



International City/County Management Association

STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted February 17, 2017



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

Strategic Planning Process

ICMA has been guided by a strategic plan since 1985. The latest update to the plan was adopted in 2008, a time of a global financial crisis—an event almost as significant as the Great Depression, creating an environment of tremendous uncertainty. The environment in which ICMA and its members operate is constantly changing, and while many of the goals from the 2008 strategic plan have been accomplished, it is time to refresh the association’s mission, vision, and strategic initiatives in order to ensure that ICMA continues to serve members of the profession effectively and stays relevant in today’s environment of rapid, perpetual change.

In early 2015, the Association embarked on a planning process to develop a strategic plan that will guide the association’s efforts in the years to come. The ICMA Executive Board established a set of objectives and a timeline to complete a new strategic plan. In April 2015, ICMA’s then-President Jim Bennett and President-Elect Pat Martel appointed 40 individuals to serve on the ICMA Strategic Planning Task Force. These individuals represent 21 states, Canada, and New Zealand. The group includes individuals of varying ages, genders and ethnic backgrounds; and different jurisdictional sizes. This talented and diverse group of professionals was chosen from an applicant pool of nearly 200 volunteers to tackle this important task. The Task Force is led by Chair Sheryl Sculley, City Manager of San Antonio, Texas and Vice-Chair Lee Worsley, Executive Director of the Triangle J Council of Governments in North Carolina.

Felicia Logan, ICMA’s Director of Leadership Development, was chosen to facilitate the strategic planning process, with Amber Snowden serving as the Task Force’s ICMA staff liaison.

Environmental Forces, Trends, and Drivers

Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are sure to miss the future. – John F. Kennedy

The first consideration in charting a path for our association's future was to consider the major forces, trends and drivers that will be affecting the members, the profession and the organization, and to understand the environment in which ICMA, and its members, must operate. The pages that follow provide a brief, yet broad examination of the critical strategic factors that we believe face ICMA in the years ahead. These environmental forces, trends, and drivers are grouped into three categories: those impacting local government/communities; those affecting the profession; and, those affecting ICMA as an association.

These environmental forces, trends, and drivers were confirmed with the ICMA Executive Board during their December 2015 meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas.

1. Local Government/Communities

a. Technology

Technological innovation continues to advance at an ever-increasing rate - a pace that continually runs ahead of local governments' capacity to adopt and adapt. Many of the technologies that will be integral to our daily lives in the next ten to twenty years have not yet been imagined and/or developed. We expect that these innovations will transform the way services are provided and goods are produced, but will also disrupt traditional business practices and operating norms. Local governments will have to contend not only with an inability to predict the future, but also an increased demand for information and services at an increased speed from inception through adoption and into implementation. In order to successfully operate in this environment, they will have to rethink their strategy, operations, and processes in fundamental ways, proactively developing clear goals that guide how they approach, maximize, and regulate the use of new technology as it becomes available.

Technology has also transformed the way that local governments communicate and share information with their constituents. While some residents attend public meetings and hearings to express their opinions and concerns, many more residents interact with their local governments without ever setting foot inside a government building. Nearly all residents own a smartphone or other mobile device, and they use these devices not only as the predominant way to obtain information, but also to register complaints about local government services and/or alert public safety or public works departments about an incident or problem.

Social networks are further fueling the new era of electronic civic engagement. The next generation of engaged citizens communicates differently than previous generations, expecting continuous and instantaneous connectivity. Local governments now have the opportunity to share information and engage residents in conversations to obtain input on important proposals or issues via social media channels and mobile apps that allow feedback in real time. On the downside, social media has provided a platform for circulating information that can be inaccurate, slanderous and dangerous for the community.

Technology has enhanced global access to information providing opportunities for networking, learning and sharing best practices across boundaries and time zones.

Local government managers must devise ways to evaluate the positives and negatives of these fast changing technologies to ensure public safety, access, and improved quality of life.

b. Cost of Service Delivery

Local governments have increasingly been expected to take on more community roles than in the past, particularly in being responsive to residents. However, while the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of local governments have grown, revenue options and the fiscal environment continue to become more constrained. More than in past economic downturns, nearly all federal, state and local governments globally were negatively affected by the recent Great Recession, also facing mounting budgetary challenges and demands for services as revenues plunged. While local government revenues have been slowly improving in recent years, many have not seen their revenues return to pre-recession levels.

