The council-manager form is the system of local government that combines the strong political leadership of elected officials in the form of a mayor and council, with the strong managerial experience of an appointed local government manager.

One of the key elements in 20th-century municipal reform has been the proposition that a strong and non-political executive office should be the administrative centerpiece of municipal government. This concept has been implemented in thousands of American cities in the 20th century by the adoption of the council-manager form of government. This form parallels the organization of the business corporation: voters (stockholders) elect the council (board of directors), including the mayor (chairman of the board), which, in turn, appoints the manager (chief administrative officer).

Unlike the council-mayor forms, where the emphasis is on political leadership, the prevailing norms in the council-manager form are administrative competence and efficiency.

FOUNDATION

The council-manager form of government came about during the Reform Era in the wake of natural disasters in cities like Galveston, TX, Staunton, VA, and Dayton, OH. Until this time, political bosses would hand out jobs to those who supported them through favors during the election process. But this was often not a sustainable way of conducting political affairs and would lead to a lack of expertise and runaway costs, particularly during disasters.

The council-manager form of government grew significantly after World War II. At that time, many municipalities were confronted with long lists of needed services and improvements that had backlogged since the Depression years of the 1930s. Faced with such challenges, many municipalities adopted the council-manager form. The plan has been especially attractive to small and medium-sized localities. It is used in a majority of American municipalities with populations of 25,000 to 250,000. It has been strongly promoted since the 1920s by the National Civic League.

## WHAT ARE THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL’S FUNCTION?

The council is the legislative body; its members are the community’s decision-makers. The council approves the budget and determines the tax rate, for example. The council also focuses on the community’s goals, major projects, and such long-term considerations as community growth, land use development, capital improvement plans, capital financing, and strategic planning. The council hires a professional manager to carry out the administrative responsibilities and supervises the manager’s performance.

## WHAT IS THE MANAGER’S FUNCTION?

The manager is hired to serve the council and the community and to bring to the local government the benefits of training and experience in administering local government projects and programs on behalf of the governing body. The manager prepares a budget for the council’s consideration; recruits, hires, and supervises staff; serves as the council’s chief adviser; and carries out the council’s policies. Council members and citizens count on the manager to provide complete and objective information, pros and cons of alternatives, and long-term consequences.

## WHAT IS THE COST TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF APPOINTING A PROFESSIONAL MANAGER?

Local governments have found that overall costs are reduced with competent management. Savings come in the form of reduced operating costs, increased efficiency and productivity, improved revenue collection, and/or effective use of technology.

## IS THE FORM POPULAR IN LARGE COMMUNITIES?

Yes. Out of 199 cities with greater than 100,000 citizens, 112 use this form of government. Some examples are Phoenix; San Diego; Dallas; Cincinnati; San Antonio; Kansas City, Missouri; and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

## IS THIS FORM OF GOVERNMENT USED ONLY IN CERTAIN KINDS OF CITIES?

No. In fact, it is not restricted to cities. It is used by counties too. Currently, 3,625 cities operate under this form. Additionally, 529 counties indicate that they operate under the county administrator form, including Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties.