

## **ADMINISTRATOR OR MANAGER RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION ADVISORY SERVICE**

The Administrator or Manager Recruitment and Selection Advisory Service is joint service offered in cooperation with the New Jersey Municipal Management Association (NJMMA). The Advisory Service has three components:

1. An overview prepared by the Executive Director of the Association on the recruitment process;
2. Reference materials included in this website and outlined below; and
3. The availability of a retired municipal Administrator or Manager to meet with elected officials to discuss the overall recruitment process and answer questions that local officials may have about the best practices to be followed.

The purpose of the Advisory Service is not to become involved directly in the recruitment process; rather it is to offer guidance on the best methods to be used by local officials to accomplish their recruitment goals and to avoid some of the many pitfalls that can occur during the transition period between Administrators/Managers in a municipality. Neither the New Jersey State League of Municipalities (NJLM) nor the NJMMA will perform recruitments or make specific recommendations on candidates; our functions are limited to providing information and reference materials that can be used by local officials.

### **THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS: AN OVERVIEW**

#### **Change: The one constant in local government**

Change is a constant in local government. Periodic elections often result in turnover in the elected officials and it is not unusual for those serving as the Chief Administrative Officer or Chief Executive Officer of the municipality to be replaced. This replacement can be voluntary through retirement or resignation (wherein the incumbent obtains other employment or involuntary when the elected officials seek a change in the administration of the municipality). The challenge to elected officials is to obtain the most suitable replacement Administrator or Manager in a manner that candidly provides the candidate and the municipality with a clear understanding of each others assets and liabilities. In addition, it is best if this replacement process is done in a manner perceived as transparent, responsive to community and organizational needs and through consensus of the governing body.

Change tends to evoke apprehension in an organization, be it a planned change or a involuntary change. This apprehension cannot be ignored since it will only feed on itself. It is best addressed in a straightforward way by comments of the elected officials as to the reasons for the change and their goals for the replacement process. This should be accompanied by concise and decisive actions to provide for leadership during the transition period.

#### **What to do in the Interim**

The role of a Municipal Manager as the Chief Executive Officer is fairly well defined in state law and municipal charters. Normally this position must be filled by some person during the transition period due to the legal and financial responsibilities assigned to the position.

However the role of an Administrator/Manager will vary by organization. In some municipalities an Administrator/Manager functions as a Chief Executive, whereas in others it has purely administrative and advisory responsibilities to the governing body. It is important to understand the specific roles/responsibilities of this position in determining how the organization is to function during the transition period.

Normally, elected officials should not assume operational responsibilities in this interim period. These officials need to have time to concentrate on the recruitment process as well as their normal governmental duties and other private-life responsibilities. In addition, assuming operational responsibilities can lead to conflict with other elected officials which can jeopardize the recruitment and selection process and can send the wrong message to the organization (the politicization of the management process). An elected person, even though in office for many years, not really have the detailed specialized information that is required in this transitional period when issues tend to surface that would otherwise lie dormant.

Generally it is best to appoint someone as the Interim Administrator/Manager as soon as possible. The right selection goes a long way to resolve organizational unrest, as well as provide assistance to the elected officials. In the best case scenario, the incumbent has provided sufficient notice and can remain in the position for the time it takes for his/her replacement to arrive on the scene. However, this is the exception and not the norm. In the worse case scenario, the incumbent was terminated and left office in a very short time frame. There are two alternates to consider: using an existing staff person or seeking out an Interim Administrator or Manager from outside the organization.

#### *Appointing an Existing Staff Person as the Interim*

The obvious advantage to appointing an existing staff person is the immediate availability of the individual, coupled with their knowledge of the organization and current issues. Obviously the availability and suitability of an existing employee can vary significantly in each organization. Some of the issues that should be discussed when considering this alternate include:

- The leadership capability of the staff person;
- Their acceptance in the organization;
- Their knowledge of the organization-wide scope of work and open issues;
- The amount of time they have available to assume the extra work;
- The impact of this new assignment on their ongoing duties and responsibilities; and
- Their experience and capability to operate at this higher level in general and in the public forum in particular.

