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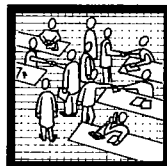
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# Scandinavians Lead the Way in Training for Local Elected Officials

*Drew Horgan*

**S**trong and vibrant local governments are operating in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. A sure sign of this is the time, energy, and money spent on the training and development of councillors (local elected officials).



## Nonpartisan Training

Anyone who has visited one of the local government training centers in the four countries mentioned here can only come away in awe of the importance given to training and development programs for local government, and particularly for local councillors. Perhaps most striking of all is the continuous collaboration between local government training organizations and political parties. The latter accept—and support—the idea that nonpartisan training on policy processes, local management, and leadership issues is good for them, their candidates, and local government.

A good example of this ideal is the program of the Finnish Local Government Association. This group's training and development curriculum for councillors begins with issues awareness and general local administration and management training before councillors are elected. In four years, this program covers matters related to the evolution of the typical career of a councillor as an elected policymaker. It includes procedural and process matters, ranging from basic rules for meetings at the beginning of a term of office to the role and responsibility of council

committee chairpersons toward the end of the four-year period. It also deals in the substance—but not the ideological aspects—of policy issues such as public finance, the environment, economic development, social services, and transportation.

## Norway and Sweden Offer Training

In both Norway and Sweden, the national local government associations work closely with all political parties to produce special “nonpolitical” training materials for newly elected councillors. In Norway, the parties themselves use the materials to carry out their own training. The association in Sweden has developed materials to be used for discussion (and debate!) about the role of the elected official (see box on page 9).

Some professional managers might have preferred a more prescriptive approach to “training,” but this approach has helped to “clear the air” at the outset of the councillor's elected term of office. The association, through its consultancy services, backs up the training (which takes place regionally and/or locally) by running role negotiation meetings between elected officials and professional administrators. The association's consultants have found many male councillors strangely reluctant to define or negotiate their roles clearly, while female councillors seem to be much more prepared to take the initiative in such negotiations.

Denmark's local government training center, which is controlled by a board of directors comprised mostly of elected officials, offers special courses related to “new areas of concern to local governments (e.g., as a result of national legislation, transfers of responsibility to the local level, recent social or economic trends). These courses provide com-

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**Information Available for Councillors in Sweden**

**Role of the Elected Official and:**

- Citizens
- Political party
- Mass media
- Council committees
- Administration (professional staff)
- Job
- Family
- Friends
- Leisure time
- The future

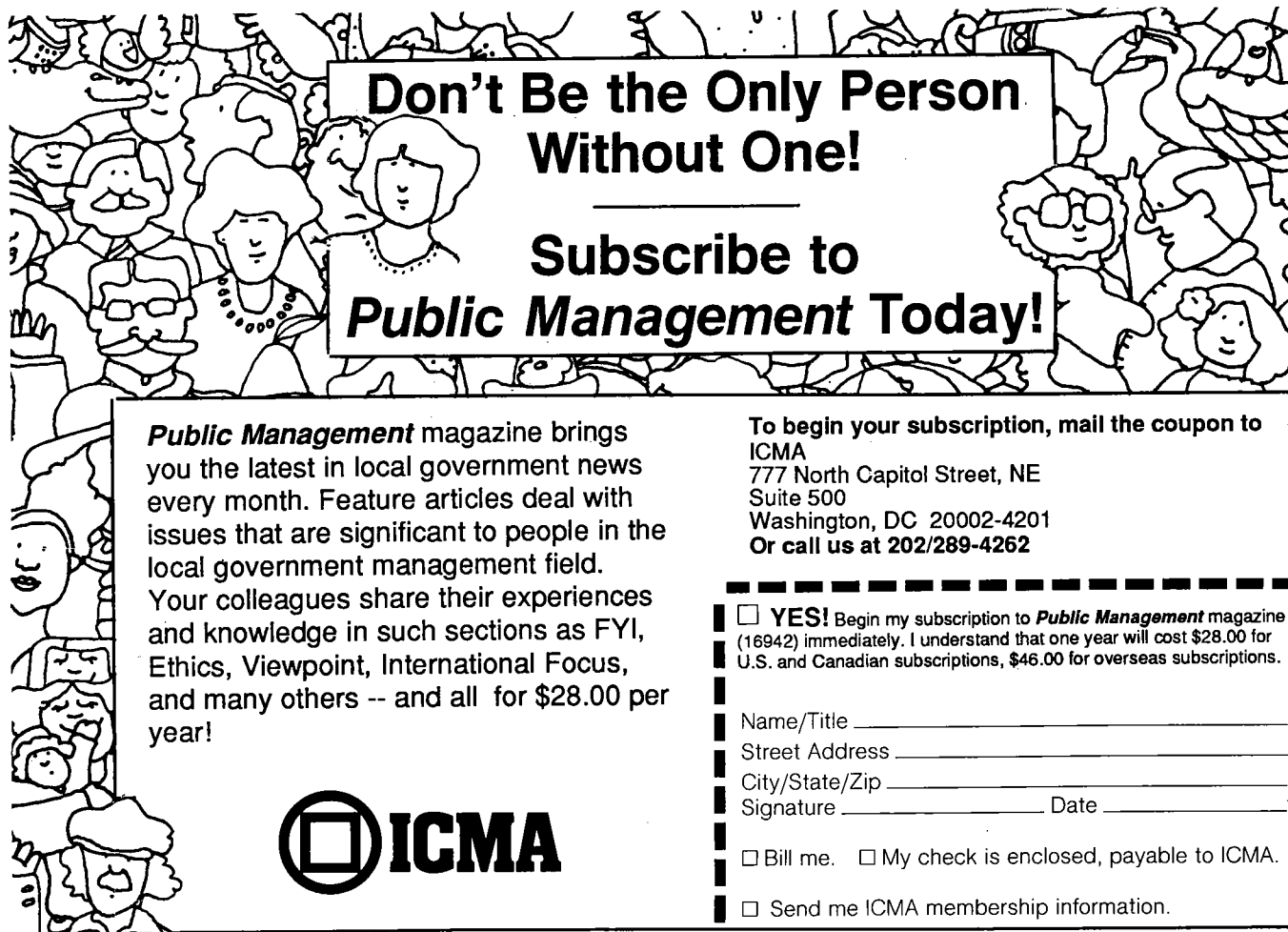
**Further and Deeper Self-Analysis of the Elected Official's Role:**

