

Municipal Managers: Regional Champions or Agents of Parochialism?

George W. Dougherty, Jr.
University of Pittsburgh

David Y. Miller
University of Pittsburgh

ABSTRACT

How local government managers acquire skills and knowledge of policy approaches applicable to multijurisdictional problems is the primary focus of this paper. Managers work in an environment where cities and their infrastructures are getting older and more expensive; economic and social disparities are increasing; and the cost of local services is rising faster than elected officials are willing to raise revenues (Miller, 2002). Municipal managers face these concerns on a daily basis, and they are the officials most likely to realize the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of acting alone when trying to solve problems that have metropolitan origins and effects. Solving these problems requires engaging in intergovernmental and inter-local activities in new and innovative ways. For that reason it is important that managers be prepared with a range of skills that facilitate regional solutions. To address this concern, we review the Model City Charter as well as training materials and guidelines from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) to determine whether the current emphases in local government management training prepare local managers to handle multijurisdictional or regional problems. Our conclusion is that there is a serious mismatch between the traditional skill set and what is now required for multijurisdictional problem solving.

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Annual Convention was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in October 2007. While the conference is largely dedicated to professional training for members and convention-style presentations by vendors, the University of Pittsburgh's

Graduate School of Public and International Affairs was invited to host an academic-style colloquium in honor of one of its graduates, incoming ICMA President Ed Daley.

The President's Colloquium, "Struggling at the Core: Regional Disparity and the Future of Cities," focused on the role of local government managers in dealing with issues that cross jurisdictional lines. What was most notable about this event is that, while the panel of experts presented a balanced and cautious response to regional problems, the practitioners in attendance spoke the most passionately of the need to risk personal consequences to accomplish multijurisdictional goals. There was a consensus among the panel and the practitioners that professional local government managers *should* play a role in addressing regional problems, but many noted the difficulty in communicating the benefits of multijurisdictional cooperation to officials, especially elected officials in *other* municipalities. Furthermore, none of the managers present was able to clearly articulate the skills or policy tools necessary to build consensus around or to achieve multijurisdictional or regional goals. They understood the importance of a healthy region, but could not articulate how to balance the good of the region with the good of their respective communities.

Arguing the need for local governments to work together has a long history in the United States, but not necessarily as a central theme. Stephens and Wikstrom (2000) note that many of the city management reforms of the early twentieth century were strategies aimed at overcoming regional decentralization, fragmentation, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness. More recent arguments for comprehensive regionalism include combating local disparities, improving maintenance of infrastructure, enhancing quality of life, and improving economic development prospects. However, regional solutions to regional problems have been limited to a handful of policy tools—namely mergers and consolidations (making "them" become a part of "us"), optional participation in Councils of Government, and limited collaborative agreements involving few municipalities—and policy areas like transportation, where external funders demand regional cooperation (Mitchell-Weaver, Miller, & Deal, 2000). Meanwhile, cities and their infrastructures get older and more expensive, economic and social disparities have increased within many regions, and the cost of local services continues to rise, often at faster rates than elected officials are willing to raise revenues (Miller, 2002). Municipal managers face these concerns on a daily basis, and they are the officials most likely to realize the ineffectiveness of going it alone when trying to solve problems that have metropolitan origins and effects. For that reason it is important that managers be prepared with a range of skills to cope, including those that lead to regional solutions.

Local government managers' acquisition of skills and knowledge of policy tools applicable to multijurisdictional problems are our primary concerns. Managers that travel across the country and the world to attend

ICMA conferences both take their profession seriously and are among the best trained in the field. If these professionals do not have the requisite skills and knowledge to foster regional solutions to regional problems, one can question whether the academic and professional organizations responsible for professional development are providing an adequate knowledge base for facing regional problems. To address this question, we conduct a content analysis of the Model City Charter as well as ICMA and NASPAA training materials and guidelines to determine the current emphases in local government management training. We conclude with recommendations for education in the field of local government administration to improve the fit of training materials and guidelines with the current, more regional context.

A BRIEF HISTORY

As just noted, the profession of local government management grew out of internal concerns with inefficiency, corruption, and incompetence in urban areas (Fredrickson, Wood, & Logan, 2001). Beginning with the first professional manager—hired in Staunton, Virginia, in 1908—municipal governments have increasingly called on city managers to administer their internal affairs. Because local government administration focuses on running individual governments, the knowledge base has mostly developed in a number of identifiable areas—like finance, management, and personnel, with subfields in police, fire, public works, and parks management. As with any field of study and practice, one potential problem is that the knowledge base and standards of practice may stagnate as realities change. This can occur not just with the *content* of what the profession knows, but also with the *context*. John Nalbandian notes the importance of contextual concerns in educating local government leaders, before suggesting regionalism be included in future city manager training (Nalbandian, 2002). Though professional standards and our understanding of municipal management have certainly improved since 1908, it may also be that the context in which practitioners work has changed.

