

# Council-Manager Form of Government

The Town of Avon has a Town Council-Town Manager form of government.

## What is the council-manager form of government, which is used today by so many cities, towns, and counties?

Council-manager government combines the strong political leadership of elected officials with the strong managerial experience of an appointed manager or administrator. All power and authority to set policy rests with an elected governing body, which may include a Council President for Towns and members of the council, commission, or board. The governing body in turn hires a nonpartisan manager who has very broad authority to run the organization. In Indiana, the Town Manager does not have oversight of the Police Department.

Born out of the U.S. progressive reform movement at the turn of the 20th century, the council-manager system was designed to combat corruption and unethical activity in local government by promoting effective management within a transparent, responsive, and accountable structure. Since its establishment, the council-manager form has become the most popular structure of local government in the United States. The form is also widely used throughout the world in countries such as Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

9 out of the top 10 best places to live (24/7 Wall Street) have a council-manager form of government.

## How does council-manager government work?

The elected council or board represents their community and develops a long-range vision for its future. They establish policies that affect the overall operation of the community and are responsive to residents' needs and wishes. To ensure that these policies are carried out and that the entire community is equitably served, the governing body appoints a highly trained professional manager on the basis of his/her education, experience, skills, and abilities (and not their political allegiances). If the manager is not responsive to the governing body, it has the authority to terminate the manager at any time.

## What is the role of the manager under council-manager government?

The manager is hired to serve the council and the community and brings to the local government the benefits of his/her training and experience in administering municipal or county projects and programs. The Manager, in Indiana, may help the Clerk Treasurer prepare a budget for the council's consideration; recruits, hires, terminates, and supervises government staff; serves as the council's chief adviser; and carries out the council's policies. Council members and residents count on the manager to provide complete and objective information about local operations, discuss the pros and cons of alternatives, and offer an assessment of the long-term consequences of their decisions. Appointed managers serve at the pleasure of the governing body. They can be fired by a majority of the council, consistent with local laws, or any employment agreements they may enter into with the council. The manager makes policy recommendations to the council for consideration and final decision. The manager is bound by whatever action the council takes, and control is always in the hands of the elected representatives of the people.

## What is the role of the council?

The council is the community's legislative and policy-making body. Power is centralized in the elected council, which, for example, approves the budget and determines the tax rate. The council also focuses on the community's goals, major projects, and such long-term considerations as community growth, land use development, capital improvement and financing, and strategic planning. The council hires a

professional manager to implement the administrative responsibilities related to these goals and supervises the manager's performance.

### **What is the role of the mayor or chairperson?**

Chairpersons, known as Council Presidents in Indiana, or Mayors in council-manager communities are key political and policy leaders, and their specific duties, responsibilities, and authorities depend on the organization's charter. In council-manager communities, typically the mayor or chairperson is a voting member of the city or town council who presides at council meetings, represents the city in intergovernmental relationships, appoints members of citizen advisory boards and commissions (with the advice and consent of council), assigns agenda items to committees, facilitates communication and understanding between elected and appointed officials, and assists the council in setting goals and advocating policy decisions.

### **What kinds of communities use the council-manager form of government?**

In 2007, more than 3,500 (49 percent) of the 7,171 U.S. cities and towns with populations of 2,500 residents or more operated under the council-manager form. This structure is also used by more than 370 counties. More than 92 million people in the U.S. live in communities that operate under this form.

Source of information listed on this Web page is [www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org)