



The Role of
Associations in
Strengthening
Local
Government

A Look at AMMAC

Asociación
de Municipios
de México, A.C.



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Please note: In the text municipality and local government are used interchangeably when referring to cities, towns, and villages. Local government does not refer to state government. The terms national, federal, and central refer to the highest level of government. The term state refers to regional levels of government within the federal system.

In Mexico, the political parties most active in local government are PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), PAN (National Action Party), and PRD (Party of Democratic Revolution). The parties are referred to in the text by their Spanish acronyms.



The forces of change are sweeping through the cities and towns of Mexico. The vehicle for that change is local government. Working together via their association, municipalities are creating a more supportive legal and regulatory environment and sharing information to improve management and service delivery. Increased revenue sharing for local government, skill building in financial management, and information sharing among municipalities are but a few areas that have been impacted and improved by the work of the local government association and its members.

INTRODUCTION

Local Government Worldwide

For centuries, many countries have maintained a centralized political system, whether military or civilian, democratic or authoritarian. In practice, control remained at the center and local governments served as arms of the state or pawns without a say in their destiny. Without financial resources, decision-making power, or a voice, what happened at the local level depended almost entirely on whim and political intrigue.

However, the last decade has witnessed a global trend toward democracy and the decentralization of authority. Local government is increasingly recognized for its potential contribution to the economic development and socio-political stability of a country. In the developing world and among countries in transition from the former Soviet bloc, dramatic decentralization during the last ten years has increased the autonomy and responsibility of local governments. Instilled with the opportunity to make decisions, local leaders with the political will and leadership capacity have moved their municipalities visibly forward in areas of management, citizen participation, and service delivery. These success stories, unfortunately, remain largely isolated, and there is much to do to enhance the skills of local elected and appointed officials so that local governments will be able to reach their full potential within a changing environment and better meet the needs of their communities.

Role of Local Government Associations

Local government associations play an important role in enhancing the ability of their members to continually hone and improve their skills. Associations provide a forum for information exchange, serve as a center for research in support of professional development, and serve as an advocate for members vis-à-vis other levels of government and relevant institutions. Local government associations can help define important governance issues and work to improve the image of local government with the public.

Local government reform and the establishment of local government associations have often come at a time of transition. In the United States, for example, the National League of Cities, the National Civic League, and the City Managers' Association (today known as ICMA, the International City/County Management Association) were all established between 1894 and 1924 when many American citizens were expressing their unwillingness to tolerate dysfunctional, often corrupt, local government and limited, ineffective services.

In many countries undergoing political reform or decentralization, the establishment or renewal of local government associations has taken place. Hopefully, these associations have the will and capacity to support local governments in their increasingly important roles. The Association of Mexican Municipalities (*Asociación de Municipios de México*) or AMMAC is an example of a new association that is standing up for local government and working to ensure that local officials will have the skills to meet the challenges involved in service delivery and improving the lives of citizens.



BACKGROUND

Colonial Inheritance and Revolution

Like many countries throughout Latin America, Mexico inherited its political and socioeconomic structures from a legacy of colonization. The strong central government of Mexico, then called New Spain, maintained control and answered directly to Spain as the most important colony. Mining and agricultural products produced fortunes that were exported to Europe. Throughout the country, political leaders were appointed by the king or his New World representatives. Independence was declared in Mexico on September 15, 1810, but the centralized political and economic system remained.

One hundred years later, a new generation of young leaders wanted to participate in the political system, which was closed and narrowly managed. Many social problems existed. The Mexican Revolution took place and eventually resulted in the establishment of the National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*), which later became the Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*). Through the full control and sharing of power within the political system clearly dominated by this one party, many years of stability ensued. Agreements made among politicians included prohibiting reelection to ensure that there would be space for many party members to have their turn in a position. With no real competition or balance of power, corruption was allowed to flourish and political stagnation took hold.

Traditional Politics and Local Government

Until recently, the roles of the mayor and the municipality in Mexican local governments were very limited. Cities were essentially the administrative arms of the state and were controlled politically by the governors. Mayors in Mexico were directly elected, as they have been since 1946. But because of the power of the PRI and its control over all levels of government and the economy, virtually all mayors—like governors, senators, and legislators—were from the PRI. An occasional opposition mayor was elected, but with virtually no impact on the system.

MEXICO AT A GLANCE

Governmental System
Federal Republic

Official Name
United States of Mexico
(*Estados Unidos Mexicanos*)

Population
Almost 102 million¹

Number of states
31; 1 federal district

Number of municipalities
2,429²

Nominal GDP
\$557 billion (est. 2000)³

GDP per capita
\$5,223 (est. 2000)



Furthermore, the legislative environment in Mexico left municipalities essentially powerless. In order to provide any service to the community, a municipality had to request permission from the state. Therefore, municipalities had to fight political battles for the right to serve the community. Municipalities' powers were also constrained by their lack of revenues: the miniscule revenues allocated to local government represented much less than 5 percent of all government spending in Mexico. The lack of possibility for reelection of mayors and other elected officials further weakened local government by removing local officials' incentive for doing a good job.

Without their own sources of revenue or decision-making power, municipalities depended on the central government for service provision. Mayors, although elected by the people, logically pledged their allegiance to the governing party (PRI) and the central government, which could dole out resources and ostensibly assign the next political post. Allegiance to the party, coupled with an inability to provide services without state permission and support, meant that municipalities provided services on an emergency and ad hoc basis.

The execution of this relationship between the federal government and municipalities actually served as the catalyst for the establishment of AMMAC.

Political Opening

In Mexico throughout the 1980s, more opposition party candidates were being elected at all levels of government. In 1989, the constituents of Baja California elected a non-PRI governor, which got international attention. This changing composition created a space—albeit a small one—for dialogue and initiated a new dynamic. A new balance of power was emerging.⁵

In 1992, the newly elected mayor of Tijuana read about another mayor who used his political connections and turned to the federal government to request tens of millions of *pesos*, which he was quickly granted. After seeing this in the press, the mayor of Tijuana, like any reasonable local government leader, decided that he too should seek out funds for his community. But when he, a member of an opposition party, turned to the federal government, not only did he not receive any money, he could not even get anyone to enter into a dialogue about the needs of his community.

Reflecting on this situation, the first-time mayor realized that not only was political bias at the root of this problem, but also the entire decision-making system was flawed because decisions directly pertaining to local government were being made elsewhere with no input from those impacted. And this was not happening just in his city, but throughout Mexico.

In order to address this situation, the newly elected mayor realized that one voice would not be enough.

The Founding of AMMAC

At a political event, the mayor discussed this issue with his colleagues. The mayor of Mazatlan, who was finishing his term, told of an exchange with local government associations in Germany in which he participated. This information planted the idea about the importance of a *horizontal, inclusive local government association*. For nearly a year, the new mayor and his staff researched various local government associations from Spain, Chile, Canada, and the United States, among others, to find out how they are organized, what they do, and who participates. At the same time, the mayor of Tijuana personally visited many mayors throughout the country from his own party to discuss the importance of a local government association devoted to serving municipalities.

Surprisingly, most mayors were skeptical. Why did they need this type of organization? They knew best for their community, what did they need to learn? When officials from this opposition party learned that the association would not be politically affiliated and would be open to municipalities led by mayors from other parties, they were concerned. They thought that the association might interfere and diminish their party's political position and power. But, preoccupied with other political issues, they did not obstruct the process. The mayor persisted, and eventually a small group of mayors bought into his vision.

AMMAC FACTS

Established

1994 with 18 members

Number of Members

239 municipalities representing 45 percent of the population

Number of Staff

22 and will increase to 24 in 2002

Legal Status

Civil organization, nonprofit

National Conferences

Eight in 2002

Member Benefits

When municipality joins, all staff have discount to AMMAC events, programs, and materials

Welcome packet contains extensive information about AMMAC and other timely information

Newsletter free of charge, each member municipality receives 30 for distribution

Access to member-only information and research

Access to information services and legal representation

Invitations to all AMMAC events

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The association Local Governments for Autonomous Local Government (*Ayuntamientos por el Municipio Libre*)⁶ was established by a group of about 18 newly elected mayors from an opposition party. In Puebla, on March 20, 1994, with another 50 mayors in attendance, the founding members established their constitution, which emphasized their support for all local governments and encouraged others to work to fulfill the promises of federalism with municipalities as a key governing unit.