Nowhere is the internal focus on the management of a particular local government more dramatic than in the Model City Charter. The model charter represents the current thinking of practitioners, experts, and academics on what a local government should look like. The charter's roots date back to the late nineteenth century, with reformers desiring to develop the "best" form of government. Since 1900, the charter has been updated seven times (1915, 1927, 1933, 1941, 1964, 1989, and 2002). The 1900 version called for a mayor-council form of government with the mayor directly elected, at-large elections for council, an independent civil service commission, and nonpartisan elections. The revisions since the initial model charter have dealt with such items as the following: The council-manager form; refinements to the civil service system; proportional representation; rules on slum clearance; district elections; and

hybrid models of mayor-council and council-manager forms of government. This list is not meant to be exhaustive but is suggestive of the focus of what constitutes good local government.

Prior to the eighth edition (2002), there was virtually no reference to the metropolitan region as part of the Model City Charter. The eighth edition made the first modest acknowledgment of the region. The National Civic League's (2003), commentary to section 1.03 Intergovernmental Relations states,

The nature of intergovernmental relations is rapidly changing. Most cities are integral parts of the region. In that regard, engaging in cooperative intergovernmental relations is fundamental to the effective functioning of the city and the region of which it is a part. Although the purpose of engaging in intergovernmental relations is primarily to further the ends of the city, the health of the region should also be of concern to the city (p. 4).

Later, in section 4.04 Land Use, Development, and Environmental Planning, it is recommended that the city council be charged with determining "to what extent the comprehensive plan and zoning and other land-use ordinances are consistent with regional plan(s)" (p. 29).

The commentary that supports the charter clause simply states,

Most cities are integral parts of metropolitan and other regions. The planning and development policies of a city have implications beyond its boundaries. The overall health of a Metropolitan region is dependent on some integration of local and regional planning. In addition to establishing appropriate processes and relevant agencies, the city should seek consistency with regional plans in its planning endeavors (p. 30).

Aside from these two modest references to the city's relationship with the region of which it is a part, the balance of the 79-page Model City Charter is internally focused. This observation is not meant to say the issues covered in the charter are unimportant. To the contrary, they are extremely important as concepts and ideas that have been nurtured for over 100 years within eight additions of the charter. However, these issues instruct a city on how to operate internally, not on how to operate externally.

At the turn of this century, perhaps as much focus needs to be concentrated on those external issues to complement the long, rich, and productive history of focus on internal issues. The need for increased external focus is heightened because the context has changed. Cities are no longer, if they ever were, self-sufficient cores of urban areas that are surrounded by self-sufficient

municipalities (Miller, 2002). They are part of a larger network of public, nonprofit and for-profit organizations that operate within and beyond the boundaries of any particular local government (Sparrow, 2008; Kettl, 2006; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Agranoff, 2006). Successful partnering and managing in this new network are essential if municipalities are to manage local fiscal and service-delivery concerns. In the absence of relationships and agreements with other parties, the municipalities will not be able to implement necessary fiscal and service reforms. To be effective, managers and elected officials have to get very good at intergovernmental and intersectoral partnering. Managers have to develop an organizational culture that places partnering as a preferred strategy for the delivery of services to residents. In many cases, the municipality's long-term viability is dependent on its success in developing workable intergovernmental partnerships (Miller, 2002).

A 2005 publication by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development portrays the new context clearly, stating

We now have citizens living in one political jurisdiction, working in another and enjoying their recreation in yet another. These people expect to find (and in most cases are willing to support) adequate services and facilities wherever they are. They are not really interested in jurisdictional boundary lines. It has become very difficult to draw a meaningful line between urban and rural municipalities, and between cities, boroughs and surrounding townships, especially when considering police protection, refuse collection and disposal, sewage facilities, economic development, housing, flood control and water supply (p. 18).

The literature on metropolitan governance notes that there are few widespread, comprehensive examples of success at regional cooperation and coordination. The most obvious attempts include annexation in major metropolitan areas along with a handful of examples of city-county consolidations or multimunicipal mergers (Mitchell-Weaver et al., 2000; Gerken, 1988; Miller, 2002). Tax-base sharing, municipally initiated regional service districts outside of water and sewer, and binding participation in councils of government are still rare occurrences (Miller, 2002). This is not to say that collaboration at the local level does not occur. A 2006 symposium on collaborative governance in *Public Administration Review* cites examples in public safety (Thurmaier, 2006; Donahue, 2006), capital planning and zoning (Eagle & Cowherd, 2006), education (Bushouse, 2006), and environmental issues (Belefski, 2006; Alexander 2006). It remains unclear how common these types of arrangements are and how open most managers and elected officials are to joining them. If substantial benefits can be gained from further proliferation

of regional efforts, it remains that citizen expectations will not be met most efficiently and effectively if municipal managers are not prepared for the new context they find themselves working within. The literature is not silent on this new context. Indeed, there are several intellectual frameworks to guide the understanding of managers and scholars alike.

