

The Recruitment Process

The recruitment process is distinguished from the selection process by virtue of the fact that it focuses on the generation of a sufficient pool of qualified applicants. Important when considering the recruitment process are relations with applicants and the process for advertising and obtaining applications for the vacant position.

Relations with Applicants

As indicated previously, the recruitment of a city manager is a two-way street. While it is always possible to generate applications from individuals just by placing advertisements in various publications, the concern of the city council should be in quality rather than quantity of applicants. Those individuals that the city council would consider outstanding are often employed elsewhere, and they may have given little consideration to a job change. When their attention does focus on the vacant position, it is important that key information be packaged and presented effectively, and that the process be flexible and well organized so as not to discourage the potential applicant from pursuing the vacancy. Similarly, the image that others have of the city is reflected in how the recruitment is conducted and this is a further reason why relations with applicants is important. Considerations to keep in mind in establishing positive relations with applicants include the following:

Application form--While cities may wish applicants to complete a standardized application form, most city councils prefer to provide some flexibility by permitting applicants to submit a resume in whatever format they believe will be the most effective. From the standpoint of the applicant, this approach provides the ability to present past work experience in a way that is directly related to the vacant position. At the same time, it permits the city council to see how the applicant organizes and presents material in a written format, and the manner in which materials are prepared can also be an initial indication as to the real interest of the person 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.

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, in fact, represent a good career opportunity. Oftentimes, they will seek information about the city and the position as part of their review of this particular career opportunity.

Here is one of the first places where a potential applicant will form an impression of the city. If the impression is that the recruitment is disorganized, that members of the city council are not sure what they are looking for or they are saying different things, or that sufficient information about the city is not easily obtained, they may simply lose interest and not apply. On the other hand, if their impression is that the city council has spent

time considering the position, that the recruitment is well organized, and that information about the city is positive, complete and effectively packaged, this can tilt the scales in favor of submitting a resume.

Whether the city council is conducting the recruitment or an executive search firm is involved, a basic information packet should be prepared that includes:

- a copy of the recruiting guidelines, indicating key objectives and priorities, and what the city council is looking for in the position
- ordinance or charter requirements, if they contain significant or unusual provisions regarding the position
- summary information about the city government, including biographical information on council members (with length of service), organization structure, personnel practices, number of employees, services provided, and budget data
- a timetable indicating the principal steps and time frame for the overall recruitment
- information about the city including data on key businesses, in the form of a Chamber of Commerce brochure or publication, if such is attractively prepared and available

Acknowledging applications/status report--A simple and courteous step in the recruitment process that is often overlooked is acknowledging resumes as they are received, and notifying applications as to their status as the recruitment proceeds. Prompt acknowledgment of resumes is one indication that the recruitment process is being handled in a businesslike way, and it can further impress the applicant in a positive manner. Notifying all applicants as to their status, even if they are not selected as a finalist, is a basic courtesy that will pay benefits in terms of how the candidate views the city. The initial acknowledgment can also reference the recruitment timetable and, unless there are unusual or unanticipated delays, this notice should be sufficient until applicants are actually notified as to their final status. Applicants should be notified before their name is printed in a newspaper. To maintain confidentiality, any correspondence from the city should be directed to the applicant's home, not business address.

Confidentiality--As indicated previously, confidentiality is an important consideration in any recruitment. Open record and disclosure statutes vary from state to state, and obviously a recruitment must be conducted consistent with applicable state law. Applicants recognize that city councils, or their representative in the recruitment process, will need to conduct background checks before a hiring decision is made. However, applicants are also aware of the problems that can be created locally if premature disclosure of their interest in another position is made public.

From a recruiting standpoint, it is in the interest of the city to maintain confidentiality throughout the process. Assurance of confidentiality will simply result in more applications for the city council to consider, particularly from those individuals who are presently working. While applicants realize that the city will want to contact

their present employer at some point in order to assess the job they have done, they typically prefer to wait until it is clear that they are going to be considered as a finalist.