Budgetary challenges have also resulted in federal and state cutbacks in funding to local government, coinciding with devolution in the form of unfunded mandates, rules, and regulations, shifting responsibility to the local level without providing corresponding sources of revenue. This further impacts local governments' finite resources and constrains their ability to provide essential services. These are critical issues because local governments perform most of the activities that residents directly associate with government. Local governments undertake most of the direct spending on public goods and services, and they bear primary responsibility for public safety and investments in social services, education, and infrastructure that directly affect our economy and quality of life.

c. Public DisTrust

Over the past few decades, the rules governing and organizing politics and governance have changed. The increasingly heightened polarization of policy issues makes it more difficult for governments to achieve compromise requiring leaders to identify, speak and agree on common values in order to govern. Political polarization has been further fueled by the new trend in 24/7 media coverage. Constant media

attention into the minutest details of politicians' everyday lives has eroded personal privacy, limiting the number of candidates willing to open themselves and their families to such levels of public scrutiny. Instant access to information via social media, paired with anti-government sentiment, create a difficult environment for local governments to present the facts, which are often not as interesting or entertaining. Too often, social media spreads misinformation before local governments have time to present the facts, putting local leaders on the defensive rather than managing the flow of accurate and timely information.

In the U.S., polls consistently show that public opinion and trust in government have dropped to historical lows. People have become increasingly skeptical about politics and government as a way to affect positive change. This skepticism seems to have corresponded with a sharp decline in civic engagement. By almost every measure, residents' engagement in politics, government, and their communities has fallen steadily and sharply over the last generation. This has occurred despite the fact that education levels, the best individual predictor of civic participation, have risen sharply. Around the globe, local governments are well-positioned to address this trend. Most governmental interactions with residents are at the local level and through transparency, engagement, performance and accountability, local governments can help to build trust with one individual and/or one community group at a time.

d. Environmental Sustainability

Issues such as climate change, energy and water insecurity, natural resource conservation, and the management and disposal of household and industrial waste are serious environmental and socio-political challenges that know no geographic boundaries. The need to build effective partnerships among jurisdictions is essential to preserving public health, safety, and security. Local governments must take both a regional and global approach to build resiliency and develop effective and comprehensive solutions to these complex issues.

e. Demographics

Sweeping demographic changes have been occurring and will continue to occur in the coming years which will have a significant impact on the ability of local governments to provide necessary infrastructure and services. The world's population continues to grow older rapidly as fertility rates have fallen in most developed nations and people are living longer. Today, 8 percent of the world's population is age 65 and older. This percentage is expected to double to 16 percent by 2050. Research also shows that the world's population is increasingly urbanized and will continue to move from rural areas to cities. In response to these shifts in population, local governments will have to address new configurations for housing, transportation, infrastructure, community facilities, health care and social services, education, and public safety.

f. Social Integration

As a result of rapid and dramatic demographic and population changes, our global communities are experiencing cultural change on a scale and at a pace that is unprecedented in human history. Propelled by relatively inexpensive long distance travel, the racial and ethnic compositions of our nations and communities are undergoing rapid and dramatic change. Without providing better opportunities for these growing, yet still disadvantaged populations, tension and social divisions will grow as poverty and segregation persist. This is further fueled by mass media and rising police-community tensions.