TAKE ONE: NETWORKS OF COLLABORATION

This new context seems ripe for collaborative, regional approaches among local government managers when addressing service delivery and coordination of policies. Sparrow (2008) makes this point effectively, using the metaphor of a knot to describe breakthrough, creative solutions to key problems: Like the most complex problems in local government, a tough knot requires one to focus on the knot as a whole and view it from different angles. But as Kettl (2006) points out, most managers and their agencies continue to work on their parts of the problem while relying on established processes and technologies and without the realization that focusing on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of only their own agency may actually pull the knot tighter (Sparrow, 2008). The most successful efforts to undo knots require us to see the knot from many angles first and then test the relationships as we begin to loosen it. The key to solving these complex problems is to start viewing the whole knot and then bring together important sets of eyes to engage it collaboratively, across multiple agencies.

The problem for most managers is that many of the most important knots in local government do not fit within a single city, town, or borough. Sparrow (2008) notes that “unfortunately, very few problems worth addressing conform to jurisdictional and functional boundaries” (p. 88). Kettl (2006) explains that boundaries are extremely important in the U.S. system of government for practical, political, and symbolic reasons. In practical terms, boundaries tell us just how far our responsibilities extend and where they do not extend. Politically, boundaries indicate a lot about the resources available to solve problems and provide services, and to whom managers are accountable. Boundaries are also symbolic in that they provide identities to bureaucrats and citizens within their jurisdictions, and they allow elected officials to show they are “doing something” to combat problems by shifting boundaries on occasion.

Since boundaries are often difficult to change for political and symbolic reasons, even at the local level, collaborative networks are proposed as a way to approach these knots. But Agranoff (2006) notes that there are multiple types of networks with differing expected outcomes and advantages. The four most prominent forms of networks are (1) informational—sharing information and technologies to make voluntary changes among partners possible; (2) developmental—exchanges coupled with “education and member services” to foster individual agency implementation; (3) outreach—developmental efforts are supplemented with “blueprinted strategies for program and policy

change that [lead] to an exchange or coordination of resources”; and (4) action networks—formally adopted interagency agreements on service delivery adjustments (Agranoff, 2006, p. 57). Bilateral and multilateral mutual aid agreements and the assumption of services by other agencies are collaborative, but do not fall within Agranoff’s definition of networks. Our focus here is on the service delivery and coordination of policy associated with action networks.

One common theme in the network literature is that the skills associated with collaborative approaches are unique and therefore different from those of traditional management, which help managers focus within a single organization (McGuire, 2006; Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Kikert & Koppenjan, 1997; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Kettl, 2006, 2002; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004). While many networks are organized in ways similar to nonprofit boards, their network management is substantially different from intra-agency settings in that it is more deliberative; focuses on reaching consensus (versus authoritative decisions); is less hierarchically authoritative, with the presence of partners (versus superior-subordinate); and has less clear legal authority and fewer direct consequences for those that “defect” (Agranoff, 2006). Furthermore, Agranoff (2006) indicates that the vast majority of managers’ time is still focused on Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, and Budgeting (POSDCORB)-type concerns within their own organizations. Discussing barriers to collaborative efforts, Kettl (2006) notes, “there is manifest evidence that government at all levels has not ensured that its managers develop skill sets to keep up with the rapidly evolving tools they are responsible for using” (p. 16).

TAKE TWO: INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTIVE ACTION

Another theoretical perspective that is often used to explain the context of regional cooperation is the political economy literature on the organization of metropolitan regions, Institutional Collective Action (ICA). ICA conceptualizes local governments (or homeowners associations, special districts, and other forms of public service-delivery institutions) as a form of public household that represents a group of citizens who share a common sense of purpose or want (Feiock, 2009; Oakerson, 1999). Each of these public households is a local public economy, and these local public economies engage in collective action and behave in ways that mirror how individuals act as they seek self-interests. Managers, as representatives of their constituencies, are expected to engage in intergovernmental transactions as a utility-maximizing exercise. Like all utility-maximizing exercises, regional solutions suffer from the problems of multiple transaction costs, defections, and free-riding strategies (Olson, 1965; Axelrod, 1984; Ostrom, Gardner, & Walker, 1994).

Multijurisdictional options for service delivery will be chosen only if transaction costs are decreased and the expected utility is greater than internal alternatives. Basolo (2003) uses this perspective to note that regional solutions

have largely been limited to areas with high fixed costs or apparent economies of scale, such as waste management, water and sewer, and public transportation. Attempts at cross-jurisdictional solutions to regional problems are also hampered by Jeffersonian desires for local autonomy and local economic interests that spur intraregional economic competition and limit cooperation (Basolo, 2003).

The key, then, to most collective action problems is mitigating the transaction costs involved so that regions can realize the potential benefits of shared services and coordinated policies. Feiock (2008) identifies four types of transaction costs as barriers to multijurisdictional agreements. Information costs, which concern the clarity of partners' preferences, increase as the number of players increase but decrease when potential partners are homogeneous. Agency costs are tied to internal principal-agent problems and can be reduced by long tenure of officials and evidence of stable local institutions. Negotiation/division of benefits costs deals with the ability to negotiate mutually beneficial deals and how the spoils of multijurisdiction agreements are divided. These costs are also reduced by homogeneity and symmetry in political strength (Heckathorn & Maser, 1987). Finally, enforcement costs are reduced by repeated interactions and close proximity—these reduce the chances of partners renegeing once a deal is struck. Interestingly, ICA turns to network theory to reduce many of these costs because bilateral and multilateral relations across many areas create social networks that clarify potential partners' preferences (information costs) and allow agencies to build reputations as good partners, thus reducing agency, negotiation/division, and enforcement costs (Thurmaier & Wood, 2002).

