



NJMMA

**GUIDELINES
TO AID
MUNICIPALITIES
IN THE
SELECTION
OF A
MUNICIPAL MANAGER**

As used in this pamphlet, the terms municipality, community, and city, refer to any government of general jurisdiction legally constituted under state laws (i.e. — town, village, borough, city, township.)

The terms manager and administrator refer to the chief administrative officer of any municipality who has been appointed by its governing body.

The terms governing body and council refer to the elected body governing any municipality.

INTRODUCTION

Council members who participate in the appointment of a municipal manager or administrator are engaging in one of the most important tasks they will perform during their term of office. It is a task requiring careful planning, astute evaluation of candidates, and a clear understanding of the relationships between the manager, the council, and the community and of the responsibilities of the new manager.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to assist councils in the selection of municipal managers by suggesting and discussing guidelines and procedures that should be used in the selection process. The pamphlet is geared to the community that is hiring a manager for the first time but can certainly be used by any municipality that will be going through the process. No two communities will be looking to satisfy the same needs, but a listing of criteria and a procedural outline will provide a solid basis for establishing priorities which will assist councils in avoiding pitfalls and unnecessary delays.

The pamphlet is presented in three parts. Part I is a summary of steps that a council can and should follow in selecting a municipal manager. Part II presents a series of questions and answers that the council as a whole should ask and discuss amongst themselves. The results of these discussions will hopefully lead the council through an effective selection process. Part III is a listing of "Do's" and "Don'ts" for city councils.

PART I

SUMMARY OF STEPS IN SELECTING A MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATOR/MANAGER

The primary steps that a council should follow in selecting a municipal manager are outlined briefly below. Additional details on each step are presented in Part II.

Steps that a Council should follow include:

1. Survey the council's own needs as well as those of the municipal organization and the community.
2. Decide on what qualifications will be set for the position, tentatively establish the salary or salary range, and outline the responsibilities that will be associated with the position. At this stage, the council should be asking itself the following questions:
A. "What kind of manager do we want and need?"
B. "Do we need outside assistance?"
3. Determine how the selection procedure will be handled; whether an outside consultant or executive search firm will be hired, whether a council committee will be set up to conduct interviews, who will receive and screen applications, etc.
4. Recruit potential candidates by advertising in the state league of municipalities magazine, the New Jersey Municipal Management Association newsletter, and by sending information regarding minimum requirements

to the International City Management Association for listing in the Associations semi-monthly newsletter.

5. Include in the advertisement a deadline for the receipt of applications and indicate what materials are to be submitted (i.e.-resume, references, samples of written reports, etc.)
6. Notify all applicants in writing of the receipt of their applications and review the applications and supporting papers. This step would include reference checks and inquiries to former employers.
7. A list of semi-finalists should be established and interviews scheduled. Again, all applicants should be notified in writing of their status. A decision should already have been made by the council with regards to what interview expenses the municipality will pay to the semi-finalists.
8. At the end of this step, a short list of finalists, usually two to four, should be selected. Further investigation of each candidate should be conducted, including a possible visit to at least the leading candidates' municipality to interview appropriate sources. Such visits should be made only with the concurrence of the applicant.
9. Another round of interviews should be set up with the finalists to allow the council the opportunity to find out more about each candidate and to allow the candidate to discuss in greater detail how they will approach their job responsibilities.
10. When the council has decided which finalist is their number one choice, a tentative job offer should be made and further discussions held until mutual agreement is reached. Arrangements should also be made for the candidate and his/her spouse to visit the city, at the city's expense. The other finalists should be notified that a choice has been made, thanking them for their interest in the position.
11. Prepare an employment agreement covering statements of intent and common understanding on pay, professional development, reimbursement of relocation expenses (if applicable), termination, and other conditions of employment.
12. Arrange for the new manager to meet the city employees and community leaders.

PART II

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS INVOLVED IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

1. Why is the selection of a manager difficult?

Beyond the fact that the municipal manager will be the most important appointed official in the city government, there are a number of reasons why this appointment raises special concerns.

