Helping Tennessee Cities Move Ahead

Municipal Technical Advisory Service

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The University of Tennessee Municipal Technical Advisory Service

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in cooperation with the Tennessee Municipal League
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Consulting firms specializing in municipal government are nothing new, but there's nothing else in the country quite like MTAS. The University of Tennessee's Municipal Technical Advisory Service has been around since 1949, on call for Tennessee cities and towns. As our name implies, MTAS is a technical assistance provider. We've got consultants who specialize in most areas of municipal operations and we bend over backwards to give our clients what they need when they need it. Most of us have city hall experience — so we know how it is.

How did Tennessee municipalities get so lucky? The Tennessee Municipal League, the lobbying arm for the state's cities and towns, turned to the General Assembly and asked for technical help for its members. And the league wanted that help to be independent of politics. The result was MTAS, now an agency of The University of Tennessee's Institute for Public Service. MTAS is funded by a direct state appropriation and with a portion of the local share of the statewide sales tax. Thus, almost all MTAS services are pre-paid; our cities don't get a bill.

MTAS annually completes more than 1,000 municipal management projects and averages about 13,000 other services each year. In a two-year period, MTAS extended a helping hand in all but eight of Tennessee's 341 cities and towns. While university-based, MTAS consultants don't get involved in academic research and teaching; practical technical assistance is our job.
**What they’re saying about MTAS**

“I have held the MTAS banner high over the years. When you’re as small a community as we are, with such a small staff, we could not live without MTAS expertise and experience. If it weren’t for MTAS, we’d probably spend more time in the court house than at city hall. It’s their leadership that’s so important.”

Mayor Tommie Goodwin, Trenton 1993-94 President of the Tennessee Municipal League

“MTAS is not only concerned about the needs of the cities. They’re also concerned about their responsiveness to the needs of the cities.”

City Administrator Lynn Wampler, Fayetteville 1993-94 Tennessee City Manager of the Year

“After more than 20 years managing a Tennessee city, I recently moved to be city manager of Fredericksburg, Virginia. I’ve called MTAS twice already for advice and research. I guess old habits are hard to break!”

City Manager Marvin Bolinger, Fredericksburg, Va.

“MTAS has provided many, many hours of quality counseling to the city of Tullahoma. Their assistance is invaluable.”

City Administrator Jana Vosika, Tullahoma
“I have never been disappointed in the professional assistance provided by MTAS. Their representatives are very interested and focused on helping Tennessee municipalities become progressive and on the cutting edge. Whenever I ask for help, MTAS always responds. What a wonderful partnership!”

Mayor Don Trotter, Clarksville

“One of MTAS' biggest strengths is the diversity of its consultants. You name the topic, there’s a consultant with some experience in the subject. And MTAS consultants are always there for you, with a sympathetic ear if that’s what you need or a practical, realistic suggestion to handle a tough problem. Tennessee cities are fortunate to have such support.”

City Manager Gary Hensley, Maryville

“MTAS hits perfect balance. It’s like a great performer on the high wire. On one side, it’s located at the university. So it is protected from having raw politics override professional technical assistance. On the other side, it’s still close to the street. So it is forced to give practical advice that works in the often grubby world of government. Perfect balance. No other state has come up with anything near as good for providing solid technical assistance to city government.”

Executive Director Joseph Sweat
Tennessee Municipal League
LEWISBURG — The complexion of Lewisburg’s council changed after the 1993 city election. With a new mayor and two new councilmembers out of five, Lewisburg turned to its MTAS management consultant for a three-hour orientation session. The council reviewed Lewisburg’s charter, sunshine and conflict of interest laws, and personnel and purchasing policies. MTAS wrapped it up with suggestions on how the council could work as a team with the manager to reach city goals.

SMYRNA — This growing community needed more fire protection than its all-volunteer force could provide. Smyrna called MTAS’ fire management consultant. The result? A multi-faceted firefighting force composed of volunteers, paid city firefighters, and cross-trained police officers. At MTAS’ suggestion, the city is also building a new fire hall.

LOBELVILLE — This city of fewer than 1,000 needed to move its utility billing and general ledger operations into the computer age. City officials turned to MTAS to prepare a computer system bid package.

ALCOA — Cutting public works costs was the city’s goal — and MTAS recommendations made the difference. Our consultants even included cost containment suggestions for landfill operations.
GERMANTOWN — City officials wanted to know who was using its new community center, who wasn’t, and why. MTAS randomly surveyed Germantown citizens and organized focus groups. The result was an in-depth report with recommendations for city officials.

SPRING HILL — The city was facing an age-old problem: not enough revenues in its water and sewer operations to cover costs. Should it raise rates? A team of MTAS finance and public works consultants took a long, hard look, and the answer was yes. Bolstered by MTAS support, the Spring Hill Board of Mayor and Aldermen approved a rate hike.

CHATTANOOGA — Citizens historically rate recreation services as high priority. With MTAS’ help, Chattanooga’s Department of Parks and Recreation gave 28 of its citizens a unique opportunity to be involved. MTAS facilitated planning sessions so these citizens could help the department set its goals.

UNION CITY — It was an MTAS blitz. Twelve consultants from nearly every field of municipal government spent 180 hours in Union City, reviewing city operations from top to bottom. The result was an inch-thick report to the city manager chock-full of recommendations on everything from police and fire to personnel management. It’s called a Comprehensive Management Overview, and MTAS has requests to do more of them.
SODDY DAISY — MTAS has a consultant who specializes in utility financial management. Soddy Daisy has a new tap fee structure thanks to his expertise.

SARDIS — When this town of just 300 people took on two annexations, increasing the population to 450 and doubling the municipality's land area, it needed help. Sardis' vice mayor got it from his MTAS management consultant, who attended the citizen information meetings and walked the city through the process.