ICA theory also highlights concerns for professional managers, especially in their relations to elected officials. Managers may attempt to negotiate agreements only to have elected officials “veto” their efforts by not passing legislation necessary for implementation (Tsebelis, 2002; Feiock, 2008). Elected officials may be more myopic than managers due to the former's higher rates of turnover and short election cycles (Clingermayer & Feiock, 2002; Feiock, 2008) and the desire to keep voting blocs stable (Feiock, 2008). Gerber and Gibson (2005) note,

the underlying political dilemma associated with regional governance is that local officials need to give up some authority to achieve regional coordination but they may then be held accountable for regional policies that are contrary to the preferences of their local constituents (Gerber & Gibson, 2005, as cited in Feiock, 2008, p. 309).

However, the literature also notes that managers may enhance their careers if they can claim and capitalize on the benefits of collaborative efforts (Stein, 1990; McCabe et al., 2008; Feiock, 2004; Carr & LeRoux, 2005).

Concerns for Local Government Managers

Local government managers know they should be engaging in collective action with surrounding communities. Dealing with internal concerns alone is often difficult work. That said, it is unclear what training and education are necessary so that managers are equipped with the necessary tools to make outcomes—both for their communities and the broader regions of which they are a part—that are as positive as possible. Imagine for a moment a simple, two-dimensional matrix involving the interests of the community that employs the manager and the region of which that community is a part (see Figure 1). We posit that, in collective action, the outcome of any particular agreement could have one of four possible impacts on that community and its region. In the first, the outcome is positive for the community and positive for the region—the ideal situation and the asserted goal of any transaction. Coming to such an agreement should be relatively easy assuming all parties have full information about the expected outcomes. In the second, the results are negative for the community and negative for the region creating a lose-lose situation—an unlikely event unless imposed by some outside party.

It is the third and fourth possible outcomes that are the most intriguing. In the third, the impact on the community is positive, but the impact on the region is negative. Examples of this might include aggressive fiscal mercantilism or campaigning against policies that overcome local resource disparities like regional tax-base sharing. In many regions this is business as usual, but it raises important questions for managers. Is the manager professionally free to advance such an outcome? What options exist for the manager to work towards mitigating the negative consequences for the region? How are the interests of the region and community weighed? These questions and the tools needed to engage them need further exploration.

Figure 1.
Outcomes of Regional Decision-Making

		IMPACT ON REGION	
		<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
IMPACT ON COMMUNITY	<i>Positive</i>	(1) Win-Win	(3) Parochial/Private Interests Acceptable
	<i>Negative</i>	(4) Undeveloped Skill and Knowledge	(2) Lose- Lose

In the fourth outcome, the impact on the region is positive, but the impact on the community is negative. Examples might include enterprise zones that allow local businesses to expand by relocating within the region or tax-base sharing to pay for regional assets. Many municipalities instinctively strive to oppose these outcomes, raising additional questions. Should a manager be rewarded or punished for supporting or failing to block such regional action? What strategies might be applied to minimize the local negative effects? Furthermore, one must consider whether we are preparing our elected and appointed officials to be able to engage in a healthy discussion of such outcomes.

WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW MAY HURT US ALL:
SURVEY RESULTS FROM THE PITTSBURGH REGION

The seeming consensus reached by practitioners at the ICMA President's Colloquium regarding multimunicipal efforts seemed a bit too good to be true given information we were analyzing at the time. The University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs had recently partnered with the Local Government Academy, an independent nonprofit that promotes local government excellence, to conduct a survey of municipalities in southwestern Pennsylvania. The focus of the survey was regional concerns in local government and a number of policy alternatives that might be used to improve the Pittsburgh area's health.¹ The Pittsburgh region is a highly fragmented area that would seem ripe for cooperation across its many municipalities. Pennsylvania has over 2,600 municipalities, second-most in the nation. Allegheny County alone has 130 municipalities, 34% with fewer than 2,500 residents, and many that cover areas of less than two square miles. Based on the managers' comments at the ICMA session, the daily pressures managers face, and their professional backgrounds, one might expect a group of municipal managers in Western Pennsylvania to be the biggest proponents of multimunicipal and regional solutions to local government problems.

