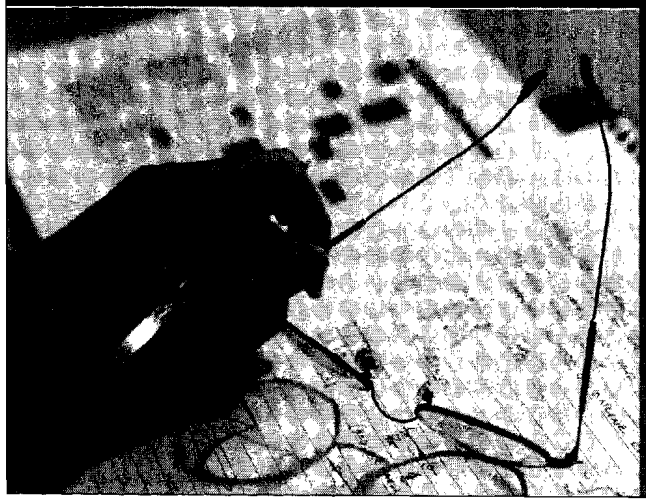
Recruitment Guidelines For Selecting a Local Government Administrator



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Introduction

The term local government, as used in this report, refers to any local government of general jurisdiction legally constituted under state laws—a town, village, borough, township, city, county, or a legally constituted council of governments. The terms administrator and manager refer to the chief administrative officer of any local government who has been appointed by its governing body.

The terms council, commission, and governing body refer to the elected body governing any local government, including city councils, town councils, boards of trustees, boards of selectmen, boards of supervisors, and boards of directors. The term council used in this document refers to all types of governing bodies.

Recruiting and selecting a local government administrator is one of the most important responsibilities of a local governing body. It requires careful planning, astute evaluation of candidates, and a clear understanding of the relationship between the local government and the administrator.

To a great extent, a local government administrator serves as a resource to the elected body. Whereas the council provides policy and political leadership for the community, the administrator brings policy problems to the elected body, develops alternatives, helps the elected body as it is making policy choices, and then implements policy and provides the administrative leadership necessary for continued progress and high morale. His or her input makes the difference as to whether or not the objectives and priorities of the governing body—and indirectly the community—are refined, considered, and implemented.

How are public officials to proceed, then, when the chief administrative position is vacant? Who governs in the interim period until a successor is selected? How is recruitment actually conducted? What selection process should be used? What should be the criteria for the position? What resources are available to assist in recruitment and selection? These are only some of the questions that will concern elected officials.

Members of the council will have to deal with a variety of other issues as well. Potential candidates, for example, will begin "campaigning" for appointment. They may contact some or all members of the council to express interest and advance their cause. Members of the community, too, will propose their own preferences and viewpoints. And, of course, the press will pose questions, ranging from why the vacancy exists to what the new administrator is going to be paid.

All of this activity, pressure, uncertainty, and even confusion can result in premature commitments and impulsive action—neither good for the community nor conducive to recruiting and selecting a top-notch administrator. For the recruitment process to be successful, local government leaders must provide the following:

- Strong, consistent political leadership.
- A well organized and coordinated recruitment process.
- A plan for administering the affairs of the local government while the recruitment process is under way.
- A timetable that ensures prompt, comprehensive recruitment and guards against impulsive and premature action.

An organized approach and strong, consistent leadership from the local governing body are essential to the recruitment process. Without them, recruitment can damage the image of the local government; divide the local government and the community; weaken the authority of the government; erode the responsibilities associated with the position; and hurt the ability of the local government to attract and retain good candidates for this and other administrative positions.

To help councilmembers conduct a successful recruitment and avoid a negative experience, this handbook presents guidelines for recruiting and selecting a local government manager. While no two jurisdictions require precisely the same qualifications and responsibilities from their administrator, the guidelines outlined here provide the basis for determining priorities. These guidelines will enable local government officials to go about recruiting and selecting the best possible administrator for their needs.

This handbook includes a discussion of the following key issues: resources available to assist in the process; interim management; applications, relations with applicants, and interviews; compensation; and transition. The exhibits present resources and publications available, suggested interview questions, and a summary checklist and timetable. Using these guidelines can make recruiting and selecting a new administrator a positive, enjoyable, and unifying experience for local government officials.

Resources Available

Elected officials in search of an administrator will find a variety of resources available to assist in the recruitment process. These include:

- ICMA, the professional association of appointed administrators serving cities, counties, regional councils, and other local governments. ICMA staff can suggest advertising sources and individuals and agencies who may be available to assist: help pass the word when a vacancy exists by placing a printed advertisement in the *ICMA* News*letter;* and provide information on such issues as compensation and how other local governments have handled recruitment. ICMA Range Riders also can provide advice and assistance based on their years of experience in local government.
- Other professional organizations. The following organizations can advertise the vacancy, identify potential candidates, and assist in conducting background checks of the applicant. The league of cities and counties in each state; the National League of Cities; the National Association of Counties; the National Association of County Administrators; the American Society for Public Administration; and related local, regional, state/provincial, and national professional organizations.
- Current and former local government officials. Local government officials in adjacent communities or retired local government officials are a good resource for assistance. For example, a neighboring local government official could screen applicants, and a retired official could coordinate the recruitment process or provide interim management assistance. ICMA's Range Rider Program may be a good source for such assistance.
- Others having an interest in local government. College or university faculty members, institute of government staff members, local government consultants, and community leaders also may be able to provide leadership and assistance with some part or all of the recruitment process.
- Executive recruitment firms. Several nationally recognized firms are available to assist in recruiting key management positions in local governments. They can coordinate the overall recruitment process, or they can assist with such specific aspects of recruitment as identifying potential candidates, conducting background checks, or developing and conducting the selection process. ICMA can provide a list of firms that specialize in public sector recruitment. For a copy of the list, contact the job ad coordinator at ICMA, 202/962-3650.

ICMA Range Riders. Local government professionals serve as Range Riders for ICMA and for their respective state leagues or state associations. Range Riders generally are retired and respected local government managers with long experience in the profession. Available as resources to local government administrators, Range Riders meet periodically with managers to discuss the profession and any concerns managers might have. Discussions range from such topics as council relations, career changes, and staff reorganization to politics and ethical questions. All discussions are confidential. Range Riders are friends, colleagues, and counselors—not consultants.

Although not all states have Range Rider programs, other resources may be available through the state league or state association of managers.

Interim management. Often the first questions elected officials must face when a vacancy occurs are:

- What should we do to ensure that the affairs of the local government are properly administered until a new manager is selected and on board?
- How do we get the recruitment process started?
- Who is in charge?

First and foremost, local government officials must avoid acting impulsively and succumbing to the temptation to hurriedly appoint an administrator as a quick fix to the problems of vacancy, recruitment, and selection. Local government officials need an interim period to consider carefully the criteria they are seeking in a new administrator and to recruit and select the best possible successor who meets these criteria.

Only by considering how applicants compare and measure against one another and, of course, against the criteria can elected officials be sure that the candidate they appoint will be backed by the appropriate combination of work experience and management style.

Following these steps will enable councilmembers to provide sound interim management while an efficient recruitment process is under way.

Appoint an interim administrator. It is important to clarify who will be responsible for directing the local government while the new administrator is being recruited. The council might want to consult with the outgoing administrator regarding possible staff members who could fill this role, or they may agree that they have confidence in a specific staff person.

