



Honorees, staff, and others attending a reception in 1979 during which African American city and county managers were recognized by the U.S. House of Representatives.

# COURAGE, SKILL, AND GOODWILL

**Help Tell the Story  
of the First Generation  
of African American City  
and County Managers**

A Legacy of Diversity  
in Leadership of Local  
Government

**Their story has remained  
largely untold... until now.**

# A PATH TO “A MORE PERFECT UNION”

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary in 2026, we reflect on our ongoing journey toward equality and justice for all Americans.

From 1968 to 1983, pioneering African American city and county managers (AACMs) were appointed to leadership positions across the country, writing an important yet overlooked part of this journey.



Manuel Deese being announced as Richmond's city manager in 1979.

## OUR MISSION

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA), aim to:

- Raise awareness of AACM contributions
- Inspire future generations
- Highlight this vital chapter in local government history and American democracy



Members of the Minority Executive Placement Program advisory committee in 1979

## SHOWCASING TRAILBLAZERS

Our comprehensive project includes:

### 1. Historical Research and Asset Digitization

- Researching 40+ communities where the first generation of AACMs worked
- Digitizing materials from archives and libraries

### 2. Interviews and Video Recordings

- Recording first-person accounts from surviving AACMs
- Gathering perspectives from family, colleagues, and officials

### 3. Contextual Asset Collection

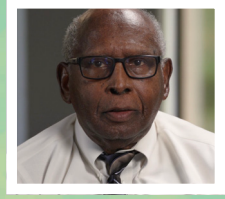
- Compiling archival documents, audio, and video

### 4. Production of Digital and Video Histories

- Creating an evergreen storytelling website
- Developing digital displays for institutions
- Producing community-specific short videos
- Creating a PBS-quality documentary series

## SPOTLIGHT: JAMES C. JOHNSON — A PIONEERING LEADER

In 1968, James C. Johnson became the first African American city manager in the United States when he was appointed by the city council of Compton, California, a significant milestone in the pursuit of equal representation in local government leadership.



Hear his compelling story in this video.



Watch the  
James C. Johnson video

## PROGRESS TO DATE

- Launched a comprehensive website ([icma.org/legacyofleadership](http://icma.org/legacyofleadership)) showcasing project findings and resources
- Video case study of James C. Johnson, the first African American city manager
- Historical articles in *Public Management* magazine
- Compiled an initial database of early AACMs

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. **Help spotlight the contributions** of under-represented groups in local government management.
2. **Support the development of inclusive leadership** that reflects the diversity of our cities and counties.
3. **Encourage new generations** to pursue careers in public service by showcasing diverse role models.
4. **Contribute to documenting and sharing stories** that might otherwise be lost to time.

Your support can make a lasting impact in several ways:

- Help fund research, video production, and digital resource development.
- Offer expertise, services, or resources to advance our mission.
- Collaborate with us to expand the reach and impact of this initiative.



Sherry Suttles (right) and her mother after Sherry was named city manager in Oberlin, OH.



From L-R: Carl Harness, Chief Human Services Administrator, County of Hillsborough, Tampa, FL, Marc Ott, ICMA CEO/ED, Sy Murray, former city manager and professor.

Contact us to discuss how you can contribute to this vital initiative and join us in honoring these trailblazers and shaping a more inclusive future in local government leadership.



**DONATE NOW**

For more information, please contact  
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**ICMA**

The International City/County Management Association  
[icma.org](http://icma.org)

**NFBPA**  
National Forum for Black Public Administrators

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