

Promoting Ethics in Local Government: A Year in Review Fiscal Year 2025

Ethics Training and Education

ICMA's ethics program prioritized member education by facilitating **26 ethics sessions, training, and webinars**, reaching over **2,600 individuals** in FY25.

- Ethics training occurred with 5 sessions at the ICMA annual conference, a local government reimaged conference (LGRC), the state conferences of Tennessee, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Texas, as well as the Experiencia Puerto Rico conference with Caribbean and Latin American leaders. ICMA published its first-ever dual language article (English to Spanish) in PM magazine recapping that session with the speakers of Puerto Rico's Executive Director in the office of Government Ethics, ICMA Mexico's Executive Director and ICMA's Ethics Director
- ICMA's partnership with state associations is vital to promote ethics in the local government management profession. Ethics staff presented in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin on the ICMA Code of Ethics as well as held briefings for state association executive boards on their role in ICMA's ethics review process.
- The ICMA Executive Board's (Board) Committee on Professional Conduct (CPC) members and ethics staff held feedback sessions with members about potential revisions to ICMA's Rules of Procedure for Enforcement of the Code of Ethics (Rules).
- Staff held student sessions with the University of Georgia's student ICMA chapter, and a Kansas University public administration class in conjunction with the Government Finance Officers Association.
- The ethics program closed out the fiscal year hosting ICMA's first-ever free, member-only series. The series addressed trending topics and issues our membership is facing, including ethical leadership in communications, balancing political neutrality with personal advocacy, and local government's commitment to democracy.

Milestone Celebration and Outreach

The Code's 100th anniversary ended in December 2024 after a year-long commemoration including monthly features in Public Management Magazine, Leadership Matters, digital media, spotlights and stories from members, as well as an interactive timeline highlighting the Code's history in words and images.

March was Ethics Awareness month and ICMA spotlighted the Code with a digital "What's on Your Wall?" campaign encouraging members to hang it prominently in their workspace. 30 members submitted photos of themselves with their framed Code and quotes on the importance of the Code to them personally and professionally. Images and quotes were shared on ICMA's website and social media.

Completion of Code of Ethics Review with Membership

In 2013, the Board approved the CPC's plan to review each tenet of the Code with the membership. This structured effort resulted in reviewing all twelve Code tenets and their associated guidelines. Engaging members in discussions to ensure continued relevancy to the profession was a crucial component of this 12-year effort. The 2025 annual election marked the completion of this Code review.

The membership voted overwhelmingly in favor of proposed changes to the ICMA Code of Ethics: Tenet 8 on professional development (**95% approval**) and Tenet 10 on job interference (**87% approval**). Membership approval for Tenet 8 revisions received the highest approval in ICMA's online voting history.

Ethics Advice and Resources

ICMA ethics staff responded to **129 ethics inquiries** from members seeking confidential advice and assistance in resolving ethical dilemmas. ICMA members with questions about their ethical obligations are encouraged to contact Jessica Cowles, Ethics Director, at jcowles@icma.org

Challenging ethical issues with relevancy for members as training tools are publicized in the ethics column of the monthly *PM Magazine*. Ethics advice, information, and the ICMA Code of Ethics are available online: <https://icma.org/page/ethics-issues-and-advice>.

Ethics Enforcement

All members of ICMA agree to adhere to the Code. ICMA enforces the Code through a formal, peer-review process the CPC, a standing committee of the Board, administers as outlined in the Rules. When ICMA receives a complaint concerning the conduct of one of its members, the complaint must meet the following criteria the Rules establish to open a formal ethics review:

- (1) if the allegation(s) were proven true, the conduct would have violated the Code; and
- (2) a written narrative that describes how the member's conduct may have violated the Code and documentation to substantiate the allegation(s) from the complainant's perspective.

The confidential ethics review process provides the member with due process, beginning with ICMA sharing the complaint and documentation to respond in writing to the complaint allegation(s). When additional information is required for the CPC to reach a decision on the member's alleged conduct, the CPC can request the state association president appoint a fact-finding committee to offer the member an opportunity to meet, gather documentation available in the public domain, and prepare a summary report that is shared with the member and the CPC.

In determining the appropriate sanction for an ethics violation, the CPC considers the facts of the matter, the nature of the violation, any past ethics violations, the willfulness of the violation, the level of professional or public responsibility of the member, and the impact of member's conduct on the organization and the local government management profession. The Rules provide the CPC with an array of options to reach a decision:

- close a case with or without advice when no violation of the Code occurred;
- privately censure a member for an ethics violation; or

- recommend the Board publicly censure a member and/or revoke the credential, suspend from membership, or permanently bar/expel a member whose conduct has violated the Code.

The CPC **completed 32 ethics reviews** this fiscal year. At the end of FY 2025, 15 cases are pending the conclusion of the ethics review process. In FY25, 10 cases resulted in sanctions: 1 public censure and 9 private censures with details outlined below.

Conduct that resulted in a public censure

► **Public Confidence and Political Activity (Tenets 3 and 7)**

- A manager violated village policy and state law when he used a village-owned cell phone to send text messages to seven village employees with a link to sign the incumbent mayor's petition seeking election for state office. The manager also used a village-owned vehicle to deliver hard-copy petitions to several locations.

Conduct that resulted in a private censure

► **Public Confidence (Tenet 3)**

- A manager pled guilty to misdemeanor assault which was ultimately discharged by the court and was fired following the incident.

► **Public Confidence, Personal Relationships, Public Trust (Tenets 3, 11 and 12)**

- A manager engaged in a personal relationship with a city employee that resulted in a pregnancy and marriage. Recognizing that conflict, the member separated from the organization.

► **Professional Respect (Tenets 2 and 3)**

- A manager sent unprofessional and inappropriate text messages to members of a governing body in an effort to undermine a colleague.

► **Political Activity (Tenet 7)**

- A manager unsuccessfully ran for elected office in a neighboring jurisdiction.
- A manager served as a political party committee member, hosted a political fundraiser, donated money to political campaigns, and served as chairman of a political campaign.
- A manager appeared on a ballot for a political party town committee for a presidential primary.
- A manager made a social media post supporting a candidate for school board.
- A member successfully ran for judicial office and then separated from local government.
- A member made a financial contribution to their former council member's campaign fund.

For questions on the ethics enforcement process, individuals can contact Camilla Posthill Conners, ethics senior program manager, at cconners@icma.org.