Establishing a Strong Base

Even though the founders of AMMAC were from one political party, they insisted on being a *nonpartisan association* so that their mission and focus would be clear: they aspired to be an organization that could speak on behalf of all local governments, provide a forum for sharing experiences, and influence national-level decisions regarding municipal issues. Creating an organization that was nonpartisan, open to expansion, and focused on horizontal collaboration provided a new kind of legitimacy in Mexico.

The founders decided that *members of the association would be the municipality as a whole*—not individual mayors or council members. (Council members are not directly elected; instead, seats are granted based on the proportion of party votes in the mayoral election.) This was a crucial decision for various reasons. First, due to term limits in Mexico, if the association had mayors as its members, the exchange of information and development would not reach its full potential due to the short three-year term an individual mayor is in office. Second, because the entire municipality is a member, even if the mayor is from one political party he or she has to get approval of the entire council in order

to commit the municipality to membership in AMMAC and to allocate funds for dues. Therefore, council members of different parties make the decision to join, which encourages pluralism.

The *membership fee structure* was another area that AMMAC had to design carefully to properly support the association and simultaneously work within the legal and social structure in Mexico. One concern was how to justify the use of government funds to support a nongovernmental association. AMMAC's founders addressed this concern by explaining that because the association helps the municipality to carry out its responsibilities more effectively, the membership fee is not a misuse of public funds.

AMMAC's founders committed themselves to the concept of autonomous local government (*municipio libre*) as their first objective. In 1996, the founders participated in an exchange with the Arizona League of Cities and Towns (a state-level local government association in the United States), which ICMA organized at AMMAC's request. With the Arizona League and ICMA, AMMAC's founders addressed issues of long-term association development and sustainability and the role an association can play in support of local government. They also realized that if the goal of an autonomous local government were reached, the association would seem to have no reason to exist, according to its name. So, that year the name was changed to the Association of Mexican Municipalities (*Asociación de Municipios de México*) to reflect the association's broader mission of supporting local government on an ongoing basis.

AMMAC – The Early Years

During the first two to three years of operation, AMMAC had up to 22 member municipalities and an executive director with little additional staff. The focus in the early years was making sure that the association would be sustainable.

AMMAC initially provided a minimal number of services with an emphasis on information exchange. Each year

the association held an annual conference with 40–80 participants from member local governments and others. In addition, AMMAC held various training sessions on topics of interest to members including financial management, public works, and improving tax collection practices.

Lobbying efforts with the federal government began primarily through contacts with friendly congressional representatives who sought out

research or opinions from AMMAC on local government issues. Unlike their counterparts in the United States and other countries, congressional representatives in Mexico do not have staff, so it is natural that they contact their colleagues for assistance. AMMAC went to its board and member municipalities' staff to put together the information needed. In this way, although direct lobbying was not taking place, AMMAC was gathering experience and increasing its reputation as a key resource on municipal issues. While there were important issues that AMMAC needed to address with the federal government—especially financial issues and the responsibilities of local government—the moment was not yet ripe for attaining concrete results. But the existence of the association, discussions among members, and support to decision makers regarding municipal issues meant that when an opportunity arose AMMAC would be prepared to emerge as an organization speaking on behalf of local government.

Another important area of activity during the first years was establishing AMMAC within international local government circles. Contacts with international organizations and local government associations in other countries gave AMMAC an opportunity to learn about various programs and successful approaches to association management that it could use in its own work. Such contacts also allowed the association to call attention to the important changes occurring in Mexican local government. Contacts made early on remain an important component of AMMAC's activities today.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN ICMA AND AMMAC

ICMA met the founders of AMMAC soon after the association came into existence, through an environmental program focused on local governments in Mexico, sponsored by USAID. In 1996 at AMMAC's request, ICMA arranged for AMMAC representatives to visit Arizona and the Arizona League of Cities and Towns (a state-level organization affiliated with ICMA). The visit gave AMMAC an opportunity to consider the roles and responsibilities of a local government association vis-à-vis its members and the whole local government sector.

Since that time ICMA and AMMAC have continued to collaborate on various levels. ICMA and AMMAC signed a formal affiliation agreement in 1999, committing to sharing information and working together on programs that are mutually beneficial, supporting the missions of each organization, and encouraging exchange among local government in the United States and Mexico. Due to its history and years of experience, ICMA has naturally served as a model from which AMMAC adapts ideas for use in Mexico. For example, the recent ICMA experience working with the private sector and corporate sponsors has been useful to AMMAC in initiating a similar program. The performance measurement program that ICMA coordinates with cities throughout the United States has served as another useful example and led to the establishment of a Performance Measurement Center, which is currently working with 15 municipalities in Mexico. ICMA and AMMAC have also shared ideas regarding speakers and topics for meetings and conferences. AMMAC has provided input to ICMA regarding the municipal sector in Mexico, which has been helpful to different programs in support of local government. In addition, ICMA has provided ongoing, informal feedback to AMMAC on organizational and membership issues.

ICMA and AMMAC anticipate collaborating far into the future as affiliates supporting local government and the improvement of the quality of life in U.S. and Mexican communities.

AMMAC TODAY



Journalists interview Jose Antonio Telleria Beltran, Mayor of Pachuca, and Vice President of AMMAC at an association event.

To better understand the important progress made by AMMAC during the past eight years, this case study explores two areas: first, how the association has contributed, and continues to contribute, to the development of the entire local government sector in Mexico through such activities as advocacy, training, and information sharing; and second, what steps AMMAC has taken to improve its organizational capacity so that the association not only meets current needs, but also is as sustainable and well rounded as possible so that it can continue to meet member needs over the long term. Finally, looking toward the future, there will be a brief discussion of strategic areas that AMMAC needs to address to further strengthen the association as it continues its important work.

From the very beginning, the president and board of AMMAC insisted that the association have its own revenues. In addition to membership dues, from the start all participants in any event paid their own way as well. AMMAC has always operated as an organization that seeks to add value, and municipalities must pay for that value added.

In the early years, since there were a limited number of members, there could only be a limited number of staff and events. That may have served the association well by giving it some time to consolidate and focus on its mission. The numbers of staff, activities, and members have since grown more or less at the same rate. Diversification of activities over time has been accompanied by diversification of funding. Today, the association relies not only on membership dues, but also augments its resources through the services and programs that it provides.

ROLE OF AMMAC IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR

Advocacy: Local Government Rights

ISSUE

Local governments dispersed throughout a country are an important component of a strong democratic system when they have the necessary rights and means to serve their citizens. To function optimally, the political framework, legislation, and programs of the national or state governments must be supportive. While not all local governments face the same issues all of the time, local governments often have issues in common vis-à-vis state or national governments. A strong local government association brings together local governments, identifies issues, conducts research, and often develops a policy platform and represents local government as a whole before state and national government.

RESULTS

- 2002: Establishment of the Federalism Forum for Municipal Development—an agreement between the federal government and three local government associations serving as a forum to discuss legislation and issues related to municipalities.
- 1999: Constitutional Reform—Article 115—municipalities granted full responsibility for the delivery of many services previously delegated at will by the state.
- 1998: Financial Reform—large increase in transfers to municipalities resulting in a greater share of public expenditures.

Although only about 240 municipalities are current members of AMMAC, the association's achievements in finance and local government management in relation to the federal government benefit the whole local government sector because changes in legislation or the development of programs in

support of local government apply to all municipalities. AMMAC stands for improving the ability to manage and the quality of services in municipalities through its advocacy work.

Prior to the establishment of AMMAC, any influence that a municipality had on the national government (which even within the federal system is responsible for laws pertaining to local government) was through personal contact or through one's party. The federal government maintains the general legal framework, and for years the states were delegated authority to decide which services each individual municipality was allowed to provide. Very few municipalities could actually achieve contact or influence, so the vast majority were left with no means of communication with the federal government, which meant that municipalities were not included in decisions related to their own management.

AMMAC became a potential means for municipalities to communicate with the federal government and influence decisions about municipal management. When it was founded, AMMAC immediately put the following issues on its agenda:

- Additional financial resources for local government
- Clear assignment of responsibilities (rather than delegation from the state)
- Reelection for mayors and council members
- Ability to have own local taxes.

To move forward, AMMAC had to more clearly define these issues, and certain changes had to take place within the national government for a favorable atmosphere to emerge.