If there is an assistant administrator, for example, who may be considered for the position, the council often will appoint this person as interim manager. This will give them the chance to observe firsthand how he or she handles the job. Or the council might select as interim administrator a department head who is not a candidate for the position but who is mature, seasoned, respected by fellow employees, and competent.

In some cases, the local government leaders may not feel there is anyone on staff to whom they can or would want to turn. In this case, it may be possible to retain the services of a recently retired manager or a manager who is between jobs. State associations, municipal leagues, or ICMA Range Riders may be sources for possible interim administrators.

Regardless of who is appointed, it should be clear to all local government officials and staff that the interim manager is in charge. It should also be clear that this person does not have an inside track to the new position. If the interim manager is ultimately selected, it is because that person proves to be the best in relation to the other applicants.

Act promptly. The recruitment process should begin immediately after the official decision has been made regarding resignation, retirement, or termination. Failure to do so can generate rumors within the community by various interested parties who will exert pressure on members to quickly fill the vacancy. Councilmembers must bear in mind that an impulsive response to this pressure can be divisive for the governing officials and can damage their credibility.

What local government officials need to do is promptly develop and announce a specific plan and timetable for the recruitment. They must take into account any circumstances, such as an impending recall, that might cause delays, and they must communicate any changes in the established schedule to all concerned, particularly to the applicants themselves.

Occasionally, a council will delay recruitment because an election is pending or a proposal to change the form of government is coming up for a vote. Even so, the initial recruitment steps should be taken immediately in order to reduce the time lapse between the departure of one manager and arrival of another.

If a local government has just voted to adopt the council-manager form of government, the beginning of the search will depend on when the form becomes effective. If council elections were held at the same time and outgoing members are sympathetic to the change, it may be possible to have applications on file by the time new councilmembers are sworn in. In any case, the new council should proceed with the recruitment as soon as possible.

Finally, the councilmembers must take charge of the recruitment. They must make clear to all concerned what processes they will follow to recruit and select the best administrator.

Carefully consider the way the vacancy is announced. If the vacancy is the result of retirement or of the administrator moving to a new position, a simple announcement to that effect is sufficient, even desirable. When advertising the position, the local government will be able to claim that there has been great stability in the position; it now is vacant only because of retirement or of a new job opportunity for the former administrator. In this way, with the vacancy presented as an opportunity that does not come along often, qualified applicants may be drawn to the position.

If, on the other hand, the position is vacant because the former administrator was terminated or quit, neither the local government nor the former administrator will benefit from a public quarrel. It is far better for all concerned (even though it may be emotionally difficult) to simply reach a mutual decision and timetable for leaving. From a recruiting standpoint, handling a difficult situation well will enhance the image of the local government. And there is less likelihood that the former administrator will talk negatively of the local government and, thereby, deter potential candidates from applying.

Obtain a status report on the local government's activities and projects. Although it is not desirable for the council to immerse itself in the administrative affairs of the local government, it is important that they receive a briefing about current organizational problems and the status of important projects before the current administrator leaves. In this way, they can better monitor progress on important matters, provide direction, and set priorities for the person selected as interim administrator.

Defer key actions where possible. Obviously, the local government must continue to operate during the recruitment period. The council and interim management team should do whatever is necessary to make sure that important projects and the delivery of services continue to move toward.

However, they should defer key actions where possible until the new administrator is appointed. After all, to ensure effective administrative leadership in the future, it is desirable that the new administrator be involved in as many policy decisions as possible. Just filling a vacant department head position, for example, is an opportunity for the new administrator to begin building an administrative team. In fact, such an opportunity can be used persuasively to pique the interest of potential candidates during the recruitment process.

Recruitment Process

Just as it is necessary to determine who will provide interim administrative leadership, it also is necessary for the council to determine who will actually conduct the recruitment and to decide on the major steps and scope of the recruitment. A successful recruitment takes time and is complex. At the outset, it is essential that the council spend considerable time determining and reviewing precisely the criteria they are seeking in an administrator. See information on preparing an administrator profile.

Although 100 or more applications may be submitted for a position, the number of candidates actually meeting the council's requirements may be limited. It is advisable, therefore, to supplement the advertising process by aggressively identifying and talking with potential candidates. Similarly, to ensure that finalists have the requisite work experience and management style, work-related background checks and a thorough interview process should supplement a review of resumes.

Once a selection has been made, the compensation package must be developed and negotiated. It includes such issues as deferred compensation, housing, and a written employment agreement. Thus, to be effective, a recruitment must be well planned and led by someone who is knowledgeable and experienced in this area.

Conducting the Recruitment

The council has a number of alternatives available for conducting the recruitment.

- The local government officials themselves can conduct the recruitment.
- The local government can retain an outside party to conduct the recruitment.
- The local government can conduct the recruitment in conjunction with an outside party.

The council can conduct the recruitment itself. Many councils have successfully conducted recruitments for professional administrators. If this alternative is selected, it should be with the understanding that it is a time-consuming and complex task. Councils have the option of delegating responsibility to the chairperson of the elected body, to a committee of the local government officials, or to the council as a whole.

Councilmembers must be sure to select someone on their board who is well respected and who has the time to provide the leadership and follow-through that will be necessary every step of the way. If the elected body chooses to conduct the recruitment itself, it should seek the assistance of the jurisdiction's human resources officer.

The council can retain an outside party to conduct the recruitment. In some cases local government officials may ask the interim manager or a retired manager to coordinate the recruitment process. More often, however, the local government contracts with a firm that specializes in providing executive search assistance.

When using an executive search firm, the council does not give up any of its authority. It continues to define what it is looking for in a new administrator; it picks the final candidates; it does the interviewing; and, of course, it makes the final selection. When a local government uses the services of an executive search firm, it obtains the full-time coordination necessary to conduct an effective recruitment, and it gains the expertise important to each step in the process.

Typically the executive search firm begins by meeting with the elected officials both individually and as a group to help them decide what they are looking for in a new administrator. It is the firm's responsibility to facilitate these discussions and to help reach a consensus on such items as desirable work experience, management style, timing and scope of the recruitment, and compensation. After these matters have been reviewed, the firm coordinates the overall recruitment process and assumes responsibility for all tasks until it is time for the elected body to select and interview finalists. The firm acts as a resource throughout the entire recruitment process.

Councils using these services should make certain they select a reputable firm familiar with the special requirements of local government administration. The experience of a consulting firm should be checked by letters and phone calls to the local governments that it has served.

The council can conduct the recruitment and retain an outside party to assist at certain points in the process. A third alternative is for the local government to assume responsibility for conducting the recruitment and to supplement the process at some point with assistance from an executive search firm or other outside source, perhaps an ICMA Range Rider.

In some cases, the council may seek assistance at the outset in thinking through the overall recruitment process and defining what they are looking for in a new administrator. In other cases, the local government officials initiate the process on their own by advertising for the vacancy. They then retain an outside source to help review resumes, conduct background checks, and structure an appropriate interview process. This alternative may be most appropriate where cost is a consideration or where the local government desires to take a more active role in the recruitment.

Other participants. Once the council decides who will conduct the recruitment, other parties like staff members, citizens or citizen committees, and the press can become involved at various stages.

Local government staff. Staff member roles can vary depending on who conducts the recruitment. If the council is conducting the recruitment, staff will be responsible for working with the elected body to develop an effective and legal recruitment and selection process and then placing advertisements and collecting resumes. They also may

assist in scheduling interviews. If an executive search firm is involved, the firm will be responsible for all of these administrative details. In this case, the role of staff is usually limited to providing information about the local government and coordinating with the firm.

