

Manager VS. Administrator

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Question: What's the difference between a town manager and a town administrator or administrative assistant?

Answer: It depends on what powers and duties have been granted to each of them.

The position of town manager can be created either by municipal charter or by adoption of the statutory "town manager plan" (30-A M.R.S.A. §§ 2631-2639). The powers and duties of a manager under the statutory plan are clearly enumerated in § 2636 and include broad executive and administrative authority, including the power to appoint, supervise and control all employees and appointed officials except for board members and assessors. Under a charter the powers and duties of a manager may vary from the statutory plan, although most charter-created managers in reality hold authority and responsibilities very similar to managers under the statutory plan.

The position of town administrator or administrative assistant is nowhere referenced in statute and can be created only by local enactment (either charter, ordinance or warrant article). Because there is no statutory "model," and because different municipalities conceive the position differently, the powers and duties of an administrator or administrative assistant vary widely. In some cases, an administrator is simply a manager by another name (for perhaps political or other reasons). In others instances, an administrator may be little more than an assistant or secretary to the selectmen (still an important job). The point is, it is virtually impossible to generalize about the position of administrator or administrative assistant because it is by definition "homegrown" – the job description and the skills required (as well as the compensation offered) depend on the expectations of each municipality that has chosen to create such a position.

For more on this subject, see MMA's "Information Packet" on the town manager plan. For a fascinating history of the manager plan movement (in which Maine was a leader), see the publication "The Manager Plan in Maine" by James J. Haag, also available free to members on our website (www.memun.org). (By R.P.F.)