EAST RIDGE — Many elected and appointed officials, and some determined citizens, felt it was time to make a change in East Ridge, from commissioner to council-manager government. They turned to the Tennessee City Managers Association, who turned to the MTAS communications consultant. She developed a public relations campaign for the referendum that included a logo and billboard design, brochures and flyers, press releases, public service announcements, and speeches. East Ridge is now a council-manager city. The campaign was also successfully used in Cleveland.

CROSSVILLE — It had been a long time since Crossville had reviewed the classification and compensation of its 150 employees. MTAS helped the city do it — writing the job descriptions, ensuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and helping hire a consultant to complete the compensation package.
NEW JOHNSONVILLE — There’s a new police manual in town, thanks to MTAS’ model and a consultant’s hard work.

CLIFTON — When a little city like Clifton (population: 620) needs traffic signs, finding the money to pay for them can be the biggest hurdle. An MTAS public works consultant helped the city identify appropriate grant programs and apply.

BRISTOL — Passage of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act meant major changes for local government facilities nationwide. To make sure its city-owned school system complied with the new regulations, Bristol called MTAS.

CARTHAGE — MTAS joined forces with the state’s Local Planning Office to develop a long-range capital improvements planning and budgeting process. Now there’s a model for other cities and towns.

FRANKLIN — Franklin was ready to hire a professional city manager and turned to the MTAS personnel consultant. He helped write the job description, provided salary information, drafted interview questions, and served on the mayor’s advisory committee.

KNOXVILLE — MTAS studied the organization and management of the code enforcement program. The result? MTAS ideas and suggestions improved service delivery and effectiveness.
It may sound like a cliché, but it’s true: MTAS is just a phone call away. Time and again, Tennessee officials say the most important service MTAS provides is a quick answer to a very specific question.

- What’s adequate notice for a special called meeting of the commission?
- Should my city sign a mutual aid agreement with the county for fire service?
- What setbacks from schools and churches are required for beer establishments?
- Does my town’s charter give the city manager the power to fire employees?
- Can we auction off our old police cruiser?
- Does my city need a policy on infectious disease control? Do you have a model?
- What does off the record mean to a reporter? What about deep background and not for attribution?
- How do our solid waste collectors get commercial drivers’ licenses? Do they have to?
- The mayor’s son owns the only office supply store in town. Is it a conflict of interest for my city to do business with him?
- What’s the average salary for city clerks in East Tennessee?
- Where should our wastewater plant operator go for training?
- Can I use state street aid funds to buy stop signs?
- Can our commissioners go on a planning retreat?
- Can we deannex a neighborhood?
- Must our municipal judge be elected?
- I’ve got an idea. Mind if I bounce it off you?
Looking it up at MTAS

Our Library

One reason MTAS services are so valuable to Tennessee cities is because our consultants are backed up by the most accurate and recent information available. That information comes from the MTAS library, the most comprehensive collection of municipal-related material in Tennessee and one of the most extensive in the country. Any municipal official may call on the professional library staff to look up just about anything. The librarians also have access to MTAS’ vast database on Tennessee cities and will gladly print out, for example, the names and addresses of all public works directors in cities with populations of less than 5,000. The library also handles surveys; at a city official’s request, a librarian will call several city halls for specific information. While not scientific, the surveys give a good idea of what other municipalities are doing.

Our publications

MTAS is nothing short of a publishing house, printing scores of documents annually to keep Tennessee cities informed. Director’s Bulletins are printed quickly and mailed first class when important news breaks. Technical Bulletins explain in-depth new regulations or actions cities should take. And then there are the one-of-a-kind publications: the 88-page Purchasing Guide for Tennessee Municipalities, or the 62-page A Look at the Americans with Disabilities Act: A Guide to Compliance for Tennessee Local Governments, or the comprehensive Tennessee Municipal Handbook. A pub catalog is printed annually.
It's the consultants who make MTAS tick. At least one of them has some experience in nearly every municipal issue.

- **Management** — These professionals are usually a city's first contact with MTAS. They're assigned a specific geographic area and are familiar faces in their city halls.

- **Finance and Accounting** — MTAS' number crunchers help cities manage their money and develop new revenue sources. If it has to do with accounting, purchasing, budgeting, or debt service, they've got the solutions.

- **Law** — Our law consultants research hundreds of questions monthly and send cities written opinions. They also prepare and revise charters and draft ordinances and resolutions. One attorney heads up a team that produces municipal codes.

- **Public Works** — Streets, drainage, solid waste, wastewater, water treatment. Whatever a municipal public works department handles, someone at MTAS handles, too.

- **Personnel** — From job descriptions to an in-depth annual survey of municipal salaries, MTAS' personnel consultant helps cities manage their most important resource.

- **Communications** — Reaching citizens with good information is a high priority for local government today. The communications consultant can help — with the media, with publications, or with other outreach methods.

- **Fire** — Whether the question is where to build a fire station or how many firefighters are needed per shift, MTAS' fire management consultant knows the answer.

- **Special Projects** — One consultant tackles an issue at a time — new federal cable television regulations, for example — and answers questions thoroughly and fast.
The University of Tennessee does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, national origin, age, handicap, or veteran status in provision of education opportunities or employment opportunities and benefits.

The University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or handicap in its education programs and activities, pursuant to requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Public Law 92-318, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Public Law 93-112, and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, Public Law 101-336, respectively. This policy extends to both employment by and admission to the University.

Inquiries concerning Title IX, Section 504, and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 should be directed to Gary W. Baskette, director of business services, 109 Student Services and Administration Building, Knoxville Tennessee 37996-0212, (615) 974-6622. Charges of violation of the above policy should also be directed to Mr. Baskette.

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