In addition, it is important to consider whether this person is in fact a possible candidate for the position. If so, their appointment could be viewed as a "working test period" by some or an "insiders pick" by others.

A disadvantage of this alternate is that it can be difficult to find the right candidate for the position: one who can provide the organizational leadership required during this difficult period.

### *Appointing an Experienced Administrator/Manager as the Interim*

One of the alternates available to a municipality is to hire as the Interim someone who is experienced in the field of municipal government. Three possibilities are:

1. A person who is recently retired and available to work on a part time basis and on an individual basis (this is very common in the educational field);
2. A person working for another municipality who would have some time available to assist either through a shared service arrangement or as a secondary job; or
3. Employing a private firm that provides this service.

An advantage to this option is that you gain access to a knowledge and experience base which provides assurance to the organization that there will be adequate leadership to assist the staff in completing their desired tasks during the transition period. In essence, there is a very small learning curve since most organizations in New Jersey operate in similar manners. A further advantage to bringing in an experienced outsider is that this person can provide elected officials (and the replacement Administrator/Manager) insight as to the assets and liabilities of the organization, as well as the issues facing the organization: essentially doing an independent review of the operations and capability of the organization at a fairly in-depth basis. And finally, another advantage to elected officials is that this temporary person can "tell it like it is". Since the Interim Administrator/Manager is not wedded to the organization, he/she can provide the neutral fact-based commentary that is so needed during this transition period when rumors and inferences acquire a new level of existence.

The drawback of this option is cost, especially if the prior Administrator/Manager is still on the payroll due to severance payments or accrued leave. However, when considering cost it is important to recognize that the rate quoted is complete without fringe benefit expenses or long term commitments.

### *Something to Avoid*

Do not appoint an outsider who has no real knowledge of the municipal operation or the local issues, even if they have extensive experience in the private sector. The learning curve will be too much for the organization to bear during this transition period. And, as noted above, it is generally not advantageous to have an elected person assume these responsibilities.

### *Role of the Interim Administrator or Manager*

Generally the role of an Interim requires 10 to 20 ~~24~~ hours a week, preferably on a three day basis. Obviously this varies by the scope of the organization and the specific role of the Administrator or Manager in that organization. The Interim should attend all of the governing body meetings, in the same fashion as the permanent Administrator/Manager so that he/she is fully aware of the concerns of the elected officials and the citizenry. If you have an experienced individual as Interim, it is best to utilize the skills and experience of that person to the greatest extent possible, including involvement with other professionals serving the municipality.

The Interim Administrator/Manager's role is to provide guidance so as to avoid as many of the "mines in the minefield" as possible, to provide advice to the staff and elected officials in how to identify and address issues, to make decisions that cannot be delayed until the arrival of the new permanent Administrator/Manager, to avoid long term entanglements and detailed

studies that will transcend the Interim's involvement in the organization, to identify and scope out the issues requiring attention and to handle operational issues as they arise and must be resolved. In many respects a good Interim works through the existing staff providing them the support and guidance that they need to get the necessary daily tasks completed.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the role of the Interim is to set up the transition for the incoming new Administrator/Manager so that their learning curve is reduced and they can be more productive early in their tenure.

## **THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

With the proper continuation of the organization resolved, the governing body is now in a position to concentrate on the recruitment and selection of a permanent replacement Administrator/Manager. Several words of advice:

- Do not rush into the process without the proper preparation;
- You will immediately get resumes from various people interested in the position, thank them for their interest and put them into the process with all other candidates to be considered once the formal advertisement process is initiated; and,
- Make no commitments to anyone other than that their resume will be given due consideration. Remember that selecting the final candidate requires a consensus of the entire governing body, so do not commit to that which you may not be able to deliver.

Recruiting qualified candidates and then interviewing them and making a final selection is not as easy as some would think. The process varies by municipality. In some, the governing body as a whole does the entire process, in others the Mayor and/or a committee of the governing body completes the recruitment and screening process (with the entire governing body involved in the final selection process), yet in others citizens committees are used for a portion of the process with the governing body reserving to itself the final selections. In cases where the incumbent is retiring, that person can provide staff assistance to the governing body in this process. In some cases the Clerk's office or the Administrator/Manager's office personnel can also be involved. And finally, a third party recruitment firm is sometimes utilized.

### **Step 1: Who is to do what, when and how?**

Several keys to remember throughout the process: recruitment is a two way street. As closely as you are screening and interviewing a candidate, the candidate is doing his/her own analysis to determine if he/she wants to be a part of your organization. It is not uncommon for a governing body to have employment offers rejected by their top candidate due to a reluctance of the candidate to become involved with that particular governing body. Secondly, confidentiality is critical. This is why all resumes must be carefully protected and that the staff members providing assistance be trustworthy to maintain the confidentiality of the process. Good candidates may be currently employed and they will be reluctant to become involved at the early stages if their current employer becomes aware of their interest. Obviously at some point in the recruitment process the candidate's interest will become known; but this normally occurs in the final stages where both sides have a reasonable understanding of each other.

### *Doing the recruitment yourself or using a professional recruiter*

The use of an outside third party recruitment firm for the position of Administrator/Manager is not uncommon. The obvious goal is to get the best candidate for the position, one who not only has the technical and person skills for the position, but one that is also the best fit for the community. The goal is to select someone where there is chemistry between the candidate and the governing body, with each side having confidence in the other. This selection is similar to a marriage, and the recruitment firm can serve as the traditional matchmaker in this environment.

The advantages of using an outside recruiter are:

- The ability to resolve confidentiality problems, as well as prompt responding to all inquiries, etcetera;
- Preserving the elected officials time and effort by focusing them on the important issues;
- The capability of bringing qualified candidates to the municipality, candidates who may not otherwise submit applications;
- Assistance in the selection and interview process, insuring that it is fair and objective and allows the best candidates for that particular municipality to be a part of the mix. This assistance can also help in avoiding pitfalls that may occur in the interview process which can unfairly interfere with the final decision – the extraneous issues that sometimes arise or the personality issues that prevent the governing body from getting a clear understanding of the candidates; and
- Their ability to do background verifications and final contract negotiations in a manner that will not cause ill will by either side.

Obviously the main issue is the cost. You will find that public sector recruitment is significantly less expensive than what is common in the private sector, and many of the firms involved in public sector recruiting offer a variety of options, varying the cost according to the level of their involvement. A second concern by some elected leaders is a loss of control over the process. However, in reality the elected leaders have better control through the use of the recruiter than they would through the dynamics of interplay among the individual members of the elected governing body.

### *Using the Interim to Assist in the Recruitment*

It is not unusual for an Interim to assist the governing body in the recruitment process when a qualified Interim is employed. There is still an expense to this alternate since the Interim is normally paid on a hourly basis, but this method can be less expensive than using an outside recruiter and sometimes the governing body, after getting familiar and comfortable with the Interim, has a level of confidence in his/her capabilities that facilitates the recruitment process. In addition, the Interim's knowledge of the organization and standard recruitment practices makes this person a good facilitator of the process, plus provides a degree of confidence in the process by the applicants.

## **Step 2: Develop Criteria**

After determining how the recruitment process is to be managed and staffed, the next step is a meeting of all of the elected officials to reach an agreement on the basic parameters of the

recruitment process, in particular, what qualifications and qualities are you looking for in your new hire. A skilled Interim or a professional recruiter can provide assistance in this since as they are familiar with the criteria commonly used. What education and/or experience is the municipality going to require? Are there any special skill sets that the municipality needs? Are there special issues confronting the municipality that temper the type of person being sought? How does each of the governing body members view the role and functioning of the office of the Administrator/Manager? Although some may feel that this discussion is extraneous, in reality it is the most important part of the process since the governing body should reach some general consensus of what is really important in their future Administrator/Manager.

