City of Gilroy

STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item Title:	**2025 City Administrator Performance Evaluation Process**
Meeting Date:	January 27, 2025
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STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS Not Applicable

RECOMMENDATION

Council appoints a three-member Council sub-Committee and direct them to:

1. Engage and interview a consultant to establish the annual City Administrator performance evaluation process;
2. Provide a recommendation to the full Council for a consultant tasked with creating and implementing an evaluation process for the City Administrator that utilizes industry standards and best practices and complies with the International City Management Association (ICMA) guidelines for the City Administrator to obtain certification as a Credentialed Manager (CM).

BACKGROUND

The City Council's oversight of the City Administrator is a cornerstone of effective municipal governance. A well-structured and objective performance evaluation process is a powerful tool for setting clear expectations, measuring accomplishments, and promoting continuous improvement. Currently, the City lacks a formalized process for evaluating the City Administrator's performance, which is in line with best practices for California municipal organizations. It's important to note that the current City

Administrator is striving to obtain his International City Management Association (ICMA) designation as a Credentialed Manager (CM). This credential requires an ICMA-approved evaluation process, which covers 14 core evaluation areas essential for effective local government management and leadership.

ANALYSIS

In developing a recommendation to the City Council, staff obtained information from cities in the region to understand how high performing cities evaluate their City Manager.

- Palo Alto
- Mountain View
- Cupertino
- Sunnyvale
- Santa Clara
- San Mateo

These cities implement best practices outlined in the Manager Evaluation Handbook created by ICMA (attached). The Handbook describes a process that enhances communication between the City Administrator and the Council regarding the administrator's performance in fulfilling assigned duties. It also establishes specific work-related goals, objectives, and performance measures for the upcoming year. As the City Council prepares for the Fiscal Year 2026 and 2027 budget process, this is an ideal opportunity to align the City Administrator's performance with the Council's budget and work plan, which will be adopted in June 2025.

High-functioning organizations typically engage an expert consultant in this area, as many City Council members lack experience in evaluating an organization's chief executive. They also rely on a consultant to facilitate communication between the Council, the community, City staff, and the City Administrator. Also, an expert consultant can bring objectivity to the process as they are not a vested party.

Other Agency Researched Trends

In researching other entities that have established similar evaluation processes (Campbell, Los Altos, Menlo Park, Mountain View, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, and Palo Alto), several trends have been identified as best practices utilized:

- Annual Review: Each agency conducts a yearly review of their City Manager. Some agencies determine from year to year that the reviews may be more

limited in scope, depending upon external factors such as limited budget or time constraints.

- Performance Review Policy for City Manager: Only the larger agencies surveyed, such as Mountain View and Sunnyvale, have a formal written policy that details the process for City Manager performance review. Sunnyvale is reevaluating its current processes. The other agencies surveyed rely on past practices to guide the City Manager evaluation process instead of a written policy.

- Setting an Annual Time Frame and Schedule for Evaluation and Review: In the larger agencies, the City Manager review process begins by confirming the time frame and key milestones. Mountain View also sets a schedule that identifies when closed sessions and various Council meetings will be devoted to evaluation.

- Subcommittees: Several agencies utilize a subcommittee, which may, for example, consist of the Mayor and two other Councilmembers, to facilitate the evaluation process, work directly with the City Manager, give the evaluation to the City Manager, and negotiate the compensation. These subcommittees also serve to establish and drive the timeline for the evaluation process.

- City Managers prepare a summary report for the Council to serve as a tool for evaluation: In almost all cases, the City Manager must prepare a report to provide details of issues, significant accomplishments, and goals for the upcoming performance year. In some agencies, the City Manager directs the Executive Team (typically Department Heads) to provide information on their significant accomplishments and upcoming goals, which are included in the City Manager's report to the Council.

- Performance Evaluation Form: The larger agencies use an evaluation form for the City Manager to complete for Council review. In the case of one city, the evaluation is given to the City Manager, and each Council member also completes an evaluation form on the City Manager's performance. Other agencies rely on the City Manager's summary report for evaluation.

- Question and Answer Session with the City Manager: In one agency, the Council works with its evaluation subcommittee to develop specific questions to ask the City Manager after the Council has received the City Manager's own report or performance evaluation. In a closed session Q&A with the Council and facilitated by the subcommittee members, each City Manager can answer Council members' questions. This Q&A session is factored in the

evaluation process timeline and allows for open dialogue with the Council and the City Manager in a structured format.

- Confidential Evaluation Report: The Council prepares and presents a confidential report to the City Manager in all cases. In all cases, this report is placed in the City Manager's confidential personnel file.

- Consultants: Half of the cities reported using a consultant to facilitate the evaluation process, particularly with a new City Manager. Consultants are used in some agencies to implement 360-degree reviews of the City Manager. Also, consultants assist the City Manager and Councils in setting performance goals for the upcoming year. One city has written into its policy that a consultant will be permitted to facilitate the more in-depth performance review process every three years.

- Goal Setting Process: Agencies report using a consultant to work with the Council in goal-setting processes for the agency and thereby determine the performance goals for the City Manager as a result of the goal-setting process.

- Closed Sessions: In all cases, closed sessions were set up with the evaluation subcommittee and/or the whole Council and the City Manager to discuss performance.

- Salary Surveys: In all agencies, the Council is provided with compensation information, which is used after the evaluation to help determine the appropriate compensation adjustment for the City Manager. Usually, Human Resources staff conduct compensation surveys or provide survey data based on agreed-upon local comparator agencies.

- Public Meetings to approve compensation adjustments: After the evaluation is complete and the compensation for the City Manager is agreed upon, the final approval for compensation is presented in a public Council meeting (as required by State law).

