

THE POLICYMAKING ROLE OF THE MAYOR IN COUNCIL-MANAGER CITIES:  
DETRACTING AND ENHANCING FACTORS

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## **Executive summary**

Municipal reform turned the traditional view of the mayor as the supreme leader of cities upside down with the National League of Cities' Model City Charter of 1915. The council-manager form unites legislative authority in the City Council and reserves administrative authority for the city manager.

Today, nearly half of U.S. cities with more than 2,500 residents operate under the council-manager or "weak mayor" form—surpassing adoption or retention of the mayor-council or "strong mayor" form. The form of government, however, is not without its opponents. Challenges to council-manager cities are plentiful, averaging one form of government change effort every five years according to one International City-County Management Association survey.

A healthy percentage of the discontent with council-manager cities stems from the subordination of the mayor in the polity. Numerous studies confirm that the city manager and council members play a vital policymaking role while the mayor only ekes out a bit part. Council members and the city manager are leaders in budget development, recommendation or initiation of policy and recommendations. The mayor is sidelined. While some forms show adaptations to the realities of the shared responsibility for policy—council, mayor and city manager—debate continues today regarding delineating administrative and policy functions in council-manager cities.

Yet not every mayor performs in the same manner even in the same form of government. Researchers have recognized that the mayor in council-manager cities can be "the first among equals" and a powerful leader of a different ilk than in strong mayor forms. So what factors influence the policy role of mayors in council-manager cities? Can relative policy leadership roles be predicted by analysis of other factors, such as tenure of the city manager and council members or size of council?

Through an online survey of council-manager cities in Washington, this study probed the various policymaking possibilities and roles to determine factors that enhance or detract from the mayor's role. The expectations for findings were:

- Positive relationship between mayoral direct election and mayoral policy leadership
- Positive relationship between mayoral tenure and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between tenure of city manager and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between expertise of city manager in profession and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between tenure of council members and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between number of council members and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between number of council committees and mayoral policy leadership

In some cases, data did support the hypotheses. In five of the nine policy activities, the city manager was seen as the strongest policy actor. The remaining four were led by Council. In addition, mayors with council members with shorter tenures appeared to enjoy more policy leadership.

In the case of the tenure of the city manager, both in the profession and in one city, the results were mixed. For city managers with 8+ years serving a city, the role of the city manager in advocating policy in the community was significantly lower, as was building consensus with elected officials. Stronger policy roles for city managers with longer tenure in one city included proposing new policies, developing the budget and serving as an intergovernmental liaison. The mayor's role in advocating policy and building consensus with elected officials increased significantly to fill the gap left by the city manager's retreat from those areas. In other areas, however, the mayor's role decreased significantly—in proposing new policies and developing the city budget, for instance.

For city managers with 21+ years of experience in the profession compared to all city managers in the survey pool, the impact appeared to be negligible. However, the role of advocating policy in the community, setting long-term fiscal priorities and building consensus with elected officials on policy showed less perceived involvement by long-term city managers. In those cases, it appears that the city manager deferred that role to the council. Therefore, the findings split more finely with some policymaking roles increasing for the mayor with professional, experienced city managers and some decreasing.

Insufficient data was collected to cull information about the relationship of mayoral direct election, tenure of the mayor, number of council members and presence of council committees.

Although inconclusive in some areas, the study does support the theory that the mayor plays a lesser role in policy leadership than the city manager and city council members. The implications of the split in roles for a city manager with much expertise in the profession and tenure with one city are unclear. However, the findings may point to a seasoned veteran backing off more overt and public policy leadership roles in favor of safer ground in the policy-administration discussion. In addition, the findings did show that newer council members seem to allow more of a policy role for the mayor while longer tenured members decreased the mayor's role and increased the city manager's—possibly due to a learning curve where members become aware of the relative vigor of each role.

As many cities struggle with the “right” form of government, the debate concerning the policy-administration divide continues. Yet little attention seems to be paid to the variances within council-manager forms. To preserve the vitality of the reformed city, more study needs to pinpoint possible factors such as term limits, dedicated mayor-council staff, part-time vs. full-time mayors and the election of council members at large or by ward or district. In addition, the adapted form deserves careful consideration as the possible next evolution of the council-manager form, taking the best from one form and mixing it with the best from the other to create the most efficient and democratic model of city governance.

*“The images of the offices of the American mayor and the city manager found in the literature of public administration and political science are related to the realities of those offices in much the same way as Smokey the Bear is related to the grizzly bear of the Northwest. The literary figures are benign, simplified caricatures of complex and not completely tameable realities”*  
(Boynton & Wright, 1971, 28)

## Introduction

Who rules our cities? What is the best form of municipal government? There were approximately 7,500 cities in the United States in 2004 (Fredrickson, Johnson & Wood, 2004). A good number of them struggle with those questions every year. The debate about the structure of local government and their respective ability to provide “rational administration” vs. “political responsiveness” has raged over many decades (Box, 1995, 711). In a 2001 survey by the International City/County Management Association, city governments had averaged one attempt to change the structure or form of government in the previous five years (International City/County Management Association, 2001). By 2006, 49% of cities with more

than 2,500 residents operated under the council-manager form and 43% under the mayor-council form (International City/County Management Association, 2006). Considerable academic and professional expertise has been expended comparing and contrasting the two structures to determine how leadership roles are defined and exercised.

With nearly a 50/50 split between the two dominant city structures, the debate about form of government flares up in the academic literature and at polls in communities all over the country at regular intervals. The zero-sum game does not aid either the manager or mayor in more effectively serving their communities. Federalism severely restricts the authority at the local government level (Schrager, 2006). Policymaking power has become increasingly important as the federal government continues to withdraw monetary support and devolve programs, pushing responsibility to the local level without accompanying funding. As creatures with powers only as assigned by the state government, cities play on a very narrow field. The chief executive, whether mayor or manager, is a pivotal player in urban policymaking (Morgan, England & Pelissero, 2007, 92). Infighting over roles only diffuses power in the policymaking arena. Furthermore, role arguments may lead to frequent re-evaluations of forms of government that ultimately throw communities into disarray.

The battleground of form-of-government debates often zeros in on the ideal vs. real roles of elected officials and appointed officials in policymaking. The skirmishes often stem from a misunderstanding of separation of powers in municipal governance. The concept is a take-off on the early writings of Woodrow Wilson regarding separation of the executive, legislative and judicial branches in U.S. government. The politics-administration model, an adaptation of the separation of powers, seeks to keep administration separate from politics (Montjoy & Watson, 1995). In its many interpretations, the definition of politics has become synonymous with policy making, creating a level of angst with the city administrator’s considerable role in policy formulation. Yet the basis for such arguments is faulty.

The misunderstanding began a century or more ago. The Progressive Era between the 1880’s and 1920’s sought to curb corruption and counteract patronage systems while inserting a level of professionalism and efficiency into city management. In 1915, the municipal reform effort reached a seminal point when the National Municipal League’s Model City Charter proposed changes to city government structure to unify the executive powers and create division between executive and legislative functions. The council-manager form of government was seen as the antithesis of the strong mayor or mayor-council form, which centralized administrative and legislative authority in one individual. The council-manager form made the executive role the purview of the city manager and shared the legislative role between the mayor and council. Contrary to modern day interpretations, the model was a “unity of powers” not a “separation of powers” reform. Writing for the International City Managers’ Association in 1958, Ridley asserted

that “In spite of what some of the early theorists and practitioners said, the council-manger plan does not provide for checks and balances nor a separation of powers” (1).

The model’s plan is for the mayoral post to be the titular head and that policy-making is a collective function of the council. Officially, the mayor is still limited to presiding over council meetings and ceremonially representing the city (Boynton & Wright, 1971). With the advent of the reformed municipal government, some saw the mayor reduced to largely ceremonial acts or, more generously, as taking on the role of chairman of the board (Svara, 1987). In this iteration of municipal governance, the mayor was no longer the strong policy leader, instead becoming the “first among equals” on the council (Bebout, 1955). The once-powerful chief executive is often perceived as being relegated to the role of ribbon cutter. The traditional tension between the administrative leader in the form of the city manager and the once-undisputed legislative leader in the form of the mayor becomes unhealthy as mayors are termed “weak” or “strong” based on their relative policymaking roles.

While the rapid growth in council-manager cities may be over (Fredrickson, Johnson & Wood, 2004), the questions about appropriate roles of the chief appointed official of a city remains vital to the effectiveness of municipal management. Tensions surface questions as to whether the city manager will continue in a policy role if it threatens tenure (Banovetz, 1994) or if elected officials’ expanding administrative roles threaten the manager’s authority (Svara, 1989; Nalbandian, 1990). In the early years of the implementation of the new model city charter, the city managers’ professional organization provided very strict guidance to city managers regarding their policymaking role. In 1924, the line between policy makers and administration was very clear in the International City Managers’ Association Code of Ethics. However, the lines have blurred over the years as the manager’s role in policymaking has been recognized. By 1952, the association called the manager a “community leader” who submits policy proposal and provides facts and advice to council on policy matters (ICMA, 1968, 93-94).

*“The injunctions to walk uprightly before men, compassionately before the weak and humbly before the council stand out in the tracts.”*  
Bosworth, 1955, 10.

The evolution of the city managers’ own code of conduct is a clear indicator of the development of the city manager’s policy making role. The academic community also watched the debate closely and weighed in at regular intervals. The once strict dichotomy separating administrative and policymaking tasks fell out of favor as scholars realized that city managers had significant roles in recommending policies and leading communities (Adrian, 1969; Stillman, 1977; Newell & Ammons, 1987; Svara, 1989). By the early 1990’s, some were seeing the city manager as the primary policy actor (Morgan & Watson, 1992). Others went so far as to recognize the manager as a politician (Bosworth, 1958). The International City-County Management Association, in its introductory text for city managers, advocate for a shared model of policymaking. Even in “strong mayor” forms, the roles of the mayor and manager have become intermingled so much as to make strict separation nonsensical (Ebdon & Brucato, 2000). Mayors often hire chief administrative officers to run the day-to-day business of the city. On the other side of the policy-administration equation, the mayor’s individual power is enhanced in council-manager forms when the mayor is directly elected by voters and not by council. The formal adaptation of forms of government and roles is indicative of the ongoing debate and discomfort with the melding of roles of the mayor and manager or chief administrative officer. Yet it is unclear that the overlapping or customization of the mayor and manager roles is the primary factors impacting policy activities of mayors in council-manager cities. The more relevant questions may be:

- 1) Does the mayor, council members or city manager perform more of the traditional policy leadership roles?
- 2) Do council standing committees weaken the role of the mayor in a council-manager city?
- 3) Do larger councils take influence away from the mayor?
- 4) Do council members with longer tenures decrease the power of the mayor?