It is critical that communities make investments in education, language acquisition, job training, and other services to combat unemployment and facilitate integration and inclusion of diverse groups into society. Special attention must also be given to issues around enhancing cultural competence, minimizing implicit biases and improving race relations. Local governments along with their police departments will have to work hard to recognize that those in authority must rely on inclusion, openness and encouragement of diversity instead of expecting the continuance of an out of date social order maintained through rules, laws and intimidation. It will be incumbent on local governments to assure that staff and service providers are well-trained in recognizing the value of differences, particularly for those local governments that provide law enforcement, education and social services. Strategies such as those recommended by the 21st Century Policing report and training (re implicit bias) must be considered by local government professionals if we are to embrace all members of our communities.

g. Globalization/Global Trends

Globalization has broken down preexisting jurisdictional boundaries and created a new social and economic reality – one of interaction among people, the private sector, and governments in disparate locations. Local communities are now competing on a world stage to attract labor, businesses and industries, and financial capital. Furthermore, globalization and technological transformations have enabled the workforce to become increasingly mobile. Workers may no longer be tethered to a physical office in order to complete their work, and can choose to live in a place based on quality of life considerations. Local communities who establish equitable policies and practices and develop healthy communities with high degrees of civic participation and strong social support systems will create a sense of safety and belonging that makes residents love where they live, and will attract others to want to live there.

Increasingly, the geography of opportunity will prevail, and the search for political freedom and economic improvement has driven individuals from struggling nations to other places where opportunities seem to be more abundant. This movement of people across borders creates challenges to national security, the loss of national identity, and the need to provide customized services to help these new populations become integrated into society. This integration is challenged by skepticism and fear

of the “other,” particularly as fears of terrorism continue to pervade the international dialogue.

While the global transformation has led to increased economic growth, the benefits have not been evenly distributed. Deep challenges remain, including poverty, homelessness, persistent unemployment, political instability, violence, and conflict. These problems are often closely tied to inequality. In developed and developing countries alike, the poorest half of the population often controls less than 10 percent of its wealth, leading to the emergence of a new, and perhaps permanent majority – the economic, cultural, and social underclass. Tensions between those who have and those who have not will continue to result in social unrest.

2. The Profession

a. New Leadership Skills

Faced with fiscal constraints, increased demands for immediate services, declining resources from other levels of government, complicated social and economic issues that transcend geographic boundaries, local governments on their own are challenged to find sufficient resources or solutions to fully meet their communities' wide-ranging needs. Local government management leadership will require a new and improved skill set that includes building collaborative partnerships across all sectors – citizens' groups, neighboring communities, governments at all levels, as well as private and nonprofit organizations. They must be adept and willing to seek expertise and resources outside the bounds of their own organization. Leadership skills will be needed to build social capital and foster connections between people to encourage commitment to each other and to the community. Successful local government management leaders will be innovative in developing creative solutions to community problems. Economic, environmental, social and natural disasters will require local government management leaders to be able to develop and support new types of community resiliency plans that incorporate maintaining quality of life as a key to long-term sustainability.

b. Public Disconnect

While professional local government management has a proven track record of more than 100 years of success in creating strong and vibrant communities, the role of the local government manager is still not clear to the general public, or even to many elected officials. There is a lack of understanding of the distinct roles that various levels of governments, special districts and authorities can play in providing services; and with constant media attention and access to information, single instances of service delivery failure at any level can influence the citizens' perception of all governments.

Most people care about their communities and are willing to learn, providing a captive audience. To make them aware of the value of their local government, we

must find ways to “tell our story,” and continue efforts to help residents understand that, while they may not constantly think about how services are provided until there is an issue, professional managers and staff are working every day to ensure that local government services are of high quality, run smoothly, and are cost effective to the taxpayer. Improved methods of communication are essential to promote and champion the good things that local governments are doing and to highlight the value proposition of the daily services that local governments provide. Proof is in local government performance.

c. The need for Increased Diversity and Inclusion

The current overall demographic profile of the local government management profession does not generally reflect the diversity of many of the communities in which we serve. However, ICMA research has shown that MPA/MPP students and early career professionals are more diverse and more reflective of the general population than those currently in local government management positions. Due to the current lack of diversity in the profession, this next generation may not see local government as an attractive option. This makes it imperative that local governments partner with undergraduate/graduate programs to tell their story of community service and to engage in outreach and recruitment efforts to bolster diversity. They must also assess their current practices to ensure that no institutional biases or barriers exist so that they are able to attract, retain, and provide opportunities for advancement to women and minorities.

d. Sustaining the Profession

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, local governments were forced to dramatically retool their organizations in order to create efficiencies. Many downsized or out-sourced services, and combined and/or eliminated services. In doing so, the traditional bench strength of these organizations was depleted. As a large proportion of the public sector workforce nears retirement, it is now more important than ever to develop a strategy to fill the professional pipeline with committed, capable, competent, and diverse professionals. We must identify, grow, and strengthen a pool of candidates within our organizations and within the profession who are ready to take on significant leadership roles.

