

Veterans Local Government Management Fellowship (VLGMF) Fellowship Project Guidance

Fellowship Project Guidance

ICMA and MTAC Talent Acquisition & Consulting, LLC encourage host local governments to design meaningful fellowship projects that can be completed within the 60-to-120-day Veterans Local Government Management Fellowship (VLGMF) placement period.

The fellowship project should serve as the fellow's primary applied learning experience, helping them understand how local government challenges are identified, researched, analyzed, communicated, and implemented. In addition to project work, host governments should expose fellows to the broader practice of local government, including organizational structure and culture, department operations, executive leadership, elected-body dynamics, budgeting, human resources, public works, public safety, community engagement, public meetings, ethics, and accountability.

Projects should be clearly scoped, achievable within the fellowship timeline, and produce a tangible work product that benefits the organization after the fellowship ends. Host governments should select projects that allow fellows to develop practical experience and leave with a concrete accomplishment they can highlight on a resume and discuss in future interviews.

The growing availability of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools allows fellows to complete certain project tasks more efficiently than under traditional fellowship models. When used appropriately and with human oversight, AI can accelerate activities such as research, policy comparisons, document review, data organization, financial scenario development, meeting summary preparation, communication materials, curriculum design, and presentation development. This enables host governments to assign projects that move from problem identification to a useful final product within a relatively short fellowship period.

Examples of appropriate fellowship projects include:

- Cost-benefit analyses and operational reviews
- Utility rate and fee studies
- Capital planning support
- Workforce and staffing analyses
- Customer service process improvements
- Policy research and guidance development
- Public communication and engagement tools
- Emergency management planning resources
- Police academy or workforce training curriculum development
- Special projects within the manager's office or management analyst functions

To ensure project success, host governments should provide reliable source materials, establish clear deliverables and timelines, require appropriate human and subject-matter expert review, and ensure the final product has practical value for the organization beyond the fellowship period.

Core standard for fellowship projects

A Veterans Local Government Management Fellowship (VLGMF) project should be:

Standard	Meaning for the host government
Important	The project should address a real local government need.
Bounded	The project should be narrow enough to move from problem definition to useful output within 60 to 120 days.
Artificial Intelligence (AI) assisted	AI may be used to accelerate research, drafting, analysis, organization, comparison, and communication.
Human-reviewed	A supervisor, department head, subject-matter expert, or other appropriate official should review the work before the organization relies on it.
Source-grounded	Findings and recommendations should connect to actual documents, data, laws, policies, interviews, budgets, or operational records.
Useful after the fellowship	The host government should receive a product it can use, adapt, continue, or implement after the fellow leaves.
Resume-ready	The project should give the fellow a concrete accomplishment they can name on a resume, describe in an interview, and use to demonstrate readiness for future local government positions.

Project selection guidance for host governments

Host governments should select projects that are meaningful but realistic. The best projects are not vague assignments such as "review operations" or "research best practices." The best projects have a clear management question, a defined audience, available source material, and a practical endpoint.

Host governments should select projects that provide organizational value while also giving the fellow a specific project accomplishment they can carry into future local government applications and interviews. Examples include:

Project type	Better project framing
Police academy curriculum	Develop or update a training module, curriculum outline, lesson plan sequence, or policy-aligned instructional package.
Cost-benefit analysis	Compare options for a specific program, capital project, staffing change, technology purchase, or service delivery model.
Utility fee analysis	Review current rates, compare peer communities, organize cost-recovery assumptions, and prepare fee options.
Capital planning	Organize project data, summarize facility or asset needs, compare prioritization criteria, and prepare planning materials.
Staffing analysis	Review workload, service demand, job duties, peer staffing patterns, and possible staffing options.
Customer service workflow	Analyze service request patterns, map process steps, identify bottlenecks, and recommend improvements.
Policy guidance	Compare policies, summarize legal or operational issues, draft guidance, and identify implementation steps.
Manager's office initiative	Support performance measurement, board or council briefing materials, organizational analysis, or special project development.

How Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used

Host governments should treat Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a project accelerator, not as a substitute for professional judgment.