5) Does the tenure of the city manager negatively interact with the policy leadership of the mayor?

The International City-County Management Association regularly surveys its members on the “state of the profession.” An adaptation of that survey tool and academic literature review will provide the basis for a survey of cities in Washington to probe the relationship between various factors and the role of the mayor in Washington’s council-manager cities.

### **Municipal policymaking: politics vs. administration**

The policy process in cities is a complex and often convoluted negotiation among numerous actors with varying values. A wide range of interests—individual and group—may marshal the forces to place policy issues on the city’s agenda or impact the outcomes of deliberations. Those policy actors may include business leaders, neighborhood groups, social service advocates, advisory citizen committees to the council and state legislators. The chief elected and chief appointed officials often play primary roles as negotiators and power brokers to bring those interests together. Council members traditionally play a lesser role in policy initiation and formulation, especially in council-manager cities (Adrian, 1958).

The historical assumption in public administration was that elected officials make policy and managers implement it. It was thought that a “hard-and-fast line” could be drawn between the two types of officials in council-manager cities based on policy roles (Ridley, 1958; Rosenbloom, 1993; Svava, 1985). The attempt to clearly delineate policymaking from administration has spawned decades of professional dialogue and study in academic and professional literature. Although the fallacy of clear separation in municipal government no longer holds (Stillman, 1977; Svava, 1985; Newell & Ammons, 1987; Nalbandian, 1991; ICMA, 1993; Watson & Hassett, 2002), a general understanding of what constitutes “policy,” “politics” and “administration” remains a necessary evil in developing an analytical framework.

Early public administration authors often discussed politics and policy as if the terms were interchangeable. Goodnow’s writings in 1900 in *Politics and Administration* in particular blurred the lines between the two. However, Goodnow himself offers a definition of politics that makes it clear that policymaking in itself does not constitute politics. The definition in his tome speaks to politics as the organization of a party among its citizens including “marshalling voters, and obtaining and distributing public patronage.” (Goodnow, 1900, 19). Using this definition, Montjoy and Watson (1995) posit that removing party politics from administration does not equate to removing all policy making activities from administration.

Policy can be generally defined as a set of principles or program of actions adopted by a person, group, or government. They provide a basis for action (Ridley, 1958). A more specific definition is “how to spend government revenues, whether to initiate new programs or create new offices, and how to distribute services at what level” (Svava, 1989). A simplistic definition of the policymaking process involves just three stages: 1) raising the issue or initiating policy; 2) consideration of a proposed course of action; 3) making the ultimate policy decision by approving, modifying or rejecting the proposal (Ridley, 1958, 13).

Administration is perhaps the easiest term to define. It can generally be described as organizing people and resources to carry out assigned tasks. Or, as Svava (1989) defines it: “specific decisions, regulations, and practices employed to achieve policy objectives.”

### **Major city policy decisions and administrative actions**

- In 1971, Boynton and Wright listed the major elements of city policy authority as:
- formal role in the preparation, submission or execution of the budget
  - appointment of department heads
  - veto over council actions
  - formal power over council agenda or recommendation of policy
  - appointments to citizen advisory boards and committees

In the International City/County Management Association's regular surveys on the profession, elements of policymaking probed include very formal powers—such as the power of the mayor to break ties on the council, propose policy or veto measures. It also includes:

- Assigning council members to chair or serve on committees
- Appointing citizens to serve on advisory or quasi-judicial authorities, boards or commissions
- Receiving the annual budget and comment/make suggestions
- Making an annual report to the council and citizens on the state of the community
- Initiating the hiring and/or involuntary termination of the chief appointed official

In a model developed by Svara after a study of North Carolina cities in 1989, policy activities included budget formulation, budget review and approval. The budget in particular is recognized as a primary policy document of city government (Ridley, 1958). Morgan and Watson (1992) expanded the list of actions connoting policy authority to include and distinguish between formal and informal power. The new iteration added activities otherwise considered “ceremonial” to the list, including acting as a media representative and lobbying state legislators. In some cities, council committees further diffuse the policymaking role (Ridley, 1958). Other elements have also gained favor as indicators of mayoral power. In particular, the mayor's right to vote with the council, veto council actions, the tenure of the mayor and direct election of mayors have been argued to impact the balance of leadership powers in cities (Kammerer, 1964; Wikstrom, 1979).

Some have tried to define the city administrator's role as specifically just execution of policies handed down from politics (Sayre, 1958). Others have made it clear that administration includes elements of policy making and policy execution (Ridley, 1958). Administration and management activities may include service delivery involvement, hiring or promotional decisions about staff, determining formulas for allocating services, handling complaints from citizens and employees and adopting policies for internal management (Svara, 1989). It is the “day-to-day administration” the city manager was originally intended to handle when the reformers adopted the model city charter.

### **Administrator's role in policymaking**

There are two primary forms of municipal government—the council-manager and mayor-council forms. Commission and town meeting forms still exist, but are very rare today (ICMA, 2001). Typical council-manager cities include a council of between five and nine representatives elected on a non-partisan basis, some at large and some by ward or district. The council serves as the chief policymaking body of the city by approving ordinances, policy and budget. The council appoints a chief executive—city manager or chief administrative officer—who carries out policy and is responsible for administrative functions while serving at the pleasure of the council (Stillman, 1977). The mayor-council form includes a mayor elected at large. The mayor serves as the chief administrative officer. The council, often elected in a mix of at-large and district elections, is the legislative body. The council adopts policies which the mayor then carries out.

However well recognized the city manager's role in administration is, the role in policymaking is often neglected (Ridley, 1958, 7). City managers operate in a political environment by design (Watson & Hassett, 2002). The role of the city manager/administrator in policymaking has evolved (Svara, 1985; Banovetz, 1994), but from the early days there was clear understanding of the difference between partisan politics and policymaking. City managers were advised to use their “political sense without being involved in partisan political questions” (Ridley, 3). Strict confinement of the city manager to administration appears to be the established early view (Schrager, 2006). The International City Managers' Association Code of Ethics in 1924 stated: “It is the council, the elected representatives of the people, who primarily determine municipal policies and are entitled to the credit for their fulfillment.” However, a 1938 revision to the code started blurring the lines, recognizing early on the city manager's policy. The 1938 code states: “In order that policy may be intelligent and effective, he (the manager) provides the

council with information and advice (on policy matters).” Although this does not propose a policy initiation role, it is nonetheless a vital role in policy formulation. In the 1952 code revision, the manager was called a community leader who “submits policy proposals to the council and provides the council with facts and advice on matters of policy to give the council a basis for making decisions on community goals” (ICMA, 1968, 93-94). In 1969 the International City-County Management Association recognized a role for the manager in “developing and analyzing alternatives for the council’s consideration.”

Whether or not the professional organization recognized the emerging role of the manager/administrator in policymaking, it obviously was occurring in practice. In a 1958 survey, 77 of 88 managers indicated they initiated policy regularly (Ridley, 19). In a 1980 National League of Cities Survey, 38% of the council members in council-manager cities rated the manager as main source of policy initiation in comparison to 41% who rated themselves and 7% who rated the mayor as the main source. Traditionally, city managers have a wide scope of influence in policy implementation and some policy making (Svara, 1989; Morgan & Watson, 1992; Banovetz, 1994). City managers’ calendars support that conclusion. In a 1985 survey (Newell & Ammons), city managers reported that they 32% of their time on policy development; 32% on community leadership and relations with officials outside government and the council 17% and the remainder on management.

Some are even bolder, asserting that the city manager is indeed a political leader (Kammerer, Nalbandian & Portillo, 2006). Yet the policy role is dicey territory for the manager (Nalbandian, 1990). In the primer for city managers, the primary source of conflict between managers and council is “for the manager to overstep his or her bounds and become too involved in policymaking or politics” (ICMA, 1993). Accounts from city managers across the country point to the difficulty of being defined by charters and laws on one hand and being asked to play substantial policymaking roles on the other (Nalbandian, 1990). Other studies second that, finding political turmoil to be a primary factor influencing city managers’ tenure (Whitaker & DeHoog, 1990; Renner, 2001). Even the Code of Ethics, once unambiguous, once again indicates a retreat overtly recognizing the centrality of the manager’s role in policymaking. The most recent revision, in 2004, includes a tenet: “Recognize that elected representatives of the people are entitled to the credit for the establishment of local government policies; responsibility for policy execution rests with the members.”

### **Mayor’s role in policymaking**

The policy role for the manager or administrator may create considerable conflict with the mayor. The once powerful chief executive found the role eviscerated in the council-manager form. The derogatory categorization of mayors as “strong” or “weak” based on their relative powers can not but infuriate a popularly elected official. In addition, the mayor is often elected to office based on requests by constituents. The mayor then feels compelled to try to fulfill those campaign promises by bringing legislative powers into alignment with citizen expectations (Schragger, 2006). In the often ceremonial role of mayor in council-manager cities, the mayor will become frustrated with attempts to influence both the council and the manager in carrying out those campaign promises.

In surveys of formal mayoral power, it appears clear that the mayor does predominantly serve as a figurehead. A 1968 survey of municipalities by the International City Managers’ Association probed the role of the mayor. The range of roles taken on by the mayor was found to include:

1. ceremonial tasks
2. spokesman
3. presides
4. educates
5. liaison with manager
6. forms team

7. sets goals
8. organizes relationships
9. advocates policy
10. promotes city
11. directs staff
12. selects manager (ICMA, 1968)

The most common activity of mayors in that survey by far was acting in ceremonial and presiding officer roles—83% of cities indicated their mayor played ceremonial roles and 52% as presiding officer. In the real policymaking activities such as advocating policy and goal setting, the numbers were lower. Just fewer than 30% witnessed goal setting by mayors, 13% saw organizing and 33% saw policy advocate activities. One study in Virginia found that policy leadership, including council leadership, were primary activities of the chief elected official (Wikstrom, 1979, 273). However, that study only requested information from the mayors themselves.