### **Step 3: Advertisement**

Once the basic qualifications are agreed to, an advertisement is created. Good sources for publicizing the recruitment are NJLM's website and the NJMMA's monthly newsletter when seeking a person with municipal experience. Many municipalities will also place an ad in local newspapers although this source is less likely to generate many candidates with prior experience. If the municipality is willing to consider experienced candidates from other states, the newsletter of the International City Management Association is also a good source.

Remember, the goal of the advertisement is to attract as many qualified candidates as possible. Sometimes very detailed minimum qualifications and very complex required responses will cause those who have good jobs and would be good candidates to disregard the opportunity. Ideally you want to receive as many resumes as possible, and then sort through them to determine who should be interviewed on a preliminary basis.

It is important that submitted resumes be kept in a secure location and their receipt acknowledged in a prompt manner.

### **Step 4: The preliminary screening**

After a reasonable number of resumes are received, the governing body or a selection committee should review them using a basic qualification tool based upon the goals of the municipality. Do not try to review and evaluate each resume as it is received; it is too difficult to maintain an overall perspective when the screening is done in a piecemeal fashion. The goal at this stage is to achieve consensus on a pool of candidates to be interviewed, not to make the final selection. Normally you would try to screen down to between six and nine candidates. Typically, this process is not as difficult as it may seem: there are some very simple and basic methods of ranking the candidates. Included with the reference materials at the end of this article is a suggested screening process and instruction sheet.

Some recruiters use a structured questionnaire to be completed by those selected in the initial screening process, and the purpose of this questionnaire is to ascertain the thought and communication process of each candidate and provide information that can be used during interviews.

### **Step 5: The interview process**

The interview process is multipart. The first round is the "breaking ice" session, wherein each of the selected candidates are given an opportunity to introduce themselves and have a

discussion with the selection committee (or governing body) of items of common interest. Normally at this stage each candidate is asked the same questions so that you can see how each candidate reacts under the same conditions. It is best if one person serves as the neutral facilitator and question asker. Assume at least an hour for this interview, and do not try to do more than three or four at any one time. After each interview each member present should write down his/her individual impression of the candidate before any discussion occurs.

After the first round of interviews, the candidates are ranked by those involved and screened down to two or three candidates. Again, the issue is not agreeing on who is the best candidate, but to reach a consensus as to who are the top candidates.

The top candidates are then interviewed a second time, ideally in a longer and less formal interview. The goal here is to encourage more open discussions about management styles, the issues facing the community, the prior experience of the candidate in relation to these issues, communication styles and etcetera.

After the second round of interviews it is possible for a top candidate to emerge. Very often the person will not be everyone's "top candidate", but a candidate that is acceptable to everyone. This person is then invited back for further discussions. Often in this final stage there are meetings with key staff personnel and tours of the community.

#### **Step 6: The selection process**

A few comments about the selection process... The best candidate is the person that the governing body feels the most comfortable with. There is no one perfect candidate for all municipalities. A qualified candidate may do very well in one municipality and poorly in another, and yet bring the same skill set and personality to each. The variables are the dynamics with the elected leaders, the staff and the community in general. As noted above, the selection process is a "marriage" of the right parties, as imprecise as this process may be.

It is reasonable for the governing body to look for a significant commitment by the selected candidate. A reasonable time frame to expect a person to remain in the municipality is five years; few people can predict what will occur beyond this. Do not base your selection upon a lifetime commitment, although easily offered it is not realistic.

#### **Step 7: The final agreement**

Once there is a consensus of who to select, a small committee, or one person, should be given the responsibility of discussing detailed terms and conditions of employment with the top candidate, as well as the responsibility of doing background checks and calling references.

