

STRONG-MAYOR VERSUS COUNCIL-MANAGER FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington: Comparing/Contrasting the Mayor-Council and Council-Manager Forms of Government <http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/management/forms/compare.aspx>

ADAPTED FOR THE MAT-SU BOROUGH (ASSEMBLY VS. COUNCIL)

Characteristics	Mayor-Assembly	Assembly-Manager
Legislative authority	Assembly	Assembly
Executive authority	Elected mayor	Appointed manager
Selection of CEO	Popularly elected	Appointed by assembly on the basis of experience
Removal of CEO	Recall election	Removed by a majority vote of the assembly
Tenure of executive	3-year term, 2 terms max.	Indefinite
Tenure of assembly	3-year term, 2 terms max.	3-year term, 2 terms max.
Appointment of department heads	Mayor (with assembly confirmation, if provided)	Manager (no assembly confirmation)
Removal of department heads	Mayor	Manager
Veto	Mayor	Manager has no veto
Policy development	Mayor can propose	Manager can recommend
Policy implementation	Mayor	Manager
Underlying principles	Separation of powers Political leadership Strong central executive	Separation of politics from administration Promotion of economy and efficiency through professional management Strong central executive

Source (Information extracted from and revised for Mat-Su Borough government): Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) of Washington <http://www.mrsc.org/askmrsc/pasttopicsubject.aspx?sid=11#Council-Manager-Form> (*Note: The following "arguments" have been collected from a variety of sources and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of MRSC or MRSC Staff.)

**Assembly-Manager Form
Government Organization**

What are some of the arguments for and against the ASSEMBLY-MANAGER form of government?

Arguments For the ASSEMBLY-MANAGER Form

- Administration of borough business is removed from politics.
- Assembly-manager form is based on an efficient business model.
- Since borough managers are appointed rather than elected, greater attention can be given to selecting a qualified manager. The pool of qualified candidates is larger since candidates can be recruited from as far as the assembly desires up to and including a nationwide search. (Mayors must be a resident of the city prior to their election.)
- Since managers are appointed not elected, they are less likely to have political obligations which will affect the quality of their administration.
- Emphasis is placed on the role of the legislative body and its policy-making function. Assembly gets better cooperation and information because the city manager is their employee.
- Since manager serves at the pleasure of the assembly without a definite term, he/she can be removed at any time, limiting the danger of an abuse of authority.
- The assembly/manager relationship is similar to the school board/superintendent relationship.

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Arguments Against the ASSEMBLY-MANAGER Form

- The assembly-manager form gives too much power to one person – the city manager.
- A professional manager chosen from outside the borough may not know the community and is too far from the voters.
- Assemblies may leave too much decision making to the manager, who is not directly accountable to the public.
- Without an elected chief executive, the community lacks political leadership.
- The assembly-manager form is too much like a business corporation which is not suitable for managing community needs.
- Citizens may be confused about who is in charge. Most expect the mayor to respond to their problems. The mayor has no direct control over the delivery of services and can only change policy through the assembly.
- A borough manager may leave a city when offered a higher salary and greater responsibility in another location.

What are some of the arguments for and against the MAYOR-ASSEMBLY form of government?

Arguments For the MAYOR-ASSEMBLY Form

- This is the form that is familiar to most Americans because it is patterned after our traditional national and state governments. There is a separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. There are checks and balances.
- Also separation of powers provides healthy independence, debate and creative tension. Separate legislative and executive branches provide the best opportunity for debate and consensus building.
- By electing, rather than appointing a mayor, political leadership is established. The borough has a political spokesperson that has a high degree of visibility.
- Some argue that an elected mayor will have a higher standing and greater voice in regional affairs of the borough.
- In most cities the mayor is vested with the veto power, and can serve as a check on an unpopular assembly decision.
- A professional administrator can be hired to assist the mayor in the management of the city's operations thereby freeing the mayor to concentrate on political leadership or to offset weaknesses in the mayor's management background or experience, but the mayor is still ultimately responsible.

Arguments Against the MAYOR-ASSEMBLY Form

- The office of the mayor gives too much power and authority to one person. It permits an incumbent to make decisions based largely on political considerations, and to use the office to further personal political objectives.
- The qualities needed to win an election are not the same qualities needed to manage a modern metropolis. A mayor while politically astute may not always possess the necessary management training and experience.
- If an elected mayor proves to be incompetent or worse, he/she cannot be removed until the end of their term, or through an expensive and divisive recall election process.
- A separately elected mayor may resist requests from the assembly. The mayor may attempt to isolate the assembly by controlling staff, information, and reports; "turf wars".

Additional resource information is available at the following sites:

- <http://www.leaguecity.com/DocumentView.aspx?DID=2870>
Texas: PowerPoint comparing pros/cons of strong-mayor vs. council-manager form of government
- City of Sacramento: http://www.cityofsacramento.org/charter/documents/CM_vs_Strong_Mayor_Rev_6-23-09.pdf
COUNCIL-MANAGER OR "STRONG MAYOR" The Choice is Clear: Learn the Facts About Council-Manager Government
- Strong Mayor-Council Institute: <http://strongmayorcouncil.org/home.html>