The next generation of local government leaders, like those who came before, are motivated by more than money. They want opportunities to do something worthwhile, and will examine an organization’s mission, values, and culture when considering a position. They also want to work for someone from whom they can learn a great deal. In order to win the competition for talent, we must do a better job of telling the story of local government management as a public service career choice. Local governments must build their brands in order to counter media portrayals of government as slow and unresponsive – we must sell the profession as an opportunity

to work for an organization with a mission that matters, to serve the public with integrity, to do interesting work while making a difference.

e. International Perspective

The big issues that local government managers face are issues that transcend traditional boundaries. The challenges faced by a local government manager in North Carolina are similar to those faced in local governments in the Netherlands, Canada, or Australia. New leadership skills are needed to manage communities in today's globalized world. To be effective leaders, local government managers must be adept at identifying, starting, and facilitating conversations across borders; sharing solutions, best practices, and resources to react and adapt to the dynamic and rapidly changing economic and social realities.

3. ICMA: The Association

a. Providing Relevance and Value to Members

ICMA's membership has grown to over 10,000 people, a membership base that includes those currently serving as local government managers, as well as those who aspire to serve in this role. Concerns about the "value proposition" of membership means that for ICMA to enjoy continued growth, the association must increase its potential to serve and provide value to the profession. ICMA's annual surveys suggest that members highly value membership in ICMA – both the network of peers and the services that it provides. However, as the trends and drivers affecting local governments and the profession change, the expectations and needs of members will also change. In order to remain relevant, ICMA must continually assess and adapt its programs and services to ensure that it continues to provide value and advance the state of the profession.

b. Promoting an Ethical Culture

Promoting an ethical culture is a key leadership responsibility. The commitment to ethics is what distinguishes professional local government managers. The ICMA Code of Ethics establishes boundaries and provides guidance to members as they strive to carry out their duties in an increasingly complex and contentious environment. The Code establishes equity, transparency, honor, integrity, commitment, and stewardship as standards for excellence in democratic local governance. To ensure that ethical conduct remains a centerpiece of the local government profession, ICMA must continue to provide training on ethics for local governments, publications and guidance on ethics issues, as well as technical assistance and advice to members for any issues or concerns that they face.

c. Embracing and Promoting the "I" in ICMA

Today, with more than half of the world's 7 billion inhabitants living in cities, and with projections showing that continued urbanization will increase this to two-thirds by 2050, the "I" in ICMA is more relevant than ever. The urbanization megatrend, if well managed, will have enormous economic, political, demographic, social, public health, and ecological benefits for all.

Given this and other global trends, it is crucial that ICMA strengthen relationships with international affiliates and approach all its programs and services with a global perspective. There are similar issues facing communities around the globe including integration of refugees into communities, climate change, limited resources, unfunded mandates, and there are lessons to be learned from each other. By partnering with our international affiliates, ICMA can provide a network of solutions and enable faster adoption of best practices around the world. ICMA is well positioned to contribute to global efforts in partnership with our affiliates to ensure that our communities are places in which citizens can enjoy safe, prosperous, and productive lives.

Based on its strong membership base, its outstanding reputation, and its long track record of promoting good governance and sound management principles in local governments in developing and decentralizing nations throughout the world, ICMA has established a strong position in the realm of international technical assistance. Through funding from agencies like USAID, ICMA engages in technical assistance activities to build capacity and share knowledge and best practices to communities worldwide.

However, ICMA's International technical assistance activities do not come without risks. ICMA is a complex organization with several diverse revenue sources and business lines. Revenues from grants and contracts in the international arena currently comprise approximately fifty percent of the association's total revenues. Any fluctuation in this revenue source can have a major impact on the overall size and structure of the association.

