
Do We Still Need Model Charters? The Meaning and Relevance of Reform in the Twenty-First Century

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In 1989, the National Civic League (NCL) released the seventh edition of the Model City Charter. In some respects, that edition was out of date when the NCL published it. The major new features were the endorsement of practices that had already become commonly used: direct election of the mayor and district election of council members as an alternative in large or diverse cities. If these proposals had been made in the sixth edition in 1964, the model charter drafters would have been on the cutting edge of change, as their predecessors were in developing the first charter in 1900 and the second edition in 1915.

Still, the seventh edition was an important contribution. Led by the project coordinator, William N. Cassella, Jr., executive director of the National Municipal League from 1969 to 1985, the revision project addressed issues that had not been resolved among reformers previously. Cassella (who had coordinated the revision of the charter approved in 1964) and revision project chairperson Terrell Blodgett attacked some sacred cows at the same time that they defended the values of the reform movement and reaffirmed the principle that structure matters. As the NCL prepares for a new round of deliberations leading to an eighth edition of the recommendations for local government structure and practice, the question must be asked: Are model charters still relevant?

In the twenty-first century, it is understood that structures do not automatically determine behavior or create desired conditions in government. Structures are part of a broader set of attitudes and values that shape “norms of appropriateness” that guide behavior.¹ Model charters are important not only for the specific structural features recommended but also for the values that they are intended to promote. In the first article in this issue, Frederickson, Wood, and Logan review the evolution of the Model City Charter. Their work, emphasizing specific charter provisions and terminology, ably delineates the changes that have occurred in the structures of city government throughout this period.

I will not repeat those specifics but instead will focus on the values that have served as the foundation for the reform movement.

From this perspective, the overall impression is a mix of constancy and change. There has been substantial continuity in the recommended and actual forms of government, what Frederickson and colleagues call the “legal-statutory platforms,” but electoral structures have undergone considerable change. The legal-statutory platform defines offices and assigns authority among them, while electoral structures determine how officials are selected. (A third aspect of the reform agenda—management practices in personnel, purchasing, and budgeting, etc.—has not changed significantly since the second model charter.) It is important to examine not just constancy and change in key charter provisions but also how the characteristics of officials themselves have changed.

With regard to the form of government, the central issue in the coming charter revision process concerns the significance of different governmental structures. Can choice among alternative forms be rendered irrelevant by a blending of government structures, or are there fundamental distinctions between them that keep choice among alternative forms at the forefront of the debate over model charters? In trying to answer the question of whether we still need models in the twenty-first century, this article examines some specific proposals about how to categorize structural options and considers what differences structures make.

Continuity and Change in Local Government Reform Values

The original municipal program—the first model charter approved in 1900—established the approach of emphasizing structural change as the primary response to problems with governmental performance and perceived defects in local democracy.² Governmental incompetence was as great a concern as (and probably a more widespread problem than) political corruption at the time. Although some have criticized the reformers for ignoring social reform and failing to attack underlying problems of economic inequality and political powerlessness,³ the reformers of the Progressive Era believed that structural and legal change—for instance centralizing executive authority, reorganizing and professionalizing departments, establishing home rule, and reducing partisan influences—was a precondition for other changes. Rather than proposing a program of substantive policies for local officials—and the early leaders of the then–National Municipal League included many social reformers—the approach was to change the structure and process of government to enable new leaders with greater direct accountability to the public to undertake innovations in policies and services.

These reforms had the effect of shifting political power from neighborhood to citywide interests and from parties to businesses, but the reformers were convinced that the highly fragmented, weak-mayor–council governments that

prevailed at the time were poorly serving the interests of all city residents. Commenting on the nature of reform, Pease argued that the reformers believed institutions and practices had to be thoroughly modernized “if urban government were to move effectively into the field of social welfare and were to ride herd on economic interests.”⁴ It was difficult to formulate a substantive program of reform without first creating the organizational capacity for democratic government and effective implementation of programs.

The first model charter organized the governmental form around the principle of the strong, elected executive—a substantial departure from the governments found in cities at the turn of the last century. This approach accomplished the objectives of concentrating authority and strengthening executive leadership, but reformers recognized limitations in this approach from the beginning. In his review of the Municipal Program in 1900, Durand would have preferred to see greater council control over the executive and asked whether it was possible to create a form akin to the cabinet system, “in which close harmony, rather than separation, of executive and legislature should be sought?”⁵ To Goodnow, creation of the “council system” of city government “has the great advantage that it avoids all possibility of conflict between municipal authorities. The council being absolutely supreme in the city there is really no authority with which conflicts may arise.”⁶ Deming was favorably disposed to English local government, which had a strong council—including a mayor without executive authority—to direct the city administration.⁷ As Frederickson, Wood, and Logan observe in this issue, the reformers were not won over by the commission form but rather kept looking for a structural approach that would reconcile their support for representative democracy with the principles of hierarchy and merit and at the same time avoid the undemocratic features of the commission form.

