

# 2018 Ethics in Local Government Survey

## Summary Report of Results

Ethics are a core element of ICMA's mission to advance the profession of local government management. Since the development of our Code of Ethics in 1924, ICMA has built an extensive collection of advice on ethics issues, case studies, and model local government documents. In 2018, ICMA partnered with Sacramento State University to track the current status of ethics standards/policies, staffing, and training in local governments. This survey was distributed to ICMA member chief administrative officers to answer on behalf of their local governments, which may operate under council-manager, mayor-council, or another form of government. A link to this survey was distributed via email to 3,093 ICMA members affiliated with U.S. municipalities, counties, councils of governments, and special districts. 838 members completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 27.1%. This report summarizes the survey highlights and overall responses.

### Survey Highlights

- Just over half (53.9%) of respondents indicated that identification and resolution of ethical issues/violations are a routine part of their local government's organizational management. 55% have an established process for reporting ethics issues concerning their local government.
  - 80.9% indicated they did not track or measure ethics violations (i.e., in aggregate or beyond the resolution of an individual issue).
- 84.6% of local governments allow ethics complaints to be made either anonymously or on the record, as opposed to only one method or the other.
- Few local governments reported having an ethics office/commission/board (12.8%) or ethics/compliance officer (13.2%).
- Nearly half (45.4%) of local governments are focused more on prevention of ethics issues; an additional 41.2% are focused equally on prevention and detection.
  - However, it is less common for local governments to formally recognize ethical behavior. Just 23.9% reported doing so; others noted that ethical behavior is an expectation of public service.
  - Few local governments (15.5%) survey employees about ethics, ethics compliance, and organizational culture.
  - Nearly half (48.3%) incorporate ethics in the employee recruitment and selection process.
- 62.5% of local governments have established their own code of ethics/conduct. Of those, 70.5% were developed with input or leadership from the local government's staff.
- The top three topics covered by local codes of conduct and ethics training are conflicts of interest, acceptance of gifts or favors, and use of public resources. Approximately 60% or more of the respondents reported separate policies specific to outside employment, social media, and internet usage.

	Number Surveyed	Number Responding	Response Rate
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,093</b>	<b>838</b>	<b>27.1%</b>
<b>Geographic Division</b>			
New England	234	59	25.2%
Middle Atlantic	191	46	24.1%
East North Central	552	167	30.3%
West North Central	429	123	28.7%
South Atlantic	689	167	24.2%
East South Central	72	23	31.9%
West South Central	243	71	29.2%
Mountain	259	80	30.9%
Pacific	424	102	24.1%
<b>Population</b>			
250,000 and above	83	20	24.1%
100,000 - 249,999	175	47	26.9%
50,000 - 99,999	312	77	24.7%
25,000 - 49,999	479	120	25.1%
10,000 - 24,999	777	217	27.9%
5,000 - 9,999	573	149	26.0%
2,500 - 4,999	380	119	31.3%
Under 2,500	268	78	29.1%
Unknown	46	11	23.9%
<b>Type of Government</b>			
Municipality	2,735	731	26.7%
County	308	95	30.8%
Other	50	12	24.0%

## Response Summary

### 1. Does your local government have an entity-wide ethics office, commission, or board?

n	Yes	No
836	12.8%	87.2%

### 2. Does your local government have an ethics/compliance officer?

n	Yes	No
836	13.2%	86.8%

### 3. If so, is this the employee's only function (i.e., the employee is solely dedicated to this purpose)?

n	Yes	No
105	2.9%	97.1%

### 4. What level of effort is dedicated to this employee's ethics/compliance function? (Percentage of FTE)

n	Median % FTE
84	10.0

### 5. To whom does the officer report? (n=104)

Chief administrative officer	51.0%
Chief elected official	22.1%
Other	20.2%
Ethics board or commission	3.8%
Human resource manager	2.9%

### 6. Are identification and resolution of ethical issues/violations a routine part of the local government's organizational management?

n	Yes	No
818	53.9%	46.1%

### 7. At what level does this process occur? (Check all that apply.) (n=434)

Entity-wide	82.9%
Department/division	44.5%

### 8. Do you have an established process for reporting ethics issues concerning your local government?

n	Yes	No	Not sure
755	55.0%	38.7%	6.4%

### 9. Which of the following are available for reporting ethics issues concerning your local government? (Check all that apply.) (n=618)

Form submitted to human resources	51.9%
Other	40.1%
Internally-managed hotline or mailbox	20.7%
Form submitted to compliance officer	14.4%
Externally-managed hotline or mailbox	12.9%

### 10. Which of the following best describes how those reporting ethics issues are identified? (Check one.) (n=687)

Complaints can be made anonymously or on the record	84.6%
Complainant must go on the record	12.4%
Complaints are always anonymous	3.1%