AI may assist with:

AI-supported task	How it helps the project
Research organization	Helps the fellow organize large amounts of information quickly.
Policy comparison	Helps compare peer community practices, templates, and approaches.
Drafting	Helps create first drafts of summaries, outlines, curriculum materials, memos, guides, or presentations.
Data organization	Helps categorize, clean, summarize, or structure information for review.
Scenario development	Helps outline alternatives, assumptions, tradeoffs, and possible implementation paths.
Plain-language communication	Helps translate technical or internal information into clearer public-facing language.
Presentation preparation	Helps structure briefings, talking points, tables, and visual summaries.

Host governments should require fellows to treat AI-generated work as a starting point. Fellows should not treat AI-generated work as verified, final, or ready for use without human review.

Project review and validation

Host governments should build a simple review process into each project. The review process does not need to be burdensome, but it should be intentional.

The fellow should identify:

Review element	Practical question
Source grounding	What documents, data, laws, policies, interviews, budgets, or records support the work?
Verification and validation	What facts, assumptions, calculations, or claims did the fellow check?
Risk review	What legal, financial, labor, privacy, equity, operational, political, or public trust issues should the host government consider?
Human review	Who reviewed the work before the organization shared it or used it?
Limitations	What remains uncertain, incomplete, or dependent on future staff review?
Handoff	How can the host government continue, update, or implement the work after the fellowship ends?

This approach is consistent with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF), which organizes AI risk management around Govern, Map, Measure, and Manage. For fellowship projects that are AI integrated, host governments should set expectations for AI use, define the project purpose and risks, check the work, and manage risks before relying on the final product.

Realistic expectations by project length

Fellowship project window	Appropriate project expectation
60 days	Diagnostic review, policy scan, curriculum outline, fee scan, peer comparison, preliminary analysis, workflow map, or decision framework.
90 days	More complete analysis, draft curriculum package, fee recommendation, cost-benefit review, policy framework, operational improvement plan, or implementation roadmap.
120 days	Pilot-ready product, training package, dashboard prototype, implementation toolkit, full fee model, curriculum package, or operational improvement package.

Recommended host government approach

Host governments should manage fellowship projects through a clear sequence:

1. **Define the project tightly.** Identify the problem, decision, department owner, audience, and expected use.
2. **Identify available source material.** Provide budgets, policies, fee schedules, ordinances, plans, reports, training standards, interviews, or operational data.
3. **Clarify Artificial Intelligence (AI) boundaries.** Explain what tools the fellow may use and what information the fellow may not enter into AI systems.
4. **Use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to accelerate early work.** Allow the fellow to use AI for research organization, drafting, comparisons, summaries, and structure.
5. **Require human review.** Assign the appropriate supervisor, department head, finance staff, legal counsel, human resources staff, or subject-matter expert to review the work.
6. **Focus on a usable endpoint.** Structure the project so the organization receives something it can use, adapt, implement, or continue.
7. **Make the project resume-ready.** Structure the project so the fellow can name it, explain the problem it addressed, describe the work completed, and discuss how it prepared them for future local government positions.

Acronyms and key terms

Term	Definition
Veterans Local Government Management Fellowship (VLGMF)	A fellowship program designed to help transitioning service members enter local government management careers.
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Technology that can assist with drafting, summarizing, analyzing, organizing, comparing, or transforming information.
National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)	A federal agency within the United States Department of Commerce that develops standards, measurement guidance, and technology frameworks.
Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF)	A National Institute of Standards and Technology framework for helping organizations manage risks related to Artificial Intelligence.
National Institute of Standards and Technology Artificial Intelligence 600-1 (NIST AI 600-1)	A National Institute of Standards and Technology publication that applies the Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework to generative Artificial Intelligence.
Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI)	A type of Artificial Intelligence that can create or transform text, images, summaries, analysis, code, or other content based on user instructions.
Human-in-the-loop review	A process where a person reviews AI-assisted work before it is used or shared.
AI assurance	A structured process for confirming that AI-assisted work is reliable, appropriate, and ready for use.
Verification and validation	Checking whether information is accurate, sourced, complete, and useful for the intended purpose.
Source grounding	Connecting claims or recommendations to actual documents, data, laws, policies, interviews, or verified records.

References

- International City/County Management Association. (n.d.). Veterans Local Government Management Fellowship (VLGMF). <https://icma.org/veterans-local-government-management-fellowship-vlgmf>
- National Institute of Standards and Technology. (2023). Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0). U.S. Department of Commerce. <https://www.nist.gov/itl/ai-risk-management-framework>

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