International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Recommendations
Staff also pulled information from ICMA, the industry association for local government management. They produced an 18-page handbook for Manager evaluations (attached). It identifies as the key step the development of the rating instrument, and then guidance on how to evaluate performance.

It recommends that councils may find it helpful to use an independent consultant, especially if the elected body is not experienced in the performance evaluation process for local government. The handbook provides options and input into potential processes, but identifies that the elected body, in consultation with the manager, should customize the process to fit the organization and priorities of the local government.

Recommended Action
Based on this preliminary research, the City Administrator recommends that the City Council form a sub-committee consisting of the Mayor and two additional Councilmembers to develop a process for Gilroy's City Council to evaluate its City Administrator.

Creating a sub-committee will allow for focused attention on developing a robust evaluation process. The sub-committee is also recommended to select a qualified consultant with relevant experience along with a strong positive reputation in establishing and administering executive performance appraisals for California municipalities. This consultant will provide expertise in designing an evaluation process and rating instrument that is equitable, results-based, and consistent with industry best practices.

The sub-committee would work closely with the consultant and the City Administrator to ensure the process is:

- Objective and aligned with the City's strategic goals.
- Focused on and considers performance and attainment of goals and milestones established for the City Administrator.
- Incorporates feedback from the community including City partners, local non-profit, boards and commissions and the public.
- Reflective of best practices within California municipalities.
- Designed to provide actionable feedback for professional growth and organizational improvement.

Once the evaluation process is developed, it is recommended that the sub-committee present its recommendations to the full City Council for consideration and approval.

ALTERNATIVES

Council may choose to explore a different method for developing the evaluation process for the City Administrator. Staff recommends the proposed process because it aligns with industry best practices and is utilized by other reputable, high-performing cities.

FISCAL IMPACT/FUNDING SOURCE

The formation of the committee does not create a fiscal impact. Securing a consultant will carry a cost in an amount that is not currently known, but such costs will be absorbed within existing appropriations.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This item was included on the publicly posted agenda for this meeting, and the finalization of the process will be returning to Council in a public meeting in the future.

NEXT STEPS

If approved, staff will work with Council's selected committee to implement the creation of the evaluation process.

Attachments:

1. ICMA Manager Evaluations Handbook.

Manager Evaluations
HANDBOOK

ICMA

Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

ICMA advances professional local government worldwide. Its mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and advancing professional management of local government. ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, provides member support; publications, data, and information; peer and results-oriented assistance; and training and professional development to more than 9,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect 185 million individuals living in thousands of communities, from small villages and towns to large metropolitan areas.

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Definition of Terms

- The term *local government*, as used in this handbook, refers to a town, village, borough, township, city, county, or a legally constituted elected body of governments.
- The term *manager* refers to the chief executive officer (CEO) or chief administrative officer (CAO) of any local government who has been appointed by its elected body to oversee day-to-day operations.
- The terms *elected officials, elected body*, and *board* refer to any council, commission, or other locally elected body, including assemblies, boards of trustees, boards of selectmen, boards of supervisors, boards of directors, and so on.
- The term *manager evaluation* refers to the appraisal or assessment conducted by the elected body of the manager's performance in achieving organizational goals and implementing policy.

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Preface

The evaluation of the manager is a key component of any well-run local government, yet the value of a quality evaluation process and the responsibility for that activity is often overlooked. Even in communities that are considered to be professionally governed, the performance evaluation of the local government manager can be an afterthought. The 2012–2013 Executive Board of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), led by President Bonnie Svrcek, acknowledged the need for local government managers and their elected bodies to put more focus on the manager evaluation process. Accordingly, it created a task force of managers from around the United States, representing over a dozen communities, to develop a *Manager Evaluations Handbook* that would assist managers and their boards in this critical task.

Managers are encouraged to review this handbook with an eye toward working with their elected bodies to develop formal, mutually agreed-upon processes for their own evaluations. This handbook, however, is also intended to highlight the value of a formal manager evaluation process and to assist local elected officials in the design of an effective evaluation tool.

Executive Summary

The periodic evaluation of the local government manager by the elected body is an important component of a high-performance organization. The evaluation should contain performance goals, objectives, and targets that are linked to the elected body's established strategic plans, goals, and priorities, and it should focus on the manager's degree of progress toward organizational outcomes. To be fair, it must be based on criteria that have been communicated to the manager in advance. Sample or generic evaluation forms, if used, should be customized to reflect these criteria.

The purpose of the evaluation process is to increase communication between the members of the elected body and the manager concerning the manager's performance in the accomplishment of assigned duties and responsibilities, and the establishment of specific work-related goals and objectives for the coming year. Thus, all members of the elected body should participate in the process, both by individually completing the rating instrument and by discussing their ratings with the other board members in order to arrive at a consensus about performance expectations.

There is no one correct way to conduct a manager evaluation. The key is to ensure that the evaluation takes place in a regular, mutually agreed-upon manner and is viewed by all as an opportunity for communication between the elected officials and the manager.

It may be useful, particularly if the members of the elected body are inexperienced in the performance evaluation process, to use a consultant to help the elected body prepare for and conduct the manager's evaluation.

Successful Evaluation Tips[1]

Performance evaluations will allow you to

A. Recognize the accomplishments of the manager and show appreciation for the unique contributions to the organization
B. Clearly identify areas where the manager is doing well
C. Clearly identify areas where the manager can improve his or her performance
D. Specify definite actions that will allow the manager to make additional value-added contributions to the organization in the future.
E. Obtain the manager's own opinions on progress and his or her individual contribution to collective actions and achievements.

Discussing tasks that the manager performs well

- Gives the manager insight into self-awareness, interests, and motivation
- Gives the manager recognition and appreciation for achievements
- Creates a positive climate for the remainder of the review.

