

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW



Congratulations! Your resume or application has passed muster, and you have been asked for an interview. Give yourself a pat on the back, because that can be the biggest hurdle. But be aware that this is the stage where things really begin to get interesting! Interviews can be conducted via phone, in person, or a combination of the two, so be prepared. Following are some recommendations as you prepare for your interview.

(Note - some of this advice is universal, and some of it is geared toward entry/mid-level job seekers and some toward senior-level. Adjust your expectations accordingly!).

I. Research the Local Government

- Get to know the issues the host local government is dealing with. Local governments often post this information on their Web site. Read the past few Council Agendas. Read through the archives of the local newspaper to get a different perspective on the issues. If there is a local chamber of commerce, review their Web site as well.
- Find out who the key staff members are for the host government (such as the city/county manager, assistants, department heads, etc). Visit the city/county manager's Web site. Learn some details about the city/county manager's approach to local governance if possible.
- If you're a member of ICMA, you can learn more about the manager's work history using ICMA's Who's Who function. Contact managers and members in neighboring communities. Also ICMA Range Riders are an invaluable resource.
- Familiarize yourself with the key functions, roles, and responsibilities of the government in general and the City/County Managers Office in particular.
- If available on their website, read through their most recent Budget and Strategic Plan. (If these are not available online, ask the host government if they can provide you with a hard copy).
- Get to know which industries/companies contribute to the local economy.
- Check the council meeting minutes for the last 24 months.
- Arrive in town before the interview to look around and meet with people who are familiar with the area – even residents and shop owners.
- Learn as much about the government's financial status as possible (from audits, annual reports, most recent budget, and so on).
- General undefined Google searches can bring up resources and information not easily found in regular channels.

II. Anticipate and prepare for Questions Most Likely to be Asked

- Tell us about yourself. Why have you chosen public service as a career path? Why are you interested in local government?
- What are your career goals? How will this position help you obtain your goals?
- What are the most important issues currently facing our jurisdiction?
- What is your background in local government? Why do you think you are the right person for the job? What can you offer us?
- What is your working style? Do you prefer to work individually or in groups? Why?

- Tell us about your ideal supervisor. What kind of relationship are you looking to develop with the city/county manager and his/her staff?
- What is your approach to customer service? How would you deal with an irate constituent?
- Tell us about a difficult project you have worked on in a prior job or class.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- If we asked a former employer of yours to describe you, what would they say?

III. Expect Some Curveballs

- Be prepared for panel interviews, generally consisting of the city/county manager, an assistant or department head and HR person.
- Some host governments may require you to participate in a role playing exercise (e.g., dealing with an angry constituent).
- It's highly possible that you will take part in a written/analytical exercise. The exercise will test your communication and analytical abilities, generally dealing with the host governments budget or divisive issue.

IV. Overall Strategies for Success

- Come prepared. Read between the lines of the job description and really ascertain which skills are being sought. Do the homework on the host government and be prepared to show verbal or written evidence of what you have learned. Make a cheat sheet that lists the top personal qualities you want to convey, the most difficult work/school-related situation with which you've dealt and projects that would relate back to those primary job skills the employer is seeking.
- Rehearse your interview. It's good to practice either in front of a mirror or a friend.
- Be confident. Look how far you have come; you're a semi-finalist in a nationwide job search. You clearly have the requisite skills to earn the job—you must believe that and show it during the interview.
- First impressions are critical. Show up on time. Wear your best formal business attire. Greet the interviewers with a smile, look them in the eye, and give them a firm hand shake.
- Be excited! This is a big deal. Your level of excitement will signal to the interviewers how interested you are in the job.
- Answer each question directly. Speak slowly and clearly so you can be heard. When asked a difficult question, take your time and think about your response before

giving your answer. Make sure to maintain eye contact with the individual asking each question.

- Remember to be yourself; you want your personality to come through during the interview.
- Before ending the interview ask the interviewer(s) questions regarding the jurisdiction, the position, development and mentoring opportunities, etc. You are interviewing them just as much as they are interviewing you. These questions will help you ascertain whether or not the host government is a good “fit” for you.
- Thank each and every one of the interviewers for the opportunity.

V. Post-Interview Tactics

- Spoil yourself, interviews are tough work. Go out and celebrate.
- Send personal letters of thanks to all those who took part in the interview process, including the administrative assistants, receptionists, welcome-wagon – you get the idea.
- Don't be afraid to call and ask about when you might hear. Sometimes showing enthusiasm for the position can tip you over the edge.

Go in there with enthusiasm, a great attitude, and believe in yourself. Good luck!

Learn more about careers in local government and professional management at [icma.org/careers](https://www.icma.org/careers).