The survey asked municipal leaders about the role of fragmentation in local government. Table 1 shows that approximately 68% of respondents indicated that the high number of local governments in the region produces fiscally stressed governments. This result might suggest both a willingness and a need to ease fiscal pains through coordinated financial arrangements and shared services, especially since problems in struggling municipalities (crime, lax code-enforcement, and reduced recreation services, for example) may have spillover consequences for neighboring communities. However, the report noted, "the overall tone of the responses indicated a pessimistic outlook on the prospects of intergovernmental cooperation" (Local Government Academy, 2006, p. 9). In response to the question, "What do you see as the greatest challenges in enhancing intergovernmental cooperation in southwestern Pennsylvania?" almost half (45.8%) cited parochialism as a primary challenge. The report summarized administrators' responses, saying,

References to parochialism focused on the feeling that there are too many municipalities, and that territorial attitudes and the “belief that municipal borders are sacred” are the major challenges to intergovernmental cooperation. Some mentioned that constituents are suspicious of change and of partnerships because they feel that their interests will not be effectively represented, as they might lose power and sovereignty through intergovernmental cooperation. Also mentioned was the inability for municipalities to work together to identify common needs (Local Government Academy, 2006, p. 9).

These are legitimate concerns and support the importance of local autonomy and of barriers identified in the literature (Basolo, 2003; Kettl, 2006). But the tone of these results runs counter to what was expressed at the ICMA conference. It may be that these concerns are attributed to others in the community, like elected officials, and that professional managers are better positioned than others to answer these issues and provide evidence of cases where intergovernmental or regional solutions might reduce costs and/or improve services to citizens. Further analysis of survey results suggests that this is not likely the case.

Table 1.

Responses to the Statement “The relatively high number of governments in southwestern Pennsylvania tends to produce some governments that are fiscally stressed.”

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
18%	14%	36%	32%	100%
9	7	18	16	50

Note. Data from Local Government Academy (2006)

In addition to the questions presented earlier, we asked about the general willingness of respondents to pursue intergovernmental strategies.² Table 2 shows that 88% of respondents saw benefit in providing services independently within their jurisdictions. The most beneficial service-delivery option was to provide selected services to selected partners (94%), followed by formal, binding Joint Service Agreements (90%). Note that municipalities would

retain substantial control over service delivery in each of these three alternatives. Substantially less support was indicated for contracting with other municipalities (54% beneficial) or the county (48% beneficial) to receive services for a fee.

The same pattern emerged when administrators were asked which of these service provision methods were most *likely* to be accepted by their municipality, with more than 96% indicating they would likely continue to provide services independently. Internal service while providing service to selected partners was deemed likely to be acceptable by 80% of respondents, and joint service agreements was deemed likely to be acceptable by 70% of respondents. Again, the likeliness of other service-delivery models drops with the level of local control over the service. Other survey questions regarding tax-base sharing and the expansion of regional asset districts were even less likely to be accepted.

Table 2.
How Beneficial Are the Following Service-Delivery Options? How Likely?

	Beneficial	Likely
Internal Improvement	88% (44)	96% (48)
Internal w/ selected cooperation	92% (46)	80% (40)
Joint service agreements	90% (45)	70% (35)
Contract w/ other municipalities	54% (27)	48% (24)
Contract w/ county	48% (24)	38% (19)

Note. Data from Local Government Academy (2006)

These survey results suggest that there is not as much support as one might like or suspect in a region ripe for multijurisdictional service-delivery and resource sharing. Administrators in the region are more likely to look internally or grasp for revenue sources already in existence than give up local autonomy or redistribute revenues. These preferences come despite evidence that forces outside

of any particular municipality—like the regional economy, aging populations, and increasing disparity in municipal resources—are substantially responsible for the fate of each jurisdiction (Miller, 2002). That the status quo is considered most likely and multijurisdictional alternatives substantially less likely suggests that professional administrators and elected officials may not have the skills or knowledge necessary to make multijurisdictional or regional policies a reality.

There is nothing within the literature that suggests managers, by definition, have to be agents of parochialism. External options, to be seen as acceptable, must be framed within the agreed set of shared understandings held by each community. Managers often play an important role in framing decisions for elected officials and the public (Moore, 1995; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004). As noted above, long tenure helps, as do managers' abilities to monitor enforcement and provide stability through regular contact with counterparts in other governments (Thurmaier & Wood, 2002; Agranoff, 2006). But consistent with Herbert Simon's admonition—we can only design that which we know—regional strategies cannot get on the table if they are not known or understood. From that perspective, we raise the question of what role ICMA, NASPAA, and other professional associations involved in local government do to help structure a manager's understanding and awareness of multijurisdictional problems. The key question is whether local government managers are trained to be agents of regional problem solving or agents of parochialism. Subsequently, if their focus is largely internal, how should professional development in local government management be adjusted, and in what ways?

REVIEW OF LEADING ORGANIZATIONS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

It is our contention that the field of local government administration is only beginning to recognize the importance of the context of community and region. At least partially, this absence of focus lies in the early twentieth century roots of the profession that concentrated almost exclusively on internal, single-municipality operations in the name of efficiency and effectiveness. This made sense as municipalities began to take on large-scale projects like paving roads, laying water and sewer pipes, and providing professional police and fire services. Furthermore, much of the funding for these projects came from state and Federal agencies, which demanded basic levels of efficiency, effectiveness, and administrative control *within* municipalities. New managers were appropriately trained in this context to focus internally, attempting to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, and proper controls. We argue that the context of local government management has changed substantially in the past 30 years due to growing disparities within regions, urban sprawl, threats of terrorism, and global competition (Miller, 2002; Sparrow, 2008; Fraser, Lepofsky, Kick, & Williams, 2003). Responses to these changes require multimunicipal and regional solutions to problems, but local government management training has largely remained internally focused.