Reminders:

- Listen intently.
- Reinforce the manager's performance.
- Emphasize facts; provide concrete examples and specific descriptions of actions, work, and results.
- Give only positive feedback during this part of the evaluation.
- Acknowledge improvements that the manager has made.
- Praise efforts if the manager has worked hard on something but failed because of circumstances beyond his or her control.
- Describe performance that you would like to see continued.

Discussing areas that need improvement

- Gives insight into how the manager feels about change, improvement for growth
- Allows you to express any concerns you have about the manager's overall performance and performance in specific areas
- Lets you challenge the manager to higher levels of achievement.

Reminders:

- Keep the discussion focused on performance.
- Describe actions and results that do not meet expectations.
- Describe areas where the manager can make a greater contribution.
- Describe any situation or performance observed that needs to be changed; be specific.
- Tell the manager what needs to be done if a specific change of behavior needs to take place.
- Focus on learning from the past and making plans for the future.
- Keep this part of the discussion as positive and encouraging as possible.

Do's and Don'ts

DO:

- Spend a few minutes warming up in which the agenda is laid out so everyone is reminded about what to expect. Give an overview.
- Always start with the positives. Be specific.
- Explain the ratings in all areas: Talk about how the consensus was arrived.
- Be honest. Tell it like it is.
- Be a coach, not a judge. Managing employees is a lot like being an athletic coach. Effective coaching involves a lot more than just score keeping. Simply providing the score at the end of the game doesn't improve performance.
- Discuss with the manager his or her reactions to the ratings, making clear that you are interested in his or her feelings and thoughts.
- If appropriate, develop an improvement plan that includes areas of deficiency, developmental needs.

DON'T:

- Rate the manager without the facts. Ratings should be on actual results.
- Be too general.
- Sidestep problems. Document performance problems and clearly identify what needs improvement.
- Be vague or generalize the reasons for the performance scores. Clear and specific examples of results should be available.
- Ambush the manager by identifying deficiencies or problems that have never been addressed in informal discussions prior to the formal evaluation.
- Minimize the manager's concerns or discount his or her feelings.

Introduction

There is some irony in the fact that managers' evaluations are often less formal and less structured than those of the managers' employees. While the manager may oversee the evaluation of hundreds of employees within an organization, his or her own performance evaluation becomes the task of elected leaders who are often not formally trained in the evaluation process or who have narrow or conflicting definitions of good performance. The fact that an elected body with numerous members is charged with the task of evaluating the manager makes the need for a clear and agreed-upon evaluation process even more important. And a thoughtful and structured evaluation process that is supported by all involved parties enhances the ongoing communication that is fundamental to effective board/manager relationships.

A manager's evaluation should contain performance goals, objectives, and targets that are linked to the elected body's established strategic plans, goals, and priorities and should focus on whether the manager has achieved the desired organizational outcomes.

Sometimes the tone of a performance review can be unduly influenced by the manager's last success or failure. Judging performance on the basis of a single incident or behavior is a common problem that can arise in any organization. But a single incident or behavior should not be the sole focus of a performance evaluation. That is not to discount the importance of how a manager handles high-stress, higher-profile issues, which is an important aspect of a manager's responsibility. However, day-to-day leadership, which is also a key responsibility of the manager, can sometimes go unnoticed even though it provides the foundation in which high-stress, high-profile issues are handled.

ICMA has developed a list of 14 Practices for Effective Local Government Leadership that is recommended to members who are considering their own professional development needs and activities. The core areas represent much of what local government managers are responsible for on an everyday basis, and competency by the manager in these practices is central to an effective, high-performing, professionally managed local government. It is therefore the recommendation of ICMA's Task Force on Manager Evaluations that competency in the ICMA Practices also be considered in the manager's performance evaluation.

There is no one way, let alone one single correct way, to conduct an effective manager evaluation. This *Manager Evaluations Handbook* will present traditional evaluation approaches that have proven to be successful, along with some alternative methods that may be good for your local government. Again, the key is to ensure that the evaluation takes place in a regular, mutually agreed-upon manner and is viewed by all as an opportunity for communication between the elected officials and the manager.

The Purpose of Manager Evaluations

High-performance local governments embrace an ethos of continual improvement. Conducting regular appraisals of the manager's work performance is part of the continual improvement process.

The purpose of the evaluation process is to increase communication between the members of the elected body and the manager concerning the manager's performance in the accomplishment of his or her assigned duties and responsibilities and the establishment of specific work-related goals, objectives, and performance measures for the coming year. The evaluation process provides an opportunity for the elected body to have an honest dialogue with the manager about its expectations, to assess what is being accomplished, to recognize the manager's achievements and contributions, to identify where there may be performance gaps, to develop standards to measure future performance, and to identify the resources and actions necessary to achieve the agreed-upon standards. Keeping the focus on "big picture" strategic goals and behaviors rather than on minor issues or one-time mistakes/complaints leads to better outcomes.

Given that good relationships promote candor and constructive planning, the performance appraisal also provides a forum for both parties to discuss and strengthen the elected body–manager relationship, ensuring better alignment of goals while reducing misunderstandings and surprises. When elected bodies conduct regular performance appraisals of the manager, they are more likely to achieve their community's goals and objectives.

Basic Process

Ideally, the performance appraisal process for a manager is the natural continuation of the hiring process.

How to Initiate

Prior to the recruitment of candidates, the elected body typically develops the goals and objectives for

the position of manager. Then, during the selection process, the candidate and the hiring body meet to discuss these items along with the long- and short-term needs and issues of the community. Through these conversations, the basic tenets of the manager's performance evaluation are identified. At this point, the performance appraisal process just needs to be formalized. When the employment offer has been accepted, the employment agreement should include the requirement and schedule for the manager's evaluation.