Citizen committees. The council must make a decision as to whether or not to involve citizens or citizen committees in the recruitment process. In the majority of cases, the local government assumes responsibility for the recruitment and (on its own or with a firm) goes through the process of selecting a new administrator without citizen involvement.

In some cases, however, elected officials have involved citizens or citizen committees in defining what the local jurisdiction is looking for, in the review process leading to the determination of finalists, and/or in the selection process itself. However, the governing body should not lose control of the final decision-making process and candidates should not receive the impression that they are being hired by a committee rather than by the government itself. After all, once hired, the administrator is accountable to the elected body.

Press. Members of the press will obviously have an interest in the recruitment process, and their involvement will be dictated in part by state law and in part by tradition. At the outset, local government officials should brief the press on the timing and steps involved in the overall process. After the deadline has passed for submitting resumes, the elected officials may wish to brief the press on the overall response.

Confidentiality of resumes is a major concern in any recruitment and it can significantly affect the number and quality of resumes received. Candidates should be apprised of any applicable state laws in this area, and the council, with advice from the local government's attorney, should determine what will and will not be made public.

Scope and Parameters of the Recruitment Process

Regardless of who carries out the recruitment, a framework for the recruitment process must be developed. The governing body must agree at the outset on a number of key issues critical to the success of the recruitment: criteria for the position, geographic scope of the search, timing, and compensation.

Criteria for the position. What is the council looking for in a new administrator? The council should begin with a survey of its needs and those of the local government. By reaching a general consensus on criteria for the position at the outset, even before the advertising process begins, the elected body will be better able to specify what they are looking for in a local government manager, and the council will have a specific basis for reviewing resumes, selecting finalists, and making a hiring decision.

Items to be considered include local government size, its nature, the services it provides, and overall objectives and priorities. The work experience, skills, and expertise of the candidates must relate to these criteria.

These types of situations should receive special consideration as the council decides on criteria.

1. A local government that has just changed its form of government will ordinarily need a manager who can inspire local government officials with the enthusiasm needed to implement the new system. A first manager in a new system should be adept at public relations and in establishing relationships with incumbent officials and employees.

2. When a manager has been dismissed or has resigned under pressure, the council tends to look for strengths in areas in which the outgoing manager showed weaknesses. There are dangers, however, in overcompensating for qualities that have led to dissatisfaction. These dangers cannot be overemphasized. If the outgoing manager gave too much freedom to subordinates, for example, suddenly changing to a strong disciplinarian might result in antagonisms that would only lead to further problems. Sometimes a new manager will be confronted with major problems that must be dealt with immediately. If such a situation is anticipated, the council should inform any applicant who is being seriously considered.

3. When a popular manager retires or moves to a larger city, the council often asks this person's assistance in the search for a successor. Yet the council should not overlook the possible need for new strengths or different qualities. The assistance of lay citizens or of an outside consultant might be desirable at this stage.

Although establishing criteria for the position can be an agonizing and difficult process, it does not have to be. In fact, with good leadership it can be a unifying and educational process for all concerned. (For more detail, see the section on the selection process.)

Geographic scope of the recruitment. Once a vacancy is advertised, resumes will usually be received from individuals in different parts of the country. At times, a particular executive search firm will specialize in attracting candidates from a certain region. It is assumed that the local government is looking for the best candidate and that all resumes received will be reviewed carefully.

For purposes of an aggressive search for candidates, however, some local governments will choose to focus on their state or region, thinking that these candidates may have a better understanding of and orientation to local problems, legal issues, financing alternatives, and similar matters. On the other hand, as local governments grow, they increasingly prefer an aggressive nationwide search for individuals who have demonstrated an ability to manage in a complex urban environment and who might bring a fresh perspective.

Timing. The timing of the recruitment can sometimes be affected by publication deadlines, which are important in terms of properly advertising the vacant position. An ideal timetable would provide at least 60 days from the start of the recruitment to the deadline for submitting resumes; 30 days to review resumes, conduct background checks, interview candidates, and make a selection; and at least 30 days for the new administrator to relocate.

Because top candidates often view submitting a resume as a major career decision, it is important that they have adequate time to consider the opportunity, discuss it with their families, and prepare an appropriate resume. Similarly, the council or the executive recruitment firm needs sufficient time to review resumes and conduct background checks to ensure that good candidates are not overlooked and that finalists meet the desired qualifications of the governing body. Again, it cannot be overemphasized that the recruitment should move forward expeditiously while at the same time allow adequate time for a thorough and comprehensive process.

Compensation. A final item to be considered at the outset of the recruitment is compensation. It is important for the local government to have some general understanding of the acceptable salary range, but it also is important that it leave itself some flexibility in this area.

The posture of public officials in most successful recruitments has been to leave salary open, commensurate with background and experience. This does nothing to discourage interested applicants from applying, yet it does not commit the local government to anything. This approach basically says that the locality wants the best administrator it can find, and that it does not expect anyone to come to work for less than what he or she is currently earning.

From a practical standpoint, every local government has compensation limits, and this can be taken into account by reviewing the current salary of applicants at the time finalists are selected. By leaving salary open at the outset, a locality has helped to ensure that it will have a maximum number of applicants to consider and it has left itself the flexibility to pay a higher salary that is what it takes to hire the first-choice candidate.

ICMA encourages local governments to establish a salary or salary range and to provide applicants with that information at the time the position is advertised. It does recognize, however, that this information cannot always be provided at the time of recruitment.

Recruiting Applicants

Generating a sufficient pool of qualified applicants is a key part of the recruitment. It involves advertising for and soliciting candidates to be sure that qualified candidates are not overlooked. (Specifics of the applications process are discussed in the following section.)

Advertising. It is in the interest of the local government to be sure that everyone who might have an interest in the vacant position is aware that the recruitment process is under way. Thus the advertisement itself should be carefully worded and the advertising program should be comprehensive.

To be comprehensive, however, an advertising campaign does not have to be extensive or expensive. Most local governments, for example, avoid advertising in general circulation newspapers for an administrator unless there is a local requirement to the contrary. This is an expensive form of advertising that produces few results.

More effective sources can be found with organizations directly related to local government. In addition to ICMA, this includes the National League of Cities, the National Association of Counties, the National Forum for Black Public Administrators, and the American Society for Public Administration. Resources at the state level include state municipal leagues and county associations.

Local governments have some flexibility when preparing and placing advertisements but at a minimum, the advertisement should include these items:

- Name of the local government.
- Title of the vacant position.
- Population of the local government.
- Amounts of the operating and capital budgets.
- Number of full-time employees.
- Services provided.
- Statement that salary is open and commensurate with background and experience.
- Filing deadline, including any special items of information desired like current salary and work-related references.
- Brief description of key areas of interest and desirable experience and qualifications.
- Where and to whom to send resumes.
- Web site of the local government.

Some publications permit the use of display ads that call for an innovative format incorporating the local government logo and/or graphics. For a modest extra cost, these ads offer the local government an additional opportunity to impress potential candidates.

Solicitation of candidates. While advertising can generate outstanding applicants, and local governments should look closely at all resumes that are received, local governments should supplement the advertising process by identifying outstanding potential candidates and inviting them to apply.

Useful sources of information about potential candidates include members of the local government, the current administrator, former and retired administrators, local government officials in adjacent communities, executive directors of state leagues, directors of university public administration programs, and ICMA Range Riders.