2002: A Seat at the Table. The most recent result of AMMAC's advocacy activities is nothing less than a historic event. In early 2002, the federal government joined together with all municipalities of Mexico to form the Federalism Forum for Municipal Development (*Mesa de Federalismo para el Desarrollo Municipal*). In Mexico, this is the first time that the federal government has established a means for open dialogue with municipalities about the laws, issues, and programs that are decided at the federal level but have a direct impact on local government. Now, not only can AMMAC and other local government associations lobby the federal government on specific issues, but they also have a formal mechanism to influence the decisions of government.

President Vicente Fox declared his support for this formal mechanism, the Forum, which will deal with legislative and administrative issues. He stated, "Certainly the presence of the municipalities strengthens this National Political Agreement (*Acuerdo Político Nacional*), and it gives integrity to the process of democratic transition and also represents an indispensable contribution to the change process that the country is experiencing. With their presence we guarantee that the change extends to all spheres of society."⁷

To achieve this goal of open dialogue, prior to the signing of the agreement, AMMAC joined with two other local government associations to create the National Conference of the Mexican Municipality (*Conferencia Nacional del Municipio Mexicano*), because together these associations represent essentially all local governments in Mexico. In establishing the National Political Agreement, President Fox preferred to work with all municipalities through their associations.

KEY POINTS ABOUT AMMAC IN THE AREA OF ADVOCACY

- Association established early, even before political environment ready for intensive lobbying efforts on behalf of local government.
- Horizontal cooperation among local governments supported by members from different political parties.
- Committee of professionals organized from member cities to give important technical input in support of lobbying effort.
- Cooperation with other local government associations established to facilitate advocacy in areas of joint concern to the benefit of all local government.

Possible Areas of Improvement

- Develop a mechanism to encourage more diversity among committees researching issues on the advocacy agenda.
- Provide other opportunities in addition to the annual conference for members to raise potential issues.
- Assign staff other than the executive director to committees to facilitate communication between the committee and the association.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, there are two major associations representing the concerns of cities and elected officials: the National League of Cities (www.nlc.org) and the U.S. Conference of Mayors (www.usmayors.org). In addition, there are a number of professional associations, including:

- The International City/County Management Association, whose members are the chief appointed officials in city and county government (icma.org)
- The Government Finance Officers Association, whose members are finance officers at the local, state, and federal level of government (www.gfoa.org)
- The American Planning Association, whose members are urban planners working in the public and private sector (www.planning.org)
- The American Public Works Association, whose members work on infrastructure and transportation issues (www.apwa.net)
- The Solid Waste Association of North America, whose members work on solid waste management issues in the public and private sector (www.swana.org).

The two other local government associations included in the National Conference of the Mexican Municipality were founded in response to the establishment of AMMAC. If AMMAC had not been established, it is likely that there still would not be local government associations in Mexico. The other two associations differ significantly from AMMAC. One of the associations was established by the political party PRI and automatically includes as members all mayors who are affiliated with that party.

The second is likewise affiliated with a party, PRD, and all affiliated mayors are automatically included in its membership. These associations are both managed by their respective party and struggle to define themselves. Often mayors are unaware that they are members, and the associations do not have a functioning dues structure. Their financial support comes from the party. Nevertheless, because these associations officially represent local governments, their presence was required to form the National Conference of the Mexican Municipality. And their inclusion may benefit AMMAC because it will make the dialogue with the federal government more inclusive and, therefore, more legitimate.

AMMAC has consistently worked to lobby the federal government on various issues, some of which are detailed below. Each step contributed to the signing of the National Political Agreement with the federal government, which took place almost exactly eight years to the day after AMMAC was founded.

1998: Financial Reform. All local governments agreed that they did not receive enough funds and that this was a serious problem to address with the federal government. In 1997, there was a political window of opportunity. For the first time ever, Congress was divided among parties in the lower house. This meant that there was room for negotiation on issues, allowing AMMAC to step forward and dramatically impact the situation of local governments in Mexico.

Among the newly elected members of Congress were five to ten allies who were former AMMAC members and consultants (primarily PAN, but also PRI and PRD). They were able to influence the national budget because in Mexico the lower house controls the budget. In this situation the executive office, which had traditionally dictated the budget even though the lower house was technically in control, no longer was able to impose its will regarding the budget. This created a political opportunity and room for dialogue.

In 1998, the first significant financial reform benefiting cities was enacted. This reform included two new funds or means of revenue sharing, which would be managed directly by the municipalities. The first had no restriction on spending categories and supplemented the municipality's general fund, and the second was a significant increase in social development funds, which had to be used for infrastructure (broadly defined).

Financial transfers to all municipalities, which had been traditionally only about 3 percent of annual public expenditure, increased to 10–12 percent on average over a period of a few years. Even in the first year the increase amounted to 6–7 percent of public expenditure. For municipalities this was a very big increase. In financial terms, this change most benefited the 80 largest cities in Mexico, many of which were members of AMMAC. The increase in overall funds, and the fact that a portion transferred was not earmarked, greatly increased the decision-making power of the municipalities.

The lobbying effort contributing to these achievements, which AMMAC launched in 1998, was conducted by the executive director with the support of a technical committee made up of treasurers from AMMAC cities. AMMAC worked to prove that not only were more funds needed, but also that it was essential for local governments to receive transfers that they could decide how to use. The committee of treasurers provided real-life examples to demonstrate why local governments needed more autonomy with regard to how funds are spent. In addition to receptive PAN politicians, support from PRI and PRD members of AMMAC made this effort more broad based. All municipalities shared an interest in increased transfers and in more decision-making responsibility regarding expenditures.

The increase in transfers might have gone through, pushed only by political forces with the increased proportion of PAN and PRD officials at all levels of government, but the increase in decision-making power granted to local government was a direct result of AMMAC's research and advocacy activities.

1999: Constitutional Reform. In 1999, an important constitutional reform changed the administrative system of governance. Until this point, each municipal responsibility had to be granted from the state individually, and the state had the right to take away services from the municipality at any time. With the 1999 constitutional reform, all municipalities received responsibility for an entire list of specific services (see the sidebar on page 13). And if a municipality decides that it is not capable of providing the service, the council now has the right to vote and grant that service to the state. This change was clearly a shift in power and a new sharing of responsibilities, increasing the role of the municipality.

Politically, this achievement was difficult because it was necessary for

two-thirds of the lower house (there is no executive veto) as well as a majority of states to vote in favor. Therefore, instituting this change required a great deal of political will from various levels of government.

To achieve this constitutional reform, AMMAC launched an advocacy campaign that rallied city clerks and mayors to help by lobbying members of Congress. In Mexico, Congress is controlled by parties, so AMMAC members of various parties had to contribute to this effort in order to have an impact.

AMMAC and its members are very proud of this achievement, which benefits all municipalities in Mexico. After this historic change took place, AMMAC began offering assistance to municipalities to initiate the services for which they are now responsible.

MAYORS' COMMENTS

"Another important point we owe not only to AMMAC, but also to ICMA is the community policing project... We have been working on this project for eight months. We received assistance and training from Salinas, California after meeting them in San Antonio last year at an ICMA meeting.... This community policing project... has resulted in an extraordinary success and a trust on the part of our citizens.... Community policing is on foot, close to the action, they intermingle with the youth, they give talks and have a constant presence... they are in permanent contact with the citizens."

MAYOR LUIS ANTONIO ZAPATA GUERRERO, CORREGIDORA, QUERETARO



AMMAC mayors meeting with Francisco Gil Diaz, the Secretary of the Treasury, to request taxing authority on behalf of all Mexican municipalities.

2002: Pending Issues. AMMAC attempted in the 1999 reform to include other important issues that the association is fighting for: the consecutive reelection of mayors and the right of municipalities to have more of their own local taxes (own-source revenue). Both initiatives were turned down in the 1999 reform and remain on AMMAC's advocacy agenda.

Reelection is a controversial issue with many facets that AMMAC members and others debate. Despite the controversy, this issue stays on the agenda because there is agreement that reelection of mayors should not be prohibited by law. Without consecutive reelection, the mayor's motivation to provide good services and prove that he or she should be reelected is absent, which makes it very difficult to encourage improvements in local government management.