Surveys that rely on only formal models of power and influence may be inadequate. Although the survey found most cities fit the model with shared policymaking roles between the council and mayor, the mayor was most likely to:

- have the most contact with political party leaders
- be nominated as the major political leader in the city
- be consulted by the manager about political issues
- be most frequently involved in the administrative process in the city with involvement

measured as oversight of and contact with administrative officials (Boynton & Wright, 1971).

**Characteristics of a weak mayor:**

The council is powerful, with both legislative and executive authority  
 The mayor is not truly the chief executive, with limited power and/or no veto power  
 The council can prevent the mayor from effectively supervising city administration  
 There may be many administrative boards and commissions that operate independently from the government

**Characteristics of a strong mayor:**

The mayor is the chief executive officer, centralizing executive power  
 The mayor directs the administrative structure, appointing and removing department heads  
 While the council has legislative power, the mayor has veto power  
 The council is relieved of day-to-day administration  
 National League of Cities accessed 4/24/07 at [www.nlc.org/about\\_cities](http://www.nlc.org/about_cities)

Others have similarly pointed out the informal powers exercised by the mayor (Kuo, 1973; Sparrow, 1984; Morgan & Watson, 1992). Sparrow in particular pointed out that the mayor can significantly increase influence through collaboration with other council members. One study found the mayor's promotion or opposition to policies—even those with considerable council support—had a measurable impact on the measure's ultimate success or demise (Kuo, 1973). Other variations on council-manager plans create new leadership roles for the mayor. For

instance, chairing the rules committee assigned to delegate policy deliberation to committees may increase the mayor's role (Newland, 1989).

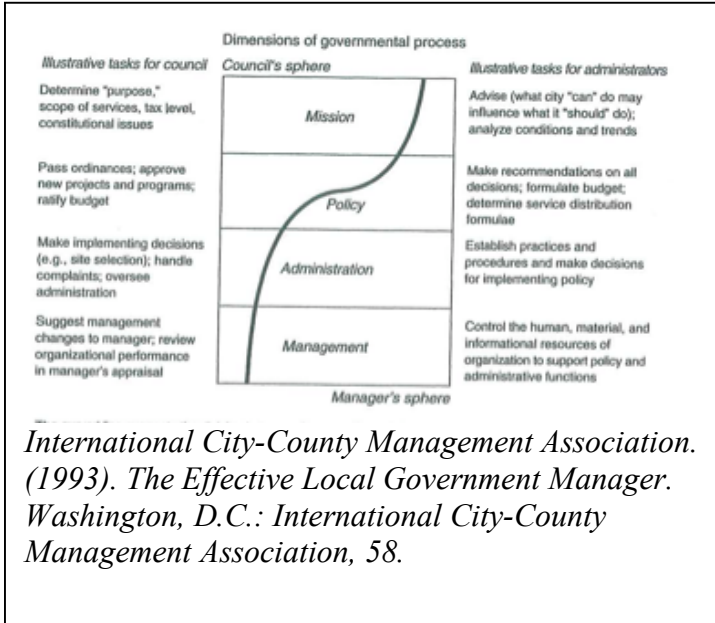
**Evolutions in municipal forms of government**

Today the strict policy-administration dichotomy model of municipal governance is found untenable (Svara, 2001). Municipal powers, some recognize, can't be distributed by design (Schrager, 2006). The acceptance of a shared role by city managers is evident in the adoption of Svara's duality model in the primer for city managers, *The Effective Local Government Manager*. There appear to be three distinct schools of thought on how to resolve the dissonance between

theory and reality: 1) redefine the role of the chief elected official to assert policymaking supremacy; 2) redefine the roles of both the chief elected and appointed official; 3) redefine the model so it reflects reality.

Those who advocate for a reassertion of the role of the strong mayor in council-manager cities see it as, on one hand, a benefit in reasserting the city's right to bargain in the many layers

of government created by federalism. In addition, Schragger (2006) pointed to the city manager's lack of accountability to the populace. He argues for strong mayoral power as superior for accountability, transparency and populist energy and the ultimate path toward a healthy, vital polity. Historically, some have cast doubt on the ability of the council-manager form to manage conflicts (Banfield & Wilson, 1963). The methods for reasserting mayoral authority are numerous. Sparrow (1984) saw promise in the actions of San Diego Mayor Pete Wilson between 1971 and 1982. During his reign, the mayor unveiled methods to increase the chief executive's role including having the mayor appoint the members and chair of each of four standing committees; creating staff positions to support the committees; determining which legislation requires



committee review and which committee should review it; setting the agenda of the full city council; and becoming becomes the chair of the most powerful committee—the rules committee. Sparrow uses the study of one mayor's reign to conclude that the city manager is losing power with emergency of strong-mayor, council-manager form.

Another response to the continued redefinition of the mayor's and manager's roles is seen in the merger of the two primary forms of city government. In a study of cities with populations of 100,000 and above between 1980 and 1994, the convergence of the council-manager and mayor-council forms in the use of district city council elections, directly elected mayors and professional management positions in mayor-council forms was found (Ebdon & Brucato, 2000; Fredrickson, Johnson & Wood, 2004). Adapted council-manager city is now preferred model for cities with more than 50,000, according to Ebdon & Brucato. See Appendices A and B for elements of traditional mayor-council and council-manager and current adapted forms. This convergence increases the power of mayors in council-manager while introducing the professional competencies of the chief administrative officers who work alongside mayor and council and relieve the mayor of day-to-day administrative duties (Schragger, 2006). The adaptations affect both the chief appointed official's and the chief elected official's responsibilities and spheres of influence.

The third option involves redefining the model to fit the practice. The approach has a sound basis in both empirical and anecdotal evidence. Findings show that the detailed features of these traditional models have been so mingled as to all but eliminate the importance of the formal designation of a city as either mayor-council or council-manager (Ebdon and Brucato, 2000). Nalbandian (1990) found policy leadership shared. Using data from 1987 ICMA survey found again that mayor and manager work as a team (Morgan & Watson, 1992). A less dichotomous, more shared framework, such as that espoused by Svava (1989) appears to better reflect reality and eliminate apparent conflicts. In the model, although elected officials are largely responsible for setting the mission and broad goals for city government while managers handle the management systems of the city, the officials share responsibility for policy and

implementation—the mid-level of policy activities. This model allows a policy-making role for managers and some management influence by the mayor and council. Elected officials and administrators maintain distinct roles based on their unique perspectives and values and the differences in their formal positions, but the functions they perform necessarily overlap (Svara, 2001).

### **Hypotheses: detractors and enhancers of mayoral role**

Even if policy leadership is not a zero-sum game but rather a collaborative process with room for many actors (Simon, 1957), every actor can't be equally involved in calling the plays. Subsequently, an increase in power of one policy actor would reduce another actor's opportunity to lead. Given this hypothesis, an increased role of council members or the city manager in policymaking activities in council-manager cities would decrease mayoral leadership. The tenure of the policy actors within a community may expand that policymaking role or capability. Wikstrom (1979) found that to be the case with the longer tenure of mayors increasing the mayor's policy role. That finding can be extrapolated to encompass the notion that all primary policy actors, including the city manager and council members, amass more influence the longer they serve as a community leader. Additionally, the number of primary policy actors—such as council members—in a city could diffuse policymaking authority and thus restrict the mayor's ability to take the mantle of leadership. Council committees create coalitions of those policy actors that may be able to overcome the power of the chief elected official.

In exploring the relationship of these various factors with the leadership role of the mayor in council-manager cities, the primary hypotheses are:

- Positive relationship between direct election of the mayor and mayoral policy leadership activities
- Positive relationship between mayoral tenure and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between tenure of city manager and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between length of city manager in profession and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between tenure of council members and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between number of council members and mayoral policy leadership
- Negative relationship between council committees and mayoral policy leadership

### **Research design**

The study uses a non-experimental design—a snapshot in time of the opinions of staff in a cross-section of council-manager cities in Washington gathered through an online survey. The bulk of survey questions probe relationships between the tenure and number of various policy actors and coalitions of policy actors to allow correlations to be drawn between the mayor's leadership roles and those factors.

**First Class** - Population of 10,000 or more; adopted charter.

**Second Class** - Population over 1,500; no charter; not a code city.

**Town** - Population less than 1,500; not a code city; classification eliminated for any new towns in 1994.

**Optional Municipal Code** – Unincorporated areas with at least 1,500 population; over 10,000 may adopt a charter; form of broad statutory home rule authority; began in 1967.

(Municipal Research and Services Center, 2007)

Respondents answered a series of questions in the survey related to policy leadership roles. The majority of the survey questions are nominal, only requiring yes/no or number answers. The survey does not require precision, in that many of the questions have a range of years for tenure. One series of questions on

specific policy leadership roles of the mayor, council and city manager required an ordinal response—a ranking of the level of involvement of the three city policy actors. The first question eliminated any cities that don't operate under the council-manager form. Respondents choosing any other options were taken to the end of the survey. The survey gathered only one piece of demographic information—the position of the respondents. This question was included, in part, to sort out any elected official responses from the sample. However, population data could be determined based upon the number of council members indicated in each response. A copy of the instrument is reproduced in Appendix C. The survey tool was pre-tested before being distributed by three municipal government professionals and revised accordingly.

To ensure some potential for generalizability to other populations, many of the questions were replicated or adapted from previous surveys of the International City-County Management Association and other studies. Those studies helped operationalize the concepts of “policy” and “leadership.” The survey narrowed the field of possible representations of formal and informal leadership roles to a manageable number. Not included in the survey questions were some aspects proposed by Morgan and Watson (1992) and gathered in previous International City/County Management Association surveys, including giving the annual “state of the city” address. One less formally recognized leadership role—coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions—was included to round out the role of a strong policy actor in calling upon all sources of opposition or agreement, including elected officials, appointed officials, the media and committees. This inclusion is supported by the early work of Adrian (1958), which found that unofficial groups provided a significant amount of leadership in council-manager cities. Although various formal and informal roles might be weighted to give priority to more formal authority and activities, this study will give all leadership actions and influences equal weight.

### Sample

The sample was a convenience sample of city managers and staff in Washington. By narrowing the study sample to one state, the impact of differing state laws governing forms of government is removed as a variable. Cities in Washington are allowed to operate under various forms based primarily on population. Those include the mayor-council, council-manager, commission and “optional municipal code” or a form of home rule. Cities may be mayor-council or council-manager cities and also code cities. See Appendix D for the breakdown of the various forms of government for Washington cities. Currently there are [10 first class cities](#), [16 second class cities](#), [73 towns](#), [181 code cities](#) (one with a charter) and one unclassified city according to the Municipal Research and Services Center. To further reduce the variations in the sample and eliminate the impact of mayor-

### Formal power

Call special meeting  
Directly elected  
Appointment to boards  
Annual message  
Veto  
Appointment of department heads  
Prepare budget  
Prepare agenda

### Informal power

Ceremonial representative  
Confer frequently with manager  
State capitol representative  
Frequent media representative  
(Morgan & Watson, 1992)

council forms and commission forms in comparing data, only council-manager cities were included in the sample. In total, 53 cities in Washington were organized as council-manager cities in May 2007. The list of council-manager cities follows in Appendix E.

However, variations do still exist within the sample. Because of the broader authorities provided to cities with their own charters and the optional municipal code cities, variations exist in how forms of government are exercised across the state, including in first-class council-manager cities. For example, in Vancouver the city attorney's appointment is subject to council confirmation. In Yakima, the mayor is elected by the council for a two-year term. In Tacoma, Washington, the council does not confirm any appointments and the mayor is independently elected for a four-year term. The survey design takes into account these variations by asking whether a city is a "code" city.

### **Data analysis**

The online survey comprised of 20 questions was sent to a sorted list to members of the Washington City-County Management Association members in council-manager cities and posted on a list serv. The survey was open to city staff and could be forwarded via an e-mail link to others, so a response rate can't be determined. The survey was available from May 22 to June 20, 2007.

Staff from cities did respond through a list serv posting on the Washington City-County Management Association Web site and an e-mail distributed to municipal clerks in Washington.

During the time the survey was available, 100 respondents accessed it. Of those, 39 were from mayor-council cities and one from a commission form of government. Those respondents were not given access to other questions in the survey. The vast majority of respondents were from optional municipal code cities in Washington.

Of the 45 respondents from council-manager cities, the majority were city managers (18) or other city staff (12). The remainder of the respondents indicated they were deputy/assistant city managers (5), department directors (6) and assistants to the city manager/management analysts/interns (3). One respondent did not indicate a position or answer the majority of the questions. That respondent's limited answers were deleted from the data set.

The majority of respondents (80%) were from optional municipal code cities in Washington. Six respondents were from first-class cities and three from second-class cities. The preliminary report of all responses is included in Appendix F.

### **Limitations**

No control group or pre- and post-test assurances of validity or reliability are available for this non-experimental design. In addition, there is no method to determine if various staff members from a municipality—city managers, deputy city managers, city clerks, management interns and others—responded only once or more than once as all staff of council-manager cities were invited to participate. A "ballot box stuffing" prevention mechanism on the Web site did prevent individual users from taking the survey more than once. However, the survey does offer the advantage of the absence of any experimenter biases or other interactions of the experimenter in the process. The tool itself has face validity and content validity based upon its reliance on many previously tested instruments.

Due to the non-experimental nature of the data, descriptive statistics—not inferential—are the most appropriate findings. Data analysis will primarily use comparisons of results for the sample as a whole versus various subsets of responses to illustrate any variability in mayoral policy leadership activities to test the hypotheses.

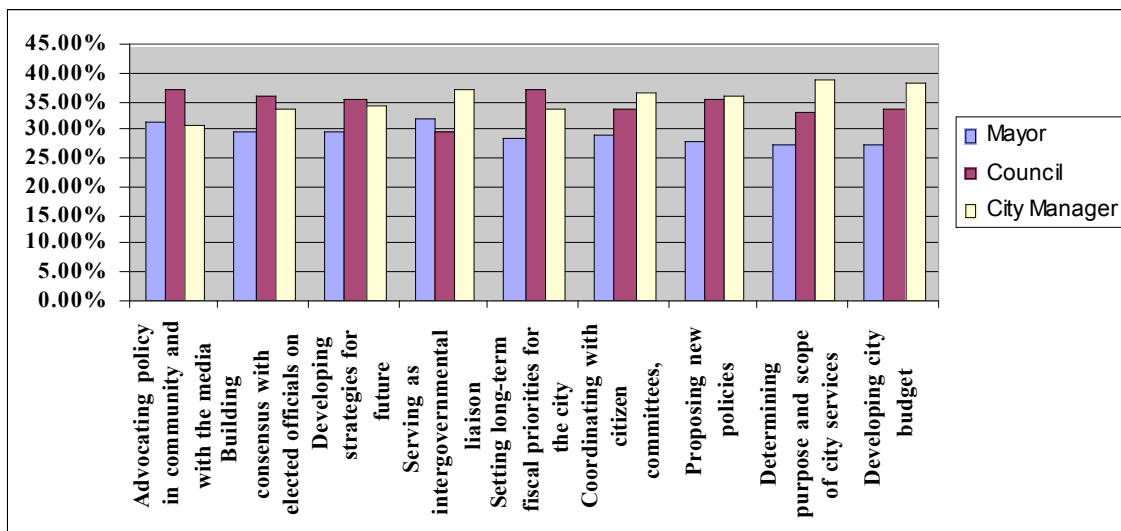
### **Roles of mayor, council and city manager**

The first question to be tested was who the primary policy actor in council-manager cities is—mayor, council or city manager. Conventional wisdom and research predicts that the council and city manager will be more dominant policy actors than the mayor in council-manager cities.

To analyze policymaking roles and factors influencing the role of the mayor in council-manager cities, several filters were used to generate comparisons to initial hypotheses. To turn the rankings (1 to 3) of the strength of the policy roles of the mayor, council and city manager into more easily interpreted data, the responses were summed and percentages derived. Using this method, the policy actor with the lowest involvement (rated a 1 by respondents) would receive a lower percentage of the overall policymaking role than the policy actor with the highest involvement (rated a 3 by respondents).

As indicated in the results below, the mayor was indeed perceived as a less forceful policy actor than the council and city manager. In five of the nine policy activities, the city manager was seen as the strongest policy actor. The remaining four policy roles are seen as primarily driven by the council. The mayor did not rate as the strongest policy actor in any of the policy activities. The findings support the hypothesis.

<b>All Responses and Policy Role Strength</b>			
	<b>Mayor</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>City Manager</b>
<b>Advocating policy in community and with the media</b>	31.73%	37.35%	30.92%
<b>Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city</b>	28.92%	37.35%	33.73%
<b>Developing strategies for future development of the city</b>	29.72%	35.74%	34.54%
<b>Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues</b>	29.72%	36.14%	34.14%
<b>Serving as intergovernmental liaison</b>	32.53%	30.12%	37.35%
<b>Determining purpose and scope of city services</b>	27.71%	33.33%	38.96%
<b>Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions</b>	29.32%	34.14%	36.55%
<b>Proposing new policies</b>	28.11%	35.74%	36.14%
<b>Developing city budget</b>	27.71%	33.73%	38.55%



### **Mayor tenure and authority**

There were several questions in which insufficient data existed to draw any conclusions, however preliminary. For instance, one hypothesis was that the mayor’s tenure might positively

relate to the policy leadership portrayed. However, findings were inconclusive, as no mayors had served four years or more in the sample.

Similarly, it was difficult to test the notion that mayors who are directly elected display more forceful policy leadership. The results were also not adequate to provide any delineation between mayors who rotate into the position over those directly elected by voters, as 41 of the 45 respondents indicated that the council selects the mayor from among its members. Only three indicated direct election of the mayor. However, the limited data indicated that policy roles change appreciably when the mayor is directly elected. Interestingly, the mayor’s role in setting long-term fiscal priorities, determining the purpose and scope of services and proposing new policies was appreciably lower than the average of all responses while the role of intergovernmental liaison was significantly stronger.

<b>Mayor Directly Elected and Policy Roles</b>			
	Mayor	Council	City Manager
<b>Advocating policy in community and with the media</b>	38.89%	33.33%	27.78%
<b>Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city</b>	<b>16.67%</b>	38.89%	44.44%
<b>Developing strategies for future development of the city</b>	27.78%	33.33%	38.89%
<b>Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues</b>	33.33%	38.89%	27.78%
<b>Serving as intergovernmental liaison</b>	<b>44.44%</b>	16.67%	38.89%
<b>Determining purpose and scope of city services</b>	<b>16.67%</b>	33.33%	50.00%
<b>Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions</b>	22.22%	33.33%	44.44%
<b>Proposing new policies</b>	<b>16.67%</b>	38.89%	44.44%
<b>Developing city budget</b>	27.78%	33.33%	38.89%

The mayor’s role in appointing members to citizen committees also warrants more study. Even though only three respondents indicated the mayor has that authority, the difference in the advocacy role is notable. This area—seemingly new territory for the study of city leadership—may show a relationship between citizen appointing authority and visible advocacy roles.

<b>Mayor Appoints to Citizen Committees and Policy Roles</b>			
	Mayor	Council	City Manager
<b>Advocating policy in community and with the media</b>	<b>44.44%</b>	22.22%	33.33%
<b>Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city</b>	22.22%	44.44%	33.33%
<b>Developing strategies for future development of the city</b>	16.67%	44.44%	38.89%
<b>Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues</b>	33.33%	22.22%	44.44%
<b>Serving as intergovernmental liaison</b>	38.89%	16.67%	44.44%
<b>Determining purpose and scope of city services</b>	22.22%	38.89%	38.89%
<b>Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions</b>	22.22%	27.78%	50.00%
<b>Proposing new policies</b>	22.22%	38.89%	38.89%
<b>Developing city budget</b>	33.33%	16.67%	50.00%

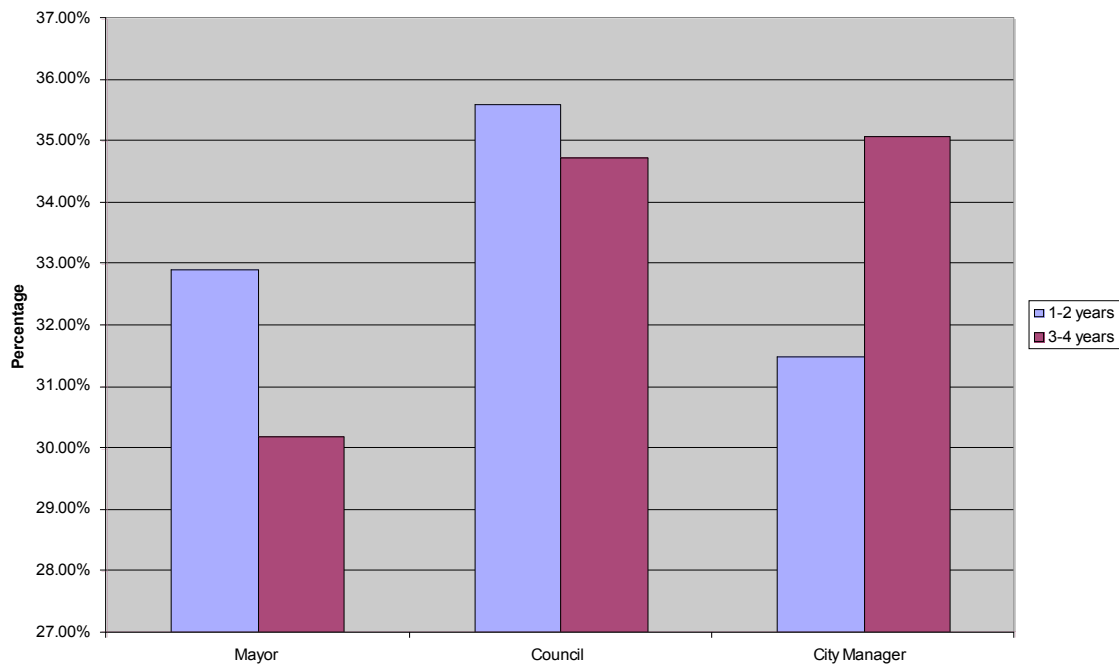
### Council tenure and mayoral leadership

Another hypothesis to be probed was: Do council members with longer tenures decrease the power of the mayor? The assumption was that more veteran council members would decrease the policy leadership role of the mayor.

For the analysis of the impact of council tenure on mayoral leadership, responses with one or more “not sure” answers regarding the tenure of council members were removed, as well as any that didn’t rank policy leadership roles of the mayor, council and city manager. Findings were limited to cities with 5 or 7 council members. The majority had 7 council positions.

Data was pulled for council members who, in total, had an average of 1-2 years on the council compared to 3-4 years on the council. As indicated in the graph below, it did appear that relatively younger councils rely more heavily on the mayor and less on the city manager, whereas council members with average experience ranges from three to four years tended to lean more heavily on the city manager and less on the mayor. This finding comports with the hypothesis.

**Council Tenure and Policy Roles**



**Council membership, committees and mayoral authority**

Another question posed in this study was: Do larger councils take influence away from the mayor? The hypothesis was that larger councils would dilute mayoral influence. However, it would be difficult to assess the impact of the size of the city council on the mayor’s policymaking role, given that 93% of respondents had councils comprised of seven members. Only a few very small cities had five members and only very large cities warrant a nine-member council. Therefore, no analysis was done on the hypothesis that larger councils dilute the policymaking role of the mayor.

In addition, in only three responses did council committees exist, making it difficult to judge whether council standing committees weaken the role of the mayor in a council-manager city, as expected. Despite the dearth of data, the impact on the policy roles was significant enough to note. Across the board, the mayor’s role in policymaking was stronger in cities with council committees by as much as nearly 15%, as in the case of developing strategies for future development of the city. The mayor’s policy role as rated by respondents increased significantly when compared to overall data. The impact of that increased role appears to be felt by both city managers and the council. However, the bulk of the difference is seen in the council’s role in policymaking, which was weakened considerably.

<b>Council Committees and Policy Roles</b>						
	<b>Mayor</b>	<b>Delta</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>Delta</b>	<b>City Manager</b>	<b>Delta</b>
<b>Advocating policy in community and with the media</b>	38.89%	7.16%	38.89%	1.54%	22.22%	-8.70%
<b>Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city</b>	33.33%	3.61%	22.22%	-13.92%	44.44%	10.30%
<b>Developing strategies for future development of the city</b>	<b>44.44%</b>	<b>14.72%</b>	<b>22.22%</b>	<b>-13.52%</b>	<b>33.33%</b>	<b>-1.21%</b>
<b>Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues</b>	33.33%	0.80%	33.33%	3.21%	33.33%	-1.21%
<b>Serving as intergovernmental liaison</b>	33.33%	4.41%	27.78%	-9.57%	38.89%	5.16%
<b>Determining purpose and scope of city services</b>	<b>38.89%</b>	<b>9.57%</b>	<b>22.22%</b>	<b>-11.92%</b>	<b>38.89%</b>	<b>2.34%</b>
<b>Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions</b>	<b>38.89%</b>	<b>10.78%</b>	<b>33.33%</b>	<b>-2.41%</b>	<b>27.78%</b>	<b>-8.36%</b>
<b>Proposing new policies</b>	38.89%	11.18%	33.33%	0.00%	27.78%	-11.18%
<b>Developing city budget</b>	33.33%	5.62%	38.89%	5.16%	27.78%	-11.39%
<b>TOTAL DIFFERENCE</b>		<b>67.85%</b>		<b>-41.43%</b>		<b>-24.25%</b>

### City manager's expertise and tenure and mayoral role

The final question to be analyzed was whether the tenure of the city manager negatively impacts the policy leadership of the mayor. For city managers with 21+ years of experience in the profession compared to all city managers in the survey pool, the impact appeared to be negligible. However, the role of advocating policy in the community, setting long-term fiscal priorities and building consensus with elected officials on policy showed less perceived involvement by long-term city managers. In those cases, it appears that the city manager deferred that role to the council. Therefore, the findings split more finely with some policymaking roles increasing for the mayor with professional, experienced city managers and some decreasing.

<b>Long Term City Managers and Policy Roles</b>						
	<b>Mayor/all</b>	<b>Mayor/long managers</b>	<b>Council/all</b>	<b>Council/long managers</b>	<b>City Manager/all</b>	<b>City Manager/long managers</b>
<b>Advocating policy in community and with the media</b>	31.73%	32.50%	37.35%	40.00%	30.92%	27.50%
<b>Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city</b>	29.72%	29.17%	36.14%	40.00%	34.14%	30.83%
<b>Developing strategies for future development of the city</b>	29.72%	27.50%	35.74%	40.00%	34.54%	32.50%
<b>Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues</b>	32.53%	30.83%	30.12%	35.83%	37.35%	33.33%
<b>Serving as intergovernmental liaison</b>	28.92%	35.00%	37.35%	30.00%	33.73%	35.00%
<b>Determining purpose and scope of city services</b>	29.32%	27.50%	34.14%	35.83%	36.55%	36.67%
<b>Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions</b>	28.11%	26.67%	35.74%	36.67%	36.14%	36.67%
<b>Proposing new policies</b>	27.71%	26.67%	33.33%	35.00%	38.96%	38.33%
<b>Developing city budget</b>	27.71%	25.83%	33.73%	35.00%	38.55%	39.17%

For city managers with 8+ years serving a city, policy roles also differed in some arenas. Most significantly, the role of the city manager in advocating policy in the community was significantly lower, as was building consensus with elected officials. Stronger policy roles for city managers with longer tenure in one city included proposing new policies, developing the budget and serving as an intergovernmental liaison. The mayor’s role in advocating policy and building consensus with elected officials increased significantly to fill the gap left by the city manager’s retreat from those areas. In other areas, however, the mayor’s role decreased significantly—in proposing new policies and developing the city budget, for instance. Similar to the findings for city managers with many years in the field, the data is split among various policy roles with some supporting the hypothesis that city managers with more years in a position take stronger roles and some countering that proposition.

<b>City Manager 8+ Years in Same City</b>			
	<b>Mayor</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>City Manager</b>
<b>Advocating policy in community and with the media</b>	<b>39.58%</b>	<b>37.50%</b>	<b>22.92%</b>
<b>Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city</b>	27.08%	43.75%	29.17%
<b>Developing strategies for future development of the city</b>	22.92%	43.75%	33.33%
<b>Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues</b>	<b>39.58%</b>	<b>35.42%</b>	<b>25.00%</b>
<b>Serving as intergovernmental liaison</b>	33.33%	27.08%	39.58%
<b>Determining purpose and scope of city services</b>	25.00%	37.50%	37.50%
<b>Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions</b>	25.00%	37.50%	37.50%
<b>Proposing new policies</b>	<b>22.92%</b>	<b>33.33%</b>	<b>43.75%</b>
<b>Developing city budget</b>	<b>22.92%</b>	<b>31.25%</b>	<b>45.83%</b>

Although not a hypothesis in this study, results were pulled for city managers only to test how they perceived their roles and whether their responses might skew the data. Results from the city managers on their policymaking roles compared to the mayor’s and council members’ closely paralleled the results from all respondents. However, the city managers consistently rated themselves a couple of percentage points lower. In addition, the city managers appeared to perceive a more even splitting of policymaking roles between the mayor and council, as evidenced by the higher scores given to the mayor.

City Managers Only			
	Mayor	Council	City Manager
Advocating policy in community and with the media	34.26%	35.19%	30.56%
Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city	33.33%	37.04%	29.63%
Developing strategies for future development of the city	32.41%	36.11%	31.48%
Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues	33.33%	36.11%	30.56%
Serving as intergovernmental liaison	34.26%	28.70%	37.04%
Determining purpose and scope of city services	32.41%	31.48%	36.11%
Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions	32.41%	33.33%	34.26%
Proposing new policies	33.33%	32.41%	34.26%
Developing city budget	29.63%	35.19%	35.19%

### Conclusions

Washington’s council-manager cities appear to operate under policymaking dynamics similar to other reformed North American cities with distinct executive and legislative roles. The survey data supports the theory that policymaking roles including budget development, policy initiation and advocacy are shared between the mayor, council and city manager. The findings support the widespread adoption of the adapted form foreseen and documented by academicians

“Council-manager mayors can contribute substantially to the performance of their governments and the betterment of their communities. The position is not a pale imitation of the executive mayor’s office in a mayor-council city, but rather a unique leadership position that requires distinctive qualities.” (Svara, 1987, 225)

including Morgan and Watson (1992). In no policymaking arena did any one player or group of players exert more than 44% of the policy leadership power. However, division of power is not equal. The mayor is not seen as the dominant policy actor and may be somewhat inconspicuous (Adrian, 1958). As suggested by Boynton and Wright (1971), the council is perceived to perform a stronger policymaking authority than the mayor. The city manager also plays a very visible and vital policy role in leading the polity.