When soliciting candidates, once a list of names has been compiled—and the emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity—the council should send a letter of invitation advising the individual of the opening and requesting that a resume be sent if there is an interest in the position. The letter, which should be personally typed, should enclose a basic package of information describing the local government (see the section on applications) and the vacant position.

Once the letter has been mailed, a follow-up telephone call should be made to confirm that the letter was received, assure the recipient that it was not a form letter, indicate why the position is a good career opportunity, and answer questions. The same deadline for submitting resumes should be used in both the advertisements and the supplemental letters of invitation. For the purposes of confidentiality, all correspondence should be sent to the applicant's private residence.

In-house candidates. The local government should be sure to inform local government employees of the vacancy and how and when to apply. It may be that the local government will even want to invite one or more employees to submit a resume. Whether in-house candidates are solicited or apply on their own, it is important that they be treated in the same manner as other applicants.

It should be made clear that if an in-house candidate is ultimately selected as administrator, it is only because the council felt that the candidate was the best choice in comparison with the other applicants. While most applicants will receive written notification of their status, the council may wish to talk personally with in-house applicants who were not selected to ensure good communication with staff, maintain morale, and help ensure an orderly and positive transition.

Applications and Relations with Applicants

The applications process is the point where effective screening of applicants begins. For this part of the recruitment to be successful, the council must proceed carefully and with considerable thought. This section deals with such issues as whether or not to use a standardized application form, providing potential candidates with key information about the position and the local government, and the importance of establishing and maintaining good relations with applicants. If high-quality candidates are to be encouraged to pursue the vacancy, then the local government needs to present a portrait of itself as a well-run, organized, and efficient organization.

Application form. Most local governments prefer to ask applicants to submit a resume in whatever format they believe will be most effective, rather than a standardized application form. From the standpoint of the applicant, this approach provides flexibility to present past work experience in a way that is directly related to the position in question. At the same time, it permits the local government to see how the applicant organizes and presents material in a written format. The manner in which materials are prepared can be an indication of real interest in the position.

If an application form is used, it should be easy to complete, and the information requested should be related to the vacant position.

Relations with Applicants—Do's and Don'ts

Do:

Keep all candidates informed of their status at all times.

Select a short list of the most promising candidates.

Carefully check references on those candidates judged best qualified.

Call these candidates for interviews at your local government's expense.

Visit, if possible, the localities in which the most promising candidates work.

Send the candidates under consideration copies of your government's budget, charter, annual report, and other pertinent documents.

Pay expenses of candidates called for a second interview (and of their spouses/partners).

Be prepared to enter into a formal written employment agreement with the successful candidate.

Promptly notify all other candidates once the selection has been made.

Keep all information strictly confidential throughout the entire recruitment and selection process, unless state law requires otherwise.

Don't:

Don't limit your recruitment and investigation to "home towners" or to a single candidate.

Don't' let the selection process last too long.

Don't expect to get all necessary information about candidates from written material.

Don't forget that you are seeking overall management ability, not technical competence in one specialized field.

Don't release for publication any names or local governments of candidates, unless state law requires it.

Don't overlook in candidates the need for municipal administrative experience and the advantages of value of college or university training, post-degree training, and continued professional development.

Providing information. Serious applicants will not submit a resume for consideration until they have done their homework and satisfied themselves that the vacant position does represent a good career opportunity. Often they will seek information from local government officials about the local government and the position.

This is one of the first places where a potential applicant will form an impression of the local government. If the impression created is that the recruitment is disorganized, that members of the local government are not sure what they are looking for or are saying different things, and that sufficient information about the locality is not easily obtained, potential applicants may simply lose interest and not apply.

On the other hand, if their impression is that the local government has spent time considering the position; that the recruitment is well organized; and that information is readily available, positive, complete, and effectively packaged, this can tilt the scales in favor of submitting a resume. Here are the items that a basic information packet should include:

1. A copy of the criteria for the position indicating key objectives and priorities as to what the local government is looking for.

2. Ordinance or charter requirements if they contain significant or unusual provisions regarding the position.

3. Summary information about the local government, including organization structure, personnel practices, number of employees, services provided, and budget data.

4. A timetable indicating the principal steps and time frame for the overall recruitment.

5. Information on the local government in the form of a chamber of commerce brochure or similar publication, if such is attractively prepared and available.

6.Web sites that contain information on the local government.

Acknowledging applications/status report. All too often, recruiters overlook the simple and courteous step in the recruitment process of acknowledging resumes as they are received and notifying applicants of their status as the recruitment proceeds. Prompt acknowledgment of resumes is one indication that the process is being handled in a businesslike way, and it can further impress the applicant positively.

Similarly, notifying all applicants as to their status, even if they are not selected as finalists, is a basic courtesy that will affect how the candidate views the local government. The initial acknowledgment also should inform the applicant of the recruitment timetable. Unless there are unusual or unanticipated delays, this notice should be sufficient until applicants are actually notified as to their final status. To maintain confidentiality, all correspondence should be directed to the applicant's home, not business address.

Confidentiality. Confidentiality is an important consideration in any recruitment. Applicants are concerned about the potential damage to their present job security and long-term career opportunities if premature disclosure of their interest in another position is made public. While applicants realize that the local government will want to contact their present employer to conduct background checks and assess the job they have done, they typically prefer to wait until it is clear that they are going to be considered as finalists for the position.

The elected body should determine, at the outset, the extent to which the recruitment process will be confidential. This should be decided with advice from the local government's attorney because open record and disclosure statutes vary from state to state. If disclosure of applicants' names is likely to occur at any point, potential applicants should be advised so that they may take this into account in deciding whether or not to pursue the vacancy.

From a recruiting standpoint, assurance of confidentiality will result in more applications being submitted, particularly from those who are presently employed elsewhere. Because of the importance of confidentiality to both parties, such assurances should be honored and contacts with present employers should be coordinated with the applicants in order to provide the applicants with adequate time to first notify their current employer. There is no faster way to damage the image of the local government and to lose good applicants than to violate the trust or assurance that was given regarding confidentiality.

Selection Process

Once the deadline for submitting resumes has passed and all applications have been received, the selection process begins. Principal steps include reviewing applications, determining finalists, interviewing finalists, conducting such post-interview activities as second interviews, and making the final selection.

Reviewing Applications

The selection process begins with a review of all resumes that have been submitted. The advertised deadline for submitting resumes usually is viewed as a planning deadline; therefore, all resumes are considered even if they arrive after the deadline. Because it is not unusual for a local government to receive in excess of 100 resumes for a vacant position, guidelines must be in place for the review to be efficient and thorough.

One approach is to give each member of the council a fixed period of time to review all resumes and to recommend those applicants who should receive further consideration. One councilmember will then group the common choices together and resolve whether those who were not picked by the majority of the reviewers will receive further consideration.

Another approach is to ask a committee of the council to assume responsibility for the application review process and to recommend a group of finalists to the council as a whole. Sometimes the local government calls on managers in the area or ICMA Range Riders in the state to assist in the narrowing-down process. Applicants should be advised if this last procedure is used, the confidentiality of resumes should be maintained. In other cases, a search firm or the locality's human resources officer can make a first cut to reduce the applicant pool.

Here are steps that are particularly important in the resume review process:

1. All resumes should be acknowledged. Ideally, resumes will be acknowledged as soon as they are received. The acknowledgment should incorporate a broad timetable that provides the council with adequate review time before finalists are selected.