Member Engagement and Communications

Member engagement is essential to the success of ICMA's initiatives. Therefore, a significant responsibility of the Strategic Planning Task Force was to seek engagement and feedback from ICMA members and stakeholders. With that input, the group worked to develop an updated vision/mission and core beliefs for ICMA's future, along with strategic objectives and a roadmap to move the association forward. The member engagement strategies were designed to ensure that the Strategic Plan reflects the priorities of ICMA members and stakeholders as we move forward to ICMA's next 100 years.

The member engagement strategy included sharing information and the solicitation of input through multiple channels, such as focus groups, surveys, direct member contact at the ICMA Annual Conference, regional summits, and other meetings, and the

establishment of an online engagement platform to provide a discussion forum. The data and feedback collected comprised an essential resource used by the Task Force, helping it identify the strategies that ICMA should pursue to advance the state of the art and state of profession, and to continue to provide value to its members.

Just as our membership and Task Force representatives are diverse, so was the feedback received. While it was, perhaps, an easier task to identify core beliefs and trends, it was more difficult to reach consensus on how to quantify and qualify issues and what action strategies to employ.

Strategic Plan

Vision:

To be the leading association of local government professionals dedicated to creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.

Mission:

To advance professional local government through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics.

Core Beliefs – We Believe In:

- **Public Service:** including the stewardship of democratic principles and the efficient and transparent use of public resources;
- **Ethics:** as the core of professionalism in local government leadership and management as outlined in the ICMA Code of Ethics;
- **Council Manager Form of Government and Professional Management:** as the preferred local government structure;
- **Equity and Inclusion:** ensuring that local governments are inclusive and mirror the diversity in communities;
- **The Continuous Pursuit of Excellence:** including professional development, life-long learning, networking, capacity building, knowledge sharing and engagement;
- **Stewardship:** balancing resources including people, financial, social capital and environmental so that communities are better than we found them
- **Leadership:** developing leadership capacity and attracting and developing future generations of leaders.

Key Priorities:

The Strategic Initiatives identified by the task force naturally lend themselves to being organized around the following key priorities:

- Member Benefits and Growth
- Learning Community
- Thought Leadership and Research Network
- Advocacy and Outreach
- Governance and Operations

Strategic Initiatives

Key Priority: Member Benefits and Growth

A. Diversify and expand the membership.

Strategies:

- I. Maintain an organizational priority to grow and retain the membership in order to support local government's ability to attract and retain talented professionals;
- II. Implement board approved recommendations of the Task Forces on Diversity & Inclusion and Women in the Profession;
- III. Develop strategies to assist talented individuals in gaining entry into the profession;
- IV. Define and promote the value of belonging to ICMA in addition to State Associations, International and other Affiliates, and other related professional organizations;
- V. Support the professional and personal needs of members at all life and career stages;
- VI. Continue to expand the relevance of Student Chapters and their respective universities to highlight career opportunities in local government management;
- VII. Work with elected official organizations to develop and implement training to facilitate the increase of a more diverse pool of executives;
- VIII. Identify and promote member services that are relevant to the International community.

Key Priority: Member Benefits and Growth

B. Improve and sustain collaborative relationships with international and state associations and affiliates to support, align, and advance common goals.

Strategies:

- I. Strengthen and formalize relationships with organizations that have similar missions to leverage resources for the benefit of the profession;
- II. Expand the Regional Directors so that at least one director covers each region to foster relationships with international and state associations and the general membership;
- III. Establish deeper relationships with international, state associations and affiliate membership organizations to develop a leadership pipeline to serve on the ICMA Executive Board;
- IV. Enhance communication and dialogue to develop synergistic relationships with international, state and affiliate organizations and other professional associations;

- V. Explore and establish relationships with non-traditional organizations that could serve as partners in achieving ICMA's diversity goals;
- VI. Advance work with IHN, NFBPA, and NACA and other organizations on establishing joint recruitment goals and recruitment opportunities and amend the national affiliate agreements as appropriate to further our shared goals.

Key Priority: Learning Community

C. Create a worldwide learning community of local government professionals and provide training programs for all career stages.