The impact of the shared city leadership role is unclear. Many believe that the mayor’s ability to join with other council members (Boynton & Wright, 1971; Sparrow, 1984) to create a dominant coalition of policy actors is a significant strength—and one that wouldn’t be reflected in

these survey results. In essence, the mayor could still be a “first among equals” and something more than a ribbon cutter but less than a stand-alone policy maker (Svara, 1987). Mayors in council-manager cities may well still serve to improve performance of the system as a whole (Svara, 1990). Some of the survey results seem to support that theory. For instance from the limited data council committees appear to increase the mayor’s policy leadership role—in direct opposition to the original hypothesis. This may in fact support the idea of a “pyramiding of power” in council-manager cities whereby mayors join forces with other council members to forward policies. From an outsider, it may appear that the council is leading policy whereas the mayor may in fact exert more influence than is immediately recognizable. Pulling like-minded council members together in a council committee structure would aid, not detract, from the mayor’s efforts to build coalitions in that setting.

It does appear that mayors who are directly elected may enjoy more leadership authority with other governmental bodies than others. Other elected officials may respect the fact that the mayor faced the same vetting at the polls that they have and thus enjoys popular support. Overt constituent support may give weight to the mayor's voice in council-manager cities. Mayors who appoint members to citizen committees also may enjoy a higher level of influence based upon a stronger connection to influential citizens in the community, as shown by the advocacy role. Again, the results need more study but may indicate the mayor's role in council-manager cities as being strongly dependent on the officeholder's ability to create coalitions with other dominant policy actors, both inside city hall and in the community.

The differences in policymaking roles based upon the tenure of council members were intriguing. Whereas fledgling council members appeared to rely more heavily on the mayor, those with three to four years of experience seemed to share the policymaking authority more readily with the city manager. Although it's difficult to surmise why this might be, it could be that council members first seek the guidance of the lead elected official in learning the legislative process before turning to the lead appointed official for more advice in drafting and forwarding policies. Or it is possible that the mayor and council members, after an initial honeymoon period, end up on opposite sides of a policy issue and part ways. It may also simply be an indication of the learning curve, whereby council members determine over their first two years in office that the city manager's role in drafting and forwarding policy is stronger than originally perceived.

In addition, long-term city managers appear to back off certain overt policy leadership roles and allow the mayor and council to take the lead. Although some roles, such as budgeting—a legislated role for the city manager—may be stronger for those with longer terms as a city manager or in a city, other roles indicate shrinkage. Given that policy conflicts are a lead cause for city managers choosing to terminate their relationship with a city—and also is a lead cause of termination by councils—it may be that city managers consciously try to become a shadow player in local politics. While safeguarding and building roles that have general acceptance, the city manager may choose to discontinue or subvert other roles that become key points of friction. Those appear to be the roles that would be most visible to constituents, such as advocating in the media. Showing respect for the mayor's and council members' relationships with constituencies may be a core survival tactic.

### **Areas for Further Study**

To further probe the relationships of various factors and the mayor's policymaking role in council-manager cities, a more robust sample is needed. In addition, the informal policy leadership roles of the mayor—such as advocating policy in the media and community and serving as an intergovernmental liaison—appear to be less influenced by variances in other factors and deserve more study.

Other questions on the mayoral role in council-manager cities include:

- Does dominant political party affiliation affect the policy roles undertaken by the mayor?
- Does the content of a policy or its alignment with party politics influence the role of the mayor?
- Do term limits influence the policymaking dynamics?
- Does the presence of mayor- and council-dedicated staff and resources influence policymaking roles?
- Do full-time mayors exert more policy influence than part-time mayors?
- Does the council as Ridley (1958) asserts seldom initiate policy, preferring to have citizen committees and groups lead?
- What is the influence of ward- or district-elected council members on mayoral influence?
- Does the content of policy—traditional versus social policies—influence the role played by the mayor and council, as posited by Boynton & Wright (1971)?

However, one has to wonder if all the time and energy spent discussing policymaking roles in council-manager or mayor-council cities misses the point. City managers' policy roles are most often set by the mayor and council themselves (Loveridge, 1968; Kammerer, 1964)—not surprisingly since the city manager serves at the pleasure of the mayor and council. That is even more accurate in strong mayor cities. One final area for further study is how the mayor and council members' understanding of their roles and the city manager's role in policymaking are similar or differ in council-manager cities.

In addition, there are a whole host of questions regarding the difference between policy roles of chief administrative officers in mayor-council cities and city managers in council-manager cities that deserve more study. For example:

- Do chief administrative officers experience less intervention in day-to-day administration than city managers?
- Are mayors who have the power to appoint the chief administrative officer stronger policy actors?
- Is there more or less overlap between policymaking roles in cities with CAOs versus cities with city managers?

### **Implications**

Sound governance relies on a somewhat unified—or at least understood—leadership structure. Policymaking in local government requires the mayor, council and city manager to see their roles as complementary, not confrontational. The International City-County Management Association assigns certain duties to the mayor or council chair:

- Presiding at council meetings
- Serving as a spokesperson for the community
- Facilitating communication and understanding between elected and appointed officials
- Assisting the council in setting goals and advocating policy decisions
- Promoting and defending the community
- Serving as a key representative in intergovernmental relations

“Much that passes for leadership in politics is strangely reminiscent of the sound and fury that accompanies a battle between two bulls. It is a matter of great importance to the contestants and may be to their more ardent partisans, but it has very little to do with the public interest.” (Bebout, 1955, 191)

The future of council-manager government is based on complementary roles for mayor, council and manager. Banovetz (1994) posits that city managers will “hunker down” if policymaking roles are not compatible between elected and appointed officials. Indeed, a main frustration for city managers is the role conflict with council over policymaking and “power prerogatives” (Carrell, 1962). As evidenced by the responses regarding city managers with history in the profession, wise appointed officials limit their policy leadership roles to areas less likely to create conflicts, including budget development and proposing new policies. One city manager, writing in the professional association magazine for city managers, advised his peers not to insert themselves into policy and community leadership roles even if a council void exists. He also cautioned his cohorts to “avoid the limelight” (Duggan, 1991).

City managers may be well served by leaving the more prominent public roles, such as acting as intergovernmental liaison and advocacy to the mayor and elected officials in council-manager cities. By doing so, they may well establish the policy development and management team of mayor, council and manager envisioned by the International City-County Management Association (International City-County Management Association, 2007).

The responsibility for defining appropriate roles lies with all of the actors—manager, mayor and council members. One of the first jobs of a new city manager is to open discussions with the mayor and council members to create a shared understanding of policymaking and executive

roles that will help avoid any future conflicts. Managers also have a real opportunity to avoid push-and-pull relations with the mayor. Although “weak” mayors may struggle with their lack of authority, seasoned city managers can help elevate that role by including the mayor in on discussions about policy early on and enlisting the assistance of the lead elected official in building consensus on policy recommendations forwarded from municipal staff.

In the end, all of the debate concerning policy and administrative roles appear to be headed for a positive result: Current municipal forms seek to blend responsiveness and democratic leadership with the elements of efficiency and professional competence, bringing the best of both forms to all types of cities.

**Appendix A**

From Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington accessed 4/24/07 at [www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Management/forms/compare.aspx](http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Management/forms/compare.aspx)



Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington  
Working Together for Excellence in Local Government

Updated 08/03

**Comparing/Contrasting the Mayor-Council and Council-Manager Forms of Government**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Mayor-Council</b>	<b>Council-Manager</b>
Legislative authority	Council	Council
Executive authority	Elected mayor	Appointed manager
Selection of CEO	Popularly elected	Appointed by council on the basis of experience
Removal of CEO	Recall election	Removed by a majority vote of the council
Tenure of executive	4-year term	Indefinite
Tenure of council	4-year term	4-year term
Appointment of department heads	Mayor (with council confirmation if provided)	Manager (no council confirmation)
Removal of department heads	Mayor	Manager
Veto	Mayor	Manager has no veto
Policy development	Mayor can propose	Manager can recommend
Policy implementation	Mayor	Manager
Underlying principles	Separation of powers Political leadership Strong central executive	Separation of politics from administration Promotion of economy and efficiency through professional management Strong central executive

**Appendix B  
Adapted Forms of Municipal Government**

**Ebdon & Brucato, 2000, excerpted from Table 1 page 24.**

<b>Mayor-Council Traditional</b>	<b>Mayor-Council Adapted</b>	<b>Council Manager Traditional</b>	<b>Council Manager Adapted</b>
Mayor directly elected	Mayor directly elected	Mayor selected by council	Mayor directly elected
Most council elected by district	Council elected by district, at-large or mixed	Most council elected at-large	Council elected by district, at-large, or mixed
No CAO Mayor is not on council	Likely to have CAO Mayor is not on council	Has CAO Mayor is on council	Has CAO Mayor is on council
Mayor has veto power	Mayor has veto power	Mayor does not have veto power	Mayor may have veto power
Mayor full-time	Mayor full-time	Mayor part-time	Mayor is usually part-time
Mayor has staff	Mayor has staff	Mayor does not have staff	Mayor does not have staff
Council full-time	Council full-time or part-time	Council is part-time	Council is part-time
Council has staff	Council may have staff	Council does not have staff	Council does not have staff
Partisan or nonpartisan	Partisan or nonpartisan elections	Nonpartisan elections	Usually nonpartisan elections
Department heads report to mayor	Department heads report to mayor	Department heads report to CAO	Department heads report to CAO
Mayor serves as CAO	Mayor appoints and terminates CAO without consent of council	Council appoints and terminates city manager	Council appoints and terminates city manager

**Default Question Block**

Thank you for participating in this short survey. Individual responses are anonymous. Please complete your survey by June 20th.

The questionnaire explores the policy leadership activities of mayors in council-manager cities. The survey tests for relationships between the mayor's leadership role and various factors including the tenure and number of council members; the tenure and experience of the city manager; and the presence of council standing committees.

**Please share this survey with others who serve in Washington council-manager cities.**

The survey should take you no more than 10 minutes to complete. If you choose to stop before completing the survey, it will save your results and you may return to it at anytime before June 21st. You may skip most of the questions if you're unsure, but please fill in as many answers as you can.

Thank you.