This manuscript reviews the actions of the organizations most responsible for developing local government managers' knowledge base and skill sets as they relate to multimunicipal and regional efforts to improve local government administration. In the following pages, we present a basic content analysis of training and education efforts provided by ICMA and NASPAA. Together, they are critical elements in the development of the tools and values that define how local government professionals are expected to behave. We conclude with suggestions about how these organizations might adjust to provide managers with the skills and knowledge necessary to explore and provide services at the multimunicipal and regional levels.

ICMA

ICMA, which describes itself as "the premier local government leadership and management organization," has made a mission of advocating excellent government performance through professional management since 1914 (International City/County Management Association, n.d.). Its major activities include publishing reference material; training, connecting and credentialing managers; and completing consulting work, often to develop professional local governance in emerging democracies. ICMA publishes *Public Management (PM)* magazine, which delivers practitioner-focused articles on local government operations monthly, and runs ICMA Press, which publishes books, reports, and research results and training material for managers, students, and government associations. Additionally, ICMA holds an annual conference that draws a worldwide audience of professionals for networking, workshops, educational sessions, field demonstrations and speakers designed to equip managers with the tools necessary for addressing contemporary issues of local government.

The tie between ICMA's mission and professional development in local government is strong and clear. Its rich and important substantive contributions include democratic, institutional development in manager-council governments, and a strong concentration on the ethical dimensions of municipal management. Therefore, we expect that ICMA's training materials provide a comprehensive reflection of professional norms, standards, and priorities among those who study and practice local government management. We would also expect that the organization would be sensitive to changes in the context in which managers manage.

A qualitative review of recent ICMA Press and ICMA Annual Conference offerings indicates that managers receive training on issues that are almost exclusively internal. Topics in both the published offerings and conference training sessions are divided by practice area, including (among others) finance and budgeting, policy facilitation, personnel, strategic planning, public safety, service delivery, and technology. The overarching theme is one of individual government performance and how managers can apply professional tools to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of operations in their particular jurisdictions.

ICMA Press.

In its 2007 Resource Catalog, ICMA Press advertised 58 titles—4 subscriptions, 27 books, and 27 reports (ICMA 2007). Only four prominently feature discussion beyond internal management issues. These include *Governing by Network*, a 2004 book by Goldsmith and Eggers that details a shift in modern management from simple service provision to navigating “the networked state;” “Cluster-Based Economic Development,” a 20-page report on identifying a region’s clusters and leveraging strategies that will help disadvantaged communities (Psilos & Broun 2006); *Managing Fire and Rescue Services*, a 2002 book that includes a section on alternative delivery systems (Compton & Granito), and “Interlocal Service Sharing Agreements,” a 16-page report on how governments can improve service quality and reduce cost through interlocal agreements (Collins, 2006).

PM: ICMA Public Management magazine.

ICMA’s monthly magazine provides local government managers a wealth of information and guidance on a wide variety of timely and ongoing concerns, including regionalism. Using their online index, we searched for any local government articles or statements ICMA classified as dealing with “regionalism” from January 1990 through October 2009. The results indicate 69 articles or announcements dealing with multimunicipal efforts. Fourteen of those instances concerned awards or nominations for awards through ICMA’s Program Excellence Award in Community Partnerships, itself a sign that ICMA is cognizant of regional and multisector collaboration. Another 33 articles provided sample plans for local governments to follow, with public safety (7), code enforcement (6), general administration (5), economic development (5), and innovations (5) being the primary subjects. In addition to the publication of two case studies, 15 articles were presented spanning such regional topics as city-county relations, city-city collaboration, and coordination of public safety services.

It remained unclear whether the results presented above constitute a substantial focus on regionalism as a subject. Table 3 puts the results of our “regionalism” search in context. By comparison, there were 665 articles on “public safety”, 373 concerning “finance and budget”, and 337 that focus on “public works” issues during the same period. The 69 articles on regionalism make up 22% of the 310 “management” articles identified by the search index. A recent “state of the profession” article coauthored by a number of respected leaders in the field of local government management is silent on the regional milieu in which most municipalities operate (Keene, Nalbandian, O’Neill, Portillo, & Svava, 2007). Instead, the authors focus on the value professionals add within their jurisdictions in service to elected officials and community members. This is only one article, but it suggests that the thought leaders in the field continue to focus primarily on single-jurisdiction issues and skills. While

Table 3.

Selected Search Results by Topic in PM Magazine (Jan. 1990—Oct. 2009)

Regionalism	Management	Public Safety	Finance & Budget	Public Works	Citizen Participation	Parks & Recreation
69	310	665	373	337	379	152

Note. We did not include Requests for Proposals/Qualifications announcements in Finance & Budget.

this shows some commitment to regionalism, the vast majority of *PMs* content is focused on managing individual local governments.

