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## FEATURES

# Ethics

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## Ethics Inquiries

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### **THE FORMER COUNTY MANAGER COZIES UP TO A COMMISSIONER**

**Q:** The former county manager was forced to resign three years ago and still lives in the community. She now works as a village manager and is a member of ICMA and the state association. There was considerable controversy over the board's decision to force her to leave county government. Some of the commissioners felt that she was not treated fairly and remain friendly with her.

The current county manager has heard through the grapevine that his predecessor has nothing but criticism about the way county government is run now. She has targeted her criticism at the county manager himself, saying that he is not competent. Are there potential ethics issues with the former county manager's conduct?

**A.** Former managers may be tempted to get involved with their former employers without realizing that their actions can run afoul of the ICMA Code of Ethics. Tenet 2 of the code has a guideline that reminds members of their obligation to inform the current administrator any time they advise or respond to inquiries from elected or appointed officials in another jurisdiction.

The county manager may want to contact the former manager privately to discuss his concerns. Alternatively, an ICMA Range Rider or other respected colleague may be willing to offer counsel to the individual.

In rare cases, the conduct of a former manager can reach the point that it may be necessary to file an ethics complaint. ICMA censured a former city manager who sought to influence public policy by taking a high-profile role in advising a faction on the city council he once served. Not only did he fail to inform the incumbent administrators of his activities, he also publicly criticized the competence of appointed administrators and exacerbated factionalism on the city council. His actions diminished public confidence in the local government and in professional local government management, a violation of Tenets 2 and 3 of the ICMA Code of Ethics.

For advice on the ICMA Code of Ethics, or to find out more on ethics training and technical assistance available to local governments, call the Ethics Center at ICMA at 202/962-3521, or visit the Web site at <http://icma.org/ethics>. Calls or e-mails can also be directed to ICMA's ethics advisers Martha Perego, 202/962-3668, [mperego@icma.org](mailto:mperego@icma.org), and Elizabeth Kellar, 202/962-3611, [ekellar@icma.org](mailto:ekellar@icma.org).

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