Gwendolyn Voelpel  
Assistant to the City Manager  
City of Tacoma

Which form of government does your city have?

*(Move your cursor over the selections below until the appropriate option is highlighted. Choose the button with the double right arrows to proceed to the next question. You may also choose the back button with the double left arrows at any point to return to the previous question screen.)*

Council-manager  
Mayor-council  
Other/commissioner

What is the classification of your city? *You may look up your city at <http://www.mrsc.org/cityprofiles/citylist.aspx>.*

- First class
- Second class
- Optional municipal code or "code" city
- Not sure

How is your mayor selected?

- Voters elect directly
- Council selects from among its members
- The council member receiving the most votes in the general election becomes the mayor
- Council members rotate into the position of mayor
- Other
- Not sure

How long has your mayor served in that role?

- 1-3 years
- 4-7 years
- 7+ years
- Not sure

Under what circumstances does the mayor have the authority to vote in a council meeting?

- On all issues
- Only to break a tie
- To break a tie and other reasons
- Never
- Other
- Not sure

Does the mayor have the authority to veto council-passed measures?



- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21 years +
- Not sure

Are any of the city manager's department head or municipal judge appointments subject to confirmation by council?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Who appoints citizens to serve on committees, boards and commissions of the city?

- Mayor
- Recommended by mayor and appointed by council
- Mayor with advice of council
- Council
- Other
- Not sure

Please rank the overall involvement of the mayor, city council and city manager in the areas listed below with 1 = lowest involvement to 3 = highest involvement. *This is a forced choice, so in each row you should only have one position rated as a 1, one as a 2, and one as a 3.*

	Mayor	Council	City Manager
Developing city budget	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Proposing new policies	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Developing strategies for future development of the city	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advocating policy in community and with the media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serving as intergovernmental liaison	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Determining purpose and scope of city services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Does your city have council standing committees that deliberate on policy issues?

Yes  
No

Who appoints members of the council standing committees?

Mayor  
Mayor recommends and council approves  
Mayor with advice of council  
Council  
Not sure

Is there a rules committee that assigns legislation to the council standing committees for review?

Yes  
No  
Not sure

How is the chair of the rules committee selected?

Mayor serves in that role  
Mayor appoints  
Mayor recommends and council appoints  
Council members and mayor rotate  
Council appoints  
Not sure

How many council members does your city have?

5  
7  
9

Please estimate how long your council members have served.

	1-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8 years or more	Not sure
Position 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Position 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Position 3	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Position 4	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Position 5	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Position 6	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	1-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8 years or more	Not sure

Position 7	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Position 8	1-2 years <input type="radio"/>	3-4 years <input type="radio"/>	5-7 years <input type="radio"/>	8 years or more <input type="radio"/>	Not sure <input type="radio"/>
Position 9	1-2 years <input type="radio"/>	3-4 years <input type="radio"/>	5-7 years <input type="radio"/>	8 years or more <input type="radio"/>	Not sure <input type="radio"/>

What best describes your position?

City manager  
 Assistant/deputy city manager  
 Department director  
 Assistant to the city manager/management analyst  
 Other city staff  
 Elected official



**Appendix D**  
**Cities in Washington**  
**Municipal Research and Services Center**

1. <a href="#">Airway Heights</a>	4640	Spokane	Code	Council-Manager
2. <a href="#">Battle Ground</a>	14960	Clark	Code	Council-Manager
3. <a href="#">Bellevue</a>	115500	King	Code	Council-Manager
4. <a href="#">Blaine</a>	4240	Whatcom	Code	Council-Manager
5. <a href="#">Bothell</a>	31000	King/Snohomish	Code	Council-Manager
6. <a href="#">Burien</a>	31040	King	Code	Council-Manager
7. <a href="#">Carnation</a>	1900	King	Code	Council-Manager
8. <a href="#">Centralia</a>	15340	Lewis	Code	Council-Manager
9. <a href="#">Chehalis</a>	6990	Lewis	Code	Council-Manager
10. <a href="#">Covington</a>	16610	King	Code	Council-Manager
11. <a href="#">Des Moines</a>	28960	King	Code	Council-Manager
12. <a href="#">Edgewood</a>	9460	Pierce	Code	Council-Manager
13. <a href="#">Ellensburg</a>	16700	Kittitas	Code	Council-Manager
14. <a href="#">Federal Way</a>	85800	King	Code	Council-Manager
15. <a href="#">Fife</a>	4855	Pierce	Code	Council-Manager
16. <a href="#">Fircrest</a>	6080	Pierce	Code	Council-Manager
17. <a href="#">Kelso</a>	11820	Cowlitz	Code	Council-Manager
18. <a href="#">Kenmore</a>	19290	King	Code	Council-Manager
19. <a href="#">Kennewick</a>	60410	Benton	Code	Council-Manager
20. <a href="#">Kirkland</a>	45740	King	Code	Council-Manager
21. <a href="#">Lacey</a>	33180	Thurston	Code	Council-Manager
22. <a href="#">Lakewood</a>	58850	Pierce	Code	Council-Manager
23. <a href="#">Longview</a>	35430	Cowlitz	Code	Council-Manager
24. <a href="#">Maple Valley</a>	17870	King	Code	Council-Manager
25. <a href="#">Medina</a>	2930	King	Code	Council-Manager

26. <a href="#">Mercer Island</a>	21710	King	Code	Council-Manager
27. <a href="#">Mill Creek</a>	14320	Snohomish	Code	Council-Manager
28. <a href="#">Moses Lake</a>	16340	Grant	Code	Council-Manager
29. <a href="#">Mountlake Terrace</a>	20390	Snohomish	Code	Council-Manager
30. <a href="#">Newcastle</a>	8890	King	Code	Council-Manager
31. <a href="#">Normandy Park</a>	6385	King	Second	Council-Manager
32. <a href="#">Ocean Shores</a>	4385	Grays Harbor	Code	Council-Manager
33. <a href="#">Olympia</a>	43330	Thurston	Code	Council-Manager
34. <a href="#">Pasco</a>	44190	Franklin	Code	Council-Manager
35. <a href="#">Port Angeles</a>	18640	Clallam	Code	Council-Manager
36. <a href="#">Port Townsend</a>	8745	Jefferson	Code	Council-Manager
37. <a href="#">Puyallup</a>	35830	Pierce	Code	Council-Manager
38. <a href="#">Richland</a>	43520	Benton	First	Council-Manager
39. <a href="#">Ridgefield</a>	2630	Clark	Code	Council-Manager
40. <a href="#">Sammamish</a>	38640	King	Code	Council-Manager
41. <a href="#">SeaTac</a>	25140	King	Code	Council-Manager
42. <a href="#">Sequim</a>	4730	Clallam	Code	Council-Manager
43. <a href="#">Shoreline</a>	52500	King	Code	Council-Manager
44. <a href="#">Snohomish</a>	8700	Snohomish	Code	Council-Manager
45. <a href="#">Spokane Valley</a>	85010	Spokane	Code	Council-Manager
46. <a href="#">Sunnyside</a>	14710	Yakima	Code	Council-Manager
47. <a href="#">Tacoma</a>	198100	Pierce	First	Council-Manager
48. <a href="#">Toppenish</a>	9000	Yakima	Code	Council-Manager
49. <a href="#">University Place</a>	30980	Pierce	Code	Council-Manager
50. <a href="#">Vancouver</a>	154800	Clark	First	Council-Manager
51. <a href="#">Walla</a>	30630	Walla Walla	Code	Council-Manager

<a href="#">Walla</a>				
52. <a href="#">Woodinville</a>	10140	King	Code	Council-Manager
53. <a href="#">Yakima</a>	79480	Yakima	First	Council-Manager

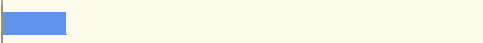

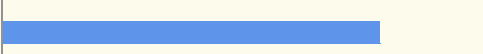

**Appendix E**  
**Washington City Forms**  
**Municipal Research and Services Center**

**Forms of Government and Percentage of Incorporated Population  
of Washington Cities - 1940 to 2003**

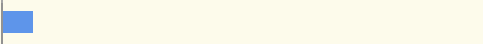
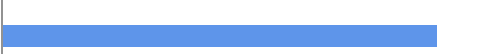

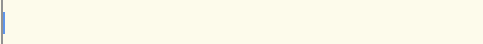


Year	Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Commission		Total No. of Cities	Total Inc. Pop
	No.	% of Inc. Pop.	No.	% of Inc. Pop.	No.	% of Inc. Pop.		
1940	208	65%	0	0%	13	35%	221	1,060,518
1950	221	61%	2	1%	15	38%	238	1,422,983
1960	234	60%	18	32%	9	8%	261	1,705,986
1970	233	57%	24	37%	8	6%	265	1,907,182
1980	230	55%	29	40%	6	5%	265	2,125,392
1990	228	54%	37	45%	3	1%	268	2,287,498
2000	224	50%	54	49.8%	1	.2%	279	3,387,824
2001	225	56%	53	43.8%	1	.2%	279	3,518,374
2003	227	55%	53	44.8%	1	.2%	281	3,736,468

**Appendix F  
Survey Results**

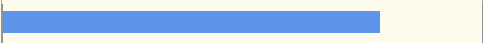
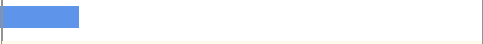


**What is the classification of your city? You may look up your city at <http://www.mrsc.org/cityprofiles/citylist.aspx>.**

Answer		Response	%
First class		6	14%
Second class		3	7%
Optional municipal code or "code" city		35	80%
Not sure		0	0%
Total		44	100%

**How is your mayor selected?**

Answer		Response	%
Voters elect directly		3	7%
Council selects from among its members		40	91%
The council member receiving the most votes in the general election becomes the mayor		0	0%
Council members rotate into the position of mayor		1	2%
Other		0	0%
Not sure		0	0%
Total		44	100%

**How long has your mayor served in that role?**

Answer		Response	%
1-3 years		35	80%
4-7 years		7	16%
7+ years		2	5%
Not sure		0	0%
Total		44	100%

**Under what circumstances does the mayor have the authority to vote in a council meeting?**

Answer	Response	%
On all issues	44	100%
Only to break a tie	0	0%
To break a tie and other reasons	0	0%
Never	0	0%
Other	0	0%
Not sure	0	0%
Total	44	100%