ICMA Annual Convention.

ICMA’s convention training sessions share this consistent internal focus. At its annual conference, the organization provides formal educational workshops and forums under the title ICMA University. A review of 2005, 2006, and 2007 conference programs determined that 63 separate topics were offered over 3 years, all of which ICMA classified as addressing at least 1 of its 18 “practice groups,” or skill areas.³ None of the practice groups focuses directly on regional issues or multimunicipal coordination.

The descriptions of ICMA University workshops that appear in the conference programs suggest no more than 4 of 63 total topics in recent years appear to address multijurisdictional problem solving. Most, like ICMA Press publications, focus on improving individual government performance through providing practical tools for problem solving. Typical examples include “Improving Service Delivery and Reducing Costs,” “High-Performance Organizations: Becoming Stewards of the Whole” and “Leadership: An Art of Possibility.”

Managers interested in regional issues at recent ICMA conferences had better luck outside of formal educational workshops, as other conference sessions did offer a few discussions on solutions that cross borders (a 2005 special session on “Homeland Security: What Managers Need to Know about Interoperability and Regionalism” and a 2007 special session, “Regional Sustainability: Partnering

for the Future,” for example). These sessions constitute a small portion of those offered at recent ICMA conferences.

ICMA and regionalism.

In summary, some of the educational and print offerings from ICMA addressed the issues of regional or interlocal service delivery directly. However, the main focus is clearly on improving the internal workings of local governments. If we accept that ICMA's training materials provide a comprehensive reflection of professional norms, standards, and priorities in local government management, the evidence presented here calls into question whether the field of local government management has adjusted adequately to its new context.

NASPAA

The standard-bearer of shaping and improving education in public management is undisputedly the NASPAA, which maintains accreditation criteria for colleges and universities that offer graduate degrees in professional public service. Its 154 member institutions offer programs specializing in policy, administration, or nonprofit management. And despite some encroachment from business schools in the last few decades, the Master of Public Administration (MPA) remains the traditional terminal degree in local government management. It follows, then, that long-term changes in the educational backgrounds of future local government managers are likely to be affected by the accreditation standards and substantive recommendations of NASPAA.

What do NASPAA schools teach?

Curriculum is one component of NASPAA's nine formal accreditation standards. However, because it serves a wide variety of institutions and aims to accredit primarily on a basis of mission, NASPAA does not require that accredited schools offer any specific coursework.⁴ Rather, it establishes eight “common component areas” to prepare students for professional public service leadership in organizations. None of the common component areas focuses on external skills or responsibilities. Instead, they include the following: Policy and program formulation, implementation and evaluation; decision making and problem solving; human resources; budgeting and financial processes; information management, technology applications, and policy; political and legal institutions and processes; economic and social institutions and processes; and organization and management concepts and behavior. All are geared to developing a strong internal focus. NASPAA does not require that schools spend an equal amount of time and resources on each area, nor does it require that a program supply all of the area courses itself. Perhaps due to the latitude NASPAA gives graduate programs in patterning their own paths of study and specialization, NASPAA does not prescribe any topic areas that explicitly involve thinking beyond jurisdictional boundaries.

NASPAA has not ignored regional thinking completely. It also publishes a series of nonbinding guidelines intended to address more specific issues in professional public service education. These include advice on diversity, internships, and developing program specializations, among other topics. One guideline, written in 1992 by the ICMA/NASPAA Task Force on Local Government Management Education, discusses the professional demands placed on local government managers and offers advice for tailoring a graduate program to prepare them accordingly. In addition to specific curriculum suggestions (courses in policy analysis, political accountability, planning and administrative values, for example), the guidelines suggest cultivating competency in relations extending beyond jurisdictional borders, to include interlocal, interregional, local-state and local-national interaction as well as involvement with private and nonprofit entities. This appears to be the only mention NASPAA makes of including regional problem solving in professional public service education. While the task force guideline highlights the importance of regional thinking, it does not speak to which competencies are important or how managers are to balance the needs of their own community with those of the region.

The key to NASPAA schools' impact on managers is what they teach in the classroom. With that in mind, NASPAA began a curricular database effort in 2007, with the hope that educators would share their syllabi, course content, and teaching tools. Response to that effort has been weak and at present information on whether, how frequently, and in what context regional and multimunicipal information and skills are taught to current and future local government managers is absent. This should be a priority of NASPAA's Local Government Management Education Committee.

NEXT STEPS: TEACHING MANAGERS TO THRIVE IN REGIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE CONTEXTS

The openness to the benefits of selected cooperation and joint service agreements in the Pittsburgh region survey, along with comments from managers at the 2007 ICMA colloquium, suggest that managers are interested in understanding and moving toward local government collaboration. It is up to leaders in ICMA and NASPAA, the organizations most responsible for professional development and education in the field, to provide the knowledge and skills to develop those interests. One obvious place to start is to review, update, and disseminate a revised version of the 1992 ICMA/NASPAA Task Force on Local Government Management Education guideline based on what we know about collaborative governance almost two decades later. Scholars and practitioners should work together to develop a "Model Intergovernmental Plan" to guide managers and elected officials nationwide on preferred practices that benefit the local government and the region. Furthermore, academics should answer NASPAA's call to build a curricular database concerning local government education so we might know how regionalism and collaboration

fit into our current management training programs. Finally, scholars in the field should move toward meta-analysis of what works in regional collaboration efforts, first by developing and supporting a database of attempts at local government collaboration, successful or not.