Strategies:

- I. Expand learning opportunities and professional development for members at every career stage;
- II. Create opportunities for individuals with diverse career backgrounds to engage in training and professional development on local government;
- III. Create learning opportunities for members to share experiences from countries around the world;
- IV. Create a mechanism for mutual exchange of best practices;
- V. Further expand the ICMA coaching program and Local Government Management Fellowship program;
- VI. Continue to create professional development content on management practices;
- VII. Consider ways to market ICMA's professional development programs to local government professionals who are not ICMA members;
- VIII. Develop mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of professional development programs.

Key Priority: Learning Community

D. Think globally, act globally.

Strategies:

- I. Develop coordinated strategy to increase brand awareness of ICMA and its benefits to international affiliates.
- II. Promote international awareness and perspective of the local impact of globalization;
- III. Develop a more robust learning network of US and International members;
- IV. Sustain ICMA's technical assistance globally to foster professional management and create sustainable communities.

Key Priority: Thought Leadership and Resource Network

E. Ensure future ready leaders by providing thought leadership for the emerging and enduring challenges facing local governments.

Strategies:

- I. Continue to support and highlight academic and practitioner research identifying the most significant issues facing local governments;
- II. Partner with the Big 7¹ and other related organizations to collectively respond to public policy issues impacting local governments.

Key Priority: Thought Leadership and Resource Network

F. Be the principal resource for leadership and management in local government.

Strategies:

- I. Design and deliver programming to address the important trends, drivers, and issues affecting local government professionals;
- II. Assess, develop, and promote professional management competencies and disciplines;
- III. Incorporate the concept of leadership in professional development offerings;
- IV. Promote leading practices to ensure local government's ability to attract and retain a talented and diverse workforce;
- V. Promote ICMA globally as the resource for leading practices in local government management;
- VI. Organize and deliver content so it is easily accessible and fresh.

Key Priority: Advocacy and Outreach

G. Promote the value of professional management and ICMA membership.

Strategies:

- I. Focus prioritization on ethics, leadership, professional development, and member connection;
- II. Find new ways to articulate the value of ICMA membership;
- III. Educate elected officials on the value of professional local government management;
- IV. Expand programs in schools to explain local government and encourage careers in local government management;
- V. Educate the public on the council-manager form of government;
- VI. Expand the outreach to community members presenting value of professional management;
- VII. Connect the profession's commitment to ethics to building public trust;

¹ The Big 7 is a collaboration of seven associations in Washington D.C. that represent their state and local government members from a broad and far-reaching perspective. Its members include: ICMA, the National Governors Association (NGA), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the Council of State Governments (CSG), the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National League of Cities (NLC), and the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCoM).

- VIII. Enhance the job center platform to support member career advancement.

Key Priority: Advocacy and Outreach

H. Reach members and other important stakeholders through expanded use of technology and emerging media.

Strategies:

- I. Identify ways to support distance learning for members;
- II. Use new technology, digital/video media, and graphic design to engage members and deliver content;
- III. Continue to invest in developing a platform to share content and to encourage peer learning and discussions;
- IV. Identify business partners to help leverage technology and media capability;
- V. Expand the way ICMA delivers its message and content.

Key Priority: Governance and Operations

I. Support the continued growth and development of ICMA's business enterprises and operational resources.

Strategies:

- I. Maintain strong financial and operational policies and practices to ensure the vitality of the Association;
- II. Develop strategies to attract and retain outstanding and diverse staff for ICMA;
- III. Support a range of viable business lines to diversify the Association's revenue stream;
- IV. Periodically review the dues policy to ensure that ICMA can attract, retain and grow membership;
- V. Maintain the strong relationship with ICMA-RC to support our members and their role in building great communities.

Key Priority: Governance and Operations

J. Evaluate the governance of the Association to enhance alignment with ICMA's strategic goals and core beliefs.

Strategies:

- I. Expand efforts to inform members about the role of the Executive Board and its election process;
- II. Evaluate the Executive Board selection process, including regional protocols and geographic assignment of states so that it aligns with ICMA's Core Beliefs and goals;

- III. Review voting eligibility so that it is consistent with the core beliefs and goals of the Association.

2015-17 Strategic Planning Task Force Members

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