2. The process should move forward as promptly as possible. If the review process takes too long, it alerts the candidate to a possible lack of leadership and indicates that the process is not well organized. Such signals can cause well-qualified applicants to have second thoughts and to change their minds.

3. The confidentiality of resumes should be maintained and should be consistent with applicable state law and the advice of the local government's attorney. Contact with others as part of the review process is important and even

expected but it should be coordinated with the applicant. The local government must avoid jeopardizing an applicant's current position. Thorough background checks and references are usually conducted after the council has narrowed down the group of applicants and after the candidate has been informed that references and others will be called.

4. Resumes should be evaluated against the criteria for the position that were developed at the outset of the recruiting process. Here are criteria to look for in the review process:

- Has the applicant had experience working in a local government of comparable size?
- Has the applicant had experience with the variety of services delivered by the local govemment? Has the experience been comparable in terms of budget size and number of employees?
- Has the applicant worked in a similar geographic area? Is the applicant likely to be comfortable in a rural or urban setting and familiar with the usual problems faced by the local government?
- What specific responsibilities has the applicant had, and what has the applicant accomplished? How does this compare with the objectives and priorities of the local government?
- Has the applicant had broad administrative and supervisory authority, or has the experience of the applicant been limited to research or administering activities in specialized areas?
- Has the applicant worked directly with the local government in the past? Does the applicant have experience working with citizen and other groups?
- What is the employment history of the applicant? Does it suggest a pattern of broad experience and increasing responsibility? Does the applicant have good tenure with each employer, or is there a pattern of frequent movement from one position to another?

Whereas a short tenure in the previous position may or may not be significant, a series of short terms should be a warning that more thorough inquiry is needed. By the same token, 10 years of experience is not necessarily preferable to five, or five to three. In fact, a person with a long tenure in one position may find it difficult to adjust to another. Similarly, age also does not necessarily correlate with maturity of judgment or adaptability.

- Is the applicant concerned with continuing professional development and participating in training programs and professional organizations?
- What is the current salary of the applicant? Does it fit within the parameters of the local agency?
- How have the resume and letter of transmittal been prepared? Do they suggest a real interest in the position? What does the resume itself tell about the person?

Determining Finalists

When the resume review process has been completed, it should be possible to narrow the total group of applicants to a smaller group of perhaps 15 to 25. This group will be subject to more thorough background checks and ultimately narrowed to an even smaller number of applicants. The latter group will be designated as finalists and invited for interviews. These considerations are important when determining finalists:

1. The council should resist the temptation to select finalists before background checks have been completed. One of the resume reviewers may suggest, for example, that based on the resume alone, the council should select finalists and move right ahead to the interviews.

However, while resumes are helpful as an initial screening device, they also can be misleading. They reveal nothing about the management style, personality, or interpersonal skills of the individual in terms of his or her ability to work effectively with people. They also can create an exaggerated impression of actual work experience, responsibilities, and accomplishments. It is neither practical nor necessary to conduct background checks on all

applicants, but an important interim step is to conduct background checks on a smaller group as a prelude to and basis for selecting finalists.

2. Be sure the background checks are work related. The purpose of the background checks is to provide a solid reading of the candidate's ability to handle the job and to work with people. Consequently, background checks should be conducted primarily with people who know local government, understand the job of a local government manager, and have a firsthand knowledge of the performance of the applicant in this area.

Such work-related background checks would normally be based on conversations with current and former members of the local government, including the mayor and councilmembers; staff members with whom the applicant has worked closely and/or supervised; and others who have worked closely with the applicant, including the chamber of commerce director and the superintendent of schools. Background checks also can be conducted with state/provincial association officers, institutes of government staff members, and state league directors.

As indicated previously, confidentiality is extremely important, and the local government should be sure to coordinate with the applicant in terms of any background checks that are undertaken.

3. When conducting background checks, these guidelines are important for ensuring consistency and thoroughness:

- Have one person perform all the background checks. This can be difficult for one person to handle, however, especially if three background checks are desired. Also, it can be helpful if two or more people compare notes on the same candidates.
- Address similar issues and questions to each applicant to provide a good basis for comparison.
- Talk with enough people to get a consistent reading as to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual. If a person can say only good things about the applicant, ask him or her directly what weaknesses the applicant has.
- Use the background checks to learn about the applicant's ability to work effectively with people, to develop a more complete understanding of the applicant's work experience and specific accomplishments, and to see if the applicant's qualifications match the criteria for the position.
- Include verification of educational credentials in the background check process.

There is another possible step to use to narrow down the list of finalists. The candidates can be asked to respond in writing to a limited number of questions that members of the governing body agree on. These might include asking how the person would handle a particular situation or asking if he or she has had experience dealing with specific situations.

4. The group of finalists should be large enough to expose the council to an array of personalities. In most cases, a minimum of five candidates should be interviewed as finalists. The local government also may wish to establish a backup group in case some of the finalists decide not to pursue the position any further.

Interviewing Finalists

Once finalists have been selected, the interviewing process begins, and the local government can proceed with these steps:

1. Confirm with each candidate that he or she has been selected as a finalist. Each finalist should be congratulated and made to feel that the council is pleased to have reviewed his or her resume. At the same time, the continuing interest of the individual in the position should be confirmed.

2. Advise each finalist of the nature of the interview process, including date and time. Confirm for the finalist now

many others will be interviewed, whether there are any in-house candidates, and when you expect to make a decision. Indicate that all such information will be confirmed in a follow-up letter.

3. Assure the applicant that confidentiality will be maintained, unless state law or the advice of the local government's attorney dictates otherwise. The applicant should be advised if the names of finalists are to be made public and given the opportunity to withdraw.

4. Indicate that a more complete package of information about the local government will be mailed directly to the applicant's home in advance of the interview. Here is information that might be included:

- Current budget and financial report.
- Recent bond prospectus.
- Organization chart.
- Personnel rules and regulations.
- List councilmembers and their occupations.
- Copies of council minutes for the past several months.
- General plan and land use map.
- Statement of local government goals, objectives, and priorities.
- Any other material that would be of particular relevance, given the goals and objectives of the local government and the criteria for the position.

5. Confirm local government policy on reimbursement of expenses incurred in conjunction with interview. Most local governments reimburse candidates for all out-of-pocket expenses, including reasonable transportation, room, and board. ("Reasonable" is intended to eliminate first-class airline tickets, four-star hotels, and gourmet restaurants.)

Such reimbursement of expenses is another way the local government can demonstrate its interest in the candidate. It reinforces the positive nature of the recruitment process and makes the difference in some cases as to whether the finalist is able to attend at all. In cases where there is strong reluctance on the part of the council to reimburse all expenses, the local government can share expenses with the candidate or can agree to reimburse all expenses incurred after the first trip.

The local government staff can offer to handle all reservations, transportation, and related matters but this can be cumbersome and time consuming. In most cases, the local government confirms the time and place and lets the finalist make his or her own arrangements. Finalists usually prefer this approach as well.

The interview itself can take a variety of forms. (See section with suggested interview questions.) Two techniques commonly considered are the traditional interview and the assessment center evaluation and interview.

Council interview. Typically, the elected body as a whole meets individually with each finalist. Most local governments use this approach. During the interview they question the applicant about a variety of matters like overall work experience, specific accomplishments, career objectives, alternative approaches to practical problems faced by the local government, and similar matters. The interview gives the candidate an opportunity to evaluate the elected body as a group and to ask questions. An important issue to discuss during the interview is the council's working relationship with the manager, clarifying all roles and responsibilities.