(Excellent tools for preparing the employment agreement are contained in the ICMA Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator and the ICMA Model Employment Agreement.)

The employment agreement should stipulate that the performance evaluation will be a written document and that all parties will meet to discuss the contents in person. It should also identify the frequency with which evaluations will take place (e.g., annually, semi-annually). By including this information in the employment agreement, the hiring body ensures that communications between the manager and the elected body will be consistently scheduled, and that initiatives and objectives can be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

It is especially critical for the elected body to come to consensus on the initial expectations of the newly hired manager so that priorities can be assigned and progress measured. Those issues that were important during the hiring process will logically factor into the initial evaluation process. Then, in the succeeding years, the document can be revised to reflect the latest accomplishments and newest challenges.

Of course, priorities may shift during the year. If that happens, make it clear to the manager that new or changed priorities are being added into the evaluation process.

If, with the passage of time, elections have taken place and the board that is conducting the evaluation is not the same board that did the hiring, it is important that the newly elected officials immediately be introduced to the established performance goals, measures, and evaluation process. This can be done as part of the orientation process for new board members, included in the discussion of the form of government and the role of the manager. If a new member has no experience in conducting performance evaluations, he or she will need to receive training before participating in this process.

If performance evaluations were not discussed during the hiring process, either the manager or the elected body may request that an evaluation process be instituted, and the specifics for conducting the evaluation can then be agreed upon outside of the provisions of the employment agreement. If the request is made by the elected body, it is important to emphasize that the purpose of the evaluation process is to serve as a tool for organizational improvement, not as a means of punishing the manager or setting the stage for termination. While elected officials, especially those newly elected, may sometimes wish for a change in management, the performance evaluation process should not be used to effect such a change.

How to Proceed

A number of issues should be considered when preparing for the evaluation process, including how to develop the rating instrument (and whether to use an outside consultant), how to use the rating instrument, and whether the evaluation should be conducted in private or in public.

Developing the Rating Instrument

Unlike most employee performance evaluations, in which the employee is evaluated by a single executive or supervisor, the manager's evaluation is conducted by a group of individuals acting as a body. As each elected official likely has different expectations, the board members must first come to a consensus on measures and definitions to be used.

Using a consultant. If the members of the elected body are inexperienced in the performance evaluation process, it might be helpful at this point to use an independent consultant to assist in preparing for and conducting the manager's evaluation. A consultant could be used in a variety of ways.

When designing the evaluation instrument, a consultant should solicit each elected official's full participation by asking for examples and details for each rating category. Whether this is accomplished by interviewing each official individually or by facilitating a group session, it is important to ensure that all voices are heard. Use of an independent consultant is especially helpful if there is a lack of cohesion among elected officials.

Once the consultant has collected the information, the elected body and manager should meet in person to discuss the findings. It is recommended that the in-person conversation with the manager to review the evaluation be conducted by the elected body with the assistance of the consultant but not by the consultant alone.

If funds are limited, a consultant could be used in a limited engagement to prepare an evaluation system and then train the elected officials on how to conduct an evaluation, which the officials may manage themselves after the first year.

If the elected body decides to use a consultant, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) may be a source of referrals, as may be state municipal leagues or the local government's regular employment consulting firms. If a recruiter was used to assist with the hiring process, the recruiter's agreement could be extended to include the setup of the initial evaluation process.

It is recommended that the evaluation process NOT be facilitated by the local government's corporation counsel, municipal clerk, or human resources director because these individuals are not independent parties. In almost all cases, their positions have either a reporting or a cooperating relationship with the manager, so involving them in the manager's evaluation may damage relationships that are necessary for the effective and efficient operation of the local government

Proceeding without a consultant. If a consultant is not used to facilitate the development of the evaluation instrument, the elected body may wish to begin by reviewing the format and process used for the other local government employees and considering the same or a revised method. It is important to understand, however, that a manager is evaluated in additional ways. Because of this key difference, flexibility is needed to add any necessary components intended to assess varied goals and objectives and to facilitate a dialogue between the elected body and the manager.

To be fair, the evaluation must be outcome based, using criteria that have been previously communicated to the manager and that incorporate the elected body's priorities. The use of a prefabricated generic evaluation form (even the sample forms found at the end of this handbook) is not recommended without some customization to reflect these priorities.

Measure observable behaviors and progress toward goals

The manager's job is to achieve the organization's goals and implement the policies that have been determined by the elected body. Evaluating the manager's effectiveness in achieving the goals necessarily means that the elected body must have determined and communicated the goals to the manager in advance, ideally through a strategic planning process.

The members of the board must be in agreement about their expectations of the manager. Furthermore, both the manager and the board must understand what the expectations are.

The performance criteria established by the board for each of the prioritized functional areas need to be

The manager's success in achieving the goals set by the elected body is related to his or her competencies and behaviors with respect to the specific functions identified as the responsibility of the manager. Defining the strengths of the manager and identifying areas for improvement are part of the evaluation process. ICMA has a list of 14 core areas critical for effective local government management and leadership. While this list, the ICMA Practices for Effective Local Government Leadership, was developed for the purpose of ICMA's Voluntary Credentialing professional development program, the elected body might find it helpful for identifying the specific observable behaviors to be used in the manager evaluation. It is suggested that the elected body select what it believes to be the most important areas for achieving its goals and evaluate the manager's performance in these areas. The ICMA Practices are as follows (click here for descriptions):

1. Personal and Professional Integrity
2. Community Engagement
3. Equity and Inclusion
4. Staff Effectiveness
5. Personal Resiliency and Development
6. Strategic Leadership
7. Strategic Planning
8. Policy Facilitation and Implementation
9. Community and Resident Service
10. Service Delivery
11. Technological Literacy
12. Financial Management and Budgeting
13. Human Resources Management and Workforce Engagement
14. Communication and Information Sharing

specific and observable by the members of the elected body. If the criteria are quantifiable, they should be expressed in objective, measurable terms. For example, the manager saved 10% on the new project. If the criteria are qualitative and subjective, they can be expressed in terms of the desired outcome. For example, members of the community and employees frequently commented on the manager's fairness during this evaluation period.