In our own interactions with managers, we have proposed a number of untested practices that may reduce the transaction costs of collaborating with other local governments. Suggestions include appointing an elected or staff representative as intergovernmental liaison to regional bodies and contiguous governments so that other communities know who to contact about potential partnership opportunities. Managers may also begin mapping existing informal cooperation networks between their governments and others to identify ongoing relationships, build on current successes, and assess the reputations of potential partners. Finally, managers can actively identify partners and organizations and their combined political strength within their region to help lobby state and county officials as a block. We have made these recommendations on the assumption that they might work, but our assumptions remain untested.

ICMA, NASPAA, and public administration scholars need to develop, test, and promote intergovernmental regional skills that work. Key research questions include how the skills managers have developed to deal with elected officials in their own communities can be applied when dealing with elected officials in other communities. Research should also focus on whether iterative, small successes in cooperation lead to shared experiences between regional communities and subsequent larger endeavors. Finally, a catalog of what forms of cooperation are most common among municipalities and which are most effective would help managers begin to foster an environment of regional cooperation.

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented here suggests that local government managers and the organizations responsible for setting their professional standards and educational requirements are largely focused on internal concerns most closely aligned with the context of the early to mid-twentieth century. ICMA and NASPAA provide very little information or guidance for local government managers to develop regional perspectives or the skills necessary to implement multijurisdictional agreements that balance the needs of the community and the region of which it is a part. As predicted by the Institutional Collective Action literature, this lack of information has translated into underutilization of regional or multimunicipal alternatives within local government. The current state of affairs leaves practitioners in the lurch and suggests the need for the profession's chief development institutions to adapt to the expanded context of local government administration.

The Local Government Academy survey of managers in southwest Pennsylvania provides preliminary evidence that managers see more benefit in

internal service-delivery options than in those that include other jurisdictions. Furthermore, that few of the regional alternatives deemed beneficial by managers were identified as “likely” in the near future suggests these managers do not have the skills or policy knowledge necessary to help their communities reap those potential benefits.

The academic and professional communities that support and train local government officials need to make a concerted effort to add regional and multijurisdictional concerns to their ongoing dialogue. Scholars must evaluate and expand on existing strategies for intergovernmental cooperation. ICMA and state agencies responsible for local government must regularly present regional solutions as viable options for local governments and include “how to” information in their publications and training programs. NASPAA can do its part by making regional skills and strategies a more explicit part of its curriculum guidelines. Failure to do so will result in the development of new managers without the training they need to solve problems that affect their communities on a multijurisdictional or regional scale.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ An email survey was sent to a sample of 200 municipalities in southwestern Pennsylvania. A total of 50 (25%) useable responses were received from 44 municipalities (22%). Nineteen respondents were elected officials (38%), 27 respondents were managers (54%), and 4 respondents (8%) were “other staff.” While the response rate was not large enough to allay concerns of response bias and generalizability (even within the Pittsburgh region), we present a few of the results here as a means of framing our discussion.
- ² Differences between ICMA members, MPA graduates, managers, and elected officials were not statistically significant using chi-square tests. The survey’s preliminary nature and small number force us to temper conclusions, but these results suggest that managers are no more likely than elected officials to look to regional options to solve problems that go beyond their borders.
- ³ Practice groups include Staff Effectiveness; Policy Facilitation; Functional and Operational Expertise and Planning; Citizen Service; Performance Measurement/Management and Quality Assurance; Initiative, Risk Taking, Vision, Creativity and Innovation; Technological Literacy; Democratic Advocacy and Citizen Participation; Diversity; Budgeting; Financial Analysis; Human Resources Management; Strategic Planning; Advocacy and Interpersonal Communication; Presentation Skills; Media Relations; Integrity; and Personal Development.
- ⁴ This is based on 2006 standards. As of July 2009, NASPAA had released but not approved an updated 2009 edition. A review of the 2009 standards did not reveal any mention of regional concerns.

George W. Dougherty, Jr. is Assistant Professor, Director of the Master of Public Policy and Management, and Public Service Degree Coordinator at the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. Dr. Dougherty earned a PhD in Public Administration from the University of Georgia. His research interests include local government finance and administration, citizen participation in policy making, and judicial administration.

David Young Miller is Associate Professor and Director of the Innovation Clinic at the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA). Dr. Miller’s career includes experience as a town manager; Director of Finance and Budget for the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Regional Director of the Pennsylvania Economy League; and Associate and Interim Dean of GSPIA. His research interests focus on metropolitan regions in the United States and he is the author of the book *The Regional Governing of Metropolitan America* (2002).