Three of the most important reasons are:

1. There are a limited number of persons qualified for the management and administration of local governments. In some instances, communities may find it advantageous to have flexible requirements regarding experience and education, and to secure managers who meet their criteria.
2. No licensing or certification systems or minimum qualification requirements exist in city charters or state statutes. Any person who learns of the vacancy may apply with the hope of being considered for the position. As a result, the council may be burdened with the task of selecting from a large number of applicants, many of whom lack the education and experience.
3. The average council member seldom has more than one opportunity, if at all, to participate in the selection process, therefore past experience cannot be a guide.

2. What is a professional municipal manager?

Most professions and many skilled trades are identified by a system of licensing or certification under state law. In the case of the city manager's position, one must possess the training and knowledge that spans several business disciplines and the skills necessary to address a diverse environment.

As a result, cities may have to investigate other areas for evidence of professional competence. One might compare against the knowledge, skills and philosophies characteristic of successful managers. Certainly, a professional city manager must have acquired a general knowledge of organizational techniques, municipal process and procedures, and the ability to coordinate a wide variety of activities; and must have developed a skill at understanding and working with people. But while it is important to consider these qualities, they are too vague and general to serve as a basis for classifying a candidate as professional or nonprofessional.

Experience in a position addressing issues and problems of local government, and an educational background in public administration, are also important.

Another type of evidence of professional development, and a highly important one, is active participation in professional associations and organizations, and in-service educational programs. The professional administrator is concerned not only with continuing self-development but also with the general improvement of public service and the training of colleagues and subordinates.

3. When do we start looking?

If a city manager resigns, retires, or is being terminated, the search should begin immediately after the official decision has been made. Occasionally a city

council will delay because an election is pending or if a proposal to revise the charter is pending. The initial steps should be taken in order to reduce the time lapse between departure of one manager and arrival of another.

4. What kind of manager do we want?

No two municipalities are alike and no two managers are alike, and a particular municipality may need different types of leadership at different times. Therefore, the council should start with a survey of its own needs, the needs of the organization, and those of the community. One municipality may need strengthening in financial management, another in community planning, another in infrastructure improvements; or, as is often the case, a municipality may have a combination of these and other requirements.

The following situations should receive special consideration:

1. A municipality that has just changed its form of government ordinarily needs a manager who can bring an enthusiastic approach to implementing the new system. Also, the first manager in the new system should be strong on public relations and in establishing relationships with incumbent officials and employees of the municipality.
2. When a manager has been dismissed or has resigned the council tends to look for strengths in areas in which the outgoing manager showed weaknesses. However, there are dangers of over-compensating for qualities that have led to dissatisfaction. If the outgoing manager gave too much freedom to subordinate a sudden change to a strong disciplinarian might result in antagonisms that would give rise to further problems. Sometimes a manager must be brought in to solve major problems that may give rise to antagonisms that must be addressed immediately; if such a situation is anticipated, the council should inform an applicant who is being seriously considered.
3. When a popular city manager retires, or moves to another city, the council often asks this person's assistance in the search for a successor. The possible need for new strengths or different qualities should not be overlooked. The assistance of the New Jersey Municipal Management Association or an outside consultant might be advantageous.

Determination of criteria such as residence, extent of education, and extensive experience should not be overly rigid. Certain initial decisions regarding qualifications may change, too, as the search proceeds.

5. What qualities should we look for in a new municipal administrator?

As stated earlier, each city will seek a manager

who fits its particular needs and its distinctive features. However, certain qualities tend to characterize the effective professional manager.

These qualities include:

Relationships with subordinate personnel. An effective manager is able to delegate authority with confidence. This means allowing department heads to make decisions within their own jurisdictions without specific review and approval, and while maintaining general control over administrative operations.

The effective manager instills confidence and initiative in subordinates by encouraging careful planning and emphasizing innovation, rather than placing restrictive controls on their plans and programs.

The effective manager develops a friendly and informal relationship with the working force as a whole, yet maintains the prestige and dignity of the office.

Relationships with the council. An effective manager serves as the key official in guiding policy making without imposing on the authority of the council by providing essential information and advice.

Such a manager strives to maintain an impartial relationship with the mayor and council and keeps them equally informed about administrative developments.

Relationships with other governments. The professional manager is an initiator of cooperation among units of government. He or she should promote close communication with other local administrators and should encourage joint meetings of governing bodies for the discussion of related programs and common problems.