Using the Rating Instrument

The usefulness of any performance evaluation depends almost entirely upon the understanding, impartiality, and objectivity with which the ratings are made. In order to obtain a clear, fair, and accurate rating, an evaluator must clearly differentiate between the personality and performance of the manager being rated, making an objective and unbiased assessment on the basis of performance alone. Fairness requires the ability to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the manager's performance and to explain these constructively to the manager.

When an evaluation is completed by a group of people, it is important that it reflect the consensus opinion of all members. All members of the elected body should participate in the manager evaluation process in order to arrive at a consensus. This consensus can be accomplished by having each member individually rate the manager, followed by a group discussion to arrive at a final consensus rating for each measure. Alternatively, if consensus cannot be reached, each member can individually complete the rating form, and then one member (or the consultant, if one is used) can collect the forms and compile the results and comments into one document, followed by group discussion. It is important that each member's ratings, whether positive or negative, be backed up with specific comments and examples so that the whole group understands the reasoning behind them.

If individual comments—those that do not necessarily represent the sentiments of the elected body as a whole—are to be included in the final document that will be discussed with the manager, the board should decide in advance whether those comments will be anonymous or attributed to the individuals making them.

It is important to keep in mind that performance evaluation is just one part of the communication toolbox between the manager and elected officials. It is intended to enhance that communication, not to result in a periodic written "report card" that is an end in itself. In addition, nothing in the evaluation ought ever to be a surprise. Ongoing conversations should be held throughout the year (assuming that the evaluation is done annually) to help the manager understand if he or she is on course or if any midseason corrections are necessary. Ideally, the items in the evaluation will have already been touched on in these conversations, so the evaluation will serve as a written summary of them.

Public versus private evaluations

When deciding whether to conduct the evaluation process in a public or an executive/closed session, the elected officials, manager, and legal counsel should review state law. When possible, it is recommended that the performance evaluation process occur in executive/closed session between the elected body and manager; however, many states have specific regulations about whether and when the public may be excluded from attending a meeting involving the elected body or from having access to certain records involving a public employee. Such "sunshine" laws were first created to increase public disclosure by governmental agencies. The purpose is to promote accountability and transparency by allowing the public to see how decisions are made and how money is allocated.

While all states have such laws, the exact provisions of those laws vary. For example, specific legislation may require that all government meetings be open to the public or that written records be released upon request. In many states, all local government records are available for review by the public, including evaluation documents and notes, unless they are specifically exempted or prohibited from disclosure by state statutes.

Regardless of whether the evaluation is conducted in a public or an executive/closed session, each state's statute will dictate certain procedures for meeting notification, recording of minutes, and disclosure of decisions made. These procedures should be reviewed by the elected officials, manager, and legal counsel and followed throughout the evaluation process.

However, all final decisions or actions related to the manager's performance (e.g., employment agreement changes, compensation) should be made in a public setting.

Frequency and Timing of Manager Evaluations

As previously noted, the manager evaluation process, including the frequency and timing of the evaluations,

Benefits of executive session/closed meeting to evaluate manager's performance

- Provides a venue for handling issues that are best discussed in private, and ensures confidentiality until a decision is made regarding the manager's performance
- Provides a forum that is not unduly influenced by outside sources
- Promotes a free-flowing discussion of comments by the elected body and manager
- Ensures the respect and privacy of personnel dealings between the elected body and manager
- Improves communication between the elected body and the manager
- Reduces opportunity to politicize the performance evaluation process
- Provides a forum for the elected body and the manager to talk openly about topics that warrant special attention, such as succession planning, senior staff performance, and executive compensation
- Enables elected officials to challenge the manager without fear of undermining his or her authority in the community

Benefits of an open session/meeting to evaluate manager's performance

- Can build transparency and trust by enabling members of the public to view the process
- Can reduce claims of inappropriate agreements and "secrets"
- Can improve elected body, manager, and citizen relationships

Benefits of providing a public summary once the process is completed

- Lets the public know how the elected body evaluates and views the manager
- Ensures transparency and public accountability
- Promotes the embodiment of ICMA's commitment to openness in government
- Provides the organization with another opportunity to earn the public's trust

will ideally have been discussed as part of the employment agreement at the time of the manager's hiring. It is recommended that the initial formal evaluation not take place until the elected officials and the manager have worked together for a year; however, short, less formal evaluations are recommended on a quarterly basis. After that, at least one formal evaluation (still with quarterly informal evaluations) should be conducted per year, as longer intervals create a higher likelihood of miscommunication and surprises.

It is further recommended that the formal evaluation be scheduled during the least busy time of year for both the manager and the elected officials, avoiding both the budget preparation season (particularly if the manager's compensation is tied to the evaluation) and the election season (lest the manager's evaluation become an election issue). The scheduling should also allow adequate time for newly elected members of the board to become familiar with the manager's performance.

Relationship of Evaluation to Compensation

The primary purposes of a manager's performance evaluation are

1. To provide a tool for communication between the elected body and the manager
2. To provide an opportunity for the elected body to specifically indicate levels of satisfaction with the manager on mutually identified and defined performance priorities
3. To provide an opportunity for the manager to learn and improve
4. To allow for fair and equitable compensation adjustments based on a review of performance in achieving mutually identified priorities and on the elected body's level of satisfaction with the manager's overall performance.