Because of the importance of confidentiality to both parties, it is important for the city council to determine, at the outset, with advice from the city attorney, the extent to which the recruitment process will be confidential. If disclosure of the names of applicants is likely to occur at any point, potential applicants should be advised so they may take this into account in making their decision whether or not to pursue the vacant city manager position. Assurances regarding confidentiality 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 lose good applicants and, in the process, to damage their present security and long-term career, than to violate the trust or assurance that was given regarding confidentiality.

Recruiting Applicants

The process of recruiting applicants should be comprehensive, and should incorporate the following elements:

Advertising--It is in the interest of the city to be sure that everyone who might have an interest in the vacant position be aware that the recruitment process is underway. Even if considerable time is going to be devoted to the identification of potential candidates, a comprehensive advertising program is important in terms of assuring that no one is overlooked.

An advertising program does not have to be extensive or expensive to be comprehensive. For example, most cities avoid advertising in general circulation newspapers for a city manager, unless there is a local requirement to the contrary. This is typically the most expensive form of advertising, and it produces the fewest results. Commonly used sources would include TML's website and publications such as *Texas Town & City*, the newsletter of the International City/County Management Association, and publications of related national organizations such as the National League of Cities and the American Society of Public Administration. Affirmative action objectives can be enhanced by the careful placement of advertisements in different minority publications and by using the Talent Referral Service of the International City/County Management Association.

Cities have some flexibility when preparing and placing advertisements, but at a minimum they should include the name of the city; the title of the vacant position; the population of the city; the amount of the operating and capital budgets; the number of full-time employees; services provided; a statement of the salary range, with background and experience desired; the filing deadline, including any special items of information desired such as current salary and work-related references; and a brief

description of key areas of interest and desirable experience and qualifications. Some publications permit the use of display ads which can, usually for a modest extra cost, offer the city an additional opportunity to impress potential candidates through the use of an innovative format incorporating the city logo and/or graphics.

Solicitation of candidates--The objective of any recruitment process is to assure that highly qualified applicants are available to be considered when filling a vacant position. Advertising can generate outstanding applicants, and cities should look closely at all resumes that are received. However, in order to assure that they have a sufficient number of good candidates, cities increasingly supplement the advertising process by identifying outstanding potential candidates and inviting them to apply. Those invited to apply will typically vary from city to city, recognizing the different types of background, experience, and personal characteristics that are required in one city manager position as compared to another.

Given what the city council is looking for in a city manager, an executive recruiting firm can use its knowledge of individuals in the profession to identify a group of individuals who meet the city's specific requirements.

This process can also be utilized where the city council, as opposed to an executive recruiting firm, is conducting the recruitment. However, the city council should be aware that it is extremely time consuming and, to be effective, should be done by one person who is knowledgeable about the city and what the city council is looking for in a city manager.

The identification of outstanding potential candidates is one way to assure that those the city council would like to consider are aware of the opening, as well as the interest of the city council in receiving a resume. Suggestions regarding potential candidates can come from a variety of sources. Members of the city council, the retiring city manager, and city officials in adjacent cities may have recommendations. Staff members and officers of TML and TCMA, while not recommending particular individuals, can be a source of names, as can individuals who work with cities generally in a professional capacity and in whose judgment the city council has confidence.

Once a list of names has been completed, and the emphasis in this regard should be on quality rather than quantity, a personal letter of invitation can be sent advising the person of the opening and requesting a resume. Once the letter has been mailed, a follow-up telephone call should be made to confirm the letter was received, assure the recipient that it was not a form letter, indicate why it 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.

In-house candidates--In addition to resumes that are submitted in response to advertisements or invitations to apply, the city council may receive applications from current city employees who want to be considered. In fact, it would not be unusual for other candidates to ask whether there are "in-house" applicants.

The city's advertising program should be such that city employees are aware of the opportunity and know how and when to apply. It may be that the city council will even want to invite one or more employees to submit a resume. In either event, it is important that in-house candidates be treated in the same manner as other applicants. In this regard, it should be made clear that if an in-house candidate is ultimately selected as city manager, it is only because the city council felt the candidate was the best choice.

While most applicants will receive a written notification as to their status, the city council may wish to talk personally with in-house applicants who were not selected as a way of assuring good communication with city staff, maintaining good morale, and helping to assure an orderly and positive transition.