Organizing this type of interview is relatively easy and does not require a large commitment of time on the part of the local government and candidate. It can create a comfortable setting that contributes to an open and relaxed discussion. Because this initial interview may be limited to an hour, a second interview with one or more of the finalists may be desirable.

Assessment center evaluation and interview. The assessment center technique involves role playing and other exercises with the candidates as a group, in addition to the traditional interview. It is most frequently used in the recruitment of public safety and other management-appointed positions (and has been used only occasionally by

local governments recruiting administrators), but if well planned and organized, it can be used effectively in recruiting a local government administrator.

The major advantage in an assessment center interview is that the employer is able to see how one candidate relates to others in a group situation. Because it tends to pit one candidate against another in a group situation, however, it is important that the candidates be properly briefed to minimize any concerns regarding the process. In addition, this technique can work only if all councilmembers are committed to taking the time necessary for role playing and if they feel comfortable participating in an "acting" situation.

Regardless of which technique is used, these guidelines are important:

1. The interview process should be well organized and the setting comfortable. All members of the local government should participate but one discussion leader should be designated. The interview process not only provides the council with an opportunity to improve its knowledge of finalists, but it also influences the candidate's interest in the position. Because the process should help cement the interest of the candidate in the position, local government officials may wish to arrange additional events like a dinner or a tour of the local government.

2. The council may choose to supplement the usual discussion between councilmembers and finalists by inviting staff or community leaders to participate. For example, finalists may meet with department heads or other staff to review departmental operations in more detail or to receive a tour of the local government. Or, finalists may meet with selected community leaders to receive their input on matters they consider important to the local government.

If this option is taken, it should be made clear to all involved that these meetings are designed to provide the candidate with additional information on the local government and will not be involved in the actual selection of the administrator. Obviously, the councilmembers should carefully select the individuals with whom the finalists will meet. Again, the importance of maintaining confidentiality cannot be overemphasized.

3. If the spouse/partner of the candidate is invited to accompany him or her, it is important that this part of the process be as well organized as all matters concerning the candidate directly. Here, too, an important impression about local government image is being made. The interests of the spouse/partner should be carefully determined and accommodated. This could include a tour of the local government, an opportunity to talk with realtors and visit homes, and a briefing on schools in the area and local employment opportunities. Spouses/partners should never be included in a formal interview process, nor made to feel as if they are being interrogated in any way.

4. During both the formal and informal meetings between the council and the finalist, discussions and questions should focus on the criteria for the position that were established at the outset of the recruiting process. Obviously, discussions should stay within acceptable legal parameters and should not touch on politics, religion, and sexual preferences.

5. Do not spend time during the initial interview talking about compensation, except to ask what the expectations of the finalist are in this area. If the council is aware of general expectations, they can take this into account in making a final selection and in subsequent negotiations on total compensation. To discuss this subject in any detail during the initial interview detracts from the time needed to consider more substantive questions and can result in a defensive or argumentative atmosphere with a candidate before it is even clear that the position will be offered.

6. The personal interview should occupy at least an hour. It is difficult to pursue a range of questions in less time, and it will be offensive to the candidate who may have traveled some distance for the interview.

7. A final guideline, regardless of which interview technique is used, is that the council should continue to avoid impulsive action and should take whatever time is necessary to arrive at a comfortable and well-reasoned decision. However, again, the interview process and related follow-up activities should move forward as promptly as possible so as not to lose momentum or encourage serious applicants to have second thoughts. Of course, once a final decision has been made, all of the other applicants should be notified of their status.

Post-Interview Activities

When the interview process is over, either one person has emerged as the clear choice of the council, or the pool of candidates has been narrowed down to several whom local officials would like to pursue further.

If there is one person who is the clear first choice, the council can simply notify the candidate, confirm his or her willingness to accept the position, and then move right ahead to finalize a total compensation package and discuss other related arrangements (see section on finalizing arrangements). A second interview at the council's option can provide the opportunity to discuss the position and the applicant's qualifications in more detail.

If, on the other hand, there are still two or three applicants to whom the council would like to give further consideration, several options exist. The council may wish to invite the candidate, and possibly the spouse/partner, back for a second interview. A longer interview, coupled perhaps with some sort of function such as a dinner, can often provide the insight needed to make a final decision.

Conducting more extensive background checks with individuals in the candidate's current community or making an on-site visit to the candidate's current community are other options. Either of these latter two activities can be helpful in reaching a final decision, but it is essential that they be conducted with the full advance knowledge of the candidate. It also is advisable to conduct a discreet credit and police check.

Until all arrangements have been finalized with the first-choice candidate, the council may wish to hold off notifying the other finalists, if the council is unable to satisfactorily conclude negotiations with their first choice, they may need to engage in discussions with one or more of the other finalists. Again, from an image standpoint, it is important that all applicants learn first about selection from the local government as opposed to hearing about it from another person or reading it in a newsletter, professional publication, or the press.

Finalizing Arrangements

Once the local government has made its decision and the candidate has indicated a willingness to serve as a local government administrator, there are a number of final arrangements to be completed. They include negotiating a compensation package and completing transition activities. Only then can the new administrator relocate and begin work.

Negotiating Compensation

Because negotiating a total compensation package can be a long and frustrating process, the council needs to ensure that relations with the new administrator get off to a good start. Nothing should happen that causes the new administrator to reconsider.

- First, the atmosphere should be friendly and relaxed.
- Second, the approach of the negotiator should be flexible; negotiating implies a willingness to consider options and alternatives in pursuit of an acceptable package. There may well be more than one way to meet the financial objectives of the new administrator.
- Third, the council should be realistic. No matter how beautiful and desirable the community or position may be, no one (except in highly unusual circumstances) will accept the new position without an increase in pay over his or her present salary.

In compensation negotiations, base salary is the place to start. The councilmember conducting the negotiation should keep these questions in mind.

1. Ultimately, what salary will be acceptable to the council?
2. What is the bargaining range?

3. What is the current salary of the applicant?

4. During the interview, what type of salary and total compensation package did the candidate discuss?

ICMA, the National Association of Counties, and state leagues of cities and counties are sources of information on the salaries of administrators in local governments around the country.

Elements of a total compensation package typically include:

- Base salary.
- Deferred compensation.
- Severance pay.
- Use of government car or car allowance.
- Retirement plan.
- Medical and other insurance (dental, optical, life, disability).
- Vacation.
- Holidays.
- Sick leave.
- Membership dues and conference attendance fees.

Before the negotiation begins, the council should ask the candidate to provide a written itemization of current total compensation, along with a copy of a current employment agreement, if one exists.

After receiving this information, council should outline a proposed package. Usually there will be no negotiation on some benefits that are similar from one local government to another, such as medical insurance or holidays. Variables most often relate to cash compensation, take-home pay, and particular financial objectives like deferred compensation.

The proposed compensation package should (1) leave the individual whole on basic benefits; (2) provide an appropriate step forward in cash-related benefits; (3) ensure an increase in take-home pay, and (4) deal with any particular financial objectives that the new administrator may have.

During the negotiations, some issues will arise that do not relate to the total compensation package but may well have significant financial implications for both the local government and the applicant. Both parties need to be flexible and realistic in dealing with these issues:

Moving expenses. It is common for local governments to pay the one-time cost of moving the administrator and his or her family and household furnishings to the new local government. Sometimes both parties agree on a "not-to-exceed" figure based on estimates from moving companies.