Performance evaluations that are tied directly to compensation decisions are often distorted by those decisions and therefore result in less-than-honest communication between the elected body and the manager. This happens primarily because

1. Elected officials wishing to offer upward compensation adjustments may feel obliged to embellish the evaluation in a positive manner to justify the compensation decision to the public.
2. Elected officials not wishing to adjust compensation may feel obligated to justify their decision with negative comments about performance matters that actually are not a major concern to them.
3. The manager may be reluctant to seek full clarification on issues raised in the evaluation for fear it could result in a reconsideration of the compensa-

tion decision.

To avoid these distortions in communication, a balanced evaluation is necessary. That is, the evaluation should provide the opportunity for open communication and at the same time be used for compensation decisions related to identified performance achievement and corrective actions by the manager. To this end, a balanced evaluation would

1. Establish a clear set of performance expectations prior to the evaluation period.
2. Include a midterm evaluation without any consideration of compensation in order to focus on clarity of communication and performance to date. This evaluation would allow the manager to take steps to address areas of performance that were of concern to the elected body; it would also help to eliminate misunderstandings and miscommunication between the elected body and manager.
3. Use a full-term evaluation to evaluate the level of performance satisfaction for the entire performance period and thus provide the basis for a fair and equitable compensation decision.

Often, factors other than the performance evaluation form the basis of compensation decisions. These nonperformance considerations include

1. The economic climate of the community and region
2. The general status of compensation decisions in the private sector of the community
3. The compensation decisions for other employees of the local government
4. A general review of the competitive position of the local government in the local government's market area
5. A comparative salary review.

In summary, the performance evaluation of a professional manager can provide input into compensation decisions by the local elected body. However, the communication value of an evaluation is best served by a periodic evaluation not directly tied to compensation.

The Evaluation Results

The evaluation serves as the written, formal record of the conversation between the manager and elected body and consists of two important sections. The first section is the elected body's appraisal of the manager's performance with respect to the previously agreed-upon goals for the period under review as well as the general performance of the organization. The second section contains an agreed-upon list of the goals to be accomplished during the next appraisal period as well as any specific performance areas identified for improvement.

What Others Are Doing: Survey Results

In developing this handbook, the task force surveyed a sample of local government managers within the United States to obtain information on current evaluation practices. The key findings of the survey suggest that the evaluation process is a problem for a sizeable number of managers. Fortunately, though, most respondents did not report problems with their evaluations and took the time to comment on key aspects of successful appraisals. These comments provide clues to the common pitfalls related to the evaluation process and, more importantly, suggestions for improving the process. This section of the handbook describes these survey findings.

The most common challenges managers and elected bodies face with the evaluation process revolve around four general areas: failure to undertake evaluations, lack of a credible appraisal process, lack of knowledge of the council-manager form of government, and lack of communication. Each of these topics is briefly discussed below.

Failure to Undertake Evaluations

Employee appraisals are a standard feature of most workplaces. They serve as a means of enhancing employee performance as well as the overall effectiveness of the organization. Indeed, employee appraisals serve similar purposes as performance measures of programs and services. In both cases, we seek to identify opportunities for continual improvement. Yet people avoid completing performance appraisals, most likely because properly completed appraisals require time and effort. Other reasons for avoidance may include fear of criticism or the underlying stress associated with the appraisal process. Neglecting to undertake regular performance appraisals, however, can lead to underachievement. Worse yet, failing to complete appraisals on a regular basis can lead to unfounded assumptions that all is well when it is not. It is therefore important to establish a regular pattern of appraisals.

The survey responses identified two methods to help ensure that appraisals are conducted on a regular basis. The most common method is to place a require-

ment for an annual evaluation within the employment contract. The requirement should also specify a time of year—often a time that is less busy than others. The other method is to establish an appraisal time at a regularly scheduled annual meeting, such as a board retreat. But while this method achieves the goal of a scheduled appraisal, it is a less satisfactory approach because it may easily dilute the focus necessary for a good appraisal.

Lack of a Credible Evaluation Process

Another common challenge that survey respondents noted is the lack of a credible evaluation process. Problems include lack of structure, little to no preparation, and limited understanding of appraisals, both purpose and process. Process issues may be addressed through formal training of both the manager and council. Training can be accomplished through work sessions with human resource professionals. Another approach is to team up with CEOs and board members of locally-based institutions that have the same challenge and jointly sponsor training programs. Although not as effective as training, the use of standard evaluation forms, customized to a community's goals, is another way of ensuring a more structured process. Lastly, most managers who are satisfied with their appraisal processes noted that one member of the elected body, typically the mayor, provided active oversight of the process and kept discussions on point and on track.

Lack of Knowledge of the Council-Manager Form of Government

Lack of knowledge about the community's form of government and/or the day-to-day work of the manager is another factor that was cited as hindering quality appraisals. In this case, providing information as early as possible to newly elected officials about the form of government is recommended. This can include meeting with those officials and discussing the manager's duties and responsibilities as well as taking them on field visits. Another approach is to partner with the statewide municipal league and/or municipal clerks association to provide seminars on the form of government. Managers can also use opportunities such as community functions to inform the general public about its form of government. Some jurisdictions use the "policy governance" model, whereby the explicit roles of the manager, elected body, and other key staff such as attorney are clearly defined and documented. Removing misunderstandings and filling informational voids about the form of government can greatly improve appraisals because such efforts clarify the duties and responsibilities of both the manager and the board.