In reference to salary and benefits, remember this is a negotiation process often requiring give and take on both sides. It is not unusual for each side to try to push hard in their favor and normally disagreements can be talked through and a reasonable settlement obtained. Once there is an agreement, this should be incorporated into a formal letter signed by the Mayor or some other municipal official. Included with this file folder is a model "Terms and Conditions of Employment Letter" that can serve as a guide in this process.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIALS

- ICMA Brochures and Information; [www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org):  
The International City/County Management Association is a worldwide association of city and county managers and administrators, with headquarters in Washington, DC. Their goal is to promote professionalism and ethical conduct in local government senior staff personnel.
- *Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator*; [www.njslom.org/recruitment.html](http://www.njslom.org/recruitment.html):  
A summary statement from ICMA's website on the recruitment process which provides a detailed step by step guideline assisting municipalities in recruiting their Chief Administrative/Chief Executive Officer. Throughout the guide are references to "Range Riders", which are available in each state to provide assistance. In New Jersey this function is available through the Executive Director of the New Jersey Municipal Management Association (see below for more information on the NJMMA).
- Brochures from the New Jersey Municipal Management Association:
  - *What You Can Expect from a Local Government Professional* – This brochure outlines the reasons why you should select a "professional, independent qualified administrator/manager" to provide services in your municipality; [www.njslom.org/recruitment.html](http://www.njslom.org/recruitment.html).
  - *Guidelines to Aid Municipalities in the Selection of a Municipal Manager* – This brochure provides further information on the processes to be used, as well as a section listing various Frequently Asked Questions, about who a professional manager is, and what qualities you should be seeking in the person selected.
  - A document outlining a process that can be used to select which applicants are to be considered in the initial round of interviews; [www.njslom.org/recruitment.html](http://www.njslom.org/recruitment.html).
- *A Model Letter of Terms and Conditions of Employment*; [www.njslom.org/recruitment.html](http://www.njslom.org/recruitment.html):  
A model "Letter of Employment" offering the position of Administrator or Manager to an individual, and outlining suggested employment conditions that should be documented in this employment; published by the New Jersey Municipal Management Association. This model letter is drafted with a number of alternates that a municipality may want to consider. It is intended to be an inventory of issues that should be discussed and resolved, either this letter format or in some other written document.
- New Jersey State League of Municipalities' *Joblines/Classified Ads* page; [www.njslom.org/classifieds\\_jobs.html](http://www.njslom.org/classifieds_jobs.html).

## ADVISORY CONSULTATION

If the elected officials of a municipality wish to meet with an experienced retired administrator or manager to discuss the recruitment process and/or the other issues outlined above, contact the Executive Director of the New Jersey Municipal Management Association at [njmmaexdir@aol.com](mailto:njmmaexdir@aol.com) or by phone at (201) 874-4050. This is a free service of NJMMA and NJLM; however before NJMMA will become involved in any specific municipality, the incumbent administrator must be aware of the intention of the elected officials of the municipality to replace him/her. This service is only available to the elected officials of a municipality, or to an officially approved search/selection committee.

## WHO WE ARE

### *New Jersey Municipal Management Association*

The New Jersey Municipal Management Association is an association of local government administrators, managers, and affiliated central management personnel whose goal is to improve the quality of local government in New Jersey. The Association promotes the professional development of local government officials by creating a network of relevant training and information exchange encouraging the free flow of information and ideas thereby enhancing the ability of each member to deal with the problems and pressures of his / her position. NJMMA is affiliated with the International City and County Management Association and subscribes to its Code of Ethics. This Code specified 12 ethical principles of personal and professional conduct, including a complete dedication to good government. For further information on the NJMMA please visit the website at [www.njmma.org](http://www.njmma.org) or contact Robert Casey, the Executive Director at (201) 874-4050.

### *New Jersey State League of Municipalities*

The New Jersey State League of Municipalities (NJLM) is a voluntary association created to help communities do a better job of self-government through pooling information resources and brain power. It is authorized by State Statute and since 1915, has been serving local officials throughout the Garden State. All 566 municipalities are members of NJLM. Over 560 mayors and 13,000 elected and appointed officials of member municipalities are entitled to all of the services and privileges of NJLM. NJLM services include: a monthly magazine (*New Jersey Municipalities*), a Bureau of Municipal Information, an extensive Ordinance Library, Legislative Analysis, Legislative Bulletins, new laws, in-service training, personal consultation, instructional seminars and research publications. NJLM is headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey. Visit our website at [www.njslom.org](http://www.njslom.org).