Temporary housing. An allowance for temporary housing is usually provided until the new administrator is able to sell his or her former home and/or relocate the family. Typically, this amount is sufficient to cover the cost of a modern furnished apartment or condominium. Again, both parties may agree to a fixed time period or amount.

Commuting expenses. As with temporary housing, the local government often will agree to reimburse the administrator for periodic family visits or for the spouse/partner to visit for house-hunting purposes.

Housing assistance. Regional variations in the cost of housing or housing financing can complicate the negotiations. There now is considerable precedent for local governments—using appropriate safeguards and

limits—to assist in the purchase and/or financing of housing for the new administrator. A variety of options exist, including a loan, a salary supplement, or a shared equity purchase.

Finally, the council should be prepared for the possibility that they will be unable to reach agreement on compensation or other matters with the first-choice candidate. In these instances, the local government typically enters into negotiations with its second-choice candidate. As indicated previously, once an agreement has been finalized, all other applicants should be promptly notified that they were not selected.

Once salary, benefits, and other finance-related issues have been worked out, it is time to move to a few remaining and important transition activities.

Transition Activities

After the local government and new administrator have reached agreement on such issues as compensation, starting date, and method and timing of announcing the selection in the administrator's new and old local government, transition activities begin.

Employment agreement. Written employment agreements are increasingly used to avoid any misunderstanding on the part of either party. It is in the interests of both the community and the manager to have a written summary of the terms and conditions of employment to which both parties have agreed. The stable working situation created by an agreement helps attract and keep top-flight managers in a generally mobile profession. Spelling out the salary, benefits, and other conditions of the manager's job puts those items where they belong—on a piece of paper where both parties can know what is expected—and removes them from the daily agenda of managers and elected officials.

While such an agreement usually does not refer to a specific term of employment, permitting either the local government or the administrator to terminate for cause or at will, it should include a section providing the administrator with severance pay for a fixed period of time if he or she is terminated by the local government. This

provides important personal and professional security for managers who have the rather unique situation of working at the pleasure of the governing body with the possibility of being dismissed for any reason at any time.

While not a lengthy legal document, the employment agreement usually is drafted by the local government's attorney. The new administrator often is given an opportunity to prepare a first draft for consideration. ICMA recommends the use of employment agreements. If an employment agreement is not used, at a minimum a formal letter of understanding should be prepared.

General assistance. For a smooth transition, the local government should offer whatever general assistance the new administrator might need in moving. Such assistance might include introductions to realtors and bankers, support to the spouse/partner in finding suitable employment, and similar activities.

Orientation meetings. The local government should arrange to introduce the new administrator to department heads and local government staff. While the new administrator may have met some of these people during the interview process, a special meeting or reception can be a pleasant way to turn over responsibility. Similar meetings, briefing sessions, and/or receptions can be arranged to introduce the new administrator and his or her family to community groups, civic leaders, and citizens in general.

Local government work session, orientation, and review of objectives. It is desirable to have an initial work session with the new administrator to discuss and clarify initial expectations on both sides and to review goals and objectives. Even though some of these issues may have been raised during the interview process, communication from the outset can help ensure a smooth working relationship.

Performance evaluation. Using the position's goals and objectives as a starting point, the local government and new administrator should agree to an annual or semi-annual review of the performance of the administrator. This

established and formal process helps to ensure that communication between the parties is maintained, that progress is monitored, and that goals and objectives are reviewed and refined on a regular basis.

Employment Agreements

Here are some elements of an agreement that a council might consider:

Preliminaries
Duties
Terms of the agreement
Termination notice
Removal and severance pay
Salary
Hours of work
Automobile
Moving expenses
Home sale and purchase
Dues and subscriptions
Professional development
Conferences
General expenses
Civic club memberships
Vacation leave
Military reserve leave
Sick leave
Disability insurance
Health insurance
Life insurance
Deferred compensation and retirement programs
Other fringe benefits
General provisions
Contract execution provisions

Conclusion

Recruitment and selection of a local government administrator is a comprehensive and complex process. As difficult as this process is, it has great potential to be a valuable and rewarding experience. Not only does it force local government officials to think about their objectives and priorities, but it gives them a rare opportunity to work together in a way seldom experienced when considering agenda items at a council meeting.

If recruitment of a local government administrator is conducted according to the guidelines outlined in this document, the chances of developing a positive and beneficial long-term relationship among the council, the administrator, and the community are greatly enhanced. The process can and will work if it is well organized and planned. (See summary checklist and timetable.) This list reiterates some of the main steps that the local government must take for the recruitment to proceed smoothly, satisfactorily, and successfully.

- Be sure the recruiting process is well organized and coordinated from the outset.

- Maintain control of the process and the hiring decision; don't act impulsively but do move rapidly toward a selection once applications are in.
- Be sure to involve in the recruitment only those who have demonstrated competent leadership skills or are knowledgeable about the process.
- Remember that recruiting an administrator is a two-way street and that the local government has a responsibility to present the position attractively, to describe the operation of the local government, to show interest in the applicants, and to be competitive.
- Assure all applicants that confidentiality will be maintained.
- Know what you are looking for when recruiting to fill a vacant position; survey the needs of the local government.
- Advertise for the position by defining clearly what you are looking for.
- Identify and invite outstanding potential candidates to apply.
- Acknowledge all applications and notify applicants of the status and timing of the recruitment.
- Carefully review all resumes and applications against position requirements and criteria.
- Evaluate the backgrounds of leading applicants and check work-related references as a basis for selecting finalists.
- Use the traditional interview, assessment center evaluation, or some similar technique as a basis for making a hiring decision.
- Negotiate a total compensation package and put all terms and conditions of employment in writing.

Resource Groups

Individual state and country organizations and state leagues of cities and counties are good resources to use when recruiting a local government administrator. They also publish a variety of newsletters and publications that are useful for advertising administrative positions.

Here are organizations and publications with a national and international appeal and distribution:

American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)

1120 G Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20005

202/393-7878

Web site: http://www.aspanet.org

Publication: Public Administration Times

International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 500

Washington, D.C. 20002-4201

202/626-4600

Web site: http://icma.org

Publications: ICMA Newsletter, Job Opportunities Bulletin for Minorities and Women in Local Government (J.O.B.)

National Association of Counties (NACO)

440 First Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20001

202/393-6226

Web site: http://www.naco.org

Publication: County News

National Association of County Administrators (NACA)

777 N. Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 500

Washington, D.C. 20002-4201

202/962-3539

Web site: http://icma.org, click "Programs" under Shortcuts section

Publication: NACA County Administrator

National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA)

777 N. Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 807

Washington, D.C. 20002

202/408-9300

Web site: http://www.nfbpa.org

Publication: Job Hotline at 1-888/766-9951 (prompt is 401)

National League of Cities (NLC)

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20004-1763

202/626-3000

Web site: http://www.nlc.org

Publication: Nation's Cities Week/y

Suggested Interview Questions

These general suggestions can be supplemented by more specific questions related to particular objectives, problems, and priorities of the local government:

1. Describe your background and experience. What have been the areas of emphasis?

2. How does your experience qualify you for this position?

3. Have you had experience in all areas of local government service? If you have not had experience in certain areas, how would you approach management in these areas?

4. What experience do you have with budget preparation and finance?

5. What experience do you have with personnel and labor relations?

6. How do you work with the news media?

7. How do you describe your management style?

8. What is your experience as a supervisor? How many people have you supervised?

9. Have you ever had to terminate an employee? What process did you follow?

10. What are your thoughts on performance evaluation? What process do you follow to set objectives and monitor performance?