Lack of Communication

Perhaps the most important ingredient for successful appraisals is effective means of communications between manager and elected officials. As in any human relationship, effective communication is key to understanding and removing faulty assumptions. Achieving superior levels of communication requires active listening and regularity. And the benefits of such attention are high. For instance, survey respondents noting the most satisfaction with the appraisal process use a wide variety of means to regularly communicate with their elected bodies. They meet with elected officials on an individual basis and talked with them regularly via telephone. These same managers provide regular written and verbal reports, typically at each board meeting, that discuss the progress on council goals and objectives, strategic plans, and prior evaluation topics, as well as on operational and special topic issues. More detailed reports are provided on a quarterly basis. In addition, many managers meet with their elected bodies more than once a year with a single-issue focus to discuss progress, redefinition, and resourcing of established goals and objectives, strategic plans and efforts, etc. These additional meetings provide time to focus on progress and reduce the probability of end-of-year surprises.

Creating an effective organization takes time and effort. It also requires regular evaluation of services and operations. Evaluating employee performance, especially the manager's, is a vital element of successful organizations. Objective appraisals can be achieved with an accurate understanding of the manager's and elected officials' duties and responsibilities. Communicating regularly and effectively through a variety of means is a vital element of successful organizations and employee appraisals.[3]

Supplemental Approaches

The basic process for evaluations may be supplemented or expanded by using other tools, such as self-evaluations, periodic check-ins, 360-degree assessments, and conversation evaluations.

Self-Evaluations

It is recommended that a self-evaluation component be included in whatever type of evaluation is used. The purpose of a self-evaluation is for the manager to reflect upon his or her level of performance in achieving the organizational objectives, including both internal and external accomplishments and challenges in handling specific tasks and taking organizational direction. In a public setting, process and perception can be as important as outcomes, and managers should include all three in a self-evaluation. Thus, a manager's self-evaluation should make clear to elected officials the process by which the manager pursued individual goals, and the perceptions of both the manager and stakeholders of the manager's success or failure in meeting those goals. A manager's self-evaluation should be customized to the needs of each governmental entity.

Periodic Check-ins

There is a management philosophy that says there should be no surprises during an evaluation. Managers should be continually evaluating, assessing, measuring, and communicating with employees. Providing this type of continuous evaluation is a greater challenge, however, for elected boards because it requires the participation of all board members—since the manager reports to a group and not a single individual supervisor. If a process is in place for formal evaluations of the manager, such evaluations likely occur just once per year. The annual evaluation can be a stressful time for all involved, and it can also be a challenge to remember all that has occurred over the past year. Moreover, it is easy for annual assessments to skew toward recent events, challenges, and successes while deemphasizing activities that occurred nine or ten months ago. In reality, an elected body's perception of a manager's job performance is often viewed through lenses crafted by the "crisis of the day" or by how smoothly the last board meeting went. A more workable alternative is periodic check-ins.

Periodic check-ins, such as once per quarter, can help reduce the stress and minimize the surprises that can come when a manager's performance is evaluated only annually. A periodic review of a manager's work plan can help remind the elected body of the manager's long-term goals (as set by the organization) so that both parties can evaluate the manager's progress toward meeting those agreed-upon goals. If progress on the work plan has slowed down or other challenges have arisen along the way, a quarterly check-in offers the manager an opportunity to self-reflect on his or her performance as well as a forum to explain delays. It can also provide the manager the opportunity to remind the board of the 14 core areas noted in the ICMA Practices for Effective Local Government Leadership that are critical and are part of operating effectively on a day-to-day basis.

A periodic check-in on the manager's work plan is also important when faces on the elected board change, such as after an election, resignation, or reassignment of committees. By apprising the new board members of the manager's work plan, the manager is making certain that the new officials understand and are supportive of the projects or goals that he or she is working on.

360-Degree Assessments

Another form of appraisal process is the 360-degree assessment, which is sometimes referred to as a "self-development" tool. Generally speaking, the 360-degree assessment consists of an employee obtaining feedback from supervisors, subordinates, and peers. In this case, the manager completes a self-evaluation as well, with a sample of the workforce providing the subordinate feedback. In some instances, feedback is also obtained from those outside the organization, such as citizens who have frequently worked with the manager and use the jurisdiction's services regularly.

Some jurisdictions include the 360-degree assessment as part of the manager's appraisal process. The ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program also uses this method as part of maintaining the credential; however, ICMA's assessments ask only behavioral questions. They do not cover progress toward organizational goals.

In most cases a 360-degree assessment is conducted digitally via the Internet. Raters are provided evaluation forms that are returned to an independent third party via the Internet in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

One of the chief benefits of the 360-degree assessment process is that it provides feedback on competencies that are not regularly seen and therefore are not discussed in the typical performance appraisals. For instance, line staff will see behaviors that elected officials do not see and vice versa. Thus, a manager's performance may be improved because it is evaluated from several different perspectives. However, if the 360-degree assessment is used as part of the appraisal process, caution should be taken so that the evaluation doesn't become a measure of the manager's popularity with staff or the public. The manager works for the elected officials and should be evaluated by them on the basis of their stated expectations.

Conversation Evaluation System[4]

This version of an evaluation is a conversational session between the manager and the elected officials. For situations where there is tension among the elected officials or between the manager and the elected body, a facilitator can be used.

Step #1: Create Factors

The elected officials divide themselves into subgroups—normally an equal number of officials in each. The number of groups should be small, so for a board with 7 members, there would be a group of 3 people and a group of 4 people. With larger boards—say a county board with 20 people—there might be more groups. Where the situation involves a mayor and other elected officials, the mayor can move between the two groups or can be part of one group. The manager makes up his or her own group.

The elected official groups are given a single question that they can respond to with a number of factors: "What should members of the elected body expect of the manager?" The groups place their answers on a flipchart page. The manager also gets a question: "What do you think the elected body ought to expect of the manager?," to which he or she can also respond with a number of factors listed on a flipchart page.

