

**Guidelines for
Recruiting a
City Manager**

2002

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Introduction

Selecting a city manager is one of the most important decisions made by a city council.

The importance is highlighted by the fact that:

- The mayor and city council provide policy and political leadership for the city. However, the city manager will be responsible for implementing policy and for providing the administrative leadership necessary for continued progress and high morale.
- To a great extent, the city manager, as a resource to the city council, will make the difference between whether or not city council objectives and priorities are refined, considered, and implemented.

Whenever the position of city manager becomes vacant, a heightened level of excitement can occur within the community. The council may become anxious because they sense the void created by the departure of the city manager, and there may be differences of opinion as to how to proceed. There may also be confusion as to what process to follow, and a general concern among members of the council as to whether they will ever be able to agree on what they should be looking for. On the other hand, potential candidates who are interested in the position may begin contacting some or all members of the council to express interest and advance their cause. Members of the community, because they are interested in good local government, have a vested interest, or both, may volunteer to help or propose, formally or informally, that certain factors be considered in the recruitment. Of course, the press will also have questions that can range from why is there a vacancy to what is the new city manager going to be paid.

All of this activity and interest can result in pressure, premature commitments, and impulsive action -- none of which is necessarily good for the community or conducive to the recruitment and selection of a top-notch city manager. Because of the natural interest in this important position, what is necessary is:

- Strong, consistent political leadership from the city council conducting the recruitment
- A well organized and coordinated recruitment process
- A timetable that assures a prompt, comprehensive recruitment, and guards against premature action
- A plan for administering the affairs of the city while the recruitment process is underway.

Without an organized approach and strong, consistent leadership from the city council the recruitment of a city manager can become a very negative experience with long-term consequences for the community. Among other things, it can have a damaging impact on the image of the city; it can be divisive for both the city council and the community; the authority of the city council can be weakened; the responsibilities associated with the position of city manager can be eroded; and the ability of the city to attract and retain good candidates for city manager and other administrative positions can be seriously harmed.

Importantly, all of those who have a legitimate interest in the selection of a new city manager can have that interest accommodated by an orderly and thorough recruitment process. The assurance of such a process is the principal responsibility of the city council.

This report discusses steps that should be followed, as a guideline, when recruiting and selecting a new city manager.