Today, many states do allow municipalities to have some own-source revenue, but the amount is not significant. The issue of local taxes is complicated, because the Mexican Constitution prohibits the same authority from raising revenue, and within municipal government the executive, mayor, and council are not considered separate.

AMMAC continues to use working groups from member municipalities as needed to analyze and contribute to advocacy efforts on these and other issues. Working group members are volunteers and are usually members of the board. AMMAC does not specifically recruit working group members from outside the board, but if people from other municipalities hear about the committee and want to contribute, they are allowed to join.

During the annual conference, AMMAC members can bring up other issues that may be important for AMMAC's advocacy.

Capacity Building: Stronger Local Government

ISSUE

Local governments, like all organizations, need to continuously increase the capacity and improve the skills of their officials and staff to be as effective as possible. In countries where decentralization has given new responsibilities to local government, the need for updates and capacity building is perhaps even greater. Local government associations often play a role in providing training directly to their members, collaborating with educational institutions to provide training, or identifying relevant training opportunities to recommend to members. Associations may also prepare materials such as books that can assist local government officials to build new skills and knowledge.

RESULTS

- AMMAC holds workshops and seminars annually on crucial topics.
- AMMAC offers additional training opportunities based on past experience as requested.
- Bookstore includes more than 200 titles from AMMAC and other institutions that produce information useful to local governments; members receive a discount on all publications.
- Members have international study tour opportunities to learn from other cities.

Today, AMMAC provides an array of services that give members the opportunity to increase their capacity to better manage and provide services to citizens. AMMAC offers learning opportunities to its members through workshops, seminars, and conferences and through books, manuals, and local government documents.

AMMAC has consistently offered a series of *workshops and seminars* for members each year. Members pay a registration fee to participate in the workshop or seminar, in addition to their travel expenses. Topics are based on participants' interests and represent core areas of activities of AMMAC.

The materials prepared for each seminar or workshop are published by AMMAC and offered for sale through AMMAC's Municipal Bookstore. Selling the materials to others who have not attended the events provides an additional source of income to AMMAC.

To supplement these offerings, AMMAC offers all past workshops and seminars on demand for a fee. Municipalities or groups can request that AMMAC present a seminar for them specifically, and they will take responsibility for recruiting participants and paying the fee and expenses. When AMMAC presents a seminar, it is guaranteed payment of the fee, which fully covers AMMAC's costs in providing the seminar. This allows AMMAC to decrease its financial risk because the association does not have to offer more seminars on its own calendar, guessing which ones might be the most popular and might bring in enough participant fees to cover costs.

AMMAC looks for opportunities to connect with or build upon other local government programs. For example, the Model Planning Institute workshop is based on the example of Ciudad Juarez, which won the National Municipal Award for this program.

The AMMAC *Municipal Bookstore* offers almost 200 titles related to local government development published by various organizations, including AMMAC, the International Union of Local Authorities, and the Center for Research and Economic Studies, among others. AMMAC provides a distribution and marketing service for the organizations with which it collaborates. Topics of materials in the bookstore include, for example, Article 115 of the Constitution, which grants local governments their rights and responsibilities, financial management, development planning, and financial resources for local governments. Members pay a significantly lower amount than nonmembers for the publications.

Each year AMMAC offers several *international opportunities* for members to travel and meet with local governments in other countries. AMMAC also maintains contact with international organizations including many local government associations. Study tours are managed like other programs: AMMAC coordinates them, but participants pay their way, and there is a discount for members. There is always a cancellation policy so that if not enough people register, the study tour is cancelled. To date, AMMAC has not asked participants to complete evaluations after study tours; it would be beneficial to ask for feedback to help prepare other programs.

AMMAC SEMINARS/ WORKSHOPS 2002

AMMAC offers its members training opportunities each year. For the first time, in 2002, all prescheduled workshops and seminars are directly related to specific programs offered to members. AMMAC now offers other workshops and seminars on a fee basis to make them available upon request, when and where they are needed. Participants pay their own expenses. Up to 100 people attend seminars, and workshops are limited to 35 participants. Scheduled events for 2002 are:

- Municipal Public Finance Seminar, Resources of the Fiscal Package 2002 for States and Municipalities, February 8
- Seminar on Performance Measurement, February 26-27
- Modernization of Municipal Norms Seminar, March 8-9
- Transparency and Code of Ethics Workshop, April 29
- Strengthening of Own-Source Revenue Seminar, May 24
- Model for Quality Government Workshop, June 28
- Lobbying Seminar, About the Income Law and Cadastre Value Tables, August 1-2
- Model for Efficient Administration Workshop, Date TBD
- Model Government Quality Workshop, September 16
- Model Planning Institute Workshop, October 4-5

AMMAC CONFERENCES 2002

The AMMAC board decides on the topics of the conferences and the locations at the beginning of the year. Often, board members host a conference in their city and assist in organizing it. Participants pay a fee to attend, which covers the cost of presenting the conference, and they pay for their own travel, hotel, and meals. The focus of the conferences is information exchange, and municipal representatives as well as other experts present in plenary and break-out sessions. Conference attendance averages 100-200, with up to 600 people.

- First National Conference on Economic Development, April 17-20
- Fourth Conference on Public Works and Services, May 29-31
- International Municipal Conference, June 17-21
- Sixth National Conference on Lobbying & Sixth National Social Welfare (DIF) Conference, July 24-26
- Fourth National Conference on Public Safety, August 22-24
- Fourth National Conference on Public Finance, September 26-28
- Second National Conference on Social Communication and Public Relations, October
- Ninth Annual Assembly of AMMAC, November

Curitiba, Brazil, has been a popular study tour destination due to the municipality's well-managed programs. The next trip will be the fourth time the study tour is offered.

Based on past visits, Merida and Puebla are seriously considering implementing a transportation system similar to that found in Curitiba. Spain is another popular study tour destination because AMMAC collaborates with the Spanish local government association.

To further encourage international opportunities for learning, AMMAC is also working to assist municipalities that are interested in finding a sister city relationship by producing a manual about managing this type of relationship.

Networking: Learning from Each Other

ISSUE

In the absence of a strong local government association that brings together members from throughout the country, local governments tend to benefit only from the experiences of their closest neighbors. When a specific problem arises, the mayor may call on a neighboring mayor to ask for advice, but probably not a mayor in another state or province. So, if nearby colleagues have not happened to address that specific problem, no advice is forthcoming. A local government association serves as a communication mechanism for its members and increases members' ability to get advice from colleagues who face similar issues. Members benefit by tapping into a whole network of colleagues and information through the association. Events provide an opportunity for networking in person. Information collected and disseminated by the association helps to decrease the learning curve of new officials.

RESULTS

- Up to eight national conferences each year with more than 1,000 total participants.
- More than 1,700 local government documents collected from member municipalities and others available for reference by members; an average of four requests per day fulfilled.
- Monthly newsletter since 1998; distributed to more than 6,000 people.
- Association Web site since 1995, which includes all programs, member information, etc.; some parts open, others for members only.

AMMAC works hard to obtain a comprehensive document set from each member in addition to examples of good documents from other local governments and organizations. In the new member information package sent out upon dues payment, AMMAC asks new members to submit their model documents. Later, the staff follows up to collect information that is missing. The resulting collection of more than 1,700 documents serves as an *information resource* that is shared free of charge with members. Representatives from member local governments can call or e-mail AMMAC and request copies of any of the documents. While the association does not keep track of requests, the assistant director responsible for this service estimates that staff replies to about four inquiries per day. Those documents that the staff deems most valuable to municipalities are scanned and made available electronically for easier transfer. Most documents are copied and mailed upon request. Whenever a municipality has a specific issue or needs examples of a specific form, AMMAC sends a variety of examples so that the recipients can decide which ones can best be adapted to their situation.

Documents include budgets, development plans, regulations on various topics, and municipal directories. AMMAC works to collect a similar set of documents from all member municipalities, which it intends to put together in a directory and publish as a Municipal Almanac. The purpose of the Almanac will be to easily present the members of AMMAC with some detail. Information to be collected about each member includes the municipal shield, the council structure, directory, political affiliation, management period, geographical characteristics, main economic activities, financial data, and sister cities.

Since it was founded, AMMAC has consistently held an annual conference, which has grown from 50–60 to hundreds of participants. Each year the number of *conferences* has grown, and this year there are seven more conferences on key topics selected by the executive board. Many conference topics have become an annual tradition for AMMAC, as noted in the sidebar.

The primary goal of the conferences is education based on information sharing. Local government representatives who share their success stories and problem solving approaches are always among the speakers and panelists. In addition, conferences provide a networking opportunity for all participants. The program is developed and speakers are selected primarily by the executive director with input from the board. Speakers are not compensated for their presentations.

AMMAC advertises conferences via the association newsletter. In addition, AMMAC sends about 1,000 invitations directly by fax and e-mail to all members and to others on the mailing list (mainly mayors of larger cities).

Conference registrants must pay a deposit, which is refundable only up to 15 days before a conference. This helps protect AMMAC financially and makes logistical arrangements easier.

AMMAC provides a certificate to all participants. This year participants must show that they attended a certain percentage of presentations in order to receive the certificate. In the past participants sometimes attended only inaugural sessions and then left to tour or attend to other issues, which posed a problem both in terms of the certificate's value and in terms of offending the person who volunteered and prepared to present. It is hoped the new attendance system will mitigate this problem.

MAYORS' COMMENTS

"Well, the opportunity to improve our skills, to take advantage of successful experiences, and to be able to work in an easier way without having to reinvent things that are already established. Another important point is that through AMMAC, we have been able to modernize technically and take advantage of the assistance that different municipalities have given us. Fundamentally (a change can be seen) in the provision of public services, which have improved. The standard for public works is one that is sustainable... Another important experience... is the Municipal Planning Institute that also comes from AMMAC assistance. The management of the treasury and the administration of municipal resources... is one of the other successful experiences. For me the most relevant (municipalities from which) we have learned the most are Merida, Ciudad Juarez, Leon, Aguascalientes."

MAYOR LUIS ANTONIO ZAPATA GUERRERO, CORREGIDORA, QUERETARO

ARTICLE 115 OF THE MEXICAN CONSTITUTION

1999 Reform Services Declared Exclusive Municipal Rights

Potable water and sewers

Public lighting

Solid waste management

Markets

Slaughterhouses

Cemetery

Streets, parks, and gardens

Public safety and transit

Others as determined by the state legislatures according to the local socio-economic and territorial conditions, and administrative and financial capacity of the municipalities



AMMAC prepares a monthly newsletter, which is distributed to more than 6,000 people. The newsletter keeps members informed about association activities and developments in the local government sector.



AMMAC has had a web site since 1995. The Web site has grown with the association and more and more services are offered on-line. www.ammac.org.mx.

Because conferences and other activities have expanded, AMMAC now has a full-time events coordinator focused on conferences with two people assisting. The increased participation over the years shows that members have an interest in the conference topics. Because members value them, conferences make an important contribution to AMMAC's bottom line.

Another means of information sharing and networking is the AMMAC newsletter, *Informa*, which was established in 1998. The newsletter always includes a list of board members and key association staff as well as association contact information. The newsletter's content was originally limited mainly to facts about the association but now features substantive information about key association activities, provides consistent information in advance about all types of events, and gives room to members to include information about their municipalities or to share opinions on local government topics.

The newsletter is produced in-house by staff using basic software. The association uses an outside printer, but mailing and the mailing list are handled by the AMMAC staff. When printing is complete, all available staff members help the one person responsible for the newsletter, which is distributed to more than 6,000 people. Each member municipality receives multiple copies for distribution. Soon, the newsletter will also be available on the AMMAC Web site. On the back of the newsletter there is also a form for joining the mailing list.

AMMAC was an Internet pioneer in Mexico, launching its Web site in 1995. Today, the association continues to improve its Web site by moving to a database-driven format. While members sometimes hesitate to use the Internet and access is not yet universal, AMMAC executives and staff see it as a part of their mission to encourage municipalities to get online because Internet access is to their benefit—especially in the long term. In addition to the Web site, which includes much association and member-only information, AMMAC works to apply the Internet in other areas as much as possible including the Municipal Bookstore, a new initiative regarding municipal service bids, and an information system with other organizations that serves local governments.

Legal Framework: Know Your Rights

ISSUE

Local government leadership and staff need to know how the legal framework impacts the operation of local government. In a situation where decentralization is taking place and laws are changing, it is a constant challenge to figure out new regulations and what impact they will have on local government. And even if laws are not changing, newly elected officials need to be educated on the legal framework and implementation so that they can carry out their duties effectively. A local government association can benefit its members by keeping up to date on legal issues, providing interpretation as needed, and sharing that information with members so that they do not have to individually seek out legal information that is often hard to find.

RESULTS

- Program devoted to helping members apply Article 115.
- Financial transfer summaries prepared for members.
- Catalog of Federal Funding Opportunities for Members (AROFIS) prepared and distributed annually.

As discussed above under advocacy, Article 115 of the Mexican Constitution was modified in 1999 to grant municipalities a list of responsibilities that were previously restricted. Municipalities were given two years to adjust their regulations in order to adopt their new rights. Many local governments even today have not taken full advantage of this important legal change. Therefore, AMMAC has given priority to helping member local governments take full advantage of their new rights. For example, AMMAC prepared a publication about Article 115 and its implications. The current project and seminar entitled “Modernization of Municipal Norms” are based on AMMAC’s research among members, which revealed a very low level of application of new rights. The seminar will highlight the possibilities for improvement under Article 115 based on the research, and if there is interest, in the future AMMAC will offer more specific workshops.

The financial transfer system (or revenue sharing) is another area in which members need assistance. Because the transfer formulas are not very transparent, local governments often do not know how much revenue from transfers they should expect in a given year, which makes it very difficult to verify that they have received what they are due. To assist members, at the beginning of the year AMMAC staff prepares a general statement of transfers to be expected based on the formulas and provides that information to each member. If requested, AMMAC assists with further details regarding transfers including additional workshops. The association offers this direct assistance as a member benefit paid for through dues.

An area in which new members often need support is their relationship with various federal agencies and ministries. Although Mexico has taken some steps toward decentralization, the country remains highly centralized, and municipalities find it necessary to travel and meet with federal officials from time to time on various issues. Because some AMMAC staff are lawyers, they can assist municipalities by representing them, which decreases the number of times that municipal representatives have to travel to Mexico City. AMMAC gives this type of assistance about four to six times a month as requested by members. To date, the number of requests has been reasonable, so they are addressed as they arise.



Participants of the seventh National Lobbying Conference sponsored by AMMAC, work together to discuss current issues.



In June 2002, AMMAC hosted an international meeting of local government associations and representatives, which included the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) and the World Federation of United Cities (FMCU).

AMMAC also provides information on municipal rights through its seminars, conferences, and publications. The seminars on Municipal Public Finance and Strengthening of Own-Source Revenue and the conferences on Lobbying and Public Finance seek to assist municipalities in understanding and acting on their rights under the law and discussing other areas that need improvement to further support local government. To increase members' awareness of federal funding opportunities, AMMAC has put together a *catalog of federally funded programs* for which members may be able to apply. This year's catalog is the second edition and describes nearly 180 different programs that are offered by the federal government and geared toward municipalities. This catalog is now an annual product of AMMAC.

AMMAC is continuously adding and updating programs that will support municipalities in exercising their legal rights.

Media Relations and Public Outreach

ISSUE

Local government may be overlooked by the media. Often, local government has a poor image, and the public is left unaware of local government successes. And, in an environment where local government has long operated as an administrative arm with little or no power, it is difficult for the public at large and the local officials themselves to adjust to the new reality by feeling proud of whatever successes they achieve. Local government associations have an opportunity to represent the whole sector and work to positively represent local government as an important institution. Outreach to the media with stories about the association and local government achievements can contribute to positive coverage of local government. Local government associations can also work to share success stories of individual local governments with the media and encourage their members to publicize their good work.

RESULTS

- Full-time person devoted to communications starting in 2002.
- Media list developed; press monitored for pertinent articles.
- Room for member input in newsletter.

AMMAC's work in this area is evolving. When the staff was very small in the first several years, AMMAC did not seek out media attention, but the staff responded to any media inquiries and consulted the board as needed to ensure that coverage was accurate. External communications were handled primarily by the executive director. As noted above, meetings with international organizations and participation in events increased visibility of the emergence of the Mexican local government sector among specialized local government audiences.

In Mexico, as in most countries, the media have not traditionally been interested in local government issues. But, with the recent establishment of the Federalism Forum (see above under Advocacy) and the interest expressed by the federal government, it is expected that the media will increase their attention to municipal issues.

