



## Integrity in Leadership? It Begins with You!

**Question 1.** Is the ICMA Code of Ethics really relevant in this era of local government? No reasonable person will dispute that the ICMA Code of Ethics was really needed in 1924 and the decades that followed. The profession was new and there was no foundation laid. Roles and responsibilities of both elected officials and managers were not clearly defined; corruption was still rampant in places like Kansas City and many other local government; most states had yet to adopt laws that regulated financial and other conflicts of interest; and there weren't effective state ethics commissions.

Today we have everything that was missing in 1924. Ethics is taught in MPA programs. Many states have laws governing the conduct of appointed and elected officials, and ethics commissions that can review that conduct. And where the states lack the laws or enforcement, the federal government fills the gap with both stronger laws and the ability to prosecute.

**Given the current environment, is the Code relevant? Or is the Code just a 'feel good' proposition?**

**Question 2.** Get arrested for a DUI, misuse the city credit card, embezzle money, sexually harass the staff and the news media will be all over the story. A bad conduct story that once would have been limited to the front headlines of the local newspaper or maybe run on the six o'clock news for a couple evenings will now go viral in a matter of minutes. The 'guilty' party will then be investigated, castigated, arrested, tried, fired or some combination of those actions. And someone along the way will report it to ICMA. When the case finally works its way thru ICMA's confidential, structured process, which could include a state fact-finding committee, it could be months before ICMA issues any public statement. For example, in the Bell California case, it was 6 months between the time the story broke and ICMA publicly censured Robert Rizzo.

**Should ICMA be more proactive and vocal when high profile cases hit the media? Make clear the profession's stance on the alleged misconduct early on? What other actions should ICMA take to offset the bad publicity for the profession when notorious conduct occurs? Or is it best not to say anything until the review process has been completed?**

**Question 3.** Bob McDonnell (Virginia), Ray Nagin (New Orleans), Kwame Kilpatrick (Detroit), Tony Mack (Trenton), Sharpe James (Newark), Sheila Dixon (Baltimore), Patrick Cannon (Charlotte) and a host of lesser known governors, mayors and elected officials are part of a special club: felons. Individuals who violated their duty to the public and participated in corrupt acts or illegal activity. Their conduct harms the reputation of government, their organizations, and the staff of those organizations. And makes it incredibly tough for staff to function!

**While members value the support ICMA provides them to ensure that their conduct meets the highest standards, what can or should ICMA do to ensure that the ethical conduct of the elected leaders is good?**

**Question 4.** At the recommendation of the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct, the ICMA Executive Board adopted a guideline under Tenet 3 of the Code to encourage members to report potential violations to the Code to ICMA. The guideline states "When becoming aware of a possible violation of the ICMA Code of Ethics, members are encouraged to report the matter to ICMA. In reporting the matter, members may choose to go on record as the complainant or report the matter on a confidential basis." And yet, despite media coverage of improper conduct or firsthand knowledge of unethical conduct by an ICMA colleague, it goes unreported. Perhaps it is a DUI reported in the local media that goes unreported to ICMA. Or an assistant city or assistant county manager who witnesses unethical conduct by his or her manager and yet does not file with ICMA.

**What does the profession need to do to encourage or require members to report matters?**

**Question 5.** The profession has long debated "What is the appropriate role for members in the political arena? The line between policy and administration is blurry. We've always taken the position that the manager especially must carefully navigate it without overtly trespassing into the policy realm. And the Code of Ethics helps to set boundaries to assist members in carrying out their duties in an apolitical manner. "Excel at the small "p" politics but don't cross the line." "Be politically astute without becoming politically aligned."

**In this period of polarized politics and gridlock, is it time for ICMA members to climb unfettered into the political realm?**