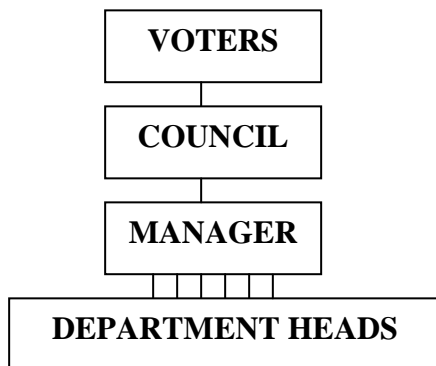# Forms of Local Government

Council-Manager

In the council-manager form of government, the council is the governing body of the city, elected by the public, and the manager is hired by the council to carry out the policies it establishes. The council usually consists of five to nine members including a mayor (or council president) who is either selected by the council or elected by the people as defined in the city charter. The size of the council is generally smaller than that of a mayor-council municipality and council elections are usually nonpartisan.

The council provides legislative direction while the manager is responsible for day-to-day administrative operations of the city based on the council's recommendations. The mayor and council, as a collegial body, are responsible for setting policy, approving the budget, and determining the tax rate. The manager serves as the council's chief advisor. Managers also serve at the pleasure of the council and are responsible for preparing the budget, directing day-to-day operations, and hiring and firing personnel.

Typically, the mayor is recognized as the political head of the municipality but is a member of the legislative body and does not have the power to veto legislative actions.
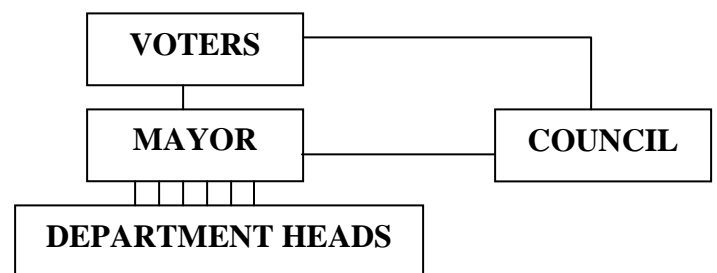
Mayor-Council

The mayor-council (council-elected executive counties) form of government is the form that most closely parallels the American federal government with an elected legislature and a separately elected executive.

The mayor or elected executive is designated as the head of the city or county government. The extent of his or her authority can range from purely ceremonial functions to full scale responsibility for day-to-day operations. But the mayor's or elected executive's duties and powers generally include the following: hiring and firing department heads, preparation and administration of the budget, and veto power (which may be overridden) over acts of legislature. The legislature has the following responsibilities: adoption of the budget, passage of resolutions with legislation, auditing the performance of the government, and adoption of general policy positions.

In some communities, the mayor or executive may assume a larger policy-making role, and responsibility for day-to-day operations is delegated to an administrator appointed by and responsible to the chief executive.

Council-Manager Organizational Structure

Mayor-Council Organizational Structure

Commission

The commission form of government, characterized by an elected governing board that holds both legislative and executive powers, is the oldest form of government in America. A descendant of the old English shire-moot or county governing board, the board is usually composed of three to five members, although the number varies.

The board of commissioners is the county governing board and serves as the head of the government. It has responsibility for adopting the budget, passing resolutions, and enacting ordinances and regulations. A number of other officials are also popularly elected and serve as heads of some of the major county departments (although the number of these independently elected officials varies considerably. Some of the common are sheriff, treasurer, and clerk).

Town Meeting

All qualified voters of the town gather on a given day (usually once a year, but more often if necessary) to elect a board of officers (selectmen) and to make policy decisions. The board of selectmen has the responsibility for carrying out the policy set by the citizens. In some towns, a manager or administrator is appointed to carry out the administrative operations of the town.

Representative Town Meeting

The representative town meeting form of government is structured in much the same way as the town meeting form, with the exception that a large number of citizens are chosen by the general electorate to represent them in voting. All citizens can attend the meetings and participate in debates, but only those chosen as representatives have a direct vote.