With a growth in activities and staff, this year AMMAC is devoting more staff attention to outreach and the media. The communications person, who is also responsible for the newsletter, has a *media list* that includes television, radio, and the press, and has contacts with key journalists. Currently, the association sends out about two press releases per month. When a press release is distributed, AMMAC staff follow up with as many as 20 periodicals to get copies of the articles that are printed.

AMMAC staff monitor 3–5 daily papers to look for coverage that pertains to AMMAC or its members. AMMAC also invites journalists to all events and keeps a sign-in list to facilitate looking for resulting coverage and to update the media list.

In the newsletter, AMMAC shares information about local government successes. Member municipalities are welcome to share information with AMMAC to be included in the newsletter, and about five local governments provide information to AMMAC each month. Information about events or local government successes or activities is included as appropriate. To date there has not been a problem of members submitting too much or inappropriate information.

In addition to more formal outreach, AMMAC represents local government as an important entity at meetings and other events with government officials and international organizations.

By focusing more on publicizing the role of local government this year and in the future, AMMAC can help make the public and other institutions aware of the role of local government, its successes, what it needs from the community, and what it needs to be structurally more effective.

Evolution of Local Government

ISSUE

To be as effective and efficient as possible, local government must continually evolve and improve in its ability to govern, provide services, and meet the needs of the community. The future of local government, what its roles and responsibilities are, and how it will fulfill them, are topics that warrant ongoing discussion and dialogue. Local government associations can bring members together on these issues to ensure that the members are working to meet today's needs, and are also looking toward the future and determining how they can best continue to evolve and improve. If the membership takes a proactive position with the assistance of the association, there is less risk that other levels of government or other institutions will dictate how local government is to operate.

RESULTS

AMMAC has worked during the past eight years to increase the capacity of local governments in Mexico. As the officials from AMMAC member municipalities become improved managers and policy makers for their communities, they will be better able to identify specific issues of concern and with the assistance of AMMAC create positions to meet their needs. As AMMAC continues to grow and consolidate its mission and activities, mechanisms for collecting member input and addressing their needs should continue to evolve and improve. For example, the new Federalism Forum for Municipal Development will provide a framework for first-time discussion on a wide range of programs and regulations impacting local government.

MAYORS' COMMENTS

"Well look, AMMAC has been useful for us as a way of helping to improve the management of government through conferences and training programs for all public officials. AMMAC has helped us in this type of relationship with other levels of government, which has allowed us to clarify some fiscal issues, issues about support, and the possibilities of other programs.... Evidently by improving the work of each public servant they are able to work with higher efficiency and... we can better serve our population. For example, the training in the area of the finance department (treasury)—today we have a program through the Internet that allows every citizen to see any income and expenditure made by the municipal government. In fact, one can even see the scanned documents where you can see a check, who signed it, what it was for, and for what amount, etc.... Without a doubt we have had a lot of contact with Queretero, Atizapan, and Guadalajara."

MAYOR JOSE ANTONIO TELLERIA BELTRAN, PACHUCA DE SOTO, HIDALGO



VIABILITY OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Governance, Leadership, and Management

ISSUE

Effective governance and management are critical to the success of any organization. A local government association that is functioning optimally has a clear organizational mission and goals and a board of directors that executes its roles with the highest regard for serving members, and is nonpartisan so that all local governments can be well represented without bias.

RESULTS

The founding members of AMMAC in 1994 immediately declared four broad goals, and in 1996 they added one more. These stated goals have been the operating principles of the organization ever since:

- Achieve autonomous local government (municipio libre)
- Promote the development and strengthening of all municipalities in Mexico
- Encourage democratic life at the municipal level
- Promote respect for human rights at the municipal level
- Establish solidarity and subsidiarity (provision of government services by the lowest level of government able to meet the need) as guiding principles of government.

AMMAC has been nonpartisan from the beginning. Although the founding members of AMMAC were from one political party, they understood that for the association to truly represent and work on behalf of municipalities it had to be independent and not affiliated with any political party. So, from the very first meeting establishing the association, AMMAC declared itself nonpartisan and has worked hard to include members from the three most important political parties.

In eight years, AMMAC has had only two executive directors, and they have been responsible for the hiring of association staff. In a country where newly elected officials often dismiss all key staff to bring in their own colleagues, it is a testament to the professionalism and seriousness of AMMAC that the executive director and staff remain, even though the president and board change each year.

The members of the board of directors of AMMAC are selected by the incoming president, who is elected at the annual conference. The membership of AMMAC votes to approve the list of board members. Each year the new president has added more and more board members to the list. Even so, because not every member has to participate in each monthly meeting, the growing number of members has not yet been an impediment. However, as AMMAC considers its programmatic and organizational strategies, it needs to review how the board is appointed and how it functions.

Board meetings take place in Mexico City near the airport to facilitate participation. Board members pay their own way to attend the meeting. Generally, 50 percent of the board

has attended; this year the new board tends to attend at a rate of 75 percent. There is always a written agenda for the meeting. Sometimes the staff prepares materials for review, such as with the performance measurement project.

At monthly board meetings, board members raise issues that need discussion, and ongoing reporting takes place. At the end of the year the executive director and staff prepare an annual report including budget information and present it to the board. After the board approves the annual report, the president presents it at AMMAC's annual conference.

Generally, the executive director and the board have agreed upon an annual workplan at the beginning of the year, guided by the association's goals. The next annual workplan is approved by the outgoing president, who has benefited from a year of experience with the association. The incoming president then follows the approved workplan, which provides for some continuity.

The workplan process seems to have served AMMAC well. But because the association is growing and increasing its level of responsibility with members and other institutions, the executive director and the board recognize the need to formalize their strategic planning process and to clearly define their vision for AMMAC's future. To facilitate the process of developing a sound strategy, AMMAC has hired outside facilitators to work with the board. This strategy will further solidify AMMAC's role and position.

With regard to nonpartisan management and the future, although AMMAC accepts members from all parties, the association did essentially emerge from one party (PAN). And

the board to date has chosen executive directors consistent with that party. In Mexico, to be involved with local government as a politician it is essential to align with a party, which makes it difficult for local government professionals to be nonpolitical. However, as the demand for professionalism in local government increases, nonpolitical professionals are likely to emerge.

The current executive director has recognized the importance of formalizing the way that the executive director is selected to open up the possibility that in the future the best person for the job, regardless of party affiliation, can be hired. This is very forward-thinking and further demonstrates AMMAC's desire to continue to play an important role as a horizontally organized institution that serves as a voice for all local government.

Programs: Plan, Execute, Evaluate

ISSUE

Through years of experience and hard work, associations reach a level at which they are able to use participant input to plan, execute, and evaluate programs to meet their needs. The annual work plan details what actions the association will take to advance its mission and goals. Needs assessment, outreach, and two-way communication with members contribute to program development.

RESULTS

With only eight years of activity, AMMAC has been gradually increasing its ability to gather and use participant input. As the number of programs and activities increase, mechanisms to formalize input have been put in place. For example, in the area of programs, AMMAC has begun



At the AMMAC Annual Assembly in November 2001, Mr. Fernando Garza (second from right), Mayor of Guadalajara, is elected President of AMMAC for the next year.

gathering participant input through surveys, using the input collected to prepare a seminar or workshop, giving participants details about member input collected at the seminar or workshop to demonstrate the importance of a given topic, following up with assistance or further training as needed, documenting the materials presented, and using the participant input as the basis of future research. AMMAC is following this formula for all its programs, which include a workshop or seminar as listed in the Capacity Building: Stronger Local Government section.

At this point, surveys conducted in support of the programs tend to be factual and technical. It does not appear that AMMAC collects any subjective information or opinions from members in a formal way. Because there are about 100 member municipalities that participate the most frequently and consistently, their input (both formal and informal) tends to influence the annual workplan and activities offered.

This year, AMMAC is introducing evaluations at the conclusion of workshops, seminars, and conferences. These evaluations will focus on a specific event, but they will provide an excellent opportunity for members and nonmembers to provide feedback to the association that may be relevant in other areas.

Beyond the surveys and evaluations, much of the input from members is either informal or comes to AMMAC staff through the board, which is not officially asked to gather member input.