**Does the mayor have the authority to veto council-passed measures?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	1	2%
No	40	91%
Not sure	3	7%
Total	44	100%

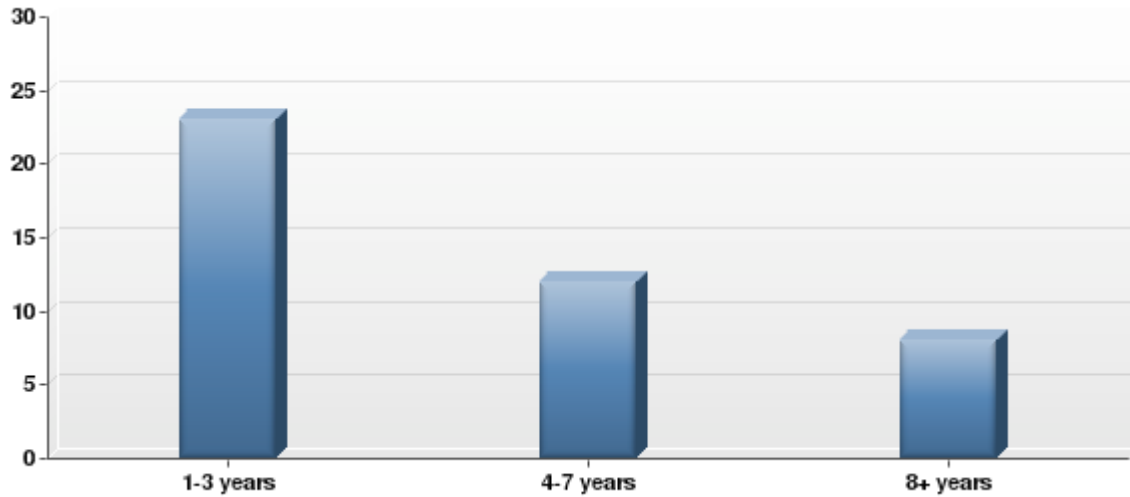
**If the mayor has the right to veto, is a super majority of the council required to overturn it?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	0	0%
No	1	25%
Not sure	3	75%
Total	4	100%

**Who appoints your city manager?**

Answer	Response	%
Mayor	0	0%
Council	20	45%
Combination of mayor and council	24	55%
Total	44	100%

**How long has your city manager served as the chief executive officer in your city?**



Answer	Response	%
1-3 years	23	53%
4-7 years	12	28%
8+ years	8	19%
Total	43	100%

**How many years has your city manager been a professional administrator, e.g. city manager, county administrator, assistant city/county manager, deputy director? (Estimates allowed.)**

Answer	Response	%
1-5 years	3	7%
6-10 years	8	18%
11-20 years	10	23%
21 years +	21	48%
Not sure	2	5%
Total	44	100%

**Are any of the city manager's department head or municipal judge appointments subject to confirmation by council?**

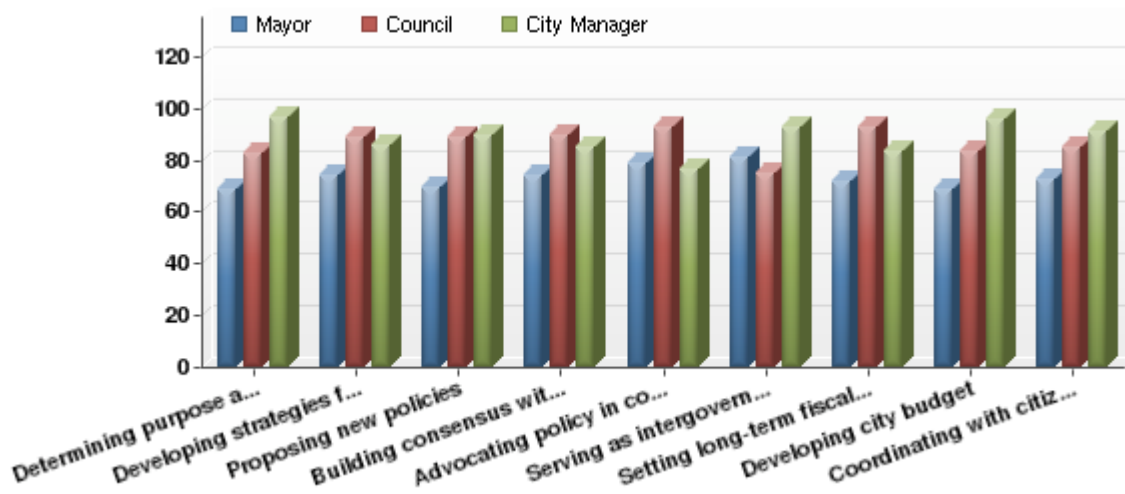
Answer	Response	%
Yes	12	27%
No	31	70%
Not sure	1	2%

Total		44	100%
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**Who appoints citizens to serve on committees, boards and commissions of the city?**

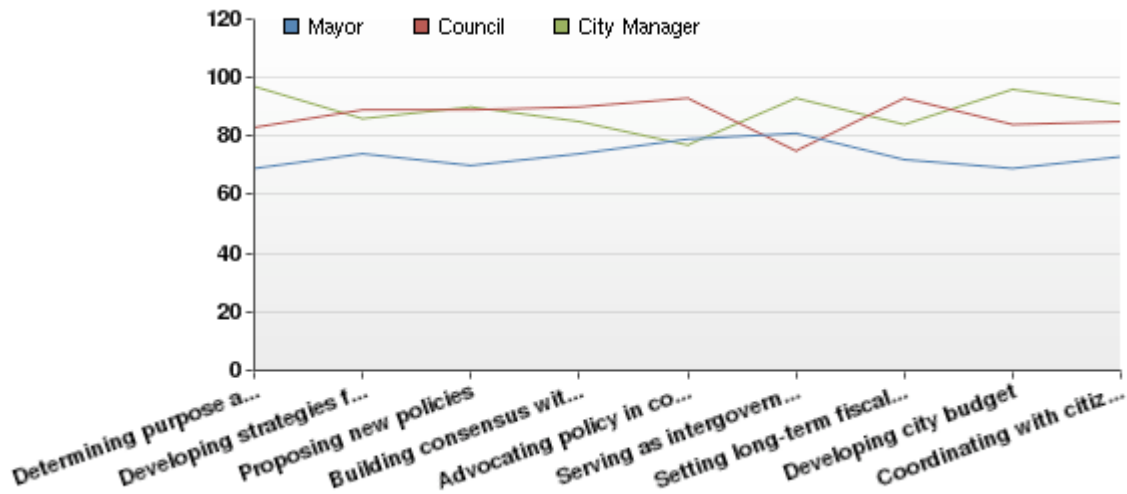
Answer	Response	%
Mayor	3	7%
Recommended by mayor and appointed by council	10	23%
Mayor with advice of council	4	9%
Council	23	52%
Other	3	7%
Not sure	1	2%
Total	44	100%

**Please rank the overall involvement of the mayor, city council and city manager in the areas listed below with 1 = lowest involvement to 3 = highest involvement.**



Question	Mayor	Council	City Manager
Advocating policy in community and with the media	31.73%	37.35%	30.92%
Building consensus with elected officials on policy issues	29.72%	36.14%	34.14%
Developing strategies for future development of the city	29.72%	35.74%	34.54%
Serving as intergovernmental liaison	32.53%	30.12%	37.35%

Setting long-term fiscal priorities for the city	28.92%	37.35%	33.73%
Coordinating with citizen committees, boards and commissions	29.32%	34.14%	36.55%
Proposing new policies	28.11%	35.74%	36.14%
Determining purpose and scope of city services	27.71%	33.33%	38.96%
Developing city budget	27.71%	33.73%	38.55%



**Does your city have council standing committees that deliberate on policy issues?**

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	17	39%
2	No	27	61%
	Total	44	100%

**Who appoints members of the council standing committees?**

Answer	Response	%
Mayor	3	18%
Mayor recommends and council approves	7	41%
Mayor with advice of council	0	0%
Council	7	41%
Not sure	0	0%

Total		17	100%
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**Is there a rules committee that assigns legislation to the council standing committees for review?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	2	12%
No	13	76%
Not sure	2	12%
Total	17	100%

**How is the chair of the rules committee selected?**

Answer	Response	%
Mayor serves in that role	0	0%
Mayor appoints	0	0%
Mayor recommends and council appoints	0	0%
Council members and mayor rotate	0	0%
Council appoints	1	50%
Not sure	1	50%
Total	2	100%

**How many council members does your city have?**

Answer	Response	%
5	1	3%
7	37	93%
9	2	5%
Total	40	100%

**Please estimate how long your council members have served.**

Question	Label 1	Count 1	Label 2	Count 2	Label 3	Count 3	Label 4	Count 4	Label 5	Count 5	Mean
Position 9	1-2 years	0	3-4 years	1	5-7 years	3	8 years or more	1	Not sure	0	3.00

Position 8	1-2 years	1	3-4 years	1	5-7 years	2	8 years or more	2	Not sure	0	2.83
Position 4	1-2 years	4	3-4 years	13	5-7 years	11	8 years or more	12	Not sure	1	2.83
Position 2	1-2 years	6	3-4 years	10	5-7 years	9	8 years or more	18	Not sure	1	2.95
Position 1	1-2 years	6	3-4 years	14	5-7 years	9	8 years or more	14	Not sure	1	2.77
Position 7	1-2 years	10	3-4 years	12	5-7 years	6	8 years or more	13	Not sure	1	2.60
Position 3	1-2 years	10	3-4 years	16	5-7 years	6	8 years or more	11	Not sure	1	2.48
Position 6	1-2 years	12	3-4 years	8	5-7 years	11	8 years or more	11	Not sure	1	2.56
Position 5	1-2 years	13	3-4 years	12	5-7 years	9	8 years or more	9	Not sure	1	2.39

Statistic	Position 1	Position 2	Position 3	Position 4	Position 5	Position 6	Position 7	Position 8	Position 9
Mean	2.77	2.95	2.48	2.83	2.39	2.56	2.60	2.83	3.00
Variance	1.25	1.30	1.37	1.10	1.41	1.49	1.52	1.37	0.50
Standard Deviation	1.12	1.14	1.17	1.05	1.19	1.22	1.23	1.17	0.71
Total	44	44	44	41	44	43	42	6	5

Responses									
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