The effective manager keeps abreast of federal and state topics that affect the city and informs the council of potential impacts.

Relationships with the public. The effective manager adapts to the community's traditions and its views and maintains a cordial and responsive attitude toward the public. In addition, the manager makes a special effort to reach all sections of the community to encourage participation in community matters.

Professional skills. The professional city manager should possess four types of personal skills:

(1) technical skills, (2) human relations skills, (3) conceptual skills, and (4) a capacity for innovation.

Technical skills relate to competence in specific operational areas of government, especially financial planning and control, administrative analysis, program direction, and community planning.

Human relations skills are reflected in the ability to work with other people. Here the capacity to listen and to recognize the interests of others may be observed in interviews with candidates.

Conceptual skills concern the ability to maintain a broad perspective of community services and to detect or anticipate relationships that are readily overlooked by the inexperienced person.

A capacity for innovation, or an ability to anticipate problems and develop effective approaches to addressing problems, is another of the attributes of an accomplished manager. While this capacity is somewhat difficult to assess, a person's general approach to problem solving and administration gives some indication.

While these qualities may be difficult to evaluate on a short-term basis, the council that keeps them in mind will be better prepared to compare the professional competence of the candidates.

6. How should we determine the salary to be offered?

What should the new manager be paid? This should be addressed before recruitment begins because the salary offered will partially determine the quality of the applicants.

7. We have received many applications. How do we identify the best qualified applicants?

If the council has set reasonably clear minimum standards, those applicants who do not meet them can easily be eliminated in the initial screening.

All applicants, especially those eliminated in the initial screening, should be notified of the status of their applications, even if it is necessary to send a form letter. The importance of notifying applicants of their status on a regular basis cannot be overstressed. It is important to the applicant as well as to the council. The applicant deserves and expects this courtesy; it also avoids many telephone calls from applicants.

The second screening can be based on a careful comparison of qualifications. However, care should be taken to avoid excessive reliance on quantitative data: i.e., ten years of experience is not necessarily preferable to five, or five to three. A person with long tenure in one city may find it difficult to adjust to another; also, age does not necessarily correlate with maturity of judgement or with adaptability. Short tenure in the previous city may or may not be significant, but a series of short terms should be a warning that thorough inquiry is needed.

8. What can we learn from the interview, and what plans shall we make for it?

The interview should be used to acquire information and impressions that will not be found in the written records. The council or its screening committee should carefully plan the key questions and perhaps also decide who should ask each question.

Key questions that can be used to compare candidates from a style viewpoint as well as from a substantive viewpoint might include:

(1) Why did you apply for this position? (2) What is your experience to date in this field? (3) What is your personal philosophy on the resolution of crucial city issues? (4) How would you handle (state a specific example of a problem)? (5) How would you describe your management style?

PART III CONCLUSION

Every effort should be made to complete the selection process within three or four months. The following list of "do's and don'ts" for city councils in selecting a manager is in the nature of a partial summary of the material in this report:

DO

1. Survey the city's needs
2. Organize the selection procedure in advance
3. Move rapidly toward a selection
4. Keep all candidates informed of their status
5. Carefully check references on those candidates judged best qualified
6. Select a short list of the most promising candidates
7. Schedule these candidates for interviews (pay appropriate expenses)
8. Visit, if possible, the cities in which the most promising candidates work.
9. Send the candidates under consideration copies of your municipality's budget, charter, annual report, and other pertinent documents
10. Be prepared to enter into a formal employment agreement with the successful candidate
11. Notify all other finalists when the selection has been made
12. Keep all information strictly confidential throughout the recruitment and selection process

DON'T

1. Don't limit your recruitment and investigation to a single candidate or only to residents of the community
2. Don't let the selection process last too long
3. Don't expect to get all necessary information from written material
4. Don't forget that you are seeking overall management ability, not technical competence in one specialized field
5. Don't release for publication any names or cities of candidates
6. Don't overlook in manager candidates the need for municipal administrative experience and the advantages and value of college or university training, post-degree training, and continued participation in professional development programs

Prepared by the
New Jersey
Municipal Management
Association