Participant input is an area in which AMMAC can make improvements during the next few years that would benefit the association in its goal setting, workplan development, member satisfaction, and future member recruitment. If AMMAC can catalog input from satisfied members and channel comments and recommendations for improvement into its planning, the association's success will be even greater than it has been to date.

Human Resource Management

ISSUE

A crucial indication of an association's ability to move from being a responsive, informal organization to one that is proactive and forward-moving is its ability to capitalize on its human resources. A staff with the professional background and experience to deliver high quality services to members is essential. Excellent human resource management requires documented and accurate personnel procedures, job descriptions, and office procedures. Employees and member volunteers should have regular, professional development opportunities, and there should be an annual employee evaluation to encourage continued performance improvement.

RESULTS

AMMAC's human resource management has benefited from having an active, professional executive director since its founding. The first director served three years; the second has been in the position since 1997. Even

while the board has changed, there has been consistency in the management of the association.

Like any small organization, AMMAC has been evolving with regard to overall human resource management and organizational development. In the early years, with very few staff members, everyone worked on everything. At this point, as the staff grows beyond 20 members, the executive director has recognized the need to improve AMMAC's overall organizational and human resource management. It is no longer possible to manage all staff and activities with the existing policies.

The current organizational chart (at left) includes necessary activities (each activity does not necessarily represent a separate staff person).

There are now 22 staff members, and this will grow to 24 full-time people soon. Presently, not all staff members have job descriptions, annual raises are given across the board and are not merit based, professional development opportunities exist but on an ad hoc

basis, and performance is evaluated on a project basis rather than on a staff basis. Even with these limitations in internal management, the AMMAC staff seems to be professional and well qualified. Many staff members have worked with local government in the past, and all professional staff have a university education. Staff members are enthusiastic about the support they provide to local government. They claim that they see improvements in local government and realize that the work they are doing is having an important impact at this juncture in Mexican history.

While most staff seem to generally understand their roles, AMMAC should develop job descriptions for all staff members reflecting their role and position in the organization and their decision-making authority so that they will be more confident in fulfilling those roles. To encourage staff to do their best work, AMMAC should consider awarding merit-based annual increases. Job descriptions should reflect AMMAC's organizational chart.

AMMAC currently offers professional development opportunities to staff, but the distribution of the opportunities appears somewhat subjective. The executive director makes decisions about professional development as staff approach him. Administrative staff have never requested training. While this procedure has worked to date, as AMMAC sets its organizational standards, it may be fairer to set an upper limit for professional development and inform all staff that they have a right to use the fund. Of course, training opportunities should relate to job duties. And where AMMAC makes significant investment in staff skills, the association should perhaps establish a requirement of a certain period of service to ensure that it benefits from the investment in professional development.

Executive Director
Technical Coordination of the Board
Coordination of Public Relations
International Relations
General Assistance

Assistant Director Administration
Dues
Administration
Promotion
Messenger
Reception
Cleaning

Assistant Director Projects
Project Coordination
Training Coordination
Database and Information
Statistics
Archives
General and Training Assistance

Assistant Director Operations
Membership
Coordination
Private Sector Affiliates
Events/Conferences
Bajio (Regional)
Operation & Assistance
Municipal Purchasing
Registration
General Assistance

The need to focus on human resources and organizational development is well recognized by AMMAC, and there is an emphasis on these issues this year. The new assistant director for operations is tasked with helping the executive director make improvements that will benefit AMMAC organizationally. AMMAC expects to make many organizational improvements in the next 12 months. During this phase of growth and further definition of goals and objectives, it will be crucial for AMMAC to formalize its human resource management.

Communicating with Members

ISSUE

Member communication and participation is an essential part of a well-functioning association. A membership organization that is driven only by its board and executive directors without broad member input is missing crucial information. Ideally, association staff and leadership are consistently friendly and respectful of members. Members should feel welcome at the association headquarters and in all activities. There should also be annual member award programs that recognize excellence. Two-way communication via a variety of means should take place on a regular basis, and members should be able to participate on committees and provide input.

RESULTS

As reflected in the topics discussed above, AMMAC is generally good at information exchange with members. However, the association does tend to be managed primarily by the board of directors and the executive director. Because the board is large and changes each year, this gives some diversity of input. And members do voice their opinion during the annual



Meeting of local government officials affiliated with AMMAC at study tour to Curitiba, Brazil, which is well-known for its progressive and efficient management practices.

conference. An example of member input was in the area of a best practices database. Members expressed interest in this area, staff listened, and the result was the performance measurement project launched this year to document best practices in a systematic and formal way. After designing the project, staff went back to the board and members for their approval of the new project.

When AMMAC considers revising its governing statutes, direct elections for all board members on rotating terms that last more than a year might be a way to encourage more member input. Likewise, greater use of committees on various issues and committee membership by more nonboard members would also yield more member input.

AMMAC does not present an award program at this time, instead focusing its energies on other program areas. However, as more media attention is focused on local government, and professional and efficient management emerges in more municipalities, AMMAC may want to consider expanding activities to increase media

exposure to positive local government examples and reward municipalities that are performing well.

A very important membership issue is that about one-third of the mayors representing member municipalities are from political parties other than PAN. Even though AMMAC is nonpartisan, due to the extremely politicized nature of parties in Mexico, there is still a certain hesitation about appearing to be affiliated with mayors of other parties. However, the quality of AMMAC programs has won over many. An interesting example is one mayor who is the regional president of PRI. He joined AMMAC and was invited to become a board member. He said that officially he could not be a member of the board due to appearances, but he still participates in board meetings unofficially. This is evidence of further change taking place. Hopefully, as AMMAC's reputation for being nonpartisan becomes stronger, more non-PAN members will join and be willing to publicly associate with AMMAC.

Member Meetings

ISSUE

To bring members together on a regular basis, a well-planned and executed annual meeting is a crucial tool of a local government association. Also, ongoing orientation programs to bring newly elected members up to date are an important service.

RESULTS

AMMAC's annual meeting or conference has taken place each year. It focuses on a well-developed educational program that reflects member concerns as expressed by the board. Many other conferences on specific topics are repeated from year to year due to their popularity. For more details on AMMAC member meetings please see the Networking and Capacity Building sections above.

Advocacy Program

ISSUE

The ability of the association to advocate on the behalf of local governments is an essential function that should be continuously improved. An association needs to have and use an established process for developing positions and arguments that includes both member input and good policy research. The association should ensure that members are aware of and ready to advocate on key issues as needed. Also, the association needs to have mechanisms in place to get members involved.

RESULTS

As detailed in the section above, Advocacy: Local Government Rights, advocacy has been a key activity and AMMAC has achieved some great successes. The recent establishment

of the Forum with the federal government will undoubtedly lead to other achievements in this area.

The approach to advocacy and lobbying to date has been managed essentially by the executive director with input from the president and board. AMMAC has effectively used technical assistance as needed by bringing in treasurers, mayors, and clerks to assist in analysis and lobbying. This approach has worked well, and AMMAC's voice in addressing issues of municipal concern has contributed positively to the current state of local government in Mexico.

Beyond the key players at the association, however, it appears that there is little use of or opportunity for the general membership to identify or participate in the advocacy efforts. Besides the executive director, there is no staff person devoted to advocacy. Because AMMAC generally has strong communication tools through the newsletter, a system for inviting members to events, and the Web site, it would be relatively easy to implement an ongoing advocacy program.

Strategically, AMMAC has offered more member services as it has grown and increased its staff resources. And some of the programs being developed relate to or support advocacy issues, such as helping members take full advantage of financial transfers that they are due and developing model norms and regulations to help members to implement Article 115 of the Constitution, which grants municipalities responsibility for many services.

As AMMAC works through its first long-term strategic planning process, it should address the role of advocacy in the association's future.

Financial Viability

ISSUE

In order to be successful, it is critical that associations address financial viability. Without well-developed, stable sources of revenues—both member dues and other sources—the association will not be effective. Membership should be as broad as possible, and the association should undertake other entrepreneurial activities that support its mission and goals. And in order to maintain the respect and goodwill of members and the integrity of the association, administration of funds must be transparent and accountable.

RESULTS

The founding members of AMMAC realized that to make the association viable, it absolutely had to have a reliable income. They set member dues, and municipalities interested in joining the association had to pay. Dues were set in three tiers, so that larger cities carry more of the financial burden. Small municipalities pay a nominal amount to make it feasible for them to participate. Dues are collected on a monthly basis.