Step #2: Reach Consensus on the Factors

The subgroups come back together and discuss each of the factors they listed. They work to combine their lists to arrive at between 10 and 15 factors.

Step #3: Assign Weight Values for the Factors

The group divides again, and the subgroups assign points to each of the factors from Step #2. They are given a total of 300 points and may assign from 10 to 30 points to each factor, but each factor must be given an even number of points. More points are given to those items that are a higher priority.

Step #4: Reach Consensus on Weight Values for the Factors

The subgroups come back together again with the point values they have from their discussions. During this conversation, the entire group tries to come to a consensus on how the point values from Step #3 should be allocated.

Step #5: Assign Rating to Each Factor for the Actual Performance of the Manager

The elected officials distribute points to each of the factors on a 1–5 scale, on which 5 is far exceeds expectations, 4 is exceeds expectations, 3 is achieves expectations, 2 is below expectations, and 1 is far below expectations. For example, a 30-point factor would have the following scale:

30–28	Far exceeds expectations (5)
28–26	Exceeds expectations (4)
26–24	Achieves expectations (3)
24–22	Below expectations (2)
22–20	Far below expectations (1)

These points are totaled, and then added to the points from the section below.

Step #6: Select Goals

The board—collectively and in consultation with the manager—comes up with the list of goals for the manager. Together they then assign another 100 points to the goals for the year. So, for example, 50 points could be assigned to Goal #1, Goal #2 could get 20 points, and Goal #3 could get 20 points, leaving 10 points for Goal #4.

The points from the above 5 steps would be added to the 100 points possible from step number 6 and would be totaled for an overall score using the chart below:

400–360	Far exceeds expectations
359–320	Exceeds expectations
319–280	Meets expectations
279–240	Below expectations
239–200	Far below expectations

In summary, this is a conversational evaluation. The evaluators review the factors each year and everybody owns them. From year to year the factors are revised as necessary to reflect the feelings of the elected body, which can change each year.

Data-gathering/Software Resources

Performance evaluation software can be an effective tool for the elected body to prepare manager evaluations. A wide variety of programs are available, enabling elected bodies to have as much or as little input into the rating categories as they wish. Some programs come with rating categories already provided for a variety of positions, some allow the customer to provide the categories, and some are a hybrid. This flexibility allows the elected officials to create a customized rating tool that works best for them.

Some evaluation software programs allow for multiple raters and some for a single rater. If the program only allows for a single rater, all elected officials convene to discuss each category, agree on the rating, and offer comments, while one elected official enters the rating and comments into the software program. In this case, there needs to be trust among the elected officials that all opinions are being heard and recorded. It is then important that all elected officials review the final draft and offer feedback before it is given to the manager.

If a multiple-rater system is used, elected officials will be completing the evaluation away from the rest of the elected body, so it is recommended that there be group discussion beforehand to ensure consistency in the meaning of the rating categories as in opinions about the manager's performance. The elected officials should also meet after they have entered their ratings because the evaluation *is* a group activity, not a multiple individual activity.

A word of warning regarding the multiple-rater system: It may be difficult to make sure that everyone fully participates in the process. Elected officials won't be informed by each other's comments, and consensus can be hard to achieve. Thus, if some elected officials provide more commentary than others, it could skew the overall evaluation.

Even with the use of performance evaluation software, an in-person conversation between the elected body and the manager is needed to review the evaluation and discuss the results.

As noted above, a wide variety of software programs are available, including

- Online survey tools such as Survey Monkey
- Performance evaluation software (SHRM can recommend)
- NeoGov online performance evaluation module

Conclusion

Communication. That is the essential element to maintaining a good relationship between an elected board and the appointed manager. Communication comes in many forms, but the board's evaluation of the manager is a formalized method of communication that should not be overlooked.

The task force that was formed to develop this handbook compiled and considered the best practices for manager evaluations. The group shared numerous ideas and learned a great deal from each other. The final product demonstrates that just as each manager and board are unique, so too must be the evaluation process for each manager. While there are common methods of evaluation, the tools and methods used to evaluate one manager in one community may not be appropriate for another manager in a neighboring community. To maximize legitimacy and effectiveness and to enhance communication, a manager's evaluation needs to be tailored to the issues and stated goals of the elected body.

That said, the task force also agreed that there are some standard elements—notably, the ICMA Practices for Effective Local Government Leadership—that would enhance any evaluation. These 14 core competencies are the framework for what a manager does on a day-to-day basis, and they warrant acknowledgment in the evaluation process.

Finally, while this handbook offers a variety of ideas on the manager evaluation process, the most important takeaway is that the evaluation must take place and that the process must be mutually agreed upon. There are many ways to get this done, but the manager and the board both deserve the structured communication that the evaluation provides.

Sample Evaluation Forms for Local Government CAOs

- Sample Appraisal of Performance
- Sample Manager Evaluation Form
- Sample Manager Performance Evaluation
- Sample County Administrator Performance Evaluation

Other Resources

- ICMA Practices for Effective Local Government Leadership
- Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator
- ICMA Model Employment Agreement
- ICMA Code of Ethics with Guidelines

Notes

1 Adapted from City Manager Performance Review, Successful Evaluation Tips, City of Mountlake Terrace, WA

2 Integrity is not simply concerned with whether the manager's behavior is legal; it also addresses the issue of personal and professional ethics: "Demonstrating fairness, honesty, and ethical and legal awareness in personal and professional relationships and activities." ICMA members agree to abide by the ICMA Code of Ethics.

3 Perkins, Jan. "Case Study: It's (Gulp) Evaluation Time." *PM*, July 2005. http://icma.org/Documents/Document/Document/3602

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