making model reflects integrity, honesty, and openness.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Conducting professional relationships and activities fairly, honestly, ethically, and in conformance with the ICMA Code of Ethics and the policies of your local government to maintain public confidence in the profession and local government
- Performing official and personal affairs in a manner that clearly conveys that you cannot be improperly influenced
- Fostering ethical behavior throughout the organization through staff training on administrative ethics and the ICMA Code of Ethics
- Holding staff accountable and instilling accountability into operations
- Communicating ethical standards and guidelines to others.

## 2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ensuring and managing community involvement in local government to support good decision making

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Building relationships among local, state, and federal elected and appointed officials to advocate for the community
- Ensuring robust public outreach in the policy-making process
- Respecting the governing body's role in setting direction and vision, and helping staff and the community understand the governing body's role in the democratic process
- Working to promote civility in public discourse
- Advocating for diverse viewpoints to be considered and helping the organization seek them out when they appear to be missing.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Understanding the perspectives of elected officials and being mindful of competing public values in policy recommendations
- Learning and respecting a community's history with various political, social, and economic issues
- Engaging with and understanding the viewpoints of key stakeholders in the community; committing to ongoing communication about expectations, decisions, and outcomes
- Understanding emerging technologies that are designed to promote open dialogue between local government and constituents
- Employing a range of engagement, positive communication, and conflict resolution methods.

## 3. EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Creating an environment of involvement, respect, and connection of diverse ideas, backgrounds, and talent throughout the organization and the community

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Authentically bringing everyone, including traditionally excluded individuals and groups, into processes, activities, and decision making
- Taking a proactive approach to service delivery and decision making that accounts for underlying differences in opportunities, burdens, and needs, in order to equitably improve the quality of life for all.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this content area are:

- Driving measures, goals, and plans around diversity, equity, and inclusion within your organization and community; communicating the vision for why and how achieving these goals will improve the organization and service delivery
- Understanding and championing sustainable support mechanisms such as affinity groups, mentoring programs, and cultural celebrations
- Educating the organization on common behaviors that advance diversity and inclusion efforts and address implicit biases
- Being aware of and acknowledging culturally significant events and holy days for employees and community members
- Creating opportunities for employees and community members to learn about each other's cultural backgrounds, lives, and interests; building relationships through increased understanding.

## 4. STAFF EFFECTIVENESS

Taking responsibility for the development, performance, and success of employees throughout the organization

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Energizing the team to reach a higher level of performance
- Providing the team with a sense of direction and purpose, and balancing the big picture framework with day-to-day operations
- Prioritizing collaboration and efforts that create a shared sense of success
- Being a role model and demonstrating behavior expected by others
- Developing an environment where staff are encouraged to learn new skills and try new ideas
- Developing meaningful connections with people at all levels of the organization
- Facilitating teamwork.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Setting clear expectations for the organization and work groups
- Creating an empowering work environment that encourages responsibility and decision making at all organizational levels
- Delegating: assigning responsibility to others and relying on staff
- Coaching and mentoring: providing direction, support, and feedback to enable others to meet their full potential
- Conducting effective performance evaluations, reviewing success and opportunities for achievement of goals and work objectives, providing constructive feedback, and identifying others' developmental needs and available ways to address those needs
- Creating a positive atmosphere where interactions are based in respect and professionalism.

## 5. PERSONAL RESILIENCY AND DEVELOPMENT

Demonstrating a commitment to a balanced life through ongoing self-renewal and development in order to increase personal capacity

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Modeling healthy work habits to your employees
- Modeling a healthy lifestyle to your employees
- Actively encouraging a personal and professional growth and development mindset throughout the organization
- Seeking and providing support when career setbacks occur.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Periodically establishing personal development goals

- Successfully integrating work and personal responsibilities; periodically assessing yourself and seeking input from trusted others on their assessment of your work-life balance or integration
- Continually practicing mindfulness of your stress levels
- Identifying areas where you would like to gain knowledge or skills and developing a plan to acquire those skills and knowledge.

## 6. STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Defining and communicating a vision and leveraging all resources and tools to achieve it

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Creating, conveying, and instilling a unified vision and purpose by illustrating and providing examples of what the future will look like
- Fostering a safe place to take risks and initiative; serving as an example to others by applying lessons learned to future initiatives, decision making, and risk taking
- Examining the full scope of factors that influence an issue, determining calculated risks, and developing and using relationships and interpersonal skills to build consensus
- Implementing integrated solutions to complex problems that address the needs of all stakeholders
- Creating new and innovative strategies to deal with rapid change by assessing the environment, synthesizing strategies and plans, ensuring organizational direction and alignment, generating excitement in the workforce, and celebrating new ideas
- Thinking and acting to instill a culture of continuous improvement; moving the organization forward through consistent examination of methods and integration of new and innovative business trends
- Demonstrating high interpersonal competence and educating yourself on fundamental concepts such as self-awareness, judgment, emotions, power, resistance to change, and trust.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Sharing, supporting, and advocating the organization's mission and vision by developing and communicating the vision to staff and others
- Creating an environment through coaching that encourages others to address complex problems using a strategic approach
- Providing resources and training to support creative innovation and problem-solving and seeking opportunities for improvement as well as new initiatives.