**11. How are ethics issues investigated? (Check all that apply.) (n=713)**

By internal staff	90.2%
By an external entity	50.6%

**12. Does your local government track/measure ethics violations?**

n	Yes	No
753	19.1%	80.9%

**13. How do you track them? (Check all that apply.) (n=143)**

Count the number of violations	65.0%
Categorize by type	47.6%
Other	16.8%

**14. Does your local government recognize ethical behavior with any of the following? (Check all that apply.) (n=706)**

Not applicable	76.1%
Personal message	18.6%
Award or certificate	7.4%
Formal announcement	5.5%
Other	3.8%
Pay raise	2.7%

**15. Does your local government have its own established code of ethics/conduct?**

n	Yes	No
744	62.5%	37.5%

**16. Did your staff develop its content?**

n	Yes	No
454	70.5%	29.5%

**17. If not, how was the code developed? (n=121)**

Other	47.1%
Organization's attorney	43.8%
Consultant	9.1%

**18. Please note whether your local government specifically addresses any of the following in your code of conduct or a separate policy.**

	n	Contained within our code of conduct	Established separately	Not applicable
Acceptance of gifts or favors	663	56.1%	43.0%	4.7%
Conflicts of interest	660	60.3%	39.8%	4.8%
Use of public resources	660	54.8%	44.5%	5.6%
Appropriate conduct in the workplace	662	44.1%	55.1%	5.9%
Outside employment	663	34.2%	59.0%	8.1%
Internet usage policy	658	24.8%	66.9%	9.0%
Nepotism	655	39.2%	53.9%	9.3%
Political activity	650	48.5%	44.8%	10.6%
Decision-making in the public interest	666	41.9%	33.3%	24.8%
Social media policy	648	20.5%	64.5%	30.2%
Values statement	618	35.4%	34.0%	31.7%

**19. Are your employees required to sign the internal code of conduct? (n=431)**

Yes, upon hire	61.9%
No signature required	30.6%
Yes, annually	7.4%

**20. Please note whether your local government uses or requires any of the following:**

	n	We use as a reference	We require employees to sign	Not applicable
ICMA Code of Ethics	669	56.1%	2.2%	42.9%
ASPA Code of Ethics	543	6.4%	0.4%	93.4%

**21. To whom is ethics training provided? (Check all that apply.) (n=684)**

Elected officials	50.9%
Managers	47.1%
All staff	44.0%
Board and commission members	31.3%
None	21.6%

**22. Is their participation mandatory or voluntary?**

	n	Mandatory	Voluntary
Elected officials	345	64.6%	35.4%
Managers	319	78.1%	21.9%
All staff	295	88.8%	11.2%
Board and commission members	208	66.3%	33.7%

**23. (1) How many hours are required?**

	n	Median Hours
Elected officials	147	2.0
Managers	157	2.0
All staff	154	2.0
Board and commission members	84	2.0

**23. (2) On what basis?**

	n	Upon Hire	Annually
Elected officials	173	52.6%	58.4%
Managers	190	58.9%	55.8%
All staff	210	69.5%	47.6%
Board and commission members	105	52.4%	63.8%

**24. How is ethical training delivered? (Check all that apply.) (n=492)**

"In house"	66.3%
External, in-person providers	48.0%
Online delivery	36.6%
Other	7.3%

**25. Please indicate whether the training provided covers the following topics.**

	n	Yes	No	Note sure
Conflicts of interest	469	94.0%	3.2%	2.8%
Acceptance of gifts or favors	467	91.9%	5.1%	3.0%
Use of public resources	469	90.0%	5.8%	4.3%
Political activity	462	85.7%	10.0%	4.3%
Appropriate conduct in the workplace	455	78.9%	16.3%	4.8%
Nepotism	449	71.3%	22.7%	6.0%
Internet usage policy	444	62.6%	30.9%	6.5%
Social media policy	448	59.8%	32.6%	7.6%
Outside employment	447	60.4%	30.9%	8.7%
Values statement	452	58.6%	29.2%	12.2%
Decision-making in the public interest	425	32.7%	9.4%	57.9%

**26. Is your local government more focused on prevention or detection of ethics issues? (n=621)**

Prevention	45.4%
Both equally	41.2%
Detection	13.4%

**27. Do you survey employees about ethics, ethics compliance, and organizational culture?**

n	Yes	No
632	15.5%	84.5%

**28. When do you collect this information? (Check all that apply.) (n=96)**

Annually	47.9%
In conjunction with training events	33.3%
Other	25.0%
Upon exit from the organization	22.9%
Upon entry to the organization	16.7%

**29. Does your local government incorporate ethics in the employee recruitment and selection process?**

n	Yes	No
634	48.3%	51.7%

**30. How are ethics incorporated? (Check all that apply.) (n=305)**

Situational questions are included in oral interviews	74.4%
All applicants are provided with a copy of the organization code of conduct/ethics	36.7%
Organization's commitment to ethics is in the job/position announcement	34.8%
Situational questions are included in the written exams	24.9%
Other	6.6%