11. How will you go about assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and identifying opportunities to improve?

12. How do you approach the planning process? What system do you use to set objectives and priorities?

13. What is important to you in establishing effective working relations with others?

14. How do you view the relationship between the administrator and governing body? How do you view your relationship with department heads and local government staff?

15. What techniques have you found to be most successful in assisting local government officials establish and implement long- and short-range goals for the community?

16. To what extent do you believe contact with citizens and citizen groups is important? How do you typically handle this responsibility?

17. What experience have you had working on an intergovernmental or interagency basis? Have you worked directly with the state and federal governments, councils of governments, and other units of local government?

18. What will your first steps be upon assuming responsibility for this position? What do you hope to accomplish in the first year?

19. From your limited vantage point, what do you believe to be the challenges and opportunities facing our organization? How is this likely to change in the future?

20. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

21. Why are you interested in this position?

22. What are your expectations with respect to compensation?

23. What questions do you have of us [reference here is to members of the governing body]?

Suggested Interviewing Techniques

Here are some recommended do's and don'ts when interviewing candidates. Remember that the law does not prohibit employers from obtaining all the information about a candidate they deem important, so long as the questions are job-related and do not elicit information that could be used for discriminatory purposes.

Do:

1. Question objectively. Relate questions to the requirements of the job and be consistent from one applicant to the next.

2. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer. Use general or open-eneded questions.

3. Avoid unduly sympathetic or unsympathetic words, gestures, or facial expressions that would make the candidate think you agree or disagree with his or her answer.

4. Avoid posing a problem or situational question combined with possible solutions. Let the candidate generate his or her own solution.

5. Develop questions based on earlier statements made by the candidate.

6. Ask questions designed to encourage the candidate to reveal what knowledge and expertise he or she possesses.

7. Avoid "trick" questions.

8. Avoid displaying your personal opinions or viewpoints through the questions you ask.

9. Listen attentively to every question asked and every answer given. Make the candidate aware that you are listening by looking at him or her while speaking.

Don't:

1. Let early biases form.

2. Ask unnecessarily long questions.

3. Let the candidate digress beyond the point of answering questions satisfactorily or showing that he or she is unable to answer what is being asked.

4. Ask confrontational or intimidating questions.

Summary Checklist and Timetable

- Designate an interim administrator.
  Week 1
- Obtain a status report on local government activities and projects.
  Week 1
- Confirm the recruiting process that will be used.
  Week 2
    - Determine who will be responsible for conducting the recruitment.
    - Establish criteria for the position.
    - Decide on scope of the recruitment and all steps involved.

- Confirm compensation parameters.
- Establish a timetable for the recruitment process.

- Prepare and place advertisements for the position in appropriate publications.
  Week 2
- Identify outstanding potential candidates and send them a written invitation to apply for the position.
  Weeks 3 and 4
- Personally contact the outstanding potential candidates as a follow-up to the written invitation to apply.
  Weeks 5 and 6
- Acknowledge all resumes as they are received.
- Review all resumes after the application deadline has passed.
  Week 7
- Conduct work-related background checks on a smaller group of applicants and then reduce this

number of finalists to a manageable number.
Week 8

- Confirm the selection process that will be used.
  Week 9
  - Determine finalists.
  - Determine policy on reimbursement of finalist expenses.
  - Establish a timetable for the selection process.
- Notify finalists and schedule them for interviews.
  Week 9
- Conduct first and second interviews and make a selection.
  Weeks 10 and 11
- Negotiate terms and conditions of employment and put all terms in writing.
  Week 12
- Finalize related arrangements.
  Week 12
  - Determine a starting date.
  - Confirm a method of announcing the hiring decision.
  - Advise all other applicants of their status.
  - Plan an orderly transition.

Suggested Administrator Profile

Developing a profile of the ideal administrator provides the background against which to evaluate candidates for the position. Here is a checklist that any community can use as a model. Each council or board member can begin by filling out the form, and then all members of the governing body can use the individual rankings to reach a consensus on how the group rates each item. Remember that each community has some specific issues or concerns that rank higher than others. An honest evaluation of what skills and attributes are most important to a community is critical at this point.

Once the council has reached consensus, one or two members who are capable writers can convert the checklist into a profile similar to the sample here. This profile can be shared with candidates who apply for the position so that they have a clear picture of the governing body's preference. All people involved in the job interviews should also have copies of the profile so that everyone is working from a common understanding of the type of person the elected officials are seeking.

Preparing this profile provides a unique opportunity to clarify and codify the skills and attributes that a community is looking for in an administrator. Local officials should make the most of this chance to get the best possible fit between the council and the administrator.

Format for an Administrator Profile

(For Council Use)

Describe the background, skills, and qualities you feel your locality needs in an administrator.

General	***Importance (High, Medium, Low)***
1. Relevant Education	_____
2. Relevant Experience	_____

Skills and Past Performance

1. Council Relations	_____
2. Administrative Ability	_____
3. Written and Oral Communication Skills	_____
4. Budget/Finance/Information Technology	_____
5. Human Resources/Risk Management/ Benefits Administration	_____
6. Labor Relations/Collective Bargaining	_____
7. Community Relations	_____
8. Intergovernmental Relations	_____
9. Economic Development/Revitalization	_____
10. Innovation and Major Achievements	_____
11. Infrastructure and Facilities	_____
12. Specialized expertise that might pertain to your locality, e.g. utility management, solid waste, and landfill management (be specific)	_____

Sample Administrator Profile

Education and Experience

A bachelor's degree or equivalent experience in local government should be required, a master's degree preferred. A minimum of three years of public administration experience is required, with five years preferred. Past local government experience of individual must show performance in areas that include budgeting and finance, human resource management, information technology, risk management, grants procurement and administration, economic development strategies, understanding of state laws, and other related matters including land use planning, zoning regulations, engineering, and public works. Prior [state] experience preferred. Experience and knowledge in local government accounting is desirable.

Skills and Past Performance

Administrative ability. Must have demonstrated performance in human resources and/or collective bargaining for a community having not less than 10 employees. Good communication skills are a must, including the ability to listen, communicate with various segments of the community, and develop good relations with the business community. Person must be willing to devote whatever time is necessary to achieve the goals and guidelines established by the council. Knowledge of how to organize departments and demonstrated leadership qualities are desirable.

Council relations. Ability to take time and interest in working with councilmembers to keep them informed and explain technical processes. Should be able to adequately inform the council on a regular basis so there are no surprises. Both written and oral communications with the council are essential. The person must be able to accept constructive criticism and to implement the needed changes. Candidate must be open and honest with the council and able to present all sides of an issue that affect the locality. The individual must be able to carry out the intentions and directions of the council enthusiastically.

Budget and finance. Should have demonstrated prior experience in managing a city or county budget. Experience and expertise in grant procurement is desirable, as well as dealing with locally-owned utility finances.

Collective bargaining/human resource management. Must have some knowledge of [state] labor relations law, with preferred demonstrated ability in the collective bargaining process. Must demonstrate a personality that can communicate the local government's goals and needs to employees.

Community relations. Candidate must have demonstrated involvement in community activities. Experience working with and understanding the needs of the business community is highly desirable. Candidate should be able to present a confident image of the local government to the community at large. Must be able to demonstrate a positive, productive attitude to citizens of the community.

Intergovernmental relations. Must be able to relate to and develop a good working relationship with other local governments, county governments, community organizations, schools, and state and federal agencies.

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