## 7. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Developing a plan of action that brings the community together, provides clarity of purpose and priorities, and guides the organization's actions in achieving its goals and objectives

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Ensuring the organization is focused on the core mission, plans are implemented, and resources are available to achieve the plan's goals and objectives.
- Ensuring that the social responsibility of the organization is well understood and forms part of the planning process
- Making sure the plan ties all parts of the organization together and that everyone sees themselves in the plan and is invested in the plan
- Making sure that the planning process is highly participative, involves all levels of the organization, has strong support from the elected officials and the community, and coalesces everyone around the plan
- Building an integrated planning system that begins with the community and flows to corporate, operational, and individual plans. Plan examples include short- and long-term financial, human resource and workforce, enterprise-wide technology, capital improvement and asset management, and community.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Carrying out the planning process incorporating the needs of all stakeholders, including input from the community, elected officials, and staff
- Completing an environmental scan and assessment of organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats including major economic, social, and competitive factors
- Developing a vision and mission for the organization that are aspirational and reflect the organization's social responsibility
- Ensuring that organizational values are incorporated into strategy and plans at all levels
- Determining goals and key strategic objectives and indicators
- Completing a strategic planning document
- Implementing the strategic plan
- Assessing the results of the planning effort through data collection and measurement and benchmarking of performance
- Ensuring necessary improvements to processes and systems so that attainment of goals and objectives is possible.

## 8. POLICY FACILITATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Engaging with elected officials and other community stakeholders to create and execute policies that achieve common goals and objectives

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Assessing the environment to determine the best approach or style for championing a project to success
- Maintaining perspective and focus on both short- and long-term outcomes
- Listening to identify core interests and build cooperation and consensus among and within diverse groups
- Helping diverse groups identify common goals and act effectively to achieve them
- Energizing a group: acting as a stimulus for group action
- Demonstrating courage and taking responsibility for advancing the policy discussion
- Knowing when to lead others and when to follow the lead of others
- Accepting and implementing elected officials' decisions that run counter to your recommendations
- Being politically savvy: recognizing and navigating relationships to influence and achieve positive results
- Understanding the political environment and the impact of decision making on diverse groups.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Helping elected officials develop a policy agenda that can be implemented effectively and that serves the best interests of the community
- Understanding the policy cycle, including problem definition, data gathering, development and analysis of alternatives, and ranking and recommendations
- Communicating sound information and recommendations
- Developing fact sheets, issue briefs, and other materials to provide information to decision makers and other stakeholders
- Respecting the role and authority relationships between elected and appointed officials
- Recognizing interdependent relationships and multiple causes of community issues
- Anticipating the consequences of policy decisions and their link to strategy
- Acting as a neutral party in the resolution of policy disputes; using mediation and negotiation techniques
- Identifying core initiatives, long-term trends, and policy issues to support and enhance the success of local government
- Participating in national, state, provincial, regional, and local policy discussions.

## 9. COMMUNITY AND RESIDENT SERVICE

Discerning community needs and providing responsive, equitable services

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Convening, encouraging, and ensuring that all facets of the community are represented and have physical or technological access to engage in and be informed about community discussions and issues
- Celebrating participation and engagement of the community
- Building a culture of transparency throughout the organization
- Making difficult funding recommendations and building consensus when needed, taking service equity into consideration
- Understanding that different approaches are needed to account for different needs.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Adopting a variety of data collection methods to determine community and resident needs and to inform decision making
- Using technology to build an open and engaging relationship between residents and their government
- Employing various communication methods, including social media, to ensure transparency and to tell the story of local government services and performance
- Providing complete, accurate, and timely information.

## 10. SERVICE DELIVERY

Understanding the basic principles of service delivery, using strategic decision making and continuous improvement to serve the organization and community, and influencing the components and relationships between operational areas

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Championing and supporting comprehensive plans and quality standards for service delivery and efficiency
- Anticipating the probability and impact of external influences on the organization, community, and individual service levels; initiating change to harness positive impacts and mitigate negative impacts
- Identifying strategic decisions required to pivot current resources and policies to achieve a desired future state
- Holding managers and staff accountable for measuring performance, using data to improve services, sharing data with other communities, and using data to communicate with constituents and tell a story
- Building a culture that values high performance and continuous improvement.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Understanding the basic principles of service delivery in functional areas
- Systems planning: Understanding the processes by which functional and operational systems can impact the ability to grow jobs and improve the economy, to control cost of government, and to improve quality of life; recognizing that systems are interrelated and interdependent and must work in a coordinated fashion in order to maintain long-term community vitality
- Asking the right questions of functional experts to ascertain service delivery needs and corresponding solutions
- Understanding the roles and responsibilities of all levels of management and aligning those with the broader mission and vision of the organization
- Identifying the interconnectivity within the organization and with other levels of government—horizontal integration and collaboration—to create opportunities to improve service or efficiency
- Identifying, gathering, and reporting performance measures in a manner that is meaningful, understandable, and efficient; using data to lead and manage the organization and deliver results.