- You and interest groups
- Their likely effects on you
- Your perception of your role
- How much of your role can be negotiated

bined "training" for mayors, councillors, and senior staff of municipalities. The center often uses these training events as a resource to help develop training packages that are then offered to local staff at one of the regional training centers. The national center operates most of its training courses through these regional centers.

**Citizens Will Benefit**

In a country as big as the United States, it is probably not realistic to expect a national training program such as the ones described here. Perhaps something similar on a state or regional basis would be possible with support from state league(s) and universities, in turn backed up by the national local government associations such as the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and ICMA. This is worth thinking about; our communities and our citizens certainly deserve the best local government leadership possible. Our Scandinavian friends would be happy to share their experience with us. **PM**



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## Orientation Practices in Other Countries

### United Kingdom

Orientations for councillors in the United Kingdom include the following:

- A national publication, the *Councillors' Handbook*, is supplemented by local guidance notes on legal formalities, allowances, and other matters.
- A series of in-house seminars covers the responsibilities, policies, and structure of each committee/department.
- Tours are conducted in local governments to visit major facilities, project sites, and problem areas.
- Receptions are held to allow new councillors to meet existing councillors and chief officers informally.

The Local Government Training Board produces various booklets for councillors on such specific topics as competitive tendering. These are designed, however, primarily for experienced councillors.

—Adrian Kellett  
Chief Executive  
South Norfolk District Council  
Long Stratton, Norwich,  
Norfolk

### Australia

An elected members' development kit, including a book and an accompanying video titled *Elected Life*, has been produced by the New South Wales Local Government and Shires Association, Sydney, Australia. The association consulted with unions and professional associations, including the Institute of Municipal Management. The video and booklet are to be used in combination with special arrangements suited to circumstances surrounding each local government council.

While each council is individual in its general approach, each council has different ways of undertaking its work. In the first instance, councils are given a physical orientation at the outset, then shown work in progress, and introduced to key staff members. Workshop sessions are conducted to ensure that meeting procedures are understood, that key environmental and planning issues are emphasized, and that by-laws and codes are explained. Once this is completed, follow-up feedback sessions are held three and six months later.

The Local Government Shires Association in New South Wales conducts the workshops on a regular basis, and it employs the assistance of speakers from its own organization and from outside the industry.

From contact with the Queensland State, it appears that this kit is way ahead of materials of other states in Australia.

—Les McMahon  
Chief Executive/Secretary  
The Institute of Municipal Management  
Sydney, New South Wales

### Canada

The Municipal Administrative Services Division, Alberta Municipal Affairs, provides newly elected municipal officials with the handbook *Now That You've Been Elected*. The handbook is intended to help these officials understand their powers and duties as described in provincial legislation.

The handbook was revised and updated in 1989. It is published in looseleaf form so information specific to a local government can be added. The booklet was first published in 1983 to mark the 100th anniversary of the first local government legislation affecting Alberta—the Northwest Municipal Ordinance.

The book's 11 chapters outline some of the personal issues that elected officials, as responsible leaders, might face, as well as intergovernmental relations, planning, budgeting, what it means to be a member of a governing body, and more.

—Beth Payne  
ICMA