In Mexico, local government elections are held every three years. Each state has elections at a different time according to state regulations. From the beginning, AMMAC founders and staff realized that membership recruitment would have to be a high priority because the three-year term and no consecutive reelection meant that new mayors would have to be continually informed about the value of membership in AMMAC.

To meet the challenge of recruitment and financial viability, AMMAC had a staff person dedicated to member recruitment whose salary was partially based on new members (when the new member paid its dues, the recruiter received the value of one month's dues). While this worked well, it became too expensive for the association; the position and its salary structure are currently under review and will be revised.

As another recruitment method, many of AMMAC's professional staff members conduct visits to candidates and recently elected mayors to explain the benefits of membership in AMMAC. AMMAC also relies upon the assistance of current members to encourage other nearby municipalities to join AMMAC. For example, Monterrey has helped recruit others in its area.

During the first three years of operation, the association relied only on member dues. But, during the past five years, the executive director and staff, working under the guidance of the board, have diversified revenues. As AMMAC has developed its programmatic activities, it has worked hard to ensure that new activities are financially sound. As opportunities have arisen for new programs or application of ideas, AMMAC has been entrepreneurial and at the same time cautious to ensure that its activities would not be overly detrimental to the financial state of the association if they failed.

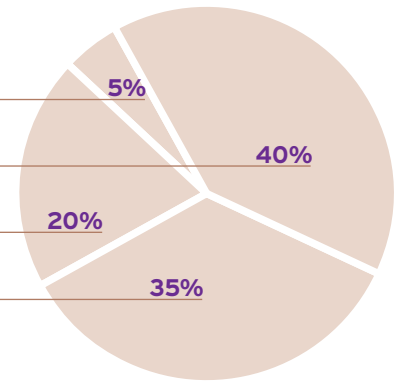
BREAKDOWN OF REVENUES

Contracts/Grants/Other

Member Dues

Private Sector Affiliates

Services



The Private Sector Affiliate program, which is entering its third year of operation, brings resources to AMMAC. In return, affiliates receive access to municipalities through advertisements in the newsletter, booths at relevant AMMAC events, listing on the Web site as an affiliate, and other means. There are three tiers of affiliations for corporations, each with specific benefits. The first year there were 25 companies participating, and there were 40 the second year. AMMAC provides access and information to members, but does not endorse any of the affiliates, which should be relevant to local government. This program is a way to increase income, provide information to members, and create a link between the private and public sector. If carefully managed, an affiliate program does not damage the association's reputation as being unbiased.

This mix of dues, services, private sector affiliates, and other sources provides very strong support for AMMAC's financial viability. AMMAC's staffing also reflects the need for ongoing recruitment of members to ensure funding, services that members and other municipalities value, and other sources of financing that are consistent with the association's objectives. In Mexico enough

local governments are able and willing to pay for membership and for services to support the association. Now, as other sources of revenue become available and member dues are further leveraged, AMMAC has an opportunity to provide better and more complex services.

AMMAC is also striving to ensure that its operations are absolutely transparent. The annual budget, income, and expenditures are posted on the association Web site. Annual reports to the board, which are also presented at the annual conference, include a budget report. And, although it is not required to do so by law, AMMAC began having annual audits in 2001 to further ensure its transparency and sound financial management. The board is not currently requiring these audits, but the executive director believes that it is better to be prepared. He believes that as AMMAC grows, it must become more and more professional in order to maintain and enhance both its programs and reputation.

AMMAC should be congratulated on its success in becoming a viable organization without donor assistance or national government influence or assistance.



EMERGING ISSUES IN ASSOCIATION DEVELOPMENT

AMMAC has passed through its start-up phase as an association. And it may be said that AMMAC has completed its primary advocacy phase in the sense that there is now room for dialogue about municipal issues in Mexico. The question is what the next phase will entail. Crucial issues and decisions facing AMMAC this year and in the near future include:

- Finalization and adoption of the strategic plan and further specification of association goals in terms of membership—should AMMAC continue to include primarily large cities and remain a stable association with about 240 members, or should it strive to broadly expand membership; what are the primary goals that members want the association to meet over the next several years? (This work is underway in 2002.)
- How to further improve organizationally and ensure that human resources are used to their fullest potential in meeting member needs.
- How to formalize management procedures to further ensure fairness to members and staff and to ensure nonpartisan approaches.
- What revisions AMMAC should make to its governing statutes so that it is best able to adjust to its growing membership and make decisions that reflect its needs.

□ Decentralization of AMMAC: currently, there is only one regional office. AMMAC intends to open others because these offices can serve the association by being closer to members in the field. Maintaining regional offices will help with recruitment and programs as well because each state has different laws pertaining to local government. Local staff in a regional office can help with research and interpretation of issues specific to that state.

SUMMARY

AMMAC has just celebrated its eighth anniversary with the historical signing of an agreement with the federal government to create a forum for discussing issues impacting local government. AMMAC was born out of a political need to create a space for dialogue among political parties and between levels of government, but has worked to be a nonpartisan representative of local government in Mexico.

AMMAC has focused on service provision and has continued to expand its offerings while remaining within the means of its budget. Members and nonmembers participating in AMMAC activities are accustomed to paying for services provided.

Professionally and organizationally, AMMAC continues to evolve with strong professional management and broad support from the board and

members. Meeting the challenge of frequent turnover within local government in Mexico, AMMAC works to continually bring in new member municipalities and to encourage those who are members to remain when there is a change in leadership. Many of the founding municipalities are still members today.

AMMAC has evolved from being a small presence with a voice, to being perhaps the most significant representative of municipalities in Mexico. The association has achieved this by representing the interest of all municipalities and leaving aside controversial topics that could not be effectively addressed, offering expanded high-quality member services over time and in line with the budget, making member municipalities pay for the services they receive so that the association's work is valued, and listening to the needs of the members via the board and adjusting programs as required.

ICMA, as an association that is continually striving to improve and better serve its members, congratulates AMMAC for its great efforts and the tremendous impact that it has had during the last eight years. ICMA looks forward to a continued affiliation with AMMAC and many years of exchange of information and ideas that benefit the programs of both associations.

Endnotes

1 CIA Factbook Mexico, July 2000.

2 Octavio Chavez, ICMA.

3 Mexico Fact Sheet, U.S. State Department, 2001.

4 State Municipal Leagues First Hundred Years, National League of Cities, 1999.

5 For an in-depth look at decentralization throughout the region, see *The Quiet Revolution*, Campbell, forthcoming from University of Pittsburgh Press.

6 The name was changed to the Asociación de Municipios de México in 1996.

7 AMMAC Newsletter *Informa*, February 2002, page 3.

ICMA

The International City/County Management Association is a professional and educational membership association of appointed local government managers and administrators in the United States and abroad. ICMA has more than 8,000 members who work for cities, counties, and regional local governments as well as educational institutions and organizations with an interest in local government. ICMA offers members access to technical and management assistance, training, publications, and online resources. ICMA members are committed to a code of ethics, which is enforced through peer review by the membership. Since 1990, ICMA has worked in more than 40 countries to improve professional local government management throughout the world with support from several donor organizations including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank. ICMA's cooperation with local governments and organizations that support them began in Mexico in 1993.

To learn more about ICMA, please visit www.icma.org.

AMMAC

The Association of Mexican Municipalities (La Asociación de Municipios de México, AMMAC) is an association of local governments in Mexico. Established in March 1994, AMMAC works to improve the management of local governments and the conditions within which they operate. Since its establishment, the association has grown to almost 240 members from around the country. Local governments, represented by their mayor or a designee, are members of AMMAC. The activities of AMMAC include:

- Recommendations to improve the legal framework affecting municipalities
- Training and exchange of experience among members
- Library, bookstore, and document archives focused on municipal issues
- Identification of service providers related to local government
- Research and technical assistance in the area of local government finance
- Facilitation of problem solving on behalf of members in issues related to the federal government
- International cooperation with various organizations including the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA).

To learn more about AMMAC, please visit www.ammac.org.mx.

This case study was funded by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and written by Ann Bueche, Communications and Training Advisor, ICMA, for the Asia Association Dialogue workshop held in May 2002 in Sydney, Australia. Through this case study, the positive experience of AMMAC can serve as a useful example to newer associations seeking to support local government in their countries.

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