## 11. TECHNOLOGICAL LITERACY

Demonstrating an understanding of information technology and ensuring that it is incorporated appropriately in service delivery, information sharing, and public access

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Remaining future oriented to anticipate how new developments in technology can be applied to local government
- Being a change agent, role model, and advocate for technology innovation that improves the organization and community
- Engaging the users of technology in decision making about the tools they use to serve the community and accomplish tasks
- Sharing data and technology with other communities to improve delivery of service and, ultimately, quality of life.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Identifying the organization's technology needs and devising strategic plans to meet those needs
- Managing technology resources to maintain up-to-date systems, software, and infrastructure; establishing a business continuity plan
- Ensuring security of information technology systems
- Continually exploring work process and process improvements; automating only effective processes.

## 12. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND BUDGETING

Implementing long-term financial analysis and planning that integrates strategic planning and reflects a community's values and priorities; preparing and administering the budget

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Supporting transparency in financial planning and budget development by involving the community to identify goals and prioritize spending
- Building financial resiliency by analyzing risk, anticipating future trends and challenges, and planning for the unexpected
- Using the budget to tell a story and as a vehicle to connect with and inform the community
- Understanding the community and governing body's priorities and advancing them through the budget and short- and long-term financial planning and management
- Communicating and working collaboratively with departments and stakeholders throughout the budget process and through ongoing financial management
- Ensuring the governing body is well informed about its fiduciary responsibilities.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Implementing short- and long-term financial analysis and planning
- Preparing accurate and understandable capital and operating budgets
- Providing information for effective budget and financial planning decisions by elected officials and other stakeholders
- Administering the adopted budget and ensuring accountability for spending
- Taking responsibility for preventing fraud in the system
- Engaging in strategic planning to direct the development of goals and the budget document
- Engaging employees across the organization in strategic planning, budget development, and ongoing budget management
- Measuring performance and assessing the results of spending
- Understanding investments and best practices of government finance officers
- Interpreting financial information to assess the short- and long-term fiscal condition of the community, determine the cost-effectiveness of programs, and compare alternative strategies.

### 13. HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

Ensuring that the policies and procedures of the organization are applied consistently and fairly, and motivating and engaging the workforce to its highest potential

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Encouraging each employee to be focused on personal growth; proactively providing professional and leadership development opportunities for staff
- Modeling the organization's values
- Building a culture of trust and inclusiveness in which employees understand the big picture and how their positions fit within it
- Ensuring that hiring practices are open and transparent and that diversity goals are acted upon
- Actively engaging employees in the development of a high-performance organization
- Forecasting the needs of the workforce and institutionalizing succession planning.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Understanding the organization's policies and procedures, making sure that they remain current, and ensuring that they are applied consistently
- Understanding the collective bargaining process
- Keeping current on trends in human resources management
- Understanding employee and employer rights and responsibilities and applicable laws and regulations
- Providing for continuous education and improvement, including coaching, mentoring, and access to professional and leadership development
- Recruiting, retaining, and developing a talented workforce
- Aligning the organization's human capital with the strategic objectives of the governing body.

### 14. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

Effectively facilitating the flow of ideas, information, and understanding

**Leadership** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Articulating personal support for policies, programs, or ideas that advance organizational and community objectives
- Practicing emotional intelligence, including understanding and managing your own and others' emotions and harnessing emotions to apply them to tasks like thinking and problem solving
- Using verbal and nonverbal communication and cues to inspire and motivate
- Effectively communicating with elected officials
- Maintaining poise and composure while presenting in emotionally charged and crisis situations
- Understanding your environment; knowing when to engage and when not to engage
- Building a culture of transparency in the organization that facilitates effective information sharing across the entire organization and community
- Strategically supplementing the organization's communication tools to provide the most effective outreach opportunities.

**Management** dimensions that contribute to this core content area are:

- Clearly and articulately conveying a message to diverse audiences who have different levels of understanding of the content
- Selecting the most effective communication methods and using interesting and compelling tools to share information, including story telling
- Communicating and sharing information respectfully, credibly, and confidently
- Communicating complex material in a nontechnical way



- Anticipating things that can go wrong and preparing accordingly
- Demonstrating a solid grasp of the subject matter
- Understanding, appreciating, and interacting with persons from cultures or belief systems other than one's own
- Providing accurate information in a timely manner
- Training staff on how to appropriately and effectively communicate with various stakeholders, including traditional and social media, with one message and one voice, and in compliance with community protocols
- Preparing a crisis communication protocol
- Establishing positive working relationships with the media and other key information-sharing outlets
- Understanding and training staff on the importance of appropriate compliance with public records requests.