With the second Model City Charter, adopted in 1915 and published with commentary in *A New Municipal Program*,⁸ the reformers established an original and comprehensive model for reorganizing government to meet what they considered to be the pressing problems of the time. They broadened the base of leadership through reliance on representative rather than executive democracy. In the second model charter, the council was the “pivot of the municipal system.”⁹ The council was given investigatory powers and authority to appoint the city manager. This latter provision strengthened both the council and the executive without jeopardizing the role of the council or perpetuating separation of powers.

To improve administrative performance and elevate the level of policy making, the reformers stressed professionalism, administrative reorganization, new management practices, and insulation of administrators from interference by elected officials. The council would exercise regular and comprehensive supervision, so there was no presumption that the manager would handle the administrative affairs of the city in isolation from the council. The manager was called upon to offer policy advice and recommendations to the council in its

enactment of legislation. Overall, the manager was expected to “show himself to be a leader, formulating policies and urging their adoption by the council.”¹⁰ The reformers did not intend to simply add an administrative technician who would take charge of implementing policies. They sought to provide for strong executive leadership but did so with a controlled executive rather than the elected executive of the first model charter. (One of the major figures from this period, Richard Childs, never wavered from his view that the city manager provides policy leadership. In 1961, he wrote “the leadership in policy which city managers are contributing on issues great or routine is not only a sound enrichment of municipal practice but it is also in accord with the initial design.”¹¹)

Thus, there was continuity in the values emphasized by the reformers in the initial period of innovation. The values expressed in the first model charter, which centralized influence in the mayor’s office in a separation-of-powers form of government, were continued in the new form of government articulated in the second model charter. The principles of combining political leadership based on representative democracy and professional leadership by an appointed chief executive, established in the second model charter, were maintained through the seventh charter. A central question now is whether these principles will continue to be the basis for recommendations in the eighth model charter.

Before addressing this issue, however, it is instructive to assess changes in how elected officials are chosen. Such consideration requires that we distinguish between changes in form of government and changes in electoral structure.

Components of Local Government Structure: Form and Elections

It has been common in the United States to lump together form and electoral features. This reflects the practice in academic research of classifying cities by the extent to which they incorporate “reform” and “traditional” features. This practice suggests that the parts are integrally linked. In the past, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has promoted this same impression by listing at-large elections as among the “main features” of the council-manager plan¹² even though the at-large method has nothing to do directly with the form of government (as ICMA itself would conclude in 1973). Direct election of the mayor, although it clearly has implications for how the mayor approaches and fills his or her office in the council-manager form of government, is also an electoral feature rather than a characteristic of form.

From this point of view, it is important to differentiate between two kinds of argument about change in local government. On the one hand, there is the argument that the distinction between reformed and traditional cities is blurring. More Type III cities, as Frederickson calls them, are emerging, which use one or more reform and traditional structural features. On the other hand,

there is little support for the argument that the distinction between forms of government is blurring. If it is happening (there are differing interpretations of events), the changes are recent and rare. This is the issue to be addressed later: Are there still meaningful differences between forms of government, or are the forms blending?

For now, the point here is simpler. Support for the council-manager form of government among reformers has not changed since it was endorsed in 1915. The number of cities that have adopted the council-manager form of government continues to grow, but change in form—abandonment of one form for the other—is rare. Change in election institutions, on the other hand, has been common. In council-manager cities, 62 percent elect the mayor directly, and many use district, or a combination of district and at-large, elections.

The need to decouple forms of government and election features is reinforced by evidence from other countries. This perspective also helps clarify what the essential differences are between government based on integrated authority and that based on separation of powers. According to a recent study of city government in twelve European countries, Australia, and the United States, nine have a form of government that is based on the features that underlie the council-manager form: integration of authority in the hands of the governing body (the United States is the only one of these countries that uses different forms of government in municipalities).¹³ These governments are all quasi-parliamentary bodies with appointed chief executive officers (CEOs).

Two, Australia and Ireland, use the council-manager government in a fairly pure form. Five countries—Finland, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, and Sweden—have a mayor (or equivalent) and an executive committee drawn from a larger council. Belgium and Holland have an executive committee presided over by an appointed mayor. Except in the United States, the election systems used are typically partisan, and political parties are important to organizing the council in countries that use executive committees. The type of constituency varies; at-large, proportional representation, representation by district, or a mixed system are all used.

In most of the countries, the mayor or equivalent is head of the council and has some executive powers, and in many of the countries council members or council committees have some direct supervisory authority over departments of city government. In all of them, the CEO serves the entire council (or executive committee), although in many the CEO is closely tied to the mayor. Thus the countries that base their local government on the principle of integrated authority share executive powers among a number of officials and often use parties and districts or proportional representation in elections.

In four countries (France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain), a strong mayor is the political and executive head of the government. There are appointed CEOs in these countries, but they operate within the orbit of the mayor and give more emphasis to the administrative aspects of the position and less attention to policy initiation than in the other types of government. It is important to note that

these CEOs are also as committed to nonpartisanship as CEOs in parliamentary-type governments, and they are fairly involved in policy innovation. Thus, they do not manifest the characteristics of political hacks or administrative clerks. Still, they tend to have less self-perceived influence compared to their mayors or to CEOs in other types of government.

Comparison with other countries suggests that integration of authority versus separation of powers is a key element in differentiating forms of government. Integration of authority can accompany various ways of dividing executive responsibility among elected and administrative officials and various electoral structures for selecting officials.

Changing Characteristics of Elected Officials and the Changing Concerns of Reformers

It is important to note that changes in American local government have come from changes in the characteristics and attitudes of elected officials as well as from changes in governmental structure. Changes in electoral practice have presumably contributed to shifts in local government, although the changes reflect broader social trends independent of changes in structure. For an extended period of time, roughly through the 1950s, at-large and nonpartisan elections were typically found in council-manager cities; these structures, along with common social and political forces, produced a certain type of council. District and partisan elections commonly found in mayor-council cities produced another kind of council.

In council-manager cities during this period, elected officials were disproportionately businessmen and professionals; they were comfortable emphasizing governance by setting broad goals with the advice of the city manager and then reviewing and approving the policy recommendations developed by the manager. Council members were volunteers who saw themselves as trustees for the community. For them, filling a position of elected leadership was an extension of their service to the community. It was common for the mayor to be chosen from the members of the council; this offered the kind of leadership that the council wanted. Mayors were not expected to have their own agendas for the city but rather were to keep the council working together effectively as a team. There was a high degree of compatibility between the mayors and council members and between the elected officials and the city managers, who stressed serving the public and bringing professionalism to city government.

The city council members in mayor-council governments who were typically elected in partisan, district elections were likely to focus on constituent services and acted as intermediaries between their constituents and local government. They were more a board of delegates than a board of governors. Mayors were occasionally programmatic politicians but were more likely to be the brokers who negotiated the compromises that fashioned majorities on the city council, while securing resources for the mayor's organization.

In recent decades, the characteristics of city council members are becoming more similar across all city types. As elected officials in council-manager cities have become more representative of the diversity of the urban population, and as the political process and community conditions have changed, council members have placed increasing emphasis on the representational rather than the governance aspects of their position. With or without change in electoral institutions, council members stress activism and an ombudsman role rather than setting the long-term goals of the community.¹⁴ Councils are often a collection of individual members with separate, constituency-focused agendas rather than a board of governors. Mayors are increasingly directly elected, although this route to office can either enhance the role of the mayor as a broad agenda setter or serve to isolate him or her from the rest of the council.

Observers of local government have become concerned with how to promote vision, cohesion, coherence, and continuity in policy making as council members grow increasingly attentive to offering immediate solutions to specific problems. There is continued concern about effectiveness, quality, consistency, fairness, responsiveness, and efficiency in service delivery and resource management. The conditions that professionals in local government can reinforce seem to be more in evidence than the qualities that elected officials must provide. Policy ideas and innovations come from many sources, including professional administrators. Indeed, evidence shows that policy innovation may come more from top administrators than from elected officials, and maintaining this capability is a concern of charter reformers. City managers who have always been (and have always been expected to be) policy leaders increasingly help councils create broad goals and promote continuity in policies and services. Still, policy agreement and commitment among elected officials and the political capacity for policy change often seem to be lacking. Preserving quality, integrity, and innovation in local government while increasing the capacity for leadership will be central concerns of a new model-charter revision process.

Perspectives on Approaches to Charter Revision

Two perspectives are emerging on how the discussion about charter revision should be framed. On the one hand there is the traditional orientation that has animated development of model charters: basic choices can and should be made between alternative structures. On the other hand, there is the view that various acceptable alternatives are available, any of which can help promote desired outcomes and characteristics. The seventh model charter reflected both perspectives. By offering a “model with alternatives,” a basic choice was made in recommending the council-manager form of government, but alternatives were offered for defining the mayor’s responsibilities and for methods of choosing elected officials. The limited alternatives in the sixth edition, although a new feature, were labeled as departures from the “stated preferences.” Since

the fifth model charter, guidelines have been offered for designing a “model” mayor-council government if a city chooses that form, but the council-manager form has been consistently endorsed.

In the current discussion, the first perspective is challenged by disagreement about whether it is still possible to distinguish forms of government. Obviously, one must be able to identify the alternatives as a condition for being able to recommend one over the other. “Can one distinguish forms of government?” is a question that precedes “Should one endorse a form of government?”

A new development that makes it harder to answer both questions is the emergence in the past decade of new types of authority for the mayor in council-manager cities. The seventh model charter provided direct election of the mayor as an option and suggested some modest special responsibilities that might be assigned to the mayor—notably, presenting a state-of-the-city address and appointing members of committees and boards with council concurrence.

In addition, it is possible to find examples of mayors who have staff assistants they appoint, who receive a salary commensurate with a full-time position, and who have a longer term than council members—provisions not included in the seventh charter. Some cities have further “empowered” their mayors by adding one or more powers to the mayor’s office: appointing citizens to serve on boards and commissions without council concurrence, exercising the veto, receiving the annual budget prepared by the city manager and presenting it with comments and suggestions to the council (or preparing a mayoral budget in addition to the manager’s), nominating the city manager to the council for approval, and initiating the dismissal of the manager.

One may assess these options and conclude, with Frederickson, that selection of such provisions leads to a mixed form, one that is no longer clearly council-manager or mayor-council. Others, such as Blodgett, argue that a determination between forms can still be made; that is, it is possible to determine which and how many provisions tip the balance from the council-manager to the mayor-council form. The former perspective could lead to taking a new approach to designating options among forms, adding a blended choice to the standard forms. This would be similar to how the seventh model charter handles the choices regarding constituency types: cities can choose at-large, district, or a combination of the two.

The latter perspective, that a choice between the forms can still be made, raises the question of what kinds of options are linked to each form of government. The Cincinnati charter revision in 1999 illustrates that this is not an academic question. Supporters of the council-manager form of government differed in their assessments of the proposed charter revisions. Writing for the executive board of the Ohio City Management Association, Timothy Hansley argued that giving the mayor of Cincinnati all the empowering provisions mentioned in the preceding paragraph makes the mayor’s office inconsistent with the council-manager form. Hansley noted in particular that the provisions giving the mayor the authority to nominate and initiate removal of the city man-

ager could undermine the ability of the manager to serve the entire council and to work independently of the control of the mayor, even though the council would have to approve both the hiring and the firing of the city manager. According to this analysis, these powers as well as the provisions giving the mayor a greater voice, more resources, and a longer term than the council permit the mayor to exercise effective control over both the legislative agenda and the administration of the city.

Bill Hansell, executive director of ICMA, concluded that the new charter was consistent with the ICMA criteria for recognizing a government as a council-manager form, contending that the revisions to the Cincinnati charter maintained the city manager's position as the chief executive and administrative officer of the city. Even taking into account the shift of authority from the council to the mayor (who takes the initiative in actions that are approved by the council as a whole, such as hiring or dismissing the manager or approving the budget as well as being able to hire assistants and appoint citizen boards and committees without council approval), Hansell does not regard the charter revisions as having changed the form of government.

To repeat the differences between the main perspectives, the blending-of-forms perspective would present the new Cincinnati charter as being neither a council-manager nor a mayor-council form. The other perspective would argue that it can be classified as one or the other. Although there is disagreement about how to classify the new charter, the representatives of this perspective would agree that it is important to make distinctions and state preferences. The first perspective would lead to presenting alternatives instead of a model, and the second would lead to continuation of the practice of offering a model, that is, a preference for the council-manager form of government, with alternatives.

Assessing Proposals Regarding Form of Government

Choosing among options requires criteria for selection. In the past, reformers sought to achieve a balance among democratic accountability, responsiveness, coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency in government. The model charter was based on the principles of representative democratic governance, integrated authority with a controlled executive, and professional leadership. Although early reformers were convinced that a cohesive board of governors could provide appropriate leadership and linkage between citizens and government, since the sixth model charter there have been efforts to enhance both representation and democratic leadership.

The mayor-council form as an approach to organizing local government is based on the principle of executive democracy reflected in a strong mayor and citizen representation through a council that emphasizes citizen service, rather than setting goals—that is, a focus on the representational rather than the governance aspects of the council role.¹⁵ The form is based on separation

of powers between the mayor and the council. Provisions to increase professionalism have increasingly been added to the mayor-council form, including appointing a chief administrative officer or city administrator. Whether the city administrator makes broad contributions to professionalism in government or primarily augments the capacity of the mayor depends in part on how the city administrator is selected.

The previous model charters have endorsed the council-manager form because it promotes integration of authority (rather than separation of powers), breadth of accountability for the city manager, provisions for democratic leadership, and potential for professional contributions to policy making and administration. The standard mayor-council form does not match or as strongly promote these qualities. The challenge in a new charter revision is to sort out options that might occupy a middle ground between these two standards. In classifying the various formal relationships between mayors and chief administrators, it is possible to build on distinctions suggested by Hansell to create a comprehensive array of forms of government with subtypes.¹⁶ They are displayed in Table 1. The basic division is between council-manager and mayor-council forms; it reflects the distinction between integrated authority and separation of powers as an organizing principle.

Among council-manager variations, direct election of the mayor gives this official a focused leadership role and a citywide mandate for an agenda presented to voters in the electoral campaign. The empowered mayor has additional authority and responsibilities drawn from those discussed earlier. A major issue in the model-charter revision process is to determine whether certain of these provisions separately or in combination contradict the basic tenets of council-manager government.

Beyond assessing specific provisions, the desirability of the mayoral empowerment approach within the council-manager form should be examined carefully. It can be argued that the desired leadership traits the empowering provisions are intended to promote can be achieved by an effective facilitative leader who uses the potential inherent in the office both to bring officials together in shared commitment to common goals and to help them work together effectively.¹⁷ The reality is, however, that the mayor often does not offer visionary leadership in council-manager government. In the study just cited, when city managers and city administrators were asked whether they agreed that the mayor is “a visionary person who constantly initiates new projects and policies,” 23 percent agreed in council-manager cities and 34 percent agreed in mayor-council cities. When the mayor had responsibility for appointing the city administrator with council approval, 42 percent agreed; in the case of the mayor appointing the administrator alone, 58 percent agreed that the mayor was a visionary in mayor-council cities.¹⁸

The empowering provisions may enhance leadership first by giving the mayor additional tools to use in assembling a coalition of supporters where it does not naturally emerge and second, perhaps more important, by attracting

Table 1. Status of Executive Officer in Alternative Forms of Government

<i>Executive Office</i>	<i>Integrated Authority</i>			<i>Separation of Powers</i>		
	<i>Council-manager</i>	<i>Mayor council-manager</i>	<i>Empowered mayor-council-manager</i>	<i>Mayor council-administrator</i>	<i>Mayor administrator-council</i>	<i>Mayor council</i>
Mayor	Chosen by council	Elected at-large; has citywide authority	Elected at-large; has extra authority	CEO	CEO	CEO
City manager/administrator	Serves entire council	Serves entire council	Serves entire council	Serves entire council	Serves mayor	-

more assertive leaders who are put off by the perceived limitations of the mayor's office. The question that we cannot answer without further research is whether empowering provisions make mayors better leaders or attract better leaders to be mayors.

A brief comment is in order about a feature of mayor-council government that incorporates some aspects of the council-manager model. There is presumably a substantial difference between mayor-council governments with and without a city administrator. To promote professionalism, it is useful to advocate creating a city administrator position; this feature has been part of the guidelines for mayor-council government provided since the fifth edition. The model-charter guidelines have given the mayor the authority to appoint the city administrator without council approval, although in practice council approval is the most common approach. Furthermore, when the administrator is nominated by the mayor and approved by the council, this official serves to bridge, but does not eliminate, the separation of powers.

Results from a 1997 survey of city managers and administrators¹⁹ indicate that when their appointment is approved by the council, most city administrators feel that they should be equally accountable to the mayor and the council; most feel that they have sufficient power to bring professional management values to administration of city government (Table 2). In the case of the mayor appointing the city administrator without council approval, accountability is directed to the mayor and only half of the city administrators feel that they can instill values of professional management.

Most city administrators, whether approved by the council or not, feel that they are increasingly the agent of the mayor and that the scope of their office is shaped by the mayor. The mayor-council-administrator (administrator approved by the council) or mayor-administrator-council (administrator appointed by the mayor without approval) forms present advantages over the mayor-council form without an administrator because both promote professionalism in city government. The mayor-council-administrator form would appear to increase the likelihood of the city administrator playing an integrative role assisting both the mayor and the city council. This aspect would potentially make it the preferred approach among the mayor-council options but not an equal alternative to the council-manager form in the minds of reformers.

Are Model Charters Relevant, and Does Structure Matter?

If structure matters, then model charters are still relevant. Although the relationship between structure and behavior is complex, structure makes a difference in the attitudes and behavior of officials and the performance of local government. Consequently, we cannot be indifferent about which alternatives are chosen in designing local government. Models are based on values that signal what kind of attitude and behavior is deemed to be appropriate. The choice

Table 2. Assessing the Impact of Three Methods of Appointing the City Administrator in Mayor-Council Cities²²

Statement	% Agreement among city managers and administrators according to method of their appointment ^a			
	Council	Mayor with council approval	Mayor	Total
The city administrator is increasingly the major agent of the mayor	37 [20]	72 [58]	100 [18]	63 [96]
The city administrator should be equally accountable to the mayor and the city council	76 [41]	70 [57]	28 [5]	67 [103]
The city administrator's duties generally expand or decrease as the mayor may determine	35 [19]	70 [65]	83 [15]	64 [99]
It is difficult for the city administrator to acquire sufficient power to infuse values of professional management into the administration of city government	24 [13]	11 [9]	47 [8]	19 [30]

^a Data are based on 1997 survey in which 37% of city administrators/city managers were appointed by the council, 52% were appointed by the mayor with the approval of the city council, and 11% were appointed by the mayor alone (see text for further details). Numbers in brackets are numbers of respondents.

Source: Svava, J.H. "Reaffirming and Reforming Reform." *Public Management*, 1999, 81, 7–10. Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

is not between progress and corruption, of course; a model charter is intended to reflect a choice of practices that are likely to do more to advance principles of sound democratic governance than the alternatives.

The failure to make such choices and a declining use of preferred structures can have negative consequences. The changes may not be evident immediately. As Peters has observed, " 'good government' can in part be expected to occur

simply because the current occupants of the system are the products of the old system,” that is, they continue to adhere to the norms of appropriate behavior that accompanied the old structures.²⁰ The risk of negative change may be greater “in the next generations of public employees who have not been brought up on the rules and the principles” of the old institutions.²¹ In attempts to strengthen political leadership in local government, the substantial contributions of city managers and administrators could be jeopardized. Professional managers serving elected officials and the public bring distinctive values that enrich and elevate the governmental process in policy making and service delivery. These include the commitment to basing policy and service delivery on need rather than demand, stressing the long-term interests of the community as a whole, promoting equity and fairness, recognizing the interconnection among policies, and advancing citizen participation that is broad and inclusive. Something important is lost if there is no professional chief administrator to channel professional values into the governmental process at the highest and most general level through interaction with the mayor and the council.

Renewing the model charter by incorporating changes that reflect new conditions clarifies the purpose of the reform process. The basic intent of the reform movement is not to defend an established set of structures. For an extended period of time between the second and the sixth charters, when the model charters remained essentially the same in their key provisions, it was difficult to determine whether the structures themselves or the nature of the governmental process was the primary concern of the reformers. The charter writers in the 1980s were interested in manipulating structure to achieve certain ends; some old positions were abandoned and new ones adopted in order to do so. Those involved in developing an eighth model charter need to have the same openness to both reaffirmation and revision of the program of structural reform for local government.

Postscript: Other Charter Reform Issues Besides Form of Government

The model-charter process has focused on the same core topics over time, and they continue to be important. Other matters can be considered that might be addressed with new structures and governmental processes. New mechanisms for citizen participation and neighborhood governance are worthy of attention. How local governments relate to each other and to the process of regional governance is a longstanding challenge that is becoming ever more critical, and perplexing, as metropolitan areas continue to sprawl farther from the urban core. Local governments are at the beginning stage of incorporating new information technologies into the way they make decisions, deliver services, and assess citizen feedback. A model charter for the twenty-first century should extend beyond the governance of individual cities and counties to recommend

new ways to improve the governance of smaller and larger “communities